Comments of the Friends of Accotink Creek on the 2023 Fairfax County Park Authority Budget:

The Friends of Accotink Creek could provide our own letter, but everything has been more ably expressed by the experts below. We fully endorse the letter below and would only add:

- It is long past time to restore the 2008 budget cuts. The condition of facilities and standards of service in some of our parks are approaching the embarrassing level.
- Can it be true FCPA is considering converting more full-time positions to part-time? This sounds like a recipe for creating a pipeline of trained park employees -- for other jurisdictions.
- Why not instead, more full-time dedicated staff with horsepower to remove the invasives that are dominating so many of our natural areas? Photos below.
- $751,954 for natural resources? Why not $1 million or $2 million? Or more? Natural resource conservation is a vital mission that is too often a neglected stepchild in our parks. FCPA can afford to staff just 8 ecologists for its 420 parks/24,000 acres while Montgomery County has 1 ecologist per 1,000 acres.

Sincerely,
Friends of Accotink Creek : www.accotink.org :

#SaveCinderBedWoods

Springtime carpets of exotic Lesser Celandine crowd out native spring wildflowers along our streams.
Exotic Porcelainberry vines cover shrubs and trees in a horror story landscape of “mound monsters”

Compiled by Lydia Lawrence (Fairfax County NAACP), Cathy Ledec (Friends of Huntley Meadows Park Board), Renee Grebe (Audubon Naturalist Society), Cindy Speas (Lewinsville Faith in Action), and Johna Toomey (Plant NOVA Trees, Corporate Outreach)

- **Racial and social equity principles in “One Fairfax” should guide FCPA’s budget.**
  - This is particularly important in supporting the Equitable Access Program.

- **Please fully fund the Equitable Access Program for $5 million.**
  - FCPA requested $5 million for help ensure park access to residents who are not otherwise able to pay for park programming. That request was slashed 90%! That drastic underfunding would mean that programs meant to serve all of Fairfax County would continue to be inaccessible to a large number of underserved residents. That is unfair and unacceptable.

- **Please invest in protecting our parks natural resources by funding the full $751,954 requested.**
  - Our natural resources are struggling and need more support. FCPA requested $751,954 to protect the health of the trees and green space in our parks. Only 6.6% of that request was
proposed for the budget. That is beyond inadequate. That minimal and shortsighted level of funding would mean that we would continue to see natural resources in our parks decline.

- **Please retain current bond funding levels to prevent divestment in our park facilities.**
  - Bonds are a critical funding source for FCPA. However, a proposal to cut the bond cycle from every 4 years to every 6 years will result in a disastrous loss of funding for things like maintenance and repair projects. FCPA currently has infrastructure and facilities that need repairs and maintenance with an estimated cost of $500 million. This is not the time to cut funding.

The County Executive’s proposed FY23 Budget would have a disastrous adverse impact on the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA).

The FCPA’s budget has remained near 2008 levels (not adjusted for inflation), with 2008 cuts unrestored. Further, in FY2010 and 2011 the FCPA lost funding for 20 positions. While positions have been restored, the General Fund has not been increased to cover this.

Unfortunately, the current budget strategy for Fairfax County (one of the wealthiest counties in the nation) conflicts with expressed County resident priorities from the FCPA 2016 Needs Assessment Survey and prevents the FCPA from fully implementing its core mission. It also precludes effective implementation of the One Fairfax policy, leaving already disadvantaged residents continuing to be underserved.

- The pandemic has made it clear that natural, green spaces filled with trees and other native vegetation are more important than ever to our communities’ mental and physical health. Native trees are essential to reducing pollution and greenhouse gases, managing and reducing stormwater runoff, supporting local wildlife, providing social and economic benefits, reducing energy costs, and more. This is particularly acute and problematic in underserved communities, which are more vulnerable to the urban heat island effect.

- Increased funding for the FCPA, particularly in the area of natural resources management, is essential. Inflation has reduced the purchasing power of General Fund support, while FCPA land area and visitation have increased significantly. **The current FCPA General Fund allocation is only 38% of the total FCPA budget.** This is astonishingly low for a park system with 24,000 acres and 420 parks serving over 1 million residents with more than 18 million visits per year.

- Adequate funding for FCPA is also a One Fairfax issue. Historically disfavored communities rely on neighborhood parks for their well-being and recreation yet the parks closest to them are often the most neglected (e.g., Justice Park, Woodlawn Park). Additionally, FCPA has been reliant on fee-based services such as recreation centers and golf courses for over 60% of its revenue. Fee-based services exclude our most vulnerable and chronically under-served residents. Increased investment in parks is needed to keep up with the growing demand for parks, natural areas, and green spaces, and to reduce service inequities that result in FCPA services being inaccessible for too many County residents.
• In addition to a General Fund allocation, voters have historically approved about $100 million in bond funds for capital projects every 4 years. This funding has allowed up to $25 million each year for capital projects, land acquisition, and park master plans. Despite repeated pleas for more financial support, the County Executive proposes a FY23 budget that changes the bond cycle to 6 years, thus leaving the bond at only $100 million for every 6 years instead of 4. This would result in a disastrous loss of capital funding of at least $50 million every 6 years, thus reducing the projected annual cash flow from $25 million to $16.7 million.

• **One Fairfax**: FCPA requested FY23 funding of $5 million for increased implementation of the BOS-mandated One Fairfax program to increase accessibility of all programming (including fee-based programs). The County Executive proposes only $500,000, a paltry 10% of the request. Many underserved residents will continue to lack equitable access to programs.

• **Natural Resource Sustainability**: FCPA requested FY23 funding of $751,954 to implement sustainable natural resource management and to improve management of natural resources in its parks. This would benefit ALL residents, yet the County Executive only proposes $50,000 or 6.6% of the requested funding.

• **2016 FCPA Needs Assessment Survey**: This statistically valid survey of county residents clearly articulated 10-year priorities for the FCPA. The top response (57% of respondents) stated their top priority to be *preserving open space and the environment*. Yet the proposed FY23 budget and all budgets since completion of the survey in 2016 continue to underfund the clearly expressed needs of the FCPA.

We urgently call on the Board of Supervisors and County Executive to increase the FY23 FCPA budget and to include the following requested expenditures:

1. Approve $5 million to provide funds for the implementation of the One Fairfax program, with continued funding at this or higher level for FY24, FY25, FY26, and beyond.

2. Approve $751,954 to provide funds to implement sustainable natural resource management and to improve management of natural resources in Fairfax County Parks, with continued funding at this or higher level for FY24, FY25, FY26, and beyond.

3. Reject the County Executive’s proposed FY23 bond cycle change by maintaining the 4-year bond cycle and increasing this to $150 million every 4 years. This should include the option to approve an off-cycle bond issue that would cover the unfunded backlog of capital maintenance and repair projects ($250 million) in our aging FCPA buildings and infrastructure.