

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 2, 2012
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER 
SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #64: TEN-YEAR CAPITAL FUNDING NEEDS FOR OPEN SPACE, PARKS, ATHLETIC FIELDS, TRAILS, AND TREES

This memorandum responds to a request by Councilman Krupicka to provide additional information regarding ten-year costs of open space acquisition, park and athletic field renovations, trail maintenance and construction, and implementation of the Urban Forestry Master Plan. This information is an overview only, and Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities staff (RPCA) staff would be pleased to meet with City Council to provide a greater level of detail on any of the initiatives discussed below.

City staff recognizes that the best use of limited resources will capitalize on optimizing the potential use, recreational opportunities, and natural resources within the existing park inventory, utilizing available funds. To reach that goal, the following seven approaches are currently underway and have varying ten-year resource needs. Strategically provided additional funding, in concert with elevated staff resources, would accelerate implementation of all activities. Information is provided for all seven approaches, and includes current planned funding and estimated funding needs (where available) over the next ten years to fully implement each approach.

The ten-year City Capital Improvement Program (CIP) was able to accommodate some, but not nearly all of the capital needs identified in this memorandum. The CIP was prepared by reviewing priorities citywide, resulting in some RPCA funding increases, as well as proposals that were not able to be funded given resource constraints and lower priority relative to other City needs.

Open Space Acquisition

10-Year Capital Needs

(\$40.0 M in 2012 dollars/land acquisition only)

As stated in Councilman Krupicka's memorandum (Attachment #1), recent economic constraints have slowed the pace of achieving the City's 2003 Open Space goal to preserve 100 additional acres of open space. In the past nine years, however, the City has successfully protected approximately 90 additional acres of open space, including the acquisition of 14 parcels for new open space. This still leaves a gap of 10 acres to reach the 100 acre goal. At the current average cost of \$4.0 million an acre, approximately \$40.0 million (in 2012 dollars) would be required to achieve the City's 2003 goal of preservation of 100 additional acres of open space. The private

sector (such as in the proposed Beauregard Small Area Plan) will also be adding to the City's Open Space inventory as an element of redevelopment activity. The current Open Space fund has a balance of \$4.5 million (excluding \$1.5 million in Department of Defense mitigation funds for open space acquisition in the West End). An amount of \$19.7 million is planned between FY 2013 – 2022 as part of the Proposed CIP, which includes acquisition associated with the Waterfront Small Area Plan. Open Space funding is typically used for land acquisition; however, improvements to acquired land are often needed, and those costs are not currently included in the estimated funding needed over ten years. City staff will continue to work with future development projects within the City to leverage additional non-City funding for additional open space acquisition and other means of protection through the City's partnership with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust.

In the spring of 2012, staff will be working with key stakeholders, including the previous Open Space Steering Committee, to update the Open Space Master plan and recommend updates and targeted policies.

Focus on Improving Passive Park Spaces and Trails

10-Year Capital Needs (Details provided in description)

Findings from a 2011 Needs Assessment conducted on behalf of RPCA showed that 85% of households have visited a park within the City during the past year. This is much higher than the national benchmark of 72%. However, of that 85%, only 23% state that the parks were in "excellent condition", 12% less than the national benchmark for this question. The Needs Assessment showed that the highest Park facility needs are those that support passive uses and individualized sport, with the top four choices being walking trails (84%), natural areas and wildlife habitats (67%), biking trails (62%), and picnic shelters (57%).

Using the Needs Assessment and a comprehensive parks inventory conducted in 2011 as tools to prioritize park projects, furniture replacement to standard, particularly in picnic areas, is of high significance. In the Proposed FY 2013 – 2022 CIP, \$3.87 million is budgeted for park renovations with the highest priority being placed on park furniture and picnic shelters.

Also using the Needs Assessment as a guide, the Proposed FY 2013 – 2022 CIP contains significant investments in bike and pedestrian trail projects. Three new multi-purpose trails will be constructed over the next ten years at a total investment of \$12.0 million.¹ Regular capital maintenance on the existing 20 miles of trails (bike and pedestrian) in the City is budgeted at \$1.78 million over the next ten years.

Development of Large Park Framework Plans Subsequent Implementation of Framework Plans

10-Year Capital Needs (\$5.0 - \$10.0 M in 2012 dollars)²

Over the next two years staff will develop Framework Plans for each of the City's large (over 20 acre), multi-use and municipally-owned parks. Established decades ago, many of these open

¹ Funding from the City's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Fund along with some State and Federal funding will be used to support non-motorized transportation initiatives including: Holmes Run Greenway (\$5.6 million); Backlick Run (\$3.2 million); and Old Cameron Run (\$3.2 million).

² Estimated capital needs do not include funding which would be required on the operating budget side for implementation of the plans, nor includes additional annual operating costs associated with the improvements as part of the new plans.

spaces no longer meet the City’s recreational, environmental, or passive use needs. Using in-house resources, staff plans to conduct existing conditions and contextual analyses, hold community workshops, and develop Framework Plans for each large park. All plans will include recommended standards of furniture and fixtures, programmatic uses, implementation strategies, and operations procedures. Cost estimates of plan implementation will be developed during each individual plan development process. A list of Framework Plans to be developed, and capital investment anticipated (Low - up to \$250,000, Medium - \$250,000 to \$1,000,000, or High - could exceed \$1,000,000) is provided in priority order below.

<u>Site</u>	<u>Anticipated Capital Investment</u>
1. Four Mile Run	High
2. Holmes Run	High
3. Chinquapin	High ³
4. Hensley	Medium
5. Simpson	Low
6. Brenman	Low

Additionally, the development and implementation of the following Framework Plans is being pursued outside of RPCA.

<u>Site</u>	<u>Anticipated Capital Investment</u>
Ft. Ward	Medium/High
Waterfront Parks (incl. Windmill Hill)	High ⁴

Maximize Use of Park Areas (Athletic Fields)

10-Year Capital Needs (\$18.2 M in 2012 dollars)

Due to land constraints, it is difficult to add additional active use areas in Alexandria; therefore, the City must upgrade existing active use areas to allow for increased flexibility and programming. A major part of the upgrades include continued conversion from natural turf to synthetic turf fields. Per Budget Memo #21, “Athletic Field at Proposed Jefferson-Houston K-8 Facility”, twelve City fields were listed in priority conversion order. The Proposed FY 2013 – 2022 CIP provides \$9.1 million in funding (after the shift of \$890,000 to the Jefferson-Houston project) for three field replacements, and five field conversions (at an estimated cost of \$1.3 million in 2012 dollars). This leaves seven fields unfunded, with a cost in 2012 dollars of \$9.1 million.

In addition to the \$9.1 million in funding and \$9.1 million in unfunded needs for field replacements and conversions, another \$8.9 million is included in the Proposed FY 2013 – 2022 CIP for ball court renovations, playground renovations, facility upgrades, ADA requirements,

³ Depending on the outcome of the Aquatics Study, Chinquapin may move above Holmes Run in priority order so projects can be coordinated with implementation of elements of the Aquatics Study. Holmes Run is currently a higher priority since there are more park features aligned with the Needs Assessment.

⁴ There is a current allocated balance of \$1.3 million for Windmill Hill Park improvements, and another \$4.0 million planned for bulkhead replacement in FY 2016 – 2017.

and Miracle Field construction.⁵ Based on staff capacity, project management, and implementation rates, this amount of funding will allow RPCA to maintain an up-to-date replacement cycle for these renovations and upgrades.

Fully Implement the Urban Forestry Master Plan

**10-Year Capital Needs
(\$5.0 - \$8.0 million in 2012 dollars)⁶**

In its broadest sense, the objective of the City's Urban Forestry Master Plan (UFMP) is to attain a tree canopy cover of 40% of the City's total +/- 16 square miles.

The current canopy tree cover as estimated by the GIS Department is 34%. The UFMP determined that the current number of street trees in the City is approximately 17,000, and that the potential street tree population is 22,000, based upon the average for eastern U.S. cities of 100 trees per street-mile. Planting **400 trees per year under the current program** (using \$113,000 from CIP) marginally advances toward the 40% coverage objective, especially since about 300 of those trees are replacements for dead/damaged trees, so they do not contribute to a net canopy increase. The cumulative canopy increase over 10 years under this program will only be 0.1566%. Planting **400 additional street trees** per year for 10 years (in addition to the 400/year typically planted) would enable the City to increase the total street tree population to 21,000 (nearing the potential maximum stocking level of 22,000), but will only increase the overall canopy cover by 0.6263%.

This increase in canopy cover (on the order of 1%) will cost \$5.0 - \$8.0 million dollars over ten years. Efforts that would be required to approach the 40% goal would carry costs that are several times that amount.

There is also the issue of identifying available open space that could accommodate the additional trees. Increasing the City's current estimated 34% canopy cover to 40% would require a net increase of 6% of the City's total surface area, which is a net increase of 26,345,088 square feet. At 687.5 square feet per tree, that means that an additional 38,320 trees would need to be planted, and that sufficient open space would need to be identified on either public or private land to accommodate those additional trees. This will be difficult to attain, given an already densely-populated and highly-developed City. Given the land-use dilemma, the greatest need for increased funding is towards tree maintenance and care. In the upcoming year the Natural Resource Division and Park Planning staff will work together on determining a more appropriate and obtainable tree canopy goal for an environment as dense as Alexandria.

Identify Areas of Shared Use

**10-Year Capital Needs
(Unknown)**

Schools and other institutional sites provide some of the largest multi-use open spaces in the City. RPCA is working to strengthen organizational relationships in an effort to develop increased programmatic uses on shared facility sites. As an example, RPCA and Alexandria City

⁵ Funding in the amount of \$8.9 million includes: ball court renovations (\$1.5 million); playground renovations (\$6.25 million); athletic field restrooms (\$0.45 million); ADA requirements (\$0.29 million); and Miracle Field (\$0.42 million).

⁶ Funding represents only capital funding associated with the UFMP. To fully implement the UFMP, additional staff and restoration of \$122,000 in annual operating funds for tree care and maintenance would be requested. The \$122,000 was part of Adopted FY 2012 and Proposed FY 2013 budget reductions.

Public Schools (ACPS) are collaborating on planning and capital improvement projects, such as the Jefferson-Houston Athletic Field (\$1.2 million total project budget) and the Patrick Henry Recreation Center (\$6.1 million), to create public spaces usable both during and after school time. The intent is to maximize resources and use by developing shared community facilities. While ten-year capital costs are unknown as all areas of shared use have not been identified, increased cooperation between organizations and guidance on how to best program CIP funds used for shared use sites will be needed.

Expand Sustainable Park Management Practices

**10-Year Capital Needs
(Unknown)**

While funding for most sustainable park management practices is included as part of various operating budget initiatives, the CIP provides funding to support capital investments at new or renovated parks and recreation facilities. New projects and improvements focus on facilities that reduce costs through the use of sustainable materials, standardized low-maintenance fixtures, and energy efficient systems such as the City’s central controlled irrigation system. RPCA is currently collaborating with General Services to create a detailed inventory of all park utilities and develop a plan to improve the energy and water efficiency of our park infrastructure. The total cost is unknown at this time; however, planned CIP funding can help support additional end of life-cycle replacement funding when new systems are implemented.

ATTACHMENT: Memorandum from Councilman Krupicka to the Mayor and Members of Council

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Debra Collins, Assistant City Manager
Laura Triggs, Acting Chief Financial Officer
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TO: The Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

CC: Rashad Young, City Manager
Bruce Johnson, Chief of Staff
Laura Triggs, Acting CFO

FROM: Councilman Rob Krupicka

SUBJECT: Budget Discussion Items

Colleagues:

During this budget process, I'd like to start a conversation about a few significant policy issues. I don't expect we'll be able to fully address all of these, but I'd like to see us set out some clear plans to make progress on these over the next few years. I would appreciate your comments as well as the thoughts and comments of the community about these issues and the best course of action to take.

- 1) **Access to 4-Year Old Pre-K:** With this budget, it is my hope that the City and Schools can establish a collective policy that no family in Alexandria be turned away from access to quality Pre-K due to financial constraints. We know that children that show up for Kindergarten ready for school are more likely to succeed in later years. And we know through our own evaluation data that Pre-K has a clear impact on student readiness for school. We have made huge progress on this issue over the last decade and now have a waiting list of less than 100 children. I would like to see us eliminate that waiting list and establish by Resolution a policy that makes it clear that Alexandria is committed to providing access to 4-Year Old Pre-K. I will propose a resolution to do this in the coming weeks.
- 2) **Parks, Fields, Trees and Open Space:** Almost ten years ago the City started a bold campaign to preserve 100 acres of open space. Due to economic conditions, we have had to pause that effort at about 70 acres. Rapid growth of families in Alexandria has put enormous pressure on our field and recreation resources; we don't have enough quality play services. In our urban community we need to maximize the use of every sports field, which means using synthetic materials. Storms and age over the years have done

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significant damage to city trees and we have not made substantial progress to implement our Urban Forestry Plan.

In addition, we have significant park improvements awaiting support: 4-Mile Run, Ft. Ward, Ben Brenman, our recently adopted Waterfront plan and more. In short, our park, field, tree and open space resources need some attention after years of limited investment. Therefore I propose we identify the costs of a ten-year park, field, tree and open space initiative and discuss new revenue sources to fund such an initiative.

As part of this budget process, I'd like to understand from the Parks and Recreation staff as well as the community what additional items would need to be added to the capital budget in order to ensure we are properly supporting these resources. If there are concerns about taking on a new fiscal challenge in these times, I would be open to the idea of a public referendum to determine public support. I am confident that most residents of Alexandria value their parks and fields and would like to see them well cared for.

- 3) **Council Salaries and Staff Support:** It has been over 9 years since the last pay raise for the Alexandria Council. And our part-time Aides are also significantly underpaid. It is always politically difficult to talk about council pay. As an outgoing member of Council, perhaps I can at least start the conversation. Council work requires 25-40 hours a week for required and community meetings, to meet with city staff and to meet with citizens who rightly expect regular and easy access. At \$27,500 Council members are paid less than elected officials in most every other major government in the region. And that salary has not changed for more than 9 years. I believe the idea of a part time Council should be maintained. A part-time Council helps ensure Council members have day-jobs that expose them to the same realities of life that residents face. But the current salaries are far less than part-time, especially in a city where the median income is over \$100,000 and the cost of living is increasing.

In addition, growing expectations for citizen access to the Council and management of a wide range of city issues necessitates that we discuss giving Council members the option of having fulltime equivalent, rather than halftime, Council Aides. Council members could choose to hire either one person for the FTE, or more than one person to divide the position. The proliferation of electronic communications since 2003 has resulted in more emails, more inquires for Council members and their Aides to be responsive to, combined with a greater expectation of timely responsiveness due to multiple methods of electronic communications. Citizens are often frustrated they can't have the level of access to Council Members and their Aides that they would like. Full time Aides would help the Council better manage the many issues they are expected to be actively engaged with. Previous reviews of the effectiveness of the Council have recommended the option of full time Aides. I'd like to suggest we change our current system to give Council members that option. In today's information connected society, constituents expect and deserve a level of service that part time Aides are just not in a position to provide.

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Aide salaries are just like City Council salaries—they must be explicitly changed by City Council – Aides do not receive step increases or other adjustments in salary when other City employees are provided either within grade step and/or cost of living adjustments. I think a discussion needs to occur about a way to tie Council Aide salaries to an equivalent position in the City so that when City employees get a cost of living adjustment, Council Aides receive some sort of pay adjustment. The salary in 2003, was \$20,788. In FY07 Aides received a 3% COLA and in FY09, Aides, along with all City employees received a one-time \$500 bonus. Currently Aides make \$21,411.52. This is well below market for the duties most Aides perform for Members of City Council, most of whom have college degrees and professional experience.

Over the next few weeks, I intend to offer the outlines of a Council resolution that could provide a consistent and clear guide for the salary policy for our elected officials and their Aides and which could inform our choices during this budget process.