

**Leeway Overlee Civic Association**  
**Minutes of General Membership Meeting**  
**Wednesday, January 20, 2010 at Reed School (Family & Consumer Science Room)**

**Civic Association Reports**

1. Civic Association President Jenni Michener called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. Starting with reports on old business, she briefed on the East Falls Church (EFC) Redevelopment Task Force<sup>1</sup> with information provided by Bob Moore and Jerry Auten, who have followed the task force on behalf of Leeway Overlee but were not able to be present. The latest draft of the EFC Metro site calls for a six story building; however, because this is lower than previously envisioned, the plan would offer less green space than in earlier drawings. The next task force meeting was scheduled for January 27.
2. Turning to new business, Ms. Michener reported that Arlington County had advised the Civic Association of Applications for Use Permits in the neighborhood. These were to be reviewed at the January 23 County Board meeting. They included permission for new antennas to be attached to the pole tower at 6900 Washington Blvd., renewal of permission for a dance studio at the Lee-Harrison shopping center, a new use permit for the bank being built [replacing the Pure gas station] at Illinois St. & Lee Hwy., and a request by Rivendell School to put up new sign on Lee Hwy. Although the pole/tower is outside of

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Arlington County website:

The purpose of the East Falls Church Planning and Transportation Study is to generate a land use and transportation vision for transit-oriented development in the East Falls Church area of Arlington County and the City of Falls Church. There are two phases to this study: land use vision development and transportation planning.

The land use visioning will be led by a staff team of Arlington County and City of Falls Church planners who will initiate the development of a concept plan and policy framework (i.e. potential zoning and land use changes) for the study area. The staff team will be guided by a citizen Task Force comprised of representatives from both jurisdictions. Representatives from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) will also participate in the process. WMATA and VDOT will be key participants in both the land use and transportation analyses since they are major landowners who control important pieces of the transportation infrastructure, including the Metrorail station, Interstate 66, and several state-owned arterial roadways.

The goal of the visioning exercise is to develop a concept plan that will set height, density, use mix, and urban design standards for Arlington County sites, including the East Falls Church Metro parking lot and other sites that are likely to redevelop, within the study area. The City of Falls Church 2005 Comprehensive Plan will be used as the guide for the sites within the City of Falls Church.

After a preliminary land use plan has been developed for the identified sites within the East Falls Church area, the jurisdictions will then engage a transportation consultant to analyze the transportation infrastructure in the area given the proposed land use recommendations. The transportation analysis will include an evaluation of pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular access to the metro station and station capacity and will recommend infrastructure, streetscape and other public improvements to create an urban, walkable, and accessible mixed-use environment within this area. This portion of the study will be completed with grant funds received from the Virginia Department of Transportation's Multimodal Planning Grant Program.

A final Concept Plan and Policy Framework will be developed and presented to the Arlington County Board and City of Falls Church City Council for adoption upon completion of the project.

our civic association boundaries, residents could be impacted. Residents were requested to let Leeway Overlee officers know if they had any concerns.

3. Ms. Michener invited Arlington Police Officer James A. O'Daniel to brief on local crime and safety concerns. Officer O'Daniel noted that there had been two car larcenies. The modus operandi apparently involved a person or persons walking along the street at night checking for open car doors. One such suspect was caught, but other cases remain unsolved; residents are advised to make sure they lock their car doors when leaving their cars. Officer O'Daniel also reported the burglary of a neighborhood house, through an open back door. Larcenies are mostly listed in Arlington crime listserv; residents can subscribe to be aware of what's going on in the County. Lee-Harrison Safeway has also reported two prescription frauds. Finally, police had received a report of a guy on the W&OD bike path flashing women. The police had a partial description, but no suspects identified. A resident asked about the lights, many of which were out; Officer O'Daniel noted that the County Parks Department maintains lights. For personal safety, he advised avoiding the trail at night. Civic Association Treasurer Karla Brown noted a report on the state police website of a recently convicted sexual predator (untoward behavior, classified as violent) having moved into neighborhood at 22<sup>nd</sup> & Kensington; Officer O'Daniel said he would look up and forward to the Civic Association any further public information. Residents who wish to contact him are welcome to do so at [jodaniel@arlingtonva.us](mailto:jodaniel@arlingtonva.us).

4. Ms. Michener then invited reports from other officers. Ms. Brown reported on Leeway Overlee CA finances. Income of \$ 785.00 from newsletter advertising and membership dues for the new year exceeded expenses for website hosting and newsletter printing of \$ 371.70, resulting in a net change in assets of \$413.30 and a balance of \$4,291.71, mostly held in a certificate of deposit. CA Secretary Ladd Connell then summarized the minutes of the October 20 meeting, which focused on EFC redevelopment and review of the Neighborhood Conservation Plan's Demographics, Urban Forestry, Historic Preservation, and Parks, Recreation, & Beautification chapters.

5. Leeway Overlee delegate to the Arlington County Civic Federation Ed Robinson then reported on the ACCF's most recent meeting, January 5, with the county's state legislative delegation. The legislators reported that the state faced a lot of increased expenses, but had made no plans to raise revenue.

### **Arlington County Budget**

6. Ms. Michener then gave the floor to the invited speaker, Richard Stephenson, who serves as Budget Director in the County Department of Revenue & Finance. Mr. Stephenson noted that he grew up in the neighborhood (at 19<sup>th</sup> & Illinois Streets), has worked for the County for 16 years, and still lives nearby (now on Harrison St. near Wilson Blvd.). He focused first in his talk on what to expect for FY 2011, which begins July 1.

7. The County is still in the budget formulation stage; the County Manager will present the draft budget to the County Board in February. Because of the overall financial crisis, County staff had decided to start budget formulation earlier and last September, already began planning for lower revenue. They had requested guidance from the Board, and the Board had advised the staff to pursue a combination of revenue increases balanced by

service cuts. Staff were concerned about some loss of residential property tax revenue, but moreso about commercial. They initially projected an \$80-90 million gap, divided equally between the County budget for itself and that for County schools, out of a roughly \$947 million total budget [including some \$350 million transferred to County schools]. Staff had invited civic federation leaders to discuss the situation, and followed this up in discussion with the County Board in October. In early December, staff held a budget forum at Washington-Lee School, followed this month [January] by an online chat with the community by the County Manager. February 20 is date for actual release of the budget proposal. The main issues raised have been service cuts, such as library hours. Budget hearings are scheduled March 23-24 for the expenditure side and March 25-6 for the revenue (tax and fee) side. The budget is then scheduled to be adopted April 24 for FY 2011, which begins July 1, 2010.

8. Residential real estate assessments went out Friday; they were down slightly (3.25%) but better than the 5% projected fall; similarly, commercial assessments fell 12.7% against 14% projected. Thus the projected gap is lower than originally projected, at least on the County side: \$30-35 million. The County Board will be offered options for raising taxes and fees, matched by cuts. The Board won't necessarily accept the staff proposals. However, once they advertise potential tax and fee increases for public comment, they can't set increases above those levels. The Board has requested a range of options ("switch-outs") as possibilities, but what it will do can't be predicted at this point. Both board and staff are trying to take into account community input, but will have to make cuts that will have an impact in terms of services. The County already cut the expenditure budget \$12-14 million in the current fiscal year, doing so mostly from internal line items. Staff work to provide the Board with accurate information as to what cuts will mean in terms of services. Everything is on the table, and every County department will take a hit; this year's cuts will inevitably impact things that citizens will notice. Last year the residential real estate tax rate went up 2.7 cents [per \$100 assessed value] and the County cut 96 employees (out of roughly 2,000), although 40 positions were subsequently filled.

9. Mr. Stephenson then answered questions. Concerning the breakdown of revenues, he noted that residential real estate is 52% of total real estate, which is about three-quarters of total revenues. Thus staff (and the Board) were concerned by the potential slide in commercial real estate values; fortunately that has turned out to be on the low end of what was predicted. Personal property taxes account for 5% of total county taxes and fees (divided roughly 65% for vehicles, 35% for business tangible). Business license, restaurant and hotel taxes, along with service fees (water, sewer, and refuse) make up most of the rest. Water and sewer fees fund those services only, and are not used for anything else. Park & recreation user fees offset costs, but these operations are not self-supporting. The County also receives funds from the federal government, a little less than \$30 million in FY 2010. Asked about increasing fees for other facilities, such as the library or swimming pools, Mr. Stephenson noted that normal fee increases are built into the base, but they are not planning on extra increases.

10. Budget staff will have a list of additional measures, however, for Board and community consideration. This would include, for instance, further postponing of some major capital projects. The Board had already frozen capital expenditures in FY 2010. Mr. Stephenson underscored that the Board has its own views; staff's job is to lay out

options. Concerning Metro, Arlington County is part of the regional authority and pays over \$20 million into Metro annually; the County also issues debt to support its capital expenses. Metro is further supported by federal and state funds.

11. Concerning Virginia state revenues, the County doesn't know what to expect; state funds were cut by \$2 million in September after having been cut \$9 to \$10 million earlier in the year. Although Governor Kaine just proposed an FY 2011 budget in December, new Governor McDonnell will propose revisions. The County expects to face more cuts, such as to the Sheriff's office, which was cut already under HB599, covering local law enforcement. Noting the State can't run a deficit, another questioner asked whether it would make sense to raise the gas tax, which is relatively low and hasn't been raised in many years. Mr. Stephenson noted that while this made fiscal sense, the County was wary that anything Arlington suggests, the State would do the exact opposite. Still, County staff work with Arlington Delegates to support responsible fiscal policies at the State level. As for Federal funding, it has remained fairly constant; however, a lot of Federal funds flow through the State, so the County often doesn't see directly what it might have received, absent State re-apportionment.

12. Concerning schools, Mr. Stephenson explained that the County does share about half of the real estate taxes with Arlington Public Schools, but other revenues don't go to APS. Thus, about 37% of total general fund budget goes to APS when all sources are taken into account. As for other cuts to be expected, Mr. Stephenson noted that all areas face some cuts. He noted that County Manager Ron Carlee proposed closing Gulf Branch Nature Center and cutting library hours; these generated a lot of opposition, so it is hard to predict what the Board will do. (Barbara Donnellan is now acting County Manager since Mr. Carlee's retirement.) On the whole, however, Arlington is "in good shape." Other counties have much more serious issues.

13. Members remarked that the County should do more to publicize the good news about Arlington, such as its small tax increases and small declines (1.5% annually in the last three years) in assessed values; meanwhile, we have a beautiful library and other great facilities. Mr. Stephenson noted that publicity was up to the elected officials and Communications staff. His focus was on the numbers: for example, taxes on the average single family home last year went up only \$51. Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee representative Rob Swennes suggested that interested residents can subscribe to County press releases or the Arlington Insider, since private papers such as the *Sun Gazette* tend to pick on the negative, as that sells more papers

#### **Neighborhood Conservation Plan**

14. Ms. Michener then invited member Cathy Mercil to introduce the Neighborhood Conservation Plan, which Ms. Mercil has coordinated updating from the 1993 version. The Plan is divided into chapters, five of which have already been provided to the County. County funding of Neighborhood Conservation projects hinge on the Civic Association having an approved and up-to-date plan. Drafts are due to the County by March 1. Final approval of the Plan will take place at the Leeway Overlee spring meeting, following County review. Today's meeting was to review the remaining chapters.

15. Concerning Traffic, Ms. Mercil summarized the chapter and its recommendations. Residents who work in Falls Church noted the difficulty of making a left from Lee Highway onto Sycamore during rush hours. They suggested the intersection could use left hand arrow that would allow vehicles to turn without racing the red light. This would increase the flow of traffic. Ms. Mercil noted that the Plan focused on conditions within Civic Association borders; the Lee-Sycamore intersection is in the Arlington East Falls Church Civic Association. However, the Plan could mention conditions that affect our CA residents. While the State (VDOT) has responsibility for Lee Highway, VDOT did add signals at George Mason & Lee Highway. Rob Swennes suggested the Civic Association could check with the County to see if they have done counts of traffic at Sycamore and Lee.

16. Karla Brown presented the Neighborhood Conditions chapter (entitled Capital Improvements in the 1993 plan). This was modified to reflect what the County is looking for now, specifically to list curbs, gutters, and sidewalks that need to be installed or fixed. The chapter includes a map (created by the County) that shows graphically where these amenities exist (or are supposed to). It also incorporates input from a written survey of residents and results of a walking survey of the neighborhood by Civic Association executive committee members to confirm what is in place and what's missing. Based on this information, the chapter lists the major areas of curb, gutter, and sidewalk needed, along with a catch-all at the end that leaves room for further requests. In this context, residents discussed the possible need for a sidewalk on North 24<sup>th</sup> St. along the way to the Lee Center.

17. A separate section covers street lighting and utilities. Recommendations in this are primarily oriented to provide lighting where there is no lighting. Residents questioned the type of lights that would be installed and light pollution, such as when street lights beam into residents' bedrooms. The chapter makes no comment on types of lights or to request replacing of old lights. Civic Federation representative Ed Robinson, who worked on lighting professionally, advised that for efficient street coverage, there is no substitute for height. The decorative lights installed for recent streetscape projects "cost three times as much and do half the job." Rob Swennes noted that the County uses the tall "Cobra" lights on arterial streets, and Carlyle style lights, designed for more appeal from a pedestrian standpoint, on residential streets. Concerning light pollution, it was noted that this is generally more an issue for athletic facilities that require higher levels of lighting, and that most cases could be dealt with by installing better shades.

18. Traffic calming and parking are also covered as sections in the Neighborhood Conditions chapter. Discussion focused on the three recommendations for traffic calming: these are for the three areas that qualify, based on County guidelines: Illinois, Kentucky, and Kensington Streets, all between Lee Highway and North 22nd Street. The recommendations also include a catch-all to cover new projects for which there is neighborhood demand. As for parking, the recommendations are for the County to enforce existing ordinances restricting corner parking to ensure good line of sight for crossing motorists and to develop new codes (other than zoned parking) that ensure adequate parking for commercial and multi-unit residential properties to minimize overflow parking onto adjoining neighborhood streets.

19. Rob Swennes presented the Land Use & Zoning chapter, a good portion of which is from the last plan, while taking into account that we had a number of recommendations that were fulfilled. One specific point concerned the Overlee Swim Club: while not recommending that Overlee have its zoning changed, the Plan notes that if Overlee would like to change to S-3A (Special Districts, commonly used for parks and school land), the Civic Association would support. This would maintain it as a semi-public space, if the swim club goes away. A second point addressed the land around the (former) AT&T Tower (now with multiple radio and telecom users). The recommendation is for the County to consider higher residential zoning for the piece that faces Lee Highway, with access from Lee Highway. As currently zoned, this will have four single family homes on a cul-de-sac backing up to Lee Highway. This could be done in conjunction with, and the community would prefer, removal of the existing tower or at least its replacement by a less-conspicuous monopole erected at the fringe of the old AT&T property and adjacent to commercially zoned property not near existing homes, i.e., behind the former Whitman Walker Clinic. The Plan acknowledged that this will happen only if the owners decide to do it.

20. Ladd Connell presented the final chapter for consideration, on Commercial Environment and Impacts. He noted that a survey of residents had found that the most problematic commercial issues (as ranked by respondents) were "Traffic," "Parking availability at stores," "General appearance of commercial area," "Level of upkeep of commercial area," "Safety while walking," and "Safety while driving." Recommendations in this chapter sought to address these concerns primarily through better County enforcement of existing ordinances or stricter licensing, e.g. to ensure businesses have adequate provision for parking. It also encouraged the County to ensure adequate pedestrian (including handicapped) access to and from shopping areas and to develop a model for alternatives for small business sites where commercial redevelopment is difficult to attract, such as those small and/or narrow properties.

21. Ms. Michener then called for a vote to approve the chapters as discussed. Member Doug Watson so moved, Karla Brown seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously. Mr. Swennes reminded all that a final approval will be called for at the Leeway Overlee spring meeting after County review and editing. The meeting was then adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

--Submitted by Ladd Connell, Secretary