



# NOVA P A R K S

Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

5400 Ox Road, Fairfax Station, VA 22039 | 703-352-5900 | Fax: 703-273-0905 | www.novaparks.com

DATE: June 19, 2017  
TO: Jennifer Atkins, Chair of Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission  
FROM: Paul Gilbert, NOVA Parks Executive Director   
RE: Draft Eisenhower Partnership Proposal for Cameron Run

I am responding to the recent proposal from the Eisenhower Partnership about the Cameron Run lease. While we greatly value the spirit in which this proposal was made, I think it is based on some assumptions that are not as good as they could be.

**Ability to invest** – A central theme of this proposal is a desire for a term shorter than the 40-year lease of the Blue and Green Plan. Any major development takes 20 years to depreciate the asset value. If NOVA Parks borrows funds to redevelop, decades are needed to pay off the loans and get any return on investment. The first phase of the Blue and Green Plan with the community park, dog park, parking lot improvements and Lazy River would be built in the first three years at a minimum investment of \$7.5 million. This investment would take 20 years to depreciate. A second phase, 15 years after the first, is what drives the 40 year number. If it was phase one only, that could be done with a 20-year lease.

The Eisenhower Partnership plan assumes the City can invest in the development of park facilities outside of the waterpark. This does not seem to be a sound assumption. The City's backlog of capital projects is enormous and growing. In the last year, the City has been inventorying the maintenance backlog on current City buildings, Metro is requiring more funding, and the sewer issue, which will cost over \$350 million in the next few years, leaves no room for a project like Cameron. While the City budgets capital ten years out, the City backlog of capital needs is likely to far surpass that time horizon.

The only realistic path to reinvest in a vibrant and attractive Cameron Run is the Blue and Green Plan that would be fully funded by NOVA Parks.

**Understanding City support for NOVA Parks** – There seems to be an assumption that the financial support the City provides NOVA Parks as a member jurisdiction is connected to Cameron Run. That is not the way it works. Each of the three Cities and three Counties that are member jurisdictions contribute the same amount per capita. It is \$1.89 for operations and \$2.57 for capital. These amounts have not gone up in a decade, and they are for overall membership in the NOVA Parks system, regardless of the number or type of parks in that jurisdiction.

City of Alexandria  
Sean Kumar  
Scott Price

Arlington County  
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In the case of Alexandria, our other park is the Carlyle House Historic Park in Old Town. This is one of the most significant historic sites in a City that is known for history. NOVA Parks owns this site and restored it fully. It continues to take a great deal of reinvestment in the facility as well as the annual operation, which like almost all historic sites operates at a significant annual loss. 31% of City residents regularly use the W&OD Trail, and around 20% regularly use both Pohick Bay and Bull Run Regional Parks. All our member jurisdictions get a great deal because so little of the operating expense of this large regional system is paid for by tax dollars. So, the City's membership in NOVA Parks is far more than just this one park, and the annual membership support is not connected to Cameron Run or the lease.

The Eisenhower Partnership plan suggests an annual inspection and oversight of Cameron Run by the City. This would be problematic. There is documentation of City Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities staff actively organizing citizen opposition to NOVA Parks. This background creates a significant issue of objectivity. NOVA Parks runs five of the most popular and well run waterparks in our region. Our facilities are popular because we are responsive to market conditions and provide the kind of high quality facilities the public wants. If NOVA Parks continues to operate Cameron Run, it must be under similar conditions as the last 37 years.

The Partnership suggested a number of specific items like a garden east of Lake Cooke, and activities like 10Ks, holiday markets, food trucks and others. Such operational issues would fall outside of long-term lease issues. We have proposed in the Blue and Green Plan working with the Towns at Cameron Park HOA to determine the nature and features of a community park east of Lake Cooke. If a garden is desired by a majority of these neighbors, it could be included. Last summer, we hosted a couple of events under the title "Cameron Rocks." They included a portable rock wall, food truck and beer garden. We agree that this type of utilization is great to bring people in during slower times, and we can continue to look for similar opportunities in the future.

I appreciate that the Eisenhower Partnership is looking for a win-win solution. The Blue and Green Plan was thoughtfully put together to include as many new facilities and uses as will fit on this property and that NOVA Parks can support. This was not the starting point for a negotiation. This is what we can do, after many months of careful consideration of all the potential options.