



April 30, 2021

Arlington County Board Members

Bob Duffy, CPHD^[1]

Jane Rudolph, Arlington County Department of Parks and Resources

Mark Schwartz, County Manager

RE: Livability22202 Support for Civic Federation Resolution on Open Space

Dear County Board Members and Staff,

We, the presidents of the three civic associations in 22202, are writing in support of the recent Open Public Space (OPS) and Equity White Paper and Resolution, which passed with support from over 90 percent of the Civic Federation's membership. We understand that the drafters have recently met with all five members of the County Board to explain the importance of the documents. The paper accompanying the resolution was written in response to the County's call-to-action in the 2019 Equity Resolution to "[collect and disaggregate] data to identify where disparities and gaps in service and administration exist." This analytical approach, identifying inequities, should be an important part of the County's strategy for identifying priorities for land acquisition, park development, and green space preservation.

Our [Livability22202 Framework and Action Plan](#) promote a comprehensive approach to shaping the built environment to enhance the physical and social health and well-being of all inhabitants and to strengthen community, including access to outdoor spaces for social interaction, casual use, and events. We believe strongly in the County's commitment to equity, which asserts that "all populations [have] access to community conditions and opportunities needed to reach their full potential and to experience optimal well-being." As noted in the Equity in OPS paper, residence, race, and income are significant sources of inequity which, not addressed proactively, will become greater over time. We are concerned about sufficient and equitable access to OPS in 22202, identified in the White Paper as one of the most underserved areas with access to OPS in Arlington.

Section 2 of the paper on Residence Type raises our greatest concern for our area:

Finding: Residents of townhomes live in areas with significantly fewer trees than residents of single-family detached homes (SFHs). Furthermore, residents of elevator apartments live in areas with significantly fewer trees, typically have fewer number of parks in close proximity, and have less OPS within walking distance per capita compared to residents of SFHs, townhomes, or garden apartments.

Parks are one of the few common assets that allow neighbors to gather as a community in a healthy environment to enjoy all the benefits nature can bestow, irrespective of age, race, physical ability, or socioeconomic status. Two examples make the point of inequity and the need to acquire more open space and increase the quality of and public access to alternative open space for community use in 22202.

1. ~~-The Highlands Urban Garden (HUG) in Virginia Highlands Park~~ co-founded by Livability22202 and the Friends of Urban Agriculture and recently approved by the County, provides an excellent example how the needs of resident in multifamily housing can be met. The majority of volunteers who work in the HUG live in elevator apartments, particularly in Crystal City. Lacking garden space of their own, they joyfully cultivate in Virginia Highlands Park. Consideration could be given to opening a similar garden project in Long Bridge Park or one of the other parks coming on line soon in Crystal City.
2. ~~-SoccerSoftball~~ field #3 at Virginia Highlands Park has served the wider 22202 community in providing access to open space and community activities during COVID. But using a field as the only source of open space for the community is causing unnecessary conflicts of usage, an untenable situation of needing to place make games and furniture on nearly a daily basis, and consternation in planning for long term needs, including in the Pentagon City Planning Study. Livability22202 therefore supports the recent motion by the Aurora Highlands Civic Association membership asking that games from the Virginia Highlands Park softball Field #3 (Hearts Field) be scheduled on other county fields, starting after the spring 2021 season so that:
 - a. the community can access open park space on a daily basis and
 - b. ~~-allow for potential interim investments in the park starting as soon as this summer~~

Inequities in OPS related to residence type exist and will be further exacerbated by the quantity of development approved or planned for 22202, with some 6,000 new residential units planned for the coming years. The inequities already found for residents of elevator apartments will be further aggravated by aggressive, high-density site plans that remove scarce existing tree canopy and replace remaining pervious surfaces with impervious ones.

The Civic Federation Open Space Equity in Arlington resolution calls for all of our residents, regardless of demographic background, income, or residence type to have equitable access to county OPS resources. Consequently, we need to understand how the County, through its updates to the Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP), planning initiatives and equity policies, is going to tackle the county-wide issues identified in the report, as well as the specific issues affecting our 22202 neighborhood. The resolution and the accompanying paper make it clear that the current PSMP and policies are inadequate to address our future needs for parkland and green space, and that existing inequities in our neighborhood and across the county are only going to get worse and more difficult to address in the future unless these issues are aggressively tackled now. We are pleased that the ongoing Pentagon City Phased Development Site Plan study is emphasizing “green ribbons” to promote walkability. But this is not enough.

We fully support the Open Space Equity in Arlington resolution and would like for the County Board to provide feedback on how they plan to approach adding quality and unrestrictive open green space in our areas of Arlington.

Sincerely,

Mike Pickford, President
Arlington Ridge CA

Scott Miles, President
Aurora Highlands CA

Carol Fuller, President
Crystal City CA

cc: Bill Ross, Chair, Parks & Recreation Commission
Phil Klingelhofer, Chair, Forestry and Natural Resources Commission
Matt Mattauszek, County Planner for 22202