

January 31, 2017

Dept. of Parks & Recreation

Arlington, VA



Dept. of Parks and Recreation:

In the spirit of improved and positive community engagement, open data usage and transparency of processes, the Friends of Aurora Highlands Parks (FoAHP) is submitting the following questionnaire to further these efforts prior to and throughout the process for the 2017 outreach for Virginia Highlands Park.

Recently, Peter Rousselot from ARLNow wrote a column [Peter's Take: Moving Ahead with Better Civic Engagement](#) with suggestions for improving community outreach. Impressed by these suggestions, the questions are to help the community better understand the process for outreach and its parameters, data about the park in its entirety and its users, environmental impact, budget analysis, outreach tools, and if any outside community impacts will be part of the process i.e. county planning, special interests, stakeholders...

The objective is to understand how all these components will fit into the community engagement process, how much of a role they play and when they are factored.

Some of the detailed questions, we anticipate will be answered in their relevant time-frame, the most pressing responses needed in advance of community outreach are:

1. When will the outreach process and anticipated design phases begin
2. What is staff outreach plan/strategy
3. Are there any constraints
4. And how will public input be weighted given other county priorities if any.

Virginia Highlands Park is located in the Aurora Highlands neighborhood. There may be no better neighborhood and time in which the County and its staff have the opportunity to show a community that they are making an earnest effort for better engagement and process.

Friends of Aurora Highlands Parks, its co-founders and its most actively engaged volunteers are happy to assist with that effort in any way possible. Please consider the questionnaire a contribution to that effort for the whole of the community.

We are happy to schedule a follow-up meeting with DPR in February with some FoAHP members and others in the community to go over these questions.

Thank you in advance for your time on this to gather important data for the community and to improve the transparency of the process and community engagement.

Sincerely,

Kari Klaus. Co- chair.

On behalf of Friends of Aurora Highlands Parks

Questionnaire for Virginia Highlands Park Outreach 2017

Timeframe:

1. What is the time-frame for the different steps of the process for community outreach?

Community outreach efforts:

1. Will the County develop a civic engagement plan and if so what is the time frame for presenting it and explaining it the community?
2. Consultants Hub: In addition to an information page, will the County consider a more comprehensive, transparent, flexible approach of a “consultant’s hub”?
 - a. Providing data, documents
 - b. Open Q&A forum to staff from residents
 - c. Survey and outreach tools and all collected information.
3. How does the County plan to ensure any surveys are designed properly to capture the widest community input with minimum bias, and just as importantly the methods for analyzing their results? See appendix.
4. What are the amenities most requested by the community so far via recent surveys, emails, and other communication to the DPR? And how will any recent community input or community documents regarding VHP shape the process and community outreach efforts? See appendix.
5. How does the County plan to ensure a diversity of views and inclusiveness of needs, especially with approved and likely near future density increases to nearly 90% of hi-rise residents in the neighborhood which are difficult to reach? Alert the residents of dates, important information and ways to participate? See appendix

External impacts:

1. Are there any known charges that need to be disclosed to the community about this project?
2. What other factors will be part of the scope, criteria and limitations for the designing of the park? See appendix
3. In addition to any charge, if external influencers (studies, committees, stakeholders, special interests) are part of the outreach, what will be their timing and can the County disclose the level of consideration that these other influencers have relative to the community’s input?

Here are some ways in which timing might affect community input options:

- a. Pre-community outreach (Causes outreach tools such as surveys, requirements and needs to dictate what that the community must work with/limits community input opportunities....)
 - b. Same time as community outreach begins (all elements and the community input are equal)
 - c. After community input has been gathered (community input is a priority)?
4. How much will the broader county planning and the results from the POPS and Facility Studies be part of the planning?
 5. If special interest groups or stakeholders are part of the input process, who determines which special interests and stakeholders are able to participate?

Data about VHP and existing facilities

1. Total sq footage of Virginia Highlands Park
2. Sq footage used for buildings inaccessible to the public i.e. firehouse and storage...
3. Sq ft of multi-use space open green usable space that cannot be reserved and is open to the community at all times.
4. Sq ft of programmed/dedicated spaces. (These are spaces that cannot be used for anything other than specific recreation/play).
 - a. What are the reservation requirements
 - b. Frequency of use
 - c. What information is gathered about the type of users: resident, non-resident, neighborhood user or traveler, infrequent or frequent user?
5. Sq ft of spaces that can be reserved, but also are used for multi-purpose use when not reserved (i.e. lower soccer fields, pavilions).
 - a. What are the hours during the workweek and days of the week that these multi-purposes spaces are most reserved?
 - b. What maintenance requirements are needed, the frequency during a year and for what time period are these areas unusable during maintenance? i.e. re-sodding, repairs, etc...
6. Sq ft of accessible natural areas for park users. (Accessible natural spaces are tree and plant filled and sports are not an option. Accessibility does not include embankments or steep hills that are not walkable and accessible).
7. Sq ft of the park that contains artificial elements; i.e. pavement, astro-turf, buildings, structures?
8. How many of VHP's facilities are deemed to be facilities for "paying participants?"

Review Process:

1. Will Parks and Rec Commission be reviewing this park's current facilities and park usage and provide their recommendations?
2. What kind of environmental impact assessments will be conducted? Will E2C2 review the plan and provide its recommendations? See appendix

Fiscal Stewardship:

1. What is the budget for the west side?
2. What portion of the budget is dedicated to staff and design versus implementation?
3. How much of the budget for the east side renovation was dedicated to "maintenance" that was used for sports facilities; including the courts, dedicated lighting, dedicated spectator seating (benches and bleachers), dedicated plantings surrounding the facilities, and dedicated runoff mitigation for the additional paved courts, and other dedicated amenities like signage?
4. What percentage of the east side budget was dedicated to other parks uses and maintenance needs like benches, plantings and additional trees in natural spaces, and walkways unaffiliated with direct access to the sports facilities—like trails or loops? See appendix
5. What are the current maintenance cost projections for existing VHP recreation facilities, over the next 5, 10, 15 years?

APPENDIX:

Community outreach

For question 3

Survey from the east side stated that the practice tennis courts will be repurposed for a youth basketball court. From the survey comments, many suggested that they wanted to increase or maintain the open, multi-purpose green space and voted for the repurposing of the practice court. *However*, the practice tennis courts and its wall were removed entirely. The youth basketball court was newly implemented with a new fence, not “repurposed.” Meanwhile the practice tennis courts were moved to a new location reducing some of the multi-purpose open green space, while the adult basketball courts were moved entirely to cover previously used and much needed multi-purpose open green space. The net result was that neither a “repurposing” of the practice tennis court took place nor was the neighborhood given information that the end results would be that they would lose a considerable amount of green space to have the practice courts moved. The community was also not given alternatives in the survey to say that they did not want any new courts and to maintain the open, green space. In their comments many made this preference as well as wanting a dog park, which is sorely needed.

For question 4

- a. Surveys (i.e. [comments section of the VHP](#) east side survey)
- b. Resident emails regarding VHP
- c. AHCA approved [Virginia Highlands Committee report](#)
- d. Other communication
- e. [Friends of Aurora Highlands Proposal](#) and Analysis
- f. The known “needs” of the community based on the [NC Plan](#) i.e. dog parks, trees, etc...?

For question 5

Aurora Highlands consists of apartments, condos and single family homes. It is estimated that with the new development, we are nearing 90% of our residential units as apartments and condo buildings. The County needs to make a concerted effort to reach these vital groups whose access park and green space at Virginia Highlands is in some cases a need for their daily activities, not just a “want.” See suggestions below for broader, inclusive community outreach.

- g. Suggestions include:
 - i. Direct post card mailings to all apartments in the buildings with information on how to participate, links to websites, dates for meetings and maps of where Virginia Highlands is in relation to their location, more or less, and what area of the park is under consideration.
 - ii. Email notification link on the post card and websites, for direct email correspondence for those interested.
 - iii. Communication with the buildings’ owners to post flyers in mail and social rooms.

External impacts:

For question 2

Here is a list of possible external impacts, which ones will apply and which ones will not and why?

- a. Studies (POPS, JFAC)?
- b. Stakeholders?

- c. Special interests?
- d. Commissions (PRC, E2C2...)?
- e. Data (census & demographics, use)?
- f. Projected types residential density within a .5mi/1mi radius and the park needs associated (hi-rise residential vs. single family)
- g. Dog park needs
- h. Environmental goals (runoff, tree canopy)?
- i. Projected maintenance costs?
- j. Budget?
- k. Other?

Review Process

For question #2

Recent photos of the recently renovated east side show extreme conditions of runoff and puddling despite a nearby "rain garden".





Figure 1 rain garden located on the left side of photo. Severe and deep puddling on the right side.

Fiscal Stewardship

For question #4

There is only one bench on the east side of VHP that is not spectator seating for a field, sport court, playground or spray park. This bench, located in one of the few remaining passive areas of the park, has been unusable for many years having sunk to the ground, but it was not replaced during the multi-million dollar “maintenance” efforts of 2015. Abundant benches and even bleachers were added to the east side as spectator seating. Here is a photo of the only east side park bench for the whole community that does not face directly onto a recreational facility. The rusty grills and picnic benches were also not replaced.

