



LONG BRIDGE PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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April 11, 2011

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

Dear Ms. Garvey:

On behalf of the Long Bridge Park Advisory Committee (LBPAC), I am pleased to transmit our report and recommendations responding to the Board's March 2015 directive to the County Manager to seek community input and work with the LBPAC to re-examine the future of Phase 2 of the Park. In the adopted Master Plan, Phase 2 includes an aquatics, health and fitness facility, 10 additional acres of park, an extension of the esplanade, and related elements.

To fulfill our task, we sought to: 1) reassess the community need and support for developing some kind of aquatics and fitness facility at Long Bridge Park; 2) prioritize key program and other elements of a facility so that it could be built within the capital budget already approved by Arlington's voters; 3) examine issues regarding the likely operating costs of the facility and how those might compare to other pools and recreational facilities in the county; and 4) assess the possible role of partnerships and sponsorships in supplementing county capital and/or operating costs.

Our recommendations are informed by input gained through an extensive process of community engagement which included soliciting comments at various community events, an online survey, and questions in the statistically valid countywide survey conducted as part of Arlington's Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP) update. That outreach confirmed both the community needs for more indoor aquatics and fitness resources, and community support for building a facility within our means.

The record also shows that despite the recent renovations and slight expansions of the three school-based community pools, the county cannot meet Arlington residents' demand for county-sponsored aquatic programs and classes such as learn to swim, senior water aerobics, and water sports. Arlington's population growth will make the wait lists even longer every year.

In sum, the LBPAC recommends that the Board should: ***direct the County Manager to immediately proceed with designing a scaled-back and more modest community aquatics, health and fitness facility at Long Bridge Park. This redesigned facility should focus primarily on meeting identified community needs. It should not be extravagant and should not exceed the funding levels that voters approved in the bond referenda in 2004 and 2012.*** To minimize the potential for construction bid problems and cost overruns, we recommend that the County use an alternative construction delivery method to the traditional design/bid/build model used by the County and Arlington Schools prior to 2013.

Regarding design, we recommend that a more compact Long Bridge Park facility should include two primary pools, as opposed to four pools in the previous design, featuring a 50-meter pool for lap swimming, fitness and competition and a multipurpose leisure/training pool for family fun and swim lessons. A substantial amount of space for exercise equipment and fitness activities should also be included as a core program element in the redesigned facility. These were identified as top priorities by Arlington residents in the recent PSMP survey. The community also strongly endorsed, and we recommend, a sustainable facility design that incorporates energy-efficient systems. The esplanade extension and additional park space, which have not run into budget problems, should proceed as planned.

In addition to those elements, components such as a warm-water therapy pool and a 10-meter diving tower should be included in the design if they can be accommodated within the existing budget for this project, and/or if the county can broker a significant partnership and/or sponsorship with a nearby university or other organization which brings substantial benefits for the community.

In short, we urge the Board to direct staff to undertake the design of a multi-purpose, municipal aquatics, health and fitness facility that is commonplace in neighboring jurisdictions and throughout the United States. Such consolidated, community-run aquatics and fitness facilities are known for their ability to achieve economies of scale and maximize cost recovery, compared to the performance of much smaller neighborhood-based pools. That said, when it comes to setting membership and other fees for this facility, the County Board ought to align these fees with its current recreational programs and services fee paradigm. This new facility should not be held to a higher standard or expectation for cost recovery than Arlington's other recreational facilities.

And while we were not directed to look beyond phase 2, we urge that the Board also direct the manager to continue to expeditiously pursue completion of other key elements of the park, including the park and trail connection over the GW Parkway and development of the fourth soccer field.

We appreciate very much the opportunity to provide the Board and the County Manager with our input on this important matter and look forward to continuing to help guide and promote the development of Long Bridge Park.

Sincerely,



Tobin L. Smith
Chair
Long Bridge Park Advisory Committee

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