

December 22, 2023

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

RE: Forestry and Natural Resources Commission 2023  
Annual Report and 2024 Work Plan

Dear Chair Dorsey,

This report summarizes the activities of the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission (FNRC) for the calendar year 2023 and provides our Work Plan for 2024.

#### Commission Members

Phil Klingelhofer, Chair  
John Carey  
Caroline Haynes  
David Howell  
Kate Donohue  
Melody Mobley  
Stephen Sockwell  
Michael Beckmann  
Josh Handler  
Mikaila Milton  
Noreen Hannigan  
Bill Browning  
Bob Benson

### **Forestry and Natural Resources Commission Activities - 2023**

The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission is committed to providing the County Board with fact-based and effective recommendations to preserve and protect our tree canopy and natural resources for all current and future Arlingtonians. The FNRC's activities during 2023 included:

- Supporting the new Stormwater Fee Schedule, while making several suggestions for improvements.
- Commending NOVA Parks for their efforts to improve the parks under their jurisdiction.
- Reviewing the Missing Middle Housing Plan and submitting recommendations regarding lot coverage and the method for determining the number of trees required.
- Commenting on the Department of Parks and Recreation Budget Proposal and supporting additional funding for high-priority items.
- Participating in the activities of the Tree Canopy Fund Program to plant more trees in the County.
- Seeking information about the quality of trees provided through the Tree Canopy Fund and discussing any available options for future improvement.

- Supporting grant proposals by Urban Forestry for funds available through the Inflation Reduction Act.
- Staying up to date on the Deer Management Survey and possible solutions and making recommendations as to the best approach moving forward.
- Reviewing and making detailed suggestions on iterations of the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan.
- Strongly supporting the update to the Weed Ordinance so that those creating more biophilic landscapes are not penalized.
- Working with associated commissions and advisory groups, including the Parks and Recreation Commission; the Arlington Neighborhoods Advisory Committee; the Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission; and the Bicycle Advisory Committee.
- Participating on Site Plan Review Committees, encouraging maximum tree canopy coverage as well as adherence to biophilic design principles.
- 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
- Gulf Branch Stream Resilience Project Advisory Group
- Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group
- Arlington Neighborhoods Advisory Committee
- Park and Recreation Commission
- Public Spaces Master Plan—Implementation Advisory Group
- Public Facilities Review Commission

- Tree Stewards of Arlington and Alexandria
- Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Virginia Department of Forestry

*Advisory Letters*

- Proposed Storm Water Utility Program is a major missed opportunity
- NOVA Parks Stewardship in 2023-2027 Strategic Plan
- RTA on Missing Middle Housing Study and Draft General Land Use Plan and Zoning Ordinance Amendments
- 2024 Department of Parks and Recreation Budget Proposal
- Support for Inflation Reduction Act Grant Application D
- Condition of Private Property (Weed) Ordinance
- Forestry and Natural Resources Plan draft
- Deer Management Project
- Correcting Misinformation on Deer Management Project
- FNRC recommendations for 2024 legislation
- Langston Blvd. Area Plan
- Support for Virginia Dept. of Forestry Grant Application
- FNRC response to Oct 2023 draft FNRP
- Considerations for 2024 CEP Update
- Gulf Branch Stream Resiliency Project

In those letters, the FNRC:

- Supported the idea of a contribution-based stormwater utility fee structure but urged the County to use actual impervious area rather than a tiered model to eliminate incentives for those at the low end of the tiers to build. The FNRC also urged that credits be given for existing, mature trees as well as newly planted trees.

- Commended NOVA Parks for its positive approach to improving wildlife habitat at Upton Hill and Potomac Overlook Regional Parks, reducing use of fossil fuels, and expanding its efforts to be inclusive of the entire community.
- Recommended that lot coverage for Missing Middle Housing be reduced and that all impervious surfaces be included in the calculation. Strongly supported scaling tree planting numbers to the size of the lot rather than the number of units.
- Strongly recommended making permanent the one-time increases in the FY 2024 budget for tree maintenance and for invasive species control, adding funding to restore full Nature Center hours, creating a specific program to increase the biodiversity and ecological value of our crucial parks and natural spaces, and living up to the County’s commitment to acquire new land for parks.
- Supported the DPR grant application under the Inflation Reduction Act for resources to address tree equity and related urban forestry issues, particularly tree maintenance, tree planting near schools, and invasive species control.
- Suggested additional definitions to clarify the update of the Weed Ordinance. These changes were accepted and will help align existing county policies as well as promote conservation landscaping.
- Reiterated support for the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan, given the vital importance of our natural capital to the community. While appreciative of the work put into the plan, suggested several enhancements and additions including incentives for land stewardship, the development of measurements to track progress, the need for equitable access to natural resources for all residents, the value of leveraging the many volunteer organizations dedicated to the environment, and suggestions on expanding and enhancing the tree canopy while mitigating the damage of invasive species.
- Expressed appreciation for the Department of Parks and Recreation approach to studying the deer management issue and encouraged an unvarnished presentation to the community based on the contractor’s findings.
- Corrected with facts and citations misinformation from animal welfare advocates about the deer overpopulation issue and possible remedies.
- Strongly urged a new approach to lobbying for legislation at the state level—rather than requesting incremental changes to existing restrictions, support legislation that directs local governments to explicitly consider the tree canopy and other natural resources from the start in all policies, plans, and decisions. The evaluation would include the possible adverse impacts on the urban forest. But more important, it would also assess the potential of trees to offer cost-effective solutions to the problems being addressed in those policies and plans.

- Voiced concern that while the Langston Blvd. Area Plan talks about becoming a “Green Main Street”, there are no solid processes, goals, or requirements that would create this outcome. To create a green corridor, urge that several key components be addressed in the Plan Langston Boulevard: Tree canopy, the creation of public spaces, and the transfer of development rights.
- Expressed strong support for the grant application to the Virginia Dept. of Forestry for resources to address preventive maintenance of trees in Climate and Environmental Justice Communities and for a matching grant to plant trees on Arlington Public Schools properties.
- Voiced its support for the revised FNRP but urged that the Executive Summary be updated to express more urgency for strong actions to protect our tree canopy and other natural resources. Identified several key actions to be undertaken immediately, including reexamining rules for lot coverage and setbacks, revising the planning process to address biophilic and natural resource issues from the beginning, moving forward on a deer management plan, completing the tree canopy study, and redoubling efforts at the state level to provide local jurisdictions with more policy tools to protect their natural resources.
- Considered the potential connections between the upcoming update of the CEP and a variety of related plans and goals, such as biophilic design, stormwater management, transportation, pollution, heat island effects, equity and more. This is an opportunity to pursue an integrated approach to these issues.
- Recommended several actions with regard to the Gulf Branch Stream Restoration Project, including establishing a monitoring system to collect data both before and after any restoration; increasing efforts to capture and slow stormwater before it reaches the tributaries to Gulf Branch stream; reducing the use of hard structures in favor of wooden ones; and saving more mature trees while taking steps to protect new plantings.

### *Tree Planting and Care Oversight*

The FNRC participates in the Tree Canopy Fund Program, which is responsible for planting 3,535 canopy trees on private property since its inception in 2008—386 trees were planted this year.

In addition, the TCF launched a pilot program this year that provided some funds for tree maintenance; 32 trees were assessed for work, and of those 20 trees were provided services, for a total cost of \$49,574.52.

The FNRC heard from Tree Steward volunteers and EcoAction Arlington with concerns regarding the quality of the trees, specifically girdling roots. FNRC and Tree Steward volunteers, with Urban Forestry staff, inspected a sample of the trees at the Davey Tree facility, and determined that the trees purchased from White House Natives were of high quality, but that some of those purchased from other vendors had issues.

## Forestry and Natural Resources Commission 2024 Work Plan

- Explore how to take a much more proactive and innovative approach to expanding, preserving, and valuing our tree canopy and other natural resources. Given the fact that we have been steadily losing tree canopy and the environmental services it provides, and the urgent need to build resiliency in the face of climate change, this Commission intends to call for consideration of our green infrastructure first, in all our plans and policies. We recognize that State laws limit some options, but there is much we can do at the local level.
- To succeed in conserving, expanding and managing our natural resources, Arlington County needs a broader set of policy tools than the state currently allows. The FNRC will research successful policies from other jurisdictions and review ideas from environmental organizations in order to better advise the Board on changes to current State laws that will enable our region to successfully address these critical challenges.
- Actively monitor implementation of the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan. Review progress and advise the County Board on select issues and opportunities throughout the year.
- Work closely with the APS liaison to FNRC on issues of overlapping interest such as best practices for natural resource management on school properties, native plantings, tree plantings and maintenance.
- Continue to review and submit recommendations for the Annual Budget and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Recommendations will include but not be limited to staffing; the planting and care of trees on public property; preservation and acquisition of natural areas; outreach to residents concerning the care of trees and support of educational efforts to build appreciation of our natural resources, including the work done by our Nature Centers.
- Urge the County to move forward quickly with the next phases of the deer management plan.
- Research issues regarding lot coverage, by-right development, construction best practices for saving mature trees, and ensuring effective tree maintenance and survival post-development. Look at financial and other incentives to ensure that developers enhance rather than diminish canopy coverage in both residential and commercial projects.
- Continue to collect and analyze data on the success or failure of the current tree replacement policy. Tree Steward volunteers are visiting a sample of newly developed home sites 5 or more years after they are first occupied to verify that the trees required to achieve 20% tree canopy in 20 years still exist. The goal is to also determine the relative contributions to the tree canopy of existing trees or new trees planted before occupancy.

- Advise on green infrastructure as solutions to current problems such as stormwater management, heat mitigation, pollution control, and equitable distribution of natural resources. Consideration of credits for maintaining mature trees as well as the funding for planting and maintenance of new trees, meadows, and natural areas will be investigated.
- Participate in Site Plan Review Committees and advocate for the preservation and expansion of tree canopy and natural areas. Push for the landscaping/Biophilia topic to be first on the agenda, rather than relegated as an afterthought at the end of the process.
- Study other Biophilic Cities, review the latest literature on best practices, and make recommendations on how to achieve our Biophilic City goals. Collaborate with other Commissions where interests intersect.
- Reach out to volunteer groups such as ARMN, TSAA, MGNV, Park Stewards and others to learn about the many volunteer efforts taking place in the County, and to request ideas on how to improve their impact and reach, as well as explore any potential collaboration.
- Seek out ways to educate the public on the importance of our tree canopy and the many benefits it provides, the value of natural landscaping and pollinator habitat, the scourge of invasive species, and how to help care for our natural community. Work with interested volunteer organizations and Commissions to leverage our areas of expertise.
- Encourage increased resources to be made available for eradication and control of invasive species; collaborate with other groups to expand public education and awareness as to which species are invasive, and how to handle them on private property.

In closing, the FNRC could not do its work without the critical support of County staff: Ryan Delaney (FNRP), Rita Peralta (Nature Centers), Alonso Abugattas (Deer Management), Jennifer Soles (Invasive Plants), Laura Shaub and Kris Krider (Biophilic Design) and Jose Portuhondo (Urban Forestry) all contributed their time and energy to educating the Commission throughout the year.

Finally, Urban Forest Manager Vincent Verweij was instrumental in the work of the Commission, keeping us informed, researching and answering our questions, and providing his expertise of urban tree canopies and the issues with preserving and growing them. His continuous support is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,



Phil Klingelhofer, Chair  
Forestry and Natural Resources Commission

Cc: Members, Arlington County Board  
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager  
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation  
Bill Eger, Chief Climate Officer  
Greg Emanuel, Director, Department of Environmental Services  
Claude Williamson, Director of Community Planning, Housing, and Development