

PROCESS

The Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities began a multi-year process to develop a Citywide Large Park Improvement Plan in summer 2012. The goal of this initiative is to study and understand the existing conditions and future needs for Alexandria's parks that are over 20-acres, municipally owned, and have multiple uses. The Citywide Parks include: **Ben Brenman and Armistead L. Boothe parks**, **Chinquapin Park**, **Four Mile Run Park**, **Joseph Hensley Park**, **Holmes Run Park System**, and **Simpson Stadium Park**. These parks serve as vital open spaces for our community, providing recreational opportunities, areas for picnics and relaxation, and ecological benefits to the City. Through the Citywide Large Park Improvement Plan, RPCA intends to determine budgeting priorities and recommendations for both short and long term incremental improvements, ensuring the Parks serve Alexandria's needs now and into the future.

From May through the end of June 2013, City of Alexandria Park Planning staff invited the public to review the draft Park Improvement Plans. These draft plans were constructed based on the findings of the 2011 Needs Assessment and community input received in the fall and winter of 2012/13 regarding existing conditions and possible future uses for the City's Large Parks.

Throughout the summer of 2013 we will be finalizing each Park's Improvement Plan prior to going before the Park and Recreation Commission and City Council in late Fall. Ultimately, these plans will create a long range vision for our large parks and will help inform budget decisions and on-going use and facility considerations.

The Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA) engaged in multiple methods to receive input from diverse groups of park users, including: public workshops on each park's draft plan, hosting online surveys, distributing hard copies of the survey to neighboring businesses, institutions, residences and park users.

Additional feedback was received during "mobile workshops" at Alexandria's farmers markets and community businesses and institutions. All in all, 147 citizens responded to the surveys and over 170 citizens attended workshops during this phase of the Improvement Plan process.

As part of the surveys and workshops, we asked citizens what they liked about the plans, what they believed could be improved, and which proposed improvements they would prioritize. The lists provided in this document summarize the feedback on improvements that received the highest number of comments for each park. RPCA acknowledges that the responses from the workshops and surveys belong to a sample of park users and are not necessarily representative of all users. For this reason, the information on the following pages will be supplemented with further site observations, data analysis, and staff feedback to inform the final Park Improvement Plans. A full report of all feedback received throughout the process will be included in the final plans.

Thank you for your participation in this process and your enthusiasm for Alexandria's parks.



The feedback is aggregated from the following outreach methods:

- Public Feedback Workshop at Samuel Tucker School – May 29, 2013
- West End Farmers’ Market Workshop – June 16, 2013
- St. Martin de Porres Senior Services Center Feedback Workshop – June 27, 2013
- Ben Brenman and Boothe Parks Survey (online and hard copies) – May 9, 2013 thru June 30, 2013

Consistent themes throughout the community feedback include:

Light Dog Park (Push-Button Activated, Timed) & Light Bridge Exit (Motion-Sensor Activated): *“Great for cooler months” “[This improves] safety” “I want to request that you reconsider this approach”*

While the majority of feedback was in favor of installing lights in the South, secluded area of Brenman Park, many survey and workshop participants voiced serious concerns over the effectiveness of push-button or motion-sensor activated lighting for the area. Safety issues could arise during whatever time elapses before a park user can activate the lighting. Considering that dog park users visit the site throughout the year, participants argued for more predictable and continuous lighting that would not be easily tampered with or in constant need of repair.

Renovate courts and install natural play features to create picnic activity center: *“The current picnic area is unattractive, in disrepair, and under-utilized.”*

There was a general consensus that the plan should prioritize the improvements to the picnic area at the South side of Brenman Park. This area, as much of the feedback indicated, is in dire need of renovation and re-design before it can become a safe and comfortable space for activities.

Improve connections to Holmes Run trails: *“More connectivity=more people=safety in numbers”*

One of the goals of the Framework Plan for the City’s six largest parks is to foster an interconnected system of open spaces. The feedback from the surveys and workshops affirmed the value of this goal, especially as a means of creating safer parks. Participants noted that creating better connectivity between the Holmes Run trails and Brenman Park would increase visibility along the trails and, thus, create a safer environment for pedestrians.

Reserve space for future community center: *“Please preserve this open space.” “Need to better understand why this is needed.”*

Many people who participated in the Brenman and Boothe survey and workshops expressed concern over the location of the proposed community center. The majority of the participants placed a high value on the passive open space at Brenman and averred that the location of the proposed community center is well-utilized by neighborhood kids, youth teams, and the park’s passive users. While many completely opposed the idea, some participants were supportive if it were a small facility that met certain needs in the area, or were ambivalent and wanted more information on the future community center’s size, uses, and purpose.¹

Build Multimodal bridge across tracks to Eisenhower Avenue²: *“This is THE change that really excites me.”*

Much of the feedback was in support of building a multimodal bridge connecting to Eisenhower Avenue. Many participants noted how the proposed bridge would create a convenient route to the Van Dorn Metro for residents near Brenman and Boothe.

Additional Feedback included:

- Stairway should be built from the South Side of Duke Street to existing overpass on Duke Street.
- Install new grills near Picnic center at Brenman
- Add better signage throughout the parks
- Keep access to the creek on the South/East corner of Brenman
- Repave the Cameron Station path
- Separate bike trails from pedestrian paths
- Add benches to the Northern passive space area at Brenman
- Add water fountains



1 A community building at this location was originally proposed in the 1998 Ben Brenman Park plan. Any new building in this park would require a special use permit with extensive public review and approval by the Planning Commission and City Council.

2 A Multimodal bridge is part of the 2009 Landmark Small Area Plan.

The feedback is aggregated from the following outreach methods:

- Public Feedback Workshop at Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill – June 5, 2013
- TC Williams Garden Club Feedback Meeting – June 12, 2013
- Chinquapin Survey (online and hard copies) – May 9, 2013 thru June 30, 2013



Consistent themes throughout the community feedback include:

Convert athletic field to artificial turf (non-regulation size): “Why not regulation size?” “Why turf if non-regulation size?”

The general consensus from the surveys and the workshops was that the proposed plan did not adequately accommodate sports activities. Participants noted that the one non-regulation size, athletic field included in the draft plan would be insufficient and unusable for many of the T.C. Williams and City teams in need of space. Much of the feedback we received suggested allocating a larger and more central space in the park for sports activities and leaving the park’s perimeter as an open area for passive uses.

Construct ¼ mile marked walking loop to ring passive open space: “Great idea!” “Would be great to be able to safely walk the course”

From the surveys and workshops, we heard a lot of excitement for a marked walking trail around the park. Given that many people already walk around the existing Chinquapin loop, many participants were certain that a walking trail separate from vehicular traffic would improve park usage. However, there was concern that the walking loop would segment the park’s large, central open space, which many felt should accommodate athletic fields.

Complete loop around the community garden: “I see no need for this” “single entrance is adequate”

The majority of community gardeners who participated in the workshops or took the survey were concerned about completing the road loop around the community garden. Gardeners noted that the road could bring unnecessary traffic around the garden and make it easier for people to dump unwanted materials in the woods bordering the garden plots.

Plant Public Grove Reflective of Historic Neighborhood Grid: “Very High Maintenance” “Would love to see more native plants.” “Like this idea a lot”

There was a mix of reactions to the idea of placing a public grove adjacent to the community garden. Many participants agreed that access to gardening opportunities at Chinquapin needed to be increased but were not convinced that the proposed public grove was the appropriate means for doing so. The consensus was a large fruit or nut grove would be very difficult to maintain. Participants suggested adding a smaller grove or garden, possibly with native plant species, that could be easily managed and maintained by a community group.

Additional Feedback included:

- Add interpretive/history trail
- Add native trees
- Consider moving parking near TC Williams
- Add more lighting around Park

The feedback is aggregated from the following outreach methods:

- Public Feedback Workshop at Cora Kelly Recreation Center – May 15, 2013
- Mobile workshop at Four Mile Farmers' Market and neighboring businesses – May 15, 2013
- Del Ray Farmers Market Workshop – June 15, 2013
- First Thursday Del Ray Workshop – June 20, 2013
- Four Mile Run Park Survey (online and hard copies) – May 9, 2013 thru June 30, 2013

Consistent themes throughout the community feedback include:

Relocate and Fence Dog Area: *"My Dog will be happy." "...it's a good way to get to know your neighbors."*

The majority of survey and workshop participants expressed excitement for a fenced dog park at Four Mile Run Park. Participants noted how the fenced dog park would be a great place for nearby dog owners to meet each other. The dog park's year-round use would increase the sense of safety at Four Mile Run Park. There was also a general consensus that the dog park should be located close to parking but away from the playground. Participants stated that the proposed dog park could be made better with additional shade, suitable surfaces, and adequate amenities.

Add new hard and soft trails: *"Absolute Must...These connections are crucial to make the park attractive and more accessible."*

Workshop participants noted that better accessibility within Four Mile Run Park was as a clear concern. The feedback on the draft plan showed that many park users liked the idea of a trail along the water's edge giving visitors access to the water and wetland area. However, respondents also expressed a major concern for the preservation of the natural resources along the proposed trail. Any trail would be designed for very low intrusion so as not to degrade the parks' precious wetlands.

Improve perimeter trees to create "green alleys": *"More trees are always good"* *"improves effect of green space"*

There was a general consensus that planting "green alleys" along Four Mile Run Park's western edge would create an aesthetically pleasing buffer between the residential neighborhood and park. Additional trees would also increase the quality of the entire park. Some respondents stated the importance of planting the trees in a manner that maintains the neighborhood's and police visibility of the park.

Add Adult Fitness Equipment: *"People would definitely use it"*

Although not included in the original draft plan, many participants from every feedback method felt that Four Mile Run Park would be a great place for adult fitness equipment. It was suggested that these fitness stations could be used by the active people taking the trail and could draw pedestrians to the park.

Establish new community garden: *"Lots of advantages"* *"This needs to be approached very carefully"*

While many citizens liked the idea of establishing a community garden, there were concerns about the garden's design and management. Citizens were concerned that the garden would take up too much of the park's limited passive space and would not be well-integrated with the rest of the park. The feedback showed the need for considering the proper management that would ensure the gardens are well kept and accessible to as many residents as possible.



Additional Feedback included:

- Add lighting throughout the park
- Add water fountains and restroom access
- Separate playground and the dog park
- Plant more trees
- Consolidating the playground and courts is a good idea
- Accommodate pick-up soccer near the consolidated play courts



Despite efforts to obtain community feedback, including online, hard-copy distribution, posted signs, and communication through athletic coaches, Park Planning only received nine completed surveys on the Hensley Park draft plan. There were no community member participants for the workshop on the Hensley Park draft plan, which was held on June 19, 2013 at the Lee Center.

Here are some of the comments and suggestions from the surveys we received:

- *Add playground or play features in order to accommodate children during picnics and events at Hensley*
- *Consider having additional temporary restroom facilities available at programmed fields during big weekend events*
- *Include drink-vending machines and concession stand space*
- *Create multiple entrance/exit points to park*
- *Expanding parking is a priority*



The feedback is aggregated from the following outreach methods:

- Public Feedback Workshop at Samuel Tucker School – May 21, 2013
- West End Farmers’ Market Workshop – June 16, 2013
- St. Martin de Porres Senior Services Center Feedback Workshop – June 27, 2013
- Holmes Run Survey – May 9, 2013 thru June 30, 2013

Consistent themes throughout the community feedback include:

Install bridge to connect all veterans park to Charles Beatley library: *“Great idea..” “this would be welcomed”*

This was a very popular point on the draft plan considering how secluded All Veterans Park is from the rest of the Park system. Many of the survey and workshop participants saw the bridge as an effective means of increasing visibility and use of All Veteran’s Park.

Remove invasive species: *“Yes, a very good idea, much needed and overdue” “Too clogged now - great idea” “Current setup is a missed opportunity”*

In the Fall community workshops, many citizens expressed the need for greater access to the waterway at Holmes Run. The great majority of those who participated in the feedback surveys and workshops stated that removing the outgrowth of invasive species is an invaluable step in establishing this access. Many participants also voiced their desire to see a healthier Holmes Run stream corridor through the removal of invasive plants.

Improve flood control for trail underpasses: *“Much needed...” “Anything that can address the frequent flooding...will be an improvement.”*

There was general consensus that improving the flood control for trail underpasses should be a priority in the Holmes Run Park System Plan.

Install lights on Beatley Bridge: *“Security” “Needed safety/security feature.” “Just have the lights be modest and understated...”*

There has been much concern about safety and the need for lights along the parts of the trail frequented by commuters. Feedback was generally supportive of lights on Beatley Bridge, but some were concerned that it might attract unwanted attention. Others requested additional lighting from Beatley Bridge through to N. Pickett St. Some form of subtle lighting, such as solar, was also suggested.

Add wayfinding & mile markers along existing path: *“Yay safety.” “A great safety addition to the trails system...” “Nice to have mile markers.”*

The feedback from the surveys and workshops showed wide support for adding wayfinding signage and mile markers along the existing path on the North side of the Holmes Run Park System. Many of the participants felt that wayfinding & mile markers would help park users orient themselves in the park and significantly increase the sense of safety at Holmes Run.²

Additional Feedback included:

- Take anti-graffiti and possibly public art approach to making the Duke St tunnel more inviting
- Install water fountains along the trail
- Create a separate path to the Bicentennial Tree
- Increase recreation programming at the park
- Add more lighting

² Since the public outreach process began, RPCA installed mile markers with solar lighting features along the Holmes Run Park Trail.



The feedback is aggregated from the following outreach methods:

- Public Feedback Workshop at Mount Vernon Recreation Center – June 12, 2013
- Del Ray Farmers Market Workshop – June 15, 2013
- First Thursday Del Ray Workshop – June 20, 2013
- Simpson Survey (online and hard copies) – May 9, 2013 thru June 30, 2013

Consistent themes throughout the community feedback include:

Improve Dog Park to include Lighting, Terraced Hill, Trees, and Play Features: *“Great improvements to space!”*

Many of survey and workshop participants were happy about the proposed improvements to the dog park and explicitly stated that this is their top priority in the plan.

Encourage use of forty five total on-street parking spaces along E Monroe: *“Good idea but probably nowhere near enough spaces”* *“This is a priority”*

Though participants liked the idea of encouraging the use of existing on-street parking spaces, many felt that there are just not enough parking spaces to accommodate the park’s many users. There was a general consensus that the plan needs to better address issues related to parking and traffic management at Simpson. The public feedback indicated the need for measures that differentiate the park user parking from non-park user parking surrounding Simpson, in response to park users and neighbors being unable to find parking.

Improve plantings and fixtures in passive use areas: *“We need to make sure Simpson Park has something for everyone...”* *“should not inhibit ball/frisbee tossing”*

This improvement received a lot of support across the board. Participants saw this improvement as a great means to improve usage of the site and increase the overall community value of the park. Investing in the passive use areas would strike a better balance of activities at the park. Participants averred that the plantings and fixtures should be installed as to allow as much usable, open space for passive recreation as possible.

Adjust playground borders, improve entrances, add natural play: *“Natural Play!”* *“The playground is used heavily throughout the year.”*

Improvement to the playground was a clear priority to many of the workshop and survey participants. The feedback showed a lot of support for adding natural play features to the playground and creating safer and more accessible entrances.



Additional Feedback included:

- Improve access to playing fields when not in use by teams
- Fix drainage issues at the passive spaces
- Improve trash and recycling planning
- Create better park entrances (signage, landscaping)
- Add turf, shade, and amenities to soccer fields*

* As part of a Potomac Yard Development condition, the soccer fields are reserved as a site for a future school. Alexandria City Public School System (ACPS) will be evaluating the need for the site as part of their upcoming Long Range Facilities Master Plan (FY 14-FY 15).