



**ARLINGTON COUNTY  
PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION**  
2100 CLARENDON BOULEVARD, SUITE 414  
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22201



August 7, 2017

Honorable Jay Fisette  
Chairman, Arlington County Board  
2100 Courthouse Plaza, Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Williamsburg Field Lighting

Dear Chairman Fisette:

Members of the Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) served on the Williamsburg Field Work Group and reported back regularly on the proceedings. In addition, the PRC heard a presentation from the Williamsburg Field Work Group in December, 2016, and were briefed on the County Manager's recommendation, and heard from citizens both advocating lighting and opposing lighting at our July 25, 2017 meeting.

We had a robust discussion about the work group findings and the County Manager's recommendation. Several key points emerged. First, the commission agreed that the narrowly defined charge of the work group to determine whether the lighting of the Williamsburg field could be mitigated to not materially change the character of the neighborhood constrained examination of broader issues relating to increasing demands for recreational field space and a county-wide analysis of field lighting. As a result, the process was extremely contentious, frustrating, and consumed an enormous amount of citizen and staff time and resources. We agreed that such a process should be avoided in the future.

Unfortunately, our "smart growth" planning failed to carve out adequate park and recreation space to accommodate the increasing population density, and growing demands. Consequently, we are forced to retrofit into our neighborhoods, and as a result, we are likely to face continuing conflicts on how best to use our limited space.

We also agreed that both sides make extremely compelling arguments and members of the commission dealt with their own conflicting views supporting sports facilities and sports participation on the one hand, and on the other hand, residents being able to experience the quiet enjoyment of their community parks and open spaces.

The pro-lighting arguments are summarized as:

- Shortage of recreational field space
- Increasing population and demand
- Need for lighted fields in North Arlington
- 2003 recommendation, 2005 PSMP, POPS recommendation to convert fields to artificial turf and lighting
- Recognition that most of our fields are going to impact neighborhoods as we retrofit our parks and recreation amenities

The con-lighting arguments are summarized as:

- The proposed lighting will materially change the character of the neighborhood
- Changing technology and information presented on LED lights after the conclusion of the work group deliberations prevented full consideration
- The work group has not been able to review “proprietary” lighting analysis
- Williamsburg fields were not specifically designed to minimize the impact of light on the neighbors
- The sole source provider contract prevents adequate due diligence of possible alternatives

It was suggested that installing the artificial turf on the Williamsburg fields may already reflect the first step in a compromise. The fields in their current form are providing significant additional benefit to participants in rectangular field sports even without lights. Given that artificial turf fields are now on an 8-year replacement cycle, a third alternative to a yes or no vote on the County Manager’s proposal is to put the Williamsburg fields into the CIP queue, but ensure that upon replacement of the artificial turf (presumably in 6 years), that the design of the fields can be taken into consideration to minimize the impact of the lighting on the surrounding neighbors. Shoe-horning lighting onto two fields that were not specifically designed for that should be avoided.

In the meantime, the county should proceed with a county-wide analysis of which fields should be converted to artificial turf, and proceed with converting first, those fields that are already lighted, and second, where we can add to the inventory of fields, such as at Long Bridge Park.

The commission voted 4 to 7 against the County Manager’s proposal; supporting the position of no lights, at least not now. During the discussion, however, there was a consensus view supporting a third alternative of a more intentional design process for lighting the Williamsburg fields when the turf is scheduled for replacement.

We appreciate having this opportunity to share our views with you.

Sincerely,



Caroline Haynes, Chair  
Park and Recreation Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board  
Members, Planning Commission  
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager  
Jane Rudolph, Director, Arlington County Department of Parks and Recreation