

Public Comments on Cameron Run Regional Park

P&RC Meeting November 20, 2014- and comments received afterwards (Update January 15, 2015)

Date Received	Name	Comment
11.19.14	Carol Grigilone	<p>Received via email: See Attachment <b>From:</b> carolyn griglione [<a href="mailto:carolyn.griglione@gmail.com">mailto:carolyn.griglione@gmail.com</a>]  <b>Sent:</b> Wednesday, November 19, 2014 9:12 AM  <b>To:</b> Laura Durham  <b>Subject:</b> Wave Pool Park</p> <p>Dear Laura,</p> <p>I thought I should send along my thoughts on the Wave Pool issue.</p> <p><i>'I would like to see the length of the lease agreement shortened. Forty years is beyond reasonable. At most ten years. At the speed things are changing who knows what could happen in ten years let alone forty. It appears we have been roped into quite a dilemma. I hope people who are forty realize they would be eighty. Does not make any sense to me.</i></p> <p><i>Unless things have drastically changed since the last time I was there, fifteen years ago, there is little option for lap swimming. There is zero entry in the wave section. I think the pool has limitations. I for one would never visit this pool again.</i></p> <p><i>I also wonder why the Rec Commission is not asking why the facility is not changed to an indoor facility that could be used year round. Much better use of our scarce land resources. I feel this is a topic that needs to be discussed. It appears they take in large revenues that could be used to construct an enclosure. Even the St. James group saw the value in this approach. I see the facility as an option for a family/leisure facility. With the right agreement this might offer an option for a family/leisure pool and remove the pressure to transform the current Chinquapin pool. Since Alexandria has opted to provide the land ( and pay to provide the land ?) Alexandrians need to benefit from this arrangement.'</i></p> <p>I think I should also clarify my question about how many Alexandria City residents use the facility. I would like to know how many people living within the City of Alexandria, not in Fairfax County with an Alexandria address, use the facility. I think the numbers might change a bit. Just a guess. How many cars in the parking lot have Alexandria City stickers showing they paid their car property tax would also be interesting.</p> <p>As always thanks for all of your hard work. What would we</p>

		<p>do without you? I can't imagine.</p> <p>Thanks, Carolyn</p>
11.19.14	William Rivers, AAA	<p>Received via email: See Attachment</p> <p>From: <b>Bill Rivers</b> &lt;<a href="mailto:rivers.15wmtida@gmail.com">rivers.15wmtida@gmail.com</a>&gt;  Date: Tuesday, November 18, 2014  Subject: Cameron Run wave pool  To: Jennifer Atkins &lt;<a href="mailto:jennifer.atkins@cloudigylaw.com">jennifer.atkins@cloudigylaw.com</a>&gt;</p> <p>Dear Jennifer: We had a meeting of the AAA Board last night and discussed the Regional Park Authority's request before your Commission this Thursday regarding renewal of the long term lease on the site and the addition of other features to the Park.</p> <p>As recently as last month, we heard from Council members about the need for a public pool in the West End. We already have that pool - it's the wave pool. Alexandria already contributes about \$600,000 per year (operating and capital dollars) to the Authority for use of the pool. It makes little sense to commit more dollars to a "new" pool in the West End when we already spend more per year at an existing one than we do for outdoor pools. It is also the best outdoor pool in the City in terms of amenities. The only real difference is that it's pricing is higher than our other public pools.</p> <p>We recommend that the Commission encourage the City Administration and the City Council to utilize this application process as a negotiation opportunity. As we understand it, not only does Alexandria pay its share of the pool's costs, but the land is leased free of charge. There should be some concessions by the Park Authority during this process to make this a better business arrangement for Alexandria. The Park Authority should be asked to suggest ways for Alexandria to better benefit from the financial arrangements. The pool doesn't open until 11:00 am during the day. Can the early morning be used for swimming lessons for Alexandria's waiting list of kids? Can Alexandria residents use the pool at a discounted rate earlier in the day - or later in the day? What incentive is there for Alexandria to renew the lease and approve additional features? How can we work with the Park Authority to make the Wave Pool the answer for our West End needs?</p> <p>This is an unique opportunity for Alexandria to solve a long standing perception in the West End that there is no public pool there. Let's maximize use of existing resources and</p>

		<p>work with the Park Authority to meet their needs and our needs at the same time.</p> <p>As always, we at AAA stand ready to provide whatever assistance is needed. Please let us know if you need any further information.</p> <p>Sincerely, William Rivers Chair, Advocates for Alexandria Aquatics</p>
<p>11.20.14, P&amp;RC, Public Hearing</p>	<p>Bonnie Petry, 4405 Vermont Ave., Alexandria, Virginia, Tarleton Park Improvement Coordinator and Member of TreeStewards of Arlington and Alexandria</p>	<p>(See Written Statement):</p> <p>Ms. Petry spoke on behalf of preserving the remaining natural areas in the Eisenhower Valley. When looking at the Eisenhower Valley, what you see in green portion is the remaining natural areas in the Eisenhower Valley. She agrees it is a unique destination site. Petry said the area known as Wards Woods, and the Clermont Natural Area contains a number of native species and a lot of mature trees that provide value and help filter water, and should be preserved and protected. She said the area used to be known as the City dump but has a lot of possibilities. Petry said people buy houses in areas where there are trees and natural areas which provide buffer, which is an asset to future development plans. Ms. Petry said the Wards Wood area – looking at the entire Holmes Run drainage, Backlick Run and Cameron Run drainage areas, what you have is the only undisturbed natural area. The soil that has not been torn up for industrial use, or had trashed dumped there, contains wildflowers that are not found anywhere else. Lester Frank Woods the father of American Botany initially surveyed the area known as “Wards Woods” after the Civil War.</p> <p>Petry said she lives in the Wakefield Tarleton neighborhood, and she regularly walks her dog near there and she is familiar with the area. In the summer months, and when the water park is open, she sees heavy utilization of the area. She believes many of the vehicles come from out of state, possibly Maryland, not Alexandria residents. She said that Commissioners should take a tour of the area.</p> <p>Regarding the picnic area, she said there is heavy utilization, and there are mountains of trash there, including dirty diapers over the Saturday weekend. Petry said there is a need for improved trash management in the park. Ms. Petry said that she jogs by the Lake Cook area and that there is wildlife and rabbits here. Within the past year, she noticed that 12 or more healthy mature native trees had been cut down, however there were some highly invasive trees were left there. Petry said this does not show careful stewardship on behalf of the NVRPA. Another time she noticed survey tape on trees in the back, surveying to expand into the only remaining undisturbed area of the Cameron Run Stream Bank. She spoke with RPCA Natural Resources staff about</p>

		<p>this. What is known as Cameron Run is Army Corp of Engineering Project.</p> <p>Petry said there should be a high value placed on maintaining trees and natural areas. There are many natural features and unique trees in the area such as Bartram’s Oak and Beadle’s Oak trees. Ms. Petry said that she finds it odd that NOVA Parks made no mention of these unique natural resources in the area in its presentation. She said that there is an incredible variety of wildlife value in this area (little green herons, great blue herons, varieties of turtles and snakes, etc.), and that this means a lot to people and needs to be protected.</p> <p>Petry said she would recommend a shorter lease term with NOVA Parks, because this would offer the City maximum flexibility. She said that the park does have some positive amenities that people enjoy. She said that there will be many new residents moving into the area, and the demographics will change. Additionally, there has been interest expressed in maintaining open space and trails. Regarding the financial details, important considerations in bringing a recommendation to City Council, is for staff to do their research on the value of tree canopy, open space and nature, and how this enhances property values. There means a lot of citizens. Ms. Petry asked the Commission and RPCA staff to please protect the last bit of natural areas that the City has left.</p> <p>Note: Ms. Petry sent in a follow-up email on November 24, 2014 expressing further concerns about the plan and slide 20. The email will be incorporated into these comments as reference.</p>
<p>11.20.14, P&amp;RC, Public Hearing</p>	<p>Susan Gitlin, 609 Little St., Alexandria, Virginia, Environmental Policy Commission</p>	<p>Ms. Gitlin spoke in favor of preserving the four plus acres of woods now under lease to NOVA parks.</p> <p>Gitlin said that the EPC has discussed this issue but did not take an official vote yet as they have not had a chance to view the plans. The EPC reached a consensus and agree that it is essential to save the area known as Wards Woods. Baum asked if staff has a history of the Wards Woods area. Gitlin said she believes that have been completed, by Robert (Bob) Taylor’s Group, RPCA Natural Resources Division. Tiwari said Taylor can provide information.</p> <p>Gitlin said the soils in this area are unique, different even than those across the railroad tracks. These undisturbed soils provide for a range of spring ephemeral wildflowers and other plants that are rare in this region. She said that some trees are a century to centuries old, and are irreplaceable. This is invaluable in terms of people experiencing and being educated about nature. These woods are also essential to addressing the City’s environmental goals, including stormwater management and tree canopy. The City is struggling to meet its tree canopy goal of 40% and currently is only at 33%, and is already overly dependent on open</p>

		<p>space and parks to meet this goal, and cutting trees work against this goal.</p> <p>She also noted that currently the area is not being maintained or protected. It contains invasive plants, trees have been removed, and there are signs that NOVA Parks is using it as a site for dumping landscaping waste. This affects the soil quality and leads to growth of invasive plants. Ms. Gitlin said she would be happy to work with the EPC to provide a letter of support of the draft plan to the Commission</p>
<p>11.20.14, P&amp;RC, Public Hearing</p>	<p>Elizabeth Wright, 113 S. Ingram S., Alexandria, Virginia</p>	<p>Ms. Wright spoke in favor of preserving, protecting the natural, native sensitive park and City land.</p> <p>Ms. Wright provided photos taken this past Sunday. Wright said she grew up a Girl Scout. She cares about and is interested in nature, and protecting what's valuable. She doesn't care where the Wave Pool expands, as long as the tree area (Wards Woods) is removed from the NOVA Parks lease and is protected. Wright said that the tree area should be given a name and to call this area "the trees" devalues a unique area. The name is Wards Woods, named after the Smithsonian botanist Lester Ward who conducted the first botanical survey of the area that is now Cameron Run Park after the Civil War. Ward's records of this site are accessible for research and available on the internet. City Naturalist, Rod Simmons has also done a botanical survey of the same area. If you compare the current list with the original list it will be interesting to see how similar, how little the area flora has changed in the past 150 years. She has learned that native natural hybrid trees are rare and they don't occur in areas that have been disturbed. There are two rare oaks in this area, a Bartram oak (a cross between red and willow oak) and a Beadles oak (a cross between a swamp and white oak). The Beadles oak is the only known specimen in all of Northern Virginia.</p> <p>Wright shared a visual/picture on her Blackberry showing the trees and debris sites. She said that 12 trees were cut down recently, to expand an area for additional picnic tables, this doesn't make sense. As a former teacher, she is all about control, and thinks the picnic tables would be better placed inside the fence with the wave pool, or another area of the property. She expressed concern that there are no trash cans over by the new picnic area. Wright said this land has never been formerly cultivated for agriculture or used for industrial purposes. The reason we know this is because of the spring ephemeral flowers that bloom there; Spring Beauty. She said these flowers are low, carpet like, and last for just a few days. Wards Woods and Tarleton Park are two areas to view these rare flowers. When you see these flowers in their native habitat, this is sure sign that the land has been undisturbed, for millennia. I can't stress how rare and unique this is. If these woods are cut down or diminished in any way, we are losing the little bit of rare, undisturbed</p>

		<p>flora. Last Sunday, when she visited the area to understand why it needs to be protected, the geologist Tony Fleming showed us the contour of the land that clearly shows this area was the original stream bed for Cameron Run. This area was a low land that flooded often, so it was never developed or used. In the old days, people knew that where it floods, you let nature do its thing. It's not like it is today where people will build in a floodplain. Cattle may have grazed here yet other than floodplain grazing, the land has been undisturbed. Wright said if you can't build within 100 feet of an RPA, then she votes to extend Lake Cook all the way back towards the west so that all of these woods will be within 100 feet if that's what it will take to protect the trees.</p> <p>The other thing she noticed about the site was there were several landscape waste piles where vegetative matter had been dumped. Ornamental invasive species planted within the park were dumped close to and within the wooded area. First, to dump on site like this appears to be indiscriminate dumping, these were not proper compost sites. Next, the loose soil and the manner of the waste dumping lends to a quick and invasive spread of these non-native plants right into the pristine undisturbed area. What the City has in Wards Woods is a natural and native treasure, and once it's gone, it can't be recreated. We should not allow an expansion of the Wave Pool park to rob Alexandria of the unique sensitive area that we have now. Ms. Wright supports having the wooded, natural areas removed from the lease agreement.</p> <p>Additional Ms. Wright said she works for FEMA currently – she said whatever is done should be documented well, in order to get 75% from the federal government. She proposed that staff state as part of any new lease since the City is an Eco-City should include that any plantings should be native to the area.</p>
<p>11.20.14, P&amp;RC, Public Hearing</p>	<p>David Levy, 309 E. Nelson Ave., Alexandria Virginia</p>	<p>Levy said he is a former Sierra Club leader and used to take hikes with others and view natural areas. Wilderness does not count unless it is in your own back yard. He asked if NOVA Parks has a natural resources person on staff, and if so, have they evaluated this site. He believes if NOVA Parks had a natural resources person on staff, they would have not cut those trees down. Levy requested that a full evaluation be done of all the natural resources in this area. He said this is a unique wildlife corridor and natural area that is millions of years in creation. He said the area probably does not meet the federal government's standards of a wilderness area because the area was most likely farmed, and trees cut over the years, but the area contains many older trees.</p> <p>Levy said that since the NOVA Parks lease is expiring soon, staff should prohibit NOVA Parks from touching this land. He said the picnic area may need to be removed to help</p>

		<p>provide a buffer. He said commercial manufactured recreation e.g. the park, should not take precedence over the unique natural resources in this area, which are millions of years old. This area is no less important than Old Town. He said that between the RPCA and NVRPA, the land needs to be evaluated by the Naturalists before anything else is touched or developed, and that some areas may need to be reclaimed for the City. He believes there is a chance to have a combined park and natural resources experience at this location.</p>
<p>11.20.14, P&amp;RC, Public Hearing</p>	<p>Suzanne Dingwell, 418 Ferdinand Day Drive, Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society</p>	<p>Ms. Dingwell, spoke in support of maintaining open space and natural areas. Dingwell said that early in Ms. Durham’s presentation, there were two places where the survey showed what the residents of Alexandria wanted most. The first priority shown was walking and biking trails, and the second was wildlife, habitat and protection of natural areas. She said this shows a clear choice. She said she was taken by the historical value of this land, and that these natural areas are very important, just like Old Town. There exists lots of documentation from the early surveys done of this area. The area has a clear botanical value, due to the fact that some soils are undisturbed; she said there is an incredible seed bank of soil memory in this area which is rare and hard to find. She said that scientists are not inventing new things that help with medicine, what they are doing is looking at natural occurrences and trying to replicate things, such as the natural healing properties of plants. There is a lot of botanical value in undisturbed soil and native species. Dingell said we can’t turn back the clock, but we can stop destroying what is left. We need to put a value on this land, tree canopy is irreplaceable. We have to make some hard choices of what we value and what we want to invest in. She believes in investing in Wards Woods is important. In Chicago, this week there is a push to retrofit old tenements and green in old alleys ways. She said the City should not get rid of valuable green space that is left.</p> <p>(Note: See Attachment letter signed by Alan Ford, President Potowmack Chapter of Virginia Native Plant Society, dated December, 11, 2014)</p>
<p>11.20.14, P&amp;RC, Public Hearing</p>	<p>Paul Gilbert, Executive Director, NOVA Parks</p>	<p>(Submitted letter to Commission, dated November, 20 2014), requesting that the P&amp;RC not to endorse the Cameron Run Area Coordinated Park and Open Space Plan as submitted by RPCA:</p> <p>Gilbert said NOVA Parks has been in existence as a Regional Park agency since 1959, and partnering with Alexandria City since 1972. NOVA Parks is a very unique organization and the only regional park agency in Virginia, and specializes in</p>

developing unique destination sites. They manage over 11,000 acres of parkland, and 100 miles of trails. NOVA Parks operates two sites in Alexandria: the Carlyle House (Old Town) and Cameron Run Regional Water Park (Eisenhower Ave.). As heard from Durham, originally Cameron Run the land was larger, but over the years the City reclaimed some of the property and the leased area now ends around the Animal Shelter. Gilbert said that the NOVA Parks has developed a fantastic water park, which attracts over 90,000 visitors a year and is a great economic opportunity for the City, and serves City residents. A recent City survey showed that 80,000 people visited the park within a two year period. They have done their own counts and water park admissions alone account for 30,000 visitors.

Gilbert said NOVA Parks does not support the Plan as presented. The reason is that a red line has been drawn that limits their ability to expand. Gilbert said that over the last year, this is not the first round in these issues. He said about a year ago there were efforts to get Cameron Run Regional Park involved in the Eisenhower West SAP planning process. Around January 2014, he received call from Deputy City Manager, Mark Jinks, who said their application for the parking lot, Master Blaster, and lease was going to be put on hold for two years or more.

Gilbert said NOVA Parks individually spoke with City Council members, the majority said they supported the partnership with City. Some members conveyed their thoughts to the City Manager; and NOVA Parks was later reengaged in the process. During the re-engagement, a process was developed by the Director of RPCA which he believes is largely bureaucratic, and takes the focus off their real goal of their lease and a permit for additional water features. He is pleased input was included from NOVA Parks. Gilbert said that Cameron Run Regional Park is a world-class water park which draws many people, and to keep the park relevant, there needs to be continued reinvestment over time. He said during the last thirty-three years NVRPA has made significant investments in Cameron Run Regional Park, and they would like to be able to manage it over the next 40 years, the same way they have been doing. While the NVRPA loves open space and trails, he believes that efforts to put in trails around the park (for passive recreation use) will box in the existing water park and limit future planning efforts. He believes the plan is an attempt by the City to exercise control over the park.

Gilbert said he hopes the Park and Recreation Commission will provide a recommendation to City Council that supports continuation of what NOVA Parks already has, i.e., a long-term lease at Cameron Run Regional Park, which will allow them to develop the park over the time. NOVA Parks will

		apply for the proper permits and go through the public process. He said that the NOV Parks wants to make Cameron Run Regional Park the best water park it can be, but can't do this if they are constrained. NOVA Parks is happy to work with T&ES stormwater management staff on the Lake Cook project. They would not support the trail that would run from Lake Cook behind the water park facilities.
12.11.14	Suzanne Dingwell < <a href="mailto:suzdingwell@gmail.com">suzdingwell@gmail.com</a> > wrote:All:	At the request of the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, who are urging protection of the green space owned by the city which surrounds the Cameron Regional Waterpark, I am attaching a recommendation. Please forward this attachment to concerned parties I may have missed. Feel free to contact me with any questions or requests.  Sue Dingwell Director at Large, Powtowmack Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society <b>VNPS.org</b>
12.11.14	Alan Ford, President Potowmack Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society	Letter to the Park and Recreation Co-Chairs Judy Coleman and Jennifer Atkins from Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission Member: Susan Gitlin, dated December 10, 2014, signed by Mr. Ford – See Attachment
11.21.14	Samantha Gallagher, Alexandria, Virginia, via email, <a href="http://www.pollinatorplates.com">http://www.pollinatorplates.com</a>	Ms. Gallagher submitted an email to Laura Durham stating that she loves the trail systems and wooded area and that she uses the Holmes Run trails almost every day. She is happy to hear that the City is planning to keep the forested areas intact and hopes they will stay that way for a long time. My neighbors and I live right up against the train system (off Richmarr Pl.) and we enjoy the wildlife who share the park and our back yards with us.
1.8.15	Letter received from Jim Kapsis, Chair of the Environmental Policy Commission and Susan Gitlin, Vice Chair, Environmental Policy Commission	Re: Draft Coordinated Park and Open Space Plan for the Cameron Run Area. The EPC supports the draft Coordinated Park and Open Space Plan for the Cameron Run area presented by City staff at the November 20, 2014 meeting of the Park and Recreation Commission. The letter will be incorporated as part of the public record.
1.8.15	Paul Gilbert, Executive Director, NOVA Parks	Second letter to the Park and Recreation Commission, regarding Cameron Run Regional Park. NOVA Parks is not agreement with the Plan as submitted by the DRPCA. NOVA Parks has submitted a Voluntary Resource Protection Area (RPA). The letter is incorporated as part of the record.- See Attachment
1.15.15	Paul Gilbert and staff, NOVA Parks	Tree Removal Issue: Memorandum. Follow-up to the November 20, 2014 P&RC Meeting. The memo addresses the issue of broken off trees around the Cameron Run Park site picnic area and shows photos of the damaged trees. The document will be incorporated for the record.

1.15.15	Ali Ahmad, President, Wakefield-Tarleton Civic Association (WTCA)	The letter expresses support by the residents of the Wakefield Tarleton Civic Association for the city staff's Coordinated Park and Open Space Plan for the Cameron Run Area, including the provisions to protect the natural areas on the North side of the city-owned land that is currently leased by the NVRPA. The letter will be incorporated as part of the public record.
---------	---	---

# Memorandum

**To:** The Chair and Members of the Park and Recreation Commission  
The Park Planning, Design, & Capital Development Division of the Department of Recreation, Parks, & Cultural Activities  
The Natural Resources Division of the Department of Recreation, Parks, & Cultural Activities  
The Chair and Members of the Environmental Policy Commission

**From:** Bonnie Petry  
Tarleton Park Improvements Coordinator for the Wakefield Tarleton Civic Association  
Member of TreeStewards of Arlington and Alexandria

**Subject:** PUBLIC INPUT INTO THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA'S COORDINATED PARK PLAN FOR CAMERON RUN REGIONAL PARK AND ADJACENT CITY PARKS

I am deeply concerned about the fate of the Eisenhower Valley's smaller remnant natural areas. I jog and walk my dog down the Holmes Run Trail and through the Cameron Run Regional Park land on a frequent, year-round basis. As such I appreciate the Park and Recreation Commission providing a forum to solicit citizen input to the city's plans for these remaining natural spaces.

I also appreciate city staff's willingness transparency in sharing information about its draft plans. **The city's draft plan for the Eisenhower Valley is a positive one.** It is clear that the city has been listening to citizens' feedback calling for the preservation of what little natural space still exists in that area.

Due to the small size and consequent vulnerability of the remaining natural areas in the Eisenhower Valley, however, the devil will be in the details.

One complicating factor determining the outcome 10 to 20 to 40 years down the road for this area and residents' ability to see and touch some nature rests not just on the city but on another, perhaps less accountable stakeholder, namely the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NVRPA).

I submit the following recommendations and concerns for the city's (and this commission's) consideration:

**1. Overall recommendation:**

- a. My first recommendation is simple and appears to be aligned with the direction the city is heading with this plan – that you protect irreplaceable remnant natural areas like Ward's Woods, the approximately 2 acres of scattered stands of old-age bottomland trees surrounding the park facilities on the East side of the batting cages, Clermont Natural Park, and Clermont Swamp Forest in the Eisenhower Valley.

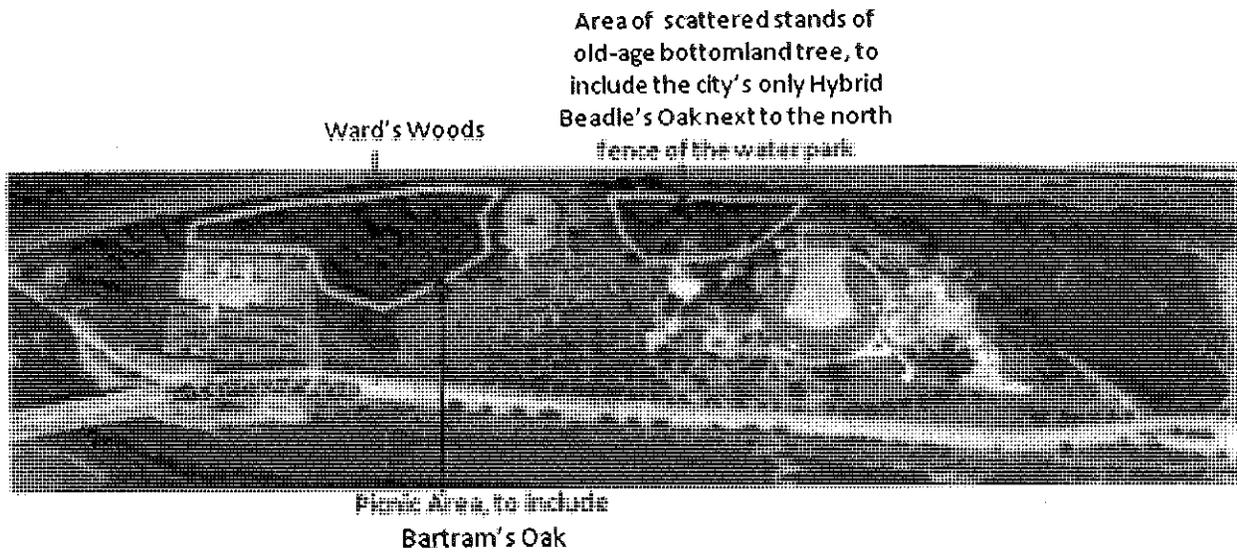
**2. Recommendations Regarding Proposed Connector Paths:**

- a. With regard to the proposed "connectors" between and within these natural areas – while there is always some degradation that can come with increased access, there is a case to be made that nature trails, in improving access to these areas, can foster an increased sense of appreciation for and stewardship of them - when people can visit and interact with nature, they work to protect it. In addition, people walking and jogging often appreciate having varied ways to walk or jog in an area so every trip doesn't have to be the same out and back trip.

- b. In recent e-mail correspondence with Laura Durham, the city's open space coordinator, Ms. Durham explained that these "connectors" are to be unpaved nature trails within these natural areas. I recommend that the city is explicit in describing these as "unpaved nature trails" in its plan (and policy) and that protections are put in place to keep motorized vehicles (to include city vehicles) off of them. In other words, I recommend that there be sufficiently specific language to prevent these trails from growing in size and impact.

**3. Concerns Regarding the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority's Stewardship of the Natural Areas Included in and Adjacent to its Current Leased Property:**

- a. The concerns portion of my input largely pertains to the NVRPA's stewardship of the natural areas within its leased land.
- b. I am deeply concerned about the level of protection afforded the approximately six acre "Ward's Woods" remnant between the animal shelter and the batting cages and the approximately 2 acres of scattered stands of old-age bottomland trees surrounding the park facilities on the East side of the batting cages (see the picture below).



- c. This area is, the only remaining undisturbed portion of the original Cameron Run's stream banks (the channelized waterway is not the original stream). This area is a fine tribute to Lester Frank Ward, the pioneering botanist (and sociologist) who surveyed the area after the Civil War. While there are some invasive plant populations on the outer margins, the interior is a wonderfully intact plant community with a seed bank that goes back to the post-glacial era. This area is in need of protection, as are all the small remnant areas in the Eisenhower Valley due to their scarcity. Even if this area did not have the specific undisturbed quality that it does, I would ask that it be preserved as there is so little nature left in the Eisenhower Valley. The remaining wildlife in our city depends on these small wooded areas with cover for their survival. For example, if you see a bird in a tree in a parking lot or along a street, you can be assured that that bird is alive and present because of wooded areas, even small margins that provide cover, native plants, native insects, and a place to raise their young.
- d. This area is indeed threatened. First the animal shelter made unilateral plans to encroach into the Ward's Woods area. Then, within the past year or so, the NVRPA cut down 12-plus healthy, mature, valuable native trees in its small picnic grove area adjoining Ward's Woods (but inexplicitly left three highly invasive "Tree of Heaven" trees). Contrary to the NVRPA representative's assertions, the removed trees were in fact native and were in fact healthy, as confirmed by the Natural Resource Manager for the City of Alexandria. This staffer is a research collaborator with the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, a past president of the

TO: Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission Co-Chairs: Judy Coleman and Jennifer Atkins  
Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission Member: Susan Gittlin  
December 10, 2014



The local chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, the Potowmack Chapter, representing 450 members, strongly urges the Commissioners to protect for the future all the remaining green and undeveloped areas of the city's property surrounding the current fenced boundary leased by Cameron Regional Waterpark. This area is critically important to the city's health and well being in several ways.

First of all, results of recent surveys show without any doubt that the priorities of Alexandria's citizens for their green and open space are:

- number one - more walking and biking trails
- number two - open space to be preserved and used to support wildlife habitat

These preferences were duplicated in two surveys that were presented at the recent Parks planning meeting and they heavily outscored all other options.

The land under discussion would be very suitable for those passive recreational uses.

In addition, within the parcel considered lies a tract of approximately 5 acres that carries both historical and botanical significance. This site has become known as Ward's Woods. Lester Frank Ward, working for the U.S. Geological Survey beginning in 1882, surveyed the lower Cameron Run valley and collected numerous plants, some of which still occur in protected places like the old Cameron Run channel forest remnant at Cameron Run Regional Park. His specimens, largely the earliest collected in the Washington, D.C. region, form the foundation of the DC Herbarium at the Smithsonian Institution.

The botanical importance of this tract cannot be overemphasized, both in the flora currently existing and in the "soil memory" there. This is the last remaining undisturbed remnant of its type, not only in Alexandria, but in the entire Eisenhower Valley. Because its original composition has never been altered by mankind's use, it is a valuable repository of natural heritage. As we watch the numbers balloon worldwide for species loss, we must take responsible actions for preserving whatever it is in our power to save. This is not saving something for a museum exhibit, it is saving a seed bank that could provide solutions and species protection for our future. Growing there now is a suite of plants, including some that range from uncommon to rare. A plant list is attached.

Earlier this month the city of Chicago initiated an expansive and expensive program to re-green a connected corridor in the heart of its most blighted tenement projects. Why would Alexandria do anything less than protect what little we have left of our own uniquely special green space? Look outward fifty years. What legacy will we choose to leave?

We are recommending the protection of **ALL** the areas within the green outline on slide 18: the passive use areas. This would include Lake Cook, the stream flowing into Lake Cook on its Western side, the mature trees outside the Northern fence line of the park including the Beadle's Oak, and the area between the parking lot and Ward's Woods. The continuity of this space will be an important factor in protecting both its continued integrity as an ecosystem and its potential inclusion in an integrated trail system.

**Alan Ford, President**  
**Potowmack Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society**



# Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

5400 Ox Road, Fairfax Station, VA 22039 | 703-352-5900 | Fax: 703-273-0905 | www.nvrpa.org

DATE: November 20, 2014

TO: Chair & Members of the Park & Recreation Commission

FROM: Paul Gilbert, NOVA Parks Executive Director 

SUBJECT: Cameron Run Regional Park

The City's Department of Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities (DRPCA) would like you to endorse a plan for the Cameron Run/ Hensley/Clermont area they are calling the "Cameron Run Recreational Area Initial Coordinated Park and Open Space Plan."

**I would urge you to not endorse their plan.**

The plan was developed solely by DRPCA staff without agreement from NOVA Parks. Moreover, DRPCA staff held a meeting at 8:00A.M. on a Thursday in an industrial park as their "public hearing" on this plan and, as you would expect, no public attended.

### **Great Waves at Cameron Run Regional Park:**

NOVA Parks has developed one of the most successful and popular water park in the region. According to a recent City contracted survey, over 80,000 City of Alexandria residents use the water park on a regular basis. This success has been driven by continual investment and innovation to make this site a popular family destination.

Currently, NOVA Parks is interested in adding a new water ride feature called the Master Blaster that will be located parallel to Eisenhower Avenue, and will help the site stay current and attractive. To remain a popular water park, we will need to invest in other attractions in the years ahead.

DRPCA leadership and staff are proposing to designate the small areas of fragmented open space as "passive recreational use" and create isolated trails through these areas. These concepts will box in the exiting water park and limit future planning efforts of Regional Parkland. This is not acceptable. As a facility that is used and loved by over 80,000 City residents, Great Waves at Cameron Run Regional Park needs to be able to grow and develop as a major tourist attraction within the City.

City of Alexandria  
David M. Pritzker  
Scott Price

Arlington County  
Paul Ferguson  
Michael A. Nardolilli

Fairfax County  
Stella Koch  
Jean R. Packard

City of Fairfax  
Brian D. Knapp  
Arthur F. Little

City of Falls Church  
Barry D. Buschow  
Jeffrey Tarbert

Loudoun County  
Joan G. Rokus  
Daniel Kaseman

### Trails:

Trails are a wonderful amenity and NOVA Parks owns and manages over 100 miles of trails. At Cameron Run, there is a shared-use path along Eisenhower Avenue that provides a popular recreational amenity used by walkers, joggers, and bicyclists. Routing a new trail behind support facilities and next to the unsightly and noisy railroad tracks creates potentially unsafe areas for the public. It is true the public would like natural trails and the larger and more linear Clermont property offers better opportunities for real nature trail.

### Lake Cook

NOVA Parks will support the City's efforts to improve Lake Cook. The only element that we would not support is the trail they would run from Lake Cook behind the water park facilities.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**I move that the Park & Recreation Commission support the element of the "Cameron Run Recreational Area Initial Coordination Park and Open Space Plan" that affects Henley Park and Clermont Natural Area. And recommend that the City Council approve a new lease with the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority for Cameron Run, but without the suggestions proposed by DRPCA staff.**

Botanical Society of Washington, a past president of the Maryland Native Plant Society, and a current board member of the Maryland Native Plant Society and the Virginia Native Plant Society. Needless to say, the Natural Resources Division has sufficient expertise to make these determinations as to the health and value of these trees.

- e. The NVRPA also began to survey Ward's Woods, presumably in preparation to clear it more land to expand the picnic area. Luckily the Recreation and Parks Department's Natural Resources Division staff noticed the survey tape, looked into the situation, and put a stop to that activity.
  - f. I am also concerned about the NVRPA's dumping of loose soil and landscaping waste on the edge of Ward's Woods as well as along the valuable and natural Southwest bank of Lake Cook. This loose soil and landscaping waste facilitates the establishment and spread of harmful invasive species into our ecologically sensitive natural areas. This dumping occurred during the summer months when the park was open. While some of the plant debris has been removed, the loose dumped soil remains in four locations. Loose dumped soil provides much more of an opportunity for invasive plants to establish themselves than ground with mature, intact plant cover.
  - g. In addition, every time I walked my dog through the picnic grove adjoining Ward's Woods this summer I noticed an extraordinary amount of particularly disgusting trash left in the picnic grove area. The authority's trash removal activities in that area have been minimal and highly unsatisfactory. Other park lands in our city, Ben Brenman Park for example, have picnic benches and some unavoidable resulting trash. The trash problem at the picnic grove next to Ward's Woods, however, far surpasses the trash problems at other city parks. The NVRPA similarly fails to adequately manage the trash at the pavilion on the East side of the batting cages.
- 4. Recommendations on the City's Upcoming Renewal of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority's Lease:**
- a. Based on the numerous examples above of the authority's questionable stewardship of the natural areas included in the current leased area, I strongly urge the city manager and city council to approve the city staff's draft plan as it stands now, with its protection of the remnant natural areas surrounding the current park facilities.
  - b. Additional building on and reconfiguration of the site outside the current developed boundaries could potentially endanger the small, environmentally sensitive areas on the leased property, to include:
    - Ward's Woods;
    - The area adjoining Ward's Woods that has been, up to now, used as a picnic area and includes valuable native trees (to include an uncommon hybrid Bartran's Oak);
    - The areas outside and inside the water park fence (East of the batting cages) that includes a number of valuable mature native trees (including the city's only hybrid Beadle's oak)
  - c. The land included in the NVRPA's lease belongs to the city and its citizens and the city is well within its rights to ensure that any lease benefit its citizens and their expressed priorities.
- 5. A Final Overall Recommendation:**
- a. It may seem unusual that myself and other concerned citizens are speaking so strongly in favor of patches of land that consist of 5 acres here and 2 acres there. Clearly we are not talking about Yosemite National Park here. However there is a real hunger, as reflected in the results of citizen input to the Eisenhower West planning sessions, to save the very little bit of natural space and trees left in the Eisenhower Valley. This is all we have left.



# Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

5400 Ox Road, Fairfax Station, VA 22039 | 703-352-5900 | Fax: 703-273-0905 | www.nvrpa.org

DATE: January 8, 2015  
TO: Alexandria Park & Recreation Commission  
FROM: Paul Gilbert, Executive Director of NOVA Parks  
SUBJECT: Cameron Run Regional Park

At your last meeting, on November 20, 2014, the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (DRPCA) urged the Commission to adopt a plan they had developed related to the Cameron Run Regional Park. At the same meeting I asked you not to adopt this plan, and I greatly appreciated your decision to not take action on it that night.

## Our Goal:

Over the past 30+ years, the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NOVA Parks) has invested substantial resources in developing Cameron Run/Great Waves Water Park, and this facility has become an incredibly popular attraction in the City. According to City polling, 55% of Alexandria residents use it on a regular basis, and it also attracts visitors from around the region, which in turn supports the economy in Alexandria. To keep this water park as a premier facility, we need to continue investing in it regularly. We are now proposing to invest over \$2 million into a new waterpark feature and some minor improvements to our parking lot.

With 6 years left on our present 40-year lease, we are requesting renewal of our lease for 40 more years, along with this latest investment in the property.

Since 2006, we have already invested over \$2.2 million in this park, which is one of the reasons it is so popular today. In fact, over the last eight years, for every \$1 the City has contributed as a member jurisdiction in NOVA Parks, we have invested \$2.7 in our Alexandria operations (both Cameron Run and Carlyle House). Just at Cameron Run we create about 150 summer jobs each year, which furnish opportunities for responsible, constructive employment for many young people in Alexandria. So, our goal is simply to be able to continue to invest in Alexandria as we have been for decades.

## Our Challenge:

Over the last year, we have worked very productively with the City Department of Planning and Zoning on the Development Special Use Permit needed to implement our planned improvements. That permit is now moving to the Planning Commission for approval in early February. We have also worked well with the City's storm water management group on its plans to upgrade Lake Cook to serve better the City's storm water needs.

City of Alexandria  
David M. Pritzker  
Scott Price

Arlington County  
Paul Ferguson  
Michael A. Nardolilli

Fairfax County  
Stella Koch  
Jean R. Packard

City of Fairfax  
Brian D. Knapp  
Arthur F. Little

City of Falls Church  
Barry D. Buschow  
Jeffrey Tarbert

Loudoun County  
Joan G. Rokus  
Daniel Kaseman

Where we have been challenged is with the City's Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (DRPCA) under the leadership of James Spengler. For reasons that are not at all clear, DRPCA was given a role related to our lease, which probably should have been given to the City Attorney's Office. DRPCA appears to have worked to either stall the project, or exert control over the Cameron Run Regional Park over the last year.

- On January 16, 2014, City staff notified NOVA Parks that both our permit and lease would not even be reviewed for over two years while the City engaged in a number of other planning processes unrelated to Cameron Run.
- Mr. Spengler worked unsuccessfully to get Cameron Run Regional Park included in the Eisenhower West Small Area Planning Process.
- In the spring of 2014, NOVA Parks Board members met with a number of City Council members and Mayor Euille to discuss why we were put on long-term hold. By June 2014, City staff was again processing our permit and lease.
- In late summer of 2014, DRPCA paid for a public opinion poll focused entirely on NOVA Parks. Overwhelmingly, City residents said they use and like the Regional Parks in and out of the City.
- On November 6, 2014, DRPCA held a public hearing at 8:00 A.M. on a Thursday to review a plan for Cameron Run and Hensley Park area that they created without NOVA Parks input. No public was in attendance, but we objected to this plan, which had only one purpose: to constrict future development of the Cameron Run Regional Park.
- On November 16, 2014, Rod Simmons from DRPCA met with several local activists to encourage opposition to our lease based on fears of environmental impacts of the small wooded area between the batting cage and the animal shelter. This is an area we have no plans to develop.

This brings us to the last Park & Recreation Commission meeting (11/20/14). DRPCA was urging you to approve the plan they had created over our objections and without a real public hearing; a plan that focused on restricting the Cameron Run Regional Park for future development.

The public speakers who focused on the natural resources of the Cameron Run Regional Park were all recruited and orchestrated by DRPCA staff. It is extraordinary for one public agency to recruit citizens to lobby against the plans and proposals of another agency.

#### **Addressing the Environmental Issues:**

While the natural area next to the batting cage was open field in the early 20th century, and not "old growth" as claimed, NOVA Parks has no plans to develop this area. Since our dealings with the Department of Planning and Zoning have been positive and professional, we have volunteered a permit condition that would treat this area as if it were 'Resource Protection Area' (RPA) under the Chesapeake Bay Ordinance. Additionally, I met with Elizabeth Wright, as did our park manager, and we have removed the invasive grass she was concerned with. These voluntary steps resolve the environmental

concerns raised, without the need for the DRPCA proposed plan, or anything else that might delay approval of the lease renewal.

**Cameron Run Area Plan (A.K.A. Syntheses Plan):**

With the adoption of the voluntary RPA as a condition of the permit, there is no longer any arguable need for the plan DRPCA developed. I strongly recommend that the Park and Recreation Commission not adopt any plan for this area. If you feel the need to adopt something, attached is a modified version of the DRPCA plan that designates all of Cameron Run as an "Active Recreation" area, just like Hensley Park. This version would be OK to adopt if you feel a need to do so.

**Recommendation to move forward with the Cameron Run Regional Park Improvements:**

It is strongly recommended that City Management remove DRPCA from any further dealing with Cameron Run Regional Park. The minor updates to the lease language have been in City hands for the last year. The City Attorney's Office could review and approve the draft lease in time for this document to join the DSUP Permit for City Council approval in February.

I regret that your Commission was drawn into this issue, but I appreciate your insightful judgment in not accepting the plan that was urged upon you at the November meeting.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss these matters if that would be helpful to you.

Copy: Mayor William Euille

Acting City Manager Mark Jinks

David Pritzker, NOVA Parks Board Member from Alexandria

Scott Price, NOVA Parks Board Member from Alexandria



## Tree Removal Issue:

At the November 20, 2014 Park and Recreation Commission Meeting much was said about the removal of some trees near the picnic area of Cameron Run Regional Park.

In late summer of 2013 Cameron Run Regional Park staff received comments for park users that large branches had fallen from trees near the picnic area, creating a safety concern. On inspection of those trees, it was clear that some in this area were dead or dying. Below are pictures of some of those trees.



Photos of several of the trees removed from the picnic area at Cameron Run Regional Park in December 2013. The center one was struck by lightning and split. The two to either side had the crown of the trees broken with large branches hanging dead. This could be from lightning or it could have been damage from the derecho storm, or other extreme weather events?

The trees removed included: an Oak – split by lightning, Black Cherry – infested with termites, Hickory – top of the tree was dead and falling, Locus – dead hazard tree, and several Chinese Sumac – invasive species.

It is unfortunate that these trees near the parking lot were damaged by storms or disease. It is also unfortunate, that RPCA staff has tried to use this to put NOVA Parks in a poor light.

### NOVA Parks Strategic Goal:

Part of NOVA Park's Strategic Plan is to enhance habitat areas through tree plantings, particularly focused on riparian areas. In 2014 NOVA Parks oversaw the planting of over 800 trees on their parkland. And in 2013 nearly 1,600 new trees were planted.



# Wakefield-Tarleton Civic Association

January 15, 2014

Ms. Judy Coleman and Ms. Jennifer Atkins  
Co-Chairs of the Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission  
1108 Jefferson Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Ms. Coleman and Ms. Atkins:

I write today on behalf of the residents of the Wakefield Tarleton Civic Association in support of the city staff's Coordinated Park and Open Space Plan for the Cameron Run Area. This includes the plan's provisions to protect the natural areas on the North side of the city-owned land that is currently leased by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. The Cameron Run Area is adjacent to our neighborhood, which runs from Gordon Street to Jordan Street, south of Duke Street. While many of our residences include children and families, our informal survey produced no calls for an expansion of the NVRPA facility and multiple neighbors spoke in support of the preservation of natural areas.

It is encouraging that this plan incorporates citizen input garnered through the Eisenhower West Small Area Plan public input process. As is made clear in the plan, citizens are placing a priority on the preservation and enhancement of green open space as well as biking and walking trails. While the Ward's Woods area between the animal shelter and the batting cages, the adjoining picnic area/buffer zone, and the natural areas starting on the East side of the batting cages to the East end of Lake Cook are not technically within the Eisenhower West Small Area Plan, they provide critical connectivity to and enhancement of the Eisenhower Valley and are an important contributor to the livability of the area for current and future residents, as well as providing a thriving habitat for wildlife.

These areas are already important to the residents of the Wakefield Tarleton neighborhood, a number of who run, walk, bike, and walk their dogs past the animal shelter, through the current picnic grove, and Eastward to and around Lake Cook. The trees, birds, and other wildlife enhance our enjoyment of our city. The preservation of this important green space on the Holmes Run Watershed is well-aligned with the City's adopted "Eco-City Charter" and would reinforce the City's commitment to "Build wisely", "Embrace natural beauty" and "Improve water quality". Preserving the natural open space for year round use by residents and as part of the area's ecosystem outweighs the seasonal benefits of a larger parking lot and slightly expanded man-made amenities.

We ask the Commission to endorse the city's plan and forward the plan to the City Council for approval. Thank you for contributing your time and talents to serve on the Park and Recreation Commission.

Sincerely,

Ali Ahmad  
WTCA President

CC: Scott Barstow, Chair of the Environmental Policy Commission  
James B. Spengler, Director, RPCA  
Robert Taylor, Division Chief, RPCA