Lake Cook Pocket Park

History and Character

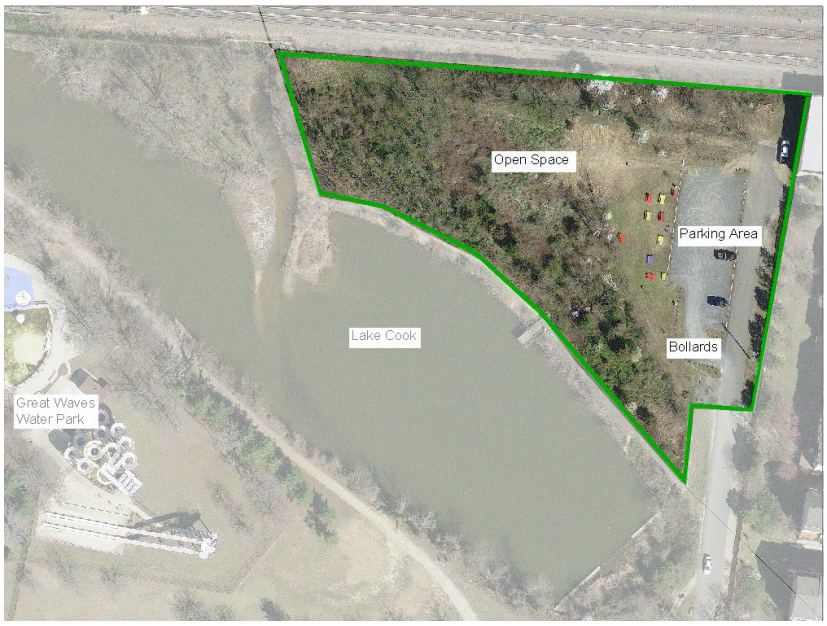
Lake Cook is located at 3911 Eisenhower Avenue in the Eisenhower Valley.

Constructed in the 1970s as a fishing pond, Strawberry Run flows into the lake and the lake flows into Cameron Run. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries stocks the lake with trout and catfish, and other fish, such as bass and sunfish, are naturally occurring in the lake.

In 1981, the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (now referred to as NOVA Parks) entered into a 40 year lease agreement with the City for Cameron Run Park, which included Lake Cook and the surrounding area. In October 2018, Alexandria City Council, as part of negotiations for an extended lease, modified the boundaries of the lease to remove Lake Cook and the surrounding area from the Cameron Run Park boundary and to create a new City park around Lake Cook.

In fall 2018, the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services, Department of Project Implementation, and RPCA completed a stormwater pond retrofit project that transformed Lake Cook from a fishing pond overrun by invasive species and with limited access into a community amenity with enhanced wildlife habitat that improves urban stormwater runoff quality. The project added a sediment forebay, pedestrian loop trail around the lake, pedestrian bridge and boardwalk, public art, additional fishing opportunities, aquatic bench with wetland plants, new overlook area along Eisenhower Avenue, and native plants throughout the project area.

Existing Conditions Map



The lake is located along Eisenhower Avenue, bounded to the north by several freight and passenger railroad tracks, including WMATA Metrorail, Amtrak, CSX, and Norfolk Southern, to the west by Great Waves Waterpark, and to the east by town homes.

The Lake Cook Pocket Park is the area located in the northeast corner of the park, generally bounded by the parking

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lot, railroad tracks, and wooded area. This portion of the park was not part of the stormwater retrofit project.

A majority of this park is located within the resource protection area (RPA) along Lake Cook. There is a WMATA access easement along the eastern edge of the park, generally following the access road to the WMATA building and Metrorail tracks adjacent to the park.

Which of the following existing park elements would you like to preserve, enhance, or transform?					
Element Number of responses	**Natural area** 35		**Element** Number of responses	**Open area** 36	
Value	**Count**	**Percent**	**Value**	**Count**	**Percent**
Preserve it	5	14	Preserve it	0	0
Enhance it	23	66	Enhance it	14	39
Transform it	7	20	Transform it	22	61

What is currently NOT in the park that you would like to see there?

1. Mountain bike trails through the woods
2. Nature themed ephemeral art installations.
3. A play space for tots.
4. It's a wasteland. I would like to see play equipment for kids older than 3 years, a communal garden area—this could be used for educational programming for kids, tables/chairs/benches/adult games—like the park on Pendleton Street
5. Given that there isn't anything there now, there is a lot we would like to see. A natural environment for families to explore would be nice.
6. Child-friendly equipment that blends into the natural surrounding. Places to gather.
7. The part is undergoing renovation, so we'll have to wait and see.
8. Plant more trees – a variety of trees, but ones that will live a long time.
9. More native trees along the bank… perhaps naturalistic looking playground features for children where the mowed turf area near the parking lot was.
10. We would love a basketball court and a place to exercise
11. Playground
12. Grass, trees

Note: There is community interest in a fenced dog area in Lake Cook Pocket Park, however, the Dog Park Master Plan states that a fenced dog area must be a minimum of ½ acre. It is not possible to meet this requirement in this park. An update to the Citywide Dog Park Master Plan (developed in 2000) will re-evaluate the dog area criteria described above.

The image on the right is an example of a bat box. Bats play a key role in pollinating plants and they also help control mosquitoes and other bugs. Bat boxes require very little maintenance and will help bats in the newly established Lake Cook.

Community Feedback

In Fall 2018, staff collected community feedback to understand how the park is used and how it could be improved in the future. The following information summarizes what we heard through an online survey and community workshop. Over 400 people responded to the survey in total, 40 of which were specific to Lake Cook Pocket Park. Staff used the collected information to develop the draft park plans.

In 10 years, I would like this Park to…

(Top 3 rankings shown, based on a weighted score)

1. *Be a safe place for children to explore*
2. *Provide opportunity to explore nature*
3. *Help reduce environmental impacts from surroundings*

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1. **Install nature inspired play features**
Community feedback indicated a desire for additional opportunities for children to play in the park. Install a playground with nature inspired features for children of all ages. Locate the playground outside of the resource protection area.

2. **Install a bat house**
Community feedback indicated a desire to enhance nature throughout the park and to control insects naturally. Bats are an important part of the ecosystem, they eat mosquitos and other insects and act as pollinators. Install a bat house to attract bats to the park. Work with the Natural Resources Division to ensure the bat house is installed in an appropriate location.

3. **Invasive species management**
The Natural Resources Division will manage invasive species in the park as part of its operating program.

4. **Plant native trees in wooded areas**
By planting sapling native trees in the wooded areas around the park, these will over time, replace trees that decline naturally. Also, evaluate the plantings around the lake and throughout the park and supplement as needed.

5. **Add seating and shade structures**
Community feedback indicated a need for shaded seating and gathering spaces. Install picnic table seating and shade structures that could be used as a gathering area for caregivers, multi-generational gatherings, and community gatherings.

6. **Plant trees to serve as barrier**
Vehicles park along the side of the access road, killing the small plants and creating muddy conditions, instead of driving into the park and parking in the provided parking lot. Trees will serve as a natural barrier along the access road and guide park visitors to the parking lot.

7. **Install Bike Share Station**
Transportation & Environmental Services is considering installing a Bike Share station near the Cameron Run bike trail. This station would provide a needed connection point in the bike share network along the busy Cameron Run bike trail. The selected location will need to allow a vehicle to access the station to "rebalance" bikes between stations.

8. **Improve park access from Eisenhower Avenue**
Provide safe and accessible pedestrian and bike crossings into the park. This may include additional crosswalks, updating existing crosswalks to high visibility, an improved intersection, and shortened crossing distance through installation of refuge islands or realigning the crosswalks.
A transportation analysis will be coordinated by Transportation and Environmental Services.

9. **Mark the loop trail with a ¼ mile sign**
The new loop trail around the lake is ¼ mile long. Mark the trail to indicate the length.

10. **Evaluate park needs based on use since renovation**
The area around the lake was extensively renovated in 2018 as part of a stormwater retrofit project. Evaluate use and park needs since the renovation, paying particular attention to school groups, fishing patterns, and neighborhood use.

11. **Explore partnerships with NOVA Parks for bathroom access**
Community feedback indicated a desire for bathrooms or port-a-johns to be installed in the park. Explore partnerships and signage with NOVA Parks to provide a bathroom for park users at Cameron Run Regional Park.

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Which of the following existing proposed park elements do you love, like, or not like?

Recommendation	Natural play features	
Number of responses	25	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	18	72
I like it	6	24
I don't like it	1	4

Recommendation	Bat house	
Number of responses	26	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	19	73
I like it	5	19
I don't like it	2	8

Recommendation	Invasive species	
Number of responses	25	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	22	88
I like it	2	8
I don't like it	1	4

Recommendation	Native trees	
Number of responses	25	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	25	100
I like it	0	0
I don't like it	0	0

Recommendation	Shaded seating	
Number of responses	26	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	21	81
I like it	5	19
I don't like it	0	0

Recommendation	Trees	
Number of responses	26	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	24	92
I like it	2	8
I don't like it	0	0

Recommendation	Capital Bikeshare	
Number of responses	26	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	10	38
I like it	14	54
I don't like it	2	8

Recommendation	Park access	
Number of responses	25	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	16	64
I like it	8	32
I don't like it	1	4

Recommendation	Trail loop marking	
Number of responses	26	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	15	58
I like it	10	38
I don't like it	1	4

Recommendation	Park evaluation	
Number of responses	22	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	13	59
I like it	8	36
I don't like it	1	5

Recommendation	Partnerships	
Number of responses	23	
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	9	39
I like it	3	13
I don't like it	11	48

In the summer of 2019 RPCA staff collected community feedback on the draft recommendations for improving this pocket park. The following information summarizes what was heard through online surveys and community feedback (see appendix for full results). Over 700 responses were collected in total, 26 of which were specific to Lake Cook Pocket Park.

Based on information from the summer input phase, staff updated the plan to best represent current and future community needs. A major change from the draft plan is the additional recommendation of a water station for drinking and water access. The Bikeshare Station location was moved to better connect with the Eisenhower Avenue Trail. Additionally, the recommendation for seeking partnerships with NOVA parks was removed as a result of community feedback.

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Improvement Recommendations

1. **Install nature inspired play features**
Community feedback indicated a desire for additional opportunities for children to play in the park. Install a playground with nature inspired features for children of all ages. Locate the playspace outside of the Resource Protection Area.

2. **Install a bat house**
Community feedback indicated a desire to enhance nature throughout the park and to control insects naturally. Bats are an important part of the ecosystem, they eat mosquitoes and other insects, and act as pollinators. Install a bat house to attract bats to the park and add education signage. Work with the Natural Resources Division to ensure the bat house is installed in an appropriate location.

3. **Plant native trees in wooded areas**
Plant sapling native trees in the wooded areas around the park, which will over time, replace trees that decline naturally. Evaluate the plantings around the lake and throughout the park and supplement as needed.

4. **Add seating and shade structures**
Community feedback indicated a need for shaded seating and gathering spaces. Install picnic table seating and shade structures that could be used as a gathering area for caregivers, multi-generational gatherings, and community gatherings.

5. **Plant trees to serve as barrier**
Vehicles park along the side of the access road, killing the small plants and creating muddy conditions, instead of driving into the park and parking in the provided parking lot. Plant trees to serve as a natural barrier along the access road and guide park visitors to the parking lot.

6. **Evaluate park program needs based on use since renovation**
The area around the lake was extensively renovated in 2018 as part of a stormwater retrofit project. Evaluate use and park needs since the renovation, paying attention to school groups, fishing patterns, and neighborhood use.

7. **Mark the loop trail with a ¼ mile sign**
The new loop trail around the lake is ¼ mile long. Mark the trail to indicate the length.

8. **Install Bike Share Station and bike parking**
Transportation & Environmental Services is installing a Bikeshare station between Lake Cook and Cameron Run Regional Park. This station provides a needed connection point in the bike share network along the Eisenhower Avenue trail. Install bike parking to encourage bike use to the park.

9. **Improve park access from Eisenhower Avenue**
Provide safe and accessible pedestrian and bike crossings into the park. This may include additional crosswalks, updating existing crosswalks to high visibility, an improved intersection, and shortened crossing distance through installation of refuge islands or realigning the crosswalks. Transportation & Environmental Services to coordinate a transportation analysis.

10. **Add water access**
Add water access for both a drinking (and bottle filler) and hand washing.

11. **Add a rules and regulations sign**
Add a rules and regulations sign to inform park users of the park's rules.

12. **Invasive species management**
The Natural Resources Division to continue to manage invasive species in the park as part of its operating program.

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Recommendations and Rankings		
Recommendation	**Ranking**	**Cost**
Play features		
Bat house		
Native trees		
Seating and shade structure		
Tree barrier		
Evaluate park needs		
Trail logo markings		
Bikeshare station		
Park access		
Water access		
Rules and regulations sign		
Invasive species management		
Bike parking		

DRAFT - WILL BE UPDATED IN FEBRUARY 2020