

Michael Galliot, Fairfax County Park Foundation Board of Directors Chair

Board of Supervisors Budget Hearings Testimony April 14, 2022

Good evening and thank you for taking the time to hear from your constituents on the FY 2023 budget. My name is Michael Galliot, and I serve as Chair of the Park Foundation Board of Directors. It's a pleasure to be here and speak to the needs of the Park Authority.

I know you have heard from others before me about the critical need for support of our beautiful and well utilized park system including more General Fund support, backing of our Capital Improvement program and provision of numerous environmental initiatives in the county's Environmental program.

I understand that your budget deliberations must balance the requests of many, and I am sensitive to what often amounts to a tsunami of need that cannot be met by available funding. On a much smaller scale, that is the challenge we face at the Park Foundation as we attempt to stretch every dollar we raise from individuals, organizations and foundations in support of our parks. The park system needs routinely outstrip our ability to fund them.

I am pleased to report that the Park Foundation continues to grow its ability to support parks. For example, at Burke Lake Park our capital campaign helped to provide \$333,000 to build two ADA compliant picnic shelters near the children's play area. They were dedicated virtually in May 2021. Ground was recently broken for the Sully Woodlands Stewardship Education Center. The Foundation has a goal to raise \$200,000 toward this STEAM education site, with \$160,000 already raised. As one of a few Living Building Challenge structures in Virginia and only 30 in the world, this state-of-the-art interpretive center will be built with recycled materials to be wholly sustainable, and pollution-free.

And of course, we were pleased to provide \$56,000 in 2021 for summer camp scholarships that bring more kids to REC-Pac and PACT programs. There are many other programs that we support however those illustrate the diversity of the projects and our willingness to provide dollars via the Foundation that would otherwise come from taxpayers.

The new Executive Director of the Park Authority, Jai Cole, has brought new energy to an old issue – the need to move to a new funding mechanism that is more equitable and provides recreation to all those in Fairfax County who want to participate; not just those who can afford it. The Park Authority needs more General Fund support. We commend the County Executive for making a down payment on this process with the inclusion of \$500,000 in his proposed budget.

The concept of paying for essential services that help people stay fit or improve mental health or build community is antiquated and not in line with our growing commitment to building a diverse, equitable and accessible park system for all. We can do better. We can be a national model and a champion for inclusion under One Fairfax which has been officially adopted by our board.

Let me conclude by promising that the Park Foundation will continue to raise dollars in support of our parks, but we ask you to begin the dialogue necessary as the Park Authority moves forward on this most important task.

Thank you.