

## North Rosslyn Civic Association

1902 N Ode St  
Arlington, VA 22209-1412

June 24, 2014

VIA EMAIL

Mr. Richard Tucker  
Arlington County  
2100 Clarendon Boulevard  
Arlington, VA 22201  
[rtucker@arlingtonva.us](mailto:rtucker@arlingtonva.us)

Re: Western Rosslyn Area Planning Study

Dear Mr. Tucker:

Within the Western Rosslyn Area Planning Study (“WRAPS”) study area lies the last large contiguous tract of unimproved land in or near Rosslyn. Rosslyn Highlands Park and the Wilson field together constitute the most significant existing park asset for our community. Preservation of this parkland for active recreational use through the WRAPS process would constitute the primary direct benefit to our community.<sup>1</sup> While we understand Steve Cole’s opening remarks to the effect that stakeholders will have to scale back their expectations and compromise in achieving a plan for the WRAPS area, the community has been badly damaged by the revision of the WRAPS charge even before the study gets underway.

On Saturday we learned that the county’s charge to the Western Rosslyn Area Planning Study (“WRAPS”) Group was changed when Arlington Public Schools (“APS”) reversed course, electing to retain its Wilson School parcel for school use in the near term. Specifically, the initial charge issued by the county board on September 24, 2013 called for “[c]ounty park, recreation and open space that is at least 60,000 square feet in size” and invited the Working Group to consider “[h]ow much open space, beyond 60,000 square feet, c[ould] be accommodated in this study area?” The board revised the charge radically on May 13, 2014, indicating that the WRAPS area would provide only “up to 60,000 square feet” while deleting any reference to a county park and allowing “interior space within the school to be used jointly by the school and the community” in satisfaction of the requirement. APS’s plan for its portion of the site calls for only 30,000 to 35,000 square feet of exterior recreational space with the remaining publicly-accessible facilities relegated to rooftop courts and/or internal gymnasiums.

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<sup>1</sup> Other “benefits” envisioned for the WRAPS study area – including a new fire station, additional affordable housing, and a potential middle school – while important, are assets that fulfill Arlington’s overall vision and not necessarily the needs of the immediate Rosslyn community. For instance, to the extent APS goes forward with its plan for a middle school in this location, the estimate is that more than 80 percent of students will be bused in from other areas. Though Rosslyn would benefit from a school on the Wilson site, this benefit would accrue only from a school more directly serving the needs of our children.

In reforming the charge to make 60,000 square feet a ceiling rather than a floor and allowing satisfaction of the park requirement to be met through interior space, the community's expanding need for parkland and active outdoor recreational space will be met with assets diminished both in size and in quality from existing levels. The WRAPS study area, we are told, comprises approximately six acres or about 261,000 square feet. Rosslyn Highlands Park, including the tot lot and basketball court, is about 35,000 square feet and the Wilson playfield and surrounding grassy area probably brings the total closer to 100,000 square feet, or more than 35 percent of the six acre site.<sup>2</sup> Even under the county's initial charge, establishing a floor of 60,000 square feet (only 23 percent of the study area), Rosslyn residents might have faced a tragic 40 percent reduction in their park and recreational inventory from existing levels. The revised charge makes the situation even worse – in a worst case scenario, usable ground-level outdoor recreational space might be as little as 30,000 square feet or a hair over 11 percent of the six acres under study (a whopping 70 percent reduction). Student priority for use of any school facilities would restrict public access to these recreational assets, further exacerbating the situation.

Whether reduced by 70 percent, 40 percent, or some lesser number, this diminution in parkland and recreational space within the WRAPS study area runs directly counter to both changing demographics and the vision for Rosslyn coming out of the Rosslyn Sector Plan Update (“Realize Rosslyn”). Specifically, the Realize Rosslyn planning process projects significant growth in the residential population of Rosslyn over the next decades. Most of the population growth will come through construction of additional high-rise residential buildings in Rosslyn's core. This process has already started with construction of Turnberry Tower, Waterview, and ongoing work at JBG's Central Place. Plans for Rosslyn Gateway (approved), 1401 Wilson/1400 Key Boulevard (approved) and Rosslyn Plaza (still in planning) also contain a substantial residential component. Accompanying the increase in overall population is a steady increase in the number of families with children within our area. Further increases can be expected, particularly with the emphasis on families when designing affordable housing units – indeed, we learned on Saturday that Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (“APAH”) plans to replace the current inventory of studio and one bedroom units at Queen's Court Apartments with a much larger number of two and three bedroom units specifically designed to accommodate families. Both residents of high-rise buildings and families with children have amplified needs for outdoor recreational opportunities.

At the same time, the Realize Rosslyn process identified a *significant existing shortfall* in active recreation venues for Rosslyn. The hardscape plazas and pocket parks scattered throughout Rosslyn do not meet the community's need for active outdoor

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<sup>2</sup> If one were to consider the underutilized land devoted to open parking lots and the lawns surrounding the Wilson and Queen's Court buildings, the open space inventory for the WRAPS study area would be higher still.

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recreation. Apart from the playfield at Wilson School, the only other sizeable grass-covered plot is Gateway Park, which is surrounded on all sides by busy arterial surface streets and not amenable to active recreational uses. Federal parklands adjacent to Rosslyn, such as Iwo Jima, severely restrict the range of permissible activities on their grounds. Indeed, the WRAPS introductory materials confirm that, apart from Rosslyn Highlands/Wilson School, the closest recreational venues for our community are at Dawson Terrace (across Lee Highway and I-66) and south of Route 50 in the Radnor-Fort Myer Heights area, neither of which is readily accessible to the residential population of Rosslyn. Possibly in recognition of Rosslyn Highlands/Wilson School's uniqueness, Realize Rosslyn planners identified the Wilson School site as one bookend in its plan to organize open space assets in Rosslyn around an 18th Street pedestrian corridor linking the Rosslyn neighborhoods to the Potomac River.

For the foregoing reasons, we fail to understand why the reasonable goal to retain and improve Rosslyn's recreational assets through the WRAPS process went so badly astray – even before the study commenced – and we ask that the county reconsider its charge for this study.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Zeien", written in a cursive style.

Jennifer J. Zeien  
President  
North Rosslyn Civic Association

cc: Steve Cole, Planning Commission