



## *Friends of Carlyle House*



October 31, 2017

### **Friends Board Officers**

*Suellen Savukas*  
President

*Mark Hill*  
Vice-President

*Lindsay Borst*  
Recording Secretary

*John Dumsick*  
Treasurer

*vacant*  
Membership Secretary

Madam Mayor and Members of City Council:

In an email to City Council dated September 20, 2017, Jennifer Atkins, Chair of the Alexandria Park & Recreation Commission (PRC), transmitted the Findings and Recommendations of the Commission regarding Cameron Run Regional Park. In the email, Ms. Atkins stated, "the Commission generally sees very little utility in continuing to pay nearly \$700,000 a year to NOVA Parks..."

The Board of Directors of the Friends of the Carlyle House, the first historic property purchased by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NOVA Parks), vigorously disagrees with that dismissal of the value of Carlyle House, Cameron Run Regional Park, and the other 29 facilities of NOVA Parks to the people of Alexandria.

### **Directors**

*Jason Ankele*  
*Rosalind Bovey*  
*Debby Christie*  
*Mary Ruth Coleman*  
*Audrey Davis*  
*William Dickinson*  
*John Dumsick*  
*Holly Hanisian*  
*Mark Hill*  
*Michael Hobbs*  
*Sue McIver*  
*Shelly Miller*  
*J. Dean Norton*  
*Keith Rouleau*  
*Deborah Rudolph*  
*Patrick Sheary*

The value of the City's relationship with NOVA Parks is demonstrated daily in Alexandria. Carlyle House provides Alexandria residents and visitors alike an extraordinarily accurate view of eighteenth-century American life through the story of John Carlyle, his family, his home, and their role in the founding of Alexandria and the events and close association with prominent statesmen and military leaders (such as George Washington) that culminated in the forging of our fledgling nation.

The Carlyle House is on the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Register of Historic Places, and has a unique appeal to educators and students of history. In FY 2017, Carlyle House hosted over 17,000 visitors, over 1,000 of which were school children on tours from Alexandria and NOVA Parks' other member jurisdictions who received free admission to the house.

Recently, the PBS series *Mercy Street* told the story of Civil War-era events associated with the Mansion House Hospital, which was located on the grounds of the Carlyle House. As a result of public awareness from the *Mercy Street* series, visitation to Carlyle House nearly doubled for the first half of 2016, attracting visitors to Alexandria from all over the world.

### **Emeritus**

*E. Hunt Burke*  
*Oscar P. Fitzgerald*  
*J. Wm. Middendorf III*

The City's participation in NOVA Parks supports not only Alexandrians' enjoyment of its two Alexandria sites—Carlyle House and Cameron Run Regional Park—but also provides Alexandrians discounted rates for visitation to all of the Park Authority's 31 parks around the region. When visitors come to Carlyle House they also support the City's economy by enjoying other City museums, dining and shopping.

The NOVA Parks system is, in short, an exemplary demonstration of the value of intergovernmental collaboration and cooperation among Northern Virginia's multiple jurisdictions—enhancing the value of each jurisdiction's individual assets and extending their residents' access to all the best that the neighboring jurisdictions have to offer. Alexandria's withdrawal from NOVA Parks would do gratuitous damage to the City's relationship with its neighboring jurisdictions, delivering a message which our City presumably does not intend, and consequences which it should not invite. It would pose, at the very least, serious questions regarding NOVA Parks' continued ownership and support of the operations of Alexandria's iconic Carlyle House.

The PRC was not requested to assess the value of Alexandria's participation in NOVA Parks—and it did not do so. The Commission's Findings and Recommendations recognize that "Council did not ask the Commission to opine on the advisability of continuing to be a member of NOVA Parks," and that question is nowhere addressed in "The Commission's Findings", "The Commission's Recommendations", or indeed anywhere in its Report to Mayor & City Council—and yet Chairwoman Atkins volunteers the unsolicited opinion that she sees "very little benefit" in Alexandria's continuing to participate in this joint endeavor with its sister jurisdictions to provide a rich and diverse array of parks to the citizens of Alexandria and all of Northern Virginia.

The PRC's Report suggests that, in considering the merits of the Cameron Run Regional Park arrangement, Council recognized that the question "required significant analysis" and a "coordinated public process to include public hearings" and, presumably, the participation of any City Boards or Commissions with responsibility or expertise relevant to the question. On the broader question of the City's continued participation in the regional compact that governs and operates the Northern Virginia Regional Park system, there has been no such analysis and no such process, and there should be no such conclusion.

Thank you for your continued support of NOVA Parks and Carlyle House.

Respectfully submitted,

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Friends of Carlyle House