

Laura Eakin Erlacher, Chair, FCPF Board of Directors

Remarks

Board of Supervisors Budget Hearings Testimony

Thursday, April 24, 2025

Government Center Board Auditorium

Good Afternoon Chairman McKay, Vice Chair Smith and District Supervisors. My name is Laura Eakin Erlacher, Chair of the voluntary Fairfax County Park Foundation Board of Directors.

As articulated in the Foundation's letter sent to each of you and copied to the Fairfax County Park Authority Board of Directors earlier this month, Vice Chair Anita Herrera and I are here to reiterate the Foundation Board's concerns with the Park Authority's proposal to have the Foundation raise an additional \$300,000 to cover the salaries of its three staff.

Anita will articulate in greater details what this could mean for the viability of the Park Foundation, its ability to operate as a going concern and the possibility of its dissolution.

I won't spend my allotted time on all the valuable support the Foundation has provided the Park Authority with over the years in raising additional funds,

particularly the past few years. We experience them in the neighborhoods and communities where we live and work. Today we're delighted to provide our 2024 Annual Report with these details.

As a collaborative partner of the Park Authority with the mission to supplement the Park Authority's projects, I'd like us to consider how we can get through this tough economic time so the Foundation can continue its great work under the leadership of the Foundation's Executive Director Bobbi Longworth, and Development Director Margaret Thaxton together with a recently-hired Finance Director. The Foundation working with the Park Authority Board and Board of Supervisors to come up with a solution. I don't have specifics today but with more time talking with each other we'll come up with ideas to meet these times. It's been done before.

Here's an example from Park Authority history. Back in 1950, my Great Grandfather LeRoy Eakin, a real estate developer from Manhattan, Kansas who had purchased land south of route 50 and west of the future beltway wanted to give 14 acres to Fairfax County for a park, however there was no agency to accept such donations. The county quickly established a park authority to accept the gift. He continued to give additional acres and money to establish Eakin Park and the 225-acre park

opened in 1968. I'm proud of his entrepreneurial vision and generosity that led to the park system we know today.

Another thoughtful solution to help our county's parks came in 2001 with the Park Authority's establishment of the Fairfax County Park Foundation. To raise supplemental funds to support the County's parks, programs and events. I was fortunate to have been on the first Foundation Board. Our first major project was Clemyjontri, the generous donation of the Lebowitz family of two acres in McLean for a playground where children of all abilities play together.

For the past 25 years, the Park Foundation has succeeded in bringing in voluntary gifts to support the Park Authority. Donors appreciate that 100% of their donations will be transferred in full to help their favorite park, program or event such as the Summer Entertainment Series, Earth Day coming up this Saturday, Wonder Wagon and much more. A personal and recent example is an Eakin family donation of \$280,000 for Eakin Park improvements at the Prosperity Avenue entrance – including the parking area, a Pavilion, and benches – with the knowledge that 100% would go to these park infrastructure improvements.

We welcome the opportunity to find a solution that allows us to try to raise unrestricted funds to maintain the Foundation as a going concern if the Foundation

must cover staff salaries. But we must do so while acknowledging in the recent best of times, our unrestricted donations are approximately 7% of the total donations.

I'll end my remarks with a quote from my Great Grandfather at 95 years-old. It is from a November 9, 1970 Washington Post article profiling his contributions to the county park system. In it, he acknowledges tough economic times ahead "money is going to be harder to get". With continued collaboration, we'll get through this difficult economic time 55 years later and as a result our parks, programs and events will continue to be one of our community's greatest assets.

Thank you!