

# BEN BRENMAN AND BOOTHE PARKS COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

## PROCESS

From September through early December 2012, the public was invited to provide input on the existing conditions and possible future uses for Ben Brenman and Boothe Parks. To gather information, the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA) held a public workshop to discuss Park needs and distributed a survey asking for feedback.

This same process simultaneously occurred for each of the City's large parks, including Chinquapin Park, Four Mile Run Park, Hensley Park, Holmes Run Park, and Simpson Stadium Park. Combined, over 585 Alexandria people responded to the surveys and 45 attended workshops.

Throughout the 2012/2013 winter, RPCA will use the information gathered to determine Park needs and priorities to develop Park Improvement Plans. Ultimately, these plans will help inform budget decisions and on-going use and facility considerations.

## SURVEY RESULTS

On October 1, 2012, online park improvement surveys became available to the public through



**“LOVE THE PATH ALONG THE LAKE AND THE VIEW. IT'S A GREAT LENGTH FOR A WALK AND ALSO TO TAKE KIDS ON A SHORT BIKE RIDE. OUR SON ALSO LOVES TO STAND ON THE BRIDGE AND LOOK AT TURTLES, ETC.”**

**“[I LIKE THE] LOCATION AND SPACE. I USED TO ENJOY THE OUTDOOR MOVIE WHEN IT WAS AT THIS LOCATION, BECAUSE IF CHILDREN GOT RESTLESS, THERE WAS ENOUGH SPACE WHERE THEY COULD GO BACK AND READ.”**



the City of Alexandria's website, press releases and social media. RPCA also distributed hard copy surveys through boxes located at entrances to the park and in the mailboxes of adjacent neighborhood homes. RPCA received 78 completed surveys.

RPCA acknowledges that this survey is not statistically accurate. Rather, the responses are from those who saw the survey and chose to participate. While this is a sample of Park users, it is not representative of all users. As an example, through sports permitting, we know that many more soccer and ballfield users visit the Park than are reported through the survey. For this reason, the information below will be supplemented with site observation and additional data to inform recommendations in the Park Improvement Plans.

The survey asked park users to identify their usual point of access into the park, the mode of transportation they use to get there, their typical park activities, what they like about the park, and what areas of the park need improvement. Survey participants also prioritized their improvement needs.

Of those surveyed, 52 participants lived in the 22304 zip code . Ten lived in the 22314 zip code; nine lived in 22302 and fewer than 5 participants lived in each of the other Alexandria zip codes or outside City limits. The majority of those who visit do so daily (28%) or weekly (34%).

**“MY DOG AND I LOVE THE DOG PARK AND ALL OF THE GREAT PEOPLE AND DOGS WE MEET.”**

**“BEN BRENNAN: I LIKE THAT THE PLAYGROUND IS SAFE FOR YOUNGER KIDS. I LOVE THE BRIDGE OVER THE POND AND SEARCHING FOR TURTLES, FROGS AND WATER FOWL (I HAVE SEEN AN OSPREY DIVING HERE AS WELL AS SEVERAL TYPES OF CRANES/HERONS/BITTERNS...I HAVE BEEN SURPRISED!) I LIKE THAT THERE ARE OPEN GRASSY AREAS FOR OPEN PLAY AND PICNICS. I LIKE THE FARMERS MARKET. MY SON LOVES THAT YOU CAN SEE THE TRAIN GO BY. BOOTHE: I LIKE THE ONE OLDER KIDS' PLAYGROUND BUT I LOOK FORWARD TO THE RENOVATED PLAY AREAS THAT I SAW PLANS FOR. I LIKED THE FESTIVAL THEY HAD THERE.”**

#### Where do you live?

*(Darker color zip codes indicate a higher number of survey participants)*

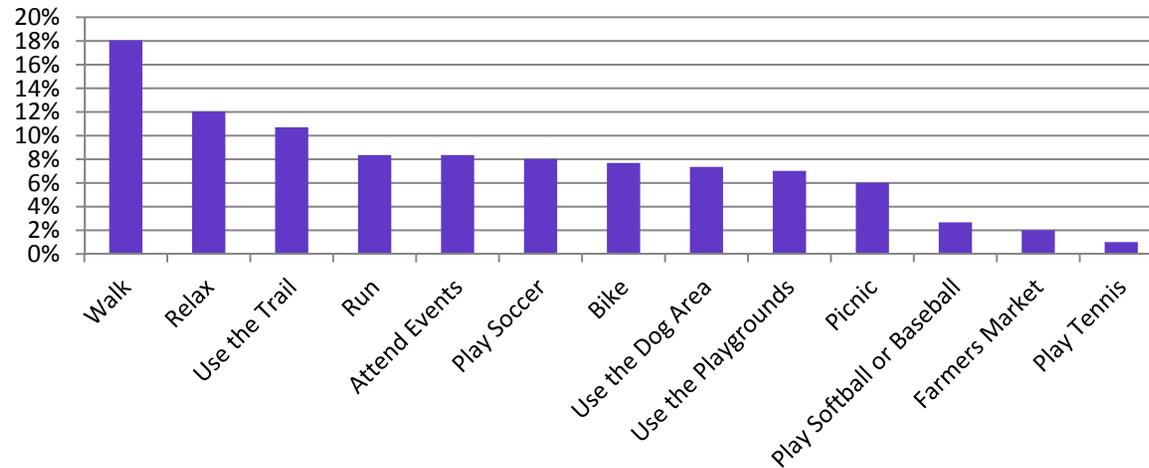


#### How often do you visit the Park?

Value	Count	Percent of responses
Daily	28	34%
Weekly	34	41%
Monthly	14	17%
Yearly	4	5%
Never	3	4%



## What do you do in the Parks?

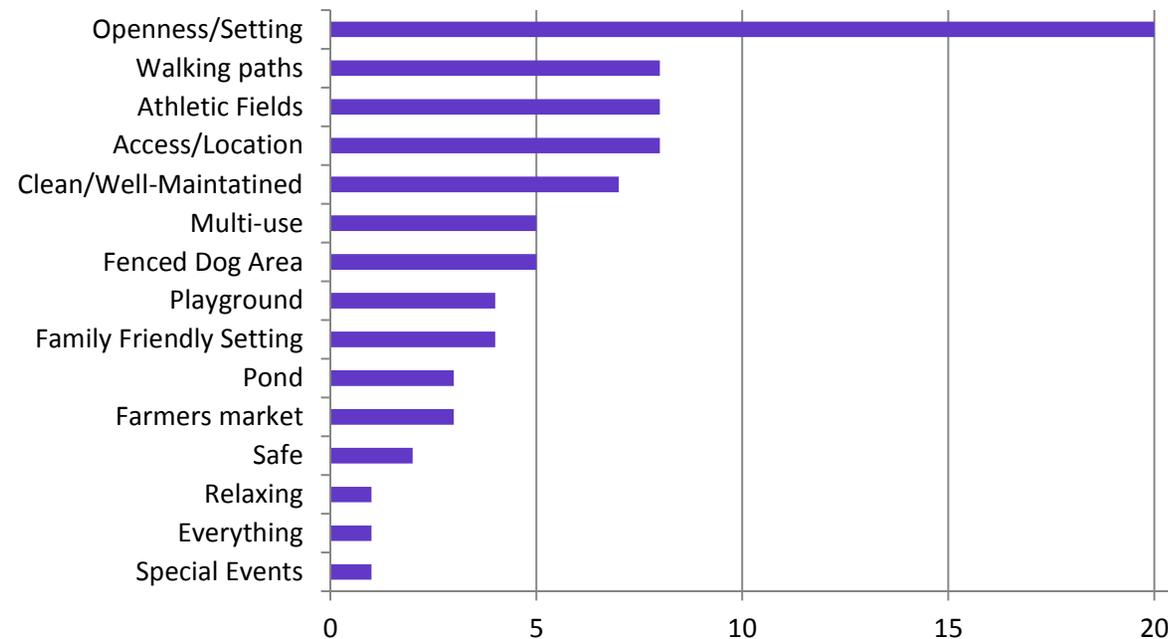


## This is what we heard:

### ACCESS AND PARK USE

Fifty-one percent walk to either Brenman or Boothe Park; 42% drive and only 8% bike. This high number of pedestrians demonstrates how Brenman/Boothe is considered a large park with a strong neighborhood use, attracting leisurely activity. It also implies the need to review safer pedestrian and cyclist access throughout the Parks. The high number of drivers is likely associated with the athletic fields, though many park users living outside of the Cameron Station neighborhood also drive to the Parks to walk or use other park features.

## What do you like about the Parks?



When asked, “What do you do in the Park?” the majority of participants stated that they go for unorganized, passive park uses. The highest use was to walk (18%). Another popular answer was “relax” (12%). These activities are multi-generational and can occur individually or in very small groups. The other responses were very closely ranked, including athletic field, dog area, and playground use, emphasizing the Parks multi-use nature. The only two activities that received responses of less than one percent were “use the basketball courts” and “use the volleyball courts.”

In answering, “What do you like about the Park,” participants overwhelmingly identified the open green space and setting of the park. All of the comments were emphatically positive, citing many reasons why people enjoy the park regularly. In particular, many



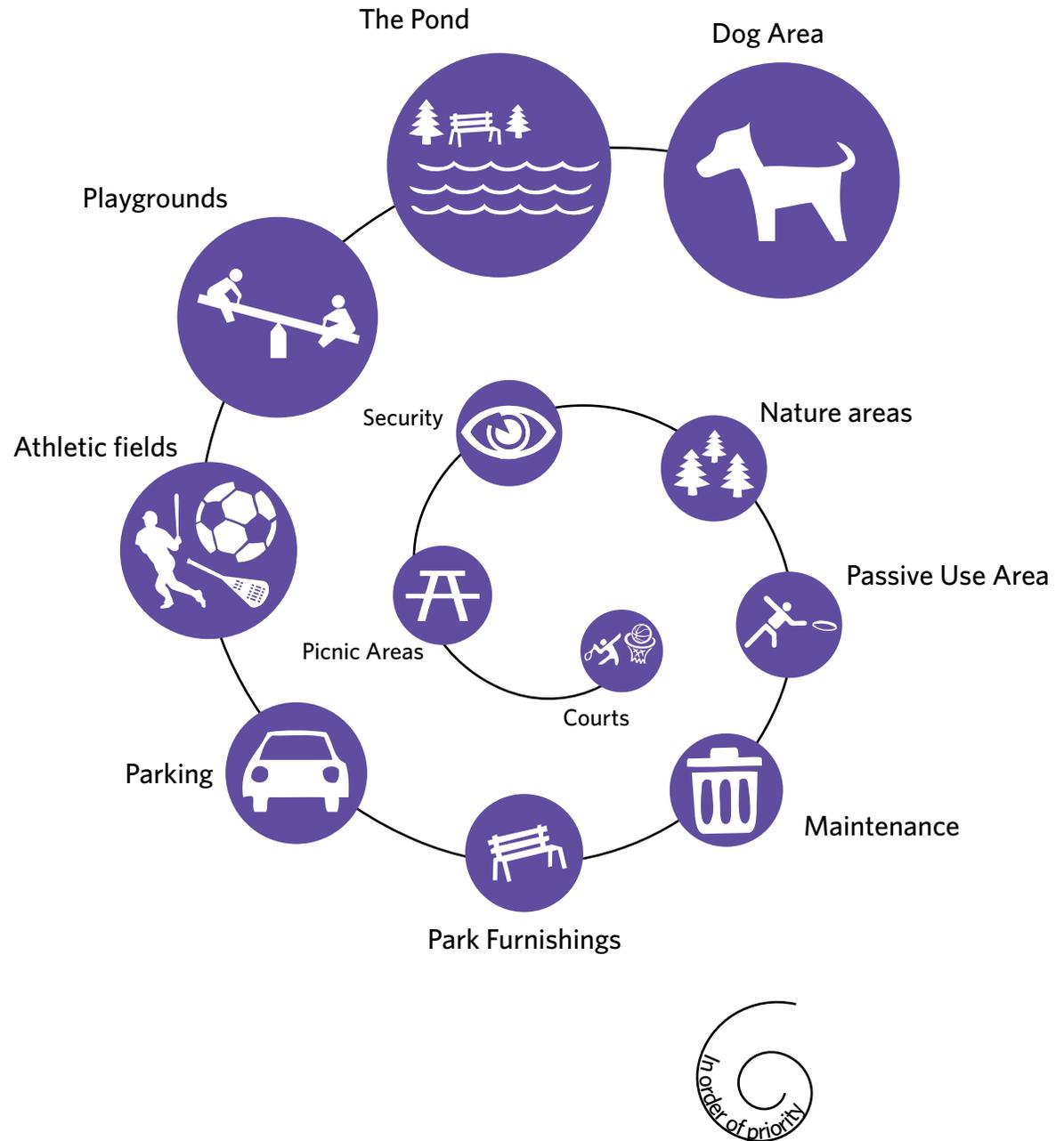
respondents noted that there is something for everyone in these Parks - children, adults, AND PETS.

## IMPROVEMENTS

Participants identified the dog area as the highest need for Park improvements, with the pond as the second highest need. The following pages have selected statements that support the need for identified improvements. The comments are shown in prioritized order, (all participants selected a need but did not always provide additional comments on their selection):

### DOG AREA

- "Lighting for the dog park! Shade in the summer. The gravel in the dog park needs to go."
- "Getting lights, solar powered at the very least, at the dog area AND the pavilion."
- "I'd like to see the small dog park near the railroad tracks better tended by the City. I'd like better fencing; right now small dogs can escape through a couple of gaps in the fence. I'd like the surface gravel to be safer--more level and cleaner."
- "I don't know if it is possible because of the topography, but I wish I could access the dog park from the park rather than having to walk all the way around."
- "Add lighting and amenities such as running water to the dog exercise area and expand its size. Add an off-leash dog run area near enclosed exercise area. Add lighting at the walkway to the bridge over Holmes Run on the Holmes Run Parkway side of the bridge. It is



- quite dark at that location.”
- “More light at the dog run area is needed. There are many people who are clearly not upstanding citizens who walk through the area and go to the picnic tables to drink/smoke.”
  - “There needs to be lighting added along the back run of the park (on the opposite side of the storm run-off canal). The pavilion at the end of this area almost always has suspicious activity going on under it when dark. A simple outdoor flood light would resolve. As an added safety measure some additional lights would be beneficial. The dog park in that area has no lighting and it isn’t safe for pets or owners at night. I know some people only have time to take their animals later after work so it makes utilizing this difficult. I am not saying this to get an action, but I truly believe it is only a matter of time before there is an assault that takes place along this stretch at night.”
  - “Dog exercise area, because it is the feature I use most.”
  - “My dog and I (and many other dogs and their humans) would love to have lights in the park.”
  - “Safety...For humans and pets! It would be nice if dog area could be divided into small /medium size dogs...to a large dog area.”
  - “I park at the library and walk my dogs along Duke St to the dog park, as do most of the people that I see at the park. It would be much better if the entrance were moved to the corner of the park closer to the library, or if a second entrance were added to that corner. Duke St is very busy with speeding cars and it’s unpleasant and potentially unsafe to walk dogs along it any longer than necessary.”
  - “Lights for the dog park”

#### THE POND

- “Ongoing cleanup of the Lake is also a huge priority -- although the lake was designed as a stormwater retention pond, more regular cleanup of the trash that accumulates near the walking bridge would greatly help. Also, the trash bins around the lake fill often, and should be emptied more regularly during periods of high use.”
- “Clean the lake up too much trash!”
- “Keeping the lake clean of man-made debris and algae”
- “The lake. It must be dredged of the massive amounts of algae that threaten its environment and made deeper. Thus, the fountains will also work better and it will avoid smelly refuse. Whoever is hired to keep it clean does not keep it clean. it needs more consistent, frequent cleanup.”
- “Put in new pumps for the fountains, (they hardly ever all work at once) and keep the trash and algae out. It looks better this year but still needs work. And water the trees in the summer!!!!”
- “There is always litter in the water - somehow that needs to be addressed”
- “Keep the lake clean and natural. Keep natural areas for wildlife to live in and for people to engage with the solace of nature.”

#### PLAYGROUNDS

- “The new playground equipment at Boothe Park has been delayed for some time, and is badly needed.”
- “Better playground and spruced up grounds in Boothe.”

- “Playground improvements at Boothe park are in dire need of updating.”
- “In Boothe, upgrade the playgrounds.”
- “The playground (tot lot) should be closer to the residences so families can walk there. Despite a fairly high fence/netting, I’ve seen a number of close calls with foul balls. I recommend moving the playground or making nets even higher.”
- “Playgrounds, some of the remote areas need cleaning up”
- “For the park system overall, I would say my number one priority is refurbishing playground areas/structures. Stevenson Square Park, which is very close to my house, had its play structure and area redone a few years ago and it has completely improved the park. More children play there. The playground is cleaner and more stimulating to young children. I think the Department should go through park by park and designate those in most need of help-- meaning those with old, rickety play structures and/or those with play items directly on dirt. Dirt results in mud and the newer spongy ground covering is cleaner and nicer.”
- “Playground needed in Brenman”

#### ATHLETIC FIELDS

- “Cleaning up stray bottles, plastic bags, and garbage by the water’s edge”

#### PARKING

- “More parking”
- “Parking. There is not enough for any social event. I have turned around and not attended some events because I could not find parking.”



## PARK FURNISHINGS

- *"Bike racks!! Every time I attend an event there, I can't find anywhere to park my bike and others have the same problem. We end up squishing them against any signpost we can find. Please stop prioritizing cars at the expense of bikes - you should encourage bike use in a park, of all places."*
- *"More benches."*
- *"More grills in Brenman."*

## MAINTENANCE

- *"More trees/Flowers. Prevent trash/clean trash build up by the lake near the bridge. Maintain water fountains"*
- *"Clean, fresher landscape and make it safe."*
- *"Cleanliness of natural areas.."*

## PASSIVE USE AREAS

- *"More open space. as we create more athletic fields which are very needed and I support, we then fence them in (which we need to do) but it reduces then the usable space for citizens. Take Brenman, look at how big it is on a map and you see a very large area. X out all of the fenced off areas and you reduce that Open space by at least 1/2. so let's keep in what it looks like on map acre wise it not necessarily usable space for the average citizen."*

## SECURITY

- *"Based on past reports, I am concerned about my personal safety when I am walking by myself in the park when there are few others around."*
- *"Security - I would like to run on the trail and*

*not be concerned about assault"*

- *"Security at the HolmesRunPark area between Van Dorn and Beauregard St., after 2 o 3 PM., on weekdays it's necessary because group of people loitering and consuming., the maintenance and cleaning. also in that area is almost non-existent."*
- *"Lights. It's fairly secluded and unsafe without lighting."*
- *"Safety/routine police patrols"*

## OTHER

- *"Provide bathrooms and make it cleaner"*
- *"There must be better enforcement of people who feed the geese. They are the biggest contributors to the problem. Also, the "geese peace" dogs should wear identification vests otherwise they look like they are illegally off-leash."*
- *"West end public swimming pool; kid friendly like the cute one at Charles Houston Rec Center"*
- *"Have more events. We miss the movies and the many concerts."*
- *"#1 Priority: Construct the long promised West End Senior Center at the dedicated pile of dirt in Ben Brenman Park. #2 Priority: Elevate the Steadfast Bridge across Holmes Run to be 1 foot above the 100 year flood plain now that the city has altered the flow of flood waters. #3 Priority: Relocate the displaced, refugee Steadfast bridge to cross Holmes Run at the rectangular pool just below the last weir on Holmes Run."*
- *"Improve staff's communication with the general public about their proposals prior to decision making for all park properties"*

- *"Space behind the far goal that is on a hill. Can that be used for anything?"*
- *"Logistics of the farmers market"*
- *"If mowed and maintained, would be ideal for community gardens where children can learn"*

## WORKSHOP

A Ben Brenman and Boothe Parks planning workshop was held on November 14, 2012 at Samuel Tucker Elementary School with the purpose of having community members identify the priorities for future improvements, based on their park experiences and observations. The workshop was advertised through the City's e-news and calendar. Signs with workshop information were posted at park entrances and flyers were dropped in the mailboxes of homes in the adjacent neighborhood. A total of six park users attended.

## INSPIRATION BOARD

As participants entered the room they were asked to comment and write their thoughts on precedent images. The exercise was designed to provoke ideas and inspire site programs. None of the images were from City of Alexandria Parks. Participants commented on the following images:





Easy fix in most locations. Already in Market Square in Old Town, works Well.

Nice for films, concerts in summer - like this!



Get me a swing in the Park - Love you forever



More community activity plus will bring in neighborhood nearby



Never Ever lose space for my farmers market

Yummy!



good idea for area of BB next to fence

Community garden behind baseball field



Interesting idea



Yummy





Love this!



Like this idea a lot



Relaxing! Plus multi-functional for adults and Kids



Skeptical of water features but would be awesome if well executed!



Tennis Courts to face north and south per USTA



Wish our dog park had more grass. Maybe relocate and rehabilitate?

### GROUP EXERCISE

Following a presentation on the Park's existing conditions, participants joined one of two tables for group exercises. The results of those tables have been aggregated, as shown below.

The first exercise was designed to identify the Park's top five assets. These are the areas of the Park that participants felt keep them coming to the Park and should remain in the Park and be further enhanced:

The top five park assets identified:

1. Playground
2. Pond
3. Turf field
4. Number and variety of pathways
5. Parking lot

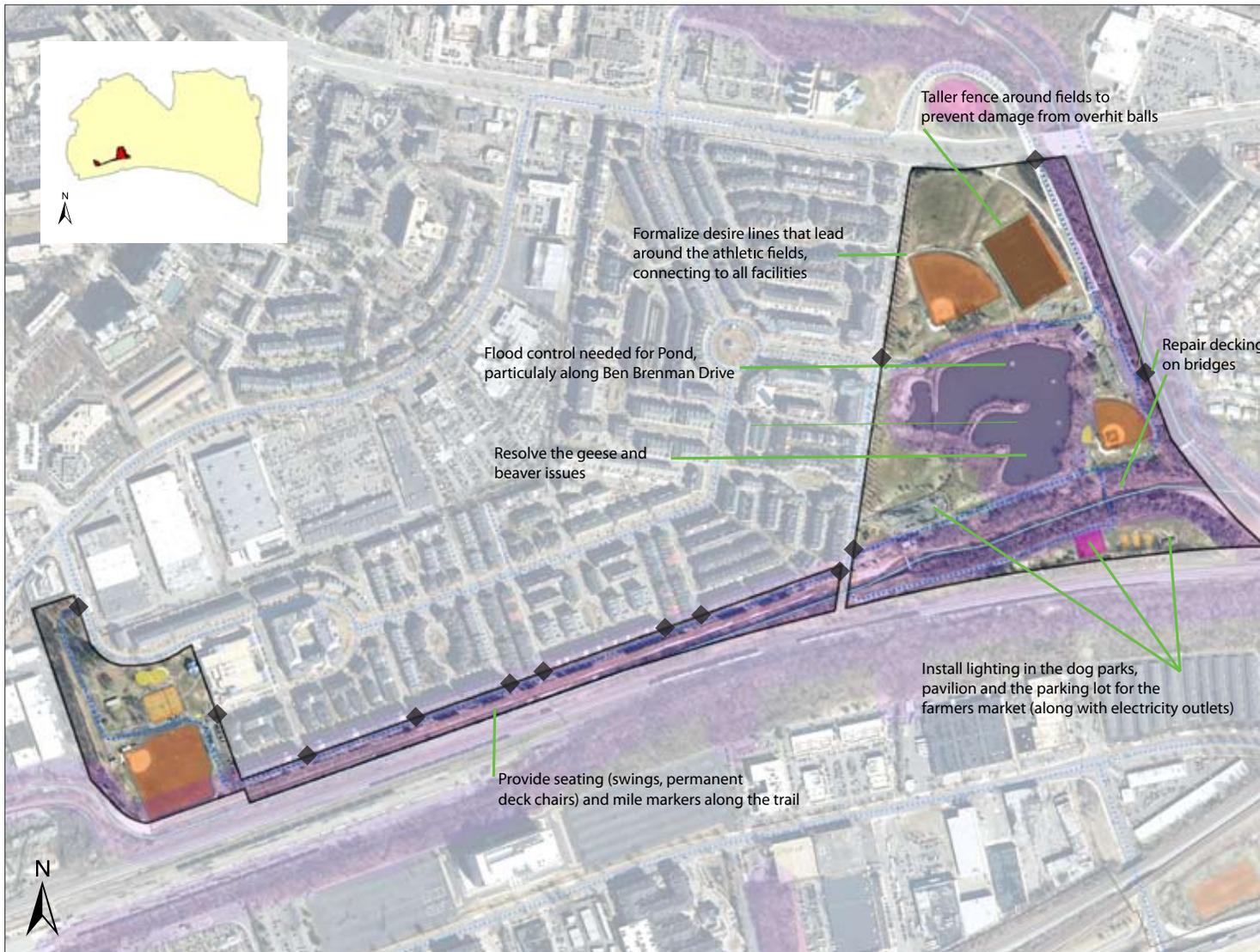
Other assets included: Hill for sledding, small dog park, open space, farmers market, tennis courts, basketball courts, trees, and the baseball field

Second, the groups used a map of the Park to (1) suggest where pathways should be for optimal park circulation, (2) which existing conditions need improvement, (3) and what programs and facilities are not in the park, but should be. The results of this exercise are shown to the opposite page.

Additional needs discussed included:

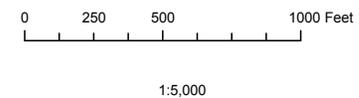
- Wayfinding signage
- Better trash can placement





◆ Entrances	■ Athletic Facilities
— Stream	■ Playground
■ Resource Protection Area	■ Dog Run
— Paths/Trails	— Comments

## Brenman and Boothe Park Workshop Map (11/14/12)



## SUMMARY

There are some consistent themes throughout the two methods of community feedback.

These include:

1. **Dog area.** Participants in the workshop and the survey named the dog area and its surrounding landscapes as Brenman Park's highest improvement need. This particular area of the Park is very isolated and dog park users feel unsafe walking to such a hidden location, particularly when visiting after work hours in the Fall and Winter. Adding lighting to the area may not be feasible because it would require bringing electrical conduit over Backlick Run, however, there is potential for installing alternative lighting such as solar lighting. In addition, a basic site clean-up and minor re-design of the picnic and dog park area could increase site activity and visibility.
2. **Stormwater Pond.** The Brenman Pond is a working stormwater retention pond, fed by rainwater traveling through the City storm sewers, the pond treats the water with aeration fountains before the water works its way to the Potomac River. The system is designed to capture any trash traveling with the water before it makes its way into the pond. However, as many respondents noted, trash often escapes the filters and enters the pond. The trash trap is difficult to clean and maintain. An increase of maintenance funds would be required to maintain the pond to its highest standard. As technology improves, new filter systems can also be explored.
3. **Boothe Playground.** Many survey respondents stated that the play equipment in Boothe Playground is outdated and spread out around the Park. For reasons acknowledged in the comments, this playground was previously identified for renovation, which is anticipated to occur in 2013/2014. The playground will be relocated and consolidated into two areas; a new playground will be located near Samuel Tucker Elementary School to provide better access and security for school children. Younger children, not enrolled in school, will have access to a new tot lot located near the exiting picnic pavilion, during school hours. Consolidating the equipment to these locations will also allow more open, passive space near the picnic pavilion.
4. **Wayfinding signage.** The Brenman and Boothe Park system is large and many people have difficulty finding their way around the Park and to certain activities. As suggested in the workshop, directional wayfinding signage would help visitors navigate their way around the Park and give a stronger identity to the Park through coordinated graphics.
5. **Park furniture.** According to the survey, one of the highest Park uses is "relaxing." To supplement this activity, respondents and workshop participants commented on the need for additional park benches, as well as more bike racks.

not fully comprehensive to all of the Park's improvement needs. Other suggestions, such as small improvements to the baseball field have also been identified through previous studies and working with the Alexandria Youth Sports Advisory Board. The information herein will be supplemented with site observation and additional existing conditions data to ultimately create recommendations and an implementation plan.

While these five themes were consistent throughout the feedback process, they are

