

Four Mile Run Valley (4MRV) Initiative

Shirlington Civic Association Concept Paper on Planning for Jennie Dean and Shirlington Park Areas, Including Dog Park

Shirlington Civic Association (SCA) residents care deeply about improvement of these park areas. Below are overall comments and concepts for improvements, followed by a list of specific needs.

- The biggest change in the Four Mile Run Valley in the past 20 years has been the creation of the Village at Shirlington as well as the addition of Shirlington Crest development in Nauck.
- The Village and most residents of the larger Shirlington Civic Association are immediately adjacent to Jennie Dean and Shirlington Parks, just across our South Arlington Mill Drive boundary with our Nauck neighbors.
- Shirlington Dog Park is important to us economically and socially; we are a community of many dog owners and demand for the dog park is rising.
- Since there is no park or community center within Shirlington, this is our most important park area and, for the majority, the closest by far.
- Our ONLY nearby playground is in Jennie Dean Park; we have a rising demand for its use by children and grandchildren of residents.
- Many of our residents are in these park areas several times a day.
- Shirlington residents contribute – regularly picking up trash, participating in ACE clean-ups, reporting problems, and keeping an eye on things day and night.

OVERALL DESIGN CONCEPTS

1. **Recognize that Jennie Dean Park is a local area park. It is not just Nauck-facing, it is Shirlington-facing as well.** Its amenities, entrances, signage, and paths need to reflect this and be oriented in both directions, which it is not at present. Its natural green space is a vital counterbalance of the urban nature of the Village at Shirlington.
2. **Honor the diversity of our area** and continue to make it a meeting ground for people of all ages, races, incomes and backgrounds, especially those who live close by. New playing fields should align with our demographics to offer maximum benefit to local residents. Take care not to increase noise and bright lights in what is, in the evening, a quiet residential area. This is not an appropriate venue for concerts, etc..
3. **Ensure that the needs of our age-diverse populations** are met with balance in park use through the proper mix of play areas, courts, athletic fields, as well as **usable, open green space and natural areas**. We have many walkers, runners, baby strollers, dog walkers, picnickers, and others with needs for **un-programmed** uses of this area.

4. **Our vision is to be part of an *extended, expanded Arlington park system* between the W&OD Trail and Four Mile Run that connects all of our neighborhoods together for recreation, play, sport and exercise.** As Arlington density increases, these open space areas will be more important than ever.
5. **We strongly support treating Jennie Dean Park as the next step in the *Alexandria-Arlington Four Mile Run Stream restoration effort*.** Design should be consistent with this important project, including improving stream quality, ensuring access to and views of the stream, design that develops the stream corridor's aesthetics with development that is oriented *toward* the stream (rather than turning its back on it), better signage, and more. These concepts have already been developed and endorsed in the Four Mile Run Restoration Master Plan; incorporate these in this master plan.
6. **Enhance the function of the 100-year flood plain and stream buffer.** This land has special risks, requirements and needs, such as increasing its capacity to absorb rain and to filter pollutants, through effective planting and design. One way to do that is to **increase the tree canopy** – this area of Arlington has lost too many trees. More trees would absorb more water. Playing fields are much less absorbent than most people think. We also would welcome **green design principles**, such as green roofs for large buildings.
7. **Improve, enhance and protect the “ecosystem” of the Shirlington Dog Park (Shirlington Community Canine Area or SCCA), a key element in the valley’s social and economic fabric.** The largest dog park in the county, this is a major amenity for local residents as well as visitors of the restaurants and shops in the Village of Shirlington and surrounding areas. Realtors feature the Shirlington Dog Park and the dog-friendly nature of the area to new buyers and renters. Coming to Shirlington for a “coffee or a meal and a visit to the dog park” is as much a reason that people, from all over, come here as “dinner and a movie.” In addition, there are now at least **a dozen dog-related businesses in the area** around the dog park - grooming, boarding, training, bakery, veterinary, etc., and informal jobs as well. We are concerned that “improvements” to other dog parks such as Clarendon were overly expensive and complex, and impinged on dog recreation rather than enhancing it.
8. **Retain WETA Operations in the Village at Shirlington** – We welcome the opportunity for the county to acquire the site of the current broadcast studio in the park area. WETA is, however, an anchor tenant and founder of the Village at Shirlington. We want to keep WETA offices and operations in the Village.
9. **Parking is one of the biggest challenges for new uses of 4MRV** – Current parking is challenging enough for existing park uses, including the dog park, recreation baseball teams and fans, new brewery, cultural programs, AFAC clients, staff and volunteers, and businesses. Any new uses must be offset by a realistic, budgeted, well-designed parking and public transportation system that meshes with the existing system in the Village at Shirlington to prevent overflow into the Village are.

SPECIFIC NEEDS

What we have now

- Awkward, hard-to-see park entrances from several directions and odd fencing;
- Bathrooms, pavilion used disproportionately by homeless and vagrants, some day labor;
- Too much drinking of liquor in pavilion and park, including along stream;
- Difficult parking, which has increased with buses, WETA, new brewery;
- Chopped up spaces, sharp corners of playing fields and playground leaving useless bits of green space;
- Oldest playing field lights in county, with manual on/off, often left on;
- Softball field that is locked up when not in used by organized teams and green space right next to stream thus not accessible for community use;
- Ugly metal park fencing and even barbed wire along WETA studio fence;
- Unattractive pathway next to the Shirlington Dog Park;
- Several vulnerable trees in the dog park that have a lot of soil impaction;
- Access to the stream from two points in the dog park, which is much enjoyed by dogs and their people, but can be hazardous to their health (bacteria levels, occasional sewer line leaks, broken glass, wire, and sharp metal on the bottom).
- No access to stream except over the single pedestrian bridge, which is much-loved;
- Some older trees, but overall a big loss of tree canopy;
- Some unused, inaccessible, but nice green space.

We need

- An improved, aesthetically pleasing park that encourages both active and passive community use;
- Fenced playground to provide a barrier to dogs as well as a play space enhanced with natural elements reflecting the nature of the Resource Protection Area (RPA);
- Additional pedestrian bridge across from Quincy Street, to open up the park area;
- A community center, shared by Nauck and Shirlington;
- Improved recreational facilities (tennis, basketball, etc.) and pavilion/bathrooms;
- A small, community-use playing field closer to Four Mile Run Drive;
- Improved path leading to the dog park and some more evening lighting there;
- Improved educational signage in the dog park, to help dog owners decide whether or not to allow their dogs into the stream
- A larger area of natural open space along the stream

- Complete walking paths around any playing fields, playground, or other features;
- Protection for existing mature trees, additional trees where practical, and minimizing impervious surfaces for water absorption;
- Parking and public transportation systems incorporating low-impact design features to increase storm water infiltration.

We don't need

- Loud noise, amphitheater, concerts – this kind of sound carries a long way in a small valley;
- Bright lights shining in windows;
- Too many playing fields with too little natural space and trees.

This draft has been posted as an SCA blog post where ideas, comments and contributions can be made: www.shirlingtoncivicassociation.org



<https://projects.arlingtonva.us/plans-studies/four-mile-run-valley/>