

**Donaldson Run Civic Association  
4612 N. 26<sup>th</sup> Street  
Arlington, VA 22207**

March 11, 2013

Paul A. Gilbert  
Executive Director  
Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority  
5400 Ox Road  
Fairfax Station, VA 22039

Dear Mr. Gilbert:

As President of the Donaldson Run Civic Association, I wanted to provide our organization's response to the proposals for Potomac Overlook Park that were outlined at the meeting held on February 25. Following the meeting, DRCA sent an email to our distribution list asking for our residents' feedback regarding the NVRPA recommendations. Like those at the February 25 meeting, the responses we received were overwhelmingly negative to almost all the proposals. Our DRCA members believe that the park would best serve the region if its primary function continued to be a nature preserve. A vast majority of them believe that new activities such as scout camps, urban agriculture, and renting out shelter space for events will change the essential character of this woodland preserve. For more details on the feedback we have received so far, please see the attached copies of the emails that were submitted.

Our members' views are consistent with your General Management Plan for Potomac Overlook, which emphasizes the intent of the park "to preserve the land in its natural state to promote the health of the environment and safeguard the diversity of species." Although that Plan also includes the goal "to provide a natural setting for recreation and exercise," the NVRPA Board recognized the incompatibility of these proposals with that natural setting by approving at its November meeting an amendment to the Plan "to reflect activity areas for [the] features . . . shown in the improvement plan."

The Donaldson Run Neighborhood has always had a strong interest in our parks, and for many residents, the proximity to natural settings was a primary reason for moving to the neighborhood. The DRCA neighborhood conservation plan that was published in 2000 states:

"Many of the parks in Arlington County are locations for soccer fields, playgrounds, or open grassy areas. However, the majority of the parks in and around Donaldson Run are forest woodlands and natural ecosystems with flora and fauna. The 2 largest concerns of our survey respondents were the protection of the existing woodlands within our community, and improved park maintenance to preserve that which we treasure most."

Thus, it is not surprising that any activity that is not consistent with maintaining the natural setting that exists at Potomac Overlook is in conflict with neighborhood values in Donaldson Run.

We are particularly concerned about these proposals because, even as modified by your recent "Version 2.0" described below, they appear to be directly at odds with the Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) recently adopted by Arlington County. As the NRMP recognized, "Arlington County is at an environmental crossroads." Most of its historical natural resources have disappeared, and many of the remaining species suffer from some form of degradation. Arlington County now has only 248 acres of "natural lands" left in its parks. Potomac Overlook's increasingly fragile natural lands are a substantial part of the few remaining natural lands in the Arlington area. In this environment, Arlington County's NRMP identified as its Goal #1 the conservation and preservation of existing natural resources, emphasizing "passive-use opportunities for visitors, such as bird watching, botanical study and hiking." It specifically identified Donaldson Run as one of its natural resource protection areas, and adopted as Goal #3 steps to avoid adverse impact on the adjoining natural resources on properties owned by NVRPA and others.

It is unfortunate that the many users of Potomac Overlook were brought in at such a late point in the process. Arlington has a long tradition of engaging its residents when major decisions such as this one, come before a community. I participated in such a process when Marymount University proposed building its dormitory/residence hall/parking garage complex that is adjacent to the Donaldson Run neighborhood. While we did not always agree with Marymount, now Marymount says that the project was improved because of the community involvement. I would urge NVRPA to press the "reset button", and when planning changes in the park, include representatives from the various constituencies that have a vested interest in this regional park. It would be helpful to understand what the problems are that NVRPA is trying to solve in Potomac Overlook. Although park utilization seems to be an area of concern for NVRPA, no data has been presented to the public to support that this park is underused.

We believe that the "reset button" should begin with a rescission by the NVRPA Board of its November 2012 approval of all aspects of this Plan and, equally important, of its approval of the departure of the Plan from NVRPA's General Management Plan for Potomac Overlook. We understand that NVRPA has recently proposed a "Version 2.0" of the Plan in response to the overwhelming opposition of the Park's users and neighbors. While we appreciate efforts made to address these concerns, we are disappointed that NVRPA has formulated Version 2.0, and shared it with the Arlington County Board, before engaging the community in a meaningful dialogue. It appears that Version 2.0 only defers some aspects of the original plan from "near-term" consideration. It also continues to reserve consideration of a number of other changes that our members have opposed as incompatible with the established mission of the Park.

DRCA is very willing to work with NVRPA to ensure that Potomac Overlook is protected, maintained and improved in ways that are consistent with its traditional role as a nature preserve, the Park's General Management Plan reflecting that role, Arlington County's support of that role as evidenced by the significant investments made for the benefit of the Park over the years, and the County's Natural Resources Management Plan. I hope that

DRCA, along with the wider community, can work with NVRPA in achieving goals that are mutually beneficial, and I am personally willing to assist in that effort.

Sincerely,

Signed Anne Wilson

President  
Donaldson Run Civic Association

Attachment

Cc: Mr. Paul Ferguson  
Mr. Mike Nardolilli  
Members of the Arlington County Board  
Mr. Roy Geiger