

FELLOW PROPERTY PARK PLAN

DRAFT

I. Introduction & Background

In 1999, City Council passed a resolution resolving to initiate a master planning process for each park in the City. Since then master plans have been created for Donald S. Frady Park, Cherry Hill Park, Madison Park, Roberts Park, Cavalier Trail Park, Isaac Crossman Park, Lincoln Park, West End Park, Howard E. Herman Stream Valley Park, Big Chimneys Park and Berman Park.

In 2019, the City of Falls Church purchased the property located at 604 South Oak Street. Commonly known as the Fellows Property, the property is approximately 1.9 acres nestled between Parker Avenue and Fellows Court and is across the street from Oak Street Elementary. The property previously featured the home of City resident Lydia “Betty” Fellows.

The Fellows Property Master Park Plan will lead to a site plan for the park and will establish clear and concise plans to guide future development of the park, while serving to protect and preserve the City’s open space and natural resources.

The first step in the process for developing a Master Plan for Fellows Property was to conduct a public input survey in May 2020 followed by a public input meeting in November 2020 to gather information and suggestions from the citizens of Falls Church. The public input meeting was held virtually on November 4, 2020. On January 6, 2021 during the Advisory Board of Recreation and Parks Meeting, Kim Haun, Arlington County’s Urban Agriculture Coordinator, presented on Urban Agriculture practices. On March 2, 2021, during the Advisory Board of Recreation and Parks meeting, Stacey Evers, founder of Grow a Row FC and Co-Chair of the Urban Agriculture Work Group of the Fairfax County Food Council presented jointly with Cory Suter, Co-Chair of Urban Agriculture Workgroup of Fairfax County Food Council, highlighting the accomplishments of the Fairfax County’s Urban Agriculture Work Group. An on-site public meeting was held on May 5, 2021. Using input from these meetings and presentations, a Draft Master Plan was presented to the public on September 8, 2021. Over the following months, the draft plan underwent multiple revisions. A second community input meeting was held on February 2, 2022. Comments received during the public input process guide the park purpose, desired future visitor experience and park themes establish important guidelines for the Conceptual Development Plan.

The Fellows Property Conceptual Development Plan makes recommendations for the preservation and future development of the park.

A. Park Purpose

1. Preserve and protect natural resources
2. Provide environmental education
3. Promote environmental stewardship
4. Provide a variety of passive and limited active recreation activities for all age groups

B. Desired Future Visitor Experience

1. Visitors will be able to participate in a variety of passive and limited active recreational activities.
2. Visitors will be able to enjoy a natural park scape with passive recreation activities such as observing wildlife and the inclusion of some form of urban agriculture.
3. Visitors will be able to enjoy a natural park scape with possible limited active recreation to be explored. Limited active recreation includes but is not limited to walking, biking and creative play.
4. Through the utilization of an outdoor educational venue and/or interpretative information, visitors will be able to learn more about environmental issues such as resource protection.
5. Visitors will be able to learn more about the history, importance and uses of present natural resources to the Indigenous people and early settlers of the City.

C. Park Themes

1. Neighborhood Park
2. Interpretive Park
3. Natural Resource Area

D. Property Description

As previously noted, the Fellows Property is a 1.9 acre parcel of land along South Oak Street, between Parker Avenue and Fellows Court, directly across the street from Oak Street Elementary. Structures on the property were removed in Spring of 2020. The 1.9 acre parcel is largely undeveloped with the exception of the original foundation of the Fellows home, original well and an existing storm water structure toward the back of the property. Preservation of the existing well with the intent to repurpose well water for urban agriculture or other uses. The storm water structure toward the back of the property installed by the prior owner in preparation to develop the property for the construction of residential homes is no longer needed. It is the recommendation of the Advisory Board of Recreation and Parks that it be removed to allow for the reforestation of this section of the property. The rich variety of perennial plantings, shrubs, under-story trees and canopy trees ensure visual interest and color throughout the changing seasons. A good portion of the property is open and grass covered but there are a considerable number trees, brush, and shrubs on the property. Four exceptional mature trees on the property are designated as City Specimen Trees and are labeled. The property is also a wildlife habitat. Public access to the park is currently available from South Oak Street.

E. Park Designation

This plan describes the current resources in the park, and makes recommendations for the preservation and future development of the park. Fellows Property serves as a Neighborhood Park because of its natural beauty and the ability to enjoy a peaceful contemplative walk on the natural trail. Neighborhood Parks serve residents from the entire City. Natural Resource Areas are designated in order to conserve, protect and provide public use and enjoyment of an area rich in

natural resources. The Fellows Property will be designated as a City Park under the “Parks for People Plan” Section of the City’s Comprehensive Plan.

II. Description of the Conceptual Development Plan Elements

A. New Plan Elements

1. Park Access

Park access is currently from South Oak Street is the preference from a majority of survey respondents. However, access should still be included from Fellows Court and Parker Avenue.

2. Interpretative Signage

The fact that the park is a Natural Resource Area and abundant with wildlife make it an excellent location for informal environmental education. Interpretive signs will be added to provide information about wildlife habitats, natural resources and the historical value these resources had to Indigenous people and early settlers of the City. The extent of the signage should be designed so as not to overwhelm the natural feel of the property. This should be considered in the number, placement and material used.

3. Benches and Picnic Tables

A few benches will be installed in various locations in the park for park users to sit and enjoy the contemplative nature of the park. Additional benches and tables suitable for picnicking, completing homework, or playing board games will be included.

4. Pathway(s)

Pathway(s) to enable users to access desired locations within the park. Material to be used for pathways is still to be determined. Pathway to enable access to areas within the park and a pathway to allow visitors to walk the full perimeter of the park will be included.

5. Nature Trail

A nature trail highlighting particular uses and historical value of natural resources that are native to our region.

6. Urban Agriculture

Urban Agriculture comes in a variety of forms. One or more forms of urban agriculture could be included in the park. Possibilities include, but are not limited to fruit trees, community garden and planting of plants that attract pollinators

7. Natural Play Area

A natural playground without a traditional structure will provide younger children the ability to explore and test their boundaries in a welcoming and safe space. Children may have access to a mud table with water from a recycled water source, tires, lumber, pots, pans, buckets, boulders and logs. Additional elements may include a natural climbing area with hand and foot holds added to large tree stumps, a walkway made with a series of stumps, canopied rushes. The inclusion of a natural play area will encourage children to develop an appreciation for the natural environment.

8. Equity and Accessibility

Parks are a free amenity in the community and can be enjoyed by all regardless of race, abilities, religion, sexual orientation or economic status. Any development or improvement to this property will be done so with the intention of being inclusive and implementing best ADA practices to ensure accessibility.

9. Resource Education Area

A small designated space to be used by Recreation & Parks Department and the City Schools to provide more formal environmental, wildlife and, natural resource education. If a resources education area is determined to be appropriate, it could be implemented in the master plan or added to Howard E. Herman Stream Valley Park.

10. Lighting

Lighting installed should meet Dark Sky standards to preserve the wild life habitat and limit light pollution. Possibility of increased lighting along the perimeter of the park to ensure the safety of patrons.

11. Storm Water

Mitigation of storm water by natural features. Potentially using low lying areas that collect storm water for this purpose.

12. Public Art

Inclusion of public art within the park may be possible when the City finalizes an Art Policy.

B. Enhancements

1. Trees

A through survey of all existing trees on the property will be conducted. Addition or deletion of trees will be determined as needed. Native trees will be used in the park to replace trees as needed

and to maintain the canopy, which features trees at a variety of heights, and in various stages of growth. Tree maintenance on the existing trees will be completed as needed and as money is allocated for such work. Trees and limbs that fall will generally be left in the park to provide habitat for wildlife. The City will always protect trees in accordance with the City's current greenspace maintenance plan.

2. Shrubs and Other Greenspace

The City will always protect shrubs and greenspace in accordance with the City's current greenspace maintenance plan.

3. Invasive Plant Removal

Invasive plants such as poison and English ivy will be removed and its regrowth monitored on a regular basis.

4. Landscape

In consultation with the City's Arborist, native trees shall be planted along the border of the Fellows Property and Parker Avenue. Maintaining an open line of sight into the Fellows Property shall be considered in determining the type, number and location of the trees. The addition of annual and perennial flowers and native plants and shrubs as necessary to enhance the natural beauty of the Fellows Property shall be evaluated on a periodic basis.

5. Entrance Sign

A gateway entrance sign designed to be consistent with the features of the Fellows Property (e.g. the entrance signs at West End Park, Howard E. Herman Stream Valley Park and Big Chimneys Park) will be added at a location to be determined.

C. Open Space

The City will conserve and maintain existing parks, open space and natural resources. This park and the open space in the park will be preserved.

D. Conclusion

Parks are vitally important to the community, users and the overall sustainability of the City of Falls Church. Preservation and conservation of Fellows Property is critically important to both the City and the region. The park provides the City a unique opportunity to establish a well-managed biological habitat that can be used for both passive and limited active recreation.

The Master Plan attempts to address potential changes and the attempts to improve Fellows Property by making it accessible, visible and attractive.

The historical significance of the park and its name will be appropriately highlighted and note through interpretative signage and other means.

This is important both for the transparency of the process and the quality of the eventual Master Plan.

Documentation the various public hearings used in the creation of the Fellows Property Master Plan can be found at www.fallschurchva.gov/Fellows

The City of Falls Church is committed to the letter and spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This document will be made available in alternate format upon request. Call 703-248-5077 (TTY 711).

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