

City of Alexandria, Virginia

PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Public Hearing and Regular Meeting

Thursday, May 19, 2016, 7:00 p.m.
Charles Houston Community Center
901 Wythe Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Summary Minutes

Commission Members: Jennifer Atkins, Chair, Judith Coleman, Vice Chair, Gina Baum, Stephen Beggs, Rich Brune, Secretary, Brian McPherson, Catherine Poulin, Michael Peter, Jess O’Connell, Danielle Baker.
Absent: Angela Lalwani.

RPCA Staff: James Spengler, Director, Robin DeShields, Executive Assistant, William Chesley, Deputy Director, Recreation Service, Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director, Park Operation, James Nichols, Division Chief, Park Operations, Dan Roush, Park Operations, Robert Narvaez, new Urban Planner II, RPCA.

Other City Staff: Jason Kacamburas, Coordinator Potomac Yard Metrorail Station, Department of Project Implementation (DPI).

Guests: Elizabeth Wright.

- I. **Call to Order:** Jennifer Atkins, Chair at 7:06 p.m. The Chair invited non-agenda public comments prior to the public hearing.

Public Comments – Non-Agenda items:

Elizabeth Wright, Ingram Street, Alexandria, updates: 1. The Brookville Valley Civic Association organized a clean-up of Holmes Run Park on April 23rd. 2. She appreciates Rod Simmons, Natural Resource Specialist, RPCA and the City’s commitment to expanding invasive plant removal. She said the Tree Stewards have done a very good job in recruiting volunteers to help. Simmons also gave a presentation on the Natural Resource Management Plan to the Holmes Run Park Committee on May 5th. 3. Wright said the City’s tree contract should prohibit trees from being volcanoed, as this is not environmentally friendly. 4. The shrubs at Cora Kelly Center were severely cut back cut. Officer Lloyd, APD, said the trimming helps provide a clear line of sight. She said staff would like to see shrubbery next to the Recreation Center and school also trimmed back. 5. *Holmes Run Park Incidents:* Wright said there were several police reportable offenses within the park involving youngsters, she asked how this information is communicated. Wright encouraged the use of trail markers to report location of incidents, and said she would like for Park staff to be made aware of incidents. They had a stand-in liaison attended the last Holmes Run Community Meeting, who provided a lot of detail.

- II. **Public Hearing** – Potomac Yard Metrorail Project: Preliminary Plans for revised Potomac Greens and Potomac Yard Parks, Jason Kacamburas, Project Coordinator, Potomac Yard Metrorail Station, Department of Project Implementation (DPI), and Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director, RPCA: *Note: Coleman was recused from discussion on this project.*

The presentation is posted at:

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/recreation/info/default.aspx?id=25560#2016MeetingInformation>

Chair Atkins called the public hearing to order at 7:15 p.m., and invited public comments, there were none.

Kacamburas, Project Coordinator, said this is the seventh project update to the P&RC, and it will focus on Potomac Greens and Potomac Yard Parks, and the Metrorail station design. Kacamburas reviewed the Station Design Site Plan, and said the plan was endorsed by the Board of Architectural Review, and Transportation Commission on May 18, 2016. He said staff has also met with the Commission of Fine Arts. He said the major items being considered now are the **Western Pavilions** designs (See presentation). He said the plan design is at 30%.

Tiwari, Deputy Director, RPCA Park Operations gave updates on the Potomac Greens and Potomac Yard Parks:

Potomac Greens Park: Tiwari said the community consensus is to maintain the existing character, features and amenities, within the park (See slide). He said the existing trail in the park will connect to the restored trail and boardwalks in the wetland area to the north. The plan includes a security fence that runs along the eastern edge of the access road to separate the park area from the Metro facility.

Potomac Greens Park, East Bicycle/Pedestrian Ramp was reviewed by Tiwari.

He said there is bike parking located underneath the ramp, near the stairs (View looking northwest). In response to a question from O’Connell, **Kacamburas** confirmed that bollards or a security gate will be located at the entrance of the access road to keep unauthorized vehicles away from this area (only service vehicles will be allowed).

Temporary Relocation of Playground: Tiwari explained that the existing playground at *Potomac Greens Park* will be temporarily relocated, so that it can remain useable during construction phase (See pg. 11). He said some concerns were expressed during community meetings; however this is the best location available. Regarding the relocation of the existing playground and tennis courts at *Old Town Greens Park*, he said this is a private facility, and this will be coordinated between WMATA and the HOA. He said the existing access road will need to be widened during the construction.

Potomac Yard Park: Tiwari said the community consensus is to maintain the integrity of the linear park system and the promenade. The pedestrian and bike trail along Potomac Ave. will be continuous. He said the north end of the park just before the retention pond will be terraced with small open areas, seating, landscaping and lighting. *Easements*: Tiwari said the area in the light gray will be part of the Potomac Yard Metrorail station. He said there will be a public access and use easement on the portion of this area that does not have any WMATA (station related) structures.

What We heard from the Park and Recreation Commission: Kacamburas reviewed comments and feedback received from the P&RC over the past several months that have been incorporated into the Plans (**See slide 15**). The focus of feedback was to ensure there is adequate bike parking, the bike trail is open during construction, and the pedestrian bridge hours. A Capital Bike Share station will be considered – but it is not part of the current project.

Bike Parking: Kacamburas gave an update on Bike Parking from the April discussion: He said the Braddock Rd. Metro Station currently has 46 bike racks (each rack can hold two (2) bikes) and 12 bike lockers. From discussions with the City’s Transportation Planning Division (Complete Streets) the Braddock Rd. bike parking is approximately 90% utilized on any given weekday. The King Street Metro Station has 44 bike racks and 20 bike lockers. The King Street bike parking is

approximately 90-95% utilized on any given weekday.

Potomac Yard Metrorail Project there will be covered bike parking on the east and west side of the station. On the east side, the bicycle parking is forecasted to be between 25 to 50 bikes. This bicycle parking will be located under the pedestrian bridge adjacent to Potomac Greens Park. On the west side, the bicycle parking is forecasted to be between 75-100 bikes at the southern entrance pavilion (at East Glebe Road and Potomac Avenue). This bicycle parking will be located in the entrance pavilion facility. The northern western pavilion is not designed yet, but staff will take a proactive approach to the design to ensure bike parking is also incorporated there. Kacamburas said there will be a Bikeshare Station in the area.

1. Brune said that because Potomac Yard Metrorail station is being put between two communities, as opposed to King St. and Braddock Rd. (which are only used 95%) having areas for future growth is recommended.

2. O’Connell, the PRC’s representative to the Old Town North Area Committee (OTN) said the OTN group discussed the current rail line is not being used any more by the Power Station, and if this becomes a bike trail, they would anticipate a potential BikeShare area.

3. Baum asked about public parking. **Tiwari** said there is street parking on the west side of the Potomac Avenue near East Glebe Rd, and on the east side near the playground in this park. Tiwari said staff will be monitoring parking to see if it becomes an issue. He said the good thing is that there is a lot of distance between the station pavilion and the park playground area.

Pedestrian Bridge – Kacamburas said feedback over the last few months, from the public meetings and AlexEngage, has shown some concern about having a 24/7 access Pedestrian Bridge. He said this item was also discussed with the Potomac Yard Metro Implementation Group (PYMIG) on Monday night. Some issues are if the pedestrian bridge were to be open 24/7, the City would need to own the bridge and be responsible for maintaining the bridge and elevators. However, if the bridge remains open only during the time the Metrorail station actually operates, then WMATA will own it and be responsible for maintaining the bridge and elevators. Kacamburas said if WMATA owns the pedestrian bridge it will be open at about 80% of the time. He said there are arguments on both sides, and City staff is obtaining all maintenance costs, and information will be presented to City Council.

Tiwari said comments were received, concerning what would happen when it snowed, or when metro has to shut down, and the bridge is not open, then the community will not have access across this bridge.

Commission Discussion: Commission members briefly discussed the pros and cons of 24/7 access to the pedestrian bridge and what would be the benefits. **McPherson** said he doesn’t think many people will be riding their bikes between the hours of 12:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.; **O’Connell**, said once the retail businesses come on-line in Potomac Yards, the bridge can provide 24/7 access to the Potomac Greens community. **Brune** asked if there are other locations on the metro system with similar situations that are closed off at certain times. **Poulin** said the Monroe Avenue Bridge could possibly be used by residents, as an alternative (Plan B) for pedestrian access.

Kacamburas, said in response to Brune’s question that this is new, metro has no other pedestrian access bridges, there is no precedent

Kacamburas reviewed **Development Special Use Permit (DSUP) Conditions** – See Presentation (pg. 15), and said approval of the **Final EIS** is expected in early June. He said staff is working diligently with the Federal Transit Authority (FTA), the National Park Service (NPS) and

WMATA. A Record of Decision is anticipated in Summer 2016.

Q: O’Connell asked if the bike trail will go through the pedestrian plaza, and if any thought been given to commuter’s safety (i.e. traffic signal, signage).

A: Kacamburas said this has been discussed, and this is one reason a section of the promenade is labeled a different color, to help delineate this area visually. In response to O’Connell, Kacamburas said any bus drop will be at the west north of the station.

EIS-Land Exchange: Kacamburas said a component of the EIS is the land exchange, the areas colored in yellow, was part of the original Net Benefits Agreement. The section by the north had some contamination as expected due to the old rail yard. He said the National Park Service (NPS) cannot take possession of contaminated land. Staff is working with the NPS. At this point, there is agreement to swap the magenta colored area which is just under seven (7) acres. He said an environmental site assessment will be completed. He said the information will be brought to City Council next Tuesday night.

Upcoming Meetings: Community Open Houses: May 23, and June 2, 2016 (6:30-8:30 p.m., Charles Houston), Public Hearings: Planning Commission, June 7, and City Council, June 16, 2016.

Next Steps: Refine and Finalize concepts, DSUP process: June 2016 public hearing (See presentation).

Tiwari – reviewed the **Wetland Restoration Concept**. He said the final design will be subject to approval by the Corp of Engineers. Design goal is to create higher grounds for re-forestation and screening of the station from the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

Tiwari said the **Rail Park Access** is currently undeveloped and not open to the public. He said this may become a staging site for construction, which will require improvements to the access road for vehicles. He said the WMATA contractor will be required to restore it to its previous condition

Atkins thanked staff for their presentation and for including the Park and Recreation Commission’s recommendations in the plan. **Kacamburas** said a City Council Special Hearing will be held on June 16th. **Tiwari** asked that the P&RC send a letter of support to City Council prior to the June 7th Planning Commission meeting.

MOTION: Brune moved that the P&RC draft a letter of acceptance of the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station Plan to City Council. Poulin asked that the motion be amended to include support for the bike path.

Atkins asked if the letter should include comments about the proposed pedestrian bridge 24/7 access. Brune said he doesn’t think the 24/7 bridge access is needed, Baum said she does not support the City owning the bridge. Brune moved, and Peters seconded that the P&RC support the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station Plan, with the exception of having a 24/7 pedestrian bridge access. The motion was approved unanimously.

III. Presentations:

Judy Lo, Park Planner introduced Robert Narvaez, new Urban Planner II, who began about two weeks ago. Narvaez, has a Bachelor’s degree from Virginia Tech, and a Master’s Degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Florida. He also worked as a Park Planner for Prince William County.

A. **Taney Avenue Park Plan:** Judy Lo, Park Planner, **See Staff Report.**

Lo gave an update on the Taney Avenue Park Improvement Plan and solicited the P&RC approval. The park is two acres, with one of the largest unprogrammed grass areas in the City. See Existing Conditions and 2016 Proposed Park Plan Improvements. In 2015

RPCA approved the Neighborhood Parks Improvement Plans. The P&RC endorsed the Large Parks Improvement Plan in 2015, which was approved by City Council in 2016. Lo said the Taney Avenue Park proposed improvements are based on these recommendations. **See presentation for details.**

Comments:

Baum said she likes the swinging bench, but is concerned about children standing on it. She also said she recalls the public desiring hammocks.

Lo said the bench was added to help keep the park informal and natural. She said that staff is looking at using wood materials on the playground materials, that are softer and carry less heat, she described the design of the tot area, and said there will also be a shade canopy. Lo said within the tree grove will be climbing equipment for school age children and there will be a natural play area.

Next Steps/Process: Community Open House, May 26; Online Survey closes on June 1st; Special Use Permit (SUP), docketed for Planning Commission, June 9 and to City Council June 18, 2016.

Lo said the implementation will be phased in. CIP Funds are available in FY17, and also a RunningBrooke and Rebuilding Together Alexandria have partnered together to contributing \$100,000 towards the project. Lo said three volunteer build days (as required by the project) are planned for September.

O’Connell asked that the build dates once confirmed be shared with the P&RC.

McPherson asked about Slide 5, and the terrain that slopes upwards. He said it will be good if the wildflowers are planted up high in order to leave as much flat open space as possible. Lo reviewed the area of the slope.

Brune said he has lived near the park for many years, and welcomes the improvements.

Atkins said the \$100,000 contribution from RunningBrooke is very exciting, and commended staff for their work on this project.

MOTION: O’Connell moved that the P&RC write a letter supporting the SUP Application for the Taney Avenue playground equipment to the Planning Commission and City Council; Brune seconded. The motion carried unanimously. Vice Chair, Coleman will draft a letter on behalf of the Commission.

IV. Items for Information:

A. Public Comments – non agenda items. See Item Above.

B. Updates:

Patrick Henry School and Recreation Center: Atkins said this item is on Alexandria School Board’s agenda tonight. McPherson the P&RC representative for the project, said two design options are being considered for the new school, Options A-1 and C-1. Option A-1, includes primary bus access from N. Latham St., and Option C-1, routes school traffic using Taney Ave., except for emergency vehicles. McPherson said Option A-1 (N. Latham St. entrance) was supported by the community, then all of a sudden, after approval by the committee. The next day the School Board said the Latham St. entrance should only be used as an emergency vehicle easement, and they came back in favor of Option C-1. He said there was another contentious community meeting, and there was a School Board meeting last week where the difference in costs, and the addition of an auditorium was discussed. McPherson said there has been a huge shift within the last week from design C-1 to A-1 (Latham St. entrance). He said the cost differential is a \$2 million, out of a \$40

million project budget, with Option A-1 being less expensive. Atkins explained the difference between the two designs: C-1 there would be no vehicles on Latham St., unless for emergency vehicles, and A-1 has a bus loop off Latham and one entrance off Taney Avenue, along with a larger continuous open space for play and less paving. Atkins asked once the School Board votes, does it go to the Planning Commission and City Council. McPherson said this will need to come back to the P&RC for discussion of fields, the new recreation center, and open space.

For more information visit, <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/facilities/ph/>

Simpson Park Playground and Passive Lawn Renovation (project manager Dana Wedeles, Urban Planner II): Judy Lo, Park Planner gave a brief update – See Staff Report. Park Planning will hold a community workshop to obtain input on the Simpson Park playground and adjacent Lawn Renovation on Wednesday, May 25. A presentation, review of concept alternatives and discussion will be held at 7 p.m. The meeting was held at Mt. Vernon Recreation Center. RPCA hired the Alexandria-based landscape architecture firm Lardner/Klein to lead the design process and May + Watkins to incorporate public art within the site. For more info see Staff Report.

- [Simpson Park Playground and Passive Lawn Renovation](#)
- [Community Workshop eNews](#)

V. Items for Action:

- A. Approval of Minutes: March 10, 2016: MOTION: Brune moved to approve the minutes, O’Connell seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. Director’s Report:

- A. **Update on Approved FY2017-2026 Operating and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Budget:** James Spengler, Director RPCA. RPCA’s operating budget, and the City’s CIP budget were approved by City Council, May 5, 2016, with five additions: 1. Addition back of two nights of drop-in activity at Nannie J. Lee Center, 2. Additional funding for waterfront programming, in anticipation of increased waterfront activity, 3. Additional funds for the marina refresh and waterfront programming, 4. Additional funding for streetscaping in Old Town, and 5. Addition back for outdoor park restroom cleaning.
- B. **Bright Mind Daycare:** Spengler said this item was on the agenda at the last City Council Public Hearing, and will come back to the P&RC in the fall as a policy discussion. *Issue: use of public parks as play spaces for private, licensed and home day care providers.* He said Alexandria City has over 200 licensed childcare facilities, ranging from homes daycare to dedicated private sites. Depending on the facility’s location, there are different requirements for children’s outdoor play. Recently many facilities needing to provide outdoor play for children, have been listing the City’s public parks. The concern is that all providers will not fit on certain sites at one time. Bright Mind Daycare has listed the Charles Houston Center as its outdoor play area. However, the Child and Family Network currently uses Houston’s playground by agreement with RPCA, and the playground is only accessible from inside the building.

Fields Use Discussion:

James Nichols, Division Chief, Park Maintenance said RPCA has created criteria on how fields are evaluated for weather related closings. Prior to scheduled games, staff makes the call for closing based on the review of the fields to determine if the field is holding water, and if rain is predicted. He said if the weather is questionable, and the field remains open, the decision to close is left to the discretion of the user groups, coaches, and Mac Slover, RPCA Director of Sports. Nichols said staff has put together a Consolidated Report that is

sent out daily at 1 p.m. Based upon the report, Mac Slover sends out notice to the coaches and posts the information on the (Phone) Hotline. In addition to the existing system, he said staff is looking at implementing a sign or flag system (red, field-closed, green, field-open, etc.) that would help alert users. Staff is also looking at giving permission to the Affiliate Groups to do minor maintenance to fields, this is yet to be implemented. Staff held a brief training this year, for coaches on field use and maintenance. Staff has been working with Mac Slover to make training for coaches a requirement on how to prepare to use the field and after field uses. He said RPCA is still using the phone line notification system, as well as putting information on RPCA's website.

Commission Comments:

Q: Peters asked if RPCA has looked at using Rainout.com. **A: Nichols** said not yet, but this can be explored. He said more rain is expected in June. Staff has checked with other jurisdictions and most use phone systems.

Q: Baum asked about Alex Renew field. **A: Spengler** said the contractor for AlexRenew is working on fixing the drainage problems and staff hopes it will be available for use in June.

Other: Coleman asked if staff has spoken with T&ES regarding doing a presentation on Ben Brenman Pond. She said this issue was raised at the April 21 meeting. Spengler said Jack Browand will follow-up. Tiwari said the first draft of the concept plan has been released and it is going through internal review.

- VII. **Division Updates:** Recreation Services, Park Operations, Park Planning, Design and Capital Improvement. **To view full staff report go to:**
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/PRCCOMBINEDFILEMAY192016.pdf>

VIII. **Commission Business:**

- A. **Discussion of Slate of Officers for June Election:** The P&RC will hold elections for officers in June. Atkins asked that Commissioner who are interested in running for office let her know. She said that Rich Brune, Secretary, P&RC will be stepping down from the Commission.

B. **Commission Updates by District:**

District I: Baum, O'Connell, Poulin:

Waterfront Walk Baum said the annual Waterfront Walk will be held on June 4th, at 9:00 a.m. and will begin at Windmill Hill Park, and end at Tidewalk Park.

Dominion Transmission Line Group – Poulin was unable to attend the last meeting. Brune attended and said the meeting began with a memo to the City to discuss the implementation of overhead lines. He said the City does not support overhead lines, as it may lead to lower property values, and electronic emissions and overhead wires may contribute to possible plane crashes and density of the Potomac Yard area. Brune said Dominion Power is not divulging much information, and have stated that they are keeping their options open and will send options to the Virginia State Commission.

Atkins said she watched the City Council meeting, and Council discussed the project at length. She said and it looks like Dominion may use the CXS route. Poulin asked if this will impact the planned Metrorail station.

Old Town North - O’Connell, said at the last meeting on April 18, a report was given on the Montgomery Park Plan, Jack Browand, RPCA attended. The last one was not park focused. He said today he sat in on a meeting with City staff regarding open space and canopy coverage. Thoughtful consideration is being given to how this neighborhood can meet its canopy coverage and open space.

District II: Atkins, Beggs, Peter:

Aquatics: Atkins said Advocates for Alexandria Aquatics (AAA) presented a check for \$5,000 towards building the 50 meter pool at Chinquapin. She said now that the City’s budget for 50 meter pool has been approved, funding raising efforts will continue towards raising the additional \$2.5 million.

North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan Advisory Group (NPYAG): Michael Peters reviewed report– **See Attached Report: Coleman** asked if they will have maintenance cost sharing. Peters said he will check in this.

District III: Brune, Coleman, McPherson:

Eisenhower West – Coleman, no update. She said in regards to the Special Events Policy the Colorfest 5K race was held last weekend (May 14) and they were using a colored chalky substance. The chalk stuck to all of the paved paths and did not wash away during the rain.

Youth Sports Advisory Board: McPherson said that Kerry Donely, former Mayor Alexandria, and current bank Executive will start a campaign to bring Parker Gray up to standard to allow more use by adding lights. For more info on Parker-Gray Stadium Project. <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/tcstadium/>

Old Dominion Boat Club (ODBC) - Brune said ODBC is having a meeting next week concerning construction of the existing building.

Cameron Run Regional Park Lease Renewal: Baum asked about the status of the Cameron Run Lease renewal. Atkins said this is under discussion with City Manager’s Office.

IX. **Next Meeting:** June 23, 2016, Location Charles Houston Community Center, to be confirmed. Tentative agenda items: Interim Fitzgerald Square update.

X. **Adjourned:** The meeting adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

Attachment: NPYAG Report from Peter

North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan Advisory Group

Report to Parks and Recreation Commission

Michael R. Peter

May 19, 2016

The main focus of this advisory group is to provide feedback and guidance as the developer seeks changes to the 2010 North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan. Much work is being done right now on east end of the site to prepare for a traffic demand study to be completed this summer. The total advisory group work will last 12-14 months.

To coincide with Metro opening, the developer, JBG, is seeking to develop the movie theater site first (beginning in 2018-2019) as the lease is up and the site will be available. This site is approximately ¼ of a mile long (roughly the same length as Shirlington).

The developer has been very specific in noting that their plans still work within the overall confines of the original small area plan, but they are seeking a significant change to accommodate development of the movie theater site.

In the approved small area plan, Potomac Yard Park would be extended all across the eastern end of the development, continuing the stretch from South Potomac Yard. In North Potomac Yard, all of the streets would terminate at a newly curved Potomac Avenue, to keep in line with the concept that the park fronts the street and all other avenues would terminate there with the park as the end vista.

The developer change requested is to keep Potomac Avenue where it is and build on the movie theater site. This would keep Potomac Yard Park at the size originally envisioned, but it would block the vistas with building in front of the park and some residential facing the park.

I raised the following concerns:

1. The residential units looking out on the park cannot have a sense of ownership over the park. Landscape buffers and other tools must be used to maintain public and welcoming access to the park.
2. No landscape buffers or other such barriers should be used in calculating the total required size of the park (3.5 acres).
3. Some avenues between buildings do allow for a view of the park, but still feel closed off. In one significant area, there is a view of the park through an archway that is completely closed with residential units beginning at the 20 foot level.
4. Other park areas in the proposed plan also include some retail fronting the areas and I raised the same concerns that it cannot feel closed off.

There was also some discussion on the school site in the plan, which remains in the northwest corner of the movie theater site, adjacent to a significant portion of the proposed Potomac Yard Park. There continues to be discussion of school access to the park and general access to appropriate recreational facilities – not just open space and then we are done. . .

On Tuesday of this week, these issues were discussed and addressed in a day-long design and community input open house. Current options being considered include the following:

1. Establishing a partial one-way road bordering the west boundary of the park; and
2. Redesigning and enhancing a park at the metro station location.

Photos and associated work from the open house can be found here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/137017570@N06/albums/72157668575502255/with/27003269692/>.