

Leeway Overlee (LO) Civic Association (CA)
Minutes of General Membership Meeting
Tues., December 1, 2015, 7:30pm at Westover Library (community room)

Officer Reports

1. LO CA President Chips Johnson opened the meeting at approximately 7:30 p.m. and invited officers to give their reports.
2. Treasurer Jenni Michener reported that LO CA had a balance of \$840.30, reflecting \$500 in income (\$440 from newsletter advertising, \$60 from dues) against \$422.84 in expenses (\$372.84 for printing, \$50 for Civic Federation dues), making for a net increase in assets of \$77.16.
3. The Secretary, Ladd Connell, summarized the previous CA meeting held September 22. During that, Rob Swennes briefed on proposed changes to the NC Process for identifying local neighborhood projects for County funding; Chips Johnson advised that Arlington Public Schools had been considering an idea for the Reed School property to be an early child education center; and Amanda Baxter, Manager for the Virginia Dept. of Transportation (VDOT) project “Transform 66 Inside the Beltway” made a presentation and answered questions on how VDOT is working to understand and mitigate impacts of future tolls for I-66 inside the Beltway. Chips Johnson reported that, following that meeting, he had written to the County Board asking the Board to use its influence to ensure VDOT address concerns expressed at that meeting, principally the potential traffic spillover from I-66 onto Washington Boulevard and Lee Highway.

Leeway Overlee CA: Past, Present and Future

4. Mr. Johnson then invited Rob Swennes to introduce the evening’s topic, the civic association itself, by reviewing the CA’s history. Mr. Swennes explained that the then Leeway Civic Association had gone dormant by the early 1970s, when he had moved to the neighborhood. CA by-laws from 1971 established boundaries extending south to Washington Blvd. Amy Appelbaum (currently LO CA newsletter distribution coordinator) was instrumental in galvanizing the community to oppose a County proposal to put a four-lane arterial through the Greenway. The success in keeping the Greenway showed the power a CA could have in influencing decisions impacting the neighborhood.
5. Mr. Swennes then summarized other events and developments in the CA itself. Noting that the CA by-laws required two meetings to make a change, he explained that the CA had received a request from a resident south of Washington Blvd., claiming that they wanted to have Leeway CA represent them. A proposal was duly voted on following that to amend the by-laws to extend the CA to south of Washington Blvd., as far as the I-66 corridor. Later the CA received a request to return the border back up to 22nd St.; LO CA decided not to pursue this, or to change the by-laws – and it has been that way for over 30 years. A more complete [history](#) is on the LO website.
6. There have been various iterations of this situation over time, Mr. Swennes explained; Highland Park-Overlee Knolls (HPOK) went through phases of more or less activity. Fairly

soon after the decision on extension of the borders, LO CA proposed a Neighborhood Conservation (NC) plan for Leeway Overlee—the whole area, including HPOK. The County official in charge (Laurie) replied that she had received a letter first from HPOK with its own plan. Leeway Overlee was asked to write its plan only for down to 22nd St., and did so. For a number of years, LO did submit proposals for HPOK NC projects, since for some time HPOK was dormant, and LO took over presentation of NC projects-- for example, the raised crossing at Lex and 18th St. Then HPOK notified LO CA, in the early 1990s, that they were active, and had an issue with two projects being submitted.

7. Subsequently, Mr. Swennes continued, the CA had a very contentious meeting, at Resurrection Lutheran Church, for a vote by those south of 22nd St. Roughly 200 showed up. An initial motion had been made to ask those south of 22nd St. if they wanted HPOK represent them; roughly 120 said no, 80 said yes, but due to a premature motion to adjourn, a second vote on which CA *should* represent the area was not taken. The Arlington County Civic Federation (ACCF) looked at the vote, noting that there was not a positive vote as to who should represent the area, and thus maintained the recommendation that HPOK continue to represent the area south of 22nd St. in the Civic Federation. The County Board decided that it did not want to intervene; ACCF also said it doesn't decide which civic association residents should join; ACCF only decides on representation in the Civic Federation.

8. Since that time, Mr. Swennes concluded, the CAs have had generally cooperative relations. Some residents say it's a benefit to have two organizations looking out for their interests, he noted. All CA actions were taken with the interests of residents at the time in mind. He summarized by noting that the Nov. 2015 CA [newsletter](#) addressed three issues:

1) CAs' value and demographics: as those who have been leading LO CA are getting older, the CA needs to find more young people to represent the area. The CA does have a number of issues to address; areas that are troubled or in decline often do not have effective civic associations. In Fairfax County, communities only have homeowners' associations; the lack knowledge of county staff and procedures is often reflected in unplanned growth and loss of neighborhood feeling.

2) Public outreach: Partly to address the demographic issue, i.e. the need to get younger people involved, the CA needed to consider how it should communicate, i.e. by newsletter, Nextdoor, Facebook, the listserv? Which of these are they better for the neighborhood? Many local civic groups have abandoned their paper newsletters entirely and have opted instead for an electronic newsletter sent out to all residents within the neighborhood who request it. Other civic associations have dropped a newsletter entirely and survive with only a Facebook page and perhaps a listserv.

3) CA boundaries: The third issue to reexamine was the civic association's boundaries. Since the 1970s Leeway Overlee's geographic boundaries under its approved bylaws have stretched south all the way to I-66. However, HPOK is also active in this area, and during the past decade or two, HPOK's presence and activities have grown.

Leeway Overlee Officers' Views

9. Mr. Johnson, noting that Mr. Swennes had “laid out the tapestry” of LO CA’s history, commented on the current status: we have the four CAs¹ working together, which may make the situation more confusing. He underscored that communities need to be represented well before the Arlington County and Arlington Public Schools (APS) Boards. APS is focused on PTAs, but those who don’t have kids in school don’t have a voice except through the CA. The County Board and staff is generally sympathetic to CAs’ concerns. After the most recent issue concerning the Reed School property, the four CAs did get together as Greater Westover. The idea is we need communication, we need to have the community think as a community; for example, the Westover shopping area may be in Westover CA, but it’s in the interest of all for the four CAs to work together.

10. Ms. Michener then offered her perspective. She had first heard of a civic association from the newsletter on her door when she moved to the neighborhood in early 2002. It was a warm welcome to home ownership in Arlington. However, she recognized that a civic association isn’t just about disseminating information. The CA is our voice to the county, she said. While individual voices are typically dismissed by the County Board, the voice of a civic association is taken seriously. Since she had been involved, she had fought the placement of an apartment building where TD Bank now stands, the CAs had brought the Westover Farmers’ Market to life, had provided input on East Falls Church re-development, and now are doing so for the Lee Highway “re-visioning.” Leeway had also completed an NC plan that placed us in the queue for several big dollar street projects.

11. Ms. Michener explained that she had been an officer of Leeway-Overlee for over eight years. As her children are now 7 and 11, she noted, it’s clear that the time commitment to be active in the CA is manageable even with a young family. The LO Executive Committee, including Mr. Swennes, and others who perform important CA work, need to transition to younger generations; accordingly, she sought comments from the audience on better ways to engage a broad cross section of the LO neighborhood. Options to consider included varying meeting times, making them more sociable, having them webcast, and creating more subcommittees.

12. Ms. Michener also reflected on LO CA’s dwindling revenues as noted in the Treasurer’s report, and invited comments on using PayPal as a means to pay dues and on moving to an all-email and Facebook means of distribution since the CA currently pays \$1500/year to print the quarterly newsletter. She suggested notice to be given in four consecutive paper newsletters that distribution in paper will cease unless someone calls or writes the CA to put them on a postal mailing list, so we can reach even those without internet. Lastly, Ms. Michener noted that Leeway Overlee’s boundaries currently overlap completely with the adjacent Civic Association, HPOK. Those who live from 22nd Street down to I-66 are essentially represented by both groups. While some may not mind this, there are many who are at least confused, if not very angry, about it. Ms. Michener had been yelled at while

¹ In addition to Leeway Overlee and HPOK, CAs working together as part of Greater Westover include Tara Leeway CA and Westover CA.

delivering newsletters south of Washington Blvd. While acknowledging the history to explain this overlap, she felt that we can better serve both groups and foster engagement by removing the confusion, that is, by changing LO's bylaws to redraw our boundaries to avoid the overlap, but asked to hear feedback from residents.

13. Ladd Connell noted that he had also been involved in LO CA as an officer for close to 10 years. While serving as LO Secretary, he did not consider himself a community activist, and he deeply appreciated those who did the more demanding work of getting neighborhood conservation projects approved, organizing events, and the like. At the same time, he observed that 1) HPOK is a well-functioning CA, particularly with its organization by committees and use of new communications tools (email, listserv, Survey Monkey); 2) the boundary overlap, as exemplified by LO CA newsletter distribution, is a source of confusion for many and annoyance for some; 3) Leeway Overlee does not need HPOK to be an effective CA—it is large enough (considerably larger than HPOK) even without it; and 4) Leeway Overlee and its residents would benefit from a full collaborative relationship with the other three "Greater Westover" CAs, but couldn't have one if we insisted on our boundaries/map.

14. Emily Costin, LO CA Vice President offered her view that it was important for Leeway Overlee to get others involved, and that for that to happen it needed to resolve the boundary issue.

Residents' Views

15. Ms. Michener, as moderator, then invited others' comments from the roughly 25 people attending. Glenn Chattel, who represents HPOK's SW quadrant, thanked the speakers for bringing these issues up. He said he had been coming to LO CA meetings for many years. Since 2001, HPOK residents and its own CA have been very active. Several HPOK officers were attending this meeting. Regarding the boundary: there has been confusion, it is important for HPOK residents to have their own CA. HPOK had been acknowledged by both ACCF and County Board, wants to have its own Neighborhood Conservation programs, wants people to know who to go to if there is a problem. The map on the Leeway Leader causes much confusion. He didn't mind receiving the newsletter, but really didn't want the map as shown on the Leader's front page. HPOK would like Leeway Overlee to be part of the four CA group that was formed by Kim Persson. Leeway Overlee could save itself money by distributing the newsletter only to Leeway proper, since it currently prints 1,600-1,700 copies, of which 650 are distributed to HPOK.

16. Another HPOK resident, Pat, said she seconded everything Glenn had said. While she appreciated that LO had helped HPOK, she recalled the vote that Mr. Swennes had described differently; she thought it was to have HPOK separate. There was confusion. She saw HPOK needed to be separate as it had its own concerns. Thus, while she appreciated getting information from the newsletter, she was irritated by the map; for those in HPOK, it seems fraudulent.

17. Alice Moore, of N. 23rd St., said she appreciated the LO newsletter. She asked, from the perspective of those N. of 22nd St., what is downside letting go of s. of 22nd St.? Have there been many people of south of 22nd St. who wanted to be represented by Leeway Overlee?

18. Bill Ross, who lives on the south side of 22nd St., said that he had moved here in 1986, and for years, never heard of HPOK. He was active as an officer in Leeway Overlee. Having listened to discussion of the issues, he said it seemed that HPOK now is vibrant, and he understood the confusion caused by the overlap. He appreciated both CAs being involved in neighborhood issues, but if someone came up with a proposal to change LO CA borders, it could be a benefit to get clarity. On getting younger people involved, he noted that HPOK does a great job at social events, and that's different from the focus that Leeway Overlee has had.

19. Mr. Johnson noted that while he also is a resident of HPOK area, he enjoyed the LO newsletter. He observed there were different cultures between the two CAs: Leeway Overlee seems to be more focused on activities to do with the county, whereas HPOK is more focused on social and entertainment activities. He welcomed having the benefits of both CAs. Could it be possible to maintain them?

20. Kathy Mimberg, President of HPOK, said she had moved here 10 years ago, heard about CAs, but didn't get involved initially because she was told that the CA roles were a long story, it was complicated, so she just paid dues to both. She later talked to [former HPOK President] Alan Howze, and was elected HPOK President in May. She had seen the same confusion as she had initially had among other residents, folks who work full-time, and don't have patience for long explanations. The confusion has been a barrier for HPOK leaders to get people involved in HPOK or now "4CA" work, she said. At every Greater Westover event, the CAs have a big map, drawn from the County website. Thanks to the Farmers Market, the CAs were able to hold the fall festival, and got more people signed up as CA members. It does really help to have the four CAs work as a group, both for information-sharing and for influence on County issues, she concluded.

21. A resident asked: what is the benefit of keeping the LO overlap? Mr. Johnson replied that there is no inherent advantage or disadvantage; the LO CA boundary was set through a process-- it's in the LO CA by-laws. From an organizational standpoint, it does cost more to distribute the newsletter to the whole area. The advantage offsetting this is sharing information; the newsletter provides a service that in some respects is unique. But organizationally it would be a net gain, given the expense and effort of newsletter production and distribution.

22. A resident of Leeway Overlee north of Lee Highway noted that, concerning distribution, she had distributed it to her block, and heard from one neighbor that social media would be a better way. However, she liked the print copy and the idea of keeping the newsletter for people who appreciate it. Options include Nextdoor, or a listserv, which would be an easy way to get information out; that's how she had found out about the Lee Highway charrette.

Mr. Swennes replied that LO already had both an announcement and a discussion listserv, and is on Facebook.

23. One resident asked whether the Arlington County Civic Federation could post newsletters from all the CAs, so residents could have one site to go to. Glenn Geiger of HPOK replied that there is a County CA website, but it is poorly positioned to handle traffic. With the four CAs, we have a gathering spot, which provides a click-in for each CA. It offers links to Facebook, Nextdoor, etc. The CAs have also used it for surveys, for example on the proposal to re-purpose Reed School for the HB Woodlawn program.

24. Resident Chris McBride, community liaison for Rivendell School, stated she got used to being member of both, after having been confused. She thought that eliminating the overlap would be cleaner, simpler, and would eliminate bickering over history. Another resident who lives on 22nd St., stated that they had had this conversation 20 years ago, the same conversation every time; while it was nice to have newsletter, it was time to move on; the boundary dispute turned people off.

25. A resident who lives on 23rd St., but had paid dues to HPOK, noted that almost all of the combined LO-HPOK area is in Tuckahoe school district. Many people communicated already through elementary school contacts. Since the CAs need to work together it would be better to cleave it off. A resident who lives on Illinois St. noted it was the first CA meeting she had attended, and expressed appreciation for the history, the passion, and the civility, despite disagreement. Concerning communications, she said she loved the newsletter, that it was really helpful; that said, the medium isn't that important, since it's easy enough to find online. What matters most, she observed, is that people have a desire to learn what's going on, to make human connections. In that light, it would be good to have a greater social component to get to know our neighbors.

Conclusions

26. Ms. Michener summed up that she had heard that LO CA should: 1) look at social media forms; 2) clarify the boundary issues, come up with ideas we could present, since the boundaries are in Leeway Overlee's by-laws, in the form of a resolution to be voted on. A resident responded that the only proposal heard was to separate LO and HPOK completely. Ms. Michener continued that we, the LO CA executive committee, need to draft the language. A resident proposed that the motion be to separate the area south of 22nd St. Ms. Michener said that a proposal for the by-laws changed would need to be circulated, so LO CA could get the first of two required votes at the next meeting. If approved by two separate votes, the by-law change would then go into effect. The LO CA executive committee would also discuss what is needed to expand distribution methods.

Submitted by:

Ladd Connell, Secretary

