

Charles Hill Park

History and Character

Charles Hill Park is located at 300 East Oxford Avenue in the Del Ray neighborhood.

Charles Hill Park was named in honor of Alexandria Police Officer, Corporal Charles W. Hill, who gave his life in the line of duty. The Alexandria Police Special Operations team has adopted the park and maintains the landscaping and plantings around the park welcome sign.



Existing Conditions Map



The 0.40 acre park features shaded sitting areas, large shade trees, a walking path, and open turf for active play. Del Ray residents installed roughly 25 colorful birdhouses throughout the park.

It is difficult to grow grass along Oxford Avenue under the shade trees. There are two

native plant beds in the park, one near the stop sign along Oxford Avenue and one around the storm drain in the corner of the park along DeWitt Avenue. There are two educational signs in the park, one describing the history of the St. Asaph Racetrack and one with biographical information on Corporal Charles Hill. The lights in the park are maintained by Dominion Energy.

Corporal Charles W. Hill

End of Watch March 22, 1989



Charles W. Hill was born on February 22, 1949, and grew up on Long Island in Suffolk County, New York. He met his future wife there as a teenager, and shortly after they married, he became a New York City police officer. But New York City faced financial problems in the 1970s and when Chuck Hill, as he was known to his family, was laid off, he found another job out of state. On August 2, 1976, he became an Alexandria police officer.

Charlie, as he was called by his fellow officers, worked as a patrol officer and soon assumed specialized positions such as Field Training Officer and Identification Technician. He joined the Special Operations Team, a tactical response unit, and in 1980 became the firearms instructor at the police range. In January of 1982, he was promoted to corporal.

In the late afternoon of March 22, 1989, Corporal Hill was partnered with Officer Andrew M. Chelchowski when the Special Operations Team was called to the 300

block of Hopkins Court. Jamie M. Wise, a 34-year-old escapee from a Washington, D.C. halfway house, had taken hostages inside a home to collect a drug debt.

At 6:35 p.m., Wise emerged, holding a sawed-off shotgun to the head of a teenaged hostage. A police marksman fired and hit Wise. High on drugs and mortally wounded, Wise was able to fire twice, striking Corporal Hill in the head and Officer Chelchowski in the legs. Corporal Hill was taken to Washington Hospital Center where he was pronounced dead at 8:15 p.m.

Corporal Hill, age 40, was survived by his wife Virginia, their sons Charles and Robert, and his mother. In 2010, his son Robert joined the Alexandria Sheriff's Office, and in 2012 was hired by the Alexandria Police Department as a patrol officer. Corporal Charles Hill was cremated and his ashes scattered.

Charles Hill Park

Which of the following existing park elements would you like to preserve, enhance, or transform?					
Element	Seating		Element	Open lawn	
Number of responses	15		Number of responses	14	
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it	8	53	Preserve it	5	36
Enhance it	7	47	Enhance it	4	28
Transform it	0	0	Transform it	5	36
Element	Planter		Element	Park sign	
Number of responses	12		Number of responses	13	
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it	5	42	Preserve it	11	85
Enhance it	7	58	Enhance it	2	15
Transform it	0	0	Transform it	0	0
Element	Lights		Element	Trashcan	
Number of responses	12		Number of responses	13	
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it	6	50	Preserve it	8	62
Enhance it	3	25	Enhance it	2	15
Transform it	3	25	Transform it	3	23
Element	Utility box		Element	Plantings around park sign	
Number of responses	13		Number of responses	13	
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it	8	61	Preserve it	8	62
Enhance it	1	8	Enhance it	2	15
Transform it	4	31	Transform it	3	23
Element	Native plants				
Number of responses	14				
Value	Count	Percent			
Preserve it	6	43			
Enhance it	5	36			
Transform it	3	21			

What is currently NOT in the park that you would like to see there?

1. It could use some more seating, and maybe a natural area- like logs tumbled in a pile or rocks to climb/jump. Maybe a low fence or low screening bushes to better keep kids from going into the street?
2. Bocce Court
3. It is used sparingly mostly just walking through. A picnic seating area or chess tables might be nice. I like the park with the bocce court-that might promote more use of the park.
4. This park would make a great monarch way station. There should be more native plants with signage to explain what they are and why they are important.
5. Play structures for children! A couple of swings and a play set with ladders/climbing opportunities and slides would be great.
6. A well maintained lawn—with actual grass, vs all weeds; pet waste stations; adequate lighting
7. Better maintenance of lawn area.
8. Better lighting, lawn mowed, leaves picked up in fall
9. Clean up. Update the bird houses. Make sure the sign about the trooper is clean and readable. Plant more grass and flowers.
10. Educational signage about native bird species to accompany the bird houses

Community Feedback

In Fall 2018, staff collected community feedback to understand how the park is used and how it could be improved in the future. The following information summarizes what we heard through an online survey, community workshop, and community meeting. Over 400 people responded to the survey in total, 20 of which were specific to Charles Hill Park. Staff used the collected information to develop the draft park plans.

In 10 years, I would like this Park to...

(Top three rankings shown, based on a weighted score)

1. *Be a safe place for children to explore*
2. *Help reduce environmental impacts from urban surroundings*
3. *Be a place to relax*



Charles Hill Park

Which of the following existing proposed park elements do you love, like, or not like?

Recommendation			Recommendation		
Park welcome sign			Access ramps		
Number of responses			Number of responses		
43			45		
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	16	37	I love it!	27	60
I like it	20	47	I like it	14	31
I don't like it	7	16	I don't like it	4	9

Recommendation			Recommendation		
Game tables & seating			Native plant/pollinator		
Number of responses			Number of responses		
45			43		
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	24	53	I love it!	34	79
I like it	7	16	I like it	6	14
I don't like it	14	31	I don't like it	3	7

Recommendation			Recommendation		
Path			Little Free Library		
Number of responses			Number of responses		
44			44		
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	26	59	I love it!	13	30
I like it	12	27	I like it	19	43
I don't like it	6	14	I don't like it	12	27

Recommendation			Recommendation		
Playhouse			Utility box		
Number of responses			Number of responses		
43			41		
Value	Count	Percent	Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	14	33	I love it!	14	34
I like it	11	26	I like it	20	49
I don't like it	18	42	I don't like it	7	17

Recommendation		
Water fountain & hose bib		
Number of responses		
42		
Value	Count	Percent
I love it!	28	67
I like it	9	21
I don't like it	5	12

In the summer of 2019 RPCA staff collected community feedback on the draft recommendations for improving this pocket park. The following information summarizes what was heard through online surveys and community feedback (see appendix for full results). The city received 716 responses in total, 43 of which were specific to Charles Hill Park.

Based on information from the summer input phase, staff updated the plan to best represent current and future community needs. A major change to the draft park plan is the removal of the Little Free Library, game tables, and play house based on community feedback. The seating was adjusted to be movable seating to provide flexibility within the park. The recommendation for a native plant and pollinator garden was changed to be a native plant bioretention garden to help address existing drainage issues while also adding plantings to the park.

Improvement Recommendations

- Update access ramps at cross walks**
Update the ADA access ramps at the intersections of Oxford Avenue & Terrett Avenue and Oxford Avenue & DeWitt Avenue to the City standard.
- Update park signage**
Update the existing park welcome sign to the current standard.
- Install game tables and seating**
Community feedback indicated a desire for a community gathering spot with game tables, similar to the tables at 3550 Commonwealth Avenue Park. Rustic tables and seating, such as logs, would keep the naturalistic feel in this park.
- Provide a native plant/pollinator garden**
A native plant/pollinator garden in the circular mulched area will be visually pleasing and provide an area for natural habitat within a largely urban setting. Native plants that are well adapted to shady settings can be selected so that plants can grow in this area.
- Install a stepping stone path**
A stepping stone path, using stones or logs surround with mulch, provides a shaded space for children to explore or for story-time.
- Install a Little Free Library**
A Little Free Library focusing on children's books would provide families access to age appropriate books. The Little Free Library could be shaped like a birdhouse to mirror the birdhouses in the trees.
- Install a playhouse**
A playhouse shaped like a large birdhouse, to mirror the birdhouses in the trees, would provide a space for children to play. Co-locating this playhouse with the stepping stone path will provide an area with multiple opportunities for children to play in the park.
- Cover utility box with mylar patterned cover**
Similar to the traffic control box wraps project conducted throughout the City in 2015 and 2016, cover the existing green utility box with a patterned wrap.
- Install a water fountain and hose bib**
A new water fountain, with a spout for both humans and dogs, will provide drinking water and water for a hose to use for watering plants.



Charles Hill Park

Improvement Recommendations

- 1 Update access ramps at crosswalks**
Update the ADA access ramps at the intersections of Oxford Avenue and Terrett Avenue, and Oxford Avenue and DeWitt Avenue to the City standard. Install a crosswalk across E Mt Ida and Dewitt Avenue to increase access to the park.
- 2 Update park signage**
Update the existing park welcome sign to the current City standard.
- 3 Create a seating area**
Install moveable seating to provide a place to relax and socialize. Moveable seating allows users the flexibility to decide where they want to gather and how to use the park.
- 4 Provide a native plant bioretention garden**
Install a native plant bioretention garden in the circular mulched area to be visually pleasing. The bioretention garden provides an area for natural habitat within a largely urban setting and addresses drainage issues in the park. Select native plants that are well adapted to shady settings and can grow in this area.
- 5 Install a stepping stone path**
A stepping stone path, using stones or logs surrounded with mulch, provides a shaded space for children to explore or for story-time
- 6 Cover utility box with mylar patterned cover**
Cover the existing green utility box with a patterned wrap, similar to the traffic control box wraps project conducted throughout the City in 2015 and 2016.
- 7 Install a water fountain and hose bib**
A new water fountain, with a spout for both humans and dogs, and hose bib for watering plants.

Recommendations and Rankings				
#	Recommendation	Dept. Lead	Priority	Cost
1	Access ramps	RPCA/TES	Medium	\$9,200 - \$12,364
2	Park signage	RPCA	Medium	\$1,800 - \$2,419
3	Seating area	RPCA	Medium	\$2,800 - \$3,763
4	Native plant/bioretention garden	RPCA	Medium	\$7,200 - \$9,676
5	Steppingstone path	RPCA	Low	\$3,900 - \$5,241
6	Utility box	RPCA	Low	\$700 - \$941
7	Water fountain and hose bib	RPCA	Medium	\$10,600 - \$14,246

