

PARKS ARE NECESSARY FACT SHEET!

The Fairfax County Park Authority was created by legislative action nearly 60 years ago due to citizen activist groups with a vision. Since then 22,600 acres of park land have been acquired, and today nine RECenters and eight golf courses offer recreational opportunities for all, and five nature centers and numerous historic sites promote stewardship and provide insight from the lessons of our storied past.

We have found balance between the dual roles of the Park Authority: to provide recreational and fitness opportunities to citizens and to serve as stewards and interpreters of Fairfax County's natural and cultural resources. Fairfax County Park Authority, a National Gold Medal Award winner and a CAPRA accredited agency, is arguably, one of the largest, most diverse park systems in the nation. Seventy-nine percent of Fairfax County's households are park users and less than one cent of each tax dollar supports the operation of our parks. We recently completed an ambitious capital improvement program, earned national accreditation, and won the support of 68% of voters for a critical \$65 million park bond that enables us to continue our forward momentum.

In 2009, the Park Authority welcomed 18.6 million visitors to 417 parks. We groomed fields for 225,000 competitors, improved our 300 mile trail system and worked to control non-native invasive plants, promote native species and preserve woodlands and green open spaces.

Recent budget cuts and potential FY 2011 reductions of as much as 11.3% of the General Fund threaten our ability to continue to provide these services and others that are integral to our nationally recognized park system. If the requested budget cuts go into affect, the Park Authority will have lost more than \$7 million of its general fund operating budget since fiscal 2008, amounting to a 28% cut over four years.

Maintaining Economic Vitality

Maintaining economic vitality is a long-standing component of the Board of Supervisors vision for Fairfax County. A healthy, functional park system is a critical component of economic vitality.

- Parks help attract business to Fairfax County.
 - ✓ Parks are important to suburban workers. A recent nationwide survey commissioned by EDA showed suburban workers identified "more nearby parks and open spaces" as the amenity they most wanted more of in their work communities.
 - ✓ Numerous national studies show that quality of life is an important consideration in business relocation decisions, and quality parks and recreational opportunities are an important factor in the quality of life that businesses and employees seek.
 - ✓ EDA touts Fairfax County as a premier business location based on the "Fairfax Advantage" which includes a pro-business climate, well-educated workforce and enviable quality of life. It promotes the quality of life as a factor that "attracts and retains professional and technology talent essential for successful businesses." When illustrating the County's outstanding quality of life, EDA features parkland and recreational opportunity.
 - ✓ Polls show that Fairfax residents see the important contribution that parks make to quality of life. In a 2007 survey of Fairfax County households, eight of 10 rated a quality park system either extremely or very important to their quality of life.
- A quality park system contributes to increased property values.
 - ✓ A Texas A&M review of 25 studies investigating whether parks and open space contributed positively to the property values of surrounding properties found a positive impact in 20 of the 25. "The real estate market consistently demonstrates that many people are willing to pay a larger amount for property located close to parks and open space areas than for a home that does not offer this amenity," the author concluded.

- ✓ The same study indicates that in many instances the incremental increase in property values and companion taxes was “sufficient to pay annual debt charges on bonds used to finance park acquisition and development.”

Proposed cuts to the Park Authority budget threaten quality of life and economic vitality.

- An 11.3% reduction in the General Fund totaling \$2.6 million and a 7.5% cut (\$541,365) in the 303 Fund (park maintenance) will result in the following impacts:
 - ✓ Reduced park maintenance.
 - ✓ Reduced trail inspection.
 - ✓ Reduced park and athletic field grooming and mowing.
 - ✓ Reduced maintenance at school athletic fields
 - ✓ Elimination of nighttime court lighting.
 - ✓ Closure of MLK swimming pool.
 - ✓ Elimination of 41 full time positions.
 - ✓ Deferred facility maintenance.
 - ✓ Deferred preservation and natural resource management efforts.
 - ✓ Reduction of school-based REC-Pac summer camp sites and field trips.
 - ✓ Slower response to internal and customer service requests.
 - ✓ Reduction of 25% in Administrative and Management support

Other Values of Parks

Building Healthy Communities

- ✓ Parks improve physical and mental health and well-being
- ✓ A 1996 report by the U.S. Surgeon General found that people who engage in regular physical activity benefit from a reduced risk of a variety of physical ailments including: hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, obesity and, ultimately, premature death.
- ✓ Creating, improving and promoting places to be physically active can result in a 25 percent increase in the percentage of residents who exercise at least three times per week according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- ✓ Parks embrace the County’s newly-crafted Cultural and Recreational Vision Element.

Practicing Environmental Stewardship

- ✓ Parks conserve nature. Large healthy parks provide safe havens for species by protecting vital habitat. Parks encompass the Board of Supervisors’ Clean, Sustainable Environment Goal Statement.
- ✓ Parks are vital to maintaining clean air and water. A New York City study found that contiguous forest stands remove up to 15% of ozone, 14% of sulfur dioxide and 13% of particulate matter from the air. The conservation organization, American Forests, estimates that trees in cities save \$400 billion in storm water retention facility costs.
- ✓ Park programs and exhibits support science and education. They provide critical learning laboratories for developing a conservation ethic that is the basis for addressing future challenges such as global warming.
- ✓ Access to the natural world represented in parks addresses the “nature deficit disorder” that has been linked to childhood rises in obesity, attention disorders and depression.

Sustaining Safe and Caring Communities

- ✓ Quality parks and recreation opportunities are the super glue for a healthy society.
- ✓ Access to parks and recreation opportunities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime and, in particular, to reduced juvenile delinquency. In addition, research by the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods indicates that community involvement in neighborhood parks is associated with lower levels of crime.