



Prince William County

PARK AUTHORITY

MEMORANDUM

Executive Director

July 31, 2007

To: Brenda Gardziel, Chairman, PA Board, Dumfries District
Brant Wickham, Vice Chairman, PA Board, Occoquan District
Stewart Christiano, Treasurer, PA Board, Woodbridge District
Richard Berry, PA Board, Gainesville District
Jane Beyer, PA Board, Coles District
Jean Smith, PA Board, At-Large Member
R. B. Thomas, PA Board, Brentsville District
Duane York, PA Board, Neabsco District

Martha Hendley, Chair, Planning Commission, Gainesville District
Russell E. Bryant, Jr., Planning Commission, Woodbridge District
Rene Fry, Planning Commission, Dumfries Dist
Ron Burgess, Planning Commission, Brentsville Dist
Edgar Bruce Holley, Planning Commission, Neabsco District
Ernie Gonzales, Planning Commission, Coles District
Gary Friedman, Planning Commission, At-Large Member
Kim Hosen, Planning Commission, Occoquan District

From: E. Jay Ellington, CPRP, Executive Director

Re: Parks, Open Space and Trails Comprehensive Plan Amendments

Over several months, the Park Authority staff and I have been reviewing these three proposed chapters authored by citizens groups. I realize this internal review process has caused delays; however, I felt it was both necessary, and fundamental, before further discussion with the interested parties could occur. It is my opinion that our Park Authority Board possesses a keen knowledge in all three of these areas, and thus far, their input has been very valuable.

In general, the staff and I agree with the majority of the statements, definitions, policies and strategies developed by these dedicated citizens.

Listed below are the areas that, the PA staff and I feel, need further discussion:

1. Level of Service Standards

The citizens' standards are different from the Park Authority standards currently used in all planning procedures. The Park Authority staff is prepared to share its recommendations for changes to the current standards, in a draft format. We also recommend that these standards not be included in the County Comprehensive Plan, but rather they should be identified in the Park Authority Comprehensive Plan.

2. Trails Commission

We agree that a new advisory body for the development of trails should be formed. Our position is that this group should be created by the Park Authority Board as a Trails Advisory Council (TAC), similar to the current Arts Council. The Park Authority has found this Council system to be an effective voice representing the Arts community, and we believe the same system would work effectively representing Parks, Trails and Open Space issues. The Charter, Bi-Laws and appointment of members should be developed and under the auspices of the Park Authority Board. We believe this will position the Park Authority in a leadership role in the future development of Prince William County.

3. Sovereign Immunity and Land Donations

The County Attorney will need to determine if Sovereign Immunity (which currently applies to the parkland and facilities owned by the Park Authority) would apply to trails or parks that are leased to the Park Authority and/or land in which easements may be given for recreational purposes. This is a legal issue that cannot be ignored.

- We will also need a determination on a 5 acre limitation on land donations. Our experience indicates significant budget impacts on small parcel donations, once development occurs.
- We will also need a determination if land can be given directly to the Park Authority for park and recreational purposes, as opposed to the current procedure of donating land to the Count, then transferring the land to the Park Authority.

4. Neighborhood Parks

The role of Neighborhood Parks and who will be responsible for their development and maintenance needs further input.

5. Open Space vs. Park Land Goals

We will need further clarification and discussion of the Open Space goal of 39% vs. the Park Land goal of 10%, including financial impact on the County Comprehensive Plan.

6. Funding

Funding for Bonds to support improvements and developments; and funds for operation and maintenance budgets, need to be considered as goals and plans are developed.

Summary of discussions between citizens groups and the Park Authority:

1. Parks nomenclature remains the same with the addition of “resource based parks”.

2. Many of the action strategies stated in this chapter, could be implemented in the Park Authority Comprehensive Plan.
3. Park Authority staff needs to review with the Park Authority Board, the practice concerning the accepting of land parcels of less than 5 acres.
4. Park Authority **staff** will consider the various suggested Levels of Standards for various facilities and will bring them forward to the Park Authority Board for consideration in the Park Authority Comprehensive Plan.
5. Park Authority staff will seek input from the Park Authority Board on a balanced approach to purchasing and development of park lands.
6. Points of Agreement –
 - Trails inventory will be kept with the Park Authority.
 - Park Authority will consider having one planner on staff, designated for Trails. (future funding)
7. Development funds are currently needed for approximately 10+ existing park sites around the county. They were not funded in current published CIP plans of the County.

Beginning on July 26, 2007, the County planning staff and the Park Authority staff have been meeting weekly to review, revise and bring forward a joint document for consideration by both groups. We realize that adoption of Comprehensive Plan amendment(s) is the responsibility of the Planning Commission and the Board of County Supervisors. We have had many discussions at all levels and bring forward several areas that need to continue to be discussed by the Planning Commission prior to final adoption of any Comprehensive Plan amendment.

The Park Authority staff wishes to thank the Park Authority Board for your oversight and direct conversations with our staff and your time spent in review of these documents to date. Thank you also to the Planning Commission for your continued dedication to get new and revised policies to guide parks, open space and trails into the future. All of your efforts will help us enhance the quality of life for our citizens in Prince William County.