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## BRISKMAN OFFERS UPDATE ON BLES PARK

*Sterling, VA, Dec. 21, 2021* --The Board of Supervisors heard comments during Public Hearing last week on the Bles Park enhancements land use application and moved it forward to the Jan. 18, 2022, Board Business Meeting for a vote. Supervisor Juli Briskman said she is generally supportive of the application and clarified the elements of the proposal.

The proposal from Parks Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) does not “develop” the 132-acre park. It proposes to augment existing active recreation facilities (four soccer fields) with adequate and safe parking that adheres to county guidelines and allows full-capacity use of the fields. It also adds some trails, a short wetlands boardwalk, pickle ball courts, a multi-generational playground, and an off-leash dog park. Lastly, the County will reopen a kayak launch on the Potomac River with access via a former gravel road.

“This may sound like a lot, but the increased structures in the flood plain amount to .89 acres. This is not development in the traditional sense, and it is not an expansion. Those terms are misleading to describe the project,” Briskman said. “The Algonkian community has been asking for a dog park and more pickleball courts for years and I am proud that we are finally building them.”

“More than 30 acres of the park is zoned for residential use and could be sold for housing or used as part of the Unmet Housing Needs Strategic Plan. However, the County is actively preserving the park,” she added.

“I share the environmental concerns raised by the community and appreciate Algonkian Planning Commissioner Jane Kirchner’s work and staff’s efforts to mitigate these concerns and balance the community needs,” Briskman said. “These enhancements will ensure more residents can enjoy the natural areas with little impact.”

During the application process and meetings with planning commissioners and my office, PRCS adjusted the application with these changes:

- Moving the proposed PRCS maintenance facility out of the park
- Moving the proposed hard-surface courts away from sensitive areas
- Reducing the amount of planned parking by 10 percent
- Reducing the unplanned lawn area by 57 percent
- Committing to the removal of non-native species and a 2-to-1 ratio of reforestation plantings after the removal of an unusable retention pond
- Decreasing impervious surface area by 12 percent
- Decreasing proposed incidental structures by 19 percent
- Removing 5 proposed pavilions

The County created Bles Park around the man-made wetlands with the intention of preserving and appreciating nature, while providing much-needed amenities for Eastern Loudoun residents.

Briskman said she is confident that county staff reviewed proposed alternatives to the planned enhancements and have valid reasons and/or jurisdictional roadblocks that prevent implementation of some of these ideas.

“I know Bles Park will continue to be an Eastern Loudoun gem that families can enjoy for years to come,” she added.

The rezoning application can be found on at <https://www.loudoun.gov/3362/LOLA> (ZRTD-2019-0004, SPEX-2019-0037, SPEX-2019-0038, & SPEX-2019-0039) Board of Supervisors meetings can be viewed online at <https://www.loudoun.gov/meetings> and Comcast Government Channel 23 and Verizon FiOS Channel 40.

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