

3550 Commonwealth Ave

History and Character

In 2009 the City negotiated an agreement to purchase this 0.58 acre property from Virginia Electric Power Company (VEPCO). The site had previously been an unsightly and dormant substation (images below). The property is adjacent to the Glebe House Apartments (to the west) and a church to the south. Cora Kelly School and Recreation Center and Four Mile Run Park are immediately across West Reed Avenue.



Purchase of the property required that VEPCO demolish and remove the substation and complete all necessary environmental remediation.

In October 2011, neighborhood volunteers partnered with the City and Dominion Power for a community planting day. Using donated plants and mulch, volunteers transformed the site, installing two gardens, a walking path, shade trees and park benches.



The community efforts beautified the park and neighborhood. The benches are regularly used by nearby residents and the pathway is frequented by families walking to Cora Kelly. Yet, the entire park was not fully planned at the time and the open space

behind the benches has remained an unused open lawn.

In 2014, a bulb-out and crosswalk improvements at Reed Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue made the site and Cora Kelly School and Recreation Center safer for pedestrians to access.

The park remains unnamed until the residents' submit a formal naming request and it is approved by the City Council's naming committee.

Community Feedback

In Fall 2014, 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 "graffiti board" in the park. Over 270 people responded to the survey in total, seven of which were specific to 3550 Commonwealth Ave. Staff used the collected information to develop draft park plans.

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

(Top 3 rankings shown; based on a weighted score)

1. Be a place to relax
2. Be a safe place for children to explore
3. Be a place to create social connections with neighbors

How do you get to this Park?

Value	Count	Percent
Walk	4	57%
Bike (personal)	2	29%
Bike (Capital Bikeshare)	0	0%
Drive	1	14%
Public Transit	0	0%
Carpool	0	0%

How far do you typically travel to visit this park?

Value	Count	Percent
Less than ½ mile	4	57%
Between ½ mile to 1 mile	2	29%
Between 1-2 miles	0	0%
Over 2 miles	1	14%

Existing Conditions



Have any of the following circumstances prevented you from visiting this Park? (check all that apply)

Value	Count	Percent
I am physically limited from walking	0	0%
There is no pedestrian/bike friendly access to the park from where I live	0	0%
I have concerns about crime or personal safety	1	33%
There is not enough parking	1	33%
There is nothing in the Park that interests me	3	100%

How often do you visit this park?

Value	Count	Percent
Daily	2	29%
Weekly	4	57%
Monthly	1	14%
Yearly	0	0%

What would you like done with the open lawn?

Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it as is	0	0%
Enhance it	2	29%
Transform it	5	71%

Explain

Plant trees

Bocce

Improve it

Perhaps the open lawn could be transformed into a pathway featuring native plants and dispersed relaxing seating.

Seriously, site specific public art in this location would create a useful, effective cultural bridge.

What would you like done with the planting bed?

Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it as is	0	0%
Enhance it	5	71%
Transform it	2	29%

Explain

Have art commission advise with participation from community

How about creating more green space such as a butterfly garden, and planting trees?

A good neighborhood start but needs more plantings

More plantings

This could be a nice site for the nearby school children to learn about plants and gardening. Could it become a community garden?

What would you like done with the seating?

Value	Count	Percent
Preserve it as is	0	0%
Enhance it	4	67%
Transform it	2	33%

Explain

Seating along a mulch pathway featuring native plants would be nice.

Turn this park into a sculpture garden!

Add more

Improve the desire path

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

Response

A butterfly garden, especially a Monarch way station. And more trees.

Active uses. Trees

Public art!!!

More plants and pathways to invite activity. A demonstration or community garden

Information about native plants. Signs that invite pedestrians and school children

Needs more seating a gazebo would be great more plantings the walkthrough needs to be reestablished labyrinth

ART. Creative seating, interesting water feature, colorful signage, many other elements - just please don't make it another ho-hum park (yawn).

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Park?

Response

HSCA did a fantastic job getting this started! It needs a name!

Too much of Alexandria has been paved over, and looks like Crystal City. How about letting parks be green spaces with lots of trees and flowers and no concrete no jungle gyms, and no organized activity.

It is in a great location near a school and a lot of residential space. It would be great to see the school children use it more to learn about the environment.

Improvement Recommendations

1 Install plaza with game tables and seat wall

This plan recommends constructing a plaza of pervious pavers on the corner of Reed and Commonwealth. Along the edge of the plaza would be a seating wall with built-in game tables, such as chess tables and foosball, and secured chairs. The plaza will serve as a community gathering spot, visible from all sides. Game pieces, such as dominos, chess, checkers, and foosball soccer balls, could be checked out from Cora Kelly Recreation Center, creating a connection between the two facilities. Trees along the edges would provide shade for the seating.

2 Retain the two landscape gardens at the corner of the Park

When the City acquired this Park in 2009, a community group volunteered their services to create and maintain two gardens on the corner of Reed and Commonwealth. This plan recommends retaining the site and adding irrigation to them.

3 Add a park sign and kiosk to create a defined entrance

A formal sign would define the entrance and recognize the site as a recreational space. The sign would be most visible along Commonwealth Avenue. A kiosk will provide space for community and park notices.

4 Plant trees around park

Planting trees along Commonwealth Avenue and around the park will provide shade and define the edge of the Park. The trees should be limbed up to 5 feet to allow clear visibility into the Park.

5 Install tricycle track/walking path

A curvy tricycle track will provide a space for children to weave and race around the site on a marked route. The track can also be used as a walking path for adults.

6 Create unprogrammed play space by re-grading and installing irrigation in the center green space

The center of this park is currently wide open, however, it is not in the condition for recreational use. Re-grading the open area and installing irrigation within the tricycle track will provide an open lawn for a variety of active and passive uses. Programmed sports would not be permitted here in order to maintain the grass for more universal use by the community. The park will remain unfenced.

7 Create shaded play areas

This plan recommends creating a space with trees and interactive and/or climbing features, such as boulders, movable bench (such as a joggle board), or stepping stones. The features are meant to be used by both children and adults and are located between the two picnic area to allow direct access during picnic gatherings.

8 Install two picnic area

The two picnic areas would each include four tables and two grills. The picnic areas could be used for small multi-generational gatherings. Trees and shade structures will be located to provide shade while also maintaining visibility from Commonwealth and Reed to ensure safe use.

9 Install water fountain

A new water fountain will have a spout for both humans and dogs.

10 Install low fence along parking lot

A two foot fence will be visually unobtrusive but will keep children and soccer balls out of the adjacent parking lot.

REED



COMMONWEALTH

— Park Boundary

0 25 50 100 Feet

Implementation Strategy

This plan uses citizen input and considers other external considerations to determine how to address park improvements incrementally over time. Most of the recommendations in the plan can be implemented independent of other projects as funding is available, whether through city or non-city funds. The cost estimates (in 2015 dollars) do not include operating costs. Prior to the implementation of any recommendation, operating costs, if any, must be considered.

The priority for each recommendation is shown as “low,” “medium,” or “high.” RPCA determined these rankings based upon (1) park user safety, (2) community prioritization feedback and the results of the 2011 and 2013 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment, (3) life span of the existing conditions, (4) potential for non-city funding sources, (5) level of user impact, (6) relationship to other projects.

3550 Commonwealth Ave					
#	Recommendation	Priority	Estimated Cost	Associated Recommendations	Dept Lead
1	Install plaza with game tables and seat wall	High	50,000 - 65,000		RPCA
2	Retain the two landscape gardens at the corner of the park	N/A			RPCA
3	Add a park sign and kiosk to create a defined entrance	High	8,000 - 10,000		RPCA
4	Plant trees around park	Medium	5,000 - 10,000	Should be done after recommendation #6	RPCA
5	Install tricycle track/walking path	Medium	50,000 - 65,000	Recommendations #5 and #6 should be done together	RPCA
6	Create unprogrammed play space by re-grading and installing irrigation in the center green space	Medium	40,000 - 50,000		RPCA
7	Create shaded play areas	Medium	10,000 - 15,000	Recommendations #7 and #8 should be done together	RPCA
8	Install two picnic areas	Medium	25,000 - 30,000		RPCA
9	Install water fountain	Low	10,000 - 15,000		RPCA
10	Install low fence along parking lot	Medium	10,000 - 15,000		RPCA



Examples of outdoor game tables

2015 Neighborhood Parks Improvement Plan: Appendix



Neighborhood Parks Plan

3550 Commonwealth Park

Community Feedback, Fall 2014



The Division of Park Planning, Design, and Capital Development is currently planning for the City's existing Neighborhood Parks, which we characterize as being 0.5 - 10 acres with a service area of up to 0.5 miles. The results of this plan will help determine budgeting priorities and recommendations for both short and long-term incremental improvements, ensuring that neighborhood parks serve Alexandria's needs now and into the future.

In Fall 2014, 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 "graffiti board" in the park. Over 270 people responded to the survey in total, seven of which were specific to 3550 Commonwealth Park.

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

(top 3 rankings shown; based on a weighted score)

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What would you like done with the open lawn?

Value	Count	Percent
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Enhance it	2	29%
Transform it	5	71%

Explain

Plant trees

Bocce

Improve it

Perhaps the open lawn could be transformed into a pathway featuring native plants and dispersed relaxing seating.

Seriously, site specific public art in this location would create a useful, effective cultural bridge.

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More plantings

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How often do you visit this park?

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Yearly	0	0%

Response

Active uses. Trees

Public art!!!

More plants and pathways to invite activity. A demonstration or community garden. Information about native plants. Signs that invite pedestrians and school children. Needs more seating a gazebo would be great more plantings the walkthrough needs to be reestablished labyrinth

ART. Creative seating, interesting water feature, colorful signage, many other elements - just please don't make it another ho-hum park (yawn).

Response

HSCA did a fantastic job getting this started! It needs a name!

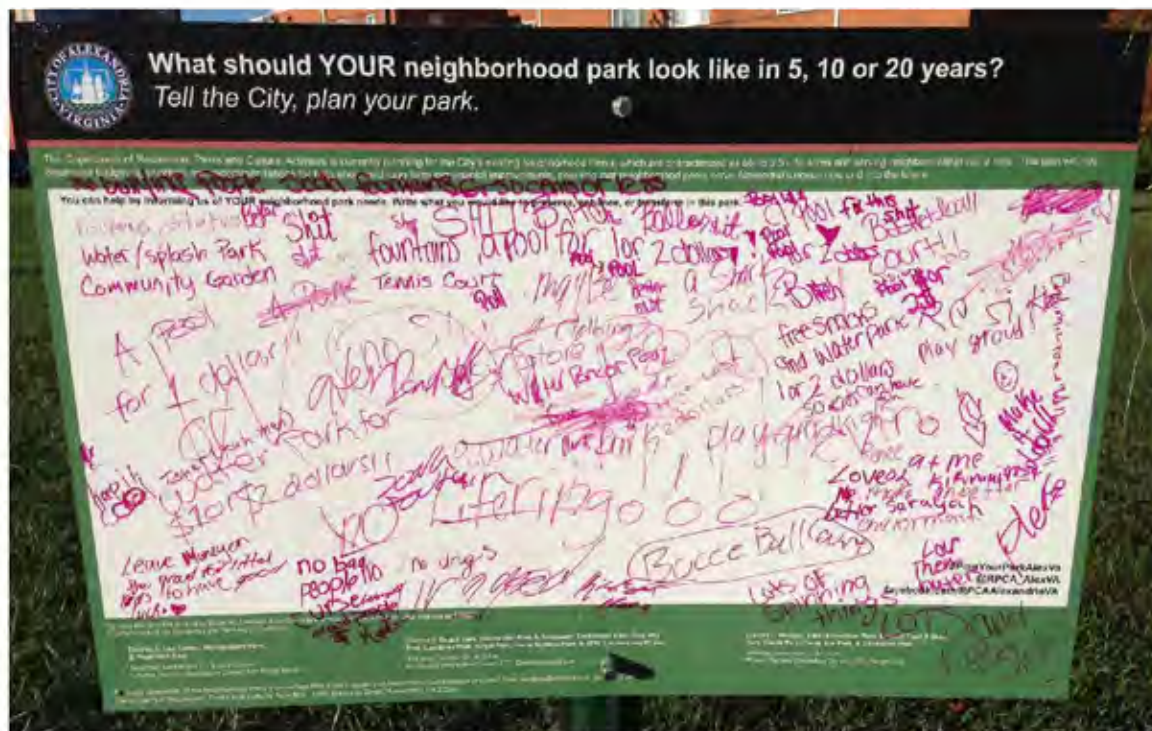
Too much of Alexandria has been paved over, and looks like Crystal City. How about letting parks be green spaces with lots of trees and flowers and no concrete, no jungle gyms, and no organized activity.

It is in a great location near a school and a lot of residential space. It would be great to see the school children use it more to learn about the environment.

- Change park's name
- Connection to Cora Kelly should be improved
- Preserve planting beds
- Enhance existing planting beds and provide additional seating and gathering area
- Enhance soft trail around seating area
- Maintain green space. Use landscaping and plantings to provide social and play opportunities
- Suggestion: provide labyrinth

A "graffiti sign" in the Park had a marker attached and asked park users to write down what they would like their park to look like in the future. The sign was on site from September to November 2014. Comments included:

- Community garden
- Bocce ball
- Badminton
- Volleyball
- Lots of 'spinning things' and slides
- Fountains
- Public art
- Water park (x3)
- Skate park
- Ice skating rink
- Swings and slides





3550 Commonwealth Ave

Improvement Recommendations

Draft (Spring2015)

1 Install plaza with game tables and seat wall

This plan recommends constructing a plaza on the corner of Reed and Commonwealth. Along the edge of the plaza would be a seating wall with built-in game tables and secured chairs. The plaza will serve as a community gathering spot, visible from all sides. Game pieces, such as dominos, chess, and checkers, could be checked out from Cora Kelly Recreation Center, creating a connection between the two facilities. Trees along the edges would provide shade for the seating.

2 Retain the two landscape gardens at the corner of the Park

When the City acquired this Park in 2009, a community group volunteered their services to create and maintain two gardens on the corner of Reed and Commonwealth. This plan recommends retaining the site and adding irrigation to them.

3 Add a park sign to create a defined entrance

A formal sign would define the entrance and recognize the site as a recreational space. The sign would be most visible along Commonwealth Avenue.

4 Plant trees along Commonwealth Avenue

Planting trees along Commonwealth Avenue will provide shade and define the edge of the Park. The trees should be limbed up to 5 feet to allow clear visibility into the Park.

5 Convert maintenance path into formal entrance

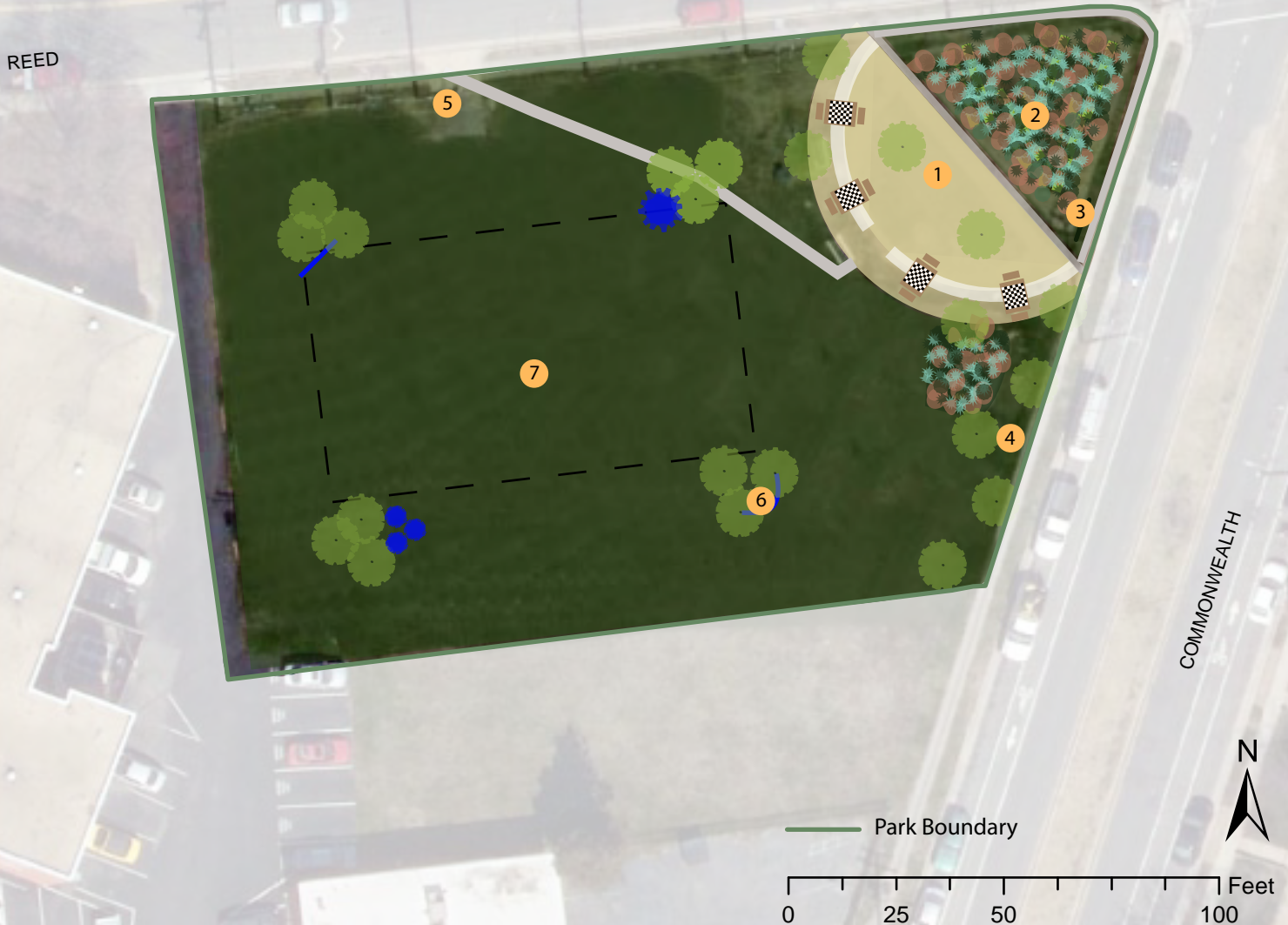
The former site's driveway is now used as a maintenance path for the park, however the asphalt abruptly ends after about 20 feet into the park. This plan recommends this as a location for a Park entrance with a sign and a path connecting to the Plaza. It also recommends removing the evergreen trees along Reed Street which currently block the view into the park.

6 Create shaded play areas

This plan recommends creating four spaces with trees and interactive and/or climbing features. Each of the four spaces may be designed with a different play element, such as a hammock, boulder, movable bench (such as a joggle board), or climbing sculpture. The features are meant to be used by both children and adults to encourage all ages to use the site and move around to different stations.

7 Create unprogrammed play space by re-grading and installing irrigation in the center green space

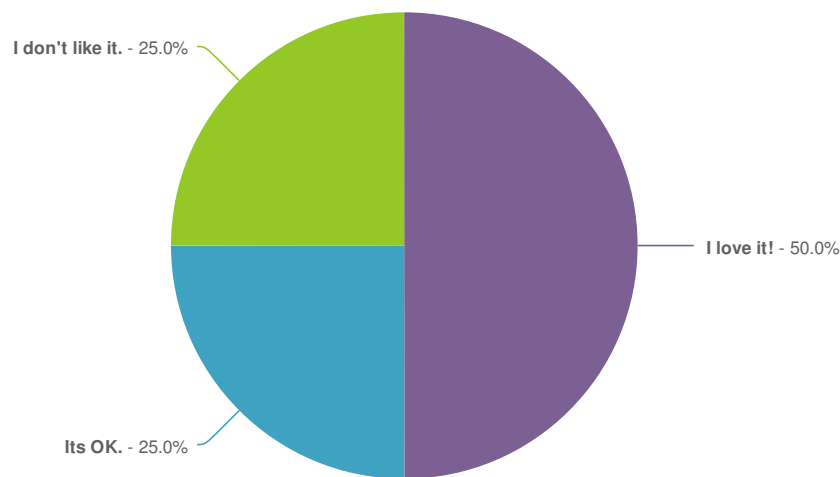
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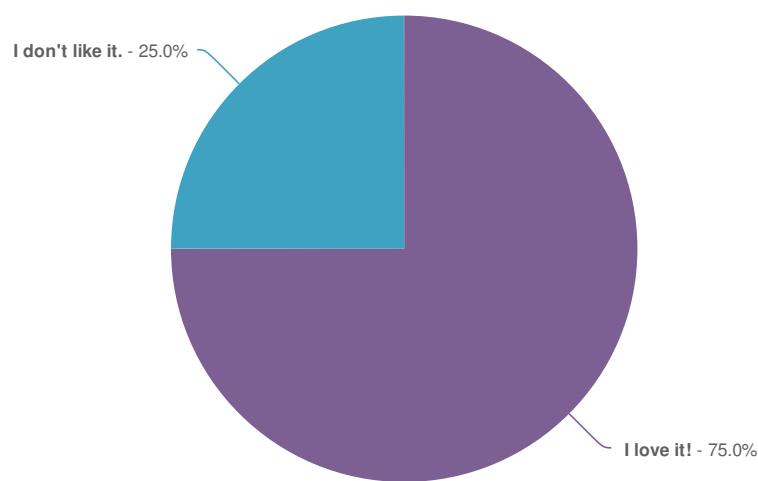
3550 Commonwealth Ave Draft Improvement Plan, July 2015

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Add a park sign to create a defined entrance



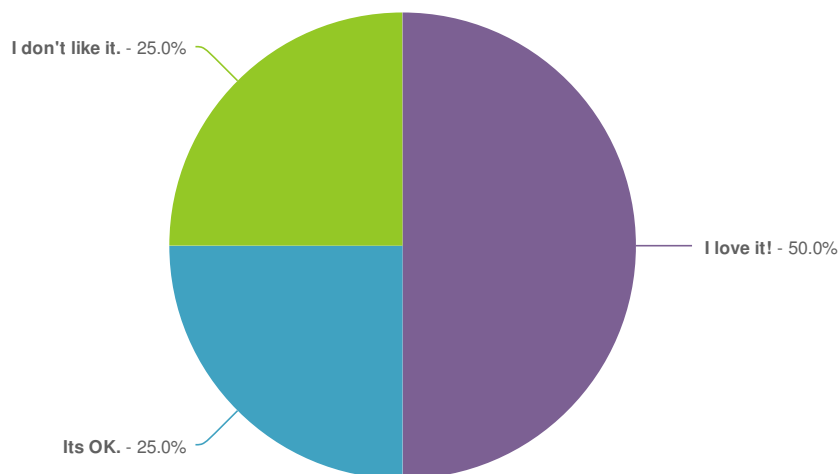
Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	50.0%	<div><div></div></div>	2
Its OK.	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>	1
I don't like it.	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>	1
Total			4

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Convert maintenance path into formal entrance



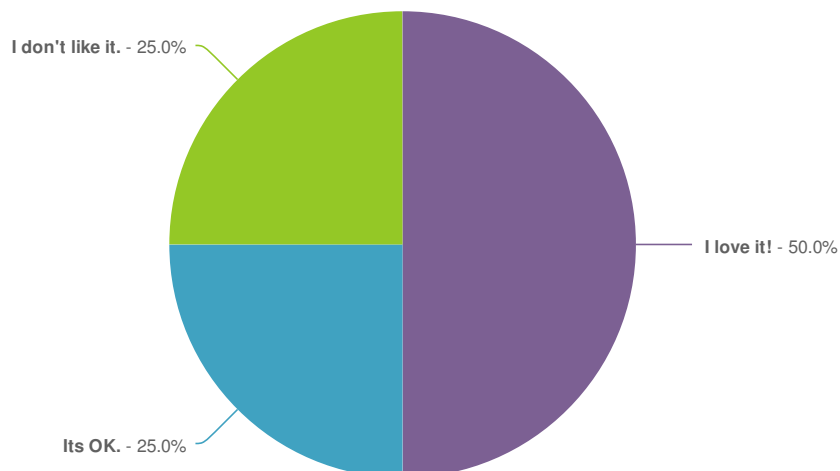
Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	75.0%	<div><div></div></div>	3
I don't like it.	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>	1
Total			4

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Create shaded play areas



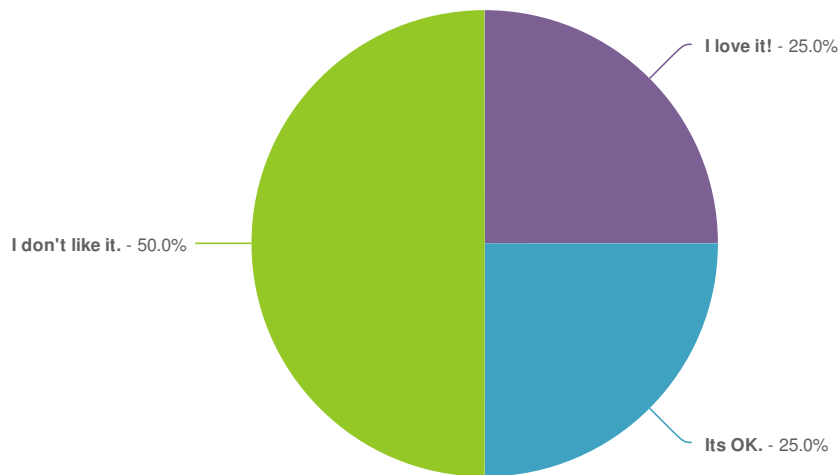
Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	50.0%	<div><div></div></div>	2
Its OK.	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>	1
I don't like it.	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>	1
Total			4

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Create unprogrammed play space by re-grading and installing irrigation in the center green space



Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	50.0%	<div><div></div></div>	2
Its OK.	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>	1
I don't like it.	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>	1
Total			4

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Install plaza with game tables and seat wall

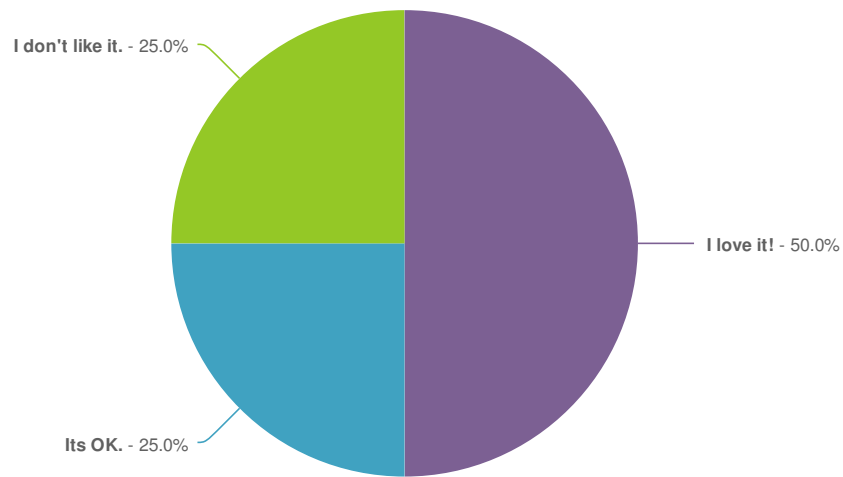


Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>	1
Its OK.	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>	1
I don't like it.	50.0%	<div><div></div></div>	2
Total			4

Explain-Install plaza with game tables and seat wall

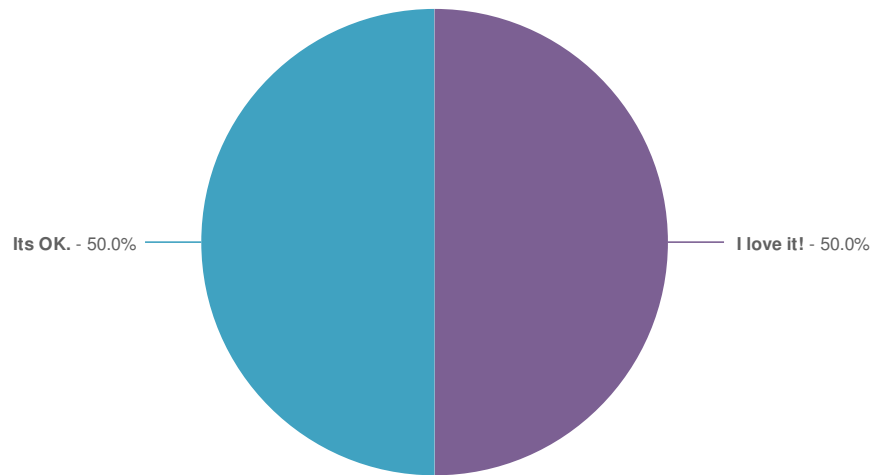
Count	Response
1	I think that people will not go to Cora Kelly to check out the pieces. So the game tables will not be used often.

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Plant trees along Commonwealth Avenue



Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	50.0%	<div><div style="width: 50%;"></div></div>	2
Its OK.	25.0%	<div><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>	1
I don't like it.	25.0%	<div><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>	1
Total			4

What do you think of the following recommendations?-Retain the two landscape gardens at the corner of the Park

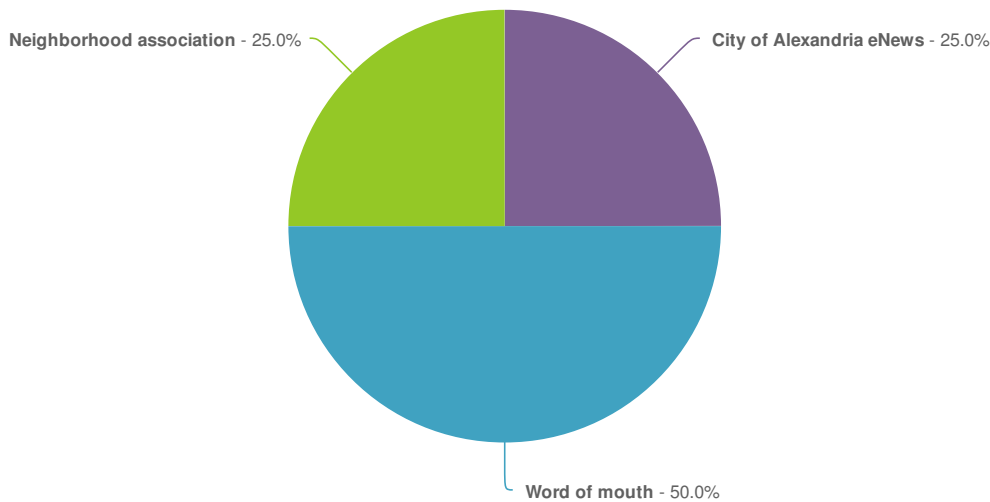


Value	Percent		Count
I love it!	50.0%	<div><div style="width: 50%;"></div></div>	2
Its OK.	50.0%	<div><div style="width: 50%;"></div></div>	2
Total			4

Do you feel all of the comments were heard and addressed in the draft 3550 Commonweath Park plan? If not, what is missing and how can we make the plan better?

Count	Response
1	yes.
1	The strong hispanic population in this community wants to see a futsal court built for our kids to play pick up soccer.

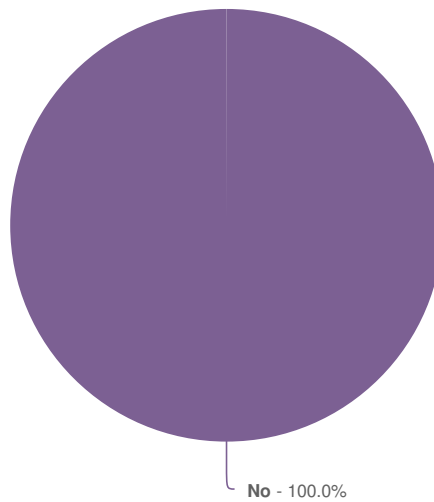
How did you learn about the Neighborhood Park Plan survey?



Value	Percent	Count
City of Alexandria eNews	25.0%	1
Word of mouth	50.0%	2
Neighborhood association	25.0%	1
Total		4

Responses "Other"	Count
Left Blank	4

Will you be attending the workshop on May 27 from 7pm-8:30pm at the Mount Vernon Recreation Center to discuss the draft plan?



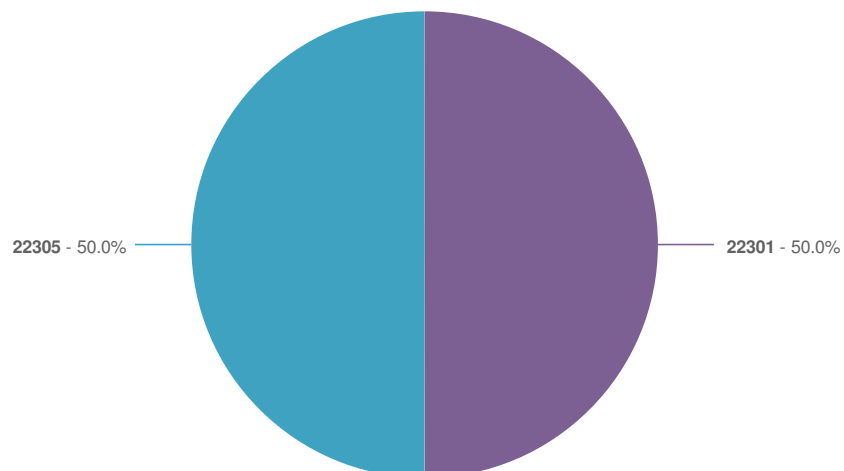
No - 100.0%

Value	Percent		Count
No	100.0%	<div></div>	3
Total			3

How many members of your household are in the following age groups?

	# in household	Responses
Under 5	1 100.0%	1
6-12	2 100.0%	2
30-49	3 100.0%	3

What is your zip code?



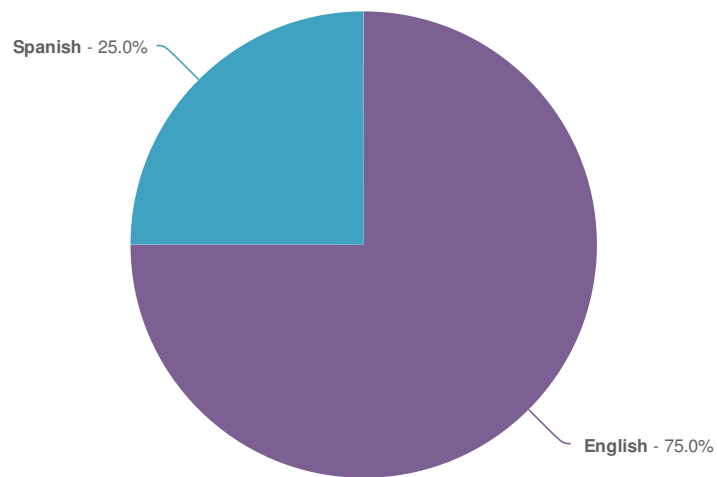
Value	Percent		Count
22301	50.0%	<div><div></div></div>	2
22305	50.0%	<div><div></div></div>	2
Total			4

Statistics	
Sum	89,212.0
Average	22,303.0
StdDev	2.0
Max	22,305.0

Responses "I live outside of Alexandria"

	Count
Left Blank	4

What is the primary language spoken in your home?



Value	Percent		Count
English	75.0%	<div><div></div></div>	3
Spanish	25.0%	<div><div></div></div>	1
Total			4

Responses "other"

	Count
Left Blank	4