

Friends of Arlington Parks

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Parks for Arlington's Growing Population

Arlington's population has grown to about 210,000, an increase of more than 10% since the year 2000. Most of the population growth has been in urban corridors. Arlington's "smart growth" policy calls for concentrating density along transit corridors and fostering *urban villages* where residents can walk to shops and in many cases take the Metro to work. This policy can offer benefits as well as challenges.

One of the challenges is in providing open space to meet the needs of a growing population. There is persuasive evidence that contact with nature is important to the physical and mental well-being of urban dwellers. Lacking yards with trees, residents of urban corridors depend on parks for opportunities to be close to nature – and that means parks with trees and green space, not paved plazas.

Arlington's success in attracting businesses and residents to its urban corridors has made land expensive, adding to the difficulty of providing parks in those areas. To meet that challenge, the County needs a comprehensive land acquisition strategy, a need that has long been recognized. The Public Spaces Master Plan, adopted in 2005, said, "There is a clear need for a multifaceted approach to land acquisition that can respond to the impacts of growth and community needs." A land acquisition policy is being developed and should be ready for consideration by the County Board later this year.

In view of the limited amount of parkland along Arlington's urban corridors, it is vital to make the best possible use of existing parks. In this report, we focus on parks along the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor, where most of the recent growth has taken place. Following are reports on selected parks along the R-B Corridor.

Rosslyn

- **Gateway Park**, located above I-66 in Rosslyn, illustrates opportunities to create open space above other facilities. This is an approach that seems likely to become more important in densely



Gateway Park in Rosslyn

developed urban areas in the future. In the course of updating the Rosslyn Sector Plan in coming months, stakeholders and staff will develop a new vision for Gateway Park, and then a new park master plan will be created.

- **Hillside Park** is a wooded park at the edge of Rosslyn. Some amenities were added last year, funded through a transfer of density from the park to the nearby Parc Rosslyn project. In advising on plans for the new features, the civic association made it clear that residents' first priority was preserving the trees and keeping most of Hillside Park in a natural state. Provided invasive plants are managed adequately, Hillside Park can provide good habitat for birds and climbing animals. Rosslyn residents can observe nature in a wooded park within walking distance of home, a rare opportunity along the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor.



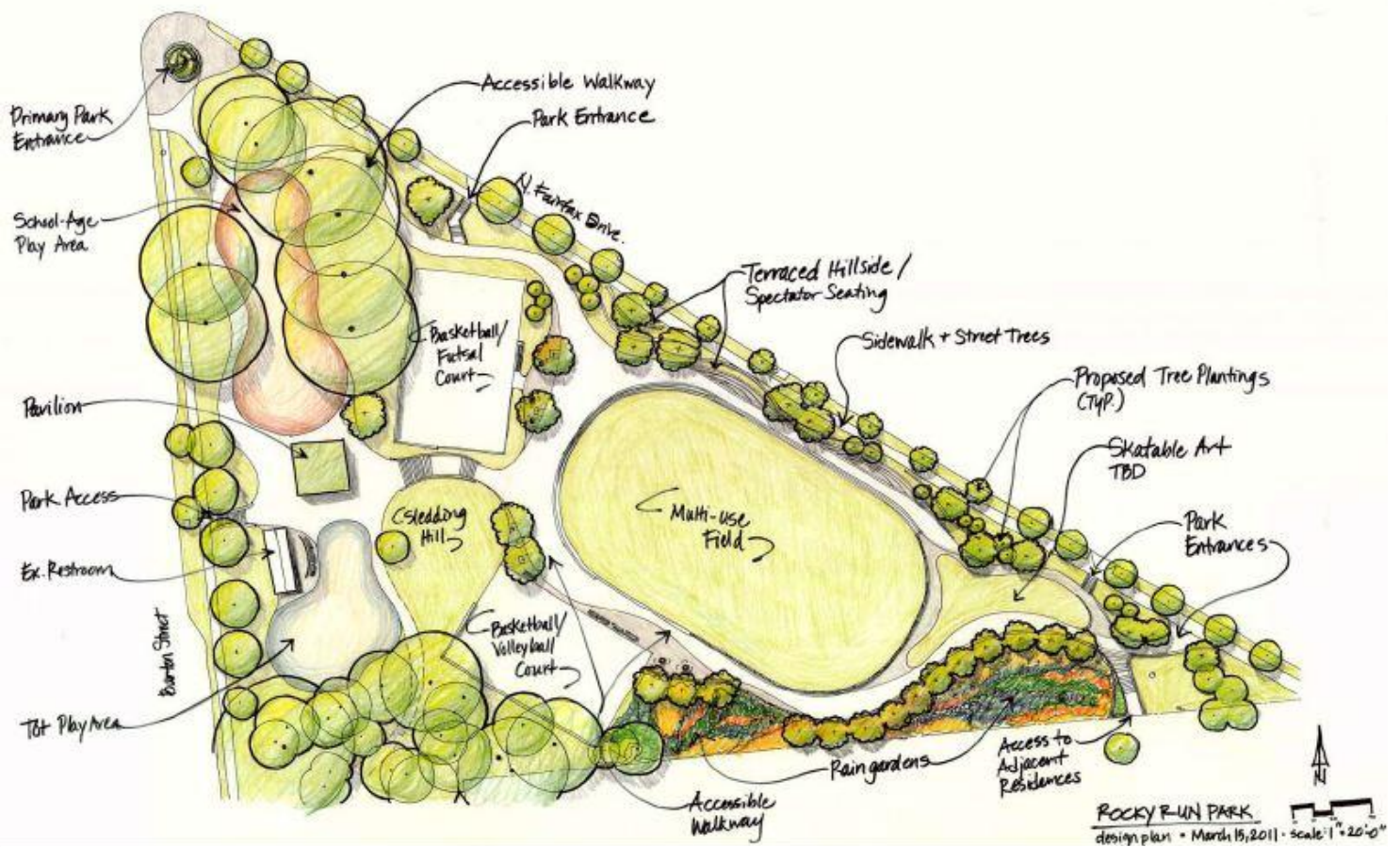
Hillside Park. Photo from Arlington PRCR website.

- **Rosslyn Highlands Park** and the grounds of Wilson School provide an island of open space in one of the most densely developed parts of the County. This was recognized in the Public Spaces Master Plan (2005), which noted that the County should: "Look for opportunities to make better use of existing public sites, such as the Wilson School/Rosslyn Highlands Park/Fire Station #10 Site." Friends of Arlington Parks believes preservation of open space at this site is very important.



Court House

- **Rocky Run Park** is scheduled for a complete makeover. County landscape architects worked with the Clarendon Courthouse Civic Association to develop a concept plan for the park (see plan). The plan calls for a large children's playground with a pavilion and separate areas for pre-schoolers and school-age children. Most of the remaining area of the park will be devoted to active recreation. There will be a multi-use field together with facilities for basketball and futsal, in addition to leaving a hill open for sledding. Stormwater runoff from the park will be directed to raingardens/bioretention areas in the southeast corner of the park. The civic association approved the concept plan in March and construction could begin as early as Spring 2012. For more information on plans for Rocky Run Park, contact landscape architects Bernadette Grullon (bgrullon@arlingtonva.us) and Valerie Mosley (vmosley@arlingtonva.us) in the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources.



Clarendon

- **James Hunter Park**, which adjoins Clarendon, is an unimproved community canine area that will get a makeover starting later this year (plans for this park are described in a separate article).

- **Future Park.** The Clarendon Sector Plan calls for creating a new park, but the property in question is privately owned and the park may be decades away. In the meantime, those who live and work in Clarendon will depend heavily on James Hunter Park.

Virginia Square

- **Quincy Park**, adjacent to Central Library, is the largest park along the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor. It offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including tennis courts, a children's play area, even a small wooded area. The ball fields are the property of Arlington Public Schools. Quincy Park is meeting a variety of recreational needs, but there may be better ways to utilize this space. Friends of Arlington Parks would favor a master planning process so that residents and planners could consider how to make the best possible use of this parkland.

Ballston

- **Mosaic Park** is located on North Pollard Street near Ballston. It is just across the street from Founders Square and is benefitting significantly from that project. The Founders Square site plan included a land swap that added 0.6 acres to Mosaic Park, increasing the area to 1.67 acres. A master plan for Mosaic Park (before) was completed in 2009 and described in the January 2010 Friends of Arlington Parks newsletter. In January 2011, the County Board approved a transfer of density rights from Mosaic Park to the Founders Square project in return for \$6.55 million for design, administration and improvements to the park. Detailed park design could begin this summer. The timing of park construction will depend on the pace of construction at Founders Square. When work is completed, Mosaic Park will represent a major addition to the system of parks along the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor.

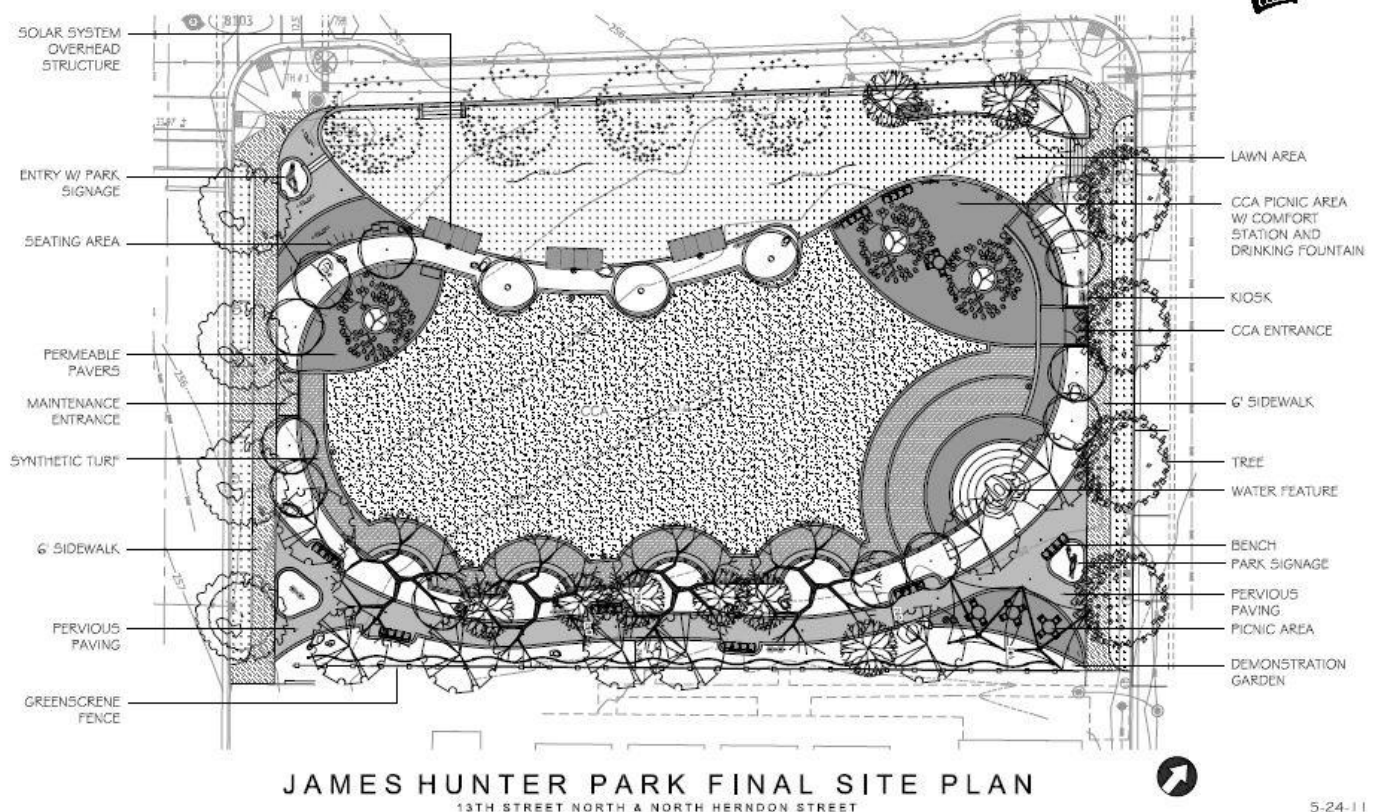
James Hunter Park

The Community Canine Area (CCA) at North Herndon and North 13th Streets, where the Clarendon-Courthouse and Lyon Village neighborhoods meet, is scheduled for a complete makeover starting later this year. The muddy, unimproved canine area will be turned into an attractive urban park. The park has been named in honor of James B. Hunter III, who served on the Arlington County Board from 1990 to 1997.

The master plan for the park was approved by the County Board in 2007, but it has continued to evolve based on guidance from the Board and suggestions from residents. Despite its small size (about ¾ acre), Hunter Park should meet the needs of a variety of visitors.

The park will be divided equally between the canine area and space for other park visitors. The canine area will extend the length of the park (see plan) and will be surfaced with decomposed granite. Synthetic turf will be installed around the perimeter of the canine area to facilitate wheelchair access.

Amenities in the canine area will include a water feature that dogs should find appealing, especially in hot weather. A few trees will be planted near the ends of the canine area to provide shade for people and dogs. In addition, trees planted around the periphery will provide some shade.



Outside the CCA, there will be a lawn area extending the length of the park along North 13th Street. As the plan evolved, the size of the lawn area was increased at the request of residents. Along the opposite side of the park, a walkway will connect North Herndon and North Hartford Streets.

Most plantings in the park will be native species. Demonstration gardens, including pollinator and butterfly gardens, are planned for areas along the walkway and at both ends of the lawn area. The demonstration gardens, with explanatory signs, will help visitors understand how native plants enhance wildlife habitat, even in a small urban park. The expectation is that residents will choose to duplicate some of these plantings at home, enhancing wildlife habitat in their own yards.

The park plan calls for use of an innovative stormwater management system called the EPIC system. That system will recycle stormwater, using some of it to water vegetation in the park. The recycled water should also keep the decomposed granite in the canine area moist, helping to keep down dust. This apparently will be the first use of the EPIC system in Northern Virginia.

Construction is expected to begin in late summer of 2011 and should be completed in the spring of 2012. It will be necessary to close the canine area during the period of construction.

Questions about this project should be directed to Park Planner Scott McPartlin (smcpartlin@arlingtonva.us) or Landscape Architect Aaron Wohler (awohler@arlingtonva.us) in the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources.

Restoration of Funding for Parks and Trees

In April the County Board adopted the budget for FY 2012, which begins on July 1. The new budget restores some of the cuts in parks funding during the last two fiscal years. It also adds a new position of Natural Resources Manager.

In FY 2010 and 2011, there were reductions in many County programs. The deep cuts in parks funding meant curtailing park maintenance activities. They also resulted in a net loss of trees, with perhaps 100 fewer trees being planted each year than were being removed.

For FY 2012, the Board took advantage of modest revenue increases to restore some of the earlier funding reductions in park programs and tree planting:

- Park and Tree Maintenance. An additional \$370,000 was budgeted for park and tree maintenance. Some of those funds will be available for restoration of seasonal programming at the Lubber Run Amphitheater. The Board also allocated \$100,000 for study of capital needs for restoration of the amphitheater.
- Tree Planting. A one-time allotment of \$90,000 was designated for tree planting. That will permit planting an additional 300-400 trees in FY 2012, which means some 250 more trees will be planted than removed. This will help to make up for net losses in the number of trees on public property in the past two fiscal years.



Natural Resources Manager. In addition to restoring some earlier reductions, the FY 2012 budget includes \$99,000 for establishing a new Natural Resources Manager position. The position will be filled by a naturalist who will coordinate implementation of the Natural Resources Management Plan adopted by the County Board in November 2010.

Enjoy Nature but be an Active Environmental Steward

As subscribers to this newsletter you are all dedicated to Arlington's forests, glades, and streams, the natural areas that remind us that nature can survive even in our urban world. With the pressures of our busy area and the economic conditions, this natural or passive parkland is at increased risk of being eroded, both by the erratic weather and the destructive actions of man.

In many cases, our natural areas were purchased with Park Bonds, specifically dedicated for that purpose. The State of Virginia protects these purchases by requiring that such land must remain parkland and not be used for other purposes. We are concerned that the County is not always in accordance with this stipulation. In addition, recently the County Manager modified bond language so that the funds could be used for other purchases, negating the State guarantee. The rationale was that purchased land often has existing houses in place that could be used temporarily by departments other than Parks if uses were not restricted. Much more flexibility has been used with Park Bond moneys, however. We need to stand firm in our demand that future Park Bonds return to the language used earlier.

Another threat to natural areas is encroachment of construction and lack of attention. Just as other protected areas require buffer zones, we need to encourage the Parks Department to consider such buffers when an opportunity arises to purchase adjacent land. We also need to stay alert, to be stewards of the

environment, to spot the physical erosion in these natural areas and tell the Department when we see problems. In some cases, adjacent private property is cleared well into the park, as homeowners extend their lawns onto parkland. The spread of invasive species from private property into parks is another serious threat. We hope to ensure that, even with decreased funding, the Department will continue to maintain these environments so that they will be sustained to the greatest extent possible.

We cannot control nature but through planning and corrective actions we can limit the impacts of severe weather and human intervention on land and habitat loss. The Parks Department cannot be everywhere but park users should be watching for and reporting problems. We need to be the environmental stewards of our small oasis of green in Arlington.

Turtle Trot Benefit for Long Branch Nature Center

In May, Long Branch Nature Center hosted a 5k certified race in Bluemont Park. In addition to the race, there were games and activities for children, including a turtle race with real turtles from the Nature Center. The turtles got race names chosen by the audience, and competed to get out of the circle first.

Proceeds will help support turtle and wildlife rehabilitation as well as educational programs at the Nature Center.



Federal Grant to Restore Wetlands, Stream Banks in Tidal Four Mile Run

The County Board recently approved the County's acceptance of a \$485,000 grant from the federal government to help fund restoration of Four Mile Run as outlined in the Four Mile Run Restoration Master Plan adopted in 2006. The grant requires some matching money to be provided by Arlington, which will come out of the Stormwater Fund. The project has received six previous grants from the



federal government. The first phase of this joint project with Alexandria will likely begin within a year, with wetland and stream bank restoration in the tidal portion of Four Mile Run, between Mt. Vernon Ave and US route 1 bridge. The restoration will provide habitat for wildlife, improve water quality in the region, and greatly improve the cityscape in that area. "Restoration of the wetland and stream banks in tidal Four Mile Run, which we expect to begin work on next year, is central to the effort to return the

stream to a more natural, better functioning waterway that will serve people from across the region", said Arlington County Board Chairman Christopher Zimmerman.

Friends of Arlington Parks Membership form

To join friend of Arlington Parks or to renew your membership, mail this form and payment to:

Terry Hillerich, Treasurer, 3555 North Somerset Street, Arlington, VA 22213

Name: _____

Street address: _____

Cit, State and Zip _____

email address: _____

Individual, \$7.00 _____ Family, \$12.00 _____ Organization, \$20.00 _____ Other Contribution _____

Check here to get your newsletter by email _____ Add me to the volunteer list and contact. _____

You may also renew your membership online with a credit card.

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