

24 February, 2021

Chairman Bouie and Chairman McKay:

Citizens of Fairfax County request the Park Authority Board immediately rescind Board Action 6, proposed by Sully Board Member Maggie Godbold, "Name the New Bridge in Gabrielson Gardens Park The Burnet Bridge to Honor the Memory of Thornton and Mary Elizabeth Burnet (Sully District).

The Park Policy Manual clearly states *"Indiscriminate exceptions to Park Authority policies are to be avoided."* **Citizens were told that the FCPA does NOT name bridges.** A current review of FCPA bridges validated this statement made by FCPA Trails Manager to citizens when 2020 inquiries were made. Therefore, this Board Action indiscriminately made exception to an established FCPA "bridge naming policy".

The Park Authority Policy Manual lists an existing **Policy 304, Naming of Facilities and Parks *discourages renaming parks except after thorough review, a proposed name is found to be "more appropriate than the existing name..."*** **Unfortunately, citizens believe that this Board Action involved neither a thorough review, nor a public process representing an "appropriate community input."**

1. The 1995/96 "Gabrielson Tract Conceptual Plan" (attached) incorporates use of the "outlet road" that provides another entrance into that park's trails through the Gabrielsons' distinctive stone pillars (that lead to his ponds and terraced gardens) which are adjacent to the "outlet road".
2. The Wickens family originally purchased the land surrounding Difficult Run in this area of the stream valley from Olivia Wines Smith and the Leeds family. Hunters Valley Road, before the Wickens improved it, had been a gravel road leading to their barns and pastures on both sides of Difficult Run that included this "outlet road". The Burnets and Gabrielsons (Dr. Ira Gabrielson and David Wickens were college friends) purchased their respective properties from the Wickens family.
3. **This "outlet road", along with the eastern pier and decking of the previous Gabrielson Bridge, constitute the property in the 20 June, 2018 Quitclaim Deed (attached) from Donaldson V. Wickens to the Board of Supervisors that enables the public eastern access to the replacement bridge and the Gabrielson Gardens Park trails; the replacement bridge's eastern pier and the bridge decking that crosses Difficult Run Stream.** Therefore the:

- a. Board of Supervisors should transfer this quit claim in toto, to be incorporated into the boundaries of Gabrielson Gardens Park, as reflected by the Gabrielson Tract Conceptual Plan;
- b. Gabrielson Bridge name should be maintained based on the long historical use of this well-established name.

The extent to which citizens were purposefully excluded from this Board Action process is troubling:

1. February 15, 2021 letter to the Park Authority from the Sully District Council of Citizens Associations (“SDCCA”) and West Fairfax County Citizens Association (“WFCCA”) Joint Sully District Land Use and Transportation Committee (the “Joint Committee”) that includes their **“regret that the SDCCA was not informed of this pending naming/renaming action during the 28 January 2021 presentation by Authority Board’s Sully Representative to the SDCCA as part of her scheduled ‘Gabrielson Bridge Update’.”**
2. Neither the Hunters Valley Association (HVA), the civic association incorporating approximately 240 homeowners along Hunters Mill Road from Lawyers Road on the north to Vale Road on the south and west to Difficult Run; nor the Hunters Valley Riding Club (HVRC), the equestrian club that operates under the umbrella of the HVA, was involved in the efforts to rename Gabrielson Bridge the Burnet Bridge. These two organizations constitute the “Hunters Valley Community” that the Burnets are named for being honored because “they worked tirelessly over many decades to ensure that the community developed into a **cohesive, caring, and environmentally aware association to assist and represent all members.**” Most current HVA homeowners and resident members are unfamiliar with the Burnet name.

Unfortunately, the Sully Board Member’s 10 February, 2021 PA Board Action has brought about the exact opposite impact on the greater community of citizens that had come together from across Fairfax County to create the Coalition to Replace Gabrielson Bridge (Coalition). The Coalition’s advocacy efforts were endorsed by the following organizations: Hunters Valley Association, Hunters Valley Riding Club, Lake Vale Estates Community Association, Twin Mill Homeowners Association, Sierra Club Great Falls Group, the Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiast (MORE), Fairfax County Trails, Sidewalks and Byways Committee, Fairfax 4 Horses, Fairfax Trails and Streams, Potomac Heritage Trail, Hunter Mill Defense League (HMDL), Hunter Mill Country Day School, and the Oakton Women’s Club. Citizens’ united efforts

quickly garnered support for Fairfax County funding from Chairman Sharon Bulova (\$300K) and Supervisor Kathy Smith (\$100K) that made the replacement of the Gabrielson Bridge a reality. The most expeditious way to remedy the divisiveness, distrust and discord that have been created by this Board Action is to immediately rescind “The Burnet Bridge” name approved in Board Action 6.

The 2018 Wickens Quitclaim Deed also disputes misinformation repeatedly stated in the FCPA’s current formulaic response to citizens writing in support of the Gabrielson Bridge’s name. This response purports “no public process beyond inclusion in the published agenda was required for this action taken by the Board” because the new Gabrielson Bridge was “an amenity within an existing park.” As has been established, **the Gabrielson Bridge replacement is actually located within an easement quit claimed to the Board of Supervisors by Donaldson V. Wickens in 2018.** Citizens have also relayed that Sully District staff member(s) are making incorrect statements regarding the ownership of the western easement that was critical for the replacement bridge’s western pier. **This new easement was provided by the current land owner, who is the third property owner since the Burnet family. These owners were also unaware of the current efforts to rename the bridge until after the Board Action had been voted on by the PA.** Documentation exists, including 2004-SU-021 BZA testimony, which proves the existing bridle trails and equestrian land use dates back to the Wickens family of the 1930s. So, to summarize the situation: the Burnets did not build the old bridge; they used but did not own the old bridge; and most importantly (and accurately) they had *nothing* to do with the new western pier easement.

Finally, the FCPA’s current formulaic public response justifies no further acknowledgement is due Dr. Gabrielson because he “is commemorated in the naming of the Park.” This naming was appropriate because the Gabrielsons conveyed their home and twelve acre property to FCPA that created the Gabrielson Gardens Park. Citizens have long maintained a “high level of interest (now very positive in most cases) in the community surrounding Gabrielson to get involved with the park, citizens are eager to review this document.” As noted in the 4 January, 1996 fax from FCPA Director Lee Stephenson (pg. 7) of the attached “Gabrielson Tract Conceptual Plan” document.

The Gabrielson Bridge’s name reflects not only its historical use by Dr. Gabrielson (as noted in his Great Crest diaries in the Smithsonian) but its continued public use by various groups (scouts, conservationists and birding enthusiasts). Dr. Gabrielson’s 1949 Golden Guide *Birds* book (reissued in 2001) is often cited as many birders’ beloved first field guide. According to local historian Trish Strat, Smithsonian-housed audiotapes recorded Clara and Dr. Gabrielson in 1974 commenting on the success of his “little blue book,”

remarking that 5 million copies had been sold. Following the demolition of the old Gabrielson Bridge, the Coalition also heard from a number of educators. They were saddened by the old bridge's removal because they often used it as an outdoor classroom to teach concepts that promote and protect natural resources. These concepts represent the legacy of Dr. Gabrielson's body of work, as noted in the 2008 Earth Day Virginia HR 26 Resolution (attached) honoring Dr. Ira Gabrielson. Citizens maintain hope that their recent successful partnership efforts with the County to replace the Gabrielson Bridge will justify additional budgetary appropriations to actualize the Gabrielson's wishes for the development and public use of their land. The bridge is an established **RELATED FACILITY** to the Gabrielson Gardens Park. The Gabrielson name should be maintained.

Sincerely,

Sheila Dunheimer

Co-Chair for the Coalition to Replace Gabrielson Bridge