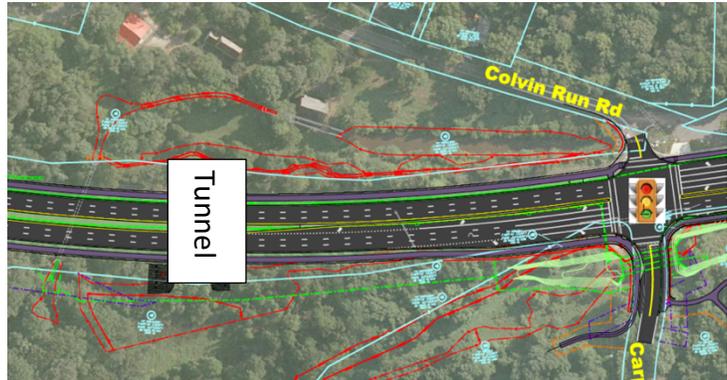


**From the President's Grindstone
March 23, 2022**

Two Cents for Parks: No Tunnel to Nowhere

Visitors to the park over the last two years have been treated to dust, din, and diesel fumes from the construction to widen Route 7. We need to constantly remind ourselves of the project's positive benefits: faster, safer transport, more exposure of the mill to passersby, and a reunion of the south side of the park with its more known northern part. The two were torn asunder in 1941 when Leesburg Pike was straightened out, by passing Colvin Run Road. Mr. Bailey, the mill's owner, at the time, battled the decision in courts, but the county prevailed. His cows grazed on the south side and had to cross the road to get to their barn. Must have been a sight, seeing a herd of cows waiting for a green light.



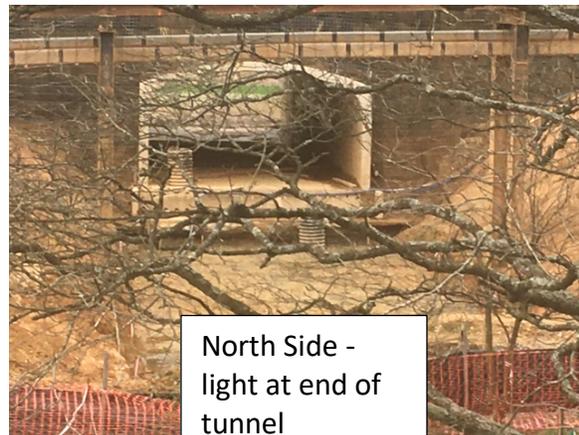
The happy reunion will be courtesy of a truly large, magnificent tunnel, suitable for people and, if they were still living, Mr. Bailey's cows. The tunnel will allow visitors to walk the original grounds, see remnants of the old mill dam and pond, and delight in more nature trails. Hikers on the nearby Cross County Trail and Rail to River Trail could easily take a short detour to explore the mill. Families could park at the mill and take a pleasant 1.5 mile walk to Lake Fairfax.



There is one catch: this big, beautiful tunnel might lead to nowhere!

“How can that be?” you might reasonably ask. Simple answer: no funding for a trail on the south side.

Lack of funds is not specific to this project. The Fairfax County Park Authority's (FCPA) budget has been squeezed. The FCPA's General Fund for day-to-day operations, is about \$27 million, accounting for a miniscule 0.6% of Fairfax County's budget, down from a tiny 1.3% thirty years ago. Put another way, in 1988 about 2.5 cents of our real estate taxes



went to the FCPA; now it is one cent. As a result, funding for services and personnel have not kept up with needs. Take a good look at your park, and you will see what I mean.

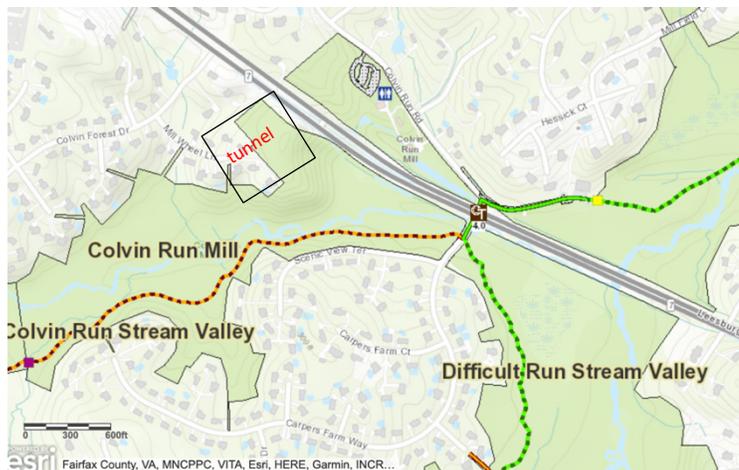
Over the same period, fees and charges have jumped from a little over a third of FCPA's total budget to two-thirds. Wow! A two-handed economist might say, on the one hand, it is good that people who use the parks pay for the parks; but on the other hand, tax dollars are supposed to pay for public services and not all parks can charge fees, and those that do, like golf courses and rec centers, might have to charge higher fees to cover costs, discouraging those who cannot afford them. As President Truman once famously quipped: "Give me a one-handed economist!"

The 420 Fairfax County parks provide recreation spaces, green spaces, and plenty of trees – healthy for our bodies, souls, and the environment. Certainly the county could and should do better. How about setting a target to get FCPA's general budget back to two cents of the real estate tax? Two cents for the parks!

Another reasonable question you might ask is why don't the hearty band of Friends of Colvin Run Mill spend a couple of days with weed whackers and chain saws and blaze a trail? After all, we are talking less than 200 yards. Free eats and drinks might attract eager, fit, and hungry volunteers.

Not so fast. FCPA officials rightly point out that amateur trail building might disturb important archeological remains, may not be on the optimal topographically route, may result in a less stable trail requiring higher maintenance, and not be on the official Trail Buddy app so hikers could easily navigate from the trails to the tunnel. Proper signage and a small fair weather crossing where Colvin Run is narrow and, in dry times, shallow, need to be part of the project.

Fair enough. But no budget means no official trail. What might happen then? Well, curious hikers might blaze their own trail. This carries all the disadvantages of a FOCRMs undertaking plus one more: the destruction of protected, delicate wetlands in the area immediately in front of the tunnel's south side. Rather than a source of natural beauty, the risk is that intrepid day hikers, without the benefit of signage or the Trail Buddy app to the official trail, might tramp around the south side to reach the tunnel. Not good for nature, the landscape, or, I submit the hikers.



If you share the view that the tunnel would be a boon to visitors to the mill, to families who wish to take a stroll to Lake Fairfax, to Cross County Trail hikers who want to experience historic aspects of the area, and to naturalists who enjoy investigating wildlife, please write to your Fairfax county supervisor as they consider the budget in April with two simple pleas: Please: "Give Two Cents for the Parks!;" Please: "No Tunnel to Nowhere

