

Dear Honorable Members of the Park Authority Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) Board's general budget priorities. On behalf of our respective organizations with members throughout Fairfax County, we were very pleased to see FCPA's priorities for the FY2024 budget cycle reflect the values of the One Fairfax equity policy. We strongly support this critical commitment toward more equitable access to parks and programs for all residents. In addition, we strongly support FCPA's efforts to increase stewardship of our natural resources. Our natural resources are on the front line of climate change; if managed well, they have the potential to significantly cushion the impact of more extreme weather for all residents. As such, we look forward to the day when FCPA is afforded the funding to become more proactive in addressing the stewardship challenges it currently cannot get to.

More specifically, we present the following feedback:

Equity:

- **We strongly support mobile nature centers that can meet the needs of all our communities.**
 - Fairfax County's vulnerability index has shown that many residents do not have access to reliable transportation.
 - We encourage the PAB board to approve the mobile park program so that all Fairfax County residents can have access to their parks.
- **We strongly support the activation staff to more fully engage our communities on their priorities and get them into the parks.**
- **We support more resources to make all FCPA programs accessible to every member of the community in their preferred language.**
 - We encourage FCPA to utilize IT resources to make FCPA online programs accessible in multiple languages. This is especially important for the online reservation systems and other information about how to access park amenities.
 - As FCPA hires new staff, especially outreach staff, we encourage a strong preference for multiple language capacity.
 - We encourage FCPA to ensure that all signs in its parks are multilingual and accessible for the diverse communities it serves.
- **We believe our parks must be safe, welcoming and inclusive for all Fairfax residents.** As such, we look forward to providing input on the proposed ranger pilot program to ensure it supports this vision.
- **We support providing safe routes for walking and biking to parks to ensure equitable access for all Fairfax residents and as an important part of reducing climate pollution.** We ask that needed funding be allocated to assess and improve the

safety and accessibility for walking and biking to our parks, maintaining park trails, and ensuring bicycling parking is available at all county parks with amenities.

Natural Resources:

- **We encourage additional support for the Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program, to protect our shared natural resources and investment in parks**
 - IMA is the command center for the county's response to the growing problem of invasive plants; funding levels must be adequate to keep pace.
 - Under the current staffing levels of two employees plus summer interns, FCPA lacks the capacity to quickly respond to existing needs in this countywide program. The three additional ecologists approved for FY23 will help, but we strongly urge FCPA Board to take advantage of the program's popularity and momentum as more prospective volunteers hear about the program and wish to receive training to address the invasive weeds. We anticipate additional staff capacity will be needed as the challenge also grows.
- **We support funding for additional ecologists, at individual parks and countywide**
 - A lot of parks have extensive natural assets whose protection is complex. It is critical to have an ecologist's eye and level of expertise on the ground, working with volunteers and managing strategic actions.
- **We support funding for bamboo eradication on park property**
 - As the largest county property owner, FCPA must abide by the new bamboo ordinance taking effect January 1, 2023 to prevent invasive bamboo from spreading to neighboring properties.
 - Considering that 200+ acres of parkland have already been overtaken by bamboo, and understanding that eradication takes multiple years, we appreciate FCPA Board's planning for and prioritizing this investment.
- **We strongly support increasing funding for forestry**
 - Trees are integral for healthy communities, climate change mitigation, and equity.
 - We recognize the need to address the backlog for removal of hazardous trees in our parks and appreciate that this must be addressed before planning additional forward-thinking management of replenishing our forests.
- **We encourage continued support for the new Landscape Legacy and Sustainability Program**
 - Last year's investment in the Landscape Legacy and Sustainability Program demonstrated a forward-looking investment in managing the parks' natural resources. We appreciate this investment and encourage the FCPA Board to continue to seek the funding support to achieve the ongoing goals of the program.

- **We support FCPA addressing trash across our parks with increased funding for recycling, staff coverage and capital equipment.**
 - Litter not only is unhygienic, it harms wildlife and human health particularly as it ends up in our waterways.

Signed,

Zander Pellegrino
Chesapeake Climate Action Network

Lydia Lawrence
Fairfax County NAACP

Whitney Redding
Friends of Holmes Run

Renee Grebe
Audubon Naturalist Society

Carolyn Gamble
Environmental Advocate

Glenda Booth
Friends of Dyke Marsh

Helene Shore
350 Fairfax

Mary Paden
South County Task Force

Michelle Krockner
Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance

Sonya Breehey
Coalition for Smarter Growth

Pam Tinker
Mother Nurture Company and Frog Pond Early Learning Center

Cindy Speas
Environmental Advocate

Tom Blackburn
Chair, Advocacy Committee
Audubon Society of Northern Virginia

Yvette White
Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling

September 22, 2022

Dear Members of the Fairfax County Park Authority Board:

Many thanks to all of you for your service on behalf of our Fairfax County Parks. Next to the natural and cultural resources actually comprising our parks, the people who oversee and directly care for their needs are undoubtedly the parks' most important asset. We, the below-referenced park Friends groups allied together to ensure that our parks receive their fair share of the County's taxpayer dollars, are grateful for all that you – and the hardworking Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) staff do – in acquiring, maintaining, and administering our parks.

Taking Care of What We Have

Staffing

In reviewing the FCPA's budget priorities, we are pleased to see an express commitment to "taking care of what we have," i.e., those parks and FCPA assets already in hand. To do this the parks require adequate staffing. This is a basic necessity and should be foremost in budgeting priorities for the FCPA. The County's natural and cultural resources can't take care of themselves. They require people to maintain them, to interpret them, and to make them accessible to all.

As we Friends working side-by-side with FCPA "front-line" staff can attest, staff at "our" parks do a wonderful job, especially given that staffing levels and the financial resources staff are forced to work with are frequently insufficient to meet the operations and maintenance tasks at hand. Notably, their financial resourcing is also, in many cases, insufficient to meet their own personal needs when it comes to their pay and (frequent lack of) benefits. As we can further attest, this adversely affects their morale and retention. These employees who, in a manner of speaking, *are the parks* should have a certainty in knowing they have the resources to perform the tasks they are charged with fulfilling and should be able to look forward to long-term, financially sustainable careers with the FCPA. Accordingly, we assert that "taking care of what we have" includes employee compensation at competitive market rates and adding more full-time positions.

It also includes improving the FCPA's financial footing such that it can fill all of the positions it already has. Of the 87 positions in the Resource Management Division, 32 remain vacant. Nineteen of these vacancies are general fund positions, and ten of those are being advertised for fill. This leaves nine general fund positions vacant, possibly purposely so. Every year, unmet financial needs cause some positions to remain unfilled so that the funds appropriated for them by the County can be put to other use. This must stop. While it might be a common agency practice, it should not be. **Monies obligated by the County to pay for authorized positions should be used to fill those positions.** As already indicated, the FCPA needs every authorized person – and then some. We recognize that a national labor shortage may hinder the filling of every available position, but the FCPA should be positioned so that it can at least *try* to fill all those for which funding is being provided by the County.

Trash Containment and Removal

We support the high prioritization for increased financial support for trash removal and forestry operations (tree maintenance) in our parks, to include stream valley parks. As we noted in our advocacy this past spring before the Board of Supervisors, visitors to some of our parks are met not with the beauty of nature, but with overflowing trash containers insufficient in their number to handle the amount of waste being generated in our well-used parks and/or deficient in the frequency with which they are emptied.

Forestry

On the forestry front, we also noted last spring how appallingly below standard our County is in its financial support for managing the lands committed to its care. Whereas even a *low level* of support is typified by expenditures of \$3,000 to \$6000 per acre, our County has been far below that with historical expenditures at only \$159 dollars per managed acre. We supported last spring's increased funding for combating invasive species, and we absolutely support increased funding now for proper tree maintenance.

Properly resourcing tree maintenance has assumed an even greater importance in light of the Board of Supervisors' adoption of the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP). CECAP's Natural Resource Strategy calls for conserving and expanding the County's existing tree canopy. As the County's largest landowner, the FCPA will need a robust tree maintenance budget to do its part in supporting significant conservation and expansion of the County's existing tree canopy.

Equity

We also applaud the proposed launch of mobile nature centers as well as mobile recreational and educational opportunities. It's important to make our parks accessible to all, to those without means of transportation to our parks as well as to those who simply may not know about particular parks at locations far removed from them given the County's vast size. We hope the proposed educational opportunities include not only environmental lessons relevant to the role of our parks in dealing with the current climate emergency, but also lessons in history, architecture, and science that FCPA historic sites and cultural resource collections can afford.

With many thanks, we are the Friends of –

Colvin Run Mill

Ellanor C. Lawrence Park

Fairfax County Archaeology and Cultural Resources

Frying Pan Farm Park

Green Spring Gardens (FROGS)

Historic Huntley

Holmes Run

Huntley Meadows Park

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tod S. Carnes', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

TODI S. CARNES

Facilitator, Fair Parks Initiative

cc: Jeff McKay, Chairman BOS
Laura Grape, Director FCPA RMD

September 22, 2022

Dear Members of the Fairfax County Park Authority Board:

Many thanks to all of you for your service on behalf of our Fairfax County Parks. Next to the natural and cultural resources actually comprising our parks, the people who oversee and directly care for their needs are undoubtedly the parks' most important asset. We, the below-referenced park Friends groups allied together to ensure that our parks receive their fair share of the County's taxpayer dollars, are grateful for all that you – and the hardworking Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) staff do – in acquiring, maintaining, and administering our parks.

Taking Care of What We Have

Staffing

In reviewing the FCPA's budget priorities, we are pleased to see an express commitment to "taking care of what we have," i.e., those parks and FCPA assets already in hand. To do this the parks require adequate staffing. This is a basic necessity and should be foremost in budgeting priorities for the FCPA. The County's natural and cultural resources can't take care of themselves. They require people to maintain them, to interpret them, and to make them accessible to all.

As we Friends working side-by-side with FCPA "front-line" staff can attest, staff at "our" parks do a wonderful job, especially given that staffing levels and the financial resources staff are forced to work with are frequently insufficient to meet the operations and maintenance tasks at hand. Notably, their financial resourcing is also, in many cases, insufficient to meet their own personal needs when it comes to their pay and (frequent lack of) benefits. As we can further attest, this adversely affects their morale and retention. These employees who, in a manner of speaking, *are the parks* should have a certainty in knowing they have the resources to perform the tasks they are charged with fulfilling and should be able to look forward to long-term, financially sustainable careers with the FCPA. Accordingly, we assert that "taking care of what we have" includes employee compensation at competitive market rates and adding more full-time positions.

It also includes improving the FCPA's financial footing such that it can fill all of the positions it already has. Of the 87 positions in the Resource Management Division, 32 remain vacant. Nineteen of these vacancies are general fund positions, and ten of those are being advertised for fill. This leaves nine general fund positions vacant, possibly purposely so. Every year, unmet financial needs cause some positions to remain unfilled so that the funds appropriated for them by the County can be put to other use. This must stop. While it might be a common agency practice, it should not be. **Monies obligated by the County to pay for authorized positions should be used to fill those positions.** As already indicated, the FCPA needs every authorized person – and then some. We recognize that a national labor shortage may hinder the filling of every available position, but the FCPA should be positioned so that it can at least *try* to fill all those for which funding is being provided by the County.

Trash Containment and Removal

We support the high prioritization for increased financial support for trash removal and forestry operations (tree maintenance) in our parks, to include stream valley parks. As we noted in our advocacy this past spring before the Board of Supervisors, visitors to some of our parks are met not with the beauty of nature, but with overflowing trash containers insufficient in their number to handle the amount of waste being generated in our well-used parks and/or deficient in the frequency with which they are emptied.

Forestry

On the forestry front, we also noted last spring how appallingly below standard our County is in its financial support for managing the lands committed to its care. Whereas even a *low level* of support is typified by expenditures of \$3,000 to \$6000 per acre, our County has been far below that with historical expenditures at only \$159 dollars per managed acre. We supported last spring's increased funding for combating invasive species, and we absolutely support increased funding now for proper tree maintenance.

Properly resourcing tree maintenance has assumed an even greater importance in light of the Board of Supervisors' adoption of the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP). CECAP's Natural Resource Strategy calls for conserving and expanding the County's existing tree canopy. As the County's largest landowner, the FCPA will need a robust tree maintenance budget to do its part in supporting significant conservation and expansion of the County's existing tree canopy.

Equity

We also applaud the proposed launch of mobile nature centers as well as mobile recreational and educational opportunities. It's important to make our parks accessible to all, to those without means of transportation to our parks as well as to those who simply may not know about particular parks at locations far removed from them given the County's vast size. We hope the proposed educational opportunities include not only environmental lessons relevant to the role of our parks in dealing with the current climate emergency, but also lessons in history, architecture, and science that FCPA historic sites and cultural resource collections can afford.

With many thanks, we are the Friends of –

Colvin Run Mill

Ellanor C. Lawrence Park

Fairfax County Archaeology and Cultural Resources

Frying Pan Farm Park

Green Spring Gardens (FROGS)

Historic Huntley

Holmes Run

Huntley Meadows Park

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tod S. Carnes', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

TODI S. CARNES

Facilitator, Fair Parks Initiative

cc: Jeff McKay, Chairman BOS
Laura Grape, Director FCPA RMD

September 23, 2022

CORRECTIVE ADDENDUM

Friends' Letter to the Fairfax County Park Authority Board dated 22 Sep 2022

The list of groups represented by the above-referenced letter is amended to additionally include the Friends of –

Accotink Creek

Pimmit Barn

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Toddi S. Carnes', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

TODI S. CARNES
Facilitator, Fair Parks Initiative