



December 16, 2022

Honorable Katie Cristol, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Forestry and Natural Resources Commission Annual Report 2022 and Work Plan 2023

Dear Chair Cristol:

This report summarizes the activities of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission (FNRC) for the calendar year 2022 and provides our Work Plan for 2023.

The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission works hard to be an active advisor to the County Board, providing recommendations to protect and improve the health and sustainability of Arlington's invaluable urban forest and other natural spaces. The FNRC's activities during 2022 included:

- Providing detailed comments and suggestions on the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan.
- Raising questions about the impact of the Missing Middle proposal on the tree canopy (see letters section for details).
- Sharing our own priorities for County budgets and for reinforcing the value of natural capital in the County's Capital Improvement Plan.
- Participating in programs to educate the public on trees and tree-related issues.
- Working with associated commissions and advisory groups, including the Park and Recreation Commission; the Arlington Neighborhoods Advisory Committee; the Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission; and the Bicycle Advisory Committee.
- Reviewing and commenting on the 2022 draft of the updated Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan.

- Supporting the study of specific threats to trees and natural resources, such as deer overpopulation, storm water damage, and unauthorized mountain biking.
- Exploring zoning mechanisms as a way to conserve tree canopy.
- Encouraging efforts to finally pass state legislation that would give local jurisdictions more flexibility and authority to require higher percentages of tree canopy coverage in new in-fill development. Such new authority is critically needed to slow the worrisome loss of trees in many parts of the County.
- Participating in the activities of the Tree Canopy Fund Program to plant more trees in the County.
- Reviewing the County’s 2021 deer survey and recommending that the County quickly launch a deer management program to halt the damage that deer are doing to the County’s forests.
- Continuing to push for a new tree canopy survey to measure the extent of (and trends in) the County’s urban canopy. Such a survey is vital to understanding how and where valuable trees are being lost—and in addressing difficult questions of equity, given the lower extent of tree canopy coverage in lower income, vulnerable, and historically disadvantaged neighborhoods.
- Evaluating the County’s updates for its standard site plan conditions and recommending changes.
- Reviewing site plans for Pen Place and a number of other development projects impacting trees and natural resources, including plans for Langston Blvd.
- Selecting trees for designation as Notable Trees.

Representation and Coordination

This year, the FNRC commissioners served as liaisons or engaged regularly with other commissions, working groups, and organizations, including:

- Arlington Public Schools
- Bicycle Advisory Committee
- Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission
- EcoAction Arlington
- Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group

- Arlington Neighborhoods Advisory Committee
- Park and Recreation Commission
- Public Spaces Master Plan – Implementation Advisory Group
- Tree Stewards of Arlington and Alexandria
- Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Virginia Department of Forestry

In addition to their official FNRC duties, many commissioners also volunteered on their own to benefit Arlington’s natural environment. They installed enclosures to protect new plantings from deer, visited schools to explain the important roles that trees and open spaces play in people’s lives, took schoolchildren to parks and taught them how to measure trees, removed invasive species, led tree walks and bird walks, gave talks on the importance of native species to birds, planted trees and shrubs in parks, handed out free trees for planting in the County’s tree distribution program, hosted tables at the County Fair, and led key organizations, such as the Arlington Regional Master Naturalists, among many other activities.

Advisory Letters

After reviewing and discussing a wide variety of proposed plans and development projects, the FNRC sent the following advisory letters to the County Board in 2022:

- Standard Site Plan Conditions
- Top Priorities for the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan and Future County Funding
- FY 2023 Budget Recommendations
- Pen Place Site Plan Proposal
- Support for a Report on Stewardship of Arlington Natural Capital and Need for Funding Enhancements
- Missing Middle Housing Study
- Capital Improvement Plan
- FY 2023 Legislative Priorities
- Draft Forestry and Natural Resources Plan
- Update to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan
- Missing Middle Draft GLUP and ZOA

In those letters, the FNRC:

- Supported the draft Forestry and Natural Resources Plan in general but expressed concerns about the lack of firm targets and goals, and

requested a greater sense of urgency about the need to protect and maintain Arlington’s precious tree canopy and natural spaces. For example, the Plan states that the tree canopy coverage is “stable” when the available scientific evidence points to a significant decline of tree canopy in residential properties throughout the County. The letter also offered additional suggestions for more creative thinking about land uses, incentives, and educational efforts, such as creating a joint urban forestry/Arlington Public Schools (APS) task force to better harness the potential of school properties for trees and natural spaces.

- Applauded the APS’s decision to include a specific line item in the APS budget for planting trees on school grounds.
- Identified unexplained claims about the levels of tree canopy coverage that could be achieved in the Missing Middle Plan. The letter explained FNRC’s opposition to the plan unless it is revised to “include concrete and believable policies for achieving higher tree canopy coverage on redeveloped properties.”
- Strongly supported state legislation that would allow Arlington and other local jurisdictions to require greater canopy coverage for new single-family developments than is allowed under the current tree replacement ordinance.
- Laid out a comprehensive list of top priorities for County budgets, including conducting and updating a tree canopy survey and natural resource inventory, explicitly valuing trees and other natural capital in the Capital Improvement Plan, expanding educational efforts, and making equity a top priority.
- Recommended improvements to the Standard Site Plan Conditions, such as requiring that final civil engineering and landscaping plans be submitted earlier in the process, requiring that “minor” site plan changes be reviewed by relevant commissions, and developing an effective incentive program for preservation of large canopy trees.
- Urged that the public space landscaping in the Pen Place project should rely on native plants, that the forest walk area should be designed with soil deep enough to support mature trees, and that the buildings should use bird-friendly glass.
- Highlighted the vital importance of natural capital—the tree canopy, other natural vegetation, parks, and other open spaces—not only to our quality of life but also because it brings enormous economic and health benefits. The letter identified four areas where more funding is especially needed: collecting and analyzing data on the County’s natural resources, removing invasive species, controlling deer populations, and increasing staffing for forestry and natural resources.

Tree Planting and Care Oversight

The FNRC participates in the Tree Canopy Fund Program, which has facilitated the planting of 3149 trees on private property in Arlington since 2008, with 329 planted in 2022. In addition, the Tree Canopy Fund Program began a \$50,000 pilot program to pay for pruning, soil decompaction, mulching, bracing, and other tree maintenance on private property. The pilot program so far has received 33 applications, and the majority of those assessed to date have been approved.

Forestry and Natural Resources Commission 2023 Work Plan

Work to improve the draft Forestry and Natural Resources Plan as outlined in FNRC's letter.

Continue to advise the County to support and pass state legislation giving local jurisdictions more authority to impose stricter tree canopy requirements on new development.

Continue to review and submit recommendations for the Annual Budget and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Make recommendations to the County Board concerning funding in the FY 2023 budget and 2021-2030 CIP for activities related to staffing; the planting and care of trees on public property; preservation and acquisition of natural areas; and outreach to residents concerning the planting and care of trees on private property.

Continue to oversee the Tree Canopy Fund Program. Work with staff and EcoAction Arlington to continue a biannual cycle of the Tree Canopy Fund Program. Evaluate the pilot program on tree maintenance to assess whether it should be continued. Maintain awareness of the Program's Preserving Mature Trees Campaign, managed by the Arlington Tree Stewards.

Urge the County to move forward quickly with the next phases of the deer management plan.

Support Biophilic Cities participation. Work with County departments and other commissions to identify strategies and specific actions aligned with the County's resolution to join the Biophilic Cities Network, embracing a design strategy that reconnects people with the natural environment. Biophilic City strategies would be incorporated into the Public Spaces Master Plan and the Natural Resources and Urban Forestry Master Plan.

Continue to advise on Planning Processes and Developments. Advise that guidelines for County and commercial development projects incorporate multiple environmental and biophilic benefits (e.g., storm water projects should also include significant natural resource benefits as parks and wild spaces, with woodland, wetland, and native meadow areas, as well as carbon sinks, temperature moderation areas, air pollution filters, and rainwater retention features). Work with staff and partners to identify and plan natural corridors on public and private land to connect existing natural spaces in parks.

Advise on public and private development plans. Review site plans for private developments and County plans for public facilities. Assess potential impacts to the County's tree canopy, natural habitat, and wildlife to devise approaches to optimize saving mature trees and protecting our local ecosystems. Provide comments and recommendations as necessary to adjust design layouts to maximize the number of trees and the protection of natural spaces, and incorporate improved planting processes and biophilic features in site plan conditions. Engage with other commissions to share information and perspectives on issues such as saving mature trees, protecting existing natural areas, and identifying and restoring new wildlife habitat and corridors.

Reduce the negative impact of by-right development on the tree canopy. Encourage the development and implementation of programs and incentives for establishing natural areas on private lands, leveraging benefits for contiguous natural spaces, and saving mature trees and preserving our tree canopy.

Continue exploring how current zoning ordinances affect the tree canopy in Arlington County and whether some modifications in those ordinances might be an effective means of reducing losses. Consider the extent to which zoning ordinances can and should be viewed as a mechanism to execute, reinforce, and formalize county policies about tree canopy and natural resources while also addressing other traditional zoning purposes, and work to make better use of conservation easements.

Collect and analyze data on the track record of the current tree replacement policy. Evaluate past individual developments to measure process in achieving the goals of 20% tree canopy coverage in 20 years, by assessing tree canopy coverage 5, 10, 15, or 20 years after construction of new houses in Arlington.

Explore whether the FNRC could play a role to promote increased tree canopy and tree maintenance on Arlington Public Schools (APS) grounds, now that APS has a new line item for planting trees in its budget.

Continue to participate in the Northern Virginia Urban Forestry Roundtable, fostering information exchange with other jurisdictions and organizations and strengthening urban forestry programs across the region.

Further explore the equity issue in Arlington, developing ideas for increasing tree canopy in lower income and historically disadvantaged areas in the County that currently have limited numbers of trees.

Given the accelerating impacts of climate change, advise the County Board on how trees and other natural resources (such as green roofs and meadows) can and should be used both to reduce levels of greenhouse gases that cause climate change and to help adapt to (and reduce) the impacts of climate change, such as urban heat.

Improve public education. Promote more robust public education content and communication about 1) the value of natural resources for healthy living and a sustainable environment, including the monetary value of high-quality trees and natural resource spaces, and 2) the beneficial role mature trees, other natural resources, and healthy soils play in reducing stormwater damage and climate change impacts to our environment and ecosystems.

Finally, the FNRC appreciates the support of County employees, notably Urban Forestry Manager Vincent Verweij, our staff liaison.

Sincerely,



Phil Klingelhofer, Chair
Forestry and Natural Resources Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Members, Planning Commission
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation