



# FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

## M E M O R A N D U M

**TO:** Chairman and Members  
Park Authority Board

**VIA:** Jai Cole, Executive Director

**FROM:** Mike Peter, Division Director  
Business Administration Division

**DATE:** September 20, 2024

### *Agenda*

**Budget Committee  
(Committee of the Whole)  
Wednesday, September 25, 2024 – 6:35 pm  
Boardroom, Herrity Building  
Chairman: Ken Quincy  
Vice Chair: Tim Hackman**

1. FY 2026 Non-Recommended General Fund Budget Reductions (with presentation) – Action
2. FY 2026 Budget Submission, Fund 10001, General Fund (with presentation) – Action



If accommodations and/or alternative formats are needed, please call (703) 324-8563. TTY (703) 803-3354

## **ACTION**

### FY 2026 Non-Recommended General Fund Budget Reductions

#### ISSUE:

Approval of the FY 2026 Non-Recommended General Fund (Fund 10001) Budget Reduction Submission to the Department of Management and Budget, as presented to the Budget Committee on August 28, with amendments as described.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

The Park Authority Executive Director recommends approval of the FY 2026 Non-Recommended General Fund (Fund 10001) Budget Reduction Submission.

#### TIMING:

Board action is requested on September 25, 2024, and the submission was due to the Department of Management and Budget on September 13, 2024.

#### BACKGROUND

The Park Authority has fiduciary responsibility over the Park Revenue & Operating Fund and the Park Improvements Fund, while the County has fiduciary responsibility over the General Fund. Activities supported by the General Fund include general access to parks and park grounds, lakefront parks, natural, cultural and horticultural sites, stewardship education programs, maintenance of parks, management of the community concert series, County archeological functions, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance activities, community-based leisure classes and special events, trips and tours, agency wide management, planning, and administrative support, general park planning and support of the County Comprehensive Plan, and project management support for capital projects.

In order to provide the County Executive and the Board with options to balance required expenditure increases against the impact on taxpayers, the Department of Management and Budget (DMB) are once again asking all General Fund and General Fund supported agencies to develop a list of reduction options. Given that the reductions taken during the FY 2025 budget process focused on efficiencies and flexibility available within agency budgets, DMB expects that the options developed this year will involve harder choices that may impact service delivery and filled positions. Agencies were asked to provide reductions totaling 10 percent of their budgets, which will allow DMB to weigh the feasibility of each option and its impact on County services as the FY 2026

budget picture develops. The total budget reduction goal for the Park Authority is \$3,561,100.

### **NON-RECOMMENDED BUDGET REDUCTIONS**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Reduction</b>
<del>Summer Entertainment Series Reduction-</del>	<del>\$109,703-</del>
Reduce Forestry Contract Services	\$200,000
Reduce Athletic Field Mowing	\$240,823
Reduce Open space Mowing	\$129,258
Reduce Cleaning of Port-A-Johns	\$48,960
Reduce Athletic Court Maintenance and Renovations	\$250,000
Reduce Trail Maintenance Funding	\$250,000
Reduce General Park and Facility Maintenance	<del>\$350,000</del> <b>\$404,851</b>
Increase Foundation Funding	\$300,000
WPFO/Eliminate Ecologist 1	\$65,000
Eliminate Historic Resource Specialist II	\$82,826
Close one nature center and one historic site (Encumbered)	\$644,000
Close Scott's Run Nature Preserve Parking Lots	\$152,548
Remove Part-time Photographic Specialist	\$26,988
Increase WPFO in Development division	<del>\$714,000</del> <b>\$768,851</b>

### **~~Summer Entertainment Series Reduction: \$109,703~~ (Amended at 9/11/2024 PAB Meeting)**

- ~~• Reduce Summer Entertainment Series to maximum of 8 shows per district~~
- ~~• Reduce from 120 to 73 shows (does not include the Children's series)~~
- ~~• With reduction, each series would receive no more than \$2,000 per show~~
- ~~• Additional reductions proposed result in decreased staffing hours and lower print budget~~
- ~~• Any future contract increases in Sound/AV (which are anticipated annually) would require additional decreases in the series or additional funding~~

### **Reduce Forestry Contract Services: \$200,000**

- Current Budget: \$1,273,000
- BOS added \$890,000 for FY 2025
- In total, the Park Operations Forestry remediates as many as 1,900 trees annually, meeting only the high priority cases.
- This would impact the ability to address high risk/high priority trees threatening life and property.
- If weather conditions require emergency responses, this reduction will impact maintenance funding or require 3rd quarter or carry-over funding

**Reduce Athletic Field Mowing from 2x/week to 1x/week: \$240,823**

- FY24 Actual: \$481,646
- BOS added \$345,000 for FY 2025 for Athletic Field maintenance
- This will require a reduction in frequency of mowing for over 200 athletic fields.
- This will impact the playability and quality of fields for users and visitors and would deviate from maintenance standards.
- This would increase and magnify the already existing deferred maintenance throughout parks

**Reduce Park Open Space Mowing: \$129,258**

- FY24 Actual: \$617,474
- BOS added \$120,000 for FY 2025
- Reclassify multiple locations to reduce mowing
- In FY24, 216 calls and emails related to mowing were received.
- This would increase and magnify the already existing deferred maintenance throughout parks.

**Reduce Cleaning Port-A-Johns to Pre-Covid Standards: \$48,960**

- FY24 Actual: \$175,000 (Cleaning and Rental)
- Reduction in cleaning services to pre-Covid standards – 2x/week.
- This would be a reduction in services available for port-a-johns throughout the parks and athletic fields

**Reduce Athletic Court Maintenance and Renovations by 51%: \$250,000**

- Current Budget: \$490,000
- BOS added \$200,000 for FY 2025
- Definition: Pickleball, Tennis, Futsal, Basketball
- Five (5) athletic courts are planned to be renovated in FY25. This reduction will take us back to renovating approx. two (2) courts per year.
- The life expectancy of an athletic court is 10 years with regular maintenance.
- The Park Authority maintains 412 athletic courts. The public can expect to see court closings start to occur.

**Reduce Trail Maintenance Funding by 50%: \$250,000**

- Current Budget: \$500,000
- BOS added \$150,000 for FY 2025
- Trail maintenance needs for more than 300 miles of trails
- Trails were identified by the community as a top priority (FCPA Needs Assessment.)

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- This would impact trail safety and usability for trail users and may require some trail closures.
- Increase and magnify the existing deferred maintenance throughout parks.

**Reduce General Park and Facility Maintenance Funding by 43%: \$404,851**

- Current Budget: \$937,000
- BOS added \$395,000 for FY 2025
- This would increase deferred maintenance to infrastructure such as dugouts, picnic tables/areas, benches, shelters, grills, playgrounds, signage, dog parks, roads and parking lots, and stabilization of new properties.
- This reduction will magnify the already existing deferred maintenance throughout the park system.

**Increase Foundation Funding: \$300,000**

- Raise an additional \$300K to cover expenses associated with operating the Foundation
- Will require the Foundation to raise additional funds and/or attach a 20% admin fee.
- Those funds (equaling \$300k) will be reinvested back to the Park Authority
- Impacts include reduction in donation amounts for programs
  - Example: SES current fundraising goal \$158,640 would now require fundraising goal of \$190,368

**WPFO/Eliminate Ecologist I Position in Natural Resources: \$65,000**

- Eliminate E-Status Ecologist I position within the IMA program unit
- Explore funding this through the Stormwater Funds
- The IMA is one of the County's most important programs for addressing invasives.
- The current program includes 62 parks, with 6000 volunteers contributing nearly 20,000 hours of service. Nearly 760 acres have been treated for invasive vegetation.
- Impact:
  - Lack of oversight, QC due diligence for herbicide application
  - Difficult to engage in early detection rapid response to stop infestation
  - Curtailed ability to engage additional volunteers to expand the IMA program
  - Reduced scale and effectiveness of countywide invasive management

**Eliminate Historic Resource Specialist II in Heritage Resources: \$82,826**

- Eliminate vacant Historic Resource Specialist II in Heritage Conservation
- Monitor 130 historic sites
- Impact:

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- Limit future growth of property assessment needed for Heritage Resources documentation for the Resident Curator Program

**Close One Nature Center and One Historic Site: \$644,000**

- Significant Reduction in Force:
  - General Fund: 6 Merit and 8 LTE
- Impact engagements with over 100,000 visitors annually, mostly children.
- Eliminate popular field trips for thousands of public, private, and home school students.
- Impacts FCPA's ability to deliver on our mission.
- The Park Authority Mission is to enrich quality of life for all members of the community through an enduring park system that provides a healthy environment, preserves natural and cultural heritage, offers inspiring recreational experiences, and promotes healthy lifestyles.

**Close Scotts Run Nature Preserve Parking Lots: \$152,548**

- Reduction in Force:
  - General Fund: 3 LTE
- The parking lot would be gated and locked. Access would be limited to residents that can walk to the park.
- Eliminate police and security presence at the park.
- Reduced frequency of FCPA personnel on site could impact globally-significant ecological resources throughout the park.

**Remove Part-Time Photographic Specialist: \$26,988**

- Reduction in Force
  - 1 Non-Merit, SYE
- Responsibility to be absorbed by merit Photographer and Marketing/Communications team via mobile devices, potentially compromising photo quality, and ultimately the FCPA brand standard, for editorial and media use

**Charge Additional Development Division Salaries to Bond \$768,651**

- Additional staff will be charged to the Bond
- This will increase Project Management Expenses for bond projects from approx. \$1M to \$1.8M per year and the agency will lose flexibility in mitigating WPFO affects on project budgets
- This will decrease the amount of Bond available for design and construction of projects.
- For the 2026 Bond \$10.9M of the \$180M will go to Project Management Expenses (up from \$6M).

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FISCAL IMPACT:

The County has asked for options that would total 10% of the current Park Authority General Fund Budget. The options presented to the Park Authority Board total \$3,564,106, meeting the required goal.

ATTACHMENT:

Compiled list of Public Comments received related to FY 2026 Non-Recommended Budget Reductions and FY 2026 Budget Requests

STAFF:

Jai Cole, Executive Director  
Sara Baldwin, Deputy Director/COO  
Aimee L. Vosper, Deputy Director/CBD  
Michael Peter, Director, Administration Division  
Tonya Mills, Senior Fiscal Administrator  
Nicole Varnes, Senior Budget Analyst

**From:** A N [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 4, 2024 11:07:29 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Mason <[Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov](mailto:Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Budget cuts to Park Authority despite surplus?

Hello,

I just read a disturbing article that the Park Authority is facing budget cuts due to lack of funds ([see article here](#)). Cuts include possibly closing a nature center and cutting the Summer Concert series? Why is this happening when I just read an article stating that the county has a \$260million surplus? ([see article here](#)). Why would our beloved Parks systems and programs be facing budget cuts when there is surplus? I have read both articles clearly and I don't understand why the county is facing budget cuts when there was just a surplus reported.

Can you please help me understand what is going on? Thank you.

Sincerely, Anh Ngo  
Annandale resident

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**From:** W. Everts [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 4, 2024 8:31:43 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Fairfax County Park proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

So I read this

## **Park Authority faces potential service cuts amid countywide budget challenges**

By [James Jarvis](#)

Published September 4, 2024 at 3:30PM



The Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) is preparing for the possibility of [significant service reductions](#) as part of a countywide effort to close an expected budget shortfall.

During a Park Authority Board budget [committee meeting](#) last Wednesday (Aug. 28, park officials outlined [proposed cuts](#) that could include shorter hours and fewer services at rec centers, less frequent grounds maintenance, cancellation of seasonal programs, reduced staffing and postponed facility upgrades.

In total, staff identified over \$3.5 million in possible cuts, or 10% of the agency's general fund budget for the current fiscal year 2025, which started July 1.

### **Why does this keep happening?**

On August 8, 2024, The FFX Now newsletter published an article addressing how they intend to distribute a \$260.6 million budget surplus.

**"Fairfax County executive unveils proposal for \$260 million budget surplus"**

By [James Jarvis](#)

Published August 8, 2024 at 9:30AM"

Nowhere in the article does it discuss any of those funds going to county parks. We, the county citizens have seen our real estate taxes increase, discussion of adding a meals tax on restaurants, and other increases. When will those elected by the citizens look for a way to apply the budget overages to benefit the tax-paying citizens? Across the board. The majority of those affected by the loss of park projects, shorter hours, cancellation of seasonal programs, reduced staffing, and postponed facility upgrades will be the seniors, parents, their children everyone who works or has worked hard to provide a good life for themselves and their loved ones. It seems to me that an unstated strategy here is to make this a class-based county where those who are middle class have to move to afford a decent life, but are encouraged to work in the county for the wealthy who will be able to afford it. Is the goal to push Loudoun County out of the list of the richest counties in the US and take their spot, because only people making more than \$147.11 will be able to live here in the next very few years.

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William B. Everts [REDACTED]

**From:** Rebecca Haldi [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 4, 2024 6:25:32 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Park Authority budget cuts

To whom it may concern,

I'm really dismayed that any cuts need made, but I really hope the forestry maintenance budget does not get reduced - it is so crucial!! I would also HATE for any of the nature centers or historic sites to close, they are such an important part of this county.

That being said, reducing the mowing frequency of athletic fields sounds like a win at least!

Thanks very much,  
Rebecca Haldi

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 4, 2024 5:33:49 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:**

Hello,

I am writing to express my dissatisfaction with the budget cuts to Fairfax Parks. Park upkeep is necessary for safety reasons and maintenance of the parks is already lacking.

Best,  
Fairfax County Resident

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**From:** Shaf Syed [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 5, 2024 2:58 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Budget Cut Feedback

I've enjoyed the parks for over 40 years. I'm very grateful for what the park offers. Even though in some parks there is less. And of course I think I'm not alone in all the cost bumps. I'm more of an outdoorsman and enjoy things like taking the boats on the water. I grew up around Lake Accotink Park and I'm sure you are familiar with what's going on with that. I can't imagine what budget cuts would do to that park which is already struggling.

I really don't think that raising the prices and not cutting the budgets is going to upset a lot of the newer and younger generation. I think the days of enjoying the outdoors and less of technology are

far and few. I think it's people like me. Who've enjoyed the park for decades that have a lot to compare with.

Please don't cut any budgets the parks. I would raise the fees of different services a few dollars. Which should offset in strategic or long-term planning.

Regards,  
S. Syed

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**From:** Emily Cole [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 6, 2024 8:57 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature Center Closure

To Whom It May Concern,

I am deeply shocked and angry to learn that proposed county budget cuts include potentially closing one of Fairfax County's nature centers. As a lifelong county resident I grew up loving the classes they offered and begged to go visit animals at Hidden Oaks and Hidden Pond constantly. My Girl Scout troop learned invaluable camping and hiking skills at Riverbend. I remember as a child how devastated I was when Hidden Oaks was temporarily closed in 2000 and how happy I was to go back and see the snakes and turtles when it opened back up. Now, almost 25 years later, I enjoy bringing my own son to the parks and watching his little face light up with excitement when a naturalist shows him an animal or teaches him about the natural world around him. He loves attending classes and programs at every center we have visited and I am honestly appalled and angry that the county would consider closing any of these remarkable community resources. Our parks and nature centers are one of our county's pride and joys and I implore you to reconsider this decision. The services, resources and joy they provide Fairfax County residents are worth more than any budget bottom line. Please continue to let them shine.

Sincerely, Emily Cole

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**From:** Joseph Kagimer [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 6, 2024 8:46 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature Center budget cuts

While I know that cuts may be necessary, please do not cut the nature center off Hummer Road in Annandale. You have put much effort into upgrading this facility and to close it or significantly reduce hours would be a waste of money already spent and a loss to the community.

I would be eliminating all entertainment before I touched this nature center. The value of the

entertainment is fleeting but the nature center is a continuing gem. My grandkids demand to go there every time we visit.

Joseph Kasimer  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Anna Childson [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 6, 2024 10:17 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Comments on Park Authority Budget

Hello,

I heard that Park Authority is having to face some budget cuts. That is unfortunate as I love ALL that Fairfax County parks have to offer. I chose to live in Fairfax county partly for the excellent parks and park resources

I would like to strongly advocate for keeping all nature centers open if possible

We live right by Hidden Oaks Nature Center and go there very frequently. Plus, my toddlers regularly go to other nature centers as well with their nanny

Nature Centers help children and adults appreciate parks and all parks and nature have to offer. Closing down nature centers will lead to fewer people appreciating parks at all and I think it would actually lead to worse outcomes long term for Park Authority and parks in general

Feel free to reach out to me with any questions if my opinion is needed further Thank you,  
Anna  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Julie Olson [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 6, 2024 2:03:11 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Mason <[Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov](mailto:Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov)>; Clerk to the BOS<[ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center - A treasure in Annandale

Good afternoon,

As a mother of a six-year old living in the neighborhood surrounding Hidden Oaks Nature Center, I am writing to you to express my concern about future funding for the center.

This area is an absolute hub for families, young children, and our grandparents to gather, learn, and explore nature. Something that does not cost money, can be enjoyed by anyone in this area - regardless of their economic status. It provides the opportunity to explore, learn, and build character and imagination.

As you work on the FCPA budget for the upcoming year - and are considering cuts to programs, I would like to express the Annandale communities' interest in continuing to support this important center and the associated programs it holds for families. They offer the exact type of programs that keep children engaged, ensure they are doing activities away from "devices" - and we really should support these important programs for our youth and to improve our community.

I would add that to not fund the center, would most certainly create a haven for older teenagers, and those looking to be "out of the eye" - as it would create the perfect space for a new trouble spot to emerge.

Thank you for your time. Julie Lynn Olson [REDACTED]

V.P Operations - Mission Solutions All Native Group

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**From:** Kevin Darmody [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 6, 2024 11:22 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov>  
**Subject:** Please don't close the Hidden Oaks Nature Center!

The Hidden Oaks Nature Center is a true gem. We probably visit at least once a week, sometimes more. We enjoy the park and all the trails in the area, but we also love going into the center to learn and show our two young girls all the wonderful educational items there. They have gone on scavenger hunts, learned about various animals and plants from the areas, interacted with staff and other visitors - all kinds of wonderful things. The future of this Country and Virginia relies upon strong, smart, educated, and well rounded children - removing access to the Hidden Oaks Nature Center would be a major disservice and would have negative long-term impacts to the community.

Please do not cut this treasure from our community.

-Kevin Darmody

Resident of Annandale, frequent visitor of the Hidden Oaks Community Center

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**From:** Susan Laume [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, August 30, 2024 12:04 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Public Comment - Park Budget Planning

## Park Authority

Thank you for your invitation to comment on the FCPA potential budget savings.

Please note that the audio during the related Board meeting made it impossible to hear several speakers/members. For example, did Linwood Gorham have/use a microphone? None of his comments were audible, even after another board member indicated he could not be heard.

I appreciate the County Executive's early attention to reducing costs/expenses. I believe all departments, including parks, should make the difficult decisions it takes to relief the residential tax burden during these difficult financial times for the county. I appreciate that FCPA will join that effort, though it seems somewhat unwillingly, and encourage even more stringent efforts than those identified. I say this even though I am a strong supporter of our park system and have been a regular and substantial financial supporter.

### Areas where more savings could/should be sought:

1) Mowing - (athletic fields and open space) — the higher temperatures we are experiencing in recent years impact the growth rate of grasses typically mowed. Though contract mow services push for consistent and regular mowing, such as once or twice a week, many areas could forego regular mowing during the months at the height of summer temperatures. The mowing frequencies in the 'non- recommended' offering do not go far enough to capture those potential savings.

2) Summer Concert / movie series — Although this item was identified as “very popular”, I was surprised at the high cost associated with the events. Wonder what percentage of the county population takes advantage of these offerings? Recommend further reductions in numbers, possibly combining nearby Districts instead of making them District specific, alternating Districts each season. Or reduce to just one per season, until the County finances return to a better position. Wouldn't residents consider these a 'nice to have' rather than a 'must have' when compared to the prospect of increasing real estate tax rates?

3) Nature Center/Historic Site Closures — Recommend increasing the number of site closures and make them 'rolling closures'; meaning close different sites each year; reopen the next year and close others. Restructure staffing so reduced a staff moves from closed sites to open sites each year. Rely on the new mobile Wonder Wagon to bring nature subjects to areas with annual closures.

4) PT Photographers - Eliminate all part-time staff photographer positions/salaries and instead utilize volunteer and donated photographs. The rise of camera phones has created an army of willing photographers anxious to share their work. Encourage photo submissions in various subject areas where PT staff photographers might have been used, such as: for social media flora and fauna postings, and events citizen attend. Use a volunteer position to sort through submissions.

5) IMA staffing/Use of Volunteers in all branches - Utilize the significant and dedicated cadre of volunteers committed to these invasive management, and other environmental

programs, in new ways within the branches instead of staff. Offer volunteer positions to address volunteer coordination, communication, and other appropriate tasks to free up permanent staff for other duties. For example, I believe the Community Garden Plot program is run successfully by volunteers; volunteer staff might be expanded to staff more nature/historic sites.

6) Event cost control - I've often attended events where FCPA staff and elected officials far out-numbered resident attendance. Review and control costs related to project event celebrations. Does each small site need a ribbon cutting? Or would a media celebration do?

Areas where savings should not be sought:

6) Trail maintenance - Described as the number one amenity appreciated by residents, trails are utilized by those with a wide variety of interests, including, exercise, nature appreciation, meditation, dog-walking, biking, sports competitions, and as such touch many residents. This is not an area which can afford to be cut without impact.

7) Foundation goal increase - This item is not in keeping with the nature of the requested cost identification exercise and, because it is a goal, not a cut per se, should not be relied on as part of FCPA's commitment to cost savings.

Areas where further explanation is needed:

8) Untouchable areas- While accepting the explanation that these are county charges to each department, these are areas where more should be done to control expenses. For example, fuel charges. A continuing nit for me, is that FCPA, PD and other departments, allow continuous running of vehicles, even when drivers are outside the vehicles for significant lengths of times, and even when the vehicle is sitting in a park environment. This practice impacts air quality, and operating expenses. More should be done, including policy changes, to reduce fossil fuel use.

9) Zero Waste - While I have long been critical of FCPA's trash management practices related to park users trash generation, I do not yet understand the park's roll in waste reduction. More information is needed.

Respectfully submitted, Susan Laume  
VA Master Naturalist  
Laurel Hill Park Volunteer Team Leader/IMA Site Lead [REDACTED]

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**From:** Keely Daugherty [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 6, 2024 2:29 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Mason <[Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov](mailto:Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov)>; Clerk to the BOS<[ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center

As a resident of the neighborhood, it is critical that the Hidden Oaks Nature Center remain open. This is a safe, happy, community center for Annandale residences. Should the budget not permit

keeping it open as is, invest in enhancing it and making it a revenue source, rather than shutting it down. I was there over the weekend this past weekend and there wasn't a singular parking spot because it was so lively and full of families enjoying the trails, park and center.

This park is a safe, clean space for wholesome family fun near a very bad apartment with lots of drug issues. If it closes down, there is a risk that the parking lot will become a place for drug deals, sex work, loitering and crime in general. Keeping the nature center opened is so important to the neighborhood and community and its inability to contribute reasonable revenue for the city is a reflection of the management, investment and support provided by Fairfax City Government resources and funding.

Lastly, a safe, fun nature center increases the property value in the neighborhood, which ultimately benefits the city. It is part of the reason we moved to Annandale from Arlington and its a buying and selling point for the neighborhood, so much so that it was listed on our home listing.

Please reconsider closing this treasured neighborhood nature center. Invest in nature, education and community.

Sincerely,

A neighbor and friend of Hidden Oaks Nature Center

Keely Anderson

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**From:** Sylvia Morgan [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 6, 2024 3:46 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Protect Hidden Oaks

As you prepare your budget for FY2026, please protect our beloved Hidden Oaks. We've been fortunate to attend many classes, camps, and field trips there, and each one has been immeasurably informative, interactive, and enjoyable. The grounds and the staff there are always so pleasant and knowledgeable, and my children and I have spent countless days exploring and playing around the trails, creek, playground, and exhibits.

Thank you for your consideration, Sylvia Morgan

Sylvia Morgan, PT, DPT (she/her)

"What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset." - Crowfoot,



Blackfoot warrior and orator

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**From:** TM Shaw [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 8, 2024 7:40 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Cc:** Sully District Kathy L. Smith <[SullyDistrictKathyLSmith@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:SullyDistrictKathyLSmith@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** 2026 Park Authority budget

I just read about the proposed changes to the budget for trail maintenance in the parks. I've been a county resident and park user for the last 40 years and believe that the trails are one of the most widely used amenities in the parks - particularly by adults. In recent years I've noticed a distinct decline in the amount and quality of trail maintenance in the park nearest me (Ellanor Lawrence) that I use every week. Vegetation from the sides of trails goes uncut for months at a time and grass underfoot gets tall. I find it hard to believe that FCPA staff is recommending a 50% reduction in spending on trail maintenance when there is already evidence of a decline in the quality already. I don't see other park budget items being reduced in such drastic measures. Older people may not use the ball fields much but we at least deserve better maintained trails - NOT A 50% REDUCTION IN EFFORT BY FCPA.

Terry Shaw

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**From:** Michael Albin [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 9, 2024 4:31 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Budget cuts

Dear Park Authority,

The FFX Times ran an article on the county's budget situation and the proposed cuts in park services. I wish to congratulate you and the BOS for proposing these cuts. The county budget is enormous and the county taxpayers, especially homeowners, carry this burden on their shoulders.

I suggest you propose some other items from the overall budget in order to restore Park Authority funds to the desired levels.

Michael Albin [REDACTED]

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**From:** Mary Levine [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 6, 2024 4:45 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Mason <[Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov](mailto:Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov)>; Clerk to the BOS<[ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center

To whom this may concern --

I'm reaching out to implore you to keep the Hidden Oaks Nature Center open for children and adults to enjoy. I have taken my young daughter there multiple times, and plan on having her 4th birthday party there (we've already done the park nearby!). The learning opportunities that children are afforded there and the interactions with local animals/reptiles are invaluable. This center gives children the opportunity to see nature at work and see how they can fit in.

What I believe would make it an even more valuable resources is to have it open in the mornings on the weekends. If it seems like there isn't enough foot traffic or interest in the area, it's because it's open precisely during the most popular nap times for kids (whose parents are still lucky enough to have kids that nap!). I've found it challenging to work around the scheduling, but nonetheless, it's absolutely worth it.

I am happy to pay more taxes if it means that our county services run well and are funded adequately. But underfunding or cutting these services, we are removing some of the things that make Fairfax great to live in.

Thank you so much, Mary

My daughter with her favorite turtle:



**Mary Levine**

[REDACTED]

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**From:** Jessica Swanson [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 9, 2024 8:00 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Cc:** Mason <[Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov](mailto:Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov)>; Chairman <[Chairman@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Chairman@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Fairfax County Park Authority Board - Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

Hello,

I am writing to share feedback on the Fairfax County Park Authority Board's proposed FY26 budget reductions.

- **FCPA should've listed all potential options:** The level of detail in the [FY25 budget](#) makes it hard for the public to weigh in on all potential options FCPA considered. Rather than sharing the many options FCPA weighed, we are left to react just to the proposed options FCPA offered, most of which seem alarming. Can FCPA identify other levers it did not propose and why it selected these particular cuts?
- **FCPA outcomes already lag neighbors:** In general, FCPA's service is already poor (e.g., mowing not timely, playgrounds in parks in poor repair, etc.), especially compared to nearby neighbors like Arlington and DC, which have invested in world-class parks. So, some might say that FCPA just needs more funding from the Board of Supervisors (BOS).
- **Increase FCPA funding but only if new governance:** I support more funding for parks programming if the BOS were to replace the opaque Park Authority structure with a county-run parks department, like neighboring jurisdictions. Simply put, FCPA has demonstrated over and over in my more than 15 years as a Mason District resident that it acts without accountability in its decision-making and use of funds. FCPA leaders are unresponsive to the community and can't demonstrate how existing funds are spent.

I deeply value our parks and recreational programs and want our county taxes to support outstanding services. FCPA can and should do better -- not just with how it shares these proposals -- but also how it operates.

Jessica Swanson [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Mitchell Hailstone [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 6, 2024 5:42 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Mason <[Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov](mailto:Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov)>; Clerk to the BOS<[ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Cc:** Betsy [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Don't close Hidden Oaks Nature Center!!

Hello,

I know Fairfax County Park Authority is considering budget cuts, and I am writing to urge you to not reduce funding for Hidden Oaks Nature Center.

I am a father of three and me, my wife, and my children regularly use and enjoy Hidden Oaks Nature Center. We regularly meet friends and other kids there to visit the Spike the Iguana, Hera the turtle, and all the other animals. They make believe with the tree house and costumes. We also take advantage of the programming it has to offer. My daughter just finished a summer camp there, and she had a wonderful experience.

Every time we go, we see other families with kids enjoying the nature center—it seems very popular. Please don't rob the community of one of the few places parents with young families can gather and meet.

Mitchell Hailstone [REDACTED]

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**From:** LeighAnn C [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, September 7, 2024 12:19 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center

Hello,

My husband and I live within walking distance to Hidden Oaks Nature Center and are devastated to hear the center may close as a result of budget cuts. We walk our 9 month old baby to the Nature center often, and the ability to have such a calm, beautiful location so close to us has been part of why we love our neighborhood so much. The Nature Playce, Storybook Trail, and gardens are a welcome escape from the urbanization of the area. Please don't close this valuable community resource. Nature should be cherished as an accessible public asset for our community and our children.

Thank you for your consideration,

Leigh Ann, David, C Landry Thong [REDACTED]

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**From:** Gwenn Berry [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, September 7, 2024 1:02 PM  
**To:** Clerk to the BOS <[ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Mason <[Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov](mailto:Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov)>; FCPA Parkmail<[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Please keep Hidden Oaks Nature Center open!

To whom it may concern at the FCPA,

In reviewing the potential changes for FY 2026 budget cuts, we. have seen that closure of one of the nature centers is on the table. As a taxpayer and community member, I would like to express my strongest urging that you not close the Hidden Oaks Nature Center. This is a very important part of our community and we would all be very disappointed to see it go. I can't think of a resource that aligns better with the Park Authority mission than the nature center!

Best regards, Gwenn Berry

[REDACTED]

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**From:** Meggie Middendorf [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, September 7, 2024 1:07 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden oaks nature center

Please don't close Hidden Oaks Nature Center. As homeschoolers, we use it every week! Thank you!

Sent using [Zoho Mail](#)

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 9, 2024 2:32:42 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center

Good afternoon,

I'm writing after learning about the proposed budget cuts for FY2025 and specifically the proposal to close a nature center. I live in Holmes Run Acres, very close to Hidden Oaks Nature Center and wanted to communicate what a treasured and valuable space it is for the community. I've been visiting the nature center on a weekly basis since my son was born in 2023. We love visiting all of animals, plants, and natural spaces and discovering something new each time. My son loves to "hoot" at the stuffed owls and last visit we watched a volunteer feed the snapping turtle! It's really been a fun and open space for fostering a love of nature and wildlife. I hope the county will continue to keep it in operation so my family and community members can enjoy this neighborhood gem for years to come!

Thank you, Amy Vance

[REDACTED]

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**From:** Pat Rowell [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 9, 2024 2:30:11 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Park Authority budget cuts

I was amazed to read about proposed cuts to the Park Authority budget. With dense development and deforestation, our children have no where to go to interact with Nature. I do not mean athletic fields. I mean Nature - trees, wild animals, wild flowers - you know Nature. It has been scientifically proven that being outside in Nature can ease anxiety and other emotional feelings. Today our youth are experiencing immense mental health challenges. Suicide rates are now kept starting at 10 years of age. Drug use is skyrocketing among our youth. If anything, you should increase the Park Authority budget to save from development areas of trees, creeks/streams, forests, etc. Not only do our children need such areas to explore, adults do also. And of great importance is the Earth's needs for more untouched Nature to battle Climate Change. I do not know what the rest of the County budget looks like but I encourage you to save more undeveloped land, put more solar on top of county buildings, cut down on highway development by considering other means of transportation such as bike paths, walking trails, etc. The blacking of America's roads, parking lots, etc. capture heat which is contrary to battling climate change.

I strongly encourage you to consider the challenges our youth are encountering and the huge impact of climate change this summer and years to come. You must change your mindsets about what the humans and fauna of our County and Country need. It's a big change but please do it.

Dr. Patricia Rowell [REDACTED]

Let there be peace on Earth and let it begin with me — us!

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**From:** Marie Kraft [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024 6:16 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:**

This park Hidden oaks nature center has ment everything to our growing family have been going there since the 70s now I find out it might close? Please keep this park open Annandale is losing so much. My grandchildren and now great grandchildren enjoy this so very much.

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**From:** andrew mueller [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 9, 2024 10:04 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Impending Budget Cuts

Don't do it! The richest county in America should be EXPANDING public services, not reducing them. Sent from my T-Mobile Samsung S23 Ultra

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**From:** Nancy Bao [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 9, 2024 5:35 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Feedback on FCPA budget

Hello,

I saw a recent article in the Fairfax Times, "Park Authority seeks feedback on 2026 budget" on Sept 6, 2024.

I just wanted to submit my feedback that trail maintenance should be increased as much as feasible, particularly on the Gerry Connelly Trail in McLean/Vienna/Great Falls. These trails are used a LOT but the overgrowth on the trails prevents even more usage. If a little maintenance is done to widen the trail, it'll get used more often, leading to a natural cycle of cleanup by users of the trails. I personally have gone out with my shears to try and cut back on the unruly weeds!

Overall, the FCPA is doing a fabulous job maintaining all the facilities, but just wanted to put in that plug for trail maintenance on Gerry Connelly Trail in the McLean/Vienna/Great Falls area.

And if I can be of assistance in organizing a Trail Clean Up in that area, sign me up! Thank you so much for this opportunity to submit my feedback.

Nancy Bao  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Scott Diffenderfer [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 9, 2024 4:39 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Budget cuts

After reading the article regarding Park Authority budget cuts I had to wonder why park maintenance is always at the top of the list. This happens whenever there's a budget crisis and it seems the area(s)



that should be of greatest concern get the largest impact. I was the Park Authority Senior Arborist a while back and when I started there was an amazingly small budget for forestry operations. Then Emerald Ash Borer hit, oak decline hit, and our parks lost 1000's of trees. The County and Park Authority stepped up and provided funding to address those crises. That was great but any sort of preventative management halted in order to address the immediate problems brought on by these insect and disease issues. I am hopeful there is a way to limit cuts to the forestry program and continue to increase proactive conservation and sustainable management practices to our vital ecological infrastructure. It's not only important to the environment, it's important for the health, safety, and welfare of our community.

SCOTT DIFFENDERFER  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Colben Krzos [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024 10:19 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Potential Nature Center Closing

Cutting IMA's budget and closing a nature center is a very bad idea. Nature centers allow for hundreds of local residents to explore nature and see wildlife. As a volunteer with very close to a thousand hours, nature centers are very dear to me. I have many fond memories as a camper aspiring to be a volunteer. I would carry as many nets as possible, out competing the volunteers who were supposed to be carrying them leading to a new rule being made of attendees only being allowed to carry one net. I did get my goal though and the next year I was asked to help out as a volunteer. I had learned much about the site and wanted to give back to the site that I had nothing but good memories of. Being a volunteer I lead groups of camp kids, helped lead scout programs and lead animal talks which gave me self confidence and public speaking skills. None of this would have been possible without Nature centers and these opportunities would be blocked for hundreds of potential volunteers if a nature center would be closed. It pains me that the invasive species that are taking over the parks would have less people combating them if IMA's budget were cut, they are vital in preventing invasive's full takeover. Even at Hidden Pond, where the majority of my volunteering takes place, we have to do multiple removals of invasive parrot feather from the pond a season, among other invasive species such as Japanese stiltgrass and English ivy outcompete around the edges. We need IMA to push back against these threats to our environment.

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**From:** Claude Long [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024 12:42 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Park Authority Budget Input



Dear Sir / Ma'am,

Many Fairfax County residents enjoy and appreciate the many Park Authority resources made available to us. Thank you! However, as with most government ran programs there is mismanagement and waste that results in continual budgetary shortfalls. There are plenty of taxpayer funds to administer the many programs but the Authority is missing the detail on where there is waste and should implement management controls to thoroughly assess and determine the forward path.

Problem. The Park Authority, and Fairfax County political and government leadership in general, has a long history of wasting taxpayer funds, wasteful programs, program mismanagement, often refuses to cut wasteful spending, and consistently looks at additional resources (taxes) as the solution that will only lead to more waste.

Case study. I go the Lake Braddock Golf Center almost every week and the optic is the Park Authority is administering a 'jobs program' rather than an efficiently organizing and managing this particular program with an efficient and effective planned and taxpayer funded staff. There are always 2-3 people behind the check-in desk and without exception one or two of them are either on their personal phone or chatting with other unoccupied staff. The snack bar has multiple employees despite no one ever ordering food the times I have been there. There is a Starter position despite a legitimate need for a separate position for this role, the check in desk could easily manage both rolls. This represents needless and wasteful human resources planning and taxpayers deserve better, especially when due to complacency and mismanagement. I am confident that other park activities experience the same mismanagement with ineffective oversight.

Recommendation. Use data. (1) Partner with local education institutions (GMU, NVCC, etc.) to collect extensive data on Park Authority programs, utilization rates, user revenue data, Human Resources business case analytics to establish efficient paid positions, survey-generated metrics, etc. (2) Use this data to make decisions on where wasteful spending can be eliminated, discontinue inefficient and unused/lesser used programs, trim staffs to necessary and efficient levels, and plan and implement a community volunteer program and utilize volunteer resources. (3) Seek a tax-incentive for volunteers so they have incentives to participate.

I am available for any questions or concerns. Please know that the Park Authority has a tough job and my input is not intended to be an inditement on hard-working citizens of Fairfax County, but we can do better.

Regards, Claude Long [REDACTED]

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**From:** Karen Emery [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 20, 2024 11:23 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov>  
**Subject:** Special request

To whom it May Concern:

I am writing to let you know of my concern of the possible closing the Hidden Oaks Nature Center. It is a wonderful addition to the neighborhood. It helps the environment by having the trees and nature instead of adding more homes and concrete to the county.

What can we do to save it?

Thank you,  
Karen Emery

Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Teri Theresa [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 7:25 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov>  
**Subject:** Please don't close nature center

Good evening,

I just read that Fairfax County Park Authority is considering closing one nature center and one historic site. Please keep them open!

I love so many Fairfax County Parks and I have been a regular visitor since 2017. There was a fun challenge to visit several sites, filling a sort of passport that summer. We have been regular visitors ever since!

We love visiting both Hidden Pond and Hidden Oaks nature centers. Ellanor Lawrence Park is a hidden gem. We visit with Santa Claus at Sully Historic Site every year. I love receiving ParkTakes and picking out fun programs for my family every season! Please keep all your nature centers and historic sites open, we are so lucky to have them!

Sincerely, Theresa Milstein

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**From:** Dick Page [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 8:05 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature center and historic site closure

I've just heard the FCPA is considering closing a nature center. Please reconsider! My family visits different nature centers frequently and the staff and programs are so wonderful and necessary to keep kids connected to the natural world.

Sincerely Dick Page

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**From:** Aubrey Davis [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 8:55 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov>  
**Subject:** Please keep our beloved nature centers open!!

Good evening,  
As a former resident of Annandale and a former stay at home mom, Hidden Oaks was our happy place! Both educational and free, we would walk the trails and explore the nature center. With the growing number of families coming to this area, our parks and nature centers are what makes living here so wonderful!

Fast forward and our family of five moves to West Springfield , choosing the new home because it backed up to Hidden Pond nature center. This special place is where my husband, now 46 and from Burke, had his 3rd birthday! When Covid hit and we were stuck at home, at least we had the nature center trails, and as places began to open but schools remained shut, I signed my youngest up for the Parktakes classes!

In a time where most kids are behind screens and not getting outside, it's more critical than ever to keep these wonderful places open and available to the public! both nature centers have a special place in my heart and the hearts of so many families here! Thank you for your time!

Aubrey Davis  
Resident of Keene Mill Station Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Karen Rose [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 9:38 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Save our Nature Centers

I am writing to express my concern over the plans to close one nature center and one historic site. My kids and girl scout troops have enjoyed many Fairfax County Park Nature Centers and historic sites over the years, please do not close these special parks, centers and sites that are invaluable to our community.

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**From:** Alison Shearer [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 11:00 PM **To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** FCPA Budget Proposal comment

Good evening,

I have just become aware that the FCPA is considering closing a nature center to try to address potential budget shortfalls. This is the wrong approach to addressing fiscal concerns. Closing any of the nature centers would be detrimental to the wellbeing of our local communities. Hidden Oaks nature center has played a central role in our family's activities for over 15 years. From weekend visits, to Dinosaur egg hunts, birthday parties, special events and scouting activities, we have been regular patrons. It would be devastating to see it close. FCPA needs to look at other areas for budget reductions that don't directly impact services to local residents.

Thank you for your consideration. Alison Shearer

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**From:** Susan Burry [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 20, 2024 10:01 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Pond

Good morning,

Recently I learned of the possibility of closing Hidden Pond Nature Center. I am appalled! I took my daughter there and now my granddaughter - it is a special place run by devoted and inspired volunteers and employees. Their holiday program is a family tradition - find the money to keep it open!

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**From:** Mar Jacquemin [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 5:53 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Comments on Budget Cut Proposal

Hello,

I am a volunteer at Hidden Oaks Nature Center. I help with kids birthday parties, camps and activities. I have seen firsthand how many children, families and individuals benefit from the existence of this (and every) nature center. Closing a nature center in order to reduce budgeting is not a good solution. We already live in a world where people lack access to the outdoors, are more disconnected than ever from nature and wildlife, and this is only getting more extreme as time goes on. I strongly urge you to reconsider these budget cuts, and not to close centers where people can go to learn, connect, play, share and experience nature. Hidden Oaks Nature Center is doing fabulous work through their programming and it would be a huge loss to the community if it were to close.

I also want to highlight that currently, invasive plants are taking over our wildlands at alarming rates. The ramifications of this are severe, and work must be done to curb their spread, plant

natives, and educate the public on this issue. I think that firing an ecologist who works on this is very harmful. I encourage you to reconsider.

It is a terrible thing that budget cuts are required for the park system. No matter what, it is a negative change and many will suffer as a result. I'm sorry to those who have to make the decisions around this, and I hope they will consider the wellbeing of the public and the planet in doing so.

Thank you,  
Marissa Jacquemin Resident of Fairfax County  
Volunteer at Hidden Oaks Nature Center

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**From:** Klarita K [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 5:45 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature Center

Hello,

As a fairfax county resident who frequents all the nature centers and parks, I implore you to not close any.

These centers and the staff involved are so crucial for humans and creatures. The hands-on education, preservation and connection to the real world can't be replicated by a book or film. Young people and future generations will have less and less opportunities to experience nature and disconnect from digital devices as urban sprawl spreads exponentially.

Nature centers should be replicated, duplicated and supported. Please don't take any away from us and generations to come.

Thank you!

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**From:** Lisa Bushman [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 5:33 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature Center and Historic Site Closures

I've been a Fairfax County resident for several decades and love our parks and historic sites. Can you tell me which sites are being considered for closure? I've looked online but can't find information on the specific sites in question.

Thank you,  
Lisa Brown Bushman

**From:** Robin Duska [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 5:31 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Opposed to Closing a Nature Center

As a long-time volunteer at Riverbend Park, I urge you not to close any of our Fairfax nature centers.

These centers are a great resource, especially for our children who otherwise spend much of their lives parked in front of screens. Please do not lessen our ability to educate residents about why nature is important!

Robin Duska [REDACTED]

NOTICE:

**The Fairfax County Park Authority Board is considering closing a nature center**

From the Budget Committee Package, August 28, 2024:

**Close One Nature Center and One Historic Site: \$644,000**

- Significant Reduction in Force:
  - General Fund: 6 Merit and 8 LTE
- Impact engagements with over 100,000 visitors annually, mostly children.
- Eliminate popular field trips for thousands of public, private, and home school students.
- Impacts FCPA's ability to deliver on our mission.

*The Park Authority Mission is to enrich quality of life for all members of the community through an enduring park system that provides a healthy environment, preserves natural and cultural heritage, offers inspiring recreational experiences, and promotes healthy lifestyles.*


Aug 24

Complete presentation: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/board/archives/2024/082824-budget-phg.pdf>

**Express your concern—Provide your feedback by Thursday, September 19**

Email [Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)  
or send to: Fairfax County Park Authority, Public Information Office  
12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 927  
Fairfax, VA 22035

**Next Step:** On September 25, at the Park Authority Budget Committee Meeting, the Board will review and approve Potential General Fund Budget Reduction Package and Budget Request Package. Contact Budget Committee Chairman Ken Quincy at [FCPABoardProvidence@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoardProvidence@fairfaxcounty.gov).

 A publication of the Friends of Hidden Oaks Nature Center  
September 2024  
[friendsofhiddenoaksnaturecenter.com](http://friendsofhiddenoaksnaturecenter.com)

**From:** Stephanie Johnson [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 4:11 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Comments re: potential closure of Hidden Oaks Nature Center

To Whom it May Concern:

Our family and many of our neighbors living here in the nearby Lafayette Village community were incredibly disappointed and saddened to hear that Hidden Oaks Nature Center may potentially close in the future due to budget concerns, and we would like to plead for reconsideration.

Hidden Oaks Nature Center (and the surrounding green space) is one of the primary reasons our family chose to live in this neighborhood over other areas in Fairfax. We have two young children who have greatly benefited from spending time learning at the centers indoor and outdoor spaces. The events and programming that this nature center offers to its community are deeply cherished, and are not readily available to these families elsewhere (without significant commute by car). Moreover, Fairfax county has very recently invested a lot of resources to improve/modernize this space, which is another reason many of us are quite puzzled by the possibility of this budget strategy.

The people of Annandale need this nature center. Research has revealed that "time spent in nature has been associated with improved psychological functioning, overall mental health, and connection to place for children, teenagers, and parents" (1). Findings from a 2021 NIH study supports "public health interventions and policies that aim to support youth health; in particular, **explicitly enabling and encouraging youth to spend more time outside in nature may serve as a simple public health strategy to support US youth's overall health and well-being**" (2). The Hidden Oaks Nature Center does just that. Given the state of pediatric mental-health in the US, our youth here in this area of Fairfax need these opportunities to get away from screens/tablets/technology and into nature. The nature-based programming offered here for all ages brings the mental health benefits of the outdoors to diverse audiences, and is needed now more than ever.

Please consider the entirety of the residents that this decision would impact. This nature center currently provides much needed joy, peace, connection/community and enrichment to all generations in the area.

Thank you for your time and consideration, The Johnson family (Stephanie Johnson) [REDACTED]

- (1) [https://cbey.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2020-10/CBEY\\_REPORT\\_HEALTH-NATURE\\_FINAL.pdf](https://cbey.yale.edu/sites/default/files/2020-10/CBEY_REPORT_HEALTH-NATURE_FINAL.pdf)  
(2) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8381719/>

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**From:** Laura Eakin Erlacher [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 9:43 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Cc:** Longworth, Roberta [REDACTED]; Anita Herrera [REDACTED]; Rich Harpe [REDACTED]; Kevin Ta [REDACTED]; Michael [REDACTED]

Gailliot [REDACTED]; Robin Walker [REDACTED]; Gary W. Kirkbride  
[REDACTED]; Thomas Chennikara [REDACTED]; Harry.Glasgow  
[REDACTED]

**Subject:** Fairfax County Park Foundation Public Comment

The Fairfax County Park Foundation Board (FCPF) respectfully submits the attached comments to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) in response to the proposal to pay the FCPA a 20% administrative fee on charitable contributions received by the FCPF.

Sincerely,

Laura Eakin Erlacher  
Chair, Fairfax County Park Foundation Board of Directors





To: Fairfax County Park Authority (FPCA) Board Members

From: Fairfax County Park Foundation (FCPF) Board of Directors

Date: September 19, 2024

Re: FCPF Response to FCPA FY 2026 'Non-Recommended' Budget Reduction

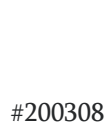
The Fairfax County Park Foundation Board (FCPF) respectfully submits these comments to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FPCA) in response to the proposal to pay the FCPA a 20% administrative fee on charitable contributions received by the FCPF. The FCPF submits that imposing a 20% administrative fee on donations would be detrimental to its mission.

**Background.** The forward-thinking Fairfax County Park Authority Board in 2000 approved the establishment of a dedicated 501(c)(3) nonprofit to attract supplementary support for the FCPA. The FCPF's volunteer Board of Directors was formed to raise funds, obtain grants, and create partnerships that enrich parks of Fairfax County.

The FCPF and FCPA have a mutually beneficial relationship. FCPF depends on certain resources provided by the FCPA in return for fundraising exclusively for the FCPA. Through the FCPA, Fairfax County provides the salaries and benefits for the three FCPF staff who conduct FCPF operations. In return, FCPF raises funds solely for the FCPA. To provide some perspective, the FCPF's federal counterpart, the National Park Foundation (NPF), which is the official nonprofit of the National Park Service, is supported by the federal government with an annual endowment of \$10 million. And in 2023, the federal government contributed an additional \$10 million, all of which provides the basis for donor confidence in the NPF.

**Delivering a Positive Donor Experience and Outcome.** FCPF, qualifying as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit under the Internal Revenue Code, was formed to enable donors to support the parks and public recreation programs of Fairfax County, who otherwise may not be able to donate to government entities. Donors of the FCPF understand that the FCPF is a qualified 501(c)(3) which is transparent about receiving support from the FCPA. Since Fairfax County residents'

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Phone 703-324-8582 ● Fax 703-653-7048 ● [www.FairfaxParkFoundation.org](http://www.FairfaxParkFoundation.org)





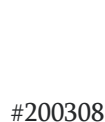
tax dollars are already supporting some of the FCPA's administrative functions, an attractive donor consideration is that the FCPF operates at a low overhead rate because of the FCPA's support. In most cases, donors want to ensure their dollars are fully dedicated to designated projects and not spent on overhead.

Furthermore, many grantors and donors, like family foundations, have policies restricting approval of donations only to nonprofits with low overhead thresholds.

**Adverse Impact.** The FCPF is concerned that the FCPA's budgetary proposal for the FCPF to pay a 20% administrative fee on donations would adversely impact donor interest in the FCPF as an attractive dedicated charitable organization of the donor's priority. It could significantly reduce donations and supplemental support for FCPA projects and programs, and materially impact the continued existence of the FCPF. Donors may be reluctant to give if a portion of their donations are going to a county entity collecting taxes. Furthermore, the proposed 20% administrative fee would be an added charge that provides no benefit to the donor yet reduces the impact of their support to the FCPA.

FCPF will continue to be part of the solution as it has over the past 25 years by providing significant and increasing support of FCPA priorities. The negative consequences resulting from this FCPA FY 2026 Non-Recommended Budget Reduction proposal are counter to the FCPF mission of raising private funds, obtaining grants and creating partnerships that supplement tax dollars to meet Fairfax County's needs for park land, public recreation facilities and services. For this reason, we recommend that this proposed reduction be removed from consideration.

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**From:** avril garland [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 4:08 PM

**To:** Chairman <[Chairman@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Chairman@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Braddock BOS <[BraddockBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:BraddockBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Mason<[Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov](mailto:Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov)>; Providence BOS <[Providence@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Providence@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Hunter Mill BOS<[HunterMillBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:HunterMillBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Springfield BOS <[SpringfieldBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:SpringfieldBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Franconia BOS<[Franconia@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Franconia@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Mt. Vernon District BOS <[Mt.VernonDistrictBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Mt.VernonDistrictBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Parkmail<[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Friends of Accotink Creek's comments on proposed budget re reduction of IMA Program staff



Sept 19th, 2024

Dear Chairman McKay and members of the Board,

The Friends of Accotink Creek were discouraged to learn of proposed cuts to management of invasive species control staffing.

At the moment the Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program office has two full-time ecologists, and one recently hired part-time ecologist. The "Ecologist part-time position slated for elimination would fully staff the IMA office.

Current staffing is not remotely adequate to beat back the level of invasive species infestations currently degrading our natural habitats and limiting public access to natural areas.

The tasks that the Ecologist 1 would perform include approving leaders for new sites and providing herbicide treatments.

We have a chronic back log of volunteers who want to become IMA site leaders in their local parks, but because of staffing shortages, approval of new site leaders has been frozen, and hundreds of hours of valuable work removing invasive growth is not getting done.

Likewise, there is not shortage of herbicide support to control tree-killing vines and infestations of lesser celandine and other prolific invaders fast taking over large swathes of our natural areas.

The July 2024 Board of Supervisors Environmental Committee meeting authorized action to halt the encroachment of invasive plants our remaining natural areas.

The Friends of Accotink Creek strongly urge that invasive management control funding and staffing be increased, rather than decreased.

NOTE: Although it is outside our watershed and we cannot not speak in detail, we understand that the Sully Historic Site has been closed due to funding/staffing issues. It just seems a shame that this historic gem of our park system should not be available for public visits. It would seem to be just the sort of place that could generate its own revenue, through means such as event hosting.

Sincerely, Avril Garland  
Board member of Friends of Accotink Creek

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**From:** Mary Martin [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 2:09 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Save our nature centers!!!

To: Budget Committee members

As a fairly new resident of Fairfax county, I have been thoroughly impressed by the Fairfax Nature Centers, particularly Hidden Oaks. I love to come here, both individually and with grandchildren. Seeing the kids here sparks hope for the upcoming generations. The kids come alive when they see the animals, insects, and plants. There are few places to have this special experience. In a world experiencing significant climate change, we need people who understand and appreciate the natural world and want to preserve it. Nature Centers help make this happen. Nature centers engage with over 100k people annually. The cost per person is small compared with the benefits.  
Save our nature centers!!!

Regards, Mary Martin  
Fairfax County resident Square dancing: "Live lively"

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**From:** Brian Pedrotty [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 9:27 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Proposed Nature Center Closure Comment to the Park Authority Board


Greetings Park Authority Board Members,

I am a Fairfax County resident writing to voice my support for the Fairfax County Parks Nature Centers and request you remove closing a center from consideration in your budget proposal to the Board of Supervisors. I fully understand how challenging it is to balance budgets in an environment where operating and personnel costs are ever increasing, while budget share seems never able to stretch far enough. Difficult decisions always have to be made, and none are ever easy.

With that in mind, I want to offer how significant the positive impact the Hidden Pond Park Nature Center has had on my family and especially my daughter. When we first moved to Fairfax County, my daughter was seven years old and absolutely in love with animals and exploring in the "forest". Hidden Pond Park, and particularly the nature center, was here favorite place to go on outings. When she was in elementary school, the park staff brought her on as an animal care volunteer. She volunteered at least one day per week, every week, through the end of her high school career and now as a college student returns to the nature center as a seasonal employee. Through this experience, she learned how to lead; how to be comfortable with presentations to the public; and how to be a good steward of the environment. Without this opportunity, she would have never been exposed to career opportunities related to parks management, conservation, zoology, or teaching. Her choice of degree field is directly related to the opportunities afforded to her while volunteering and working at the nature center.

Her own personal benefits aside, our daughter has had a front row seat for the benefits of having these education centers available to residents of Fairfax County. People come here from all over the world and the nation. The nature centers have proven to be an excellent way to introduce these new residents to the wonders of the local Virginia flora and fauna, and how to properly interact with it. These centers teach residents why it is a bad idea to relocate turtles; the harm of pollution; what it means for a plant to be "invasive" and how that impacts the environment. These are just some of the things visitors are exposed to that they will not learn anywhere else.

I am sure it can be challenging to justify the cost of operating a nature center that appears to be "underperforming", or "low traffic" compared to other centers. It has got to be tempting to close a center that doesn't seem to be having an impact when the visit numbers seem to be low. But what can't be seen in that data, is how important that center is to the people who do visit. Some of those visitors are the future volunteers and future park employees who are there to continue to be stewards of the Fairfax County natural wealth. Others may go home and start to be more responsible with their refuse and properly dispose of trash or recycle. Still other may change the types of plants they use in their yards or take measures to reduce run-off. All of these are impacts are very real at the macro level but can be difficult, if not impossible, to readily quantify in the midst of budget discussions. While I cannot offer an easy trade, I do ask that the Park Authority Board look for other potential savings that do not include reducing your educational offerings to the residents of Fairfax County.

Kind Regards, Brian Pedrotty 

**From:** Laura Whitton [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 12:13 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Budget - Keep the Nature Centers

I'm writing as someone concerned about the "non-recommended" line items for budget reductions in the upcoming FY2026 Budget. My understanding is that it is being proposed that the county close one nature center and one historic site.

Please do not close the nature centers. I am the mother of 3 teenaged boys. When they were young we spent countless hours at Hidden Pond Nature Center both in organized programs and in unstructured time. It was not only cherished time but gave us both time to learn about the incredible world around us and connect with something beyond our screens. Black snakes and chickadees. What happens if things get out of balance. How beautiful to slow down and listen until you can distinguish individual bird calls. In a time when we are struggling with teen mental health and the siren call of phones, social media and screens, I am incredibly grateful for the time we spent over years together in nature at Hidden Pond. For kind and knowledgeable guides who made it come alive. It has acted as a wonderful foundation and a durable counterbalance even this many years later. Please, please. More than ever we need the nature centers.

Many thanks, Laura Whitton [REDACTED]

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**From:** Melody Corrigan [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 12:34 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Pond

Hello PAB,

We are writing to share the importance and impact Hidden Pond Park Nature Center and the park itself has on our daily life.

We walk daily in the park and its surrounding areas. We treasure the health, vitality, and awesomeness of its flora, fauna, and animal life. The Nature Center not only educates numerous citizens, summer campers, and staff alike, it is a vital community of volunteers. Our daughter enjoyed volunteering at the Center all throughout high school and beyond. She added on the title of summer camp counselor. She then added to those two titles with facility maintenance employee. She grew up working under Mike McCaffrey and his amazing leadership, his intense love for the park/center, and his tremendous efforts to maintain it as a shining crown in Fairfax's services to its' citizens. This experience peppered every single one of her college applications and allowed her to be selected to study Biochemistry and Biology at Virginia Tech.

Mental health challenges are on the rise. The Nature Center creates a safe space for all people to take a break from the busyness of daily life.

Please continue to use tax dollars to support this Nature Center and surrounding park as it's benefits cannot be valued in dollars or cents. It is priceless to those living in Fairfax and calling this great city home.

In Him, The Corrigans

"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" 2 Peter 3:18

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**From:** Sarah Beavers Yi [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 2:31 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Response to the Proposal to Close a Nature Center

Fairfax County Park Authority Board Members,

I am writing in opposition to the proposal to consider closing one of Fairfax County's nature centers. Closing a nature center would be a huge loss to many aspects of life in Fairfax County. The mission of the Park Authority is "to enrich quality of life for all members of the community through an enduring park system that provides a healthy environment, preserves natural and cultural heritage, offers inspiring recreational experiences, and promotes healthy lifestyles." This mission will be seriously compromised if a nature center is closed.

Our family has been to multiple Fairfax County nature centers and enjoyed them all. In particular, our closest nature center, Hidden Pond, has enriched our quality of life, as we have visited hundreds of times in the past decade. This has been easy to do because it's convenient to our house. It is crucial that there are nature centers available to citizens in various parts of the County, as is currently the case. Losing any of them would impact quality of life for the residents near that center, but would also affect those living further away, as many people travel to other nature centers when time permits. Each nature center has a unique setting and program offerings.

We have invited numerous other children and families to visit Hidden Pond with us or on their own. In fact, I've often used Hidden Pond as a conversation starter when meeting new families at other parks. The variety and quality of programs as well as the number of diversity of animals in the center make it easy to recommend. Those new Fairfax County are often excited to hear of such a place and that it's free and close. Some end up paying for programs. In these ways, the nature center helps to foster community.

Nature centers promote equity by hosting school field trips. I chaperoned a field trip for first graders at Hidden Pond last year and distinctly remember asking children if they had been there before. Many had not and would not have been able to have such a fantastic hands-on opportunity without the field trip. The experience itself was extremely well-run and efficient with four stations, including meeting animals, hiking, and netting in pond water. This was all accomplished in 2 hours, which reflects the

short time available given transportation needs of the school system. Even 2 hours may not be possible if we had to travel a further distance were Hidden Pond to close.

Hidden Pond also has a strong volunteer community that supports the larger community by helping teach about and preserve the natural heritage around us. My daughter has served over 300 hours as part of a group of teen volunteers. She has supported camps, weekly programming, community outreach programs at other sites, ad hoc opportunities, and much more. Some examples are removing invasive plants from the park; cleaning up the stream valley; introducing attendees to animals; and supporting hands-on learning about a wide range of topics including geology and hydrology, the scientific method, caring for animals, caring for wetlands, and many others. The programs teach the next generation appreciation for the environment and how to steward our limited natural resources, which fosters healthy living for all citizens.

In addition to directly benefiting the nature center and inspiring the children and families visiting, Hidden Pond's programming shapes volunteers into great citizens who will no doubt continue to give back to Fairfax County in the future. It is a true service-learning opportunity where the volunteers are learning technical and leadership skills while making a real difference.

Please strongly reconsider any proposals that including closing one of Fairfax County's nature centers. They are true gems with far-reaching impact that cannot be replaced.

Sarah Yi [REDACTED]

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**From:** Jamie [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 5:17:18 PM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Cc:** FCPA Board.Springfield <[FCPABoard.Springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.Franconia <[FCPABoard.Franconia@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Franconia@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.AtLarge1 <[FCPABoard.AtLarge1@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.AtLarge1@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.AtLarge3 <[FCPABoard.AtLarge3@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.AtLarge3@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Please remove the closure of a nature center from the budget proposal

Hi!

Please keep the nature centers open and do not consider it an option to reduce the budget.

The nature centers are a wonderful resource for the community. It would be a tremendous loss and alter daily lives for families and nature lovers. The nature centers are often the first exposure little ones have to develop a love of wildlife and nature. We need the next generation to love the planet and all of its inhabitants. It creates a sense of wonder and awe for little ones to walk into the nature centers and see the animals in mini habitats. The vibe is NOT the same at the petstore. The wonderful people who have worked at the nature centers are so gifted and knowledgeable and share their love with others. The nature centers offer respite from these hectic suburban areas. The nature centers are a wonderful place to host lower cost birthday parties and offer amazing programs throughout the year. Kids are able to attend a large variety of science and environmentally focused camps while school is not in session, teenagers are



offered the opportunity to be counselors, and families everywhere have a fantastic low cost/ cheap/ fulfilling/ educational venue to visit with their families. The nature centers contribute revenue to the county via the program fees, field trips, birthday parties, and camps that are offered.

We hope the nature centers remain open indefinitely. Please help make that happen. v/r,

Jamie

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**From:** Phillip Suslick [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 7:56:52 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center - Remain open

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing to express my great desire for the Hidden Oaks Nature Center to remain open. We recently moved into the neighborhood and frequent the park and nature center on a daily basis. Having access to the nature center, and the experience it provides to our family, is very important to us.

We have understood that Fairfax County is considering closing the nature center for budgetary reasons. This would not be acceptable to our family or our neighbors. Please consider this email as indication that we will not accept closure of the Hidden Oaks Nature Center.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

-Phill

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**From:** Sarah Hammer [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 8:40:52 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Pond Nature Center- KEEP IT OPEN!

Hello, My name is Sarah Hammer and on my family's last trip to Hidden Pond Nature Center, a gentleman informed us that it might be closed to save money. I was very surprised. The nature center is absolutely phenomenal and our family finds it both education and entertaining. It is a great place to go when in any weather, but is especially wonderful for families when the weather is not ideal so we can still get some nature exposure. Everytime we go it is packed with children and families. I cannot understand why this center, which has many many volunteers, would be a candidate for closure due to budget constraints.

I sincerely hope the closure is reconsidered as closing this wonderful center would be such a loss to the community.

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**From:** Abigail [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 9:02:05 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Comment on non-recommended budget reductions

To the Park Authority Board,

I am writing to comment on the inclusion of the closure of one nature center and one historic site on the list of non-recommended budget reductions on the FY 2026 county budget. I believe this item should be removed from the list of budget reductions and no parks or historical sites should be closed because these sites are valuable parts of our county's culture and community. Parks and historical sites are important for educating our community, especially our children, about our history and the world around us. In this way, they inspire thoughtful and responsible participation in our community in people of all ages. Parks and historical sites also provide important social centres for the county. People gather at these places with their families and friends to talk, play games, exercise, and explore. They are vital to the social, emotion, and physical health of our community. For these reasons, I oppose the inclusion of the potential closure of a park and historical site in the 2026 budget and urge the Park Authority Board to continue supporting all of our parks and historical sites.

Thank you, Abigail Pedrotty

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**From:** Daniel T Kirsch [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 10:07:24 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Remove Closure of Nature Centers from Budget Proposal

Chairman Quincy, Vice Chair Tim Hackman, and the members of the Park Authority Board:

I am a new homeowner in West Springfield, and the father of a 5-year-old who has attended Hidden Pond's Jr. Ranger Camp just this past summer. My family has partaken of the many joys of Hidden Pond this year: teachable moments about local wildlife(foxes, deer, turtles, beavers), a playground that engenders new friendships among the children of West Springfield and Burke, a visually striking reminder about the importance of water conservation, moments of community and getting to know neighbors in the Pavilion by the pond, that has inspired us to call the Keene Mill Station development our home.

I have a co-worker in Alexandria who brought their toddler to Hidden Pond routinely in the pandemic, underscoring the lifeline and refuge that this unique gem brings to not only the

immediate locale, but also the surrounding communities.

I was saddened and confused to hear from my neighbors that there is a move afoot to close one of the nature centers in Fairfax County. I am certain that if any of the other nature centers provides a fraction of the social and environmental benefits that this center does, that none of them merit closure, let alone a reduction in their resources.

My neighbors and I have become quickly mobilized into the political action of participation in the budget process by this potential threat to one of the pillars of our lives in our little corner of the county. I have no doubt that a budget proposal that would include a clearer decision to remove Hidden Pond from the surrounding forest and neighborhood would see a drive toward the need to take electoral accountability in response to this issue.

Finally, I am fundamentally disturbed by the bait-and-switch dynamic that seems to be at play here. Why were we as a public lulled into a sense of security by the announcement of a \$260 million budget surplus earlier this summer (<https://bit.ly/July29Memo>), followed by a proposal to eliminate one of the chief rhetorical beneficiaries of this announced surplus (<https://bit.ly/ParkAuthorityBoard>)?

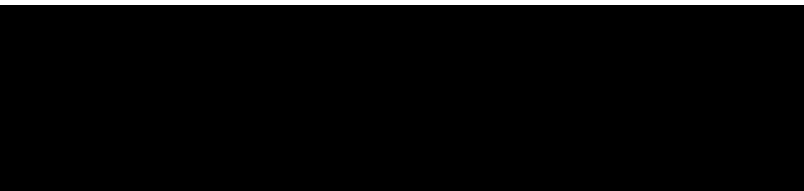
I am new to Fairfax County, of course, but let me be clear: I am in total agreement with this sentiment from Park Authority Board's section on non-recommended budget reduction items: Closing one nature center and one historic site would [negatively] "Impacts FCPA's ability to deliver on our mission...The Park Authority Mission is to enrich quality of life for all members of the community through an enduring park system that provides a healthy environment, preserves natural and cultural heritage, offers inspiring recreational experiences, and promotes healthy lifestyles."

My community and I humbly but firmly request that this proposal be removed immediately from any ongoing conversation about the annual budget.


Thank you for your time. I'm happy to speak to you about this matter now, or in the future.

Kind regards,

Daniel T. Kirsch, Ph.D. Professor of Political Science



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**From:** Genevieve Lacey   
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 1:38:38 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Please Keep Hidden Oaks Open

Hello,

My name is Genevieve Lacey and I am a senior at Oakton High School. When I was in Elementary school my mother often looked for cost free activities we could do over the summer for our middle class family. She found the discovery sticker booklet which encouraged visiting multiple Fairfax County nature centers, rec parks, and historic sites to get a sticker in your passport. Each summer we made several days of fun going to each center and exploring the grounds and amenities offered. Hidden Oaks was always a favorite of my family because of the super fun play structure, costumes, and trails outside. The center is truly unique and perfect for piquing the curiosity of children and adults alike. With each nature center we explored, I learned more about the natural world and its inhabitants and my mothers emphasis on the importance of taking care of the Earth shaped my worldview.

Today, I have grown into a considerate and empathetic human being who values all living creatures. I am currently in the process of applying to colleges for various Environmental Studies and Science undergraduate programs and I attribute my interest and value of nature and the environment to these early experiences at nature centers. Nature centers are crucial for accessible (free) education of citizens in our area which, similarly to my own experience, can foster both passion and an interest in careers dedicated to supporting the environment. This past summer I volunteered at Green Spring Gardens Nature Center for several weeks running summer camps and got to see first hand the effect that such centers have on the worldview of little kids. Opportunity to grow as people, learn about creatures and critters, the systems of life which make up their lives. Hidden Oaks is a perfect example of the benefits that communities in spite of economic status can attain from resources provided by the county.

I ask you to please reconsider your budget cuts. The benefits that the Fairfax County nature centers have had on my life are very evident and I hope that you can see the impact that Hidden Oaks has and will continue to have on every person who enters its doors.

Thank you, Genevieve Lacey

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Genevieve Lacey She/Her/Hers

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**From:** Rebecca Haldi [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 4:16:18 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** In Support of Hidden Oaks

To whom it may concern,

I began volunteering at Hidden Oaks this year C was amazed at how many children's groups - school C Scouts - as well as children with their parents, C parts of camps, are continuously delighted C educated by the amazing facilities C staff at Hidden Oaks. The center is doing incalculably good work for the community C to close it would be a crime.

Please do not close the center! Thanks very much,  
Rebecca Haldi

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**From:** G. Henshaw [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 7:21:31 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature Centers - Please Don't Close Them!

Hello,

I recently learned that there may be plans to close a Fairfax County Nature Center and I am writing to let you know that I think it's a terrible idea.

My family absolutely loves our local nature center - Hidden Pond, and we have enjoyed our visits to other nature centers throughout the county.

We have participated in and loved many of the wonderful programs at Hidden Pond. We've attended Haunted Pond, Slugfest, and many Campfire nights all of which have been so much fun. We also participated in the snake class! We hosted a birthday party at Hidden Pond one year and my kids have also attended birthday parties a few times; they have always had a fantastic time and have appreciated the chance to interact with the local wildlife - looking at, touching, and holding a variety of bugs, snakes, turtles, etc.

When my kids were younger we relied almost entirely on Fairfax County Summer Camps, year after year. The camps at Hidden Pond, when we could get in - they waitlist so fast because they are awesome - were in both my kids top three favorite all time camps. It's been a few years and they still talk about

Snake Island!

We also love the trails and playground there (they love the renovated playground) and enjoy walking out to the quiet hidden playground there. We used to visit at least once a month when they were younger, and still visit Hidden Pond every few months now that they are older and we're busier; the trails are just so peaceful and we love the little boardwalk. As they have gotten older we mostly use the trails now, and almost always stop in the visitor center to check out the critters.

Please reconsider the plan to close a nature center. We love and highly value our local nature center and can't imagine that the other nature centers throughout the county aren't equally enjoyed.

Thank you for your consideration. Sincerely,  
Gina Henshaw

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**From:** Kelly Serote [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 19, 2024 7:36:59 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature Center

I'm strongly against closing a nature center as part of the budget cuts. We've used Hidden Ponds for over 25 years as a playground, field trip destination, Scouting merit badge resource, and more. It's vital to our community here in Burke as a reasonably accessible location for such activities. It serves MANY people and the impact upon the other center (Hidden Oaks) would

make it too congested to be useful.  
Kelly Serote

Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Christine Eckstein [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 11:24 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov>  
**Subject:** Budget Reductions Input

Our family just learned about the proposed budget cuts regarding FCPA. I wanted to email in an attempt to strongly encourage you/our county to not include the closure of a Nature Center & Historic Site in the potential budget cuts.

Our Nature Centers are an AMAZING source of information especially to the kids in our area. My child has grown up going to these Nature Centers and learning about the different animals and ecosystems that exist in our area. The fact that these are here, and are free, are beyond amazing for families in this area. Especially as things continue to get more and more expensive and as focus on "being outside" somehow diminishes in education each year. My child is 6 now, and is strongly in the camp of "one day I will be a Scientist." Going to these nature centers and learning about the environment is a HUGE part of his experience and I'm sure that it has formed his interest in environmental science.

Additionally, many of our summer camps take place at these Nature Centers and Historic Sites. This year my child attended 3 different camps - each at one of these two sites. The idea that one of these could be closed in the future, or cease to exist is just depressing. The camps and activities that go on at these sites are some of the only environmental/outdoors based learning in the area. There are not other resources that are easily available to replace these with, even when you consider private and/or expensive options.

I looked through the proposed cuts and the different suggestions each area proposed. Of those that were presented, I do agree that cleaning of the porta pottys, could be reduced to pre-pandemic levels. I also agree that mowing could be *significantly* decreased. In fact - this is an area where I would suggest the county *strongly* reconsiders how much is necessary, and potentially make even further cuts to that than what was suggested. Recent environmental studies have shown that reduced mowing has huge benefits for our local ecosystems. I have areas near me that are marked as "no mow" areas by the county, and yet - there are landscapers out there weekly mowing it all down. Clearly we are paying them to do so. Our local parks could greatly benefit from more meadow spaces, this type of landscaping only requires 1-2 mows per year, and greatly benefits our wildlife.

I hope that the parks budget cuts are made without completely closing our spaces. Once our resources are shut down - it is unlikely they will ever return - even if in future years there is extra room in the budget. Please reconsider this, and instead look towards programs that could be easily reversed if a surplus arises in the future.

-Christine Eckstein

Fairfax County Resident

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**From:** Jason Spindler [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 10:47 AM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Public Comment FY26 budget- Please remove Nature Centers from proposed cuts

Good morning Fairfax County Park Authority Board,

I am writing with public comment to ask that you remove Nature Centers from the list of potential budget reductions/cuts in the FY26 budget proposal.

As an Active Duty military member, my family and I have lived in many different places throughout the United States. Based on these experiences, I have concluded that the Northern Virginia area, and Fairfax County in particular, provide one of the most unique and community-enriching benefits I have ever observed: Nature Centers (specifically Hidden Pond!). This is not hyperbole. While other National parks and entertainment complexes exist for broad participation, the Hidden Pond Nature Center provides a bespoke nature-exploration experience for people of all ages, backgrounds, and means, and provides a daily re-investment into the very fabric of our community. Hidden Pond provides immense public health benefits, a better understanding of our living areas, and education for protection of our crucial environment and its watersheds. In our experience, these community Nature Centers don't exist anywhere else in the myriad of coast-to-coast locations we've lived in and visited.

Our children get positive, life-altering experiences at Hidden Pond as well. My son has been able to volunteer hundreds of hours of free time, on his own volition, to support Hidden Pond resources, facilities, and programming. He inspired two other neighbor friends to also volunteer, which is incredible. What better way to build future ambassadors for our community and environment than the children that vocally and personally support our Nature Centers!

Our family was distraught to hear of the potential budget reduction proposal targeting Nature Centers and/or Historic Sites. Please know that our community stands (literally!) vocally and strongly in support of our local gem, the Hidden Pond Nature Center.

Please reach out via this email if you have any questions or would like additional feedback. I would be more than happy to discuss any and all aspects of our community's heartfelt appreciation for Hidden Pond!

Best,  
Jason Spindler  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Laura Trinh [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 10:46 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Keep Nature Centers Open!

Good morning,

I just became aware of the proposal to close one of your nature centers. PLEASE keep them both open - my daughter adores both Hidden Pond and Hidden Oaks. We are long time Fairfax County residents and these places are important to our family.

Thank you, Laura Trinh

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**From:** Carolyn Krieger [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 17, 2024 10:12 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Concerns Regarding Proposed Budget Cuts and Nature Center Closure

Dear Fairfax Park Authority Board,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposed budget cuts, specifically the closure of a nature center or historic site.

As a parent, I have seen firsthand the joy and educational value that the nature centers and history sites brings to children. My kids absolutely love visiting these amazing places, and it has become an essential part of our family's homeschool education, fostering an appreciation for nature, wildlife, history and environmental stewardship.

Beyond personal enjoyment, nature centers play a crucial role in educating the community and promoting conservation. They offer a unique, hands-on learning experience that simply cannot be replaced by other recreational activities. Closing a nature center would be a loss not only to my family but to the entire community.

I understand the need for fiscal responsibility, but I urge you to consider alternative ways to meet budget requirements without sacrificing such important resources.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I hope the value of history sites and nature centers are taken into consideration as decisions are made.

Sincerely, Carolyn Krieger



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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 10:22:39 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Remove closure of Nature Centers from budget proposal

Good morning,

I am writing to voice my objection to the recent proposal to close or cease funding for the Natural Centers in Fairfax county.

As a frequent user of Hidden Pond Nature Center, I can say the closure of this incredible space would be detrimental to our community. From the peaceful and joyous gathering space it provides for the community, to the significant educational benefits and lessons of responsibility it provides for our children, the benefits are significant. The closure of such nature centers will not only eliminate a wonderful place for our diverse neighbors to gather, interact, and find common joy, it will also undermine what we want our children to grow to be part of - a thriving and connected community.

Please, immediately drop the proposal to cut funding or close our highly valued nature centers in Fairfax County as it will significantly undermine many of the foundational reasons we chose to live in Fairfax County.

Thank you Jon Waller  
- concerned citizen who values our community and connection to nature.

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**From:** Shana Spindler [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 8:48:14 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Our youth need our Nature Centers - please keep them open

Dear Park Authority Board Members,

I'm writing to ask that you please remove the closure of a Fairfax County Nature Center from the budget reduction proposal. I'm choked up writing this letter. I live near Hidden Pond nature center, and the thought of such a precious resource for our community closing is devastating.

We live in a time when our youth are experiencing some of the highest rates of mental health problems that we have ever seen. To combat this problem, we ask them to put down their electronics and go outside to play with friends and immerse themselves in nature and social activities. Our Nature Centers serve as the enriching environments where our kids can go do just that. My own son has spent nearly 300 hours volunteering at Hidden Pond. He has learned work ethic, valuable life skills, and made numerous friends. His time at Hidden Pond has amplified his desire to participate in and help our community. He even learned how to fill out a permit

application to use the Hidden Pond little amphitheater to put on a concert in honor of a local charity.

I urge you, please find another way to reduce the budget. I know how much Hidden Pond means to us, and I'm sure the other Nature Centers mean equally as much to their respective communities. This cannot be an option if we value the mental health and well being of our youth. I have seen spending time at Hidden Pond work wonders for my son's happiness, self-confidence, and overall well being.

I would be happy to talk further. Please feel free to reach out to me directly at any time. Sincerely,  
Shana Spindler

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**From:** Mary Cha [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 8:45:33 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Closing of nature centers in Fairfax county

To whom it may concern:

I have recently learned of the plan to close a nature and a historical site in Fairfax county.

Please reconsider. The nature centers for me are a place where young uncertain parents can meet other parents. Where communities gather for fellowship. Where lifelong friends have been made and where they meet. Where summer camps are held and memories made. They are also a place for meditative walks.

I've frequented Hidden Pond nature center with my children for the past 10 years. If it closed it would change my life and the community for the worse.

Please keep the nature centers and historical sites open! Thanks you,  
Mary Cha

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**From:** Gabe Pumple [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 8:31:21 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Please do not close a nature center

Hello,

My family uses the hidden pond nature center more than once a week. We love all the centers the county has to offer. Please remove the closure of a nature center from this budget proposal. We've seen beavers, frogs, toads, hawks, turtles, and more at hidden pond. My kids have taken the summer camp there. We've been to numerous birthday parties there. We've made friends and grown better acquainted with neighbors, classmates, and colleagues. The center is an

integral part of our community. Do not close it.

Gabe he/him/his

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**From:** Mary Buchanan [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 8:19:14 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Please protect our county nature centers

Dear Park Authority Board and Fairfax Supervisors,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed closure of a nature center as part of the budget reduction plan. As a resident of Fairfax County, I believe that our nature centers play an essential role in preserving our community's connection to the environment, promoting outdoor education, and fostering a love of nature in people of all ages, especially children.

You have not identified which nature center would be closed, but I want to speak up for Hidden Pond in particular, which is especially near and dear to my family. It has long served as a valuable resource for environmental education, providing residents and visitors with opportunities to learn about local wildlife, ecosystems, and conservation efforts. As someone who regularly visits this nature center and others, I have seen firsthand how they positively impact our community. From educational programs for school groups to recreational activities for families, it brings people together while fostering a deeper appreciation for nature. Reducing access to such spaces undermines our collective efforts to promote healthy lifestyles and environmental awareness.

I understand that the county is facing difficult financial decisions, but I urge you to consider alternative ways to meet budget goals without sacrificing the invaluable contributions that nature centers provide. Protecting natural spaces and educational opportunities is essential for the well-being of our community, now and for future generations.

Please reconsider this proposal and explore other solutions to avoid the closure of any nature center in our county. I appreciate your attention to this matter and hope that you will prioritize preserving the natural and educational resources that make Fairfax County a great place to live.

Sincerely,  
Mary Buchanan

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**From:** CW M [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 8:12:50 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center

Good morning,

I recently learned there is a possibility of closing down Hidden Oaks Nature Center and selling it to developers. I certainly hope this does not occur, as Hidden Oaks is a wonderful nature center in an area that is increasingly lacking in nature. Hidden Oaks serves an increasingly urbanized area of Northern Virginia, without which, children will be deprived of learning opportunities. My family has been visiting Hidden Oaks for many years. We've enjoyed a wide variety of nature programs, and we've loved seeing the wildlife found in the nature center and along the nature trails. I think it worth noting that the "Little Acorns" nature class for ages 2-5 was routinely full to the point that they recently doubled the class offering. That alone shows great local interest in Hidden Oaks.

Additionally, there is historical value at Hidden Oak Nature Trail. The remnants of the Manassas Gap Railroad exist within the woods to the right of the nature center. While this may be lost on many people, maintaining that historical section of railroad bed does help provide a connection to the past.

Surely there are other areas of the budget that could be reduced to cover operating costs. Once a nature center like Hidden Oaks is bulldozed, you can't get that back. Once it's turned into apartments or condos, this area will lose a natural preserve forever.

Thank you for your time. Cullen Monk

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**From:** Sarah Burton [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 6:24:06 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Budget - Nature Center

Please remove the nature center closure from the budget proposal. The nature centers are such an important part of our community. They provide education, a connection to nature, a respect for taking care of a nature and a place for community members to meet. This would be a debating loss for the county, please reconsider.

Sarah [REDACTED]

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**From:** sarah waller [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2024 6:48:18 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature Center Proposal

Morning Parks Team,

In regards to the closure of a local Fairfax Nature Center, I ask you to consider a personal story like the one that follows.....

We are a transient military family of 4. My youngest son is naturally shy and has always struggled to make friends in our new communities. When we moved back to the Springfield, VA area we found that many of the kids we once knew had also moved and he once again was the new kid that had to start over from scratch. And then he found the Hidden Pond Nature Center and Hidden Pond Park. He spent many days at the Nature Center mesmerized by the animals and the programs that were provided. They made him feel like he belonged here. He has since been brought on as a volunteer at the Nature Center. We have seen him grow in confidence and maturity from being accepted into a community of like minded kids.

Please understand these are more than just buildings. They are places of joy and countless memories in people's lives. Children and families deserve to have places in our community that are special and unique, and at times magical. Please reconsider the Nature Center closing. Our kids deserve to have a place to flourish and call their own in our communities.

Sarah Waller [REDACTED]

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**From:** Eileen Dunphy [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 17, 2024 8:03:33 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Remove closure of nature center from budget proposal

Park Authority Board,

Please remove the closure of a nature center from the proposal to the budget. The nature center is a community hub and a resource for many groups. Both of my kids have volunteered at the nature center near my house, and they have learned life skills through their volunteer work. They both attended summer camps at the nature center and learned in a hands on environment about the local habitat and how erosion affects the park. They have learned about local wildlife through their experience at the nature center and that interest has become a core part of their character. My daughter credits her time spent at the nature center with her strong interest in biology, and she has turned that interest into majoring in biomedical engineering in college. Please keep the nature centers open and remove them from consideration of budget cuts. When I vote Yes on a bond measure for the parks department, I vote with the nature center in mind.

Thank you, Eileen Dunphy

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**From:** Will Cook [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 17, 2024 8:17:41 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Please Do Not Close the Nature Center

Please don't close the nature center and remove it from the budget cuts.

My step-kids have volunteered and attended summer camps at the nature center near our house and they loved it!

I plan to vote yes on any bond measures for the parks department hoping you will keep the nature centers open.

Thanks for your consideration, Will Cook

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**From:** Beth Cecka [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 17, 2024 9:14:23 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Please don't close the nature centers!

Hello,

Please remove the closure of a nature center from the proposal before it goes further. We love the nature centers. My kids love them and loads of kids will go to them for years to come. All these kids will learn so much. Please don't shut them down.

Thank you,  
Beth Cecka [REDACTED]

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**From:** Karin Mahoney [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 17, 2024 9:26:38 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Please don't close the nature centers!

Dear Park Authority Board Members,

I am writing to sincerely ask that you remove the closure of a nature center language from the proposal before it moves forward.

The nature centers are pivotal to our community. From families to schools, we utilize these

centers on a regular basis.

As a Mom of 3 children, ages 3-11, we visit a nature center on a weekly basis. We've had countless field trips with my older sons—both of whom look back on those trips with fondness. We live in such a beautiful area, and these nature centers only add to that, by educating visitors about all the natural beauty in our back yards.

You would devastate my family if you were to close down these amazing facilities. I know I don't stand alone with these sentiments.

I appreciate you taking my voice into consideration with this decision and hope that you remove any language pertaining to the removal of our nature centers.

Warmly,  
Karin Mahoney and family

**Karin Mahoney**  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Saki Schller [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 17, 2024 9:45:30 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Please NO closing nature center

To whom it may concern,

My name is Saki Scheller, my family and I are Fairfax county residents and we have enjoyed living here last 2 decades. We are nature loving family who visit local parks, trails, nature centers very often and we cannot imagine raising 3 children without having nature center! My kids all have gone all nature centers and have created incredible memories and they have learned a lot. Our highlight would be our daughter's birthday party and how many guests complimented how much fun they had.

I understand that everything costs more now and we have to be wise with our finance; however, please please do NOT close nature centers. City kids need access to nature and places to be curious and be free, nature center provides so much more than just a place to visit. Our kids generation already lost many access to nature and this is certainly isn't something to be taken away.

Please reconsider this proposed budget. Thank you for considering. Sincerely,  
Saki Scheller and the family

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**From:** Rev. Morgan R. McLean [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Tuesday, September 17, 2024 9:51:51 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Concern for Nature Centers

Dear Park Authority Board,  
Thank you for extending the opportunity for public comment.

My family moved to Fairfax County six months ago, hoping to find a balance of opportunities to be in nature with the urban life in a major metro area.

The parks and nature centers, especially Hidden Pond Nature Center close to our home, have been life- giving to our family. I am writing to ask that you do everything you can to protect the nature centers.

The programs offered at Hidden Pond by friendly and knowledgeable staff have oriented us to our new environment, teaching us about local wildlife and native plants.

My 5 year old loved every minute of her week-long Nature Quest Camp and begged to go another week. She learned critical safety skills, an appreciation for the beauty around her, and her responsibility for caring for the earth.

Another week her Daisy girl scout troop came for a program to earn a badge about nature.

She knows all the animals in the Nature Center and looks for their friends in the wild, ready to protect turtles, frogs, and snakes. She loves to bring visitors to meet Fluffy the snapping turtle, and to watch for birds. She even led her grandparents on a hike on each trail showing off her skills learned at camp. She is excited to have a birthday party at Hidden Pond Nature Center and do a fun nature craft with friends.

My elderly father also lives with us and Hidden Pond Nature Center was a perfect summer adventure for him, too. The air conditioned space, the bathrooms, and the accessible pathways and doors made him feel comfortable and welcome.

Of course the lovely picnic pavilion and incredible playground also provide so much to our community!

This small place, and the surrounding park and playground, have been a place for us as new residents to discover the beauty of our new home, to make friends in the community, and to care for the young and old in our family. I hope all Fairfax County Residents have a place like Hidden Pond Nature Center to find their way and to root them here.

When the time comes, you can add me to the list of volunteers who will raise funds, clean trails, and bring friends.

Thanks you, Morgan McLean



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**From:** Stephanie Schillero [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 17, 2024 12:12:56 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Potential Closure of a Nature Center

Hello,

I hope this email finds you well. As a parent, teacher, and community member, I am writing to express my concern regarding the potential closure of one of Fairfax County's nature centers. Hidden Oaks Nature Center has played an invaluable role in enriching the lives of families, children, and residents in our community, and its closure, or the closure of any nature center, would be a significant loss to us all.

As a parent, I have seen firsthand how important the nature center is in providing our children with access to the natural world. Outdoor education opportunities are becoming rarer, and the nature center offers a much-needed space where children can interact with nature, learn about local ecosystems, and develop a sense of responsibility towards environmental conservation. These experiences foster creativity, curiosity, and a sense of stewardship that will benefit them for years to come.

As an educator, I hope to utilize the nature center as a field trip site for my preschool special education students, where they can experience hands-on learning in a way that traditional classrooms cannot provide. The closure of such a facility would rob our students of these unique learning opportunities, which are crucial for building a well- rounded education and fostering a deep connection to our local environment.

Beyond its educational value, the nature center serves as a community hub where people of all ages gather for recreation, education, and cultural events. It promotes physical and mental well-being, offering a safe and accessible space for outdoor activities that bring families and neighbors together. The social and emotional benefits of such a space are immeasurable, and its closure would create a void in our community that would be difficult to fill.

I urge you and the other decision-makers to reconsider any plans to close one of the nature centers. I believe there are other avenues to explore that could preserve this treasured resource while addressing any financial or logistical concerns. The value of the nature center to our community cannot be overstated, and I hope that you will take into account the voices of those who cherish it. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Best,  
Stephanie Schillero

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**From:** Veronica Hershey [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Tuesday, September 17, 2024 12:15:28 PM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Urgent: Protect Our Hidden Pond Nature Center from Budget Cuts Good afternoon,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to express my strong concern regarding the proposed budget cuts that

could result in the closure of Hidden Pond Nature center. As a resident who deeply values the center's contributions to our community, I believe its closure would have long-term negative consequences, both environmentally and educationally.

The Hidden Pond Nature center provides invaluable opportunities for environmental education, outdoor recreation, and conservation. It serves as a hub where children and adults alike can learn about the natural world, fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship for the environment.

Additionally, the center promotes mental and physical wellness by offering access to green spaces where residents can engage in low-cost, accessible activities like walking, birdwatching, and nature exploration around the pond. We have enjoyed wonderful birthday parties with friends hosted by the Hidden Pond Nature Center and frequently visit the turtles inside. The Hidden Pond Nature center provides a safe, peaceful spot for families to visit.

Rather than closing the Hidden Pond Nature center, I urge you to consider alternative budget solutions that would allow it to continue operating. It is a resource that enhances the quality of life in our county and West Springfield specifically.

Respectfully, Veronica Hershey  
Fairfax County Resident

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**From:** Cari Crosby [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 6:30:03 PM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Regarding proposed closure of Hidden Oaks Nature Center and Scott's Run Nature Preserve Parking

To Whom It May Concern:

In the FY2026 budget for Fairfax County, it has been proposed to close Hidden Oaks Nature Center and the parking lot of Scott's Run Nature Preserve. I am writing to humbly ask for you not to approve these proposed measures to cut the budget.

My children have visited both Hidden Oaks Nature Center and Scott's Run multiple times in their lives and they have always found the visits to be education and rewarding. My 4-year-old asks me every week to visit her reptile friends at Hidden Run. Last time we walked on the trail there, she pointed out the animal tracks and several of them she was able to figure out based on what

she had learned there. She also got to have a new monarch butterfly land on her and eagerly listened to the employee teach multiple child visitors about the monarch's migration to Mexico. Hidden Oaks is a gem of a center in Fairfax and should remain open to delight future children and teach them about our local wildlife and plant life.

My family loves to hike at Scott's Run, but we have to drive to visit. My 10 year old thought the waterfalls were amazing and we have spent multiple visits exploring the various trails. If the parking lot were to close, this beautiful area would no longer be open to any other residents of Fairfax County.

Please do not close Hidden Oaks or the parking lot of Scott's Run. To offset costs, I think many residents would be willing to pay a small fee (perhaps \$5 a car for parking or \$10 a family for Hidden Run) to keep these places open. I know my family would.

Thank you for your time and attention. Have a good day. Cari Crosby  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Joey mathews [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 7:06:59 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Do not close the fair oaks nature center

I will be very unhappy

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**From:** Steve Sonner [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 6:08:18 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Closure???

Good evening--

Please find another way besides closing the Hidden Oaks Nature Center and park to help relieve the Fairfax County budget deficit.

I walk my dog along the park trails twice a day, joining many other dog owners and their dogs. I don't know what we'd all do if the park was no longer available for our dog walking.

Thank you.

Kathy Sonner

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**From:** Steve Sonner [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 2:58 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center and Park

Good afternoon--

Just learned today that Fairfax County Park Authority is considering closing Hidden Oaks Nature Center and the adjoining park area.

Please, please, please find another way to save money on the county budget.

We have lived in the nearby Pleasant Ridge neighborhood for more than 50 years and over those years have enjoyed walking our many generations of dogs in the park in all four seasons. The Nature Center also has served as a great source of information about native plants and wildlife.

Speaking of wildlife, the park is a wonderful habitat (inside the Beltway!) for white-tailed deer, foxes, raccoons, squirrels, crows, hawks, and many other species of animals, reptiles, and birds. It is heartbreaking to think what will happen to them if their habitat is destroyed.


Please reconsider and ultimately put an end to the plans to close the Nature Center and park. Let me know if you have any questions or want any additional information.

Thank you.

Steve Sonner




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**From:** Scott Yi   
**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 4:10 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:**

My name is Scott Yi and my daughter is Emily Yi. We have been going to Hidden Pond ever since she was 3 years old. She built a love for nature and built wonderful friendships with people who volunteered at the park. Now my daughter is a major volunteer in the park. Please I ask you not to take that away from my daughter who enjoys working in the park. She found herself.

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**From:** Nicole Jukich   
**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 2:54 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Please Save Hidden Oaks Nature Center

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Nicole Klein and I am a homeowner and resident of Annandale, a mother, and an almost daily visitor to the absolute gem that is the Hidden Oaks Nature Center.

I was absolutely devastated to learn of the possibility of it's closing today when I brought my son to his favorite place to visit. Hidden Oaks was a large part of the reason my husband and I decided to buy a house, settle down, and start a family in Annandale. We can walk to the Nature Center from our home and have enjoyed doing so for years. We have been very much looking forward to when our son is old enough to join the completely packed classes and events that Hidden Oaks offers for the older children. There are so many enrichment activities within the nature center that the families of this community get to enjoy and we would be much worse off without access to them. I'm concerned for myself and many other parents who will have to drive further to find alternatives in an already very populated area with few options like Hidden Oaks.

It is hard to believe just a year after investing into the beautiful new facilities and classrooms that you are considering throwing all of that away. I personally know many people that will be saddened, angered and upset if it closes. Just today, the nature center was packed with families and small children enjoying the Nature Center.

I would have been at the in person meeting to discuss this had I known about it before today.

I truly hope that my email has an impact on this budget decision. This would be a huge blow to the Annandale and larger community.

Sincerely, Nicole Klein

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**From:** Kathryn Palmer [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 4:22 PM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** FCPA Nature Center as part of Budget 2026 Reduction

Fairfax County Park Authority Board Members,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed closure of a FCPS Nature Center as part of the FY2026 budget reduction package. Nature centers play a vital role in our community, providing essential educational opportunities, fostering environmental appreciation, and offering a place for families to connect with nature.

As a resident of Fairfax County, I have personally benefited from the programs and amenities offered by Hidden Oaks Nature Center. My family has enjoyed countless visits, exploring the trails, learning about local wildlife, and even hosting my son's birthday party. The center has

been a valuable resource for our community, providing a much-needed connection to the natural world.

Research has consistently shown the positive impact of nature-based education on children's academic performance, physical health, and emotional well-being. By closing a Nature Center, we risk depriving our children of these invaluable opportunities.

I urge you to reconsider this proposal and prioritize the funding necessary to maintain and expand the services offered. By investing in our nature centers, we are investing in the education of our children, the future of our community and the health of our planet.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

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Kathryn Palmer [REDACTED]

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**From:** Maria Mathews [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 12:50 PM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Hidden oaks nature center

To whom it may concern,

My name is Maria Mathews. I grew up in Annandale and still live in Fairfax county. As a kid, my family and I loved spending quality time together at the Hidden Oaks nature center. Now, as an adult, I take my two children there in order to socialize, learn, and explore. I am writing in order to have our voices heard. My family and I strongly ask for your reconsideration to close the nature center in the proposed budget plan.

Thank you for your time, Maria M

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**From:** Claire Bruno [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 12:37 PM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** DO NOT CLOSE Hidden Oaks Nature Center

Please DO NOT close the hidden Oaks nature center!! We love this nature center, and we go there multiple times a week with all my children.

Thank you!

Claire Brund

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**From:**

**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 11:07 AM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Ruth Furpahs <[rfurpahs@aol.com](mailto:rfurpahs@aol.com)>

**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center possible closing

I live right next to Hidden Oaks and can't tell you how much I value this wonderful park. The thought of it closing is devastating to me.

I use the park every day for walks and being in nature, along with countless other County residents. I see many school buses bringing children to the park for programs to learn about the gifts of nature and the importance of preserving our natural places. I see many parents continuously bringing their children to play on the playground. I see countless adults using the courts for tennis and pickleball. Many people walk their dogs there every day. The park allows us to get away from the noise and traffic of our area and to find some serenity and peace. I encounter so many other walkers every day when I go for my walks.

Please, please do not take this park away from us. Our hearts are broken enough these days with all the chaos of these times. Please don't take away this beautiful oasis of peace in our lives. Sincerely,

Carolyn Dozier

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**From:** Annika Gross

**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 11:15 AM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Closure of a Nature Center & Historical Site

Hello FCPA representative,

My name is Annika Gross and I am a volunteer at Hidden Pond Nature Center. I have been Volunteering for about three years and have been living in Fairfax county and utilizing the parks since ~2011.

I understand that currently FCPA is considering closing one nature center and one historical site in order to cut costs, however I do not think this is the best course of action.

Nature centers in this area are a great way to educate the public about the natural world, especially the native and invasive species. These Nature Centers also run programs that

cultivate a love of nature in children and give them opportunities to get involved in nature related topics such as geology, ecology, and animal identification.

These programs are beneficial because they educate the public about environmental issues and allow children to learn about the world around them and what they can do to help the planet.

As for the historical sites, none of these should be closed to cut costs because history deserves to be known. Our country has been dictated by our diverse history and especially in such a historically relevant area, shutting down a historical site would deprive us of education and an ability to know history so it doesn't repeat.

Often, people come and go in this area to the expansive military pull here. Many people were not taught in-depth history or forgot important history, and lots of Virginia life and culture is shaped by this.

In conclusion, FCPA should not shut down a historical site or a nature center due to the repercussions of depriving the public of educational tools and knowledge.

Thank you for your time, Annika Gross

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**From:** Massiel López Martínez [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 10:39 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.Braddock  
<[FCPABoard.Braddock@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Braddock@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Please Reconsider Closing Hidden Pond Nature Center

Dear Park Authorities and Board.

I'm writing as a concerned parent and community member to ask you to reconsider the closure of Hidden Pond Nature Center. This space offers an invaluable connection to nature for families, providing educational programs, community engagement, and a peaceful environment that benefits both mental and physical well-being.

Hidden Pond is more than just a park; it teaches children to respect and love nature, fostering a sense of environmental responsibility. Losing it would be a significant loss to our community, and our vital natural refuge.

Please consider the lasting impact this closure would have on our families and community. We hope a solution can be found to keep this beloved center open.



-  
**Massiel López**

*Let's bring a bit of cheer to every day, one email at a time!*

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**From:** Reginald Berry [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 12:09 PM  
**To:** [FCPABoardProvidence@faircounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoardProvidence@faircounty.gov); FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Reduction of Nature Center Budgets

Please avoid any reduction of the Nature Center and Historic site budgets. These centers service a broad range of the population—young and old; able and disabled. These centers also provide significant educational opportunities and support for the entire tax paying community. I suggest you look elsewhere for cost reductions: focusing on areas that do not provide such universal community enrichment and support.

Thank you, Reginald Berry [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** karine chapdelaine [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 12:13 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:**

Hi,  
I am email to oppose the closure of Hidden Oak Nature Center. My family went many times to this nature center when my kids were younger. It was such a blessing to have a nature center so close to home and well maintained. I believe Fairfax County can find other ways to cut the budget without taking from the children of this county.  
Sincerely,  
Karine Chapdelaine-Walker

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**From:** IJ Villanueva [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, September 14, 2024 7:49 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Mason <[Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov](mailto:Mason@FairfaxCounty.gov)>; Clerk to the BOS<[ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:ClerktotheBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Please Keep Hidden Oaks Nature Center Open

Dear Fairfax County Park Authority and Mason District Supervisors,

I hope this message finds you well. I'm writing to express my deep concern about the potential closure of Hidden Oaks Nature Center as part of the proposed FY 2026 budget cuts. My son and I live just five minutes away, and we have come to love and treasure the center for everything it offers to the community. From the educational programming to the opportunity to connect with nature in a hands-on way, Hidden Oaks has been an invaluable resource for both of us.

It would be heartbreaking to lose this special place that means so much to our family and countless others in the area. We rely on the center not only as a local attraction but also as a way to foster my son's connection with nature and the environment. Its closure would be a tremendous loss, not just for us, but for the entire community.

I strongly urge you to reconsider any plans to close Hidden Oaks Nature Center. Its impact on local families, children, and the community at large cannot be overstated. Please find a way to keep it open and thriving.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Sincerely,

Ivana

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**From:** Joseph and Jillian Kirby [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 9:08 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Proposed cut to Nature Center in Budget

To whom it may concern -

We recently heard that FFX is considering closing one of the nature centers as part of urgent budget cuts. We are writing to let you know how valuable we find your nature centers and how they have positively impacted our lives. And, to ask you to reconsider your proposal for cutting funding to one or more nature centers.

One of the biggest challenges that young people face today is not having opportunities to connect with the outdoors and your nature centers are rare exemplars of how to do this exceptionally well. Your staff, curriculum, and the combo of the two are unmatched and so positive for kids, families, and adults alike.

The nature centers are where kids learn to connect with their natural environment, how fragile it is, and learn how to care for it, how to preserve it. And, maybe most importantly in these troubled times, how to come to nature to care for themselves.

Our kids attend camps, birthday parties, and just visit the nature centers on the weekend.

Our son just this weekend taught us about wooly aphids and how, if you sing to them, they will actually move, making time appear to be dancing. He learned that from your nature programs.

You're providing a valuable, much beloved resource to the community and making a positive impact on young and old alike.

Please reconsider your stance on the budget. With kind regards,  
The Kirby Family [REDACTED]

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**From:** Erin Eichhorn [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 16, 2024 8:47 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature center closing proposal

I'm a resident of West Springfield. I am very opposed to the idea of closing a nature center. Fairfax nature centers are highly used and provide a great free/low cost outing for families when there are fewer affordable options. Many outdoor areas in the county can become crowded on beautiful days. Closing a nature center would be shortsighted.

Respectfully, Erin  
Erin Eichhorn  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Tanya Zjara Kennedy Luminati [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 15, 2024 9:15 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** The county should not be closing nature centers

It sounds like the county is considering closing one of the Nature Centers? ( <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/budget-fees> ). This seems short-sighted given that homes and construction continue to happen; these preserves are going to be critical.

But the first question: which one? It seems premature to ask for public comment until the targeted center is disclosed and reasons for the choice communicated to the county.

Then it seems like there needs to be a move to make up that gap. Raise each parktakes class by \$1, for example, and/or work with the Park Foundation to do a special campaign to make up the gap, for at least the next budget cycle.

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Tanya Kennedy Luminati [REDACTED]

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**From:** Laurie Brill [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 15, 2024 3:55 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature Center Closing Thoughts

Hello,  
It's come to my attention that there's a proposal to close a nature center for budget concerns.

I would just like to strongly advocate against the closure. I can't tell you how many hours my family and I have spent at Hidden Pond, specifically the nature center. When my daughter was a toddler we would spend so much time looking at the animals, seeing them up close, learning from the naturalists and volunteers and building her deep appreciation, understanding and respect for nature. We did many of the activities and programs (Puddle jumpers weekly class, weekend events, etc) and my daughter loved them. She's 10 now and she still loves doing a week of summer camp at Hidden Pond!

The reservable room downstairs was home to her birthday party when she turned 4, and we had a wonderful experience! The up close encounters with the snakes, turtles and toads were amazing and instilled that same interest and respect for animals and nature in all her friends. The volunteers and staff were amazing with the pond netting experience, and to this day it's one of our favorite birthday party memories.

In a world that is dominated by technology, screens and fast paced everything, these parks and nature centers allow a beautiful space for kids and families to slow down, look around, notice the incredible natural world around us, and become true citizens of the woods.

Please reconsider closing a nature center- they may not be flashy, but they are beautiful, and deeply meaningful and should be encouraged and supported.

Thankyou, Laurie Brill  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Sara Mitchell [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 13, 2024 3:05 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Parks Budget Comment

To Whom It May Concern,

I wanted to voice my opinion against the idea of cutting the budget of the park authority. I have seen how underfunded the parks already are and how difficult it is to staff parks given the incredibly low salaries FCPA employees make compared to the counties nearby. This leads to less experienced staff, staff burnout, and many staff moving out of Fairfax County to work elsewhere in order to survive in the

area.

I rely on FCPA classes and camps for my two young children. My kids have learned to swim, tumble, dance, and create in these classes and camps, but more importantly they have had wonderful social experiences that I could not have otherwise provided. When my pandemic-era baby was supposed to start preschool, he was so afraid of other kids that he was too upset to go. FCPA classes are where I turned for help, enrolling him in as many mom & tot classes as I could to get him comfortable in public. It took time (and some amazing staff) to get him socialized and ready to try again with preschool. He is now thriving. I know the staff we interacted make pitiful salaries (if they were lucky enough to even be salaried employees) but they put their hearts into the growth and development of the community's children.

Some of said staff have not been able to continue with FCPA due to the gap between wage and cost of living here in Northern Virginia. Those who continue to work for FCPA often are retired from previous careers or have partners who can provide a "breadwinner" salary to support them. It is a shame that FCPA loses great staff because of an inability or unwillingness to employ them full time and pay them a livable wage.

There is talk of closing a nature center to save money and this deeply saddens me. We often visit nature centers in the area to learn, expose the kids to nature and animals, and bond as a family. These centers are vital to the education of the public regarding local wildlife and environments. It frightens me that as we head deeper into climate crisis that the county wants to eliminate some of the most accessible ways to teach the public about the environment and what we can do to protect it. These nature centers inspire our children to be responsible eco-warriors and develop a love of nature.

In addition to services that have greatly benefited my children, I also utilize park facilities for my own exercise, self-care, ability to be out in nature, and enjoyment. Our parks are beautiful and provide such wonderful respite from the chaos of the world. That said, I'd love to see improvements to and maintenance of park amenities and facilities.

I hope the county will reconsider budget cuts to the park authority, given the crucial benefits parks have for us all. Thank you for your consideration,

Sara Mitchell

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**From:** Beau Quandt [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 11, 2024 10:31 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov>  
**Subject:** Nature Centers

Closing any nature centers is a terrible blow for the county. County children deserve access to nature and all it can provide. This is a shameful for a county such as ours. We want nature centers!

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**From:** Krzos, Jon [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 12, 2024 9:33 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature Centers

Dear Fairfax county,

I am deeply troubled to hear that the county is considering closing a Nature Center. These Centers are needed parts of their communities. They provide great camps and childcare for parents during summer. Others use the programs and listen to the staff talks to learn about nature and how we all interact with the world.

In such a built up area such as Fairfax, these park provide a much needed connection to nature and allow for great hiking.

The special events such as birthday parties, campfires, nature walks, and animal interactions give children and parents fun safe activities.

Also do not forget all the volunteers who give so much to these centers and provide a sense of purpose, learning, and personal growth.

With all the other optional spending the county does, it is crazy and irresponsible to think closing a nature center is even an option.

The fees charged for the camps the centers provide do work to pay for the locations themselves and are often the only affordable option for working families for their children to have these opportunities.

Plus having a Nature Center in the neighborhood increasing housing values and thus real estate taxes. Jon Krzos

Vice President of Financial Planning C Analysis DCS Corporation  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** Logan Krzos [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 11, 2024 4:27 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** 2026 Budget Cuts

Dear Budget Review Committee Members,

Please vote "no" to the proposed budget cuts that call to close a nature center and a historic site. The nature centers have been a large part of my life, and it would be devastating to see even

one disappear.

I volunteer with the park authority, and have been going to programs since I was 3. Closing even 1 park would deprive thousands of people and future generations with a closer connection to their community and nature.

Please vote no during the budget meeting. Logan Krzos,

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 11, 2024 3:39 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Roberta Jeffries [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** FCPA Board.Braddock <[FCPABoard.Braddock@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Braddock@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.Sully <[FCPABoard.Sully@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Sully@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.Franconia <[FCPABoard.Franconia@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Franconia@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.Dranesville <[FCPABoard.Dranesville@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Dranesville@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.HunterMill <[FCPABoard.HunterMill@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.HunterMill@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.MtVernon <[FCPABoard.MtVernon@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.MtVernon@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.AtLarge1 <[FCPABoard.AtLarge1@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.AtLarge1@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.AtLarge2 <[FCPABoard.AtLarge2@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.AtLarge2@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.Mason <[FCPABoard.Mason@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Mason@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.Providence <[FCPABoard.Providence@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Providence@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.Springfield <[FCPABoard.Springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.AtLarge3 <[FCPABoard.AtLarge3@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.AtLarge3@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Grape, Laura <[Laura.Grape2@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Laura.Grape2@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** FCPA Proposed Budget Adjustments and Service Cuts: Comments from Sully Foundation, Ltd

The attached letter is from Roberta Jeffries, Chairman of Sully Foundation, Ltd., responding to possible budget reductions that were presented last month to the Fairfax County Park Authority Board.

Thank you, Anne Stuntz  
Sully Foundation, Ltd.

# *Sully Foundation, Ltd.*

September 11, 2024

Kiel Stone, Chairman  
Fairfax County Park Authority  
12055 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035

Dear Chairman Stone

I have received the news of the possible budget reductions that were presented last month to the Fairfax County Park Authority Board. Among the FY 2026 Non-Recommended General Fund Budget Reductions was a slide for “Close one nature center and one historic site (Encumbered).”

The Sully Foundation was established in 1970 to support Sully Historic Site. It is an independent non-profit foundation to protect, preserve and assist the historical and cultural resources of Sully Historic Site; promote education and interpretive programming opportunities; promote public use of the park facilities; and foster respect for the site. We have donated well over \$1 million in funding and expertise in all areas of the site’s activities: collections, building and grounds maintenance, staffing, archaeology, education, exhibits, signage, historic markers, interpretive slave quarter building, historic garden upkeep, and special event funding.

The Sully Foundation firmly supports the continuing operation and interpretation of Sully Historic Site. Sully is on the National Register of Historic Places, the Virginia Landmarks Register, the Fairfax County Inventory of Historic Sites, and National Park Service’s Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. It anchors a Fairfax County Historic Overlay District. It has been accredited by the American Alliance of Museums since 1979.

The site has told the story of life in western Fairfax County for over 50 years, and has been a center of learning, enrichment and fun for students, scouts and families. Prior to the pandemic and prior to the recent years of staffing shortages, the site’s visitation was 24,000 including 3,000 school aged students annually. The new initiative of \$250,000 set aside by the county to build on existing history and research about the 18<sup>th</sup> century enslaved population at Sully, and in the surrounding community, is a most exciting opportunity to expand what is known about the county’s history.

We urge the FCPA Board to ensure that Sully, one of the historical jewels of Fairfax County, will continue to be funded, supported and celebrated. The complexities and costs of closing an 18<sup>th</sup> century historic treasure are vast. There are also legal implications to the Park Authority’s Sully lease agreement with the federal government. The risk of loss is great. Without the site being open as a museum, the park land and access could return to the federal government, in this case, the FAA. The Sully Foundation gives funds each year to the site for special projects and



needs. The end of the year donation is imminent, and the Sully Foundation board must decide on giving. This threat of a possible closing of one unnamed historic site, if approved, would make it difficult to continue to give funds knowing that Sully would be closed in 2025, if Sully is the targeted site for closure.

Please consider carefully the ramifications of closing Sully Historic Site, or the threat to close in public statements such as the budget documents that were just released.

Sincerely,

Roberta Jeffries  
Chair  
Sully Foundation, Ltd.

cc. Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov  
Park Authority Board:  
Kiel Stone, Chair, Braddock  
Maggie Godbold, Sully  
Dr. Cynthia Jacobs Carter, Franconia,  
Timothy B. Hackman, Dranesville,  
William G. Bouie, Hunter Mill  
Linwood Gorham, Mount Vernon  
Dr. Abena Aidoo Hewton, At-Large  
Faisal Khan, At-Large  
Ronald Kendall, Mason  
Ken Quincy, Providence  
Michael W. Thompson, Jr., Springfield  
Johna Toomey, At-Large  
Resource Management and Interpretation Division:  
Laura Grape, Director  
bcc. Members of Sully Foundation, Ltd.

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**From:** Matt Young [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 11, 2024 11:03 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Park Authority Board - FY26 Input

Good morning Park Authority,  
I wanted to provide my input on the proposed FY26 Park Authority Board budget.

I wanted to comment on the proposal to close one nature center and one historic site for a total cost savings of \$644,000.

I understand fiscal responsibility is key to running and managing a successful park system, and tough decisions need to be made regarding revenue and costs to try to be fiscally responsible. But for this case, I'd like to make a special case for how much we appreciate the Nature Centers throughout the County, especially Hidden Oaks Nature Center in Annandale. Our family has been visiting Hidden Oaks Nature Center for over 40 years, and it has become a source of incredible educational opportunities for our kids through nature programs and incredible summer camps, birthday parties, indoor play and exposure to local animals at the indoor exhibits, as well as outdoor play including hiking, playing in Nature Playce, stream visits, and night time walks. Additionally, it has created volunteer opportunities for our kids, allowing them to learn more about nature and wildlife, while giving back to the community with their time and learning how to grow and be a leader and develop a sense of self and confidence as they help out with younger children at camps and programs.

We constantly recommend Hidden Oaks Nature Center to friends and family for events, birthday parties, and general visits and all come back with positive experiences and a further love for the Fairfax County Park system.

I know you all have tough decisions to make, but I'd to beg of you to please not consider closing Hidden Oaks Nature Center (or any if you can!) as it is an invaluable part of our local community that goes well beyond just the walls of the building at the site itself. The staff and volunteers have always been great stewards of the Fairfax County Park system!

Thank you for your consideration. Matt Young  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 11, 2024 11:37 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** FY2026 Budget Cuts

Dear Members of the Park Authority Board,

I am a retired staff member of the Park Authority assigned to Huntley Meadows Park. After I retired, I was a Friends of HMP Board member for many years and a volunteer front desk helper until COVID came along.

My concern is that you are forced to consider any reduction in the Park Authority funds at all. I can say quite honestly that the parks have been underfunded for years. Resource management is being neglected, park staff is overburdened to produce revenue, and the natural history focus is being lost. There are problems at my local recreation center, Springhill, too. I have never seen so many trees in danger of being lost and in danger of dropping a branch on someone. This is a huge safety issue and yet a reduction to Forestry funds is being considered. Of course, to close a nature center and historic site would be catastrophic to the residents of the County. Why is the Park Authority always on the chopping block? Why can't the County manage its funds more successfully? The Park Authority Board needs to push back on the proposed non-recommended budget cuts. I love living in Fairfax County and love all its beautiful parks but how is this financial situation sustainable?

Thank you, Connie Carpender

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**From:** Jean Lockhart [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 11, 2024 11:54 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov>  
**Subject:** Do not cut Hidden Oaks Nature Center from budget

It has come to my attention that Fairfax County is considering cutting a Nature Center in order to meet its budget for the coming year.

As a taxpayer, I find this unconscionable as nature centers are very important providers of programming and exposure to the natural world to our children which is sorely missing today.

Specifically, Hidden Oaks Nature Center is an integral park of the Annandale District Park and exposes a very diverse group of people to nature, through exhibits, programs (which bring in revenue), etc.

With recognition of the importance of getting children outside into nature, it's imperative that the few nature centers in Fairfax County remain as vital resources for Fairfax youth and families.

Please do not cut Hidden Oaks Nature Center, or any nature center, from the upcoming budget. Thank

you,  
J L Greer

Sent from my mobile device.

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**From:** Jane Lloyd [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 11, 2024 10:47 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Comments on Proposed FY26 Budget

I've read the proposed cuts for FCPA's 2026 budget, and I'm disheartened to see that a Nature Center and Historical Site are potentially on the chopping block. Below is an email that I recently sent to our neighborhood nature center, Hidden Oaks. It sums up our family's feelings about the important benefits that places like these offer our community.

"I want to thank your volunteers, your staff, and you for the wonderful programming at Hidden Oaks. This was my son's second year in Hidden Oaks' summer camps. We were thankful to be able to attend for three consecutive weeks. We would have spent all summer there if Parktakes hadn't crashed during registration. Hidden Oaks camps are a hot commodity!

Our son loves Hidden Oaks. He loves the camp activities. He loves the camp staff. He loves Nature Playce, and the hiking trails. He loves the Nature Center, and all of its animals. He has repeatedly declared that Hidden Oaks summer camps are his favorite.

Your camps are my favorite, too. I love the proximity to our home. I love the thought and care that is put into the activities. I love that my son is able to spend his summer outdoors. I love that he's learning about our local ecosystem, along with broader scientific and artistic principles. I love the camaraderie that the camp staff fosters among the groups. I love that I feel safe putting my son in their care. Of the assortment of FCPA camps we've attended, Hidden Oaks has the best communication by far, and the best adherence to check in/check out procedures. The preparation put into the camps is obvious. I trust the operation of the camps, and I know that if something were to go wrong, my son would be in good hands.

We've been so impressed by our camp experiences, we signed up for at least a half dozen of your fall programs. We're especially looking forward to the new Nature Maker Challenges on early release Mondays, and the seasonal scientific and cultural programs around Halloween and Thanksgiving.

Hidden Oaks is a wonderful resource for our family. It's a beautiful center with friendly, helpful staff. We're grateful to have this gem of a place right down the road. Thank you for maintaining a space that is safe, welcoming, and fun. We wish all of our Park experiences were as nice as the ones we have at Hidden Oaks."

There are solutions to FCPA's budgetary concerns that don't involve the removal of important county resources and services. Our Aquatics program, for one, is a tentpole of the FCPA budget, and could be better utilized in that regard. Those programs, our historical sites, our parks, and

our nature centers are largely what make Fairfax County a great place to live. Rather than taking good things away, I urge the Board to press for improvements to the good things we already have.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our community's praises and concerns. Our family appreciates the work you do.

Thank you, Jane Lloyd  
Mason District resident

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**From:** Katie Kennedy [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 11, 2024 10:07 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov>  
**Subject:** Comment on Park Budget Proposal

Hello,

I'd like to comment on the park budget proposal for tonight's meeting. I just wanted to say I support the closing of Scott's run nature preserve parking. Also, I feel that we should aim to keep all of our nature centers open for education to future generations! We should do everything in our power to fill today's youth with knowledge to protect our planet and its resources. Also, cutting the forestry and trail budget poses a safety concern in my eyes. The parks need to be able to keep trails accessible and remove any natural debris for the safety of our citizens using these parks. From my understanding these activities are already underfunded and removing funding could pose risk to citizens (children and adults alike).

Thank you for your time and thank you for continuing to support the parks of Fairfax County!

-Kathryn Kennedy Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Cheryl [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024 6:51 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov>  
**Subject:** Keep Hidden Oaks Nature Center Open!

Hello!

I have just become aware that Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) is working on their budget for the next fiscal year, FY 2026 and that it is expected to produce a 10% cut from its current FY 2025 budget. This will result in a loss of services to residents and it is expected that one Nature Center and one Historic Site will be closed.

Please understand that those of us who live near the Hidden Oaks Nature Center realize what a

treasure the nature center is and its programming adds immensely to our community. My neighbors and I want you to know how much we value Hidden Oaks and want to make sure that it remains open.

Many thanks for taking my comments into consideration. Sincere regards,  
Cheryl Ryefield [REDACTED]

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**From:** Brian Gannon [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024 3:29:36 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Budget Reduction Proposals

FCPA Staff and Board -

Thank you for allowing the public opportunity to provide feedback regarding potential budget cuts for FY25 and FY26. While I know that many tough decisions will have to be made, I am disappointed to see the closing of the parking lot at Scott's Run Nature Preserve on the list. Scott's Run is a crown jewel and it would be unfortunate that the majority of residents would not be able to enjoy it should the proposal be accepted.

According to your presentation, access would be limited to those within walking distance. That's a classic case of the rich getting richer - the county's richest residents would have their own private county-funded nature preserve while no one else would be able to access it. It's quite likely that visitors would attempt to park along neighborhood streets, or perhaps even Georgetown Pike, and walk along Georgetown Pike to try to gain access, creating safety and enforcement issues.

I would like to suggest exploring charging a nominal parking fee to help cover operational costs and perhaps limit some of the high demand. While a gatehouse would not be practical at that location, automated fee machines could be installed for this purpose. Many recreation sites are turning to this strategy; Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which has never had an entrance fee, implemented a parking fee in recent years. I would gladly pay a parking fee to enjoy and help maintain this resource; especially if the alternative is losing all access.

Please reconsider this possible budget cut. Thank you.

Brian Gannon

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**From:** Carolyn Gamble [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024 2:28:50 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Comments on the 10% Non-recommended FY2026 Budget Cuts

To the Honorable Members of the Park Authority Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the FY2026 proposed 10% non-recommended budget

cuts.

Recent citizen advocacy has helped the Park Authority receive modest increases from the General Fund as well as other funds to begin to rectify the chronic underfunding of the agency.

**None** of the proposed cuts should be implemented. The General Fund allocation needs to be **increased to** keep parks safe and staffed. "We are not going back!" (to quote Kamala Harris).

I am distressed by the state of Fairfax County parks. There has to be a way to turn this deterioration around. The current funding structure of the agency is not working! Relying on Revenue Fund positions to cover past General Fund position cuts at the site level is damaging parks by causing a necessary prioritization of revenue production **OVER** resource protection. As a long-time park volunteer, I have directly experienced this shift to money making at nature and history sites. I see fewer staff available for basic resource protection because they must spend all their time planning, preparing and conducting revenue programs. Burn-out from back-to-back camps is a real thing among site staff. As said before, volunteers do a lot, but we can't keep up with all that is needed to protect natural and cultural resources in the Park Authority's care.

If any of the non-recommended cuts get put into the advertised budget, there will be citizen outrage and push back.

Sincerely, Carolyn Gamble

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**From:** Connor Uzokoff [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 22, 2024 6:46 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center

Hello parkmail,

My name is Connor and I am one of the volunteers at Hidden Oaks Nature Center. I am a sophomore in highschool.

Recently, I received an email saying that one to-be-determined nature center and one to-be-determined history site will be closed. I would like to express my concern for this proposal, as both history sites and nature centers are an integral part of people's lives, especially the younger generation. I urge you not to close Hidden Oaks or any other center, as young people's lives are impacted greatly by their experiences at nature centers.

Thank you,  
Connor

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**From:** Hee-Jin Chiu [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 22, 2024 2:08 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center

To whom it may concern:

I have heard that Fairfax County is considering closing a nature center. Our hope is that it is not Hidden Oaks Nature Center. Our family has been enjoying Hidden Oaks Nature Center as we have three young children, ages ranging from 3 to 7 years old. We have visited the nature center as a family, with friends, or even with our schools on a field trip. Hidden Oaks offers educational, hands-on opportunities for children and adults to explore exhibits and speak with knowledgeable naturalists.

The nature-themed playground also provides an opportunity for various age groups to engage in safe outdoor play and movement, as it is also a fenced-in play area.

It is always nice to see so many families from diverse backgrounds enjoying Hidden Oaks Nature Center. It is so wonderful to have a nature center that provides any family various opportunities to engage in learning without having to limit families who may not have the means to pay for admission to other parks, such as Meadowlark Gardens.

Thank you for your time,  
Hee-Jin Chiu

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**From:** Kerri Lawrence [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 22, 2024 10:49 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature center closure

To whom it may concern:

I am emailing to let you know that I do not support the closure of a nature center. Thank you.

Respectfully,  
Kerri Lawrence

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**From:** Claire M. [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 22, 2024 10:33 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks Nature Center

I've heard recently from several people that there's a proposal to close Hidden Oaks Nature Center. Is that true? What's going on?



Thanks.

Claire

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From: Marissa D'Orazio [REDACTED]  
Sent: Sunday, September 22, 2024 10:32 AM  
To: FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
Subject: Do not close any nature centers!

Good morning,

It has come to my attention that the parts department is considering closing one of the nature centers in order to save funds. Please do not do this. My two young children have had multiple trips to Hidden Oaks and Hidden Pond. We love learning about animals and their habitat. Our county is special because of the high value of places on learning. Your nature centers are one of the many things that make this an especially amazing place to live. Hidden Oaks is a rainy day favorite for our family. They love listening to bird and insect calls, seeing the animals, and all of the hands-on activities you offer. Closing a nature center would be detrimental to our wonderful county.

Sincerely,

Marissa Perrone  
[REDACTED]

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**From:** J Hwu [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 22, 2024 5:00 AM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hidden Oaks

Please do not close Hidden Oaks Nature Center. It is a wonderful place to visit and learn about nature.

Thank you for not closing this nature center.

June Hwu

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From: Sarah Manning [REDACTED]  
Sent: Saturday, September 21, 2024 10:08 PM  
To: FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
Subject: Please don't close any nature centers

Good evening,

My name is Sarah Manning, and I have a 2 year old and a 4 month old. When we discovered the nature centers this summer, it was a lifesaver. We now knew of multiple fun, engaging, air-conditioned, free places we could take our children to educate and entertain them out of the harsh summer heat. We visited 3 of them multiple times throughout the summer and have plans to return many times. They are a wonderful addition to the community and we would be sorry to see any of them close. Please reconsider closing any of these invaluable gems.

Thank you,  
Sarah Manning

Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Adrienne Moravec [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, September 21, 2024 9:17 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; Braddock BOS  
<[BraddockBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:BraddockBOS@fairfaxcounty.gov)>  
**Subject:** Nature Centers - Please Don't Close

Hello,

I am writing to implore the county please not close any nature centers as part of the budget shortfall.

We understand difficult decisions must be made in this fiscal environment, but the nature centers are a crucial lifeline to families in an area with a high cost of living and few low-cost activities for families. Kids need to engage with nature and these nature centers are a great learning environment for kids and families throughout the county.

We are regular users and lovers of both Hidden Oaks and Hidden Pond. We've visited Hidden Oaks probably 30+ times since my kids were born, my autistic 6-year old is currently a sponsor of a Copes Gray Tree Frog, and we held his last birthday party there. We are looking forward to sending him to camps in the future. At Hidden Pond, we are regular visitors, have attended the campfire evenings, and love the facility.

These nature centers are such a valuable and unique resource in our county. We would be devastated as longtime members of this amazing community to lose them.

Thank you,  
Adrienne and Charles Moravec

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**From:** Michele Zink [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, September 21, 2024 8:25 PM  
**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.Braddock

<[FCPABoard.Braddock@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.Braddock@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; FCPA Board.AtLarge3

<[FCPABoard.AtLarge3@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPABoard.AtLarge3@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Reconsider closing nature centers

Dear FCPA Board,

I was dismayed to learn that the county is considering closing one of the nature centers. These centers are critical for young children to learn about the animals and environment in our community. This enables them to appreciate the wonder of nature and why they should help protect it. My children have truly enjoyed learning about animals and insects. I know it has taught them to respect them. It has also sparked their interest in finding them in our community.

My kids love seeing Fluffy the snapping turtle at Hidden Pond or Burke Centre festival. I have fond memories of taking toddlers to Hidden Oaks on cold or rainy days for imaginative play with the kids corner and climbing tower. My son had his 4th birthday party there too. Many of the parents didn't realize the park was there but thought it was wonderful. Five years later, my kids still remember finding a salamander at the little pond outside the center along with tadpoles in various stages of transformation. We haven't visited Eleanor C. Lawrence Park as often but have enjoyed our visits there.

At a time when screen time is necessary through the day, having a place to connect with nature is priceless. The variety of parks and services is one of the top reasons I love living in this county.

Thank you,  
Michele Zink

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**From:** [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Saturday, September 21, 2024 2:57 PM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>

**Subject:** Park closure

Hello,

Please do not close any of the parks or nature centers in Fairfax County. We pay high taxes to support facilities like these, and historically the voters here have always supported the financial measures to continue operations or even expand park operations. Please look for alternatives to closing a facility.

Thank you,  
Karen Moran

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**From:** Wendy Golden [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Saturday, September 21, 2024 2:44 PM

**To:** FCPA Parkmail <[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)>; [fcboardptvidence@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:fcboardptvidence@fairfaxcounty.gov)

**Subject:** Please Do NOT close our Nature Centers

Parks and Mr Quincy,

We love our nature parks like Hidden Oaks Nature Center. We live minutes from the center and have done Girl Scout events, birthday parties, school activities, family fun days and more! We heard that the Fairfax County Park Authority may be closing one of the nature centers in Fairfax County.

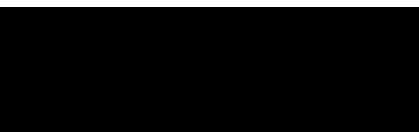
Please DO NOT shut down a nature center! Raise taxes if you must but these centers are just too important to close!!

There has to be a better way!

Kindly consider other options before you make this drastic change to our County.

Thank you

Wendy and David Golden



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**In-Person Testimony from Sept. 11 Budget Committee Meeting**  
(Transcripts received from presenters)

**Jo Doumbia**

Good evening, My name is Jo Doumbia, a 30 yr plus Mason District resident.

I am truly surprised by the offering/no-offering of FCPA to the BOS.

I am amazed to see that your offering **clearly** highlights community exposure to safety risks and yet offers them as options; for instance, stopping damaged tree management or lack of trail maintenance.

Not graceful to see that the few **free** options that the community has, such as summer concerts or access to nature and cultural centers, are earmarked for reduction/elimination.

I have gone to the Ossian Hall park summer concerts since before the park was built in 2015, where my husband has been the volunteer MC since 2005. BTW, this is the **only** park where international concerts are offered. Every Saturday during the concerts season, I have seen, elderly people, many in wheelchairs, families with neurodivergent kids, African, Latino, MiddleEasterns descents families attending this program.

I have also been a regular volunteer to HONC for several years. What have I seen? Numerous little kids been nurtured in the beauty and magnificent of nature. Progressively more and more visits from families of non-American descent. The joy when visitors learn that this is a free offering. On speaking with volunteers of other nature centers, it is not different.

These examples lead me to another point of your offering. It appears, there has not been any regard about the significant unfair/unjust impacts on vulnerable communities. These communities in many instances have access to these programs either because of proximity, free family enjoyment, etc. Have you assessed who will be worst affected? or this is an across the board exercise? The most affected will not comment unless there is outreach for them to learn about.

Did you consider the significant role that FCPA plays in helping curtail GHG for Ffx Cty to comply with its commitment to net zero by 2040? I am talking about the effective role of **nature driven solutions**. So, how is it that the offering is about going backwards on the very few gains to rescue trees from invasives for instance? This is not what needed to today and future generations.

Thus, I strongly urge you to reconsider the terms of this offering/no-offering so you do not make it **that** easy for the BOS to sacrifice the few gains made by FCPA. And considering public comments extension.

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**George Young, Friends of Hidden Oaks [on behalf of Kevin Holland]**

Good evening. I'm Kevin Holland, president of FOHONC, the Friends of Hidden Oaks Nature Center. I contend that the proposed budget proposal of closing a nature center fails to reflect the true cost of such an action.

The proposal lists the loss of 100,000 visitors for two closed sites, mainly through the elimination of student field trips and does not include lost revenue. (display) Using Hidden Oaks as a nature center example, the closure of the site would realize an annual loss of

9,450	school children and adults
31,103	walk in visitors- who do not pay a fee, Not including trail walkers who benefit from nonpersonal interpretation but do not enter the building
770	boy and girl scouts
400	summer day campers from 13 weeks June-Aug.
3800	birthday party participants/guests- many first time to any FCPA park
1800	Parktakes program participants ages 2-99
900	Rentals of PondView ( NoVa Cherokee symposium-to meetings & agency retreats.

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48,223	loss estimated annual visitation
\$225,000	loss estimated annual gross revenue

The effects go beyond visitor and revenue counts.

The Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Access plan, or PROSA strategy was adopted by this board in 2023. This plan provides a framework for providing equitable access to the park system, enriching habitat connectivity, and prioritizing recreation needs using an equity lens. These strategies are mission-centered and support the agency's values of enhancing stewardship, fostering diversity, developing partnerships and providing quality and value.

Hidden Oaks is the epitome of an urban, walkable access community gathering place. The center staff provides opportunities for passive and social recreation promoted by PROSA with free to use Nature Playce outdoor play area, multiple public art features and programming including the free and popular Walk with a Police Officer.

Hidden Oaks' staff support the PROSA strategy of enriching habitat connectivity. The staff leads scouts, adult and teen volunteers in eradicating invasive species and providing education regarding native wildlife habitats.

PROSA uses an equity lens as a cornerstone for parks. Hidden Oaks' 2003 bond-funded exhibit, Urban Woodlands: Habitats and Havens focuses on the multicultural visitor base. The exhibit text is translated into Korean. The indoor reading corner and outdoor trails interpretations are bi or tri lingual.

The nature center staff are dedicated to educating underserved students. With grant funds, Hidden

Oaks provides free Meaningful Watershed Education fieldtrips, including the cost of the buses, to over 2500 4th, 5th and 7th graders from Title 1 schools. The site partners with local community centers to provide after school nature exploration and environmental literacy programs. For the last two years the Culmore Second Story teen program has visited multiple FCPA parks each summer and fall for experiential learning- activities coordinated by Hidden Oaks staff and its partners.

Hidden Oaks is a community hub. Through partnerships with other county agencies, generous grants from Northrup Grumman and service organizations such as Rotary, and deep connections with Fairfax Master Naturalists, Hidden Oaks exemplifies financial and environmental stewardship. The site paid and volunteer staff personify diversity. Boasting a diverse volunteer corps of 189 from ages 13 through 85, the site is an ideal environment for teens to develop skills and talents that inform their ideals and career choices. With the 2024 value of a volunteer hour at \$31.80, the volunteer contribution at Hidden Oaks last fiscal year of \$135,977 is staggering.

I contend that Hidden Oaks is not a feasible reduction option based on this board's commitment to the agency's mission, values, One Fairfax and PROSA. For the record, no nature or history site is expendable.

Remove the option to close a nature center and a history site from the proposed 2026 budget and honor the agency's mission and values and commitment to PROSA.

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### **Michael McDonnell**

Hello, my name is Michael McDonnell. I was hired by the Park Authority in 1983 by the History Division as a section manager and retired after 40 years as an RMD park manager. I gratefully accepted the Park Authority's Trailblazer Supervisor of the Year in 2023. At the same time I made many in upper management uncomfortable because I was willing to speak truth to power.

To respond to the County Executive's request for a 10% cut proposal from each agency, the Park Authority has included to shut down one nature center and one historic site. Perhaps the hope is to create enough public pushback that the BOS will insist on removing that part of the proposal. But that might not happen!

I was managing Hidden Oaks in 03 when Park Authority board submitted closures of Hidden Oaks and Riverbend for budget reductions. The BOS accepted the proposal. The public outcry was huge and swift, but still too slow and for 3 months, starting in July of FY 04, I with my teams had to manage both those closed sites, reduce staff, and strategize new operating missions for each park. Due to public anger this mishmash was overturned by the BOS in October of that year and both sites fully reopened.

From our hard-won experience in 2003, I guarantee some certainties from this new 2026 proposal. Here is what you need to look forward to during the next 8 months:

1. Employees focused on trying to figure out among themselves who has seniority since a RIF process will only start with the 6 merit positions and not account for the position incumbents.



2. Employees checking their resumes and contacts in private sector jobs they previously turned down for FCPA's lower pay, perceived stability and importance of mission.
3. Employees losing sleep stressing if they'll be the position eventually targeted for elimination, and perhaps jumping ship prior to the end of the process.
4. The absolute disintegration of trust in leadership and cynicism towards any mission mention of employee welfare, creating low employee morale and stressed working conditions.

Though the sites remain unnamed, in my view the cynical use of four lovely photos in the PowerPoint proposal, including one of a child interacting with the new play pump in Hidden Oaks' Nature Playce playground, is in fact a dog whistle targeting those county citizens, who've loved all these historic and natural places for more than 50 and 60 years, with the goal to perhaps motivate them to get out and protest. Well, here we are, congratulations.

Employees don't see this proposal as a chess game. They rightly view themselves as professionals pursuing their love for teaching new fresh minds to make important and educated stewardship decisions about the future of Fairfax's cultural and natural resources. Remove this proposal for closing a nature center and historic site now. Do the hard work of finding the nearly 2/3's of a million dollars elsewhere, or tell your BOS members to search elsewhere in the County. Do this before you lose those precious resources, and employee trust has completely vanished. Thank you for your time.

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**Todi Carnes, President of Friends of Historic Huntley**

Sep 11, 2024

Dear Members of the Fairfax County Park Authority Board,

We, the below-referenced park Friends groups, thank you for this opportunity to provide input on the Park Authority staff's recently released FY 2026 Budget Materials and the Park Authority Board meeting at which they were publicly briefed.

As Friends to our parks, our most important current objective is to increase staffing at the site level. Our second most important goal is to reduce our parks' reliance on the revenue fund because it leads to an emphasis on sales rather than service.

**I. Non-Recommended Budget Reductions; Budget Requests; & the Revenue Fund**

*A. All Reductions Are, Indeed, "Non-recommended"*

The BOS and County Executive only recently began the work of incrementally increasing the FCPA's general funds budget to offset years of underfunding and to put our parks on the road to one day receiving full and proper funding. From our perspective, *any* budget reductions will effectively nullify the recent corrective increases. Accordingly, we concur with characterizing all proposed reductions as "non-recommended."

*B. Site-Level Personnel Positions Must Be Funded and Filled*

PAB members, we implore you in exercising your oversight authority, to find out exactly which, if any, FCPA general funds positions are currently "frozen" from fill in order to fund other FCPA needs. Last year, we requested that such positions be publicly identified. We believe that every authorized vacant FCPA position should be filled.

*C. It is Correct to Assume that the Revenue Fund Should Not Absorb General Funds Cuts*

It is shocking to see a nature center and an historic site as well as multiple personnel positions identified as potential budget cuts, i.e., "non-recommended reductions." It is, however, understandable that these expenses are being offered up as cuts rather than transferred to the revenue fund.

As earlier noted, overreliance on the revenue fund has essentially forced the Park Authority to prioritize chasing dollars over resource stewardship and community building. Transferring further liabilities to the revenue fund would only aggravate this problem. The BOS's FY 2026 budget guidance directing that the FCPA's funding structure be studied must be heeded. To wit:

County staff, in concert with the Park Authority Board, are directed to review the current funding structure of FCPA to determine if there are alternative approaches that could be considered to improve park services, facilities, and maintenance and further address equity. The Board recognizes that these changes will require significant fiscal resources and organizational

change and expects any recommendations to be phased in over multiple years.

[Fairfax County] FY 2025 Budget Markup Process and FY 2026 Budget Plan Recommendations (Apr 30, 2024), pp 9-10.

We understand that a contractor has been retained for the purpose of addressing equity funding, but we have seen no evidence that a wholesale review of the FCPA's funding structure is underway for the improvement of park services, facilities, and maintenance. We would like some assurance that you are considering potentially paradigm-shifting changes –that is the scale of change requisite to the need.

#### *D. Trash Containment and Removal*

The FCPA's proposed full implementation of its Zero Waste Trash Removal and Recycling program would include a substantial number of new position authorizations. While these may not be site-level positions, the additional personnel they represent would presumably relieve current site-level personnel handling trash removal to focus on other park priorities. Additionally, they would promote the fundamental goal of achieving trash-free parks, one of our priorities since the launch of our Fair Parks Initiative.

## **II. Park Authority Board Meeting Acoustics**

Finally, we broach an issue that may or may not involve a need for additional funding: ensuring that all PAB members can be heard by those attending PAB meetings virtually. As we watched the last PAB meeting either online or on video, there was a side of the meeting table from which PAB members could not be heard. It was obvious that both PAB members and members of the public attending virtually could not hear all that was being said. We would hope that adjustments at the current meeting site might be made to rectify the problem, but if not, perhaps PAB meetings could be moved to the Government Center where all participants could both be seen and heard remotely.

With many thanks, we are the Friends of –

Colvin Run Mill

Frying Pan Farm Park

Green Spring Gardens (FROGS)

Historic Huntley

Holmes Run

Huntley Meadows Park

## **ACTION ITEM**

### FY 2026 Budget Submission, Fund 10001, General Fund

#### ISSUE:

Endorsement of the FY 2026 General Fund (Fund 10001) Budget Submission to the Department of Management and Budget, as presented to the Budget Committee on August 28, 2024.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

The Park Authority Executive Director recommends approval of the FY 2026 General Fund (Fund 10001) Budget Submission.

#### TIMING:

Board action is requested on September 25, 2024, and the submission was due to the Department of Management and Budget on September 13, 2024.

#### BACKGROUND:

Similar to the FY 2025 budget, the outlook for FY 2026 includes modest revenue growth, while employee compensation requirements and operating expenses continue to increase. Given the current budget forecast, new funding requests for General Fund or General Fund supported agencies must fall into one of the following categories 1) new facilities; 2) contract rate increases; and/or 3) critical County operations.

These additional items are included as addenda to the current baseline budget request. The current FY 2026 General Fund Forecasted Budget is \$37,795,711, as compared to the FY 2025 Adopted Budget Plan of \$36,081,623, a requested increase of \$1,714,088/4.75%. This is before the inclusion of the package of non-recommended budget reductions totaling 10% of our baseline budget.

#### Other Possible Adjustments:

- The Department of Management and Budget has not given guidelines for compensation increases for the FY 2026 Budget. Based on historical figures, the increase in personnel expenses would be approximately \$319,000 for every one percent increase.

## **BUDGET REQUESTS**

Throughout the public Park Authority Board budget process, the Board has considered two specific requests, totaling \$4,455,604.

**Zero Waste Trash Removal and Recycling: \$2,861,072**

The Park Authority is committed to complying with the applicable ordinance and moving forward with the Zero Waste Plan. The additional funding will allow FCPA to expand our trash and recycling services beyond phase one. Funding will include the required capital investment and the staff needed to support full implementation. Based on available funding, the next phases may be implemented/funded over two fiscal years.

**OBI Funding – Maintenance, Stabilization and Staffing: \$1,594,532**

As part of our efforts to assess the operating impact of new parks, land acquisitions, and major renovations, Park Authority staff have continued these efforts and identified additional impacts for new areas acquired in FY24. All new and majorly renovated properties require additional maintenance, utility, and operating costs that are not in the current budget. Part of the budget request includes new positions – 8 Merit, 2 Non-Merit, and 3 Temporary.

To safely maintain park property and prevent deferred maintenance of other parks and facilities and to maintain newly acquired property. The funding will allow staff time to address critical maintenance for facilities such as trails, playgrounds, athletic courts, and general park maintenance.

New Properties and Major Use Adjustments
Annandale Civic Space
Belle Haven Park
Elklick Preserve
Hilltop Park
Lake Fairfax Inline Skate Park
Laurel Hill Central Green
Mount Vernon Woods Skate Park
North Hill Park
Overlook Ridge
Quander Fairchild
Raglan Road Park
Ruckstahl Park
Scotts Run Athletic Field and Restroom
Woodlands Education and Stewardship Center

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The baseline FY 2026 General Fund Budget is \$37,795,711, with no revenue attached. These budget requests would add \$4,455,604 to that baseline.

**STAFF:**

Jai Cole, Executive Director  
Sara Baldwin, Deputy Director/COO  
Aimee Vosper, Deputy Director/CBD

Board Agenda Item  
September 25, 2024

Michael Peter, Director, Administration Division

Katie Miga, Business Office Manager

Kelly Sackett, Strategic Business and Financial Analyst

Tonya Mills, Senior Fiscal Administrator, Financial Management Branch

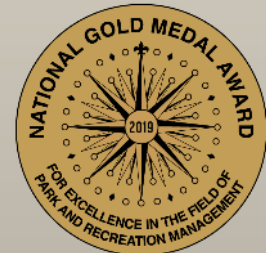
Nicole Varnes, Budget, Capital and Financial Reporting Manager





# FY 2026 Budget Development

Park Authority Board Meeting  
September 25, 2024



# Action Item

## FY 2026 Non-Recommended Budget Reduction Package

Fund 10001 – General Fund





# General Fund Budget Reduction Guidance

- Given that the reductions taken during the FY 2025 budget process focused on efficiencies and flexibility available within agency budgets, we expect that the options developed this year will involve harder choices that may impact service delivery and filled positions.
- Agencies are asked to provide reductions totaling 10 percent of their budgets, which will allow us to weigh the feasibility of each option and its impact on County services as the FY 2026 budget picture develops.

**FCPA General Fund Target: \$3,561,100**



# Summary of Public Comment

- Public Input Session – September 11, 2024 Budget Committee Meeting
- Public Input Open  
August 28 – September 20
  - 120 E-Mail and Web Comments Received
  - Responded to All with Some Follow-Up Discussions
  - All Input is Available for PAB Review

Subject	Count
Do Not Cut Parks	6
Hidden Oaks	33
Nature Centers	33
Hidden Pond	21
Nature Centers and Historic Sites	9
Hidden Pond and Hidden Oaks	1
Hidden Pond and Scotts Run	1
Historic Sites	1
Nature Centers and Low Wages for Staff	1
Riverbend Park	1
Nature Centers, Trail, and Forestry Budgets	1
IMA Budgets	2
Park Maintenance Cuts	2
Trail Maintenance	2
Other (Foundation Admin Fee, Management, Increase Fees to Offset)	6



# FY 2026 Non-Recommended General Fund Budget Reductions: \$3,564,106

Items	Reduction
<del>Summer Entertainment Series Reduction</del>	<del>\$109,703</del>
Reduce Forestry Contract Services	\$200,000
Reduce Athletic Field Mowing	\$240,823
Reduce Open space Mowing	\$129,258
Reduce Cleaning of Port-A-Johns	\$48,960
Reduce Athletic Court Maintenance and Renovations	\$250,000
Reduce Trail Maintenance Funding	\$250,000
Reduce General Park and Facility Maintenance	<del>\$350,000</del> \$404,851
Increase Foundation Funding	\$300,000
WPFO/Eliminate Ecologist 1	\$65,000
Eliminate Historic Resource Specialist II	\$82,826
Close one nature center and one historic site (Encumbered)	\$644,000
Close Scott's Run Nature Preserve Parking Lots	\$152,548
Remove Part-time Photographic Specialist	\$26,988
Increase WPFO in Development division	<del>\$714,000</del> \$768,851

# Action Item

# FY 2026 Budget Requests

Fund 10001 – General Fund



# General Budget Development Guidance

Given current forecast, guidance provided to the Senior Management Team was to **ONLY** submit new funding requests for General Fund or General Fund supported agencies which fall into one of the following categories:

- 1) New facilities;
- 2) Contract Rate Increases; and/or
- 3) Critical County Operations.

Budget addendum requests associated with new programs or enhancements to existing programs and services should not be submitted.



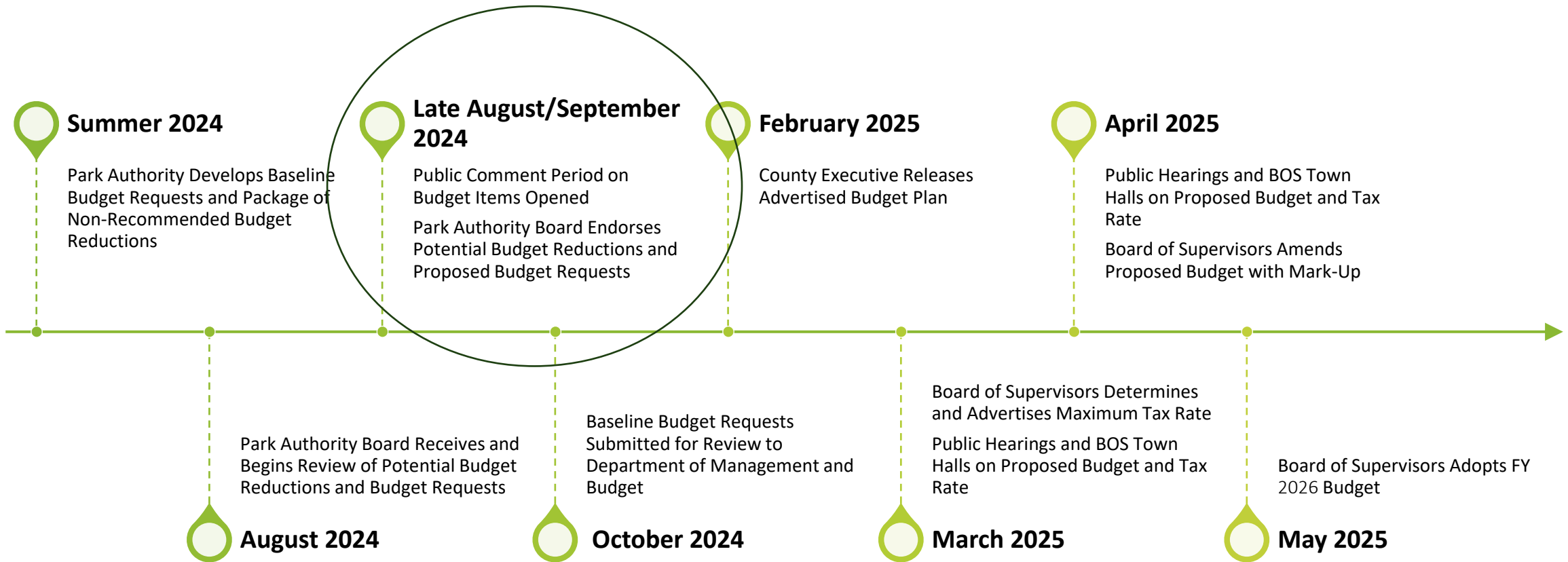
# FY 2026 Budget Requests: \$4,455,604

Items	\$ Request
<b>Compliance</b>	
Zero Waste Trash Removal and Recycling	\$2,861,072*
<b>Operating Budget Impact</b>	
OBI Funding - Maintenance/ Stabilization/ Staffing	\$1,594,532
Equity Funding Request	\$TBD

\*Can be achieved utilizing a combination of one-time (OEEC, Carryover, Third Quarter) and General Fund for positions.



# FY 2026 Proposed Budget Development Summary



# Opportunities for Input

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/board/meetings>

**Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov**

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/budget-fees>





# FY 2026 Budget Development

Park Authority Board Meeting  
September 25, 2024

