

## MEMORANDUM

TO: The Four Mile Run Valley Working Group

FROM: Elizabeth Gearin, Chair, Jennie Dean Park Committee

DATE: April 12, 2018

SUBJECT: Jennie Dean Park Committee Report, REVISED

### Executive Summary

The Jennie Dean Park (JDP) Committee has, in accord with the County Board's direction, convened and created two viable concept plans for Jennie Dean Park. Concept 1 refines the earlier staff recommendation. Concept 2 represents a new layout. Both concepts address Four Mile Run Valley Working Group (4MRVWG) motions to: provide more green space along Four Mile Run Drive; and to move the playground closer to Four Mile Run Drive. JDP Committee discussions also responded to the other motions and thus recommend that park design include references to the area's history and/or industrial character; and that early park implementation address pedestrian connections to the Park, including the pedestrian and bike connection on Shirlington Road.

This process and concept plans are further described below and seen in attachments.

As a way to help evaluate the concept plans, the JDP Committee asks members of the 4MRVWG to review both concept plans and consider evaluating each using the 4-point scale described below.

- 1 – Plan is excellent (i.e., the layout and design are excellent, there is an excellent balance among competing demands, the number and mix of benefits achieved in Phase 1 are excellent)
- 2 – Plan is good (i.e., the layout and design are good, there is a good balance among competing demands, the number and mix of benefits achieved in Phase 1 are good)

- 3 – Plan is ok but not great (i.e., the layout and design are ok but not great, the balance among competing demands is ok but not great, the number and mix of benefits achieved in Phase 1 are ok but not great)
- 4 – Plan is bad (the layout and design are bad, the balance among competing demands is bad, the number and mix of benefits achieved in Phase 1 are bad)

### Jennie Dean Park Committee Background

The County Board, at their February 20, 2018 Work Session, suggested the Four Mile Run Valley Working Group (4WRVWG) create a committee for a focused, short-term evaluation of the proposed alternative designs for Jennie Dean Park (JDP). This JDP Committee was made up of five individuals who have been participating in the 4MRVWG: Elizabeth Gearin, Chair (Planning Commission Alternate); Portia Clark (Nauck); Ginny Farris (Shirlington, Alternate); Shirley Brothwell (Sports Commission); and Carrie Johnson (At Large).

### JDP Committee Charge

The Jennie Dean Park Committee, part of the Four Mile Run Valley Working Group (4MRVWG), shall consist of five members, including the Chair. All committee meetings will be public, in accordance with Arlington County and Virginia requirements.

The Committee will review and evaluate existing alternative concept plans for Jennie Dean Park, giving due consideration to issues, concerns, and recommendations that have been raised by the community. A new concept plan recommendation may be developed but must include all elements (casual use space, large and youth baseball diamonds, tennis and basketball courts, playground, restroom, and picnic area) currently in the park.

A final report from the committee is due at the full working group meeting on 21 March 2018. (This meeting was cancelled due to weather conditions, and this report will be shared with the Working Group April 12, 2018.)

## Summary of JDP Committee Meetings

The JDP Committee held four meetings (3/1, 3/7, 3/15 and 4/5/18.) The complete summary emails for the first three meetings were shared with 4MRVWG members via email.

At the **first** meeting the JDP Committee reviewed the charge, and heard staff presentations regarding: research in response to issues raised at the County Board Work Session; and the history of the existing concept plans to date. Then the Committee members discussed the concept plans. Safety, including softball and baseball diamond locations and orientations, was agreed upon as a high priority; and the provision of open space and tree canopy along Four Mile Run Drive, connected casual use space through the site, access along the stream, the use of synthetic turf on the adult softball diamond, and several attractive and welcoming entrances were all highly desirable.

The Committee sought additional information from staff regarding the feasibility, cost and lifespan of courts with permeable surfaces; some sense of how to create/ where we might add inviting places to sit or explore natural areas; the feasibility, cost and possible siting options for a single larger shelter compared with a cluster of picnic tables; pros and cons of reversing the positions of the larger adult softball diamond and smaller youth baseball diamonds; options for separating the court space into two smaller components, one with tennis courts, one with basketball court/s; pedestrian and bike access and travel patterns getting to and through the park from the various entrances; costs of structured parking; and costs of land acquisition in Arlington County.

At the **second** meeting, the Committee discussed additional safety issues: noted that that future acquisition of the two parcels along Four Mile Run Drive could facilitate a more pedestrian-friendly entrance for park users coming down the hill on Shirlington Road; raised concerns about cyclist/pedestrian connections across Shirlington Road, including safe access to the W&OD trail; and agreed that a playground sited close to Four Mile Run Drive required fencing for safety. The Committee also discussed ways to activate the space and tie it to the community including: welcoming durable/playspace public art here (similar to the play spaceship at the Arlington Arts Center); adding pathway lighting at

night to the pedestrian bridge; and auto-loading for four vehicles (two teams) along Nelson Street.

Additional information was sought including: options for and placement of fencing/netting (including overlap fencing) for the playground and the baseball and softball diamonds; pros and cons of angled parking along Nelson St.; and issues of remediation of the WETA site for future park usage; feasibility of courts with permeable surfaces to allow for siting within the RPA; options for using excess parking at Shirlington Gateway in the evenings and on weekends; and the process for pursuing durable public art going forward.

At the **third** meeting, the Committee received an update from the Shirlington Civic Association (SCA) meeting, which park concerns include: bus/truck proximity to the playground if sited near Four Mile Run Drive (air pollution, noise, safety); building near the Resource Protection Area (RPA); bike and pedestrian safety; desire for more directed diamond field lighting given impact on the condominiums and apartments in Shirlington; stroller access through the park to the playground; maximum visual access throughout the park; that early phases of park development do not preclude future amenities such as an additional pedestrian bridge; status of the day labor site; timing of WETA departure; overall security and safety in the park; and desire for multiple welcoming park entrances.

Staff and Committee members responded to these and issues raised at earlier meetings. They noted there may be transient populations using the park as informal housing, and while park redevelopment may discourage this, there is some desire for County outreach regarding relevant housing and services.

With regard to parking, staff reported that reconfiguring parking along Nelson to provide angled spaces would yield up to 9 additional spaces, but at a loss of 10,000 sf of parkland. Moving WETA parking to the Shirlington Rd parking lot, and allowing the County to convert the WETA parking lot (toward Nelson Street) as parkland requires a more prolonged negotiation process than the JDP Committee can accommodate. While a new basketball court, which is constructed of impermeable materials and cannot be built on part of the Shirlington

Road parking lot in the second concept because of the RPA, parking can be rebuilt in this space using permeable pavers.

Staff shared fencing s for the playground, and Committee members noted that future planning for the site consider incorporating fencing design specific to either the history of JDP/Nauck and/or the industrial uses along Four Mile Run Drive. Staff also noted where diamond outfield and court fencing would be required, including areas where overlap fencing might be used to facilitate casual use of the diamonds when not in use. Committee members raised the idea of planting native vines along parts of fences to further create visual green space in the park.

At the **fourth** meeting, the Committee reviewed ways to refine both the concept plans and Committee Report. This included suggestions to include a legend, additional labeling, and so on to the renderings; and minor clarifying edits to the Committee Report. The Committee also reviewed the proposed presentation of the Report to the 4MRVWG at their 4/12 meeting, including a summary of the written report, questions to help focus the broader Working Group discussion, and an opportunity for the three civic associations participating in the 4MRVWG, as well as the Sports and Parks and Rec Commissions to comment on the Report and Concept Plans just prior to the Working Group discussion.

### JDP Committee Key Issues, Concerns and Recommendations

**Safety** of park users is a high priority. To that end the Committee considered placement options for both the youth baseball and the adult softball diamonds, to minimize both sun in batters' eyes, especially the younger players (and therefore protect them from being hit by a pitched baseball) and the likelihood of anyone being hit by foul balls or homeruns.

Fencing along parts of the diamonds and the courts similarly protects other park users from being hit by balls. With regard to the diamond and the desire to access those spaces for casual use, staff calculated areas where fencing was critical (including optimum height); thus fencing is partial along the diamonds and/or includes overlap fencing. Similarly, siting the playground proximate to Four Mile Run Drive in keeping with community desires requires appropriate fencing to protect children from

straying into traffic.

While outside the scope of siting amenities in the park space, safety of pedestrians and cyclists accessing the park is also a high priority. The Committee stressed the importance of improving safety at the Shirlington Road crossing immediately; and in later Phases providing a safe and welcoming entry at Four Mile Run Drive and Shirlington Road. Committee members supported the idea of pathway lighting the Shirlington Bridge into the park in the evening.

**Casual Use Space** and providing **connectivity through the site** and to the surrounding neighborhoods represents another priority. This includes providing access along the stream and protecting the RPA (which provides some of this casual use space), providing open space and tree canopy along Four Mile Run Drive, providing visual access through park, and providing stroller access through park. Casual use space has been identified through both the 4MRVWG and a parallel process to update the Arlington County Parks Master Plan (POPS) as a very high need throughout the County.

**Activate the Site and Tie to the Community** – Such safe entrances, and amenities like pathway lighting also act to welcome park visitors. The Committee recommends all several entrances feel welcoming. One idea includes siting a small shelter (large enough for two families) at the corner of Nelson and Four Mile Run Drive. The Committee also discussed and supported the idea of durable public art that has a tie to the community, like the play spaceship at Maury Park which was provided by Arlington’s sister city of Aachen, Germany; noting that perhaps such play equipment in JDP might have an industrial feel or otherwise tie to the history of the area. Similarly the Committee recommends that playground fencing design reference the community.

**Parking** for the site represented another issue. Committee members favor the use of existing parking where possible, rather than using park space for parking. They are concerned that parking near recreational park uses is limited; and noted that the Shirlington Road lot is problematic in terms of safe access (and thus asked staff to consider safety in its long-term use, perhaps requiring right-in, right-out), and its access. It is relatively far from the baseball and softball diamonds and

court spaces. To that end the Committee considered converting parallel parking on Nelson to angled parking, but this yields few additional spaces (9) at the expense of parkland (10,000 sf). The Committee recommends installing 4 short-term parking spaces along Nelson to allow park users to load/unload passengers and equipment. (Four was determined to be the appropriate number for two teams for either diamond.) The Committee also raised the issue of acquiring the WETA lot towards Nelson and moving WETA parkers (and other current WETA parking lot uses) to the Shirlington Road lot, but this reconfiguration requires negotiation beyond the JDP Committee scope and timing. The Committee raised the issue of using excess parking at other neighborhood locations including Shirlington Gateway in the evenings and on weekends.

**Costs and Phasing** provide their own challenges. Some amenities may only be built once given their high costs. Current high demand for diamond and court uses in the County led the Committee to try to include as many amenities as possible in Phase 1, and not take any uses offline. This discussion of demand led to the Committee's support for synthetic turf where appropriate, allowing for additional playtime. Additionally, there is concern that Phase Two funding is both uncertain, and likely to be more competitive. Relegating some amenities to Phase 2 makes their ultimate construction less certain. To that end, the Committee sought to site as many recreational amenities in Phase 1 as possible.

### JDP Committee Concept Plans – 1 and 2

In addition to discussing these specific issues, concerns and recommendations, Committee members worked with a template of the park and the recreation elements in their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> meetings to evaluate alternate park designs. The result of these explorations is two concept plans, with narrative below and renderings in attachments.

#### Concept Plan 1 (Refinement of Staff Recommendation)

Concept Plan 1 refines the staff recommendation (Refined Staff Preferred Concept, February 2018 WG Meeting) to respond to community concerns, and does the following in Phase 1:

- Flips the diamonds so the youth baseball diamond lies in the north portion of the park near Four Mile Run Drive, and the adult softball diamond lies in the south portion, near the stream;
- Minimizes the out-of-play area around the youth baseball and adult softball diamonds in order to maximize open space toward Four Mile Run Drive;
- Sites one tennis court and one basketball court in an area just south of the WETA parcel; and
- Sites a new, fenced playground and restrooms along Four Mile Run Drive.

In Phase Two, the Concept Plan 1:

- Converts the basketball court to a second tennis court; and
- Sites a new basketball court either just north of the tennis courts or adjacent to the Shirlington Road parking lot.

A larger picnic pavilion, cluster of picnic tables, and/or small shelter can be sited in either Phase 1 or 2.

Concerns with this concept plan include:

- The left-field corner of the fence for the youth baseball diamond is 75 feet from Four Mile Run Drive. This involves a section of outfield fence and a light pole, breaking up the open space in that area. Although an overlap fence will be used in the outfield, allowing access to the space when not in use, a fence that can be removed during the off-season is not feasible per staff; and
- Defers minor costs for a second tennis court to Phase 2.

See attachment for renderings for Concept Plan 1, Phases 1 and 2.

Concept Plan 2 – New Concept Plan

In Phase 1, Concept Plan 2:

- Sites and fully renovates the adult softball diamond where the youth baseball diamond is now;

- Moves the youth baseball diamond temporarily to the current site of the (larger) adult softball diamond (where its boundaries will remain partially in the RPA), with minimal renovations and minimal amenities;
- Retains the tennis courts in roughly their current location;
- Sites a basketball court just north-west of the current location;
- Sites the new playground and restrooms along Four Mile Run Drive.

In Phase 2, Concept Plan 2:

- Moves and fully renovates the youth baseball diamond northward (out of the RPA) into the current location of the WETA building; and
- Sites a new large shelter south of the youth baseball diamond near the RPA.

Concerns with this concept plan include:

- Delays the improved replacement of the youth baseball diamond;
- Sites the youth baseball diamond in the RPA (even temporarily, given an uncertain timeline for acquisition of the WETA parcel);
- Uses existing lighting for the youth baseball diamond which may not be appropriate for night play purposes;
- Existing diamond field lighting is partially retained which delays the installation of improved lighting for (spillover effects to) the Shirlington apartments;
- Delays opportunities for tree planting and restoration of the RPA until Phase 2.
- Overall design, particularly fewer opportunities for contiguous, connected casual use open space along the riparian area continuing along Four Mile Run Drive (especially in Phase One); and
- Defers major costs for the new youth baseball diamond and large shelter to Phase 2.

See attachment for renderings for Concept Plan 2, Phases 1 and 2.

### Comparison of Concept Plans 1 and 2

Where the concept plans are alike:

- Both plans retain most of the recreational elements in Phase 1 (the adult softball diamond, the youth baseball diamond, the basketball court, one tennis court);
- Both options light the tennis and basketball courts (as they are currently) but with new lights;
- Both plans site the adult softball diamond in the same place along Nelson Street, with the outfield facing away from other park elements thus reducing the likelihood of harm from home runs;
- In siting the adult softball diamond along Nelson Street, both plans require the removal of some (7) mature trees near the RPA;
- Both plans keep at least one tennis court and one basketball court in Phase 1;
- Both plans allow for siting a new playground and restrooms along Four Mile Run Drive in Phase 1; and
- Both plans allow for siting some small shelter or picnic area in Phase 1 or 2.

Where the options differ:

- Concept Plan 1 avoids siting anything in the RPA in Phase 1 or 2 whereas Concept Plan 2 sites the youth baseball diamond in the RPA in Phase 1 (and leaves the outfield fencing in place);
- Concept Plan 2 thus requires siting the youth baseball diamond twice – temporarily realigning it on the existing adult softball diamond in Phase 1, and rebuilding it permanently in Phase 2 on the grounds of what is currently the WETA building;
- Concept Plan 1 provides for appropriate diamond field lighting for both diamonds in Phase 1 whereas Concept Plan 2 uses existing adult softball diamond lighting for the smaller youth baseball diamond, which may or may not be sufficient for nighttime play;
- Concept Plan 1 replaces all existing lighting in Phase 1, while Concept Plan 2 retains some existing lighting until Phase 2;
- Concept Plan 1 is configured so that the third-base of the youth baseball diamond is 75 feet from Four Mile Run Drive;
- Concept Plan 1 sites tennis court and one basketball court in Phase 1 whereas Concept Plan 2 realizes two tennis courts and one basketball court in Phase 1;

- Concept Plan 1 provides for a large shelter in Phase 1 whereas Concept Plan 2 delays inclusion of the large shelter until Phase 2; and
- Concept Plan 1 provides more opportunities for contiguous, connected casual use open space along the riparian area and eastern park perimeter, continuing into the casual use open space along Four Mile Run Drive, while Concept Plan 2 provides a slightly larger area of uninterrupted casual use open space along Four Mile Run Drive. (Percentage of the first 150 feet of frontage along Four Mile Run Drive dedicated to fields or courts is 6% in Option 1, 2% Option 2.)

### Additional Issues Raised

Additional issues were raised as part of the JDP Committee discussions that fall outside the direct scope of the JDP Committee, but align with overall 4MRVWG discussions and may be of interest to the Working Group and the County Board for longer-term community planning. These were discussed briefly and include:

- A desire to look at other sites in the planning area, including along Shirlington Road, for community recreational uses; and
- A desire to in future, site additional court spaces on the police warehouse site and/or configure this parcel to allow multiple uses including flexible, casual use and outdoor arts.

### Thank You

Many thanks to the JDP Committee members for their respectful, thoughtful consideration of the issues raised; and to staff for their patience and responsiveness during this accelerated planning effort. Staff is to be especially commended for their willingness to consider adjusting the baseball and softball diamonds. The generally collaborative attitude of all participants helped make the process productive.