



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



September 20, 2016

The Honorable Libby Garvey
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Bluemont Park Field #3 Renovation

Dear Chair Garvey,

The Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) was not briefed on the renovation of the diamond field #3 in Bluemont Park, item #33 prior to its insertion on the consent agenda for the July 16, 2016 County Board meeting. As a result, PRC was unable to meet its advisory function to the County Board on item #33 prior to its adoption. Had PRC known about the extent of the project, we would have objected to it being included on the consent agenda. We understand that the neighboring civic associations and others have also raised concerns about both the project and about the lack of adequate community engagement, which consisted of one open house on March 2, 2016.

We have four primary concerns:

- 1) The plan calls for installing a perimeter fence around the entire ball field #3. Bluemont Park contains some of the last remaining open playing fields in Arlington. We hear a constant refrain from citizens that one of the greatest needs in the county is un-programmed open space, where people can go to throw a Frisbee, kick a ball, fly a kite, or just enjoy knowing that they have a place to enjoy open green space. The information collected by the Department of Parks and Recreation under its Plan for Our Places and Spaces initiative supports that view. As was noted in the staff report supporting item #33, this field is currently used by a wide range of individuals and groups for a broad range of activities throughout the year. Fencing off the diamond field for such limited use undermines our objective of maximizing the flexibility of county land and amenities. Although not addressed in the staff report, we understand that once ball field #3 is fenced off it will be for use by permitted sport users and unavailable to the community for open recreational use.
- 2) This project was characterized as a capital maintenance project, however the extent of the changes proposed go far beyond what might be considered maintenance to include a full suite of field amenities such as bullpens, bleachers, batting cages and extensive fencing that were not previously onsite. While we understand the desire of staff to meet schedules, we object to projects being pushed forward without adequate review by the relevant commissions and

neighboring civic associations that are able to advise the Board on the community's perspective on projects that materially change the character of the park at issue, as is the case here.

3) We understand that the stormwater management part of the project may increase the overall size of the footprint of this project, further negatively impacting the uses of this space, and believe that the community needs to fully understand the extent of this project before moving forward.

4) In an era of constrained budgets, growing user populations, and finite public land, county staff should present to the community available, flexible, alternative means of safely defining the area for baseball use during relevant periods while preserving this space for multiple other uses at all other times. It is especially important that such alternatives be presented to the community where they would result in significantly less expense.

We request that a broader community process take place before any construction begins. Such a process might allow for the recreation needs of different groups of Arlington residents to be taken into account.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Caroline Haynes".

Caroline Haynes
Chair, Park and Recreation Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation