

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 21, 2014

TO: MEMBERS OF PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: FAROLL HAMER, DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF CITYWIDE PARKS IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR CONSISTENCY WITH CITY MASTER PLAN

In the summer of 2012, the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities began a multi-year process with the public to develop a *Citywide Parks Improvement Plan*. The goal of this initiative was to study and understand the existing conditions and future needs for Alexandria's parks that are over 15 acres, municipally owned, and have multiple uses. These parks include Ben Brenman and Armistead L. Boothe Parks, Chinquapin Park, Four Mile Run Park, Joseph Hensley Park, the Holmes Run Park System, and Simpson Stadium Park. The *Draft Citywide Parks Improvement Plan*, completed at the end of 2013, reflects public input received in a thorough and inclusive community engagement effort, and the resulting plan is an excellent roadmap for future improvements, as desired by the community.

Since the *Improvement Plan* is considered an implementation plan in support of the 2002 Strategic Master Plan for Open Space, Parks, and Recreation, formal Planning Commission review and public hearing is not required. However, Planning and Zoning Staff have reviewed the *Improvement Plan* for consistency with the City's Master Plan, looking in particular at the City's 2002 Open Space Plan as well as the Small Area Plans in which each of the large parks referenced above are located. Staff has found that the *Improvement Plan* is both consistent with and supportive of the Master Plan, providing a framework for implementation of park improvements and a guide in setting priorities and budgeting for enhancing our parks.

Goal 1 of the City's 2002 Open Space Plan is to "Protect and enrich existing parks." One implementation strategy for Goal 1 is to "develop a master plan for each of the City's existing parks to guide short and long-term needs." The *Improvement Plan* executes on this recommendation by providing an implementation framework for each of the large parks, consistent with the following recommendation in the Open Space Plan: "As parks become more intensively used, the need for increased maintenance, management and planning becomes greater. In addition to identifying opportunities, the City should

provide a strategy to continually protect the existing park system and identify opportunities to enhance park resources. An important component of this work will be in defining opportunities for park renovation, expansion and linkages to create a comprehensive open space network.” (OSP p52). Staff finds that the *Improvement Plan* is consistent with the Open Space Plan.

In addition, Staff reviewed for consistency the Landmark/Van Dorn Small Area Plan (for Ben Brenman, Armistead L. Boothe, Joseph Hensley, and the Holmes Run Park Systems) Seminary Hill Small Area Plan (for Chinquapin Park), Potomac West Small Area Plan (for Four Mile Run and Simpson Stadium Parks), and the Four Mile Run Master Plan (for Four Mile Run Park). The park improvements recommended in the *Improvement Plan* were found to be consistent with the Small Area Plans.

In addition to comments already provided by Planning Staff on the most recent final Draft, Staff recommends an additional change to the Four Mile Run section of the *Improvement Plan* in order to preserve for the long term the City right of way on Commonwealth Avenue. The following language is recommended for addition to the Improvement Plan in the Four Mile Run Park section (regarding improvement number 16):

“Commonwealth Avenue is a dedicated public street and should remain as such. Making it a greenway and more park-like as part of Four Mile Park in no way suggests that it be vacated. It is necessary to keep it as a dedicated public right-of-way in order not to preclude possible future development of adjacent land.”

The Parks and Recreation Commission held a public hearing on the Improvement Plan on February 20, 2014. At that meeting, the Commission agreed in principle to the recommended change above, to be detailed in a letter endorsing the plan that they will vote on at their next meeting in March.

CC: Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager
Rich Baier, Director, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services
James Spengler, Director, Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Activities