

**Leeway Overlee Civic Association
Minutes of General Membership Meeting
Wednesday, January 18, 2006 at Lee Community Center**

1. Civic Association President Vicki Howard called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. The meeting agenda was adopted; minutes of the October 12 General Membership meeting were distributed and later approved. The report of the Treasurer, Carolyn Connell, showed an increase in net assets of \$46.67 to \$3,823.17 as of 1/16/06, reflecting \$250 in income from vendor advertising and membership fees, offset by \$203.33 for printing of the January newsletter. Ms. Howard then reported on old business. The County had turned down the application for a sidewalk under the "missing links" program from residents on N. Illinois Street; purchasing an easement would have been required, and the request fell beyond the parameters of the program. Only three of 12 applications had been approved. Concerning the gas station at 5501 Lee Highway, the County had turned down the application for zoning the strip at the rear of the site RA18. The station owner then clear-cut the strip; the station changed owners; and the new owner removed the debris and laid down gravel. The County had not replied to a question on the zoning of the strip; at least the main part was zoned C1 commercial. Rob Swennes noted that there are screening requirements between residential and commercial.

2. Turning to new business, Ms. Howard discussed a draft Civic Association letter to the county regarding the Lee Community Center renovation project. It would say that the Association: 1) fully supports the site renovation, to include improved parking, fence, field, and butterfly garden; 2) deeply laments the delay in the project [due to a threefold increase in projected cost]; 3) is concerned about expansion of parking in place of trees; and 4) would like to be included in any re-examination of the project, noting that reducing parking could be one way to reduce the cost. The County has said that it needed to look at costs before discussing in depth. Increased construction costs are a problem not just for this project. A member noted that there was a significant problem with (rain) water runoff at the southeast corner of the park, 24th & Kentucky Sts., that any plan should address, and suggested the addition of a storm drain at the corner. Ms. Howard noted that the re-grading of the ball field should substantially mitigate that problem. Rob Swennes added that the Association's overall preference was not to re-visit the plan, but to have it funded.

3. William (Chips) Johnson provided an update on plans for Westover Library/Reed School reconstruction. Library plans have been revised; elevations and floor plans are completed; the architect is still working on the exterior. The new library is to be completed by late 2007. Reed School will be phase two. The county is about to sign an architecture/engineering contract for \$860,000 for a structure that will serve: 1) the pre-school program for County school employees; 2) a (small) special education program; and 3) a teen parenting program. A planning committee will involve all stakeholders. An informal agreement with the County, dating back to 1998, recognizes the impact of the projects on each other and the desire to cluster buildings to maintain open space, i.e. by building vertically, and to minimize encroachment on the sledding hill. To date there has been good communication between the County and Arlington Public Schools, and the community will continue to encourage that.

4. Ms. Howard then introduced the featured speaker, Dr. Robert G. Smith, Superintendent of Arlington Public Schools (APS). Dr. Smith spoke on APS's planning. APS has a strategic plan which must by law be updated at least every six years. In turn, every school

has a (five-year) School Improvement Plan and a (one-year) School Management Plan. Every APS department (e.g. construction) also has a plan. Every administrator has a workplan, with at least three objectives in addition to professional development. Teachers each have a professional development plan. These are reviewed at the end of each year to see how it was fulfilled. The structure of the strategic plan covers goals, objectives, indicators, and targets. APS's strategic goals are: 1) rising achievement, for all students, and all student groups; 2) eliminate gaps in achievement; 3) make education responsive by preparing students to succeed in a diverse, changing world and being responsive to students' interests; and 4) promote effective relationships, not only within APS, but between APS and the County as a whole. This recognizes that only 11% of Arlington's population is school-age, which percentage reflects a continuing decline. These goals are based on principles of ensuring the ability to make timely decisions about the future; preparing students for life; providing a good experience, i.e. learning in an environment where students are supported, encouraged, and want to be in school; and offering differentiated education.

5. Dr. Smith then provided some statistics on parameters and achievement of the goals. APS enrollment (pre-K through 12th grade) is in its fourth year of decline. It was 19,200 at its peak; was 18,744 last year (2004-05); is 18,411 this year (2005-06); and is projected at 18,190 next year (2006-07). However, it will start to grow again: in 1999, APS had two pre-K classes; now it has 23. Kindergarten and first grade are the largest classes in student enrollment. Arlington students are 46% white, 29% Hispanic, 14% black, and 10% Asian. Students speak a total of 105 languages and hail from 128 countries of origin; 42% speak a second language. Overall APS students have an 88% pass rate on Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Average SAT scores are higher than those for both the state and the nation. The proportion of second graders scoring below grade level has declined from 17% to 5%. Enrollment in either AP or IB courses has increased from 23% to 32%, and enrollment in advanced classes by 6th-12th graders has risen by a third.

6. A question and answer session followed. Dr. Smith explained that student-teacher ratios vary according to the teaching challenges. The average is 20; Swanson (Middle School)'s is higher than Gunston's. Arlington has an allotment of 24-27 students selected annually for Thomas Jefferson Science High School: this is proportionate to its share of the contributing population. Concerning construction, the plan has been for Reed School to be funded by the next bond, but rising construction costs could delay it. Kenmore MS cost \$37 million (less than it would have cost to renovate); the new Washington-Lee HS is now budgeted at \$92.5 million. APS has made energy and environmental efficiency a priority as energy costs are a major part of the operating budget. On re-districting (i.e. of elementary school boundaries), APS decided to defer any action for two years. Tuckahoe currently has more students than it should, while Jamestown faces a gap. On handling bad teachers, Dr. Smith explained that all teachers are on probation for the first three years; this gives a good opportunity for assessment and terminating contracts when needed. Ms. Howard thanked Dr. Smith both for his presentation and his answers and the meeting concluded shortly after 9 p.m.