



**ARLINGTON COUNTY
PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 414
Arlington, Virginia 22201**

September 17, 2010

The Honorable Jay Fissette, Chairman
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Jay:

The Park and Recreation Commission is pleased to offer our comments in support of the Crystal City Sector Plan 2050, Draft 2.0 dated 6/21/10, and its associated amendments to the General Land Use Plan and the Master Transportation Plan. The Commission recognizes that this plan is critical for guiding the redevelopment of Crystal City into a complete, urban community with a high-quality public space component. The Commission has voiced its concerns regarding open space throughout the 4 year planning process and believes that the plan, within the prescribed limits, responds in large part to our concerns about the quantity and quality of public open space that this plan advocates.

Per the letter dated December 2, 2008 to the Honorable J. Walter Tejada, then-County Board Chairman, the Commission expressed its concerns about the plan's vision for open space in Crystal City. Specifically, the Commission requested the plan provide more opportunities for active users; align the increase in the amount of open space with the planned increase in residential, commercial and retail space; phase in new open space through the 40-year redevelopment to require both flexibility and certainty; and address the plan's insufficient open space quantity and quality west of Jefferson Davis Highway.

Aware of these concerns, the County Board did approve at its 12/13/08 meeting the locations and sizes of the proposed public open spaces as part of the Crystal City Policy Framework. In subsequent opportunities to influence the vision of future open spaces in Crystal City, stakeholders provided additional strong guidance in the plan to ensure high quality public open spaces would be created and built throughout the plan's lifetime, employing both active and passive elements.

The plan today reflects this guidance and related Commission concerns. For example:

- Chapter 3, Figure 3.7.1 on page 78 shows the plan's design concepts for the 26 open spaces. The open spaces designated 4 areas for active recreational facilities.
- Chapter 3, section 3.7 features five recommendations for open space planning that, if followed in future phased development site plans, could lead to provisions for additional open space beyond what is envisioned in the current plan.
- Chapter 4 lists specific recommendations and actions items, and provides additional details on the County's expectations of what should be included in the public open spaces. This will insure that developers must meet and adhere to the recommended sizes stated in the open spaces component of the plan with designs that are free of non-recreational facilities or structures.

The Commission supports the open space planning recommendations in Section 3.7.4 and the public open space actions listed in Section 4.2.5. These options provide a good foundation for the creation of a community focused open space system in Crystal City. The Commission respectfully requests the County Board strategically plan and dedicate future funds for the implementation, creation, sustainment, or redevelopment of open spaces in Crystal City.

Additionally, while the proposed final plan addresses many of our concerns, the Commission feels it vital to highlight the following broad elements we continue to believe are of paramount importance, in hopes that the Board will include the following when expressing its intent as guidance for future planners:

- ◆ Open space - both passive and active - needs to be usable, although not necessarily programmable.
- ◆ Existing open space should not be relinquished until an equal or greater amount of publicly accessible open space is made available to the community.
 - At no time should the community experience a reduction in open space;
 - The mere promise of future open space is not acceptable, as development factors beyond the County's control can impact delivery of pledged assets.
- ◆ As the realization of publicly accessible open space in Crystal City is largely dependent on the commitment of private land owners, it is imperative that:
 - Individual site plans developed years from now must remain true to the current (approving) Board's expectation for amount, placement and programming of open space;
 - The comprehensive sector plan must be a guardian to assure the community, with its ever-increasing density, retains access to the plan's minimum prescribed amount of useable open space.

Of direct relevance, the Commission acknowledges that while we firmly believe there should be a greater amount of open space planned for this high-density sector in the County, we

appreciate that nearby Long Bridge Park can eventually provide some welcome additional open space opportunities. But the Board must remember that once fully developed this community park will be highly programmed with active athletic fields and an aquatic facility for the benefit of all Arlingtonians. Further, only the northernmost user/residents of Crystal City will be in close proximity to the park, while most of the sector is NOT within easy reach of Long Bridge and users will need to utilize transportation to access its amenities. Additionally, we urge that the Board not use the existence of Long Bridge Park as an excuse to avoid adding more open space in Crystal City or, in the extreme, to reduce what is in the plan. As it is, the current plan is a compromise forged after years of discussion. While the Commission feels that there is not enough open space for the proposed density, we understand compromises need to be made. However, we strongly believe the current proposed amount of publicly available usable open space should be seen as a minimum level, with no further reduction.

Further, leveraging the full potential of the Long Bridge asset requires adequate funding for its development. The Commission is most pleased that construction of the current phase has commenced. But to truly meet the promise that this parcel offers, and to be responsive to the voters, who in 2004 approved the issuance of bonds for the purpose of developing a site full of active and passive uses beyond the current phase, the Commission reiterates here our strongest support for providing the funding necessary to achieve its full implementation. Unquestionably, Long Bridge Park can provide a nearby respite from the increased density that will be found in a future Crystal City, and opportunity for all of Arlington's recreational users, but that will only occur with sufficient commitment from County leadership, which we once again urge.

As always, the Commission appreciates the opportunity to express its perspective to you and appreciates your willingness to consider our recommendations, in this case in support of the Crystal City Sector Plan. We look forward to Crystal City's transformation as an outstanding urban community with the implementation of this plan.

On behalf of the Park and Recreation Commission, I offer

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Sildon". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Eric K. Sildon
Chair, Park and Recreation Commission