



Park & Recreation Commission

Department of Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities
1108 Jefferson Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

November 1, 2024

Mr. James Parajon
City Manager
City of Alexandria
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

RE: Park & Recreation Commission Priorities for FY 2026 Budget

Dear Jim,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on budget priorities for FY 2026. The Commission believes that our parks, open spaces and recreation centers play a critical role in making Alexandria a place for our residents to live, enjoy, connect and thrive. We take our role to provide feedback and recommendations to the Department and City Council seriously.

Based on our meetings and discussions during the past year, the Commission has identified eight priorities:

1. Ensuring the availability of sports fields & open space
2. Updating the Citywide Parks Improvement Plan
3. Increasing the RPCA maintenance budget
4. Supporting the RPCA employee and administrative needs
5. Exploring creative, new non-traditional revenue generation opportunities to supplement budget
6. Addressing waterfront flooding
7. Starting community engagement to discuss the Future of Cameron Run Park
8. Align RPCA and ACPS Funding for School Modernization Projects

Ensuring the availability of recreational fields & open space.

A combination of events in recent years has led to a significant increase in demand for recreational field space -- including COVID recovery, population increases, new school construction and increased

participation in organized youth and adult sports (which we see as a great thing!). Our sports affiliates continue to be strong partners to the City promoting access and equity through scholarships, volunteer opportunities, and strong engagement and collaboration with RPCA and ACPS. The Youth Sports Advisory Board, a subcommittee of the Commission, has also been extremely helpful in pulling these voices together.

The Commission believes that the most efficient way to ensure availability and meet the growing need for recreational spaces is prioritizing more synthetic turf and lighted fields. This enables the same number of fields to service many more hours of use throughout the year for a comparatively nominal cost. This important work should continue and expand, allowing for increased capacity and enabling income generation via parks through sports tournaments and other uses. We also encourage the Department to continue to explore sustainable and environmentally friendly turf refilling, as was recently done in the Ben Brenman rectangular field reurfing.

We also encourage the City to continue its practice of pursuing public access easements for open space in new developments which efficiently allow public access while minimizing maintenance and operating expenses. This has been a successful model for the City in a number of areas in the City. We note that this is not currently being discussed as part of the Robinson Terminal North encourage the city to explore similar opportunities there.

Update Citywide Parks Improvement Plan

The Commission encourages the Department to proactively update our Citywide Parks Improvement Plan and request funding as needed to accomplish this task. The last Citywide Parks Improvement Plan is now 10 years old, and we completed only about a quarter of the planned upgrades & improvements from the 2014 plan.

Our Parks are some of our biggest assets in terms of both land mass and budget allocation – they drive enjoyment by residents and visitors alike and are meetings places where communities are built. A comprehensive update that accounts for changes within our community as well as climate and use impacts can help the City better allocate critical budget and CIP dollars to their highest and best use based on public discussions of the Community’s needs. This includes, for example, a focus on key neighborhoods in the City disproportionately affected by extreme heat. We understand this process is already underway and encourage the Department to accelerate its review.

Increasing RPCA maintenance budget.

The number of parks and facilities that RPCA manages continues to grow, yet maintenance budgets have barely increased in the past decade. This is in part due to a stellar job by the Department managing our facilities and outside contractors more efficiently, but without proper maintenance, we risk requiring more capital improvement more regularly (and at a higher cost). Increasing the operating budget to maintain and improve our facilities and green spaces at a high level is critical.

Supporting the RPCA employee and administrative needs.

The City must support its staff to attract and retain top-tier talent. This continues to be a high priority, especially with a new aquatics facility and other additions to the Department’s workload. Competitive salaries, as well as pathways for growth within the City help to attract and retain top performing staff. This is particularly the case within our Recreations Centers for staff playing critical roles providing after-

school care and engagement programs for students, as well as programs that support health and wellness for all residents.

We also recognize that the city is currently conducting a search for a new head of the Department as a result of Jim Spangler's retirement. We thank Jim for his many years of service. In looking for a new Director, we request a seat at the table so that our feedback and thoughts can be incorporated into the hiring process. Given the challenges ahead, we encourage the city to identify candidates who can build relationships within the city and visibly engage the public to gather feedback on city plans and celebrate our parks and the programs and services provided by the city.

Exploring creative, new non-traditional revenue generation opportunities.

Today, an increasing share of the RPCA operating budget is funded via cost recovery, rentals, and classes. We encourage this trend to continue for several reasons:

1. to limit the impact to the City's operating budgets while also considering improvements;
2. to ensure that we are providing the greatest value to City residents with existing facilities and programs; and
3. to better align projects with the needs of our community – including considering new investments and working with other parts of the city to enable new or better uses of city spaces.

We encourage the City to update its Resource Allocation Model with these priorities in mind and to balance the goals of generating revenue and enabling access to all residents.

Addressing waterfront flooding.

We support an increase in funding to support additional solutions to help manage waterfront flooding in the City – solutions that we can be proud of for generations to come. Multiple parks – including our most visited parks in Old Town – are severely affected on a regular basis by flooding throughout the year. Continuing to delay will create more remediation costs while not adopting a longer-term solution. The Commission has been briefed on plans for a pump station and we continue to voice our support for moving forward with this project while also advocating to retain as much open and usable space as possible in the waterfront.

We also reiterate our calls for funding to transform Waterfront Park into its final form as envisioned in the Waterfront Small Area Plan. The current plans leave the Park in a permanent interim stage which is highly disappointing. While we agree to prioritize flood mitigation efforts, these should be coupled with a plan to complete the long-awaited Park improvements.

Start community engagement for Cameron Run Park

We request restoring funding that has been pushed back in the CIP, to start a formal community engagement no later than FY 2026 about the future of Cameron Run Park. This site provides terrific opportunity to serve as a key asset to better meet our (growing) community needs!

The Commission plans to hold a public hearing early next year to start thoughtful conversations about the current and best future uses of this site to best serve the community. In parallel, it is critical that the City is able to conduct a more comprehensive process, well in advance of the expiration of the NOVA Parks lease in December 31, 2028.

Align RPCA and ACPS Funding for School Modernization Projects

The city should work with RCPA and ACPS to align modernization plans to maximize recreation opportunities and services and ensure equity of those services across ACPS and the City. For example, the current CIP eliminates RPCA’s funding for improvements to the Leonard "Chick" Armstrong Recreation Center that would accompany and complement ACPS’s planned modernization of Cora Kelly Elementary School. This is inconsistent with recently completed school modernization projects at Douglas MacArthur and Minnie Howard that are now providing tremendous value to the city.

Please reach out to us if you’d like to further discuss or would like us to advise on other related issues.

Sincerely,

Dana


Dana Robert Colarulli, Vice Chair
Park & Recreation Commission

Stuart

Stuart Fox, Member
Park & Recreation Commission

cc: Park & Recreation Commission members
Emily Baker, Deputy City Manager
James Spengler, Director, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities
Jack Browand, Deputy Director, Staff Liaison to the Parks & Recreation Commission

Signature: 
Dana Colarulli (Nov 4, 2024 10:26 EST)
Email: danacolors@gmail.com

Signature: 
Email: stuart@r66.vc










PRC FY2026 Budget Letter_FINAL_v2

Final Audit Report

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