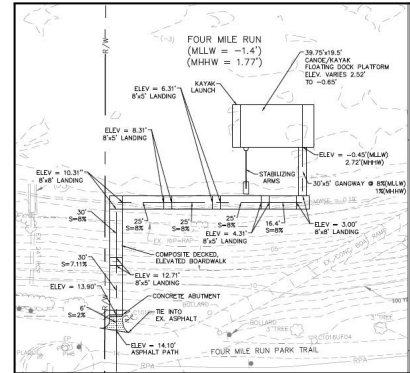


## Four Mile Run All-Ability Water Access Point

### Overview

The Four Mile Run All-Ability Water Access Point project will construct a public ADA-compliant water access point, suitable for launching kayaks, canoes, and other human-powered watercraft, at the tidal portion of Four Mile Run, a Potomac River tributary. The project site is within a public park, Four Mile Run Park, in the City of Alexandria, and it would adjoin the Four Mile Run Trail, a public bike/walk trail, and provide access to the Potomac River Water Trail (PRWT).



The project entails a raised boardwalk ramp structure, gangway, and floating dock with a platform and rail allowing for wheelchair transfer into a kayak. A roller-entry/exit will provide increased safety while launching and landing, particularly helpful for unassisted or novice paddlers. The boardwalk makes a 12-foot descent down the rock-reinforced flood control embankment to the gangway, while maintaining ADA-compliant slopes and level landings at appropriate spacing.

The project will provide area residents and visitors an outstanding opportunity for healthy recreation in nearby nature, and it activates a currently underutilized area of Four Mile Run Park. Based on launch point information published on paddling.com (accessed February 7, 2022) there are currently no ADA-compliant public water access points to the Potomac in the DC metro area, and no roller-entry launches. In addition to making the Run and the Potomac accessible to people with disabilities and/or with limited mobility, the project provides access to water that is shallow, calm, and rarely disturbed by motorized watercraft. It is an excellent location for novices to learn paddling with a low risk of capsizing in waves or boat wakes, and it easily affords access to the nearby natural wetland, Hume Spring tributary, and newly-restored wetland areas.

In providing free public access to Four Mile Run and the Potomac River, the project not only increases equitable access in our region, but it also engages the community in healthy recreation and stewardship, supporting pollution reduction, environmental education, and volunteer engagement objectives. For the Four Mile Run Conservatory Foundation, the project will help us expand program offerings that put people on the water to explore our nearby nature, some of which is essentially inaccessible on foot.

The project is within an area categorized by Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation as high-need for water access, and it supports recent and long-standing planning goals for natural resources, recreation, and equitable access at lower Four Mile Run, including the Arlington Public Spaces Master Plan (2019), Alexandria Department of Recreation Parks and Cultural Activities Strategic Plan (2018), the Alexandria Citywide Park Improvement Plan (2014), and the Four Mile Run Restoration Master Plan (2006). These plans have engaged numerous stakeholders and residents over the past 15 years, throughout which time the issue of water access has consistently been raised. Many of the participants in our kayak-based clean-ups have also voiced support for a proper launch facility, as the existing access is an improvised concrete ramp spread unevenly over the rock embankment, unsuitable for people with mobility impairments or other physical limitations, and of questionable safety. (Pictured: the 40-year-old improvised concrete ramp provides poor launch access)



### Project progress

Through community donations and a matching grant through Alexandria's Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA) we were able to contract with the engineering firm RK&K for the project design, completed in March 2022 at a cost of \$37,131. With the design phase complete, we are now pursuing a

combination of grant opportunities, corporate sponsorship, and individual donations to meet the project cost. The total remaining project cost (permitting and construction) is estimated at \$486,885.

Our fundraising has made considerable progress in the last year. In addition to a \$300,000 grant awarded through the Virginia Recreational Trails Program, we received a matching grant of \$25,000 through an anonymous donor, and RPCA matching grant funding of \$50,000. The funding committed so far allows us to proceed with the permitting as we continue to raise the balance of funds needed. We have contracted with RK&K for the necessary environmental assessment and permitting process, which we expect to have finished by the end of the year, after which time the construction may begin.

### Project Timeline

- ✓ 2017: pro bono concept sketch (RK&K Engineering)
- ✓ 2019/2020: FMRCF\* fundraising to meet committed matching funds through Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities
- ✓ 2021: Design process by RK&K, with input from City staff and USACE
- ✓ March 2022: 100% engineering design submittal
- ✓ Ongoing: grantseeking and fundraising for construction
- ✓ March - November 2023, currently underway: environmental assessment/permitting (RK&K)
- ⊙ April 2023: Alexandria Spring2ACTion fundraiser
- ⊙ Late 2023: procurement and contractor selection for construction
- ⊙ Early 2024: construction (contractor TBD)
- ⊙ Within a year of construction start: opening

### The Setting and Community Served

Lower Four Mile Run forms part of the boundary between the City of Alexandria and Arlington County, and the location of the proposed water access point is on the Alexandria shoreline. While the project would serve the community broadly as the first of its kind in the DC metro area, it more directly serves a very diverse group of neighborhoods. The project site in Four Mile Run Park is ringed by a socioeconomically and ethnically diverse group of neighborhoods, including: Arlandria/Chirilagua, with a predominantly Central American immigrant community; affluent Arlington Ridge and Aurora Heights; the historically African-American communities of Hume Springs and Lynhaven; and upscale-urban Del Ray. To the east of the park lie the US Route 1 corridor and Potomac Yard, future site of the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus.

The location is in a census tract assessed as high vulnerability on the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index, which integrates multiple variables across four separate socio-economic categories (socioeconomic status, household composition & disability, minority status & language, and housing type & transportation). The immediate neighborhood is a predominantly minority community, with the adjacent Cora Kelly Elementary school's student population characterized as 65% Hispanic, 15% African American, 14% White, and 3% Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian. 61% of Cora Kelly students are eligible for free and reduced price meals. The project site is a short walk from Cora Kelly, and school staff expect they would use the launch in water quality investigations with their students.

According to the CDC National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network's most recent available data (2019), the census tract in which the park and project are located also has an obesity rate of 33.9% (crude prevalence of obesity among adults  $\geq 18$  years of age), and a similar prevalence of physical inactivity of 32.5% (crude prevalence of no leisure-time physical activity among adults  $\geq 18$  years of age). Although these rates are lower than the corresponding statewide figures, they are higher than those for the City of Alexandria as a whole (28.9% for obesity, 21.5% for physical inactivity).

## Organization Background

The Four Mile Run Conservatory Foundation promotes nature, culture, and community at lower Four Mile Run through restoration, advocacy, recreation, and education. We serve a diverse community of residents who live, work, study, or play within two miles of the tidal portion of Four Mile Run and its associated parklands, and we work to ensure the natural amenities of this urban ecosystem are protected and nurtured. We envision lower Four Mile Run as a cherished community resource and a model for natural lands stewardship in an urban setting.

Our ongoing volunteer restoration work includes land- and kayak-based litter clean-ups, native tree/shrub plantings, and invasive species removal, and we invite active participation in community science through water quality testing, species counts, and observation using the iNaturalist app. We also partner with Community Lodgings, Casa Chirilagua, the Alexandria Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Activities, and Cora Kelly School to ensure that neighborhood youth have outdoor learning opportunities, including on-water paddling experiences, at no cost to them.

We maintain a small fleet of kayaks for volunteer stream clean-ups and other conservation work, and we host numerous kayak clean-ups each year. From our first kayak clean-up efforts in 2018 through the present, we have found that there is a tremendous demand for this volunteer activity. However, the present launch location is not suitable for anyone with balance or mobility impairments, and the rock/concrete shoreline wears excessively on the kayaks. *(Pictured: volunteers use our kayaks to remove litter from Four Mile Run.)*



In collaboration with parks staff in the City of Alexandria and Arlington County, we have worked to ensure the benefits of nearby nature are accessible to the community, both in terms of addressing physical barriers (e.g., ADA-compliant park infrastructure, access to drinking water) and sociocultural barriers (e.g., bilingual signage, programs for children from immigrant and underserved families). The kayak/canoe launch is our most ambitious park infrastructure effort to date, and we have worked closely with City staff to ensure the project has support and is consistent with park plans.

In our most recent full fiscal year (FY2022, ended March 31), our results included:

- Coordinating 1,911 hours of volunteer service by 183 individuals and more than 125 others in groups
- Leading 19 kayak-based and 20 land-based litter clean-ups that in total removed 5,391 pounds of litter.
- Providing 17 Nature Explorers And Restorers (NEAR) outdoor learning programs with youth
- Establishing the Four Mile Run Field Station, a small conservation and research facility (office trailer running on solar power) at Four Mile Run Park
- Hosting 12 public programs, including pop-up nature centers, nature/history walks, and presentations that reached more than 350 people
- Starting and completing the engineering design project for ADA-accessible kayak/canoe launch

*Updated April 12, 2023*