



ARLINGTON COUNTY  
SPORTS COMMISSION  
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Sports Commission Comments on the FY 19 Budget

The Sports Commission appreciates the opportunity to comment on the County Manager's proposed FY Budget. This statement also includes input from the Aquatics Committee. In this difficult budget year, the Commission appreciates the thoughtful work that staff and the County Manager have put into developing this budget proposal.

The Sports Commission and Aquatics Committee would like to emphasize that Arlingtonians appreciate having access to a wide range of sports and recreational amenities and opportunities, which are important factors in making Arlington a vibrant place to work and live. While there are many competing needs, County residents expect the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to provide reasonable and appropriate access to quality sports and recreational programs and facilities. We hope and trust that the Board will continue to provide adequate funding for sports and recreational activities.

Sports Programming Adds Revenue; Private Leagues Save Taxpayers Money

Sports and recreational programming in Arlington is handled both by DPR and by private/affiliated leagues. These activities produce revenue for the County -- total projected FY 2019 revenue from class fees, user fees, rental fees, and other sources, is about \$10 million, or almost 25% of DPR's total projected expenditures.

Moreover, a large portion of sports programming requires no County funding for personnel or overhead. Private/affiliated leagues handle their own registration and do their own scheduling, placing no demand on DPR for administration or instructors/coaches.

At the same time, the leagues are spending more time and money than ever before to meet the sports programming demands of County residents. The leagues are strong partners with DPR through the Adopt-a-Field program, using their own funds for smaller scale upgrades/improvement as well as for maintenance supplies and equipment and they donate thousands of volunteer hours to help take care of the fields. And more recently, the Arlington Sports Foundation has partnered with DPR and the leagues to help fund a large scale improvement at the Gunston softball field.

Sports Commission Supports the County Manager's Proposed Budget

The Sports Commission supports the County Manager's proposed FY 2019 budget as it relates to sports programming and facilities. In a tough budget year, we think DPR was asked for a reasonable but not excessive contribution to the budget shortfall. While one never likes to see cuts made that directly impact employees, we believe DPR arrived at its suggested cuts in a thoughtful manner.

In terms of non-personnel adjustments, the Sports Commission supports the proposed fee increases for short-term rentals, tournament hosting fees, aquatics and gymnastics team fees, and the realignment of other camp and class offerings. The Commission also supports the elimination of the boxing program and boxing ring at Barcroft, and we agree with DPR that this space could be put to better use.

The Aquatics Committee is generally supportive of justified fee increases, but it does not believe that sufficient analysis has been done at this time to support an increase to the aquatics fee. Specifically, it has concerns that the cost sharing agreement between DPR and APS has not been examined in quite some time, and it believes that DPR's annual transfer should be increased. The Aquatics Committee believes that further analysis of the cost sharing arrangement and an appropriate adjustment of DPR's contributions would negate the need for any fee increases.

#### Additional Opportunities Exist to Increase Revenue and Save Money

Sports participants have generally been willing to pay extra to ensure their continued access to County athletic facilities. Thus, there may be opportunities to collect additional revenue from existing users, begin revenue collection from other users, trade facilities maintenance for in-kind advertising, and further reduce personnel costs.

- Field user fees are currently earmarked for future field improvement projects. DPR could consider a modest increase in these fees. Because the budget for field maintenance has been drastically reduced since FY 2010, DPR could direct that a portion of existing fees or any fee increase would be used for field maintenance. Any user fees that are routed toward maintenance should add to rather than supplant existing maintenance dollars.
- While sports field users are charged a user fee, such fees are not assessed on users of the County's dog parks or the skate park. Skate park user fees were discontinued several years ago due to personnel costs for staffing the facility. To improve equity across users and help reduce the taxpayer's burden for supporting dog parks and the skate park or similar venues that may exist, DPR could institute membership fees for these facilities. These fees could be linked to an access card which enables user to gain entry to the facility.
- DPR could consider out-sourcing certain maintenance activities to local businesses in exchange for signage/advertising opportunities. For example, over the last 8 years, repeated cuts have been made to the field mowing budget, reducing both the months during the year when fields are mowed and the number of times they are mowed. Field maintenance and mowing could be outsourced to any of several local lawn care companies in exchange for advertising/sponsorship opportunities. Similarly, cuts have been made that have resulted in many park restrooms being closed during winter months. Our commission requested that funding be restored in FY 2018 to open the restrooms at Greenbrier Park. This was not done, and instead one of the private leagues paid to have portable toilets made available at this facility. To the extent that the closures are related to restroom upkeep, cleaning and maintenance could also be outsourced to in exchange for signage/advertising opportunities.

- Given that personnel costs consistently represent about 70% of DPR's total expenditures, DPR might want to consider turning over more sports programming to private organizations. Experience has shown that private leagues may do a somewhat better job in running sports programs since they are user driven and may therefore be more directly responsive to their customers. A change of this nature would allow DPR to focus more on classes, camps, and facilities maintenance.

#### Longer Term Issues Warrant County Board Attention

The Sports Commission is concerned about longer-term issues that have a budgetary impact and warrant County Board attention.

- Field maintenance funds are already at a bare bones level. As DPR takes steps to open up previously locked diamond fields to respond to community requests for access, the maintenance needs on these fields will be compounded. While permitted users pay a user fee, there is no mechanism to collect any user fee from a casual drop-in user. Thus, the County Board will need to give serious consideration to increasing DPR's field maintenance budget.
- The current approach for addressing any urgent maintenance or misuse issues on County fields falls to the DPR Rovers. DPR currently uses contracted personnel for these activities, but the Rovers are likely to face increasingly challenging issues as DPR turns previously locked fields into open, community assets. There is high turnover among these contractors, limiting the extent to which DPR can really "get to know" the situation on the ground. The Board should consider funding a larger and higher quality Rover program.
- There is unrelenting pressure on DPR and the County Board to open up more casual use space, including by eliminating fields or providing open access/shared use on existing fields. The Sports Commission is stringently opposed to eliminating fields. We do, however, support maximizing the effective use of existing fields and acquiring land for new fields and open spaces. However, all of these steps will require funding. The Sports Commission believes that there are additional opportunities for public-private cooperation similar to the Gunston project, but these would be greatly facilitated by loosening up some of the sponsorship/naming/signage policies that may currently restrict private donations.