

# Thomas Jefferson Site Evaluation

## Working Group Charge

8/12/14

### Background

In response to the School Board's identification of County-held land at the Thomas Jefferson site as their preferred location for a new elementary school (See Arlington Public Schools Capital Improvement Plan), the County Board directed the County Manager to evaluate the site's feasibility.

### Study Area Description

The Thomas Jefferson site is located within the boundary of the Arlington Heights Civic Association, and is bounded by Arlington Boulevard to the north, South Irving Street to the east, 2<sup>nd</sup> Street South to the south, South Old Glebe Road to the west, and excludes a series of single family homes located at the northwest corner of the site facing Arlington Boulevard. Existing uses at the site include Thomas Jefferson middle school and community garden, Thomas Jefferson Community Center and Park, a playground, lighted basketball courts, lighted tennis courts, a diamond field used primarily by youth baseball, lighted grass rectangular field used primarily by youth and adult soccer, a lighted synthetic turf drop-in field, two unrestricted-use playgrounds and a measured fitness trail. The site also includes passive open spaces and surface parking lots and is the location of the annual Arlington County Fair. (Attachment: Thomas Jefferson Site Civic Association map and aerial maps).

### Charge & Underlying Goals

*The Thomas Jefferson Working Group (TJWG) is established and charged with evaluating the Thomas Jefferson site and making a recommendation on whether or not an elementary school should be built on any part of this site.*

The evaluation will take up to five months beginning in September 2014, with either a progress report and/or County Board check-in work session in November 2014. This site evaluation may result in one of two conclusions:

- Alternative 1: Recommendation for siting a new school at a particular location within the TJ site, in which case the TJWG would develop general conditions and design principles to address both the site context and neighborhood context and to mitigate impacts on existing public areas and uses.
- Alternative 2: Recommendation not to site new school at TJ based on specific findings. <sup>1</sup>

### Site Specific Goals

The following County goals have been identified for the site:

- retain the current wooded eastern end of "TJ Park" as is (area along the western portion of South Irving Street and stretching west along Arlington Blvd)
- ensure no significant loss of green space and no net loss of recreational programming, including 2 full size rectangular fields and other amenities outlined in the study area description

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<sup>1</sup> The Arlington Public schools Capital Improvement Plan also states that should the Thomas Jefferson site not be selected, its second choice is to construct additions to two yet unspecified South Arlington elementary schools.

- maintain a cohesive park
- ensure adequate consideration given to neighborhood impacts of traffic and parking
- enhance safety on existing pedestrian walkways and bikeways
- ensure that the community center would remain available for use
- ensure that building massing is compatible with adjacent neighborhood

**Policy Guidance**

The following criteria, policies, and priorities will be considered in evaluating the Thomas Jefferson site:

1. County Policies and priorities
  - a. Conformity with the County’s adopted goals and policies with regard to parks and open space; land use; transportation; parking; accessibility; energy, sustainability and the environment; public safety and education; among others;
  
2. Criteria for consideration of Arlington County Facilities and Land Use in Arlington Public School’s capacity planning process” dated November 30, 2011 (Attachment);
  
3. Impacts to Programs and Uses
  - a. Impacts on the current level of public services (including recreational amenities) provided to County residents
  - b. Analysis and mitigation of impacts on the surrounding neighborhood;
  
4. Opportunities to combine multiple priority programs and uses on a single site;
  
5. Site Planning and Building Design Considerations
  - a. Compatibility within the neighborhood context and surroundings
  - b. Compatibility with Principles of Civic Design in Arlington (Attachment)
  - c. Minimization of construction on undisturbed natural areas;
  - d. Sufficiency of open/recreational space to support site uses and community needs
  
6. Fiscal and Timing Considerations
  - a. Development costs, including added costs due to complicated construction or phasing, mitigation of impacts, and/or maintenance of existing county programs and uses
  - b. Ability to complete a project within the necessary timeframe.

**Expectations of the Working Group**

The TJWG is established by the County Board and is composed of representatives from various appointed advisory boards and commissions, nearby civic associations, Arlington Public Schools, and civic representatives who will provide valuable insight during the process.

The following is a summary of key expectations of the TJWG:

- Consider the perspectives of citizens, neighbors, commissions, school, civic and advocacy groups;
- Evaluate consistency of proposal with adopted County policies;
- Work collaboratively with staff and APS to review options considered by APS to meet elementary school needs;
- Provide a final recommendation on use question, and input on recommendations regarding general conditions, and design principles (design, scale, massing, access, etc.) should the site be deemed appropriate for an elementary school;
- Provide strategic guidance on and help to facilitate community engagement during the study;
- Contribute to and review draft and final recommendations and reports;
- Gather feedback from the community and act as liaisons and conduits of information to and from their representative groups throughout the process
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**Time Commitment**

This group will have an initial meeting in September 2014 and conclude its work by January 2015 when specific recommendations, and general design principles if warranted, will be considered by the County Board. The group will meet at times that coincide with a master schedule to be prepared jointly by the Chair and staff. It is anticipated that the Working Group will meet an average of once a month, but it is likely additional meetings will be needed to meet the target deadlines (Attachment, “Thomas Jefferson Site Evaluation and Development Review Process timeline”).

**Composition**

Organizations and Commissions listed below will forward to the County Board their nominated representatives. The County Board will formally appoint all TJWG members. The TJWG will consist of the following:

- At large member
- Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) Members
  - Planning Commission
  - Transportation Commission
  - Energy and Environment Conservation Commissioner (E2C2)
  - Parks & Recreation Commission
- Civic Associations
  - Arlington Heights Civic Association
  - Alcova Heights Civic Association
  - Ashton Heights Civic Association
  - Lyon Park Civic Association
  - Douglas Park Civic Association
  - Barcroft Civic Association
  - Penrose Civic Association
- Sports Commission
- Urban Forestry Commission
- APS Facilities Advisory Council (2)
- Thomas Jefferson PTA
- Friends of TJ Park
- Arlington County Fair Board

The Chair of the Working Group will be appointed by the County Board. The Chair will work closely and collaboratively with the staff project manager to ensure that the planning process is completed within the timeline that has been specified and that the County Board Charge is fulfilled.

## **Staffing**

County staff will serve as the primary resources to the Working Group. A staff project manager will work collaboratively with the Chair to facilitate the working group process. An Arlington County interdepartmental team will provide staff resources to the TJWG. APS will also provide staff and technical resources, including research and analysis associated with the TJ site selection.

## **County Board Liaison**

The County Board will appoint one of its members to serve as a liaison to this effort. Staff and the Working Group Chair will regularly update the County Board liaison on progress, discuss process issues, and keep the liaison informed on direction and policy issues. The Board Liaison will ensure that the full board is kept abreast of any issues that arise. The School Board may appoint a liaison as well.

## **Community Outreach**

During the course of the site evaluation, *collaboration* with the community will be a high priority and take a number of different forms. Staff will work with the Chair of the TJWG to develop a broad-based community outreach and engagement plan for review and adoption by the TJWG. A variety of communication tools will be used, including, but not limited to:

- Thomas Jefferson Site Evaluation web page
- E-mail
- Press releases
- Public meeting notices

In addition, the Working Group may employ such meeting formats as make sense to them – for example: town halls, hearings, use of Open Arlington, twitter town halls.

Staff will provide civic engagement support as needed, including the use of email and the County's website to disseminate information to the Working Group and the broader community.

**Deliverables.** The TJWG will present their recommendations at a work session with the County Board. The recommendations will be publicly available for at least 10 days prior to the worksession.

If some part of the Thomas Jefferson site is found to be an appropriate site for a new elementary school, the TJWG will develop general conditions and design principles to address both the site context and neighborhood context and to mitigate impacts on existing public areas and uses.

**Meetings.** Staff will work with the Working Group Chair and the Working Group membership to establish a meeting schedule and agendas.