

Leeway Overlee Civic Association
Minutes of General Membership Meeting
Wed., January 23, 2013, at Westover Library (Conference Room)

1. Civic Association (CA) President Kim Klingler called the meeting to order at 7:35 and invited participants to introduce themselves. Following introductions, Treasurer Jenni Michener reported a CA current balance of \$2331.47, reflecting receipts of \$85 in dues and \$535 in ads, offset by payments to musicians for community day/yard sale entertainment and to Welsh printing for newsletter production. CA Secretary Ladd Connell summarized the Minutes of the previous general membership meeting (October 18, 2012) and they were duly approved.

2. Ms. Klingler reported that at the most recent Arlington County Civic Federation meeting, issues relating to the Metro system were discussed. One improvement being made is that replacements will have same brands and parts. She also noted Civic Federation discussion of a new noise ordinance, reflecting citizens' concerns about emergency vehicles and desire for a standard of "reasonableness."

3. In other updates, Rob Swennes reported that the Westover Farmers Market, operating during winter, including most of the summer vendors; only vegetable vendors had dropped out although they still get fresh spinach and mushrooms (he recommends the crimini mushrooms!). The market now has a DC-based vendor of granolas. The market is not seeking a coffee vendor; it wants to support Toby's Coffee and Ice Cream shop, which is open during market hours, and has both items available for purchase (and a bathroom that vendors and customers can use!). There is less of a crowd in the winter; more visitors are expected in the spring. Half of the vendors are now located on the plaza, in front of Westover Library, rather than on McKinley Rd. Local stores have stated they are happy with the additional business. Winter hours are 9am-1pm; summer hours, beginning May 1, would be 8am-12pm.

4. Turning to New Business, Ms. Klingler noted that sewer work was taking place on John Marshall Blvd. at Lee Highway. This means that at least 1 lane will be blocked during non-rush hours (beginning at 9:30am); questions should be directed to Washington Gas. Ms. Klingler raised the issue of expanding the Civic Association's communications via social media; taking a poll, she found that only six of the attendees were on Facebook.

Urban Agriculture Task Force - John Vihstadt

5. Ms. Klingler then introduced John Vihstadt, who chairs the Arlington County Task Force on Urban Agriculture (with Joan Horwit as vice chair), appointed by the County Board a year ago. By way of background, Mr. Vihstadt explained that Arlington County likes to be on the cutting edge of new initiatives. County Board members Walter Tejada and Jay Fisette had noticed that other cities were examining urban agriculture. The topic ranges from backyard hens, to rooftop gardens, to community gardens, and more. As examples, Mr. Vihstadt noted that sage, turnip, and oriental kale all can be grown in gardens, along with many other foods.

6. Mr. Vihstadt offered the Task Force's vision statement, which focuses on researching best practices and promoting community wellness from urban agriculture [see Arlington County

website]. The Task Force is a strictly volunteer effort; it will identify pros and cons of bringing agriculture to Arlington, and propose a food action plan to integrate existing and proposed policies. It has 19 members, all appointed by county board, and includes representatives of Arlington Public Schools, Arlington Parks & Recreation, and Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC). The Task Force covers food production, food distribution, soil creation and nourishment, and institutional support services. Expected TF outcomes are recommendations on institutional support services; possible executive, regulatory, and legislative structures; incentives needed; and what is effective, practical, and affordable, humanly & financially.

7. Mr. Vihstadt gave a survey of the TF issues. He noted that growing food in Arlington is very popular, with up to a two year wait for a community garden. Concerning garden space, a lot of options have been discussed. For example, the large vacant lot on the east side of Glebe Road just south of Lee Highway had been bought by developers in 2006-07; it has been fallow now for five years, but is being re-developed for high-end residential. There was hope of using open lots for a few years while development is pending. Rooftop gardens are another option, but raise questions of access, building codes, and materials. Another option is yard-sharing, between those who have land but don't garden & those who want it. The possibility of orchards (fruit trees in County parks) has been discussed, but concerns this could attract pests and homeless were raised. On raising chickens, it was clear that roosters would not be allowed, but hens might be; views diverge widely on this. The current policy is that it is allowed only on lots with at least an acre. Another initiative is "Lawns 2 Lettuce 4 Lunch:" many county grade schools are growing lettuce for their cafeterias; this is being done in Reevesland, the former farm area south of Wilson Blvd in Bluemont Park.

8. Focusing on raising of chickens, Mr. Vihstadt discussed the range of questions addressed: what about coop rules? Would they be inspected, pre-approved? Do neighbors need to approve, what would be the limits in terms of numbers, distance from property line, education/training, and testing requirements? Should it start as a pilot program, possibly in community gardens? How would they have to be contained (coop, or free range within a lot)? Animal rights advocates may oppose coops. TF recommendation will consider health, disease, rodents, predators, noise, odors, & aesthetic considerations, monitoring & enforcement, and cost. While examining all issues, the Task Force will only propose that rules change if it reaches a consensus.

9. Turning to other topics, Mr. Vihstadt noted that beekeeping per se is not regulated in Arlington County, but could be regulated under general nuisance laws. The same is true for other domesticated animals, such as goats. Residents had also raised the idea of "putting the Garden back in garden apartments." Potential benefits include food production & security, community bonding, and a healthier environment. This is already being done in several apartment complexes; many residents snap up gardening opportunities. As to front yard gardens, these are not regulated as such, although most residents want their front yards to have curb appeal, and agree that "good [well-placed] gardens make good neighbors." Concerning farmers'

markets, the farm-to-table (locavore) movement is growing in Arlington: we now have seven local farmers' markets, at least one every day except on Monday & Friday. Vendors actually are stretched thin trying to cover them all. Some are now accepting SNAP/food stamps. Related to this, schools, institutions, and restaurants are looking at how to maximize/optimize use of unconsumed foods. AFAC is considering using churches and community centers for packing & distribution. Other issues the Task Force is covering include food trucks and trailers; rooftop gardens on Arlington restaurants; soil health, composting & recycling; a Master Composter program; and organic waste collection. Concluding, Mr. Vihstadt said the Task force hopes its results will encourage local production & consumption. For further information, he suggested residents visit the County website under topics/urban agriculture. He also invited Task Force participation; the County staff point of contact is khaun@arlingtonva.us.

10. A question and answer session followed. Mr. Vihstadt advised that beekeeping has not been an issue so far. On the issues with raising hens, he noted that coops and feed are expensive; most people don't have time to care for them; hens stop laying after five years, but some owners get attached, and no shelter takes hens within 30 miles; and hens are also subject to predators (e.g. foxes). The Task Force was looking at other jurisdictions' rules: Vienna (Va.) allows hens; Charlottesville city doesn't allow, but the county does, as does Baltimore, without problems, but the Task Force hasn't had a chance to visit any of these sites. On the idea of sharing yards for gardening, reaction so far has been positive; it could be run by Virginia Co-op Extension. The portion of yard owners would want gardened could be put on a local discussion listserv. On composting, a resident noted the need for a latch to keep rodents out; composters currently provided by Arlington don't, as rats will chew through the plastic. Another resident commented that the standard for new regulations should be that they don't create new problems.

11. Before closing the meeting, Ms. Klingler noted that all were welcome to attend meetings of the Civic Federation; the next would be held February 5, 2013, at Virginia Hospital Center, George Mason Drive. She also advised that CERT training begins in March, and that Arlingtonians for Sensible Transit had provided brochures on "Examining Our Priorities" to which all were welcome. The meeting was adjourned at 9 p.m.

--Submitted by Ladd Connell, Secretary