



June 14, 2017

Chairman and Members of the  
Alexandria Parks and Recreation Commission  
City of Alexandria

Re: Eisenhower Partnership Comments on Cameron Run Regional Park Plan:

Madam Chair and Members of the Commission:

The Eisenhower Partnership formed a committee to participate in the Cameron Run Regional Park Planning process and review the alternative proposals for the future of Cameron Run Regional Park. We have followed the Plan development and public process closely since the inception of the planning process, and hosted a stakeholder session with the consultant team. After review with our internal Planning Committee and our Board of Directors, we would like to offer our review comments and concerns for the proposed Nova Parks lease extension. We have enclosed a copy of our summary notes for your review and consideration.

The Partnership would like to emphasize that the City of Alexandria and NovaParks should have as their goal to utilize the park year-round; we also feel the City should have some oversight over the management and operation of the park space moving forward. Finally we recommend that the City consider a shorter term lease to allow flexibility in the future use of the park area, as we anticipate major changes in the character of Eisenhower Avenue in the next few years, as well as increased population within the City as a whole and particularly on Eisenhower Avenue.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed long term outlook for the Cameron Run Regional Park.

Sincerely,

*Agnès Artemel*

Agnès Artemel  
Vice President  
Eisenhower Partnership

Attachment: EP Cameron Run Park Committee Notes and Plan for the Future of the Park



# The Eisenhower Partnership Plan for Cameron Run Park

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*A Balanced Plan for Cameron Run Park Offered by the Eisenhower Partnership*

*Delivered to the Alexandria Parks & Recreation Commission June 15, 2017*

## Message

The Eisenhower Partnership suggests a mutually beneficial shorter term lease with NOVA Parks that includes a shared use provision, stronger lease enforcement, and designation of a portion of Alexandria's annual funding contribution to NOVA Parks exclusively toward a year-round facility for the express benefit of both parties.

## Stakeholders

Eisenhower Partnership favors a fiscally-feasible, balanced plan for Cameron Run Park that respects:

- Alexandria citizens who desire and expect a well-kept recreational space as the return on their investment tax dollars and natural areas
- Alexandria City Council's obligation to modernize within its means
- NOVA Parks' desire to plan and budget for future capital investments
- Regional members who desire a well-maintained, collaboratively funded attraction

Together we can find a creative solution to fit our common vision.

## Win-Win Approach

Alexandria should grant NOVA Parks a shorter term lease that builds toward a mutually beneficial future for the residents, the city budget and the region.

Cameron Run Park is located directly between Alexandria's two largest mixed use small area plans, increasingly making it the centerpiece of the Eisenhower Corridor. Another 1000 residential units will be added to Eisenhower East over the next 5-10 years. New development means new homes, restaurants, retail and tax revenue for Alexandria's future. However, it also means more pavement, traffic and trash. It is important that we all invest in Cameron Run Park to become and remain an oasis of natural beauty, family entertainment and all-ages recreation.

Over time, Cameron Run Park should plan to serve increasing numbers of people in the Eisenhower

corridor over more months of the year. A year-round facility could serve this population to increase revenue for both Alexandria and NOVA Parks. It could also be a draw for both the Eisenhower East and West End Small Area plans, helping make both successful.

Getting there is the issue. Neither group has funding to begin construction today. However, such a facility could become financially viable over several years, ultimately benefiting both groups.

## Vision: Shared Property, Shared Funding, Shared Future

Cameron Run Park should serve dual purposes as reflected in the community engagement conducted over the past six months. Natural areas should stay natural but be better maintained. The waterpark should remain a fun summer location for families. The space containing the parking lot should be increasingly utilized now, then dedicated toward an all-ages, year-round facility.

NOVA Parks should continue to maintain and improve Great Waves Waterpark under a shorter lease, within its existing developed footprint. Alexandria should reclaim and beautify the natural areas and parking lot with the goal of making them more useful and attractive. By maintaining less property, NOVA Parks will be able to focus solely on part of Cameron Run that generates its revenue, therefore providing strong incentive to improve the facility. NOVA Parks will experience no decrease to its revenue and share a potential long term gain. This will also preserve the natural areas around the waterpark and prevent difficult debates about new development.

Alexandria should maintain all public park area outside the waterpark, around Lake Cook and within the resource protected area to preserve the natural beauty of the area and inhabiting wildlife. This should include connecting to nearby paths and trails and to offer all-ages, all-year use of the park. Additional trees and maintained park space should be installed to help meet the city's goal of 40% tree canopy cover. A communal garden could encourage maintenance in the neglected Northeast lot. In a sense, this renovation has already begun with Lake Cook's \$3 million dollar upgrade, paid for by the City of Alexandria and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The city-owned parking lot could feature basketball, tennis and futsal court markings for use outside waterpark hours. Additionally, the parking lot could be marketed to host beer, wine and food truck festivals, pop-up holiday markets, farmers markets, fund raisers, concerts, 10-K races, pop-up ice skating and outdoor movies. Alexandria residents would have an ongoing dialogue with their city government about what to feature and when.

Over time, a recreation center with a turf field roof and underground parking would be built over the parking lot. The easy access to the center from the beltway would benefit regional partners within NOVA Parks and the City of Alexandria. The recreation center could be jointly managed by NOVA Parks and Alexandria.

This allows Alexandria and NOVA Parks to provide year round utilization now, upgrades to existing facilities in the near future and an indoor recreation center over the long term.

A shorter term lease at the current city contribution to NOVA Parks costs Alexandria taxpayers \$7

million dollars. The Eisenhower Partnership suggests that this contribution be put directly toward the construction of an indoor recreation center that benefits both groups. Nominal daily parking rates would be charged beginning immediately with the existing parking lot, eventually to include an entrance fee or membership to the indoor recreation center.

Great Waves Waterpark also fills to capacity on most weekends of the summer. The existing parking lot can only be improved but so much, and cannot be expanded as the space around it is protected area. By extending use to year-round, NOVA Parks can expand revenues during what is likely their least lucrative season.

## Lease Recommendation

Alexandria should counter the lease offer with a fair plan that benefits both parties. Stronger governance, year round use, a shorter lease and a common future are important. By breaking the property into smaller parts and the lease into smaller more manageable increments, the City and NOVA Parks can both benefit immediately and over the long term. Alexandria and NOVA Parks would both benefit from a new recreation center that worked jointly with the existing waterpark, so long as both play a role in funding.

Before a decision is made with regard to any lease, an independent financial analysis must be conducted to quantify the return on investment of each plan to the greatest degree possible.

Cameron Run Regional Park rests on land owned by City of Alexandria that has been leased to NOVA Parks since 1981 at no cost, under the condition that NOVA Parks build and operate a waterpark. By all accounts, NOVA Parks has built a successful waterpark but has not developed or maintained the rest of the property. The NOVA Parks Blue-Green Plan asks for a 40-year lease in return for a dog park near the animal shelter, a park constructed on the east side of the property, a lazy river attraction near the waterpark entrance and renovation of splash pad in 15 years.

NOVA Parks is best prepared and incentivized to maintain Great Waves. Alexandria is best incentivized to maintain the natural areas and parking lot. Under the Eisenhower Partnership plan, the City of Alexandria would immediately reclaim all areas other than the existing waterpark facilities, including the area to the west of the parking lot (where the dog park is proposed), the parking lot, the resource protected areas, Lake Cook and all areas to the east of existing waterpark structures. There is precedent for reducing the footprint of the site. The original lease was amended in 1991 and again in 2002 to reduce the original leased area from 53 to 25.8 acres.

If NOVA Parks has less property to maintain, a shorter term lease with renewal if the waterpark passes annual inspections should be sufficient to plan new attractions within the existing footprint. Annual operations reviews should be conducted with by the City of Alexandria with penalties set out in the lease.

Alexandria and NOVA Parks should cooperatively fund a new recreation center from the \$680,000 contributed each year by Alexandria residents to NOVA Parks. The first 10 years of paying less would yield approximately \$7 million dollars. The new center could be half funded within 15 years and almost

completely funded within 20 years. Charging admission could also help cover costs.

Considering that Alexandria keeps a AAA bond rating, Alexandria could seek a loan to build a recreation center. The \$680,000 from NOVA Parks would provide a dedicated funding stream to pay back the loan. Even without a loan, Alexandria will certainly be in a better financial position in five or 10 years.

Neither Alexandria, nor any of its sister jurisdictions are currently operating in a good financial environment, therefore options are constrained as they otherwise might not be. However, these conditions will likely improve before the end of the next 40 years, so City Council should refrain from a hasty decision.

## Final Consideration

As the Alexandria Parks and Recreation Commission considers plans for the park, we ask that you consider the differences in a drive down Eisenhower today compared to 40 years ago in 1977. Most of Eisenhower was farmland and a railroad waste facility. No one could have predicted two metro stations, two government agencies, tall buildings and modern homes in this location. Over the next 40 years, the pace of change on Eisenhower will be even more rapid.

A 40-year lease limits flexibility in the heart of Alexandria's strongest source of modernization and future tax revenue. It locks Cameron Run Park into a single use for most of our lifetimes. It removes our collective ability to modernize, protect or beautify the property when circumstances call for it.

Instead, Alexandria should commit to a shorter term lease that encourages regular dialogue with NOVA Parks. This will allow both parties to adapt to new circumstances and continually make balanced decisions about the future of the Eisenhower Corridor.