

2024 SPECIAL SESSION I

ENROLLED

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 956

Commending Paul Gilbert.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, October 27, 2025

WHEREAS, Paul Gilbert will retire as the executive director of NOVA Parks in December 2025 after two decades of exceptional leadership and management of Northern Virginia's regional parks and historic sites; and

WHEREAS, NOVA Parks serves the Counties of Arlington, Fairfax, and Loudoun and the Cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Falls Church; under Paul Gilbert's leadership the authority has added more than 3,500 acres of parkland, created 18 new parks, and completed 22 land acquisitions, including historically and environmentally significant sites; and

WHEREAS, Paul Gilbert guided major expansions that enhanced recreation, tourism, and education, such as the Turning Point Suffragist Memorial and the Jean R. Packard Center and River View event space at Occoquan Regional Park, Korean Bell Garden and Winter Walk of Lights at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens, Reservoir Park at Beaverdam Reservoir, Festival of Lights at Bull Run Regional Park, Climb Upton outdoor adventure park in Arlington, and Dual Trails project on the Washington & Old Dominion Trail in Falls Church; and

WHEREAS, Paul Gilbert transformed NOVA Parks into a financially self-sufficient regional agency by fostering innovation, cost recovery, and strategic investment to sustain both recreation and conservation; and

WHEREAS, under Paul Gilbert's direction, NOVA Parks launched environmental credit programs that fund park improvements while protecting forests, streams, and open spaces across the region; and

WHEREAS, Paul Gilbert strengthened partnerships with schools and nonprofits to promote environmental education, including the Outdoor Kids Grants program, which enables Title I schools to provide hands-on science learning in regional parks; and

WHEREAS, Paul Gilbert promoted inclusive historical interpretation, ensuring NOVA Parks tells diverse stories that reflect Northern Virginia's full history, including its African American heritage; and

WHEREAS, during Paul Gilbert's tenure, NOVA Parks and the Community Foundation for Northern Virginia established endowment funds supporting land preservation, capital improvements, and outdoor education programs; and

WHEREAS, through his visionary leadership, Paul Gilbert made NOVA Parks a national model for regional collaboration, balancing environmental protection, outdoor recreation, and financial sustainability; and

WHEREAS, Paul Gilbert's contributions have been widely recognized, including the 2024 Pugsley Medal from the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration, the 2022 Freedom Fund Award from the Fairfax NAACP, the 2017 Distinguished Alumni Award from George Mason University, the Outstanding Contribution to Outdoor Recreation award from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and Land Manager of the Year from Mid-Atlantic Mountain Bike Enthusiasts; and

WHEREAS, a lifelong Northern Virginia resident who grew up in Springfield, Paul Gilbert credits his passion for conservation to his early experiences in Scouting; and

WHEREAS, beyond NOVA Parks, Paul Gilbert has served as chair of the Visit Fairfax Board of Directors and as an executive-in-residence at George Mason University, mentoring future park and recreation leaders; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That Paul Gilbert hereby be commended on the occasion of his retirement as the executive director of NOVA Parks; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Paul Gilbert as an expression of the House of Delegates' admiration for his contributions to preserving and protecting Northern Virginia's natural and historical resources.

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