

Arlington Forest Community Association (AFCA)

Resolution of the September 10, 2014 AFCA Meeting Passed by a vote of 40 to 3

WHEREAS, current county planning processes, including the Capital Improvement Plan and “Public Land for Public Good,” propose to use county-owned parks, open space, and recreation facilities for other purposes;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, THAT AFCA’s officers are authorized to provide the following formal response to the county’s [draft Public Land Site Evaluation guidelines](#).

AFCA response to the draft Public Land Site Evaluation Guidelines

We appreciate the opportunity to submit feedback to the draft Public Land Site Evaluation Guidelines (the “Guidelines”). The Arlington Forest Citizens’ Association urges the county to make the following modifications to the draft Guidelines to help ensure that the document, and the decisions of our county government regarding the use of our public lands, are consistent with long-standing county policy and strong Arlington community support for parks, recreation centers and park-like green spaces.

Requested Change 1: Add the following language as a new paragraph between the existing first and second paragraphs under the heading “Application of Site Evaluation Guidelines”:

Notwithstanding the foregoing paragraph, it is county’s intent to preserve county-owned parks, recreation facilities, park-like green spaces, and land purchased or donated for such purposes, for use as parks, recreation centers and green space. Such land and facilities shall not be used for purposes other than parks, recreation centers and green space.

While recognizing the importance, and challenge, of balancing community needs in utilizing county-owned property, Arlington residents have repeatedly and consistently conveyed their priority concern to preserve and expand the parks, recreation centers and park-like green space in our increasingly urbanized county. This is evidenced by the passage of every parks and recreation bond referendum

since 1980 with a majority of no less than 64 percent and by the thousands of people who use our parks, recreation facilities and green spaces every day.

Requested Change 2: The existing second paragraph under the heading “Application of Site Evaluation Guidelines” limits the application of the Guidelines to addressing the issue of “feasibility” of a site already determined to be the “best location” for a proposed use or uses. Determination of the “best location” for a proposed use or uses should itself be subject to the “Arlington Way” with appropriate public participation and input. No site should be selected as the “best location” for a use if that use is not feasible on the site. These Guidelines should either expressly confirm that principle (and other county processes should implement that principle) or the process created by these Guidelines should be broadened to encompass both site selection as well as site feasibility.

Requested change 3: Add an additional Primary Goal:

Continue the county’s long-standing policy to preserve, enhance and expand county parks, recreation centers and other public open space assets and to carefully maintain active and passive recreation areas and open space in neighborhoods and metro corridors.

This has been county policy since at least 1992 when the County Board adopted the county’s Open Space Policy. This policy is implemented through the Public Spaces Master Plan and the Natural Resources Management Plan.

Requested change 4: Add an additional item in Site Evaluation Process and Criteria between the current steps items 1 and 2:

In keeping with the county’s Open Space Policy and the county’s Comprehensive Plan, the County Board and the County Manager will preserve existing county-held natural spaces and parkland and will maintain county parks and recreation facilities as public spaces accessible to the entire community.

Recent county government proposals to develop parks and open/natural space have created an “either or” situation that pits citizens concerned about parks and recreation against citizens who are equally concerned about other issues. This is divisive to our community and is upsetting citizens who feel they are being compelled to choose between important community goals. This is an artificial and

unnecessary conflict. Arlington County has sufficient resources and creativity to maintain and expand our parkland and recreation sites while simultaneously supporting separate programs to address other needs.

Requested change 5: Add “surrounding communities” in Site Evaluation Process and Criteria item 4.b. The sentence would read

The composition of this group should include both representatives from the property’s immediate *and surrounding communities* and representatives who have a County-wide perspective.

The effect of major development can and is felt beyond the immediate civic association in which the development is planned, particularly when the proposed development is at or near a boundary. Citizens whose schools, recreation, commute, or livelihood may be affected by a proposed development are also stakeholders and should also have an opportunity to participate in the planning process.

Requested change 6: Add the following to Site Evaluation Process and Criteria item 4.c.:

The county will actively publicize such opportunities through outreach to citizens associations, PTAs, and other stakeholder groups as well as through publication in The Citizen, the Sun Gazette, ArlNow.com and other appropriate media.

Recently many Arlington citizens have been surprised and upset by county actions that were supposedly developed in consultative processes. Ensuring that the public is aware of opportunities participate in planning processes will result in greater buy-in.

Requested change 7: Add the following to Site Evaluation Process and Criteria item 6.c.:

iv. The replacement cost and any additional environmental or recreational value of the property.

Land isn’t free. Other than land that was donated for parks and recreation, our parks and recreation facilities were and are largely purchased or constructed through bond issues explicitly designated for and supported by the voters for this

purpose. Land needed for other purposes should follow the same process. Failure to recognize the full value of these properties when making land use decisions conveys that parkland has no value to the county except for its capacity to host development. This inherent bias will always favor development of parkland over preservation or restoration.

Requested Extension of Time to Comment

In addition to our substantive comments to the Guidelines above, we feel that this entire PL4PG process, including the request for comments on these Guidelines, has been handled on an unreasonably expedited basis that has precluded the type of broad-based and deliberate community wide input that this type of policy change and the “Arlington Way” requires.

The County Board’s December 2013 resolution directing a review by the County Manager of all County-owned properties was passed without such broad-based input. The County Manager’s PL4PG Housing Report and the simultaneous PLPG Schools Memo were drafted and issued without broad-based community input. And here again, these proposed Public Land Site Evaluations guidelines have been issued during the height of the summer vacation season without appreciable notice to the public and with only a limited time for the community to assess and review them.

We believe the county government should make a proactive effort to publicize the existence of this document and the opportunity for the public to provide feedback. In the meantime, the deadline for the submission of comments should be extended. Doing so will create an opportunity for the community and county government to work together to develop guidelines that are more consistent with the best interests of our community. That is the Arlington Way.