

LUBBER RUN AMPHITHEATER (LRA) SITE AND FACILITY ASSESSMENT

Conducted By LRA Community Supporters

March 27, 2011

Introduction

Supporters of Lubber Run Amphitheater (LRA), located in a woodland setting in central Arlington, VA, have organized a campaign for the preservation of this unique and beloved entertainment venue. In recent years the Amphitheater has been allowed to deteriorate. “Deferred maintenance” has put this urban gem at the top of the Arlington Heritage Alliance’s list of “Arlington’s Most Endangered Places”.

The unannounced closure of LRA occurred in 2009 when two severely rusted light poles fell; two more were removed when similar rust was found. The local citizens association was later informed that the condition of the stage presented a safety hazard. Following community protest, Arlington County’s Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources (DPRCR) allowed LRA to be used for a well-attended series of movies in summer 2010, but all community efforts to use the seemingly sturdy stage for any live performances were rebuffed.

A Physical Needs Assessment (PNA) released in April 2009 stated the wood stage showed “premature aging and failure.” The retaining walls in the seating area were described as being in poor condition. The report recommended that “an engineer be retained to analyze the existing condition” of the amphitheater. In early spring 2010 DPRCR contracted a \$20,000 study requesting cost estimates for three options: renovation, including improvement of design and functionality; repairing it to a usable standard; and demolition of the facility with a return of the site to a natural state.

LRA supporters were assured that, upon the August 2010 completion of the report, the community would be actively involved as the study’s options were reviewed during the County’s FY2012 budget preparations. Despite repeated requests for inclusion and the formation of The Lubber Run Amphitheatre Foundation, Inc., the LRA feasibility study was not made available until *seven months* after its promised release – which occurred nine days before the Budget Hearing held on March 22, 2011.

The County overview and an internal link to the Report itself are available at:

<http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/parksrecreation/scripts/parks/LubberRunAmphitheater.aspx>

The overview suggests that conditions at the facility represent “a hazard to public safety” and stated the County would remove the wood stage platform. Yet supporters were disappointed that instead of including the engineering analysis of the stage and retaining walls recommended in the PNA, this report included no testing or in depth study of the structures.

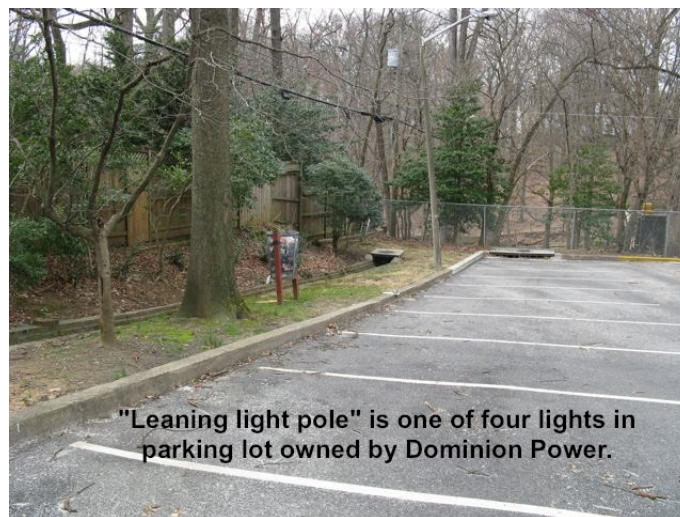
On March 18, 2011 supporters of the campaign to reopen the Amphitheater examined some findings of the job site inspection during their own site visit to the LRA complex. This point-by-point summary below addresses issues raised in the Report and includes some very different observations and recommendations, as well as documenting photos.

1. North Columbus Street Parking Lot

- a. All asphalt paving in the Parking Lot was in excellent condition, not deteriorated. No repair is required at this time. (photo 1.a)



- b. Parking Lot lighting is provided by four DVP poles, three of which are leaning. (photo 1.b)



- c. An addition of solid fencing of a reasonable height may not improve light/sound buffering since neighboring houses are well above existing fence level and would not derive

much benefit from this expenditure. The existing chain link fence running between LRA and the Parking Lot has a well-established hydrangea hedge along it and other trees and plants serve to partially block light and sound from the stage

d. A shallow water run-off channel (14-16 inches deep) runs parallel to and approximately 9.5 feet from the curb line of the Parking Lot. (photo 1.c)



e. The PNA report addresses a viable correction for the Parking Lot slope.

f. The grass island presents no visible problem unless it relates to ADA compliance.

Backup data is necessary.

2. North Columbus Street Entry Path and Lawn Area

a. A narrow asphalt depression crosses the entry path. It reaches a depth of 1.5 inches in a section near the handrail and should be patched. Additional portions of the asphalt path are in poor condition and should be repaired. The open hole that seats a metal pole meant to prevent unauthorized vehicle access could be filled since the pole is often missing. (photo 2.a)

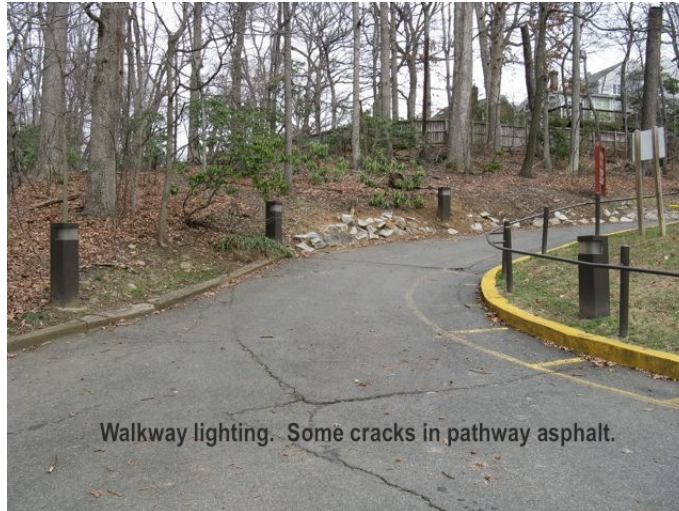


b. A grassy slope between the asphalt path and the main seating area rises toward the parking lot level. It currently provides adequate auxiliary seating and a play space for energetic children. There is smooth access to it and good grass coverage on it. No grading or reseeding is needed at this time. (At the far end of the area behind a control booth there is an obstructed view of the stage and fallen tree branches covering washed out terrain. Minor filling/level to path level is recommended.) A tree stump at the center of the grassy slope props up chairs and supports picnic coolers; no removal required. No additional terracing is required at this time. (photo 2.b)



c. Lubber Run Park has had an extensive invasive plant removal in process for several years. The strands of ivy and single lesser celandine plant have been removed. No further work is required at this time.

d. Bollard lights line the path. *Backup data needed* to determine sufficiency of existing lighting. (photo 2.c)



3. Amphitheatre Seating Area

a. Seating for LRA consists of 13 rows of low, bench seating located on graduated tiers. The top and bottom rows are wood; there are several cracked boards that may need replacement. Some paint is needed on the top row. Six additional rows are entirely clad in a product that appears to be **molded fiberglass** rather than the described *sheet metal*. The remaining five rows have **molded fiberglass** cladding on both end sections and are unclad in the central section. All rows appear firm. Several **molded fiberglass** covers require new rivets. (photo 3.a)



b. Retaining walls of red brick flank the seating area. The bottom right side wall tilts forward. The upper right side walls are plumb. Walls on the left side have more significant tilting on several levels. Many of the walls have serious cracking and should be repaired. (photo 3.b)



c. The walls are topped with **concrete** coping, rather than the described *stone*. A wash could be used to visually improve the look of unsightly existing repairs. Several sections require a new **concrete** cap.

d. Brick is spalling in many locations and should be repaired.

e. Pavers are uneven on several levels of the retaining walls, especially on the left side.

f. Foot level lighting units are located on every other seat row at both ends. *Backup data needed* to determine sufficiency of existing lighting. (photo 3.c)



g. Minor concrete cracking appears on several seating tiers. The concrete steps are in good condition. A large crack appears on the stage house concrete pad and should be filled.

4. Amphitheatre Stage/Stage House

a. The current condition of the stage remains unknown due to the lack of an engineering examination of the underlying structure. The plywood itself shows some visible de-lamination.

b. The right side of the stage extends six inches further from the stage house to its edge. Both sides of the stage are 68" from the first seating row.

c. A commercial-quality tarp, rather than roof, will provide any needed protection for the stage floor.

d. The stage house is a solid block building with well-maintained paint. Parts are sheathed with diagonally placed 1x6 boards with are used decoratively and to screen the light booths. Fewer than 15 boards (undetermined length) are necessary to address rotting boards/missing siding. (photo 4.a & 4.b)



f. The stage lighting towers were removed after a county technician who was removing lights for storage had to leap to a roof as the pole gave way due to rust damage. New lighting and towers are required,

g. There is a grated drain at the each corner of the stage. The drain grates are blocked by leaves. *Backup data needed* to determine performance with regard to water drainage in front of the stage. (photo 4.c)



h. Conflicting opinions have been presented *within* the options report on the LRA electrical service. Existing service may well be adequate for most performances. *Further data is needed.*

5. Light Booths

a. The existing mildewed wood shake roofing on both towers should be replaced with a fire-retardant manufactured shake. *Backup data needed* for performance of existing (apparently) copper guttering, which should be retained or sold.

6. Control Booths

a. The existing booths are sided with grooved plywood panels and are well maintained and neatly painted to match the Stage House. A piece of 1"x4" -9' corner trim has severely rotted and needs replacement on the left side booth. Modest mold deposits at top of both booths can be pressure-washed or bleach-wiped. (photo 6.a)



7. Comfort Station

a. The Comfort Station building exterior is well maintained, with recent roofing and paint. (photo 7.a)



b. The PNA report indicates possible corrective ADA actions may be needed. An examination of the restrooms showed that both the men's and women's rooms had one large sized stall 48 inches wide with grab bars. (photo 7.b & 7.c)

