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## Park Enhancement Grants: Pollinator Garden at Gulf Branch Nature Center

Six projects have been approved for funding under the Park Enhancement Grants (PEG) program this year. The PEG program is intended to enable Arlingtonians to initiate small capital improvement and beautification projects for Arlington’s parks and recreation facilities in their neighborhoods, and to encourage community support for public parks. One of the most interesting PEG projects is at Gulf Branch Nature Center, 3608 N. Military Road. It is sponsored by the Old Glebe Civic Association.

Part of the grant will be used to construct a pollinator garden on Military Road, opposite the entrance to the Nature Center. The present sign (see photo) will be replaced by a new sign and the planting bed around the sign will be converted into a pollinator garden. Pollinators play a vital role in the ecosystem, and the population of pollinators is declining.

This project will benefit from a volunteer activity that is new to Arlington: the Regional Master



Naturalist program. To be certified as Master Naturalists, participants must complete a busy program of classroom study and then 40 hours of community service. Some Master Naturalist candidates will work on the Gulf Branch pollinator garden as part of their community service. For those who may be interested in Master Naturalist training, the course typically covers a variety of topics including ecology, geology, ornithology, and entomology. Check the following link for more information: <http://www.armn.org/training.html>.

Staff at the Gulf Branch Nature Center will work with Master Naturalist candidates in selecting appropriate plants and designing the pollinator garden. The design will reflect the various purposes of the garden: providing habitat for pollinators, providing educational opportunities for residents, and enhancing the entrance to the Nature Center.

Master Naturalist candidates will also plant the garden. Plants have not been selected yet, but some possibilities are shown in Exhibit E (below and on page 3) of the PEG application submitted by Old Glebe Civic Association. The Nature Center will recruit Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, and other volunteers to assist with maintenance.



Purple Coneflower - *Echinacea purpurea*



Butterfly Weed - *Asclepias tuberosa*



Bee Balm - *Monarda didyma*



Coreopsis - *Coreopsis sp.*



Gayfeather - *Liatris sp.*

**Examples of plants for a pollinator garden, with pollinators at work.**

Nature Center staff will use the pollinator garden to give park visitors hands-on learning opportunities and encourage them to create pollinator gardens in their own yards. The garden will be in a highly visible site on a busy street, so many others are expected to stop for self-guided visits. Interpretive signage will be provided to help visitors understand the garden's purposes.



New England Aster - *Aster novae-angliae*



Stonecrop - *Sedum sp.*

Another element of this project is to repair some of the extensive system of trails (see photo to the right) in the Gulf Branch Natural Area. The trails are bordered by 'trail timbers' with mulch filling the area between the timbers. Repairs along the trail will include replacing missing or damaged timbers and then calling on volunteers to add the mulch.



**Section of trail in Gulf Branch Natural Area.**

## Survey on Parks Facilities and Programs

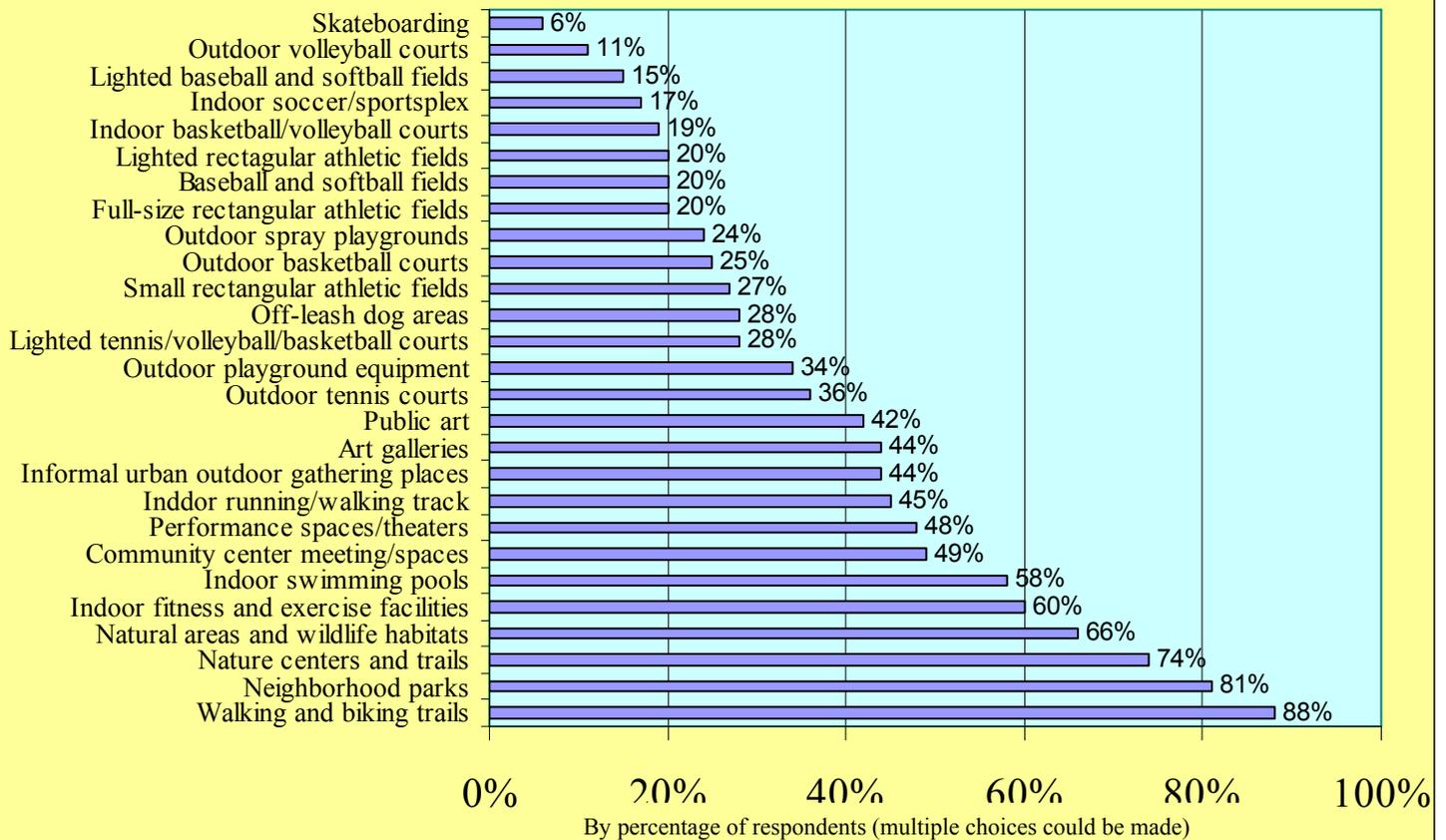
Arlington's Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources (PRCR) conducted a major survey of residents last year to help in setting priorities for future programs. The survey was administered by a contractor, Leisure Vision, working closely with PRCR staff. The results of the survey were posted on the County website late last year.

In the survey, questions were asked in several ways and it is difficult to summarize the results. Question 8 asked what benefits of parks facilities and programs were most important to the future of Arlington County. Respondents were allowed to make multiple choices, and more of them picked preservation of open space and the environment as one of their top three choices than any other category. Coming in a close second was making Arlington County a more desirable place to live, which could be seen as closely linked to preservation of open space and the environment. For the full list of responses, see Q8 on the County website (link below).

One survey question that is direct and easy to interpret was Question 9, which asked whether respondent households had a need for various parks, recreation and cultural facilities. The results are shown in the bar chart to the right. The first four categories in this ranking were:

- Walking and biking trails. These trails appeal to diverse groups, from seniors who want to walk in a pleasant environment to cyclists using the trails for recreation or for getting to work and back. Others who use the trails include adults walking their pets and young families who want their children to have some exposure to nature.
- Neighborhood parks. These parks vary widely in size and character. Some neighborhood parks have wooded areas that shade visitors on summer days. Even small parks with just a few trees provide green space that can be important to residents, especially who live or work in high-density areas.
- Nature centers and trails. Gulf Branch Nature Center and Long Branch Nature Center were described in the last issue of this newsletter. Both centers have programs that give adults and children many opportunities to learn about nature through courses and hands-on experience.
- Natural areas and wildlife habitats. Several of Arlington's stream valley parks include significant natural areas. In addition, Potomac Overlook Regional Park, located in Arlington, consists of about 70 acres of hardwood forest with trails throughout the park.

## Questions 9: Respondent Households That Have a Need for Various Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Facilities



It is interesting that more respondents expressed a need for these four classes of facilities than for athletic fields, basketball courts, volleyball courts, or skateboarding. It seems clear that Arlingtonians value their links to nature and the outdoors. However, it is important to emphasize that the survey results can be fully understood only by studying the complete report of the survey on the County website:

<http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/ParksRecreation/scripts/planning/MasterPlanning/page65836.aspx>

### Will the Dearth of Acorns Affect Arlington Wildlife?

Those who have been following the news over the past several weeks will be aware that the dearth of acorn production in Arlington last year has received considerable media attention. Now some other parts of the eastern U.S. are reporting the same phenomenon.

Friends of Arlington Parks has long counted on Arlington County naturalist Greg Zell for insights into matters such as this. When we asked Greg about the implications of the acorn shortage, this is what we learned:

A one-year dearth of acorns should not pose a threat to Arlington's oak trees, but there could be significant short-term effects on local wildlife populations. Species that rely on acorns as a staple food during the fall and winter include deer, turkeys, squirrels, chipmunks, and wild mice.

Normally, wildlife would turn to alternative or secondary food

sources (which are of lesser quality and nutritional value)

only after the acorns were exhausted. In the present situation, however, wildlife will often depend on secondary food sources throughout the winter.

The dearth of acorns together with abnormally low temperatures could lead to a reduction in the



**A red fox passing a grey squirrel. Predator and prey populations are cyclic. (Photo by John White)**



**The few wild turkeys in Arlington feed heavily on acorns in the fall.**

population of squirrels, chipmunks and mice this winter. That, in turn, could lead to a reduction in the population of predators such as red foxes, large hawks, and owls next spring and summer.

Naturalists will be monitoring wildlife activity during the winter and spring to see what impact the dearth of acorns has on Arlington's wildlife population. We will report their findings later in the year.

## Preserving Wakefield Woods and Grassland

Friends of Arlington Parks has urged the County to make preservation of green space at Wakefield High School a top priority in planning for the new school. We are concerned about a grove of mature oak trees and a unique community of rare plants along the edge of the grove close to George Mason Drive. According to Greg Zell, Natural Resource Specialist with Parks and Natural Resources Division, two locally rare plants are growing wild just inside the wood edge, on the grassy area bordering George Mason. Sweet bay magnolia has been identified in the area, one of only a few spots in the county.

The wildflowers within the woodland edge and grassy meadow represent a remnant community that historically would have occurred along the higher, dry ridgeline that connects Wakefield School with Claremont School and ends at the highest ridge lines within Barcroft Park. Another unusual feature of the grassland slope is the high number of nesting Mason Bees that are early spring pollinators.

There are many examples of Arlington schools that take advantage of nearby parks to give students opportunities to study nature. Similarly, school grounds often include green space that could be enjoyed by the public while also providing teaching opportunities.

The Wakefield woods and grassland present a wonderful opportunity for joint use for educational and community purposes. In addition to their use for passive recreation that could be enjoyed by the public, the stand of oaks, red maples, and sycamores and the rare plant community could serve as a valuable resource for biology and environmental science classes. Preserving these trees and other plants would further Arlington environmental initiatives and could be regarded as a model of environmental protection during school construction. The oak grove provides a buffer between George Mason Drive and the school



Aerial view of the green space at Wakefield High School

grounds. The row of trees along George Mason Drive serves two functions: in addition to providing a buffer between the street and the school grounds, those trees help to prevent erosion of the steep slope along the sidewalk. Both the oaks and the rare plant community should be preserved in the reconstruction of Wakefield High School.

## **Arlington Recycling Drop-Off Center Moves to Quincy Park and Recycle Plastics Curbside on April 1, 2009**

Arlington County has expanded the types of items that can be recycled, especially in the case of plastic containers. All plastic containers can now be recycled at the two Arlington Recycled Centers:

North Arlington site - Quincy Park (corner of Quincy Street and Washington Blvd)

South Arlington site - at the corner of Columbia Pike and South Four Mile Run.

The new Quincy Park Recycling Drop-Off Center (moved from 591 Quincy Street, and expanded) provides a central location in North Arlington and is open to residents during park hours. It accepts recyclable materials, including newspapers, magazines, mixed paper, catalogs, steel and aluminum cans, glass bottles and jars, corrugated cardboard, plastic bottles and jugs, **and plastic containers (# 1-7, including yogurt cups, deli containers, clamshell containers, margarine tubs, and flower pots)**. *This does not include plastic bags or Styrofoam.* Residents can now leave the plastic caps on their bottles which will now be recycled as well.

Here are some guidelines that are listed on the PRCR website:

- Recycle only the materials specifically listed and place them in the appropriate bins. Placing other materials in the bins may make the entire load unmarketable, and might even cause the loss of a buyer for future loads.
- Make sure all containers are rinsed clean.
- Keep the recycling center litter-free.
- Report any problems encountered while using the drop-off centers to 703-228-6570.
- Metal items such as pots, pans, tools, pipes, Venetian blinds, small appliances, and other metal items fitting an 11 1/2 inch by 46 inch opening will be accepted at the North Quincy St. Drop-off Center.



**Recycling drop-off center  
at Quincy Park**

## Quincy Park Plant Sale to Benefit Washington-Lee Programs

April 28<sup>th</sup> is the date set for an annual plant sale at Quincy Park (corner of Quincy and Washington-Lee Blvd) run by the Washington-Lee PTA. All proceeds go to fund important programs at Washington-Lee High School. The plant sale usually sets up under the trees next to the Washington Boulevard parking lot, though with the recycling center in that vicinity it is likely to be relocated to another area adjacent to that parking lot.

For sale will be annuals sold individually, in six-packs and whole flats, as well as hanging baskets. Tomatoes and other vegetables, herbs and a line of organic plants will also be sold.

### Washington-Lee High School Plant Sale

April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009



pm



An annual fundraiser to benefit all Washington-Lee students

At the corner of Quincy St. and Washington Blvd., in the baseball field parking lot

Hanging baskets, annuals, herbs and vegetables, including some premium organic plants

No pre-orders necessary

### Seeking New Members

Friends of Arlington Parks is seeking new members! Members who support us through their annual dues (\$7.00 per year for individual membership) are very important to us as they help pay for such costs as our newsletter and website, and could be available to step forward and support a Friends of Arlington Parks initiative.

We also need members to participate more actively by joining the Board of Trustees. This small group typically meets the second Thursday of each month to discuss park issues and plan strategies for dealing with them. If you are interested in joining our Board, please email us at [info@foap.org](mailto:info@foap.org) or make a note on your membership form.

If you are already a member, thank you for your support! If you would like to join please fill out the enclosed membership form. If you have received a complimentary copy of this newsletter it means that a current member has suggested your name as a possible new member. We hope you find it interesting and choose to join in our effort to protect, improve and expand our parks.

**Visit us on the web: [www.foap.org](http://www.foap.org)**

### **Public meeting for Mosaic park**

Members of friends of Arlington Parks have been invited, along with any other interested residents, to give input into the planning of Mosaic Park. The following letter from the task force co-chair is reprinted here:

Dear Friends of Arlington Parks,

As co-chair of the Mosaic Park Planning Task Force and a member of the Arlington County Park and Recreation Commission, I would like to invite you to the upcoming public meetings on the Mosaic Park Master Plan.

Two community input meetings will be held on **February 4 and 10**, with the same agenda for each meeting. A final master plan presentation will occur on **February 19**.

I encourage you to attend either of the community input meetings and the final master plan presentation. Details of the meetings time and location are included in the attached flyer.

Thank you very much for your commitment to preserving Arlington's parks and open space. I, along with my fellow members of the Mosaic Park Task Force, believe this master plan will result in the construction of a world-class urban park.

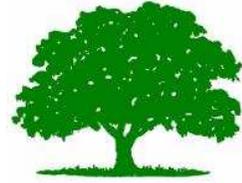
I look forward to seeing you at the upcoming meetings.

Sincerely,

Paul Holland  
Co-Chair, Mosaic Park Planning Task Force  
Member, Arlington County Park and Recreation Commission

## Help Take Care of Our Parks and Open Spaces

Arlington County has more than 800 acres of parkland and open spaces, and it is difficult for the Parks Department to maintain the parks without volunteer effort. Help keep Arlington County parks beautiful. Join other volunteers and help control invasive plants and clear trash in your local park. For more information on upcoming events visit the PRCR website:



<http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/ParksRecreation/scripts/parks/ParksRecreationScriptsParksInvasiveEvents.aspx>

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**Here are a few current listings from the website for invasives removal:**

### **Second Saturdays @ Lacey Woods**

1200 N George Mason Dr., Arlington, VA 22205

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Meet at the N. Frederick St. & 11th St. N. entrance. Nora, the event leader, will be wearing an orange vest. Pre-registration is not required but suggested. 703-228-7636.

### **Second Sundays @ Gulf Branch Nature Center**

3608 Military Road, Arlington, VA 22205

12:00 PM – 2:30 PM

Pre-registration is not required but suggested. 703-228-3403.

### **Invasive Pulls @ Long Branch Nature Center**

625 S Carlin Springs Road, Arlington, VA 22204

Sundays: February 15th, March 15th, April 12th, and May 17th

2:00pm - 5:00pm

Pre-registration is not required but suggested. 703-228-6535.



Friends of Arlington Parks Membership Form

To join *Friends of Arlington Parks*, or renew your membership, mail this form and payment to:  
Terry Hillerich, Treasurer, 3555 N. Somerset Street, Arlington, VA 22213

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Check here to get your newsletter by email \_\_\_\_\_

Add me/us to the volunteer list and contact. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$7 Individual \_\_\_\_\_ \$15 Family \_\_\_\_\_ \$20 Organization \_\_\_\_\_ Other contributions

*Please make checks payable to "Friends of Arlington Parks"*

You may also renew your membership on the web with a credit card by visiting [www.foap.org](http://www.foap.org).

**Friends of Arlington Parks**  
**3555 North Somerset Street**  
**Arlington, VA 22213**

