



McLean Citizens Association Resolution on FCPA Natural Resource Program Funding April 6, 2022

Whereas, according to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) 2017 Comprehensive Plan, Parks and Recreation, protection of “appropriate land areas in a natural state to ensure preservation of significant and sensitive natural resources” is the second of six objectives;¹ and

Whereas, according to the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), parks provide essential public services, providing economic value, health and environmental benefits, and social importance to local communities;² and

Whereas, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Fairfax County park use increased 60 percent as many residents learned or rediscovered the value of our local parks;³ and

Whereas, FCPA funding overall has declined as a proportion of total county budget funding over time:

- The percentage of the County General Fund transferred to the FCPA General Fund declined from 1.3% in 1991 to 0.61% in 2022;⁴ and
- The percentage of the County’s total real property assessed values allocated to the FCPA General Fund declined from \$0.26 per \$100,000 of assessed values in 1988 to about \$0.01 in 2022;⁵ and

Whereas, according to FCPA, its current funding, at \$159/acre for 4,720 managed acres, falls short of the national benchmark of \$3,000 - 6,000;⁶ and

¹ See <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/comprehensive-plan/policy-plan>, Parks and Recreation section, page 4. The comprehensive plan sections on environment, quality of life, land use and transportation also cite the need to protect the environment.

² See www.nrpa.org.

³ See FCPA Executive Director Jai Cole video presentation to the Federation of Friends on March 2, 2022 at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/friends> (referred to henceforth as “FCPA Friends Presentation”). Also, according to the Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC) 2021 Annual Report at 56, “[P]eople flocked to outdoor places during the COVID-19 pandemic for a place of solace and to help improve their mental health. Our local parks have seen visitation skyrocket, and, at times, the county’s natural resources have suffered due to the influx of visitors. The desire and need for residents’ access to safe, outdoor green spaces has never been more apparent.”

⁴ See FCPA Friends Presentation discussion by FCPA Division Director of Business Administration Michael Peters at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/friends>, p. 27.

⁵ FCPA Friends Presentation discussion by FCPA Division Director of Business Administration Michael Peters at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/friends>, p. 28 and FCPA answers to MCA questions (available on the MCA EP&R Document repository).

⁶ See FCPA FY2023 Proposed Budget and Update on Capital Improvement Plan (with presentation), presentation to the FCPA Board on February 23, 2022, page 10 of the presentation located at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/board/meetings>.

Whereas, Fairfax County parks and recreation efforts receive less funding as a percentage of total General Fund than neighboring counties;⁷ and

Whereas, FCPA operating expenses are funded primarily through two funding sources: the fee-supported Revenue Fund (\$39.6 million), which now accounts for over half of FCPA operating funds, and the General Fund (\$27.8 million);⁸ and

Whereas, FCPA conservation and natural resource activities are funded out of the non-fee generated General Fund, including the Invasive Management Areas (IMA) Program, which works to control non-native invasive plants on about 10% of its land, and which currently receives \$300,000 in county funding;⁹ and

Whereas, FCPA's dual-bucket funding model has, over time, reduced the funds available for non-fee based natural resource and conservation maintenance activities, including the IMA Program;¹⁰ and

Whereas, the IMA Program began in 2006 with 20 sites and currently conducts invasive removal activities in over 150 acres on over 60 active IMA sites with over 90 Volunteer Site Leaders;¹¹ and

Whereas, the IMA Program – like the Deer Management Program - relies heavily on volunteers, who have contributed 94,832 hours to the IMA Program since its inception in 2006;¹² and

Whereas, IMA volunteer hours increased from 6,289 in 2017 to 14,652 in FY 2021, and the number of park sites served by these IMA volunteers increased from 41 in 2017 to 61 in FY 2021;¹³ and

Whereas, FCPA estimated the value of its IMA volunteer efforts at \$145,087 in FY 2016 and more than one million dollars as of FY 2016 since program inception;¹⁴ and

⁷ Source: published online budgets for Fairfax County's FCPA funding as a percentage of total county budget funding (0.61% in 2022, see footnote 4) compared to 2.83% for Montgomery County Parks, Recreation, and Community Services (\$116M parks budget compared to \$6BN total county operating budget; see <https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISOPERATING/Common/Department.aspx?ID=PPC>) and 3.56% for Arlington County Parks and Recreation (\$49.9M parks budget compared to \$1.4BN balanced General Fund Budget; see <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Budget-Finance/FY-2022-Adopted-Budget>).

⁸ See FCPA Friends Presentation discussion by FCPA Division Director of Business Administration Michael Peters at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/friends>.

⁹ Id. The remainder of the \$797,669 total revenue for FCPA Resource Management is paid through grants provided by REI, Inc, and the Fairfax County Parks Foundation; also see FCPA FY2022 Second Quarter Budget Review, Fund 80000, Park Services Revenue and Operating Fund (with presentation), presentation to the FCPA Board on March 9, 2022, page 2 at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/board/meetings>.

¹⁰ See FCPA Friends Presentation discussion by FCPA Division Director of Business Administration Michael Peters at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/friends>.

¹¹ See <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/invasive-management-area>.

¹² See FCPA answers to MCA questions (available on the MCA EP&R Document repository).

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ See <https://ourstoriesandperspectives.com/2017/04/17/natural-resource-management-accomplishments-and-plans/>.

Whereas, the IMA Program currently oversees these volunteer invasive removal efforts with three dedicated staff (one full-time merit Ecologist II, one 560 hour non-merit Ecologist I, and one 900 hour non-merit Ecologist I;¹⁵ and

Whereas, all IMA volunteers are required to work under the supervision of a trained IMA Site Leader in parks and all IMA Site Leaders are trained and overseen by the FCPA IMA Ecologists;¹⁶ and

Whereas, due to the growth of the IMA Program in recent years, and the resulting increased need for IMA Ecologist oversight of IMA Site Leader/volunteer activities, in 2021 the IMA Program put a temporary cap on the number of IMA Site Leaders due to insufficient staff resources needed to train new IMA Site Leaders;¹⁷ and

Whereas, the FCPA Resource Management Division lost ten authorized full time equivalent positions between 2021 and 2022;¹⁸ and

Whereas, in its 2021 Annual Report, Environmental and Quality Advisory Council (EQAC) noted that ongoing FCPA maintenance lacks reliable ongoing funding sources, stating that the use of “one-off funding sources, such as funds from proffers, donations, the Environment Improvement Program, and project-based bond funds means that once a project, such as an ecological restoration has been completed, the long-term maintenance and upkeep-managing for invasive plants, for instance – must be funded through different means”;¹⁹ and

Whereas, in its 2021 Annual Report, EQAC supported additional funding for FCPA ecological resource efforts and invasive species control efforts; specifically more stable funding sources for FCPA initiatives related to maintenance for and management of the parks natural resources, including “establishing funding through the budget process to support a FCPA ecologist maintenance program with additional staff positions to address long-term natural resource management needs across FCPA’s approximately 17,000 acres of natural area”;²⁰ and

Whereas, the need for FCPA ecological resource maintenance has also increased due to growth in the number of acres under management (an increase of 739 acres between 2011 and 2021)²¹ and will continue to grow due to climate change, which, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Invasive Species Information Center, facilitates the growth of invasive species;²² and

¹⁵ See FCPA answers to MCA questions (available on the MCA EP&R Document repository).

¹⁶ Based on current IMA procedures and practices, see <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/invasive-management-area>.

¹⁷ Informally communicated to IMA Site Leaders by FCPA staff.

¹⁸ FY 2023 Fairfax County Advertised Budget Plan (Vol. 1), page 338.

¹⁹ See 2021 ECAQ Annual Report at 56.

²⁰ Id. at 57.

²¹ See FCPA Friends Presentation discussion by FCPA Executive Director Jai Cole, page 3 of the presentation, at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/friends>.

²² See <https://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/subject/climate-change#:~:text=Climate%20change%20is%20having%20an,for%20them%20to%20become%20invasive>.

Whereas, FCPA submitted a \$751,954 FY 2023 General Fund Budget Request for Natural Resource Sustainability to support natural resources management program funding and IMA program expansion costs to maintain FCPA's 4000+ acres of managed park space;²³ and

Whereas, this FCPA Natural Resource Sustainability funding request of \$751,954 would include funding for:

- One (1) Ecologist III Position (\$147,153.71 including fringe benefits)
- Two (2) Ecologist II Positions (\$255,715.78 including fringe benefits)
- Contracted support for legacy management strategies, including prescribed burns and replanting supplies (\$300,000)
- Vehicle purchase for staff supporting invasive management programs (\$50,000)
- Chainsaw, technology, and other field tool needs (\$7,500);²⁴ and

Whereas, this Natural Resource Sustainability funding request comprised one of its top four funding requests FCPA presented to the FCPA Board on July 28, 2021 and September 15, 2021;²⁵ and

Whereas, the County Executive's FY 2023 Advertised Budget only included \$50,000 of the \$751,954 requested for Natural Resource Sustainability;²⁶ and

Whereas, on March 28, 2022 Supervisor John Foust submitted a FY2023 Budget Consideration Item regarding the FCPA's Funding Request for Natural Resources Sustainability in which he asked the BOS to consider fully funding the Park Authority's request for funding of \$751,954 to support the Authority's natural resources sustainability efforts.

Now therefore be it resolved, that the McLean Citizens Association (MCA) supports the Supervisor's item for consideration of "full funding" of the FCPA's natural resource sustainability, a need that is amply supported by the facts set forth above regarding increased park usage and declining County financial support (both in absolute and comparative terms) and that would include an amount sufficient to fund the total compensation, including salaries and benefits, for three additional full time ecologist positions to supervise volunteers who remove invasive plants.

*Approved by the MCA Board of Directors
April 6, 2022*

McLean Citizens Association, P.O. Box 273, McLean, Virginia 22101

²³ See FCPA FY2023 Proposed Budget and Update on Capital Improvement Plan (with presentation), presentation to the FCPA Board on February 23, 2022, page 3, located at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/board/meetings> and [page 3 of Presentation on Information Item 2: FY 2021 Year-End Budget Review included in FCPA Budget Committee package presented to the FCPA Board on September 15, 2021.](#)

²⁴ Memo from Supervisor John Foust to the Fairfax BOS, FY2023 Budget Consideration Item regarding the FCPA's Funding Request for Natural Resources Sustainability, March 28, 2022.

²⁵ See page 3 of Presentation on Information Item 2; FY 2021 Year-End Budget Review included in FCPA Budget Committee package presented to the FCPA Board on September 15, 2021.

²⁶ See FCPA FY2023 Proposed Budget and Update on Capital Improvement Plan (with presentation), presentation to the FCPA Board on February 23, 2022, page 3, located at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/board/meetings>.

cc:

Jeffrey McKay, Chairman, Board of Supervisors

John Foust, Dranesville District Supervisor

Clerk of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

Tim Hackman, Dranesville Rep to the Fairfax County Park Authority Board

Jai Cole, Executive Director, Fairfax County Park Authority

Judy Pederson, Communications Director, Fairfax County Park Authority

Jane Edmondson, Chief of Staff to the Dranesville District Supervisor