



# HOLMES RUN PARK COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

## PROCESS

From September through early December 2012, the public was invited to provide input on the existing conditions and possible future uses for Holmes Run Park. To gather information, the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA) held a public workshop to discuss Park needs and distributed a survey asking for feedback.

This same process simultaneously occurred for each of the City's large parks, including Chinquapin Park, Four Mile Run Park, Hensley Park, Brenman and Boothe Parks, and Simpson Stadium Park. Combined, over 585 Alexandria people responded to the surveys and 45 attended workshops.

Throughout the 2012/2013 winter, RPCA will use the information gathered to determine Park needs and priorities to develop Park Improvement Plans. Ultimately, these plans will help inform budget decisions and on-going use and facility considerations.

## SURVEY RESULTS

On October 1, 2012, online park improvement surveys became available to the public through the City of Alexandria's website, press releases and social media. RPCA also distributed

**"IT'S A QUIET AND PEACEFUL AREA TO RELAX, WALK, AND OBSERVE NATURE, A WONDERFUL AND IMPORTANT RESOURCE FOR A CITY THAT HAS A SHORTAGE OF OPEN GREEN AND NATURAL SPACES."**

**"I LOVE ITS QUIETNESS IN THE MIDST OF A HEAVILY POPULATED AREA."**

**"IT IS A BEAUTIFUL ISLAND OF TRANQUILITY IN AN OTHERWISE BUSY NEIGHBORHOOD, MUCH USED AND APPRECIATED BY RUNNERS, WALKERS, AND FAMILIES."**



hard copy surveys through boxes located at entrances to the park and in the mailboxes of adjacent neighborhood homes. RPCA received 94 completed surveys.

RPCA acknowledges that this survey is not statistically accurate. Rather, the responses are from those who saw the survey and chose to participate. While this is a sample of Park users, it is not representative of all users. As an example, through cyclist counts, we know that many more bike through the Park than are reported through the survey. For this reason, the information below will be supplemented with site observation and additional data to inform recommendations in the Park Improvement Plans.

The survey asked park users to identify their usual point of access into the park, the mode of transportation they use to get there, their typical park activities, what they like about the park, and what areas of the park need improvement. Survey participants also prioritized their improvement needs.

Of those surveyed, 64 participants lived in the 22304 zip code . Fewer than 5 participants lived in each of the other Alexandria zip codes or outside City limits. The majority of those who visit do so daily (33%) or weekly (37%).

### This is what we heard:

#### ACCESS AND PARK USE

Sixty percent walk to Holmes Run Park; 19% bike and only 14% drive. This high number

“I LIKE THE EXTENDED PATH AND MY KIDS USE IT TO GO ACROSS THE CREEK. OTHER THAN THAT THERE IS NOTHING TO DRAW US THERE, JUST A MEANS TO AN END. I WISH IT HAD A DRAW FOR US...”

“IT PROVIDES A SAFE CONNECTION BETWEEN EISENHOWER AVENUE AND BAILEY’S CROSSROADS FOR BIKING. THE PARK IS VERY QUIET AND RELAXING TO PASS THROUGH.”

“HOLMES RUN PARK IS A VITAL CITY RESOURCE, NOT ONLY FOR THE PEOPLE THAT LIVE IN THE AREA BY THE PARK, BUT FOR PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE CITY. IT NEEDS TO BE PROTECTED, RESPECTED AND PROVIDED THE RESOURCES AND ATTENTION THAT IT DESERVES.”

#### Where do you live?

(Darker color zip codes indicate a higher number of survey participants)

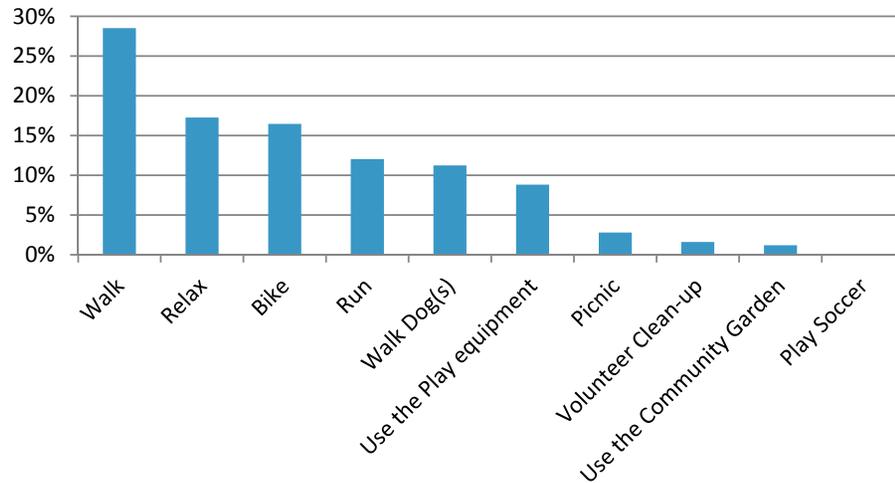


#### How often do you visit the Park?

Value	Count	Percent of responses
Daily	31	33%
Weekly	35	37%
Monthly	18	19%
Yearly	6	6%
Never	4	4%



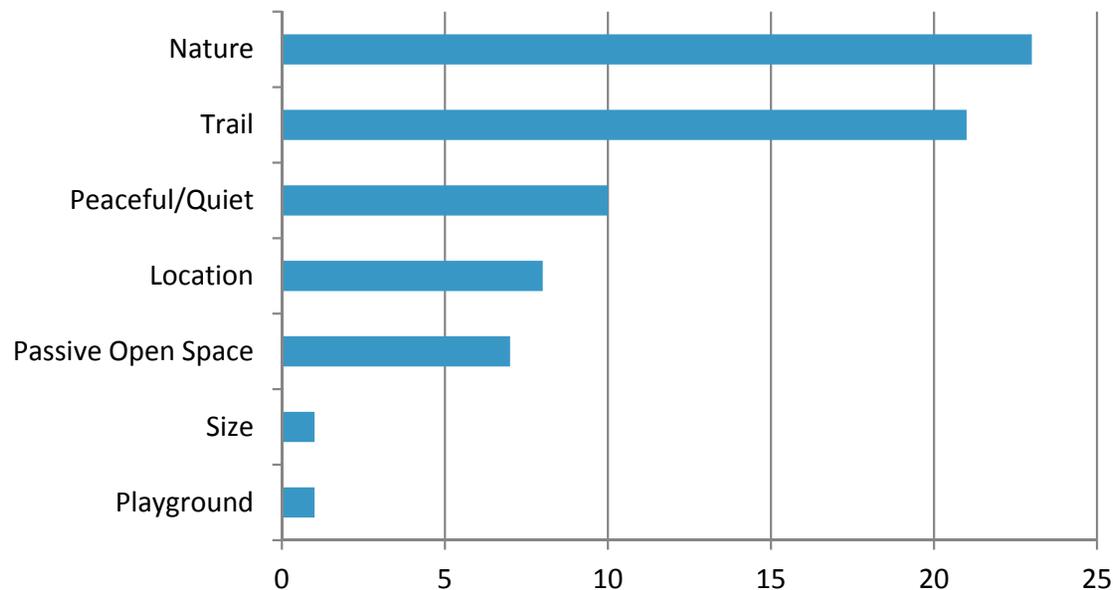
## What do you do in the Park?



of pedestrians demonstrates how Holmes Run is considered a large park with a strong neighborhood use, attracting leisurely activity. It also implies the need to review safer pedestrian and cyclist access throughout the the Park.

When asked, “What do you do in the Park?” almost all participants stated that they go for unorganized, passive park uses. The highest use was to walk (29%). Other popular activities included relaxing (17%), biking (19%), running (12%) and walking dog(s) (11%). All of these activities are multi-generational and can occur individually or in vary small groups.

## What do you like about the Park?



In answering, “What do you like about the Park,” participants were consistent in identifying the natural character of the Park’s setting. Over 30% specifically commented that they like the Park because of nature. Comments included, “[I like] the large, old trees along the bike path, the stream and the wildlife (especially the occasional heron), and the chance it gives my children to experience ‘the woods’ in the middle of the City” and “[I like] the wooded natural area next to the stream... able to see wildlife: deer, hawks, foxes, etc.” The trail is also a clear asset of the Park, both locally and regionally. Respondents liked that the trail is quiet, but also connected to places they need to go, such as the Foxchase Shopping Center.

### IMPROVEMENTS

Participants identified security as the highest



need for Park improvements, with the nature areas as the second highest need. The high need for security improvements follow several sexual assaults that occurred in 2012. Before that time there were few reported crimes. The following page has selected statements that support the need for identified improvements. The comments are shown in prioritized order, (all participants selected a need but did not always provide additional comments on their selection):

### SECURITY

- "Since I heard of a recent assault in the park, I would like to see better security."
- "There have been a few incidents that the joggers got mugged and sexually assaulted."
- "Getting the police OFF of the bike trail in their cars and using bicycle cops instead. Police cars DO NOT belong on the trails!"
- "The park requires regular police presence. Additionally, the city should make an effort to clear underbrush within the park."
- "Park Patrolled by Police Park Closed at Dark Enforcement & patrols after dark Park is not continuously patrolled unless something happens. Enforcement needs to be continuous & permanent. Holmes Run Parkway (north side) has always been a late night place to come and park and go into the park at night and do whatever people do in the middle of the night??? It is a well known area for drugs, drinking, deals, and lewd sexual acts. Police enforcement via cruiser and bike patrols down in the park (driving on the path) must remain constant to let the public know the park is being monitored on a regular basis."
- "I am concerned about the history of attacks,



- would like to explore the possibility of adding more lighting in well-traveled areas"
- "There have been a number of incidents along the Holmes Run trail in recent weeks, and I no longer feel safe taking my children there."
  - "We need to know that we are safe."
  - "Security needs to be improved."
  - "The walking/running path is USUALLY safe when there are people around - but in mid-afternoon and when it's dark (early a.m./late p.m.) I don't feel safe."
  - "While the park is mostly safe there are some obviously homeless people that make the park their home. I have never had any trouble with these individuals but I can understand why it would make some people nervous. I would suggest the occasional police bike patrols through the park, maybe twice a day."

#### NATURAL AREAS

- "The English ivy is posing a serious threat to many of the trees in Holmes Run Park. An effort needs to be made to eradicate the ivy. Just because a plant is not native, however, does not make it bad. The mimosa and Japanese honeysuckle add their beautiful aromas to the park."
- "Stewardship of this bit of the wild in the city: Keeping natural areas accessible (fighting choking vines and invasive species?)"
- "Removal of English ivy which is choking many of the trees."
- "No more concrete in the waterway"
- "A path down by the water where you can get close and look for wildlife with or without your dog- kinda like a stream oriented nature trail."
- "The greenway needs to be bolstered to provide

the best transitway for wildlife through our city. Manipulations for people should not adversely impact the wildlife corridor needs."

- "Community involvement to remove invasive plants and enhance with native planting."
- "I do wish to emphasize that the park should pretty much be left alone. Leave the Canada geese, the pigeons, the feral cats, the squirrels. They harm no one. I was active in 1997 in getting the city to stop the clear cutting of the banks of Holmes Run. I wish to see as little cutting along the banks as possible. Also remember that just because a tree in the woods is dead, it does not mean that it should be taken down. It serves as habitat to a variety of living organisms. I do not want to see the underbrush cleared. It poses no threat either. If you wish information on the benefits of underbrush, I can provide it to you."

#### PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT

- "Needs more playground equipment scattered throughout the park"
- "Playgrounds are really lame. Would love to have a community playground with picnic tables, and equipment"
- "Play equipment for children 5-10 yrs old."
- "I have lived here my whole life and have never felt particularly drawn. My daughter liked to go when she was little and the equipment was the right age for her. There is nothing to draw kids over the age of 6 there, really."
- "Add boulders and other natural features children can enjoy - not more static play equipment"

#### DOG AREA

- "A fenced-in small dog area near Holmes Run Parkway would be nice."
- "Create a small dog - dog park"
- "The park needs a small dog exercise area. There are dozens of small dog owners in the adjacent condos, most of whom are reluctant to put their pets in the nearby exercise area for fear of the many large dogs there. I would contribute up to \$200 and would be happy to spearhead a local fund drive to finance such a project, and have canvassed many of the pet owners here who have said they would also be happy to contribute."
- "Always in favor of more designated dog areas"
- "I would like a water line & spigot at the dog park. Other than that, it's a great area for dogs."
- "The dog parks on Duke and at Cameron have no water and no trees."
- "To minimize pollution, discourage dog use."

#### PATHS/TRAILS

- "Very important to widen the path to separate walkers and bikers: most bikers are racers giving no notice of approach, never slowing and very aggressive. Walkers and runners listen to music and older folks don't hear well if there is a ding from a bike."
- "Designate a walking path for kids, strollers, and other non-biking users to safely enjoy. Offer park security, graffiti and debris removal"
- "Yards and miles measurements."
- "Improve the bike trail so people can use it to ride to work. Other trails, such as Mt Vernon, are OK to ride on in work clothes. Holmes run still needs work."
- "Upgrade and properly maintain the shared-



use path to AASHTO bikeway standards (10-foot wide pavement plus two clear 2-foot shoulders \*minimum\* width). Segments of the asphalt trail that are frequently flooded should be repaved in concrete to withstand the water damage. Also, the low-water crossings should be upgraded so bicyclists do not routinely get wet feet and legs when crossing."

- "Multiuse trail, especially the tunnel, stream crossing, trail surface, and lack of curb cut at N Morgan St (I think that's the one)."
- "Is there anyway to connect the park with other parks or recreational areas on the west end? that would be a boon for the area."
- "On the south end of the park, the path towards Eisenhower Ave is in poor shape as it goes under the railroad tracks. It is narrow and often floods under the northernmost railroad bridge. The new underpass under Eisenhower Ave is helpful, but some improvements could be made to make it easier for people to go in and out from the south along Eisenhower Ave."
- "Love it, I have been using it for about 20 years, biking and walking."

#### MAINTENANCE

- "Cleaning up stray bottles, plastic bags, and garbage by the water's edge"
- "I would like to see the Park continue to promote a healthy area for all beings to flourish. Get some recycling bins by the trash cans."
- "Prevent the sewer from stinking and making the river cleaner."
- "I would like to see the park "managed" as little as possible."

- "I wish I could be furnished with a piece of equipment to pick up trash while on my walks. The trash is usually in the bushes and brush and not easily reached with my bare arms."
- "Holmes Run Park is an important reason for buying our home, so its care, security and maintenance is important to us. We run and bike in the park daily. We would like the debris (fencing, large rocks) removed at the end of Paxton St. where the sewer line was being repaired."
- "The poor maintenance of this shared-use path is a disgrace. The asphalt "pavement" north of N Beauregard St is buckled, and the section of unpaved path immediately north of N Beauregard St that was washed out by a storm about a year ago has still not been adequately restored to its poor condition prior to that storm. The section immediately south of N Beauregard St is also poorly maintained with much overgrown vegetation intruding on the narrow and badly deteriorated path. Also, the trail has unnecessary and inadequately marked bollards that are a serious crash hazard for bicyclists. I get angry when I think about this crappy and unsafe transportation and recreation asset. Once the path is safe for fair-weather use, the City should also keep it clear of snow and ice in winter. Relatively minor problems are that many dog owners do not keep their dogs leashed on the trail, and families let their little kids sit and play on the low-water bridge for long periods without adequate supervision. The fact that this survey for the Holmes Run Park does not even list a category for its shared-use path speaks volumes."

#### PARK FURNISHINGS

- "Needs more benches"

#### LIGHTING

- "I know the park is closed at dusk but it would make a great place to walk in the evening especially during the Spring and Summer. Placing lights throughout the park would make this possible."
- "A few more lights in key areas would go a long way."
- "I think better lighting would improve security."

#### SOCCER AREA

- "We enjoy walking with the dog, and playing with the kids. Some people don't like kids playing soccer there, but we love to see them out there playing. We are so short fields to use, and improvement for the youth to play soccer is a good idea."

#### COMMUNITY GARDEN

- "I didn't know about a community garden area. Perhaps there could be more community gardens."

#### ACTIVITY

- "All Veterans Park is under utilized, under planned. Would like to see this used more as a 'planned park' and the rest of the park left in a more natural state"
- "More new things to do"
- "It needs to draw the kids and family's out."
- "The installation of additional exercise equipment, expand the current exercise space"



by the Beatley bridge.”

#### FLOOD CONTROL

- “Priority #1: Raise the displaced, refugee Steadfast Bridge in Tarleton Park to be one foot above the 100 year flood plain now that any flood waters have been redirected by the City towards the Tarleton Neighborhood. Priority #2: Construct a berm, levee, or wall in along the east bank of Holmes Run in Tarleton Park to divert flood waters away from Tarleton Residences now that any flood waters have been redirected by the City towards the Tarleton Neighborhood. Priority #3: In addition to the berm, levee, or wall along the east bank of Holmes Run, construct a check valve at the outfall to Homes Run at the lower end of South Jenkins Street matching the style of the check valve to Cameron Run that protects the Wheeler Avenue warehouses. Priority #4: To compensate for the undersized outfalls for the two pedestrian concrete causeways recently constructed in Tarleton Park, add a berm eight inches high at a location five feet south of the crushed rock path and a swale eight inches deep at a location 10 feet south of the crushed rock path. The City recently brought in dirt and graded Tarleton Park so that it drain a larger area of the park northward. Priority #5: Construct a safety railing matching the railing at the outfall to Cameron Run to keep Tarleton Park users from falling about five feet to either concrete or to water at the unnatural artificially sharp bend in the stream half way between the South Gordon Street outfall and the check valve at the outfall to Cameron Run. Priority

#6: In Tarleton Park mark the borders of the Resource Protection Areas with posts spaced 100 feet apart with height level markings for the 1966 flood, the 1972 Agnes flood, the 1975 Eloise flood, and the anticipated 100 year flood level. Priority #7: Establish urban meadows in the Resource Protection Areas in lower Tarleton Park to reduce the cost of mowing. Priority #8: Relocate the marker post for the South Gordon Street Off-Leash Dog Exercise Area to a position outside of the Resource Protection Area. Priority #9: Use the standard design for street signs and posts to identify the viable streams with the serial numbers assigned to the streams in recent years. During the last revision of the maps the State granted the City a six month extension in the process updating and expanding the list. Priority #10: Add one bulletin board or one utility pole or both at each cluster of metal benches, decorative rail fences, and metal trash container in Tarleton Park for the purpose of having a place to post official notices. City notices about Tarleton Park that are posted in the industrial area on Wheeler Avenue produce minimal response.”

- “Trail under Beauregard gets flooded and is very dangerous”
- “Improve the tunnel under van dorn st and 395. It frequently floods, is very dirty, and poorly lit. It is a vital connection between the neighborhoods on either side of 395 and in regional bike trails. It makes it difficult for people who live west of 395 to walk or bike into the rest of the park. One short term improvement would be to put more jersey barriers between the stream and the path. There are one or two barriers down there

already, but they are misaligned and more would be needed to try to limit the flooding. The longer term solution is to elevate the path well above the water.”

- “Maintenance of the trail especially around the I-395 tunnel and stream crossings. There tend to be flooding and build-up of sand around these areas that make it less accessible.”

#### OTHER

- “Move the displaced Steadfast Bridge to a better location. Option #1: Place it over the rectangular pool just below the last weir on Holmes Run. Option 2: Place it north of the Duke Street Bridge to connect with the Clermont Drive crossover above Duke Street.”
- “Usually too buggy to visit during the height of summer”
- “The improvements to walking and biking that have been done in the past few years have been great.”
- “The park trail has improved a lot over the past few years, especially with the leveling of many bumps caused by tree roots.”
- “It is fine as is.”
- “Maintaining ‘green space’ and open areas for general use.”

#### WORKSHOP

A Holmes Run Park planning workshop was held on November 7, 2012 at Samuel Tucker Elementary School with the purpose of having community members identify the priorities for future improvements, based on their park experiences and observations. The workshop was advertised through the City’s e-news and



calendar. Signs with workshop information were posted at park entrances and flyers were dropped in the mailboxes of homes in the adjacent neighborhood. A total of six park users attended.

### INSPIRATION BOARD

As participants entered the room they were asked to comment and write their thoughts on precedent images. The exercise was designed to provoke ideas and inspire site programs. None of the images were from City of Alexandria Parks. Participants commented on the following images:



### GROUP EXERCISE

Following a presentation on the Park's existing conditions, attendees participated in group exercises.

The first exercise was designed to identify the Park's top five assets. These are the areas of the Park that participants felt keep them coming to the Park and should remain in the Park and be further enhanced:

The top five park assets identified:

1. The shared-use path
2. Beatley Bridge
3. Playgrounds
4. Benches and park furniture
5. Open flat area

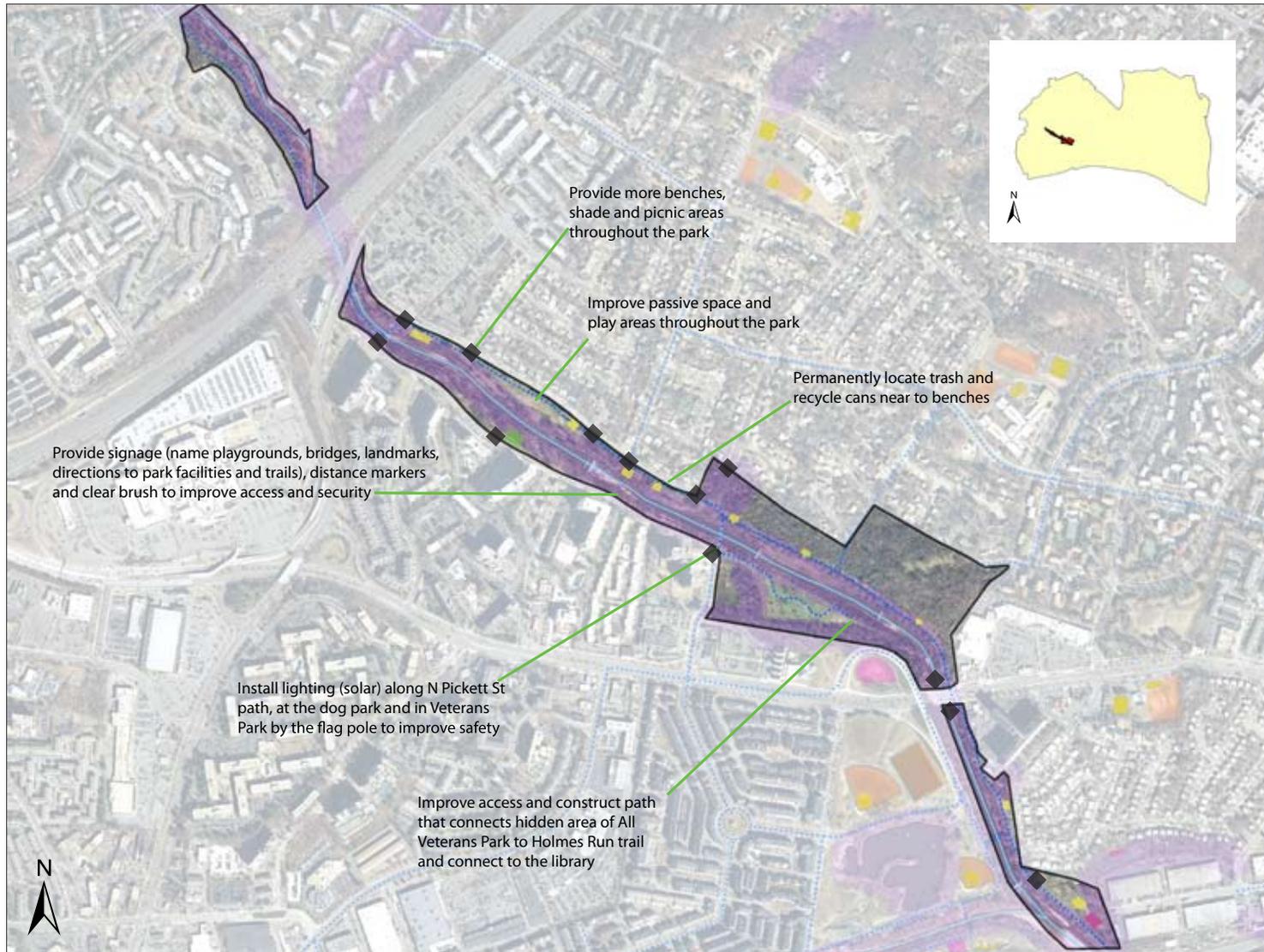
The group also mentioned the community garden as an asset.

Second, the groups used a map of the Park to (1) suggest where pathways should be for optimal park circulation, (2) which existing conditions need improvement, (3) and what programs and facilities are not in the park, but should be. The results of this exercise are shown to the opposite page.

Additional priorities discussed included:

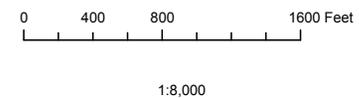
1. Mile markers needed on shared-use trail improve safety
2. Shelter improvements
3. ADA Accessibility (curb cuts for seniors and strollers)
4. Pavement improvements
5. An additional dog park for small dogs





◆ Entrances	■ Athletic Facilities
— Stream	■ Playground
■ Resource Protection Area	■ Gardens
— Paths/Trails	■ Dog Park
	— Comments

## Holmes Run Park Workshop Map (11/07/12)



## SUMMARY

There are some consistent themes throughout the three methods of community feedback.

These include:

1. **Security.** The survey and workshop indicate that security is a major concern in the Park. As mentioned earlier in the summary, this concern follows several sexual assaults that occurred in the Park in 2012. Since that time, the Alexandria Police Department has increased their presence in the area and has worked closely with the neighborhood groups to be alert to unusual park user behavior. As suggested by the police and discussed in the workshop, one easy way to address the security situation is to clear brush where it creates hiding locations and to install mile makers along the trail so that park users can easily identify where in the park they are. Many respondents asked for better lighting in the park as well. Lighting in some locations, such as along the Beatley Bridge may be appropriate, however, a careful lighting plan must also consider the fact that increased park lighting may have a negative effect by inviting illegal activity to take place in the park at odd hours.
2. **Shared-Use Trail.** The shared-use path in Holmes Run is highly active and used by runners, cyclists, and pedestrians. Because the path is so heavily used, better markings to separate the uses may help avoid dangerous situations such as collisions between cyclists and children. Flood control is also a big concern along the trail. The City of Alexandria's Department of

Transportation and Environmental Services is currently reviewing options for improving the portion of the trail underneath the 395 overpass. Areas of the trail near the Tarleton Park portion of the Park may be studied in the future for better flood control.

3. **Natural Areas.** Holmes Run Park is set within one of the most beautiful, natural areas of the City. Its quiet, peaceful setting is what draws many people to the neighborhood to live and recreate. However, throughout the park there are areas where invasive plants pose a threat to the native wildlife. There are also many locations within the All Veterans Park area of Holmes Run Park where invasive species have grown so dense that they block the view of the stream and have created dangerous, hidden areas. An effort to remove and curtail the overgrowth could help enrich the Park's natural health.
4. **All Veterans Park.** Throughout the survey results, many people stated that there needs to be a draw to the Park for their family to use it. The All Veterans Park portion of the Park has the potential to be an area to meet the need for passive play, such as picnics, frisbee throwing, or other unorganized recreational activity. It also, has a beautiful setting along the stream, though currently hidden by overgrowth. As suggested during the workshop, a re-design of this portion of the park may open the space to be more usable and bridge connections between the library and shared-use Holmes Run trail could lead

people to the Park and activate the site.

5. **Play equipment.** Many of the play equipment pieces scattered throughout the Park are dated. While some pieces have recently been replaced, more equipment and natural play features that cater to all ages could help draw more people to the Park and become a greater neighborhood asset.

While these five themes were consistent throughout the feedback process, they are not fully comprehensive to all of the Park's improvement needs. Other suggestions, such as small improvements to the existing dog areas and Park maintenance may be more easily addressed, while larger projects aimed to control flooding along the trail will take time and heavy resources, but can be planned for now.

The information herein will be supplemented with site observation and additional existing conditions data to ultimately create recommendations and an implementation plan.

