

September 22, 2022

Dear Members of the Fairfax County Park Authority Board:

Many thanks to all of you for your service on behalf of our Fairfax County Parks. Next to the natural and cultural resources actually comprising our parks, the people who oversee and directly care for their needs are undoubtedly the parks' most important asset. We, the below-referenced park Friends groups allied together to ensure that our parks receive their fair share of the County's taxpayer dollars, are grateful for all that you – and the hardworking Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) staff do – in acquiring, maintaining, and administering our parks.

### **Taking Care of What We Have**

#### *Staffing*

In reviewing the FCPA's budget priorities, we are pleased to see an express commitment to "taking care of what we have," i.e., those parks and FCPA assets already in hand. To do this the parks require adequate staffing. This is a basic necessity and should be foremost in budgeting priorities for the FCPA. The County's natural and cultural resources can't take care of themselves. They require people to maintain them, to interpret them, and to make them accessible to all.

As we Friends working side-by-side with FCPA "front-line" staff can attest, staff at "our" parks do a wonderful job, especially given that staffing levels and the financial resources staff are forced to work with are frequently insufficient to meet the operations and maintenance tasks at hand. Notably, their financial resourcing is also, in many cases, insufficient to meet their own personal needs when it comes to their pay and (frequent lack of) benefits. As we can further attest, this adversely affects their morale and retention. These employees who, in a manner of speaking, *are the parks* should have a certainty in knowing they have the resources to perform the tasks they are charged with fulfilling and should be able to look forward to long-term, financially sustainable careers with the FCPA. Accordingly, we assert that "taking care of what we have" includes employee compensation at competitive market rates and adding more full-time positions.

It also includes improving the FCPA's financial footing such that it can fill all of the positions it already has. Of the 87 positions in the Resource Management Division, 32 remain vacant. Nineteen of these vacancies are general fund positions, and ten of those are being advertised for fill. This leaves nine general fund positions vacant, possibly purposely so. Every year, unmet financial needs cause some positions to remain unfilled so that the funds appropriated for them by the County can be put to other use. This must stop. While it might be a common agency practice, it should not be. **Monies obligated by the County to pay for authorized positions should be used to fill those positions.** As already indicated, the FCPA needs every authorized person – and then some. We recognize that a national labor shortage may hinder the filling of every available position, but the FCPA should be positioned so that it can at least *try* to fill all those for which funding is being provided by the County.

## *Trash Containment and Removal*

We support the high prioritization for increased financial support for trash removal and forestry operations (tree maintenance) in our parks, to include stream valley parks. As we noted in our advocacy this past spring before the Board of Supervisors, visitors to some of our parks are met not with the beauty of nature, but with overflowing trash containers insufficient in their number to handle the amount of waste being generated in our well-used parks and/or deficient in the frequency with which they are emptied.

## *Forestry*

On the forestry front, we also noted last spring how appallingly below standard our County is in its financial support for managing the lands committed to its care. Whereas even a *low level* of support is typified by expenditures of \$3,000 to \$6000 per acre, our County has been far below that with historical expenditures at only \$159 dollars per managed acre. We supported last spring's increased funding for combating invasive species, and we absolutely support increased funding now for proper tree maintenance.

Properly resourcing tree maintenance has assumed an even greater importance in light of the Board of Supervisors' adoption of the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP). CECAP's Natural Resource Strategy calls for conserving and expanding the County's existing tree canopy. As the County's largest landowner, the FCPA will need a robust tree maintenance budget to do its part in supporting significant conservation and expansion of the County's existing tree canopy.

## **Equity**

We also applaud the proposed launch of mobile nature centers as well as mobile recreational and educational opportunities. It's important to make our parks accessible to all, to those without means of transportation to our parks as well as to those who simply may not know about particular parks at locations far removed from them given the County's vast size. We hope the proposed educational opportunities include not only environmental lessons relevant to the role of our parks in dealing with the current climate emergency, but also lessons in history, architecture, and science that FCPA historic sites and cultural resource collections can afford.

With many thanks, we are the Friends of –

Colvin Run Mill

Ellanor C. Lawrence Park

Fairfax County Archaeology and Cultural Resources

Frying Pan Farm Park

Green Spring Gardens (FROGS)

Historic Huntley

Holmes Run

Huntley Meadows Park

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tod S. Carnes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

TODI S. CARNES

Facilitator, Fair Parks Initiative

cc: Jeff McKay, Chairman BOS  
Laura Grape, Director FCPA RMD

September 23, 2022

CORRECTIVE ADDENDUM

Friends' Letter to the Fairfax County Park Authority Board dated 22 Sep 2022

The list of groups represented by the above-referenced letter is amended to additionally include the Friends of –

Accotink Creek

Pimmit Barn

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TODI S. CARNES  
Facilitator, Fair Parks Initiative