

Residents' Critical Analysis Was Key to Success  
Parks4Everyone Statement on the Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP) Adoption

After years of community engagement, the PSMP was [approved by the County Board on April 25](#) with written guidance forthcoming from the County Board to address the outstanding issues such as field utilization data for determining field needs and casual use space needs.

It goes without saying that this was a long process – what needs to be reiterated is the 286 page “plan” is much better after the hard work, commitment, and organization led by a group of residents who insisted that data, definitions, and transparency would make the document stronger and better for Arlington’s long-term planning.

Only after residents pushing, Commissions digging in, and a decisive January 8<sup>th</sup> [Civic Federation vote](#), representing over 50 civic associations and member organizations across Arlington County, did the PSMP become more reflective of the core issues affecting our parks. The PSMP needed to convey the priorities and needs of the vast majority of Arlingtonians including more trails, green open space parks, and natural areas.

This resident-driven effort exposed deficiencies in the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) including poor facility and field management practices, a lack of data to support some of the most costly and impactful original PSMP recommendations, and an erroneous Level of Service methodology which resulted in unsubstantiated sports facility needs.

Furthermore, resident activism uncovered that the public perception of field need is primarily attributed to DPR's false rhetoric of "needing more fields and turf" as a solution to fix what has been their inability to properly manage county fields. DPR's poor management practices have caused reserved fields to sit empty for thousands of hours each year during the prime seasons preventing others from reserving those same fields, resulting in this field deficit perception.

The PSMP now, because of the advocacy of residents, independent of the PSMP sanctioned groups, sets the stage for future County decisions about sports facilities to be based on real data and utilization as highlighted by the County Board's guidance to the County Manager on implementation and follow-up, "Utilize level of service as a planning tool to manage public space assets efficiently" and "Analyze athletic field utilization to improve data on the current use and assess future athletic field needs." While there was previously a reluctance to provide this information to the public throughout the PMSP process, it now must be done in a very publicly inclusive and transparent way moving forward.

The PSMP has the potential to address community needs, maintenance, and field priorities through data-driven transparency and prioritization of financial resources and land being appropriately allocated.

The incredible effort exerted to get the PSMP Update's Advisory Committee to be responsive to the evidence and the wide-spread concerns resulted in contentious and time-consuming delays. By working together, being inclusive to all ideas, and being open to a better way of analyzing real need, balance has been brought to this Arlington planning process.

The data and work by the Parks4Everyone group exposed core issues easily remedied by more effectively allocating fields to improve sports users' access to fields. And P4E's contributions have greatly improved this road map to help make our public spaces now, and for the next generation, inclusive to everyone.