

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Hearings

Laura Eakin Erlacher, FCPF Board of Directors Chair

April 16, 2026

Good afternoon Chairman McKay and Members of the Board of Supervisors. My name is Laura Eakin Erlacher, Chair of the Fairfax County Park Foundation Board of Directors. I was honored to serve as a Board Director when the Foundation was established in 2000, and it is especially meaningful to be here as the Foundation celebrates twenty-five years of success.

I stood before you a year ago to share the Park Foundation's concern about the need to raise \$300,000 in FY2026 Essential Operations to cover the salaries of our three staff, an unprecedented shift in our fundraising approach over the past twenty-five years.

At that time, while balancing significant budget reductions across county agencies, you demonstrated a clear commitment to the Foundation's work and success. We are deeply appreciative of your engagement and support.

Thank you for listening and, together with our Park Authority partner, allowing us to raise these Essential Operations funds over two fiscal years. That flexibility has been critical to our near-term viability.

I'm pleased to return one year later with an update.

This has been a successful year of fundraising, not just in the numbers, but in what those numbers represent: the strength of our mission and the commitment of this community to the county's park system.

Over the past four fiscal years unrestricted donations have averaged approximately 8.5% of our total giving. So our priority this year was transparency, educating our donors about this shift in need to unrestricted donations. Many were accustomed to 100% of their contributions going directly to a park, program, or event.

Across each of our major campaigns: this past Fall, Giving Tuesday, Year-end, and upcoming this Spring; together with outreach to major donors, we made supporting unrestricted donations to support Essential Operations a clear and consistent priority.

And our community responded. As of March 31st, unrestricted donations increased to 16% of total revenue up from 4% from last fiscal year.

As of March 31, 2026, the Foundation has raised close to \$230,000 (\$229,024) in support of Essential Operations, fully meeting our budget obligation for this fiscal year, and we continue fundraising to meet the current year's budgeted operational expenses as we look ahead to FY2027.

At the heart of this success is extraordinary leadership.

Our Executive Director, Bobbi Longworth, and our Director of Development, Margaret Thaxton, will be retiring at the end of this year. Over the past fifteen years, they have transformed the Foundation growing revenues from \$335,769 in FY2010 to more than \$5.4 million in FY2025 (\$5,469,390) and, more importantly, building the relationships and trust that define its strength today. Their impact will be lasting,

and they will be greatly missed. And we thank them for the leadership that has brought the Foundation to where it is today.

As the Foundation enters a new chapter of leadership, we look ahead with confidence and enthusiasm for our continued collaboration with the Park Authority, and we welcome Deputy Director Nigel Fields.

Thank you to the Board of Supervisors and to the Park Authority for twenty-five years of collaboration. We are proud to be your partner and to continue our work together bringing private dollars to public priorities and supporting the community in ways government funding alone cannot always achieve.

As my tenure as Board Chair concludes this year, it is only fitting that I'm followed by Alyssa Keefe, one of our newest Board members, the next generation of Foundation leadership.