

Leeway Overlee (LO) Civic Association (CA)
Minutes of General Membership Meeting
Mon., January 26, 2015, 7:30pm at Westover Library (Conference Room)

1. Leeway Overlee CA President Greg Rusk opened the meeting and presented the agenda as follows:

Time	Topic	Presenter
7:30-7:40	General Business (introduction, approval of minutes, treasurer's report)	Greg Rusk, LOCA President Jenni Michener, LOCA Treasurer
7:40-7:55	Neighborhood Conservation Projects	Rob Swennes, Neighborhood Conservation Representative
7:55-8:00	Lee Highway Revitalization Community Meeting Tomorrow Night	Greg Rusk
8:00-8:45	Arlington Economic Development (Presentation and Q&A)	Jay Fiset, Arlington County Board Member

Following introductions, Minutes of the October 7 general membership meeting were shared and the Treasurer's report delivered and both were accepted without changes.

Neighborhood Conservation Projects

2. Leeway Neighborhood Conservation Committee Representative Rob Swennes then explained the proposal for a neighborhood conservation project on the east side of John Marshall Blvd. btwn 22nd Road and 23rd St., which lacks a sidewalk. Pedestrians use the street, notably to walk to Overlee Pool, so the absence of a sidewalk is a safety issue. This would become the second priority project, following an existing one on N. 22nd St. btwn Lexington & Kentucky. Like that, which fronts along only three houses, this project would be relatively small. It was recommended that the street would have parking on only one side to permit two-way traffic without encroaching significantly on the Greenway.

3. A block resident noted that they had submitted a letter to the Civic Association eight years ago. Ms. Michener noted that this is at least the 3rd time this project had been proposed, but that competing proposals had been given priority. A resident moved that Leeway support the project, and the motion was seconded. Mr. Swennes specified that this meant voting for the project to become Leeway's second priority project, following the one that had already been approved by the Civic Association. Mr. Rusk called for a vote, with a result of 15 in favor, 4 abstaining, and none opposed.

Lee Highway Revitalization

4. Mr. Rusk announced that a community meeting of the Lee Highway Alliance on revitalization of the commercial area along Lee Highway will take place on Tuesday evening, January 27th, from 7 – 9 p.m. in the multipurpose room of Tuckahoe Elementary School, 6550 N. 26th Street. The residents of several civic association areas adjacent to Lee Highway will be at this

informational meeting. The meeting will lay the groundwork for a later formal charrette – a collaborative discussion and community-driven design forum. Prior to the charrette, the Lee Highway Alliance (LHA) has scheduled a series of briefing meetings with local residents along the Lee Highway corridor. This was the briefing meeting for our area. It was designed to address how the nearby Lee Highway commercial area will change in the coming decades; he encouraged those interested to attend.

Arlington Economic Development - Jay Fisette, Arlington County Board Member

5. Mr. Rusk, noting that last time, County energy staff member Richard Dooley spoke about Arlington's energy plan, remarked that this evening's speaker came with even greater knowledge and authority: County Board member Jay Fisette. The theme of the discussion was to be Arlington's economic development. Mr. Fisette thanked Mr. Rusk and offered take questions and issues that residents wanted to hear about. Topics that residents asked about included "public land for public good;" Columbia Pike re-development in light of the streetcar cancellation; Arlington's role in/responsibility for Metro; Thomas Jefferson Middle School and Arlington's park system; office vacancies (& how to solve the current vacancy rate of 20%).

6. Mr. Fisette addressed office vacancies first, noting positive trends such as the re-development of the core block in Rosslyn office & residential buildings replacing Orleans House, including a high-rise with external elevator that will have an observation deck as a tourist attraction. He noted the biggest issue had been the Defense Department's Base Re-Alignment and Closure (BRAC), which began in 2005-06, to consolidate functions in more secure bases, which resulted in Arlington losing more BRAC-related tenants and jobs (17,000) than any other locality in the US. A few years ago Arlington had only an 8% office vacancy rate; some planners thought it too low to allow tenants flexibility, and that 10-15% is ideal. BRAC led to a planning process, in which the County sought the best balance of residences and offices. Crystal City was the most heavily commercial area; to balance this, the Board had just approved a site plan to allow a new residential building with two towers, to replace an office building. Other challenges impacting economic competitiveness included school growth and housing affordability (in this, Arlington is a victim of its own success). On the positive side, Arlington has the best transit system in Virginia (40% of all transit trips in Va. Start or end in Arlington); the school system (\$19,000 value per kid per year), although only 13% of adults have kids in the schools; the crime rate as low as ever; and a tax rate that is near the lowest in the region, although assessed values are not.

7. Concerning affordable housing, Mr. Fisette said that starting 20 years ago, with [former Board Chair] Al Eisenberg, Arlington had worked to establish affordable housing, both for principle and for economic reasons (the community benefits from diversity, including in incomes). All such efforts were run by non-profits, leveraging both private and federal funds. Arlington now has a rental assistance program, based on income level. Most applies to garden apartments, which the County is preserving, and some to high-rise units. Contrary to rumors, the program has little impact on school population and overcrowding is not allowed. In fact, school population is growing most in single-family neighborhoods that have been re-developed; money drives a lot of house re-development, because lots are valuable. Bigger homes house bigger families, so the link is stronger there than between affordable housing and school enrollments.

8. Concerning Columbia Pike, Mr. Fisetta that he and Ms. Hynes changed their vote on building a streetcar because they no longer had a consensus. That said, the Board is committed to continue to find the best transit option. Some of those were not looked at before. The Board will also look at land use and affordable housing plans. The Board wants to integrate housing, re-development, & transit. The best alternative will likely be a bus, since Metro requires really high density. People surveyed had said they wanted Columbia Pike to be a “Main Street,” with 4-10 story buildings. County staff will look at the best alternatives. The streetcar was meant to generate revenue by attracting more people— a bus will not generate the same kind of revenue. Right now, the County is just closing out the contracts. Arlington County is still committed to invest in Columbia Pike.

9. Concerning Metro and its impacts, Arlington has had a seat on its board, and now actually is just an alternate. In terms of safety, there are lots of deaths on roads, compared to two deaths on Metro in the last several years. Chris Zimmermann represented Arlington on the Metro board when he was a County Board member, and now Mary Hynes does. Arlington has become a model for other communities by increasing densities along Metro corridors. Now Arlington is challenged by other jurisdictions following the same planning model.

10. Economic Competition: With the Silver line and other development, Tysons and DC are now a place where people want to live. Some Arlington office space is now being transitioned to hotels. Arlington has a higher percentage of 25-34 year olds than any other jurisdiction in the region, and has transit, an airport, and brainpower (a highly educated population), but also has more competition. In response, the County has modified its technology zones and started a new public-private partnership, Tandem NSI. Governor McAuliffe came to Arlington to highlight its place in national security, including that it still has the Pentagon. Ballston-Virginia Square is a hub for universities (Virginia Tech, Marymount, George Mason) and has DARPA. In the past, localities didn’t poach business tenants and have relied on their assets; now, Alexandria (for example) “is putting a ton of money on the table.” So norms that jurisdictions had adhered to are breaking down. The region needs to coalesce, while competing fairly, Mr. Fisetta asserted. He added that Arlington had had a great economic development director, but he had died of a heart attack, and a new one was just hired the prior week.

11. Turning briefly to East Falls Church, Mr. Fisetta said that he was not aware of any development on the site that Metro & VDOT own; no developer had put forward a proposal.

12. Concerning non-conforming houses, Mr. Fisetta said that the last time the issue was addressed was in 2004-05. The County had considered lot sizes, pipe stems, and had “tightened the envelope”—made it much harder to do pipe stems, but no change on setbacks or height; the main change was reducing lot coverage from 57%. The County had created a graded system, so largest lots get less coverage, with some exceptions for detached garages. If it meets code, the County can’t interfere. Virginia is a property rights state. Most homeowners and developers try to fit within the coverage limits. But as a result of the zoning changes, some homes are now non-conforming. So the zoning administrator, who is independent of the County manager to a degree, changed interpretation of the non-conforming rule, so owners of non-conforming homes

now can't do a structural change without going to board of zoning appeals, Mr. Fisetle explained. But the County does not want to incentivize teardowns, so some flexibility is needed.

13. Concerning the proposed aquatic facility, Mr. Fisetle explained that the County had received 30 acres of land for free to convert to recreational space. That process (creating Long Branch Park) had taken 20 years. The County then then did a needs assessment, and found that adding swimming facilities was number 1 or 2 on the list, and had incorporated a facility into the County master plan through a wide- open [consultative] process. The County Board had approved a community energy plan that set goals for County energy consumption. This meant that if the County was putting a new building online, it wanted it to be more energy efficient. The bids for constructing the aquatics center came in higher because a lot of contractors didn't understand how to build it efficiently. The County Board then made a commitment not to spend more than was approved and decided to look for partners, then had the 2024 summer Olympics as a possibility, and had just found out that Boston was selected, not D.C. So the next steps are to update the plans and the needs assessment to validate the plans.

14. Concerning the issue of "public land for public good," Mr. Fisetle observed that a key factor is that Arlington is only 26 square miles, and has a lot of land needs so in some cases has to provide for multiple uses. Specifically addressing whether housing would be built on County land, the Board had asked the County manager to identify any viable opportunities. One outcome was construction of the Arlington Mill community center. Concerning housing on parkland, when the County is investing in a facility, the Board looks at multiple potential uses. But it has never proposed putting stand-alone housing in a park. On the other hand, at Wilson School, for example, there is a lot of surface parking on parkland. Nobody wants to take open space that is actually green and turn it into housing, but schools may have needs to expand. Arlington Mill remains only example of housing in a parkland, having replaced another building.

15. Mr. Rusk thanked Mr. Fisetle for speaking and closed the meeting at 8:55 p.m.

Submitted by:

Lawrence Connell, Secretary