



# LIVABILITY22202

## Working Group Report on Open Space Workshop

December 2020

Livability22202 is a collaboration of the Arlington Ridge, Aurora Highlands, and Crystal City Civic Associations, representing the residents of the Pentagon City and Crystal City neighborhoods in zip code 22202.



ARLINGTON RIDGE



AURORA  
HIGHLANDS  
CIVIC ASSOCIATION



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**This report presents the recommendations of 22202 residents on how to address Open Space needs in the 22202 community as the area undergoes a period of intensive development that will increase the area population, creating more demand for open space and opportunities for residents to connect with nature. This need necessitates a community-driven collaborative approach to solution finding. This report provides a summary of the first community workshop on Open Space.**

**The Open Space Working Group welcomes comments, suggestions and alternate views on this topic. To provide comments or to get involved, please email us at [info@livability22202.org](mailto:info@livability22202.org)**

**This is one of a series of reports from collaborative working groups on a range of topics affecting livability.**

**For more, see [www.livability22202.org](http://www.livability22202.org)**

## **Livability22202 – Open Space Workshop**

### Executive Summary

Throughout the first half of 2020, neighbors from the Arlington Ridge, Aurora Highlands, and Crystal City civic associations gathered for a series of discussions, including a community-run workshop in February 2020, to develop a comprehensive agenda on open space. Designing a livable city requires a comprehensive approach to shaping the built environment to enhance the physical health, social health, and well-being of all inhabitants and to strengthen the overall community. Open space is a critical element of a livable community. This report focuses on open space across the 22202 community and provides recommendations that can be useful to all stakeholders and subsequent planning activities.

The Livability22202 Action Plan identified community open space as key to achieving several livability priorities, including environmental sustainability, biophilic design, connected open space, eco-corridors, and community-building. The 22202 community has placed special emphasis on interconnecting open spaces, utilizing both public and private open spaces, and creating multi-use spaces to maximize the utilization of the limited space available. The plan also noted the important linkage between open space and community facilities, which are often adjacent. Accordingly, the Action Plan proposed a community workshop to address the “integrated pedestrian network, open space, and eco-corridors.”

Achieving the open space goals envisioned in the Action Plan faces several challenges. First, relying on acquisition of new parkland is unlikely to keep pace with the rate of population growth. For example, given the 23,500 additional Arlington residents expected during the next decade, the County’s goal of acquiring 30 acres of additional open space during that period amounts to adding about 56 sq ft per new resident (about an 8.5 ft diameter circle per new resident), far below the current service levels of about 130 sq ft per resident.

A second impediment is that existing County parks in 22202 are not well matched to the needs of a residential population that increasingly lives in high-density housing. These existing parks are suburban in design, emphasizing facilities for sports and other activities that can’t be done in single-family backyards. As residences with no backyards proliferate in 22202, these parks are becoming inadequate to meet the needs of the rapid population growth and changing demographic.

The solution, therefore, hinges on finding access to land that is currently inaccessible, squeezing usable square footage out of “wasted space,” partnering with landowners for public use of private spaces, and, above all, promoting the evolution of existing parks to meet the needs of the present and future residents.

To plan for a new vision, resident volunteers organized an Open Space Workshop on February 22, 2020, bringing together members from the three civic associations within 22202, as well as property owners and developers, Arlington County staff, and subject matter experts. Working with nationally recognized organizations such as the Project for Public Spaces and the landscape architecture firms James Corner Field Operations and Hoerr Schaudt, as well as local non-profits such as Friends of Urban Agriculture, workshop subgroups examined open space issues organized around four topics:

1. Connecting residents to the natural world and enhancing biodiversity throughout 22202
2. Re-envisioning Virginia Highlands Park as the backyard for the Pentagon City community
3. Developing a holistic approach to planning Crystal City Parks

4. Exploring the possibility for a publicly accessible greenway from Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary along the railroad tracks to the southern end of Crystal City

Core principles surfaced repeatedly in each of the subgroups, reflecting the overarching need to develop holistic planning for connectivity, nature, and community-building:

- Improve hostile pedestrian environments and develop walking/biking loops throughout 22202 .
- Promote connectivity of open spaces from Arlington Ridge to Crystal City and Long Bridge Park.
- Connect Crystal City to the natural areas of Roaches Run on the east side of the railroad.
- Identify goals for natural systems: pollinators, tree cover/heat island reduction, storm water/drainage, solar energy.
- Increase shade trees and develop plantings to provide seasonal color and interest year-round.

The workshop report provides observations and specific recommendations for each of the areas and parks in order to initiate a sustained collaboration with other community stakeholders, including property developers, owners, county staff, and commission members, each of whom is invested in the success of our community. General recommendations are summarized below:

- Incorporate biophilic design approaches into open spaces and interconnect open spaces with retail high streets, multimodal transit, residential areas, and community facilities with an integrated pedestrian and bike trail network.
- Redesign Virginia Highlands Park into an urban park with an emphasis on multi-use casual uses suitable for the needs of residents living in high-density residences.
- Develop the Crystal City open spaces as part of an interconnected Open Space Framework that links the open spaces in a greenway configuration.
- Develop a linear park in the wooded area adjacent to Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary with a pedestrian trail that connects to Roaches Run, Crystal City, and Long Bridge Park in a loop trail configuration.

We continue to explore the themes of connecting residents to nature and to develop more complete concepts for creating a network of green corridors, parks, and natural places within 22202. A connectivity map shows how a biophilic walkway can connect Arlington Ridge through Aurora Highlands to Crystal City, with varying paths to and from natural areas. Subsequent efforts have focused on imagining casual use and event space at Virginia Highlands Park, creating a Naming Map to show community-centric possibilities in open-space areas, and installing a Highlands Urban Agriculture garden (HUG) as a pilot project. Our recommendations for Crystal City parallel those resulting from the BID and JBG-sponsored Crystal City Parks community engagement as input for future County consideration of five parks.

Achieving a highly livable community in 22202 requires strong collaboration with other community stakeholders, including property developers, owners, county staff, and commission members, many of whom participated in the workshop and the discussions addressed in this report. The community is grateful for the commitment of these stakeholders and looks forward to bringing the ideas in this report to fruition.

## Livability22202 – Open Space Workshop Report

### Introduction

Throughout the first half of 2020, neighbors from the Arlington Ridge, Aurora Highlands, and Crystal City civic associations gathered for a series of discussions, including a community-run workshop in February 2020, to develop a comprehensive agenda on open space. Designing a livable city requires a comprehensive approach to shaping the built environment to enhance the physical health, social health, and well-being of all inhabitants and to strengthen the overall community. Open space is a critical element of a livable community; accordingly, the Livability22202 Action Plan identifies open space as one of its key priorities.<sup>1</sup> This report focuses on open space across the 22202 community.

Arlington, where no resident is no more than a half-mile walking distance from a park, is frequently lauded for its parks. But with its rapid population growth and demographic change, and with little undeveloped land remaining, the County must consider how to meet the needs of existing and new residents. The County committed in the Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP)<sup>2</sup> to acquiring an average of 3 acres of land for park space annually over the next decade, roughly the size of a circle 8.5 feet in diameter for each new resident. But it is unclear whether it will be able to meet even that goal. Furthermore, parks within the 22202 area are essentially suburban in design, and as the Trust for Public Land (TPL) notes, great parks “must reflect the communities they serve.”<sup>3</sup> TPL’s 2017 *Field Guide for Parks and Creative Placemaking*<sup>4</sup> lays out the principles and strategies for “creative placemaking,” and in rapidly growing and changing 22202 it is becoming clear that the traditional parks of the past do not serve the needs of the present or future.

Over the past five years, public outreach by the County has exposed the underlying—and overwhelming—desire for more natural areas. In 2015, the County conducted a Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey. The majority of residents expressed a need for hiking trails, natural areas, and wildlife habitats, as well as paved multi-use trails. Shortly thereafter, the County launched development of the Public Spaces Master Plan, which was published in 2019.

Since 2016, the County also has explored the concept of biophilia—human connections with nature—and how that might be incorporated into Arlington’s planning and policies. In March 2020, Arlington joined the Biophilic Cities Network<sup>5</sup>, a worldwide network of cities working together to promote the economic, health, educational, and environmental benefits of incorporating nature into urban design.

In reviewing the existing parks and green spaces, current trends in Arlington, and experiences of other cities for the Livability22202 workshops, it became clear not only that the amount of open space is currently insufficient in 22202, but also that a new approach is necessary for designing accessible casual

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<sup>1</sup> Livability 22202. February 07, 2020. Accessed August 23, 2020. [livability22202.org/files/Livability22202-Action-Plan-v1.0-12-Nov-2019.pdf](https://livability22202.org/files/Livability22202-Action-Plan-v1.0-12-Nov-2019.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Public Space Master Plan. April 25, 2019. Accessed August 23, 2020.  
[http://arlingtonparks.us/psmp/PSMP%20Final%20Draft\\_06242019.pdf](http://arlingtonparks.us/psmp/PSMP%20Final%20Draft_06242019.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Trust for Public Land. *Creative Placemaking: Creating Parks, Expressing Culture, Strengthening Communities*. Accessed November 16, 2020. <https://www.tpl.org/our-work/creative-placemaking>

<sup>4</sup> Michael Clarke. The Trust for Public Land and The City Parks Alliance. 2017.  
[https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files\\_upload/FINAL\\_FieldGuide\\_Layout\\_sm\\_0.pdf](https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files_upload/FINAL_FieldGuide_Layout_sm_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Biophilic Cities. Accessed August 23, 2020. <https://www.biophiliccities.org/>

use spaces and integrating nature into the residential and recreational experiences in the area. The COVID-19 crisis, which has shuttered many offices and recreational opportunities and confined people to their houses and apartments, has increased the need for open space dedicated to casual use, nature walks, and connected trails. As County Board Chair Libby Garvey acknowledged recently, “Scientific evidence shows that people are happier, emotionally and physically healthier, and more productive when they work and live close to nature.”<sup>6</sup> Budget constraints due to COVID-19 also dampen the hopes for land acquisition. Nonetheless, development and partnerships in 22202 offer opportunities for expansion of accessible open space and creative redesign of existing spaces.

In addition to the identified needs and goals for open space in 22202, and because of the importance of open space to all citizens in the community, the Livability22202 Action Plan also recognizes that the current Arlington County structure of multiple site plan reviews and the Pentagon City Phased Development Site Plan process limit opportunities for comprehensive open space planning. These processes, constrained by time and scope, lack the ability to “connect the dots” across the broader area of the community. A comprehensive community discussion of open spaces across all areas of 22202 was needed, with the goals of improving the public dialogue and developing an integrated approach to planning and effecting change. The Open Space Workshop sought to initiate this discussion.

## Workshop Overview

Organized by volunteers, the Livability22202 Open Space Workshop brought together members from the three civic associations within 22202, as well as property owners and developers, Arlington County staff, and subject matter experts. In addition, the Livability Working Group had conversations with nationally recognized organizations such as the Project for Public Spaces and the landscape architecture firms James Corner Field Operations and Hoerr Schaudt, as well as local non-profits such as Friends of Urban Agriculture. More than 65 community members and experts gathered on February 23, 2020, to examine open space issues organized around four topics:

- Connecting residents to the natural world and enhancing biodiversity throughout 22202
- Re-envisioning Virginia Highlands Park as the backyard for the Pentagon City community
- Developing a holistic approach to planning Crystal City Parks
- Exploring the possibility for a publicly accessible greenway from Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary along the railroad tracks to the southern end of Crystal City

The day began with five “Pecha Kucha” presentations on open space: an introduction to the French ball game pétanque, played on courts in Virginia Highlands Park, and its local community; a talk by Oakridge Elementary School Teacher Jennifer Burgin on the importance of nature in sparking students’ interest in science; an overview of urban agriculture initiatives in Arlington County by the Friends of Urban Agriculture; a talk on Thinking Landscapes by Hoerr Schaudt, a landscape architecture firm; and a brief on principles of Open Space Planning by the LAB architecture firm. A short lunch period featured a slideshow of Arlington flora and fauna by naturalist and photographer David Howell. Over the course of the day participants divided into focus groups, went on walking tours of selected open spaces within 22202, and undertook planning exercises to develop an understanding of open space opportunities in the neighborhood. During the final hour of the workshop, participants presented their observations and ideas for each of the four sub-topic areas.

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<sup>6</sup> “Arlington County joins Biophilic Cities Network”. Accessed November 12, 2020.  
<https://parks.arlingtonva.us/2020/03/arlington-joins-biophilic-cities-network/>

## Workshop Session Summaries and Recommendations

### Connecting Residents to Nature

Facilitators:

Elizabeth Gearin, PhD, George Washington University Adjunct Professor  
Scott Brinitzer, Landscape Architect

#### Overview

Livability22202 goals for open space mirror the concepts of biophilia. These concepts emphasize the importance of green infrastructure for stormwater management and temperature regulation, enhanced connectivity, a healthy and diverse habitat to support native wildlife species, and the benefits to health and well-being from outdoor experiences and connections to nature. In March 2020, Arlington County joined the Biophilic Cities Network, noting in a press release, “As a Biophilic City Network Partner, Arlington will apply biophilic principles to its current and future policies and practices. The principles will not only influence public space projects in our parkland and the right-of-way, but also private development.”<sup>7</sup> Although biophilic elements can improve many unused spaces, it is also important that they be intentionally designed into the built environment.

The “Connecting Residents with Nature” session examined ways to improve natural ecosystems and processes within 22202, including ideas within the broad realm of biophilia. The Action Plan’s key objective to “foster environmental sustainability” denotes four recommendations for the County to pursue: (1) advance sustainable building design, (2) increase natural open space and tree canopy, (3) incorporate biophilic design into projects for public and private sites, and (4) create and support community gardens in Pentagon City and Crystal City.

The Arlington County Public Spaces Master<sup>8</sup> Plan also includes four priority actions directly related to the theme of this workshop group:

- Priority Action 5: Ensure access to spaces that are intentionally designed to support casual, impromptu use and connection with nature.
- Priority Action 8: Ensure and enhance access to the Potomac River, Four Mile Run, and their tributaries while improving the tree canopy, native vegetation, and other natural resources along waterways.
- Priority Action 9: Expand Arlington’s network of connected multi-use trails.
- Priority Action 11: Protect, restore, and expand natural resources and trees.

This group examined how to begin implementation of these recommended actions, focusing on the 22202 area’s extensive wooded areas, streams, water bodies, and single-family neighborhoods with mature tree cover. These include Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary and the wooded areas along the George Washington Memorial Parkway on the east side of 22202, Four Mile Run on the south, and the small Long Branch tributary off of Four Mile Run on the west side of the area (including Troy and Fraser Parks). In between, significant vegetated and possibly biodiverse areas with mature trees can also be found, including the areas of mature trees within Virginia Highlands Park, and James W. Haley, Fort Scott, and

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<sup>7</sup>“Arlington County joins Biophilic Cities Network”. Accessed November 12, 2020.

<https://parks.arlingtonva.us/2020/03/arlington-joins-biophilic-cities-network/>

<sup>8</sup> Public Space Master Plan. April 25, 2019. Accessed August 23, 2020.

[http://arlingtonparks.us/psmp/PSMP%20Final%20Draft\\_06242019.pdf](http://arlingtonparks.us/psmp/PSMP%20Final%20Draft_06242019.pdf)

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Eads Parks on the southern edges of the community. An additional area of significant vegetative character exists along the east side of Arlington Ridge Road and Lynn Street, including on the Arlington County South Lynn Street right-of-way and on the western edge of the River House property.

While other workshop sessions focused on particular places within 22202, including the urban spaces within Crystal City, the semi-urban but more open and natural spaces of Virginia Highlands Park, and the more natural wooded areas and wetlands at Roaches Run, this session examined strategies to knit all areas of 22202 together through interconnected natural areas and also through enhancement of the urban areas within the high-density portion of 22202.

This session looked at two very different environments within 22202, the more natural watershed of Long Branch Creek and the heavily urbanized and paved commercial core. The group explored ideas for introducing appropriate plant and animal ecosystems into 22202 on a more systematic basis, and considered possibilities to introduce a system of more complete “greenways” within 22202. They identified areas with significant opportunities for continuous walking and bicycling paths, tree canopy, storm water management, pollinator gardens, and other more natural and continuous plant communities. These elements can be woven through the neighborhoods, linking the more urban and lower-density portions of 22202 together.

### *Walking Tours*

Two walking tours explored the high-density urban area at the north end of Pentagon City and the lower-density Long Branch Creek watershed neighborhoods on the southwest edge bordering Glebe Road and Army Navy Drive.

### *Urban Core*

This group walked from the Crystal City Marriott north along South Eads Street, west along Army-Navy Drive, and then south along Hayes Street, exploring the edges adjacent to I-395 and the federal parking lots associated with the Pentagon. Observations from the walking tour and subsequent mapping exercise elicited the following recommendations:

#### *General*

- Develop a green corridor or urban trail system throughout all of 22202, with wayfinding including signage or sidewalk markings/graphics; connect smaller parks and green spaces with each other as well as with Met Park and larger parks (e.g., Long Bridge and Virginia Highlands Parks (see Figure 1)).
- Place trees between bike lanes and traffic lanes where possible.
- Add green walls to building facades that do not include active retail or habitable space.
- Use permeable materials for sidewalks; add more benches at all streets.
- Let vegetation extend from buildings closer to sidewalks and pedestrian areas – utilize a layered landscape with small trees, shrubs, groundcovers.
- Utilize hardy plants and native species that can thrive in urban conditions.
- Encourage green roofs at businesses and residential buildings – this will also improve view corridors and can provide habitat for bird and bees.
- Focus on improvements to the overall tree canopy in the higher-density urban areas.
- Improve overall tree canopy along all streets including Army-Navy Drive, Eads Street, and South Hayes Street.

#### Eads Street

- Extend linear park on South Eads Street by using the wide sidewalk adjacent to Met Park, as the Amazon HQ2 project develops.
- Provide extensive tree planting at the north end of Eads Street adjacent to “Teardrop Park” on both sides of the street, with potential preservation of some trees on the PenPlace site along the stretch across the street from Teardrop Park .
- Recognize the wildlife habitat currently provided on the PenPlace parcel as the most significant natural area in the immediate vicinity.

#### Army-Navy Drive

- At entrance to the tunnel connecting to the Pentagon Memorial, add rows of small trees at either side to highlight the entrance, draw people in, and add greenery; consider adding signage
- Reconfigure the Pentagon parking lots north of Army-Navy drive at edges closest to urban area/drainage provide water for wildlife and plants that will thrive in wetter conditions; use vegetation supportive of local wildlife, especially birds.
- Improve pedestrian sidewalks and crosswalks to be less hostile.
- Vegetate/green the sloped areas near the parking lots with native shrubs and/or urban ag plants.
- Acquire the Pentagon overflow parking lots in the long term.
- Consider vertical structures in parking lots covering the cars (which could provide shade, solar energy, and possibly greenery), and vines on walls adjacent to freeway at parking lots north of Army-Navy Drive.
- Within the green triangle at Rt 110/ I-395 loop, consider a wetland/bioretention area, with possibly a pocket park with benches. This might include a retaining wall for safety, education signage, meadow plantings with wildflowers, and un-culverting the drainage to allow some water for wildlife and encourage biodiversity. Minimizing the grass in this triangle may make this easier to maintain, as well.
- Improve connection to Long Bridge Park at the east end of Army-Navy Drive – ideas discussed include a “skyway” or zipline.

#### *Long Branch Creek*

The second group took a shuttle to the mouth of Long Branch Creek where it joins Four Mile Run and walked north along the creek and adjacent properties to the county-owned Fraser Park adjacent to Army-Navy Drive.

Long Branch Creek connects to Four Mile Run just south of Glebe Road. To the immediate north of Glebe Road is Troy Park, an approximately 3-acre linear strip of open space on the west side of the creek. Fraser Park is located farther north and was described by a resident during the workshop as being dedicated through a fee or easement to Arlington County in exchange for a right-of-way through the Forest Hills townhouse development (county records indicate this nearly 2-acre parcel is owned by the Forest Hills Community Association). Arlington County describes Fraser Park on the county website as a place to “enjoy over two acres of open green space complete with grills and picnic tables for an outdoor meal.”

On the walking tour, participants noted the following:

- The residential areas on each side of Long Branch Creek include diverse housing types: garden apartments, duplexes, and townhouses. The garden apartments on the east side of the creek have a large amount of parking abutting the natural area and limited access to the creek and park.

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- Portions of Long Branch Creek have the characteristics of an open sewer.
- Turf maintenance practices at the adjacent golf course may result in fertilizer and herbicidal runoff into Long Branch Creek, which meanders through the golf course property and subsequently empties into Four Mile Run and then into the Potomac River.
- Much of the stream edge is contained by engineered concrete walls for flood control.

### Workshop Discussion, Findings, and Recommendations

Upon sharing observations from both the walking tours within the high-density urban area and along the Long Branch Creek Watershed, session participants identified an overarching need to develop integrated greenways and natural corridors with the following ideas and characteristics:

- Develop walking/biking loops around the entire area, and within neighborhoods in 22202.
- Connect Arlington Ridge to PenPlace to Long Bridge Park.
- Connect Crystal City to the natural areas on the east side of the railroad.
- Identify goals for natural systems: pollinators, tree cover/heat island reduction, storm water/drainage, solar energy.
- Develop plantings to provide seasonal color and interest year-round.
- Connect various green spaces together.
- Increase shade trees and improve hostile pedestrian environments.

As participants explored the themes of connecting resident to nature, more complete concepts for creating a network of green corridor, parks, and natural places within 22202 began to develop.

### Post-Workshop Activities

After the workshop, the extensive notes from the group were used to draft a preliminary pedestrian connectivity map, shown in Figure 1. The map of pedestrian routes notes the following:

- The network connects residential neighborhoods, major open spaces, transit nodes, retail-high streets, and community facilities (library, schools, community centers)
- Public pedestrian access through privately owned superblocks is critical to achieving a walkable community. Examples of superblocks are Pentagon Row, Pentagon City Mall, Riverhouse, Met Park, Pen Place, Southampton, and the Brookfield Properties office complex
- Pedestrian friendly access across Route 1 is of paramount importance: key crossings at 12<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets need attention to improve safety and connectivity between Crystal City and the neighborhoods west of Route 1
- Bicycle routes, as detailed in the Bicycle Element of the Public Space Master Plan, complement the pedestrian walking network with many trails supporting mixed pedestrian and cyclist use with dedicated cyclist trails. These routes connect, in turn, to the larger trail network across Arlington County and the metro area

Pedestrian routes should have biophilic characteristics and support the local ecology. Eco-corridors would have a particular focus on these qualities. The following characteristics might be considered:

- Provides physical, visual, and acoustic separation from the road and built environment; one should hear birdsong on a biophilic walking path
- Dispenses with rectilinear and uniform spacing characteristics – paths meander and trees are irregularly spaced to provide a more natural aesthetic

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- Consists of native trees and plantings, with county arborist support to ensure long, healthy life span
  - Supports native wildlife, including butterflies, bees, birds, and other animals
  - Highlights seasonality in the design and selection of the trail elements



*Figure 1 Integrated Biophilic Pedestrian Trail Network*

The thoughtful and deliberate development of an integrated biophilic pedestrian and bike network across the 22202 community is responsive to many of the community's priorities as stated in the Action Plan and the PSMP: a highly walkable, accessible environment, improved physical connectivity across the

neighborhoods, increased open space and tree canopy, and use of biophilic elements that bring nature in closer proximity to residents' everyday routines.

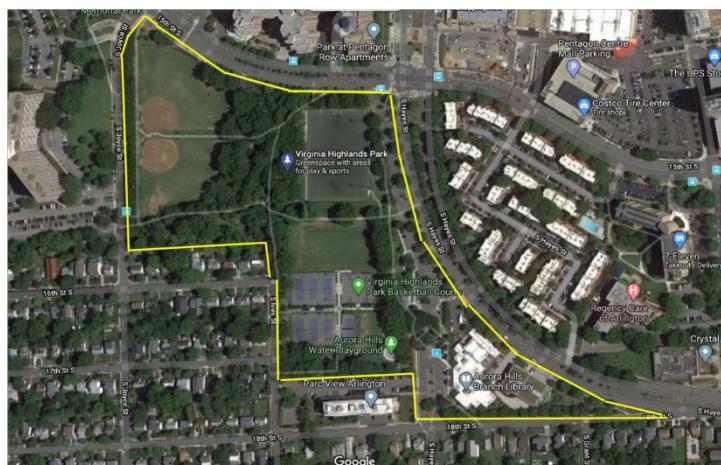
## Virginia Highlands Park

Facilitator:

Brian Harner, Architect

### Overview

The history of Virginia Highlands Park (VHP) goes back to 1972 and Arlington County's plans to increase density and uses in the Pentagon City area, concurrent with the advent of the Washington area Metro system. In 1976 the County approved a Phased Development Site Plan (PDSP) for Pentagon City, which included a dedication of land for open space. At 18 acres, more than four times the size of Quincy Park in the Ballston corridor, Virginia Highlands Park (Figure 2) is the second largest public park located within an Arlington urban center. The only Arlington parks that are larger, with the exception of Long Bridge Park (36 acres), are those parks with woodland tracts and trails, including Glencarlyn Park (100 acres), Barcroft Park (63 acres), Bluemont Park (51 acres), Donaldson Run (30 acres), and Lubber Run Park (30 acres).



### Virginia Highlands Park overview

- One of the largest public parks in Arlington (18 acres)
- A traditional park that has underutilized and waste space;
- Long-standing local (AHCA) efforts to improve VHP
- County VHP Master Planning on hold (removed from FY21 CIP)
- Working group brainstormed programming and project recommendations in interim

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Figure 2 Virginia Highlands Park. With its large, centrally located space, the park's evolution from suburban single-use park to a multiuse urban park is critical to achieving a highly livable community.

Arlington County describes Virginia Highlands Park as "packed with opportunities for fun," including the following amenities: "two adult, lighted diamond fields, six lighted tennis courts, two tennis practice walls, two lighted basketball courts, ... a volleyball court... a "natural grass rectangular community field, lighted rectangular synthetic field, a spray ground to cool off in the hot summer, three pétanque courts, and a frost-free drinking fountain."<sup>9</sup> A wooded area with a picnic shelter, grills, and tables separates the diamond fields from the soccer fields. A second, smaller picnic area is located at the southwest corner of the park near the tennis courts. In addition, VHP also contains public restrooms, the Aurora Hills Branch Library and Community Center, Fire Station # 5, and a memorial to 9/11 tucked away behind the firehouse.

<sup>9</sup> Arlington County Virginia Highlands Park. Accessed November 13, 2020.  
<https://parks.arlingtonva.us/locations/virginia-highlands-park/>

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Citizen interest in the future of VHP is very high, and members of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association have worked for years to improve the amenities and programming of underutilized space in what is a traditional park suitable mostly for walking and active recreation (Figure 3). It does not currently lend itself to casual use, exposure to nature, or programming of community activities. The paradigm for park design has changed considerably in recent years, as demonstrated by the recent design by James Corner Field Operations for Metropolitan Park next to Amazon's HQ2 headquarters.

**2016 Aurora Highlands Civic Association's Proposal**

to re-imagine the fenced softball fields for open space and daily community park uses

**January 25, 2016**

Aurora Highlands Civic Association

John Quincy Chair  
Karen Donley  
John Vittorio

Dear Members of the County Board,

After many months of hard work and community involvement, the Aurora Highlands Civic Association has developed a proposal to change the use of the fenced softball fields at Virginia Highlands Park. The proposal is the result of a long process of community engagement and planning.

The members of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association have worked with the Aurora Highlands Civic Association to develop a proposal that would allow for the Council to consider the following:

- A new 100% PTFE coated synthetic turf surface to be installed on the softball fields.
- A new 100% PTFE coated synthetic turf surface to be installed on the baseball diamonds.
- A new 100% PTFE coated synthetic turf surface to be installed on the soccer fields.
- A new 100% PTFE coated synthetic turf surface to be installed on the football field.

Members:

Subha Aslam  
Aurora Highlands Civic Association

**Virginia Highlands Park Proposal**

February 21, 2016

Virginia Highlands Park Proposal  
Aurora Highlands Civic Association

**2017+**

**With fences down, the community could pilot special events**

S'mores, kites, egg coloring, piñata, moveable chairs, and fort building

*Figure 3 2016 AHCA Proposal for Virginia Highlands Park. Local civic associations have proposed modifications to the park to improve its alignment with local needs.*

The 22202 community had engaged in discussions about VHP during the development of the Public Space Master Plan (PSMP). Potential uses of the park considered during the PSMP process included a more balanced mix of uses within the park and the need for more significant casual use space to serve the thousands of residents in the immediate vicinity, particularly those in apartment buildings. Residents noted the following during plan development:

- The park is central to Pentagon Row, the Fashion Center, Pentagon Centre, recreational facilities, the library, and the senior/community center.
  - The park is an easy walk for thousands of office workers, visitors, and residents.
  - The park would draw people to the relatively isolated Pentagon Row retail area.
  - Ease of access by Metro, bike, and walking makes it an ideal destination for community events or casual activity.

## Walking Tour

The VHP workshop group took an approximately 1.5-hour walking tour of the park in the morning and held a design exercise and discussion in the afternoon. Departing from the Crystal City Marriott Hotel, the

group entered VHP near Fire Station 5 on 18<sup>th</sup> Street. The tour then proceeded past the Aurora Hills Library and followed a path to the west between the turf soccer field and the natural grass field.

Participants noted the following about various aspects of the park:

- The 9/11 memorial, tucked away on the grounds of Fire Station 5. The memorial consists of a salvaged portion of a steel beam from the World Trade Center, donated by the NYC Fire Department in honor of the first responders at the Arlington Fire Department. Participants commented that the site could be enhanced with plantings and a plaque and should be made a more integrated part of VHP.
- The Aurora Highlands Neighborhood Conservation Plan<sup>10</sup> identifies other issues regarding 18<sup>th</sup> Street and what might be done to improve it at this point, where it is very isolated from the rest of the park.
- Various portions of the park seem to be “wasted” with inefficient parking lots, buffer strips between parking and other uses, and smaller parcels within the park, especially at the corners and entrances from surrounding neighborhoods. Participants felt many of these areas could be put to better use, should the park be designed differently.
- The single-loaded parking lot along S. Hayes Street is extremely inefficient and impedes pedestrian access into and through the park. It could be repurposed and made part of the park as greenspace. Both sides of adjacent S. Hayes Street have public parking spaces.
- Noting the many large apartment buildings adjacent to and within several blocks of VHP, the group discussed what amenities would be desirable and best serve this part of the neighborhood.
- The existing softball fields occupy 3.5 acres of VHP in the middle of a dense urban area. For large portions of the day and year the ballfields are not in use, whereas there is high demand for casual use space in the park for picnicking, exercise, casual sports such as frisbee or touch football, family activities, kite flying, and other neighborhood-oriented uses.
- The neighborhood has been trying for a long time to get a dog park at VHP for residents to use.

### Workshop Exercise and Conclusions

In the afternoon, the Virginia Highlands group was divided into two smaller groups and undertook a tabletop design exercise to reimagine the park. Using a palette of program templates (cutouts of ballfields, gardens, tennis courts, etc. to scale), participants discussed park assets and liabilities, and discussed ways to relocate active recreational elements and add in new open space opportunities, including passive recreation spaces, community gardens, and other ideas (many of which are included in a separate matrix developed after the workshop).

Workshop participants sought to further explore citizen preferences and design possibilities at VHP. The two VHP subgroups compiled their ideas for a long-term design for the park by developing two conceptual plans that indicated preferred amenities and where they might be placed in VHP. Citizens, staff, and consultants worked together to find solutions, and one participant noted that “we worked so well together and put together in less than two hours a possible master plan for the park — amazing.”

Current VHP activities tend to be focused currently on recreation. Participants discussed that a larger number of amenities and activities could be included in VHP than at present and suggested ways to distribute those amenities. The working group concluded that appropriate placement and distribution of

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<sup>10</sup> Aurora Highlands NC Plan Update. 2008. Accessed August 23, 2020.  
[https://aurorahighlands.org/\\_Media/NC\\_AuroraHighlands\\_Plan.pdf](https://aurorahighlands.org/_Media/NC_AuroraHighlands_Plan.pdf)

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amenities would be required to balance active and passive (casual use) space (e.g., recreation/open space/natural areas) and design ways to mix them.

Key points include:

- Virginia Highlands Park is the “heart of the heart” of the 22202 community.
- VHP is an important circulation space between the urban core and low-density neighborhoods, providing paths to Pentagon City and Metro. Design should focus on how people move through the park – walkways, trails, and paths – the landscape experience of moving through the park
- Features might include an augmented hill at the edge of the casual use space to serve as a small sledding site and an amphitheater for movie nights.
- The soccer field might be consolidated with the ball diamonds in order to provide a large community casual use space.
- Gathering space ideas included optimizing the north part of the parks where most multi-family residents would access the park for casual use space for a “Bryant Park” like feel – for social gatherings and programmed events such as music performances.
- Focus is needed on the northeast and northwest corners of the park at that corner as popular entrances to the park.
- Forested areas should be retained, enhanced, and maintained.
- A fenced, community dog run is in high demand.
- Community gardens and urban agriculture could be incorporated.
- Numerous small spaces can be improved with native plantings such as pollinator gardens.
- The existing library and community center are important.
- Lighting should be improved along pathways that residents use to walk to and from Metro.
- Additional water features could be added, especially associated with the desired casual use space.
- Joint redevelopment with a school, housing, and library is worth considering.

### Post-Workshop Activities

In early March 2020, the County proposed funding for the development of a Master Plan for VHP in its Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Unfortunately, with the emergency funding needs arising from the COVID-19, the Master Plan funding and many other CIP projects were soon deferred for the 2021 fiscal year and may not be restored for some years to come. Therefore, the ideas of the Open Space workshop and subsequent engagement by the Open Space working group may be useful for facilitating a discussion of the long-term future of the park. Accordingly, the Livability22202 Open Space Working Group has continued to develop the concepts initiated at the workshop.

Since conclusion of the workshop, a Livability Working Group continued to develop a matrix of ideas for VHP based on participants’ ideas and a more readable concept plan for these ideas (Naming Map, Figure 3). The matrix is divided into Phase I (through the winter of 2020-2021) and Phase II (spring and onwards). It makes a distinction between temporary programming and specific projects. Agreement by the County to not program the North softball field for the remainder of 2020 during the COVID-19 restrictions opened up possibilities for the temporary programming which has already begun. In response to AHCA requests, the National Landing BID supported the 4th of July 2020 event with painting of social distancing circles and gift certificates to restaurants. JBG Smith funded some chairs and temporary lighting to enliven the park. The County approved a joint proposal by Livability22202 to install a Highlands Urban Garden (HUG) near the VHP tennis courts as a pilot project, and the BID agreed to fund the costs.

A “Naming Map” (Figure 4) illustrates ideas from group participants for suggested new amenities, including a small and big dog park or run, a community garden, improved and expanded tree-planted areas, and a community green labeled as “flex” space. An extensive network of paths through the park was also recommended. Both groups explored the possibility of creating joint-use active recreation fields on the west side of the park, combining the turf soccer field with the ball diamonds to create a more efficient use of space. This then opened up an opportunity for a community green at the northwest corner of the site, a casual use space roughly the size of the open grassy area of Bryant Park in New York City. Another idea envisioned a creative element to the edge of this green, an added hill or mound that could form a natural amphitheater, provide children’s sledding opportunities, and provide topographical interest in the park space.



Figure 4 Virginia Highlands Park Naming Map. Considering the park as a set of interconnected spaces allows a variety of new uses to be explored.

Using parkland itself for a school was not well-supported among all participants. However, if necessary, VHP could potentially provide space for a neighborhood school: The design exercise showed that a school of the size of the Discovery School could fit on the site of the library and community center. A second option, more widely accepted across both groups, would be to site a school on an expanded parcel such as where the existing Parc View apartment building is located. Many concerns were raised, however,

about the impact on public park facilities if usage was shared with a school and school needs were prioritized over public uses.

## Crystal City Parks

Facilitators:

Stan Szwalak and Lauren Konney, Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects  
Jon Hensley, Jon Hensley Architects

### Overview

The Arlington County Crystal City Sector Plan, adopted in September 2010, identified 26 urban parks spread throughout the sector, ranging in size from the largest at 74,200 square feet to 3,300 square feet at the smallest. The group focused primarily on five of these parks during the workshop because these are expected to be considered during the upcoming site plan applications, with potential transfer of ownership from JBG Smith to the County, as shown in Figure 5:

1. Center Park
2. Gateway Park
3. Metro Market Square/18<sup>th</sup> Street
4. Crystal Park
5. 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Plaza

During the walking tour, the group also discussed the 15<sup>th</sup> Street park currently under design by the County.

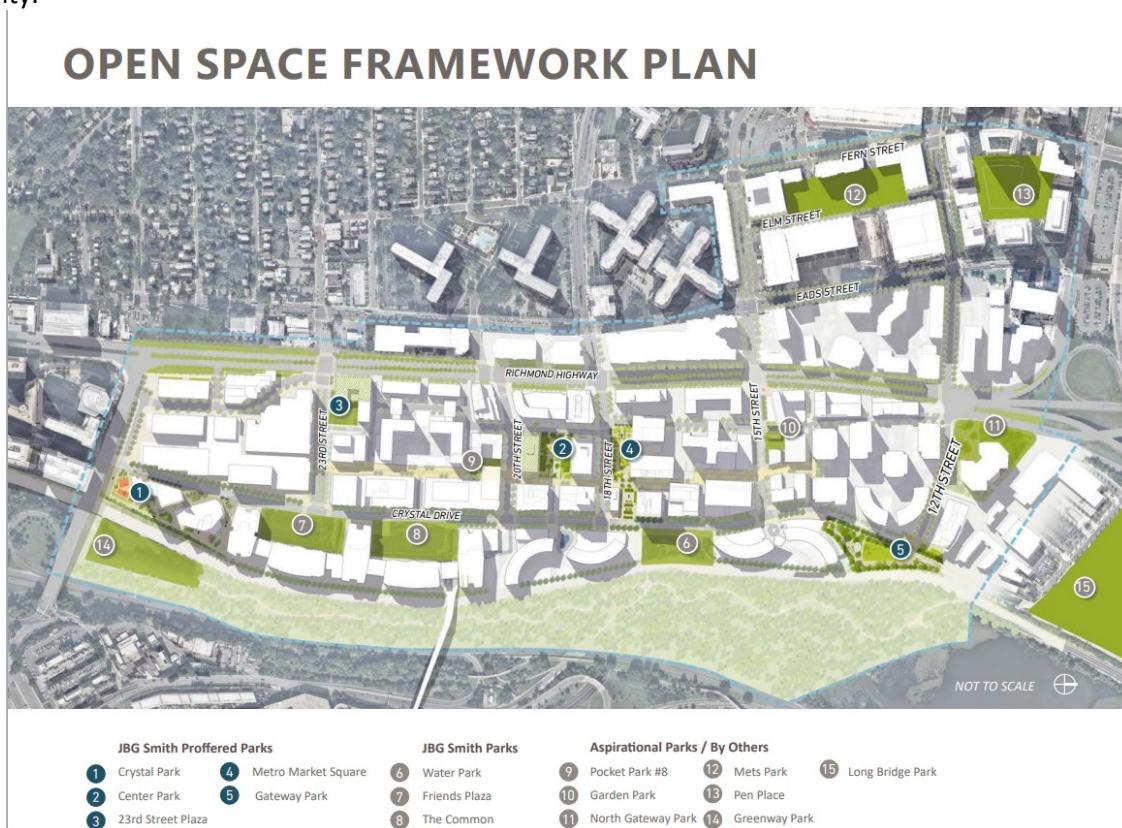


Figure 5 Crystal City Open Space Framework Plan. With its unique mix of public and privately-owned open spaces, the community, county and JBGs, the majority owner, consider these spaces as components of an integrated local park network.

Workshop participants discussed that the parks currently lack character and a sense of place. How can they become locations and destinations with their own interest, sense of place, and identity? In particular, the idea that each park should have its own identity, within the overall interconnected network of parks, was appealing to residents. Connectivity, through a planned greenway, is essential. Specific recommendations were made for each of the parks, including defining characteristics, design, and potential uses. The workshop identified a need to develop a comprehensive concept for the network of Crystal City parks that includes strategically locating the various program elements desired by the residents where they will be most useful and least disruptive to residents, visitors, and office workers.

General conversation during the workshop touched on the following issues:

#### *Park Programming*

Participants noted that most neighborhood gatherings currently take place at the Crystal City Water Park, a great location for programming activities, such as Wine in the Park started by the BID. It has hammocks, chess, a ping pong table, and a cafe during the warmer months. A discussion about missing program components included the opportunity for continuing a farmers' market; none of the new parks were considered viable, except perhaps the 18<sup>th</sup> Street Market Plaza. It was noted, however, that the development at 1900 Crystal Drive (approved by the County Board in March 2020) could allow for a farmers' market at Center Park.

Opportunities for program elements to be included in future planning, included:

- An open-air event space (taking into account concerns for the adjacent uses)
- Opportunities for urban agriculture (even as non-working exhibits, with educational signage)
- A farmers' market
- An interim dog park in the area west of Metro Market Square (at the time disturbed by construction but subsequently planted with trees), which might be available for up to 10 years
- Permanent dog parks, though no specific location was suggested
- Parks and open spaces adjacent to cultural facilities and assembly spaces that can help bring the community together

The following issues were also discussed, including the locations of particular program elements:

- The parks were generally felt to be important neighborhood amenities, rather than regional destinations.
- It is difficult to determine where best to locate active recreational programming within the sector, as most residents prefer passive or casual-use spaces with biophilic elements.
- Impacts from noise and lights for sports and events uses must be considered carefully and are viewed as drawbacks.
- Currently, there aren't many children in the Crystal City neighborhood and there is only one small public playground at the south end. Demand is expected to increase in the future as additional housing is added in the neighborhood. Currently, the only other public playgrounds are at Long Bridge Park and along Potomac Avenue in Alexandria. However, the Water Park provides a site for children to run around and dip their feet in the fountain.
- Urban agricultural uses such as gardens or forest walks could help activate residual or underutilized spaces in the neighborhood that do not lend themselves to larger program activities.

- Intensely planned public spaces feel more active and inviting and could be populated with outdoor game boards and hammocks.

#### *Circulation and Connections*

Linking pedestrian circulation between the parks and creating a sense that the parks form an overall network of open spaces in Crystal City were considered important goals. Currently, the parks feel isolated and unconnected, and ways to connect them from a pedestrian experience should be investigated, both visually and thematically. There was considerable discussion of a “greenway” (or bio walk) from Arlington Ridge to Crystal Drive, which could include Virginia Highlands Park, Metropolitan Park, and the proposed 15<sup>th</sup> Street and existing Gateway Parks. Figure 1 above shows a possible map for this possibility. Discussion also included whether there is currently a “center” of the neighborhood or a main “gathering spot,” and the existing Crystal City Water Park and the future Center Park were mentioned.

During the walk, the BID spoke of a potential project to make the Metro entrance at Clark and S. 18<sup>th</sup> Street more of a natural, tree-scape park with an artistic wall mural. They also raised the idea of a potential dog park above the mural wall and along Clark/Bell, although it now appears that the County prefers to consider this as part of designing the Clark/Bell Street intersection with 15<sup>th</sup> Street. This would delay any creation of a dog park there in the near future. The original proposal for a meridian park on 15<sup>th</sup> Street was recently the subject of discussion by the County with residents, the CCCA, and developers and may therefore be modified. A park along the north side of 15<sup>th</sup> Street would be more usable and attractive if it can be redesigned. It would also offer a better “greenway” connection from Pentagon City to Crystal Drive, as shown in the Connectivity Map (Figure 1).

Significant improvements to the neighborhood circulation network are needed: all east/west connections across Richmond Highway need to be redeveloped and improved to make crossing safer for pedestrians, improve navigability, and create an overall more pleasant experience. More distinct thresholds and entrances to park spaces should be explored to distinguish them from their surroundings and create a sense of place. In addition, participants supported improved connections to the airport – the pathway through the existing tunnel connections is circuitous – and to the Mount Vernon trail system. (Design of the proposed CC2DCA pedestrian/bike bridge from 2100 Crystal Drive to the airport proposed by the BID has been partially funded now by NVTa but will require negotiation with the National Park Service.) Participants discussed the need for improved signage and wayfinding to link the parks and noted that maps are less important than more intuitive wayfinding devices.

#### *General Design Considerations*

The neighborhood is dark at night and the lighting looks dated. New lighting should be carefully designed with consideration for residential units, adjacent uses, and contrasting light levels. Design opportunities that interested the participants included:

- Utilizing topographical changes and vertical grades
- Biophilic installations, such as gardens and trees
- Public art including areas of photographic interest and opportunities for murals at the tunnels and underpasses
- On-site stormwater treatment incorporating educational signage
- Solar power collection installations
- A cascading water feature to help integrate the different levels of Crystal City (Hoerr Schaudt’s project in Normal, Illinois, was referenced as an example)

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- Opportunities for outdoor heating at night, such as public firepits
- Improvement to the Metro entrances and bus stops

### *Landscape and Vegetation*

The importance of native plantings and encouraging natural ecosystems has already been discussed in detail in the Connecting Residents with Nature section (see above). Specific ideas for the Crystal City Parks were discussed:

- Investigate short-term landscape solutions while construction is underway.
- Create more significant planting at major streets and boulevards such as installations in the planted medians, as at Michigan Avenue in Chicago.
- Introduce more seasonal plantings in containers.
- Utilize more native plantings.
- Consider vertical greening in strategic locations at building walls or along major infrastructure to add interest and link the parks together.

### *Workshop Discussion and Findings for Specific Parks*

(described in descending order of size)

A 1.5-hour walking tour followed the tabletop discussion: from the Marriot along Clark/Bell past the upper area for the 18<sup>th</sup> street park, to 15<sup>th</sup> Street (another proposed garden park under County consideration), to Crystal Drive (Gateway Park), down past the lower site for the 18<sup>th</sup> Street park and the site of the Center Park behind 1900 Crystal Drive, to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street (Plaza park), and back up Clark/Bell. Other proposed ideas for pocket parks were discussed along the way, including a potential dog park above the western Metro entrance. Recommendations for each park are included in the Crystal City Parks full summary report

#### *Center Park 74,200 sf/1.7 acres*

As the largest proposed new park within the Crystal City Sector Plan, Center Park would be located east of Clark-Bell between 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets and west of the proposed 1900 Crystal Drive development. Center Park is expected to play a significant role in defining the heart of the community. Workshop participants identified Center Park as the best opportunity to link together the entirety of Crystal City. Its centralized location makes it a good option for community events. A farmers' market had been located previously at what is now being called 1900 Crystal Drive, but that access for setting up booths was difficult, but Center Park might be a good location for this use.

The Crystal City Sector Plan provides significant guidance for Center Park, including:

- The park is intended to be the centerpiece of Crystal City and act as a focal point for all surrounding activities.
- Envisioned as an open space with a civic character, it will be the largest park in Crystal City with a target size of 74,200 square feet.
- The size of the space would allow for a wide variety of uses, such as passive recreation, exhibitions, concerts, festivals, cafés, some temporary kiosk retail, and evening outdoor movies.
- Retail uses are envisioned on the north and east sides of the park, with the possibility of a retail arcade at the north end, which could be enclosed in the winter months.
- JBG Smith has offered space on the south side for a library and community space, fronting the park. That building is eventually scheduled to be torn down and the park enlarged.

- A prominent vertical architectural feature could be located at the southwest corner of the park to signal a point of entry and gathering when arriving from Richmond Highway.
- A strong link between 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets and Crystal Drive should also be considered. A grand stair/seating area located along the eastern side could be one possible strategy to negotiate the grade differences. The site plan calls for an opening/access street from Crystal Drive as well as an alley between 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets and these would intersect at the staircase.
- Much of the park should be pervious and predominantly grass.
- Special art features could be incorporated into the landscape and architecture of the park, and artistic lighting should highlight the park during the evenings.
- Cisterns within the park and adjacent buildings could capture rainwater for park irrigation.
- Wind turbines and/or solar panels could be used in artistic ways to educate visitors and to supply power for park events.

While some of the guidance provided in the Sector Plan is detailed enough to be more relevant to later stages of design, workshop participants were in general agreement with the Sector Plan vision for this park. Following are the primary considerations for Center Park:

- Green biophilic elements throughout
- Entertainment programming
- Return of the “Screen in the Green” movies
- Cultural center, including the library and community center, adjacent to a central gathering space
- Possible skating rink
- Temporary closure of South Bell Street to extend the usable space for events
- Farmers’ market – with a different configuration of South Bell Street to allow better vehicular access
- No active sports or a dog park, as noise and lights could be a problem

#### *Gateway Park 54,500 sf/1.25 acres*

Gateway Park is an important space at a transitional point from Crystal Drive to the Long Bridge Park Esplanade; it is the "gateway" to Long Bridge Park, which has active recreation in the form of athletic and play facilities. This is the quiet end of Crystal City; the park is surrounded by residences and there is no commercial activity. Residents consider this to be a community park and noted that many enjoy the view of this tranquil, green space from their apartments. The landscape buffer on the east and south sides of the park promotes a naturalistic feel. A quiet walking path runs along the tracks on the park's east side.

Gateway Park is described in the Crystal City Sector Plan to:

- Include an entrance into the new Long Bridge Park north of Crystal City.
- Have a target size of 54,500 square feet.
- Connect the Long Bridge Park Esplanade directly to a path through the park to Crystal Drive.
- Include design features that might tie into the Long Bridge Park landscape design, such as lighting design, pervious paving, and rain gardens.

The Sector Plan states that the design for Gateway Park should "integrate the Long Bridge Park Esplanade as a coordinated element whose character, design, and width continues through the space toward Crystal Drive." Workshop participants did not identify any specific concerns with this guidance, but they disagreed strongly with the Sector Plan's vision for Gateway Park to include neighborhood-serving "recreational

facilities such as tennis or volleyball courts, a playground, benches, and picnic tables.” Concerned about increased noise and a loss of tranquility, participants expressed a clear preference to maintain the orientation and programming of Gateway Park as more passive in nature. However, the location of the park as a natural extension of Long Bridge Park and the size of the park may allow for a mix of less disruptive casual uses, if appropriately defined and located, and biophilic elements such as gardens. Participants felt that this location was unsuitable as a dog park and noted that many dog owners allow their dogs to run and play off leash in the park, to the annoyance of those practicing yoga or playing barefoot.

Concern about noise and disruptive activities was repeated for all the other parks except for the existing Crystal Park at 2525 Crystal Drive, where active recreation already exists. As discussed above in the overall design and programming considerations, the workshop identified a need to develop a comprehensive concept for a Crystal City park network that strategically locates the desired program elements where they will be most useful and least disruptive to residents, visitors, and office workers.

When the new office building proposed for 101 12<sup>th</sup> Street comes under review (currently in engagement with the community prior to an SPRC, it is expected to include a roughly 15,000 sf park area that borders Gateway Park, between the proposed building and the Long Bridge Park Esplanade. This will provide an opportunity to envision a new space together with Gateway Park and consider a unified set of improvements, with a potential coffee shop, since there is no coffee shop on the northern end of Crystal City.

Specific design and programming issues recommendations for Gateway Park included:

- Incorporate stormwater features into the design of the "new park area" associated with 101 12<sup>th</sup> Street and connected to Gateway Park. Stormwater drainage during major rainstorms repeatedly floods the area and there is concern that replacing the current 12<sup>th</sup> Street park with concrete will exacerbate the problem, if not properly dealt with during building construction.
- Consider a future access point to Roaches Run by including a bridge or tunnel crossing the railroad tracks at 12<sup>th</sup> Street—it is believed a tunnel previously existed but was filled in.
- Retain as many existing trees as possible and consider a forest walk of some kind.
- Consider small gardens, including a potential Master Gardeners Demonstration plot with signage identifying plants.

#### *Metro Market Square 43,900 sf/1.0 acre*

Multiple issues regarding the Metro Market Square, located along 18<sup>th</sup> Street between Clark-Bell and Crystal Drive, were discussed in the workshop, without producing any strong sense of what this park could become in the future. However, the walking tour and workshop discussion identified some significant design challenges for the space, as well as some potential concepts.

Metro Market Square is described in the Crystal City Sector Plan with the following potential design features and program elements:

- New entrance to the Metro Station at the east end of the plaza and elevator to the upper park
- Center of retail activity, with a small retail building on the southeast end of the park
- Ground plane finished primarily in hard surfaces to allow for market uses, temporary pushcart retail, public gatherings, outdoor entertainment, etc. in the upper park area

- Opportunity for a permanent market building arcade along the length of the plaza, which could be used for a local farmers' market (although this might also be effectively located in a new shared street off Clark Street, associated with the 1900 Crystal Drive project), arts and crafts festivals, and/or carnivals
- Inclusion of small water features, benches, café seating, larger interactive sculptures, chess tables, bosque of trees, and similar features in the overall design
- Potential use of pervious paving, artistic wind turbines, and solar panels on the roof of the market building

Workshop participants noted on the walking tour that Metro Market Square was considered for the farmers' market in the Sector Plan, and was located here for a short period, but the space has poor visibility, pedestrian access is challenging, and the required fire lane does not leave much space for the market. Thus, the workshop conclusion was that without substantial redesign, this is not a good location for a farmers' market.

Additional design challenges for the space were discussed, including:

- Fire access requirements to adjacent buildings precludes market programming activities.
- Topography of the site is challenging, dividing the site into two or even three distinct spaces.
- 18<sup>th</sup> Street sidewalk is not wide enough.
- Parking garage entrance poses problems (though the proposed building would cover it).
- Walking paths through the site need improvement.
- The park area here was noted as being "small."

JBG Smith has proposed detailed plans for Metro Market Square in its site plan for 1770 Crystal Drive, including the new Metro entrance and a concept for active uses and new structures to provide activities and amenities in this space. Workshop participants felt that this park is currently a good place for quiet daytime public gathering for nearby professionals and should be kept open during the development's construction. Specific design concepts included:

- Use for lunch, casual space
- Outdoor seating
- Spanish Steps (to transition the grade)
- Central staircase from Crystal Drive to upper level, and an elevator in the small retail building
- More activated uses at the Crystal Drive section of the park
- Passive upper level
- Green wall

#### *Crystal Park 38,000 sf/0.87 acres*

Crystal Park, located at 2525 Crystal Drive currently has two volleyball courts, a basketball court, a small parkour, and a small playground. Participants noted that the volleyball courts are heavily used by residents, but that the adult exercise equipment at Crystal Park is not extensively used. Suggestions were made to have adult exercise equipment adjacent to playground areas. Costa Rica's Parque Recreativo y Deportivo de Santa Ana was referenced as an example.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Hernandez “Parque Santa Ana Costa Rica”. February 18, 2019. Accessed August 23, 2020.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkF\\_qXvab9M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkF_qXvab9M)

This park will be an important part of the development of the adjacent site for a potential new residential building. This area didn't seem to generate any interest in uses other than what is currently there, which workshop participants generally felt work well in this location. However, given the characteristics of the existing site and without more knowledge of the potential new development, it was difficult to envision a new concept for this space and what kinds of uses would be appropriate. There was no objection to keeping existing activities already there, especially since no alternative location in Crystal City appears appropriate.

The Crystal City Sector Plan describes Crystal Park as “a proposed improvement of an existing recreation area along Crystal Drive, near the eastern end of the new 25<sup>th</sup> Street.” The plan noted the following features:

- Target size of 38,000 square feet
- Predominately recreational uses
- May include athletic courts as well as a playground with bench seating for on-looking parents

The plan cautioned that if a childcare facility remains in this area, a strategy will be needed for meeting the outdoor space requirements

#### *23rd Street Plaza 13,000 sf/0.34 acres*

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Plaza is proposed as a component of the new streetscape that would be created with the realignment of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and the introduction of a park on the north side, eventually extending from Crystal Drive to Clark/Bell. The plaza is connected to JBG Smith's proposed Site Plan Amendment for landscape plan changes and the allocation of approximately 5,739 square feet of unused retail gross floor area and modifications to landscape, hardscape, and streetscape located at 2001, 2121, and 2231 Crystal Drive. The plaza will provide a neighborhood gathering place featuring retail frontage along its north and east sides. The plaza will feature a blend of hardscape and greenscape elements, including patterned paving, lawn panels, tree bosques, benches, café seating, and a fountain or sculptural piece as a central anchor. Additional features could include pervious paving, water filtration gardens, demonstration wind turbines and solar panels.

The Crystal City Sector Plan states that the 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Plaza will be a new retail plaza located at the corner of 23<sup>rd</sup> and Clark-Bell Streets, with at-grade access from 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. The Sector Plan identifies the following features for this park:

- Target size of 13,000 square feet
- Retail uses envisioned on the north and east sides of the plaza, with pervious paving and landscaping appropriate for an active retail venue
- Noteworthy design for buildings on the north to help create a sense of place and backdrop to the park, with a level of transparency that helps activate the space and enliven the plaza at night
- Program as a neighborhood gathering place, with benches, café seating, and a fountain or sculptural piece at the center of the plaza
- Potential direct entrance to the Underground or link to the existing access point at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street through a creative streetscape design that celebrates the connection between the Underground entryway and the plaza

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A smaller park of 3,300 sq ft is also included in the Sector Plan at the corner of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Crystal Drive. (There has been some concern recently that the JBG Smith site plan for Block M, bounded by 20th and 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets and Crystal Drive and Clark/Bell, might be eliminated, actually reducing the open space provided for in the Sector Plan.)

Discussion of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Park in the workshop was limited by time constraints, but the park was discussed during the walking tour. The following observations and concepts were identified:

- Adjacent vehicles pose a safety concern for park users.
- Tall fencing should be avoided if possible.
- The crossing of Route 1 at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Plaza is dangerous, but the popular Restaurant Row on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, across Richmond Highway, should be made more accessible to help small businesses in the area.
- The community would like a more “Main Street” feel for this corridor after redevelopment.

### *15<sup>th</sup> Street Garden Park 33,500 sf/0.77 acre*

The Sector Plan describes the 15<sup>th</sup> Street Garden Park, positioned as the central feature of the 15<sup>th</sup> Street reconfiguration between Crystal Drive and Clark-Bell Street, with the following features:

- As currently designed, a “median park” in the middle of the street
- Quiet, neighborhood-oriented green space
- Proposed size of 33,500 square feet and a curb-to-curb width of approximately 80 feet provides
- Lush flower gardens featuring seasonally colored trees and flowers, including large trees at the heart of the space
- Paved walks and seating areas with benches to provide neighborhood residents and a quiet place to relax
- Central water feature and pavilion, which will serve as focal points for the park
- Sustainable features such as water filtration gardens, native plant species, and pervious paving
- Meandering, multi-use trail that could also accommodate bicyclists “in a more passive way” and complement the more active bicycle facilities provided on adjacent streets

Due to time limitations, the workshop effort did not include much discussion of this park, although it was noted that the park could be a potential location for a temporary dog park during construction of adjacent buildings. Residents, the BID, and local developers have long objected to the County’s design for a “median park,” which they consider inadequate and inappropriate. However, during the walking tour, County, BID, and CCCA representatives advised that a recent negotiation with the County has led to a potential redesign for a park along the northern side of 15<sup>th</sup> Street, which could eventually extend the full length from Crystal Drive to Clark Street, when the Crowne Plaza redevelopment takes place. Reconsideration of this park design is in process but requires a lengthy County process over the next year.

### *Post-Workshop Activities*

Since the workshop, two significant events have taken place that will affect the future of the Crystal City Parks. First, James Corner Field Operations led a community engagement process to seek input on the design and amenities residents would prefer in the Metropolitan Park connected with the Amazon HQ2 development on the border between Crystal City and Pentagon City. The final design has made clear that future parks should no longer be just traditional green fields for recreation and walking like Virginia Highlands Park, but designed for a variety of uses that suit the environment.

Second, JBG Smith has been working with Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects to transform the public realm of Crystal City (see Figure 10.) As a part of this change, five private parks which JBG Smith proposes to transfer to the County as part of Site Plan Review Processes--Crystal Park, 23<sup>rd</sup> Street Plaza, Metro Market Park, Center Park, and Gateway Park – will be undergoing redevelopment. The Crystal City (now National Landing) BID organized with JBG Smith a series of three community engagement sessions with residents to determine the preferred design and amenities options ([www.crystalcityparks.com](http://www.crystalcityparks.com)). A final summary report will be available at the end of 2020 and will serve as a programming framework document to inform the future design of the parks. The input received during these meetings parallels very closely the input from the February Livability workshop. Both can prove useful guidance when the County conducts its own community engagement to determine the design and amenities for these parks once the parks are proffered during the site plan review process.

### [Roaches Run](#)

Facilitator:

Leo Sarli – LAB

#### [Overview](#)

The Roaches Run session of the Open Space Workshop examined the potential for a linear greenway between the George Washington Memorial Parkway and the railroad tracks, from the south end of Crystal City to Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary with access from multiple points within Crystal City.

The Livability22202 Action Plan identifies one of the community's key objectives as fostering environmental sustainability and notes two elements applicable to the Roaches Run discussion:

- Strategically increase the amount of natural open space and improve the tree canopy, with a focus on reducing heat island intensity, improving stormwater management, and increasing urban biodiversity.
- Emphasize the incorporation of biophilic design elements into site plans, including private and public space, and the application of biophilic approaches to integration of the built and natural environments.

The Arlington County Public Spaces Master Plan also includes several “priority actions” aimed at creating better connections with nature for the urban and developed parts of the county, and out of the total of 11 priority actions, at least five are directly related to the theme of this workshop group, with the most relevant being Priority Action 8:

- *Priority Action 8: Ensure and enhance access to the Potomac River, Four Mile Run, and their tributaries while improving the tree canopy, native vegetation and other natural resources along waterways.*

The site under discussion includes the Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary and the adjacent wooded area that runs along the eastern flank of Crystal City, between the railroad track and the George Washington Memorial Parkway, transitioning to wetlands and Roaches Run itself at the northern end of the site.

Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary, managed by the National Park Service, is a natural lagoon that shows up on the earliest Arlington County maps. Work by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s added a

tidal gate, the parking lot access from the southbound lanes of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, a gamekeeper's residence, a feed storage shed, and two miles of trails around the lagoon. Today the tidal gate and parking area remain.<sup>12</sup>

Despite being adjacent to Crystal City, Roaches Run is seldom visited, owing to its car-only access. Although the parking area is often full, these are generally ride-share cars, awaiting ride pickup requests from arrivals at Washington National Airport.

In 2008 and 2012, the National Park Service undertook an environmental assessment of the Roaches Run area, including Gravelly Point, with the objective to evaluate "options to: enhance visitor experience; improve traffic operations; accommodate recreational user groups; improve park infrastructure; and enhance the safety of pedestrians, motorists, and cyclists in the study area."<sup>13</sup> The study culminated in an Environmental Assessment that produced a plan for a Roaches Run boardwalk pedestrian trail and removable boat launch (see Figure 6).<sup>14</sup>

Although no action was taken on this plan, the Environmental Assessment does provide a basis for revisiting the idea, with the prospect of connecting the trail system through multiple access points to Crystal City.

### Workshop Discussion

The Roaches Run session was set up as a morning workshop and an afternoon walking tour. During the morning workshop, the group reviewed a map of Roaches Run and the surrounding areas. The group gained an understanding of the multiple custodians and owners of the wooded area, including the National Park Service and JBG Smith. They identified potential access points from Crystal City, discussed potential walking trail routes that would allow people to experience the wooded area without unduly disturbing the ecosystem, and then did a walking tour through parts of the wooded area to get a sense of the existing environment. Last, the group considered how Roaches Run access could be integrated into an overall system of pedestrian greenways across the 22202 community, fostering connectivity to Roaches Run and the adjacent area.

The following discussion points were noted:



Figure 6. NPS Roaches Run & Gravelly Point - Alternative D

<sup>12</sup> Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary. Accessed on July 26, 2020. <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/roaches-run-waterfowl-sanctuary-arlington-va/>

<sup>13</sup> Public Scoping Draft Gravelly Point and Roaches Run EA. June 22, 2012. Accessed July 26, 2020. <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=186&projectID=23571&documentID=47635>.

<sup>14</sup> Gravelly Point and Roaches Run Environmental Assessment. Accessed July 26, 2020. <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/showFile.cfm?projectID=23571&MIMETYPE=application%252Fpdf&filename=alternativeD%5F11x17%5F5%5F24%5F12%2Epdf&sfid=134547>

- A walking-only path is desirable, so the trail design and connectivity should dissuade bicyclists from using it. The trail should not be designed nor construed as a commuting trail.
- A Public Spaces Master Plan survey found that hiking trails, as opposed to multi-use trails, were emphasized as a top priority.<sup>15</sup>
- Trail routing should be sensitive to the Roaches Run eco-system, especially around the water. Elevated boardwalks and/or raised paths may provide lower impact than dirt paths. An over-water boardwalk was considered too intrusive to the sanctuary.
- Although a loop trail makes for a more interesting walk and provides more options to connect with other trails than an out-and-back trail, a loop around the Roaches Run periphery itself was considered too intrusive to the existing ecosystem. However, a loop might be achieved by connecting a trail that runs along the eastern edge of Roaches Run with Long Bridge Park at the Aquatic Center, via a pedestrian passage through the Long Bridge Railroad Trestle.
- The NPS proposed a boat launch in 2012. Although a small number of kayakers currently use Roaches Run, the group did not think the boat launch or promotion of Roaches Run for more kayaking would be desirable, because the waterfowl would be easily spooked by the activity.
- Activities could include birdwatching, fishing from the shore, and airplane watching.
- There is also an opportunity for environmental education. If a survey of the flora and fauna were undertaken, an interactive exhibit could be created (e.g., at the edge of the parking lot) that describes the significance of the natural lagoon and the surrounding area for wildlife, floodwater runoff, and noise abatement.

### *Walking Tour*

The Roaches Run and the adjacent area comprise about a 1-mile contiguous stretch of wooded land that varies in width from about 50 yards to about 200 yards. The Roaches Run group participants were familiar with Roaches Run itself, which is currently accessible only by car from the south-bound lanes of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. So, the group explored two less familiar areas, indicated on Figure 7:

- The wooded area south of Roaches Run and north of the Water Park tunnel, accessible from the Mount Vernon trail connector that connects to Crystal City at the Water Park
- The wooded area south of the Water Park tunnel and north of the airport access road at the south end of Crystal City, accessible through a JBG-owned access tunnel that runs beneath the railroad tracks

### *Observations*

The group noted the following observations:

- This is a highly significant, biodiverse natural area, and any effort to incorporate it into an active park environment needs to focus upon its importance and its fragility. Cleanup and removal of invasive species is important. If additional buffers of trees/native vegetation could be added, this might help to improve the long-term viability of the area. There is also an opportunity here for environmental education, i.e., if a survey of the flora and fauna is undertaken, an interactive exhibit describing the natural lagoon, its uniqueness and significance as well as the surrounding area for wildlife--birds, insects, fish, foxes, etc.; floodwater runoff; noise abatement; and picturing

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<sup>15</sup> Public Space Master Plan. April 25, 2019. Accessed August 23, 2020.

[http://arlingtonparks.us/psmp/PSMP%20Final%20Draft\\_06242019.pdf](http://arlingtonparks.us/psmp/PSMP%20Final%20Draft_06242019.pdf)

species to be identified--could be created at the edge of the parking lot, a focal point for Roaches Run park.

- A considerable amount of trash is found throughout the site. Cleanup and removal of invasive species are important.
- A well-defined ridge, rising about 20 feet above the surrounding area, runs, roughly, from the Water Park tunnel connector path south to the airport access road.
- The grade rises about 30 feet above the parkway grade, just south of Roaches Run.
- The south end of Roaches run transitions into wetlands and low-lying ground, effectively keeping pedestrian traffic about 50 yards away from the water.
- A small stream that feeds Roaches Run from the south end. This stream originates in outflow from a culvert on the retaining wall on the Crystal City side of the site.
- An old (buried) 12<sup>th</sup> street tunnel reportedly connects Crystal City to the wooded area, but the group could not locate it.
- Brick foundations remain on a rise just south of Roaches Run itself.
- The railroad grade level to the west is significantly higher than water level.
- A homeless encampment is located about 50 yards north of the Water Park connector trail.
- Large well-tended mature trees line the edge of the site adjacent to the George Washington Memorial Parkway. The interior of the site also has several large mature trees.
- A large burrow, perhaps for a fox, was found on the rise just south of Roaches Run.
- The area has a variety of trees, shrubs, and other plants that are being overgrown by invasive species, including English ivy.
- The area provides noticeable attenuation of noise from the airport and parkway to Crystal City.
- Given the challenges of drought conditions, the heat sink of Crystal City, VRE expansion and auto pollution, there is a real danger that these woodlands and their trees could be compromised in coming years. A dying natural space would be very detrimental, both environmentally and aesthetically, as the back sides of Crystal City and the VRE could be exposed to GW bike path and parkway users.

## Recommendations

The Roaches Run group developed the following recommendations:

- A connection to Roaches Run with a walking path through these surprisingly topographically interesting woods would be a welcome amenity to increase appreciation and reduce threats to that natural area.
- Routing and connectivity of the trail system should be attentive to minimizing the impacts on the natural environment, while increasing the opportunities to appreciate the area.
- A pedestrian only trail, preferably a loop, should be considered for the Roaches Run and adjacent land parcels. Walking loops would be very positive, in whatever form experts and NPS agree are possible, so that we increase appreciation and reduce threats to that natural area.
- Boardwalks should be considered for their ability to limit the impact of pedestrian traffic on the environment.
- The following access point should be considered.
  - South Crystal City access via JBG property at 2535 Crystal Drive
  - Mid Crystal City via the VRE/MARC Station and the CC2DCA Pedestrian Bridge
  - Mid Crystal City via the Water Park connector to the Mt Vernon trail.
  - North Crystal City access via a connection of the Roaches Run trail to the Long Bridge Park, through the Long Bridge Railroad trestle.

- A first step toward restoring the area and building community interest might be to sponsor a clean-up site in the area as part of the annual Potomac River clean-up day, typically held in March and April each year.
- The sand/mud flats at the south end of Roaches Run should be preserved; these are a habitat for birds and insects.
- A narrated audio tour could be used to educate the public about the trail and Roaches Run.
- Other activities to consider:
  - Seeding wild rice for birds to support migrating and overwintering birds
  - A survey of the flora and fauna
  - An invasive species removal activity
- As we move forward in planning for Crystal City, it's important to ensure that the various stakeholders, including the BID, the county, private property owners, NPS, and VRE, consider the beneficial impact of this area.

### Post-Workshop Activities

After the workshop, a walking trail concept was developed, drawing from the group recommendation. The concept shown in Figure 8 proposes a trail running the complete length of the linear wooded area, starting at the south end, and routed along the east side of Roaches Run, under the Long Bridge trestle, and into Long Bridge Park by the Aquatic Center. From there, the trail returns through Long Bridge Park and the Crystal City Greenway to the starting point.

Access to the trail is provided at the following points:

- South Crystal City access via JBG property at 2535 Crystal Drive
- Mid Crystal City via the VRE/MARC Station and the CC2DCA Pedestrian Bridge
- Mid Crystal City via the Water Park connector to the Mt Vernon trail.
- North Crystal City access via a connection of the Roaches Run trail to the Long Bridge Park, through the Long Bridge Railroad trestle.

The trail concept leverages the parallel and linear orientations of Crystal City and the Roaches Run area to provide access to the natural Roaches Run environment from multiple locations within the urban Crystal City environment area in just a minute or so of walking. Such access from an urban area is relatively rare and would put a natural environment within quick reach for Crystal City residents. Careful layout of the trail system would be attentive to preserving the natural area, plants and wildlife .



Figure 7 Roaches Run Walking Tour Observations



Figure 8 Roaches Run Trail Concept and Access Points