



ARLINGTON COUNTY  
SPORTS COMMISSION  
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 414  
Arlington, Virginia 22201



September 19, 2018

The Honorable Katie Cristol, Chair  
Arlington County Planning Commission  
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Four Mile Run Valley Park Master Plan and Design Guidelines

Dear Ms. Cristol,

The Arlington County Sports Commission would like to provide input on the Four Mile Run Valley (4MRV) Policy Park Master Plan (PMP) and Design Guidelines. This letter updates our May 18 letter to the County Board.

Our Commission was represented on the 4MRV Working Group (WG). Our primary interest in the project is the renovation of Jennie Dean Park and the possible addition of future sports and recreational amenities in the study area. For the reasons outlined below, the Sports Commission strongly supports the PMP and associated Design Guidelines and urges the County Board to adopt them as presented.

### **Improvements to Jennie Dean Park Will Enhance a Valuable Community Asset**

Jennie Dean Park is a valuable community asset that will be significantly improved through implementation of the PMP. Jennie Dean Park is an important location for sports in Arlington, and upgrades to this park are long overdue. At one time the sole park for Arlington's African American residents, Jennie Dean Park's connection to sports dates back over a century. The Sports Commission deeply appreciates the work that has been done to document the park's sports and recreational history, and strongly endorses efforts to capture and reflect this history in park signage. Today, Jennie Dean Park serves thousands of Arlingtonians playing softball, baseball, basketball, tennis, and other field-based sports.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) registers about 1,600 adult softball players in the Spring and about 1,450 in the Fall, 90% of which meet Arlington residency requirements. There are also several private leagues that rent fields from DPR to run softball programs for Arlington adult residents. Arlington Babe Ruth and Arlington Little League jointly register about 3,000 players each Spring and about 1,500 players each Fall. The Arlington Girls Softball Association registers about 500 players in its Spring season. While registration data is not available for tennis and basketball players, anecdotal information indicates that Arlington's public basketball and tennis courts are heavily used on weekday afternoons and evenings and all day on the weekends.

The Sports Commission endorses the following sports-related improvements:

- Replacing and upgrading the two diamond fields to improve orientation, safety, playability, drainage, and access, as well as user and spectator accommodations.
- Upgrading the tennis and basketball courts to adhere to current County standards with respect to court surface, fencing, drainage, and other playability measures while also adding extra seating, shade, water fountains, and trash receptacles.
- Upgrading all sports amenity lights to take advantage of the most current technology while simultaneously reducing glare and spillover.
- Increasing flexibility for sports users by planning for rectangular field play in the softball outfield.
- Increasing community access to the fields through a more open fence design while still addressing safety concerns.

The Sports Commission further endorses the manner in which the PMP creates contiguous casual use open space in Jennie Dean Park. We note that such expansion is made possible, in part, through the County's acquisition of property east of Nelson Street, and we encourage the Board to follow through on every opportunity to acquire additional properties as they become available in order to fully implement the PMP's vision. It is only through such acquisition that the Board's original charge to replace all of the park's existing recreational amenities can be met (i.e., reinstating the second tennis court).

The Commission supports other key elements of the PMP, including improved gateways, pathways, signage, and wayfinding; better accessibility and compliance with ADA standards; upgraded and expanded playground spaces and picnic areas; improved stormwater management and treatment of the Resource Protection Area; increased access to Four Mile Run; and preservation and expansion of the tree canopy and other natural park elements.

### **Further Expansion of Recreational Space Near Jennie Dean Park and in the Study Area is Needed**

As noted in the PMP, there is current demand in South Arlington and the neighborhoods adjacent to the Four Mile Run Valley for additional casual use and recreational spaces beyond what is provided by Jennie Dean Park. Recent and expected demographic changes, particularly growth in the youth and Millennial populations, are expected to increase such demand. However, as the PMP notes, "due to both the narrow configuration of...land parcels owned by the County east of South Nelson Street and the direction provided by the County Board to remove the County owned parcels west of South Nelson Street from the Parks Study Area Boundary, it is not possible to meet any additional programmed park and recreation needs other than replacing the two lighted diamond fields, two lighted tennis courts, lighted basketball court, picnic shelters and playground."

The Sports Commission has previously shared its disappointment with this outcome and its hope that the Board will be open to using these properties to meet, at least in part, the demand for more park space. We are equally hopeful that there may yet be additional opportunities within and outside of Jennie Dean Park to expand recreational spaces in this part of town.

On balance, the Sports Commission believes that the PMP provides for significant improvements to the County's sports, park, casual use, and natural spaces and encourages the Board to adopt the PMP and associated guidelines. We appreciate having been a part of the 4MRV process and look forward to seeing these important changes unfold.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shirley Brothwell".

Shirley Brothwell, Chair  
Sports Commission

Cc: County Board Members  
Mark Schwartz, County Manager  
William Ross, Chair, Park and Recreation Commission  
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation