

Document Supporting POPS Civic Federation Resolution – January 8, 2019

Summary

Arlington’s Public Spaces Master Plan (“PSMP”) or Plan Our Public Spaces (“POPS plan”) will be used as the basis for making investments and planning decisions for the next twenty years regarding parks and recreation. The POPS plan contains specific quantitative recommendations that will be used to make such decisions, including:

- dedicating acres of public parkland (e.g. providing more or different sports fields or more casual use space)
- installing multi-million-dollar CIP improvements (e.g. more synthetic turf and/or lights)
- maintaining existing assets (e.g. spending enough money to keep existing grass and turf fields in maximum playable condition before spending money on new fields or new field infrastructure)

Correctly estimating these quantitative recommendations is critically important to prioritize limited financial resources to best meet the diversity of park and recreational needs.

Arlington’s Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) failed to apply the recommended industry standard Level of Service (LOS) methodology by excluding from the public POPS process the abundance of supply and demand field data and analyses which DPR had in its files and has been working on since at least 2015. These data are necessary to determine the quantitative recommendations relating to the proposed LOS for sports fields in the current final draft of the POPS plan. The industry standard LOS methodology was provided to DPR and that industry standard methodology requires the use of these data: “Each community determine its own LOS standard based on current supply and demand and future supply/demand projections” ([POPS LOS Methodology 171220](#)).

Because DPR failed to follow the industry standard methodology, the quantitative LOS recommendations are abstract notions with no rationale explaining how the recommendations were established. As such, the POPS plan must be adjusted both to remove the unfounded quantitative recommendations and to include the industry standard LOS methodology.

Defining Level of Service (LOS)

LOS is a number which, if properly calculated, can be used as a quantitative measurement to determine the number of recreational facilities (by type).

For example, if LOS is determined to be 1 diamond field per 6,000 people, then a population of 230,000 people ought to have 38 diamond fields. If LOS is determined to be 1 diamond field per 7,000 people, then the same population ought to have 33 diamond fields. And so on.

What’s the difference between the POPS plan’s definition of LOS and the DPR consultants’ recommended industry standard definition of LOS? As illustrated in the table below, the POPS plan’s definition does not take into account current supply and demand:

	POPS Definition of LOS	Industry standard definition of LOS
Current population	x	X MUST
Projected population	x	x MUST
Current Supply (hours available)		X MUST

Current Demand (hours needed)		x MUST
Projected Supply (hours available)		X MUST
Projected Demand (hours needed)		X MUST
Once supply/demand analyses are complete, a range of variables are used to cross check the estimates		
Peer Cities Comparison	X (no explanation how its measured or weighted)	x OPTIONAL
National Averages	X (no explanation how its measured or weighted)	x OPTIONAL
Community Input	X (no explanation how its measured or weighted)	X OPTIONAL
Observations	X (no explanation how its measured or weighted)	x OPTIONAL
Participation rates (registration numbers)	X(no explanation how its measured or weighted)	X OPTIONAL
Resident priority	X (no explanation how its measured or weighted)	X OPTIONAL
Quality of Experience		X OPTIONAL
Availability of Programs		X OPTIONAL
Market Trends		X OPTIONAL
Parkland totals (compare similar park system sizes for feasibility of adding facilities)		x OPTIONAL
The results =	Targeted ratio of facility per capita (i.e. 1 court per 2,500 people)	

- Other categories of fields and facilities besides diamond fields should also be analyzed for their accuracy using the referenced DPR data compared to the POPS plan’s recommendations
- [In 2015 an external consultant](#) and [DPR’s reports and analyses](#) showed that DPR has not been scheduling fields well.

Other LOS variables

The other LOS variables used in the POPS plan’s recommendations included (1) peer cities, (2) national averages and (3) resident priorities. However, DPR has not disclosed how they calculated these variables individually nor how they weighted these three variables against each other. **Most importantly, the public POPS plan never mentions that supply and demand data were used in any of the final recommendations, nor in the internal FOIA’d documents, even though using such data is the standard industry practice.** More information about the serious methodological flaws can be seen [here](#).

Based on the flawed and improper way in which DPR calculated LOS, the POPS plan connects the LOS to financial and land use decisions by saying:

“Level of service [LOS] standards show that Arlington will need an additional 11 rectangular fields and 2 diamond fields by 2035... Increasing the number of synthetic fields, adding lights, and/or the combination of synthetic fields with lighting provides the best opportunity for the County to meet the demand...” [Page 195 PSMP]

How LOS will impact Arlington

LOS will:

- impact Arlington’s allocation of resources: land and dollars
- justify the modification of space to change from one use to another, *e.g.* from baseball to soccer or basketball to tennis, and how that space is configured, *e.g.* with turf and lights
- establish a prioritization regarding how projects and acquisitions move forward
- determine maintenance funding and use allocation
- be used as a benchmark for any future reviews of POPS in the next 20 years and for all community park planning projects in the next 5 years
- have a direct impact on other County plans, including the *Urban Forest Master Plan* and the *Natural Resources Management Plan*

How Arlington residents uncovered the facts

A group of Arlington residents have been actively involved all during the POPS process. They found that their experience on the ground did not match what the POPS plan was and is saying about LOS. These residents were walking by parks and observing that the fields were open and available on a regular basis, even at the height of the season on weekends and evenings, in good weather. These residents also wondered how the methodology regarding LOS standards in the PSMP was determined, as well as, how peer cities and national averages were determined. This resident group asked DPR to voluntarily provide the data explaining this information in 2017. However, DPR did not respond to their repeated requests.

Planning commissioners and sports commissioners also asked DPR for more details throughout the POPS process, including an explanation of the methodology and the data backing up the POPS plan for 11 more rectangular fields and 2 more diamond fields by 2035. DPR also never responded to their requests for more information.

DPR’s failure to voluntarily provide the information led a group of Arlington residents to initiate a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to Arlington County in December 2017 asking for

- information on the methodology DPR used regarding LOS & the LOS variables (i.e. peer cities)
- insight into actual supply and demand data for sports fields

Given time constraints, these residents analyzed *primarily* the information relating to diamond fields because the observations of actual usage on the ground were so greatly disconnected from the POPS plan’s recommendations.

Analysis of DPR information produced under FOIA

By August 2018, this resident group had identified that the POPS plan’s claim that it is necessary to add two new diamond fields by 2035 is NOT supported by the actual supply and demand data produced involuntarily by DPR under FOIA. In fact, [DPR’s analyses showed](#) that there is **a considerable excess of diamond fields** and that there will still be an excess of diamond fields beyond 2035. Nor, was there any evidence or indication in all the FOIA’d documents (our FOIA request specifically asked for documentation regarding how the LOS was calculated) that showed that supply/demand data were used. And, the June 2017 POPS public draft makes no mention that supply/demand data were considered in the LOS.

In addition, this resident group concluded:

- The POPS plan’s LOS methodology did not follow industry standards

- DPR didn't follow their own expert consultants' methodology statement about needing to use supply and demand data in current and future LOS projections
- County staff had not shared their data and analyses, nor provided any rationale regarding their POPS recommendations to the public as part of the POPS process. However, FOIA'd documents revealed email correspondence among staff, e.g.: *"Rectangular fields: If possible, could we try 3 options for standards (4000,4,500, 5,000 - to see if the number of fields needed is changing significantly?) - If this is not possible by tomorrow, let's change the rec. standard to 4,500).*" ([DPR tweaks the LOS](#))
- This statement calls into question whether the field numbers were the result of the LOS recommendations, as claimed by DPR during the public POPS process, or instead whether the field numbers were determined **prior** to the LOS recommendations
- DPR has not shared with the public any of the referenced data or analyses they have completed in the last three years, even analyses labeled specifically for the POPS process, e.g.: "POPS Field Est v3" ([Diamond fields, Utilization Data](#))
- The County Board was also misinformed, by omission of critical information, [when the County Board prepared a statement supporting the current Population Based Level of Service](#). Unfortunately, DPR also failed to provide the County Board with the full consultant's Population Based LOS methodology statement which states the need for supply/demand data. [This response to Katie's letter explains](#) how the County Board members were not given all the information at the time that they wrote their statement and the negative implications of following the current and incomplete POPS LOS.

Final POPS Plan fails to follow Arlington's community preferences

The POPS plan's methodology is inconsistent with the results of the County's statistically valid survey of our community's priorities for our parks. This survey of critical data regarding residents' needs, while part of the June 2017 POPS plan draft, is no longer in the October 2018 final draft. In this statistically valid survey of the community, residents indicated their greatest needs are for trails (both hiking and biking) and natural areas. [See Page iv: 2016 Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment Survey](#). They further expressed the greatest [desire for natural areas](#).

Nowhere in the current POPS plan's final draft is it shown that these community survey priorities were even considered. The need for open space recommendations were left blank, and there was no indication that this public need was prioritized against the specific recommendations for increasing the number of fields.

Improve the Scheduling of Fields

DPR has been unable to properly and efficiently manage and maintain Arlington's sports fields for years. According to the Chair of the Sports Commission, DPR has delegated nearly all scheduling of diamond fields to a single resident volunteer, instead of staff, with little to no oversight or accountability. The manner in which DPR has improperly managed its scheduling has resulted in a **false perception of unavailable or too few fields**.

Example: DPR gives bulk reserved hours to leagues, way more than is ever needed. So, fields are over-reserved, as much as double what teams use or need. This means that a field could be blocked off for 8 hours and only 4 hours are actually used and needed. [This is confirmed by outside consultants' reports,](#)

[DPR's staff "rover" reports on field usage, and DPR's own internal analyses](#) about the over-scheduling and management issues.

Spend more to maintain existing fields

Arlington needs to maximize the utility of its existing field infrastructure by spending enough more money to keep existing grass and turf fields in maximum playable condition before spending money on new fields or new field infrastructure.

Regrettably, and incorrectly, DPR has chosen to rely heavily on borrowed/bond funds for maintenance capital. Since bond funds are scarce (we need them to meet larger and longer-term capital needs for school construction, among other things), this funding source isn't sufficient to meet DPR's ongoing maintenance/operating needs. This explains why we continually hear complaints from users about unplayable fields.

Shifting DPR's funding focus from expansion to better maintenance and more efficient operations of existing facilities will stretch the useful life of existing facilities and increase capacity. This is a more cost-effective solution than permitting existing infrastructure to fall into ruin from neglect, and then facing a huge total replacement cost, or adding new facilities without first repairing existing ones that have deteriorated enough to make them unusable

LISTED BELOW ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT DPR SPREADSHEETS AND THEIR TABS

Follow this link <https://foia.arlingtonva.us/responses/entry/938/> and then look for the spreadsheet name in the FOIA documents list followed by the important tab name in that spreadsheet.

[POPS Field Est v3](#)

Tab "Diamond Field" projections through 2045 of actual need for diamond fields. A spreadsheet error, using Spring 2045 estimate of # of teams was used for Fall 2016 # of teams, grossly inflating the Fall 2045 estimates for Adult softball. The corrected spreadsheet error and analysis can be viewed [here](#)

[Rover Reports](#) (3). Include in person visits to reserved fields for confirmation of usage. Spreadsheets: (1) Fall 2017 Rover Data, (2) Field Usage [Rover Reports Fall 2016](#), (3) Field Usage Rover Reports Spring 2017.

[Field Usage Analysis FY 2017:](#)

Tab "All Data For Comparison"

Columns:

H-M = DPR calculated prime hours & capacity based on turf/grass type, lights or no lights, and sunset hours

BF = Total prime hours available/ field.

D = Operating hours

BK = total maintenance capacity hours/ field...

Tab "Measures" shows percentage of fields under capacity

Tabs "Cool Season Sunset, Bermuda Sunset, Synthetic Sunset (no lights)" sunset hours for 2016

Tab: "FY 2017 reservations" any reservation information

[Fall Pilot Summary](#)

Tab "Summary" shows allocated time vs. team need. This section shows over-allocation by DPR in their scheduling

[Sport Allocation Draft v3](#) (used in part for "Fall Pilot Summary" spreadsheet)

Tab "League Input" Number of teams per league, practices, games and hours needed.

[Sport Allocation Draft Springy2](#)

Tab "League Input" Shows over-scheduling percentages

[2017 Field Hours 7.31.2017](#)

Tab "DPR Facility Reservation Report"

[Rained Out through Fall 2017](#)– information about grass field closures

[LOS 6-22-2017](#)– One of the iterations of the Level of Service from the consultants.

[Green Play Consultant Reports](#) Outlined issues of over-scheduling, field allocation, prioritization of league types, etc...starting in 2015.