

Joint Committee Report Concerning Resolution on 1101 Lee Hwy.

At the April CivFed meeting Bernie Berne introduced a resolution asking the County to conduct comprehensive planning of 1101 Lee Highway (a parcel designated as part of the Upper Rosslyn site for a planned boathouse) and to defer further coordination with the National Park Service for a boathouse project under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) until completion of that planning.

The draft resolution was deferred from the May meeting pending our requests to the County to clarify the status of comprehensive planning for the parcel.

Notwithstanding CivFed's requests for clarification, a few days prior to the May 18th County Board Meeting, an item appeared in the County Board's consent agenda requesting authorization for the County Manager to enter into a Programmatic Agreement with the National Park Service and other agencies. The Programmatic Agreement was in furtherance of the review process under NEPA "to develop a boathouse and related facilities on the Virginia side of the Potomac River." including the Upper Rosslyn Site. At the request of CivFed representatives, the item was removed from the consent agenda. The item was considered at the recessed May 21st meeting and approved unanimously by the County Board. Speakers from CivFed and the Environment and Energy Conservation Commission, among others, spoke in opposition to the Programmatic Agreement, which they felt was premature until additional County planning had been completed.

The Chairs of the three relevant Committees (Parks & Recreation, Environmental Affairs and Planning and Zoning) subsequently expressed their views that, because the County Board had spoken clearly and unanimously on this issue only a week or two previously, there was a question whether the resolution should move forward or whether CivFed should express its disappointment and concerns about both the decision and the process less formally to Board members and County staff. Nevertheless, the resolution's proponent strongly felt that the resolution should go forward, as did majorities of each of the relevant Committees.

The following recommendation was submitted to, and rejected by, the members of the committees:

The following committee chairs of the Civic Federation — Environmental Affairs, Planning and Zoning, and Parks and Recreation — move to not move forward the proposed resolution entitled "Resolution of Arlington County Civic Federation Regarding Use of 1101 Lee Highway Property in Rosslyn."

The committee chairs wish to express, at the outset, their thanks to Bernie Berne and other proponents of the Resolution. The chairs believe that, though their Resolution, the proponents have helped to bring attention to the County's sometimes unclear or inconsistent planning commitments as well as renew public attention on park planning efforts that may present a threat Arlington's tree canopy and the natural environment generally. The Resolution correctly notes, in the view of the Committees, that information released by the County at the time the Lee Highway parcel was purchased

indicated that the County would conduct further planning to choose among alternative potential uses of the parcel, only one of which was a boathouse support facility.

The chairs do not believe, however, that the Proposed Resolution is appropriate for a vote before the Civic Federation at this time. That Resolution asks that (1) that the County conduct promised “comprehensive planning” for the 1101 Lee Highway parcel, including for uses other than a boathouse support facility; and (2) that the County ask the National Park Service to defer any further consideration of the parcel for boathouse use until the completion of that planning. (For several years, the National Park Service has been conducting an environmental assessment of the Arlington Boathouse project under the National Environmental Protection Act. The Park Service’s draft environmental assessment has identified one alternative — including the 1101 Lee Highway parcel — as its “preferred alternative,” the option that best achieves the Park Service’s mission, considering environmental, economic and other factors).

In recent weeks, however, both the County staff and the County Board have made plain their view that the planning efforts for the Arlington Boathouse Project undertaken over the past 30 years or more provide a more than adequate basis to devote a portion of the 1101 Lee Highway parcel as a boathouse support facility. In response to questions posed by a representative of the Civic Federation on May 7, 2019, the County Manager stated that the parcel was originally purchased to serve as part of the boathouse project and that no further planning for alternative uses would be conducted. On May 21, 2019, the County Board unanimously authorized the County Manager to enter into a Programmatic Agreement with the National Park Service and other agencies to conduct additional investigations needed for the Boathouse Project. The Boathouse Project is defined in the Programmatic Agreement to include the 1101 Lee Highway Property. At the Board’s public hearing on the Programmatic Agreement, the Resolution’s principal proponent, the President of the Civic Federation, and the Environmental & Energy Conservation Commission (E2C2) requested the Board to conduct additional planning for the property, including consideration of alternative uses. The Board did not accede to those requests.

In light of the County’s recent position that additional planning into alternative uses of the Lee Highway parcel is unnecessary and that it is time to move forward with its federal partner to plan and construct the long-delayed Boathouse Project, the chairs see no value in a resolution that asks the County to reconsider. The chairs do, however, recommend that interested citizens work with the County and the National Park Service on future planning for the Boathouse Project. It will be important, the chairs believe, to ensure that pre-design and design work conducted on both federal and County lands is sensitive to the historic and aesthetic values protected in the George Washington Memorial Parkway Historic District, preserves and protects the valuable habitat and natural resources adjacent to the Potomac River, and minimizes adverse effects on the natural environment.

Notwithstanding this recommendation not to move forward on the proposed resolution, the committee chairs feel that the County Board and staff are violating the spirit of the Public Spaces Master Plan, adopted just last month, which promised transparency in implementing the Master Plan and all park planning decisions. Actions such as placing

the Programmatic Agreement at the last minute on the consent agenda, without first soliciting review and comment from either the Park and Recreation Commission, or the Environmental Energy Conservation Commission, undermines public engagement and causes some County residents to believe that the County is not committed to true openness and full public participation on civic issues that affect them.

Along with this recommendation Committee members were provided with the latest rewrite of the resolution with changes primarily recommended by the Chair of the Environmental Affairs Committee, John Seymour, which were accepted by Bernie Berne.

Notwithstanding the recommendation of the three committee chairs (John Seymour – Environmental Affairs, Ben Kenney – Planning and Zoning, and Duke Banks – acting Chair, Parks & Recreation), the results of the vote by committee members is as follows:

Yes – Resolution should be voted on by membership, notwithstanding the County Board’s action – 9 (Jay Wind, Mark Antell, Bernie Berne, Suzanne Sundberg, Connie Erickson, Natasha Atkins, Joe Pelton, , Rick Epstein, Kit Norland)

No – the Resolution should not be given further consideration because of the County Board’s action – 0

Did not respond to vote electronically – 3 (Suzanne Bolton, Jesse Boeding, Michael Thomas)

Given these vote results, committee chairs recommend that the resolution be brought to the floor and considered on its merits.

Bernie Berne has agreed to the following friendly amendment to reflect the decision of the County Board at its May 21st meeting. This would be the adding of the following three Whereas clauses and one Resolve clause to the initial resolution:

WHEREAS, as part of the Civic Federation's review of the draft resolution it made inquiries of County staff to ascertain the County's intent regarding planning for the 1101 Lee Highway Site and, despite those inquiries, received no definitive answers;

WHEREAS, despite those inquiries and without notice to the Civic Federation or to the appropriate County Commissions, the County Board included as a consent item to its May 18, 2019, meeting a proposal to enter into a Programmatic Agreement with the National Park Service and other agencies in furtherance of the Boathouse Project, including the 1101 Lee Highway property; and,

WHEREAS, the County Board subsequently, by a vote of 5-0, authorized the County to enter into the Programmatic Agreement, despite the objections of the President of the Civic Federation and the Environment and Energy Conservation Commission, among others;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that, through its actions with respect to the 1101 Lee Highway property, the Arlington County government is not acting in accordance with:

- (1) prior County government statements that assured a comprehensive public planning process for this property;
- (2) the County's April 25, 2019, Public Spaces Master Plan, which promised openness and full public participation in all park planning decisions as well as the prioritization of this property for the development of a park master plan; and,
- (3) the County's long-standing practice of submitting projects with such significant potential environmental effects to the relevant appointed County commissions.

This additional language updates the resolution that was distributed in the Newsletter and is reflected as *italicized red* in the resolution that will be considered at the general meeting.

Given the short time frames between the County Board action (May 21st) and the June 4th CivFed meeting, committees polled the latest group of committee members they had on file by email.

RESOLUTION OF ARLINGTON COUNTY CIVIC FEDERATION REGARDING USE OF 1101 LEE HIGHWAY PROPERTY IN ROSSLYN

WHEREAS, in 2014 Arlington County paid \$2.4 million to purchase a privately-owned property in Rosslyn located at 1101 Lee Highway (now identified as 2101 North Lynn Street);

WHEREAS, the April 23, 2014 County Manager's report in support of the acquisition stated that the property could be used as an ancillary boathouse facility or "in addition, or as alternative uses, the County may locate other passive and/or active recreational uses on the property";
[\(arlington.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php? view_id=2&clip_id=2769&meta_id=121077\)](http://arlington.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=2769&meta_id=121077)

WHEREAS, the County's May 13, 2014, news release announcing the County Board's approval of the property's acquisition stated that the County was considering using the property as:

- (1) an ancillary boathouse facility containing educational and recreation facilities that would complement a potential lower boathouse site on the Potomac River shoreline;
- (2) a possible realignment of a bicycle trail to improve safety and access; and
- (3) open space for passive recreation use; (newsroom.arlingtonva.us/release/county-board-approves-acquisition-of-lee-highway-property-along-potomac-river/)

WHEREAS: the County's 2014 news release stated: "Any planning efforts will include a comprehensive public process." The news release stated further that the "public process" was to be in addition to a complementary process undertaken by the National Park Service;

WHEREAS, the Public Spaces Master Plan that the Arlington County Board adopted on April 25, 2019, identifies the property as a new County park
([arlington.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php? view_id=2&clip_id=3630&meta_id=185729](http://arlington.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=3630&meta_id=185729)). The Master Plan identified the park as among those of high importance to the County's park system within the next decade and on which the County should focus its master planning efforts;

WHEREAS, the park contains an upland woodland that is located east of North Lynn Street between the George Washington Memorial Parkway to the north and I-66 to the south;

WHEREAS, the park's natural area is presently visible and accessible to the many users of the nearby Custis Trail;

WHEREAS, the July 2015 Rosslyn Sector Plan states that the County should increase the approximately 5% total tree canopy coverage within the Rosslyn Coordinated Redevelopment District to 15% or more to enable the coverage to meet or exceed the County's goal for central business districts as outlined in the County's Urban Forest Master Plan;
[\(arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2015/12/151208_RosslynSectorPlan-HI.pdf\)](http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2015/12/151208_RosslynSectorPlan-HI.pdf)

WHEREAS, at its regularly scheduled meeting on December 5, 1995, the Arlington County Civic Federation passed a resolution recommending that a boathouse not be built at the shoreline site below Rosslyn and across from Theodore Roosevelt Island (the Lower Rosslyn Site) because of its adverse environmental impacts on the shoreline and nearby natural areas;

(www.civfed.org/boathouse.htm)

WHEREAS, the Civic Federation reaffirmed its opposition to the construction of a boathouse at the Lower Rosslyn Site in a March 12, 1998, letter to the Chairman and other members of the Arlington County Board and in a July 22, 2004, letter to the Superintendent of the National Park Service's George Washington Memorial Parkway; (www.civfed.org/boathouse.htm)

WHEREAS, in June 2018, the National Park Service (NPS) issued a draft environmental assessment (EA) for an "Arlington County and Vicinity Non-Motorized Boathouse Facility"; ([parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm? parkID=186&projectID=13418&documentID=89109](http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=186&projectID=13418&documentID=89109)).

WHEREAS, the draft EA states: "The NPS, in cooperation with the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and Arlington County, is evaluating the proposed development of a boathouse and related facilities on the Virginia side of the Potomac River";

WHEREAS, the "preferred alternative" in the draft EA identifies the use of the park (the Upper Rosslyn Site) as a support facility for a boathouse to be constructed on the Potomac River at the Lower Rosslyn Site.

WHEREAS, the draft EA describes the planned uses for the park as follows: "A support facility containing office space, locker rooms, restrooms, and space for education and outreach would be developed on site in Rosslyn out of the floodplain, between Lynn Street, the I-66 off ramp, and the George Washington Memorial Parkway.";

WHEREAS, the draft EA describes another alternative that would construct the boathouse on the Lower Rosslyn Site without using the Upper Rosslyn Site. Under that alternative, the boathouse would have the same footprint and facilities as would the boathouse constructed under the "preferred alternative";

WHEREAS, the draft EA also cautions that "construction of the facilities on the Upper Rosslyn Site would necessitate removal of some trees that are within the boundary of the George Washington Memorial Parkway Historic District which would alter the cultural landscape and diminish the integrity of the setting and feeling of the immediate area.";

WHEREAS, there is no need to impair the County's natural resources and significantly reduce the tree canopy in the park when a functional boathouse can be constructed at the Lower Rosslyn site without impacting the park;

WHEREAS, the County government has cooperated with the NPS in the development of a "preferred alternative" that would use the park for a boathouse support facility without first conducting the comprehensive public process to which the County had committed in its County's May 13, 2014, news release or the master park planning process recommended in the Public Spaces Master Plan;

WHEREAS, as part of the Civic Federation's review of the draft resolution it made inquiries of County staff to ascertain the County's intent regarding planning for the 1101 Lee Highway Site

and, despite those inquiries, received no definitive answers;

WHEREAS, despite those inquiries and without notice to the Civic Federation or to the appropriate County Commissions, the County Board included as a consent item to its May 18, 2019, meeting a proposal to enter into a Programmatic Agreement with the National Park Service and other agencies in furtherance of the Boathouse Project, including the 1101 Lee Highway property; and,

WHEREAS, the County Board subsequently, by a vote of 5-0, authorized the County to enter into the Programmatic Agreement, despite the objections of the President of the Civic Federation and the Environment and Energy Conservation Commission, among others;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that, through its actions with respect to the 1101 Lee Highway property, the Arlington County Civic Federation considers that the Arlington County government is not acting in accordance with:

- (1) prior County government statements that assured a comprehensive public planning process for this property;*
- (2) the County's April 25, 2019, Public Spaces Master Plan, which promised openness and full public participation in all park planning decisions as well as the prioritization of this property for the development of a park master plan; and,*
- (3) the County's long-standing practice of submitting projects with such significant potential environmental effects to the relevant appointed County commissions;*

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED, that the Arlington County Civic Federation urges the Arlington County Board and/or County Manager to immediately initiate the comprehensive public planning process as provided in the County's 2014 news release regarding the County Board's approval of the County's acquisition of the 1101 Lee Highway property, and the County's Public Spaces Master Plan; and,

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED, to help assure that the County government completes its public planning process for the property in a timely manner, the Arlington County Civic Federation recommends that the Arlington County Board and/or County Manager ask the National Park Service to defer any further consideration of the use of the Upper Rosslyn Site for a boathouse support facility until such time as the County government has completed its public planning process for the property.

(Note: above resolution language includes the phrase "the Arlington County Civic Federation considers that" that was added as a friendly amendment during discussion)