

**EXCERPT RELATED
TO THE TJ SITE**

2008

Arlington Heights Civic Association
Neighborhood Conservation Plan



neighborhood with grassy areas between Arlington Blvd. and neighborhood streets need improvement. All of these areas beg for attention.

Community Entrances Recommendations:

1. Due to its location next to school and community center, the proposed Neighborhood Conservation project on S. Irving St. between Arlington Blvd. and 2nd St. S. should be given priority funding outside the NCAC program.
2. Grassy areas separating Arlington Blvd. from neighborhood streets should be beautified with tree and shrub plantings.

Open Space and Recreation Facilities

Arlington Heights has four recreational open spaces. These are: Thomas Jefferson Middle School and Community Center, a 20.57-acre multi-use indoor and outdoor recreation area; a 3.5-acre playground at Patrick Henry Elementary School; Arlington Heights Park, a miniature park at the intersection of 9th St. S. and S. Irving Avenue; and another small park known as “Fourth of July” Park at the intersection of Arlington Blvd. and S. Garfield St.

These four parks provide Arlington Heights with 8.6 acres of park space per thousand people, compared to the National Park and Recreation Association's recommendation of 10 acres per thousand persons. Despite the significant park area in the neighborhood, access to recreational activities is inadequate for a number of reasons.

The space at the Thomas Jefferson complex and at Patrick Henry Elementary School is shared with Arlington Public Schools for use by students during school hours. Much of the remaining time for recreation at the Thomas Jefferson complex is taken up by countywide organized activities. Thus, access to the joint-use facilities at the Thomas Jefferson Center is heavily restricted. In sum, there is limited space available for neighborhood and family activities either for adults or children.

Improvement to Thomas Jefferson Community Center Grounds

The Thomas Jefferson Community Center is the most significant public site in our neighborhood. The president of the Arlington Heights Civic Association has written the County Board to request that the site be master planned, in coordination with the planning process for Thomas Jefferson Middle School. The potential for recreational uses at the center are a major benefit to the neighborhood. Yet, there are ongoing problems at TJ that limit its usefulness to the neighborhood. Athletic fields take up the vast majority of outdoor space. As discussed below in "Neighborhood Green Space," there are no green gardens, lighting is a problem, and the playground is inadequate. Arlington Heights residents believe there is an opportunity to make improvements to the Thomas Jefferson Community Center grounds that would greatly enhance

its usefulness to the neighborhood. Areas shown as blue, pink, aqua, and green in the following birdseye view of the TJ grounds are areas of open space that could potentially be improved.



Birdseye View of TJ Grounds (Credit: Arlington County GIS Mapping Center and Richard Bullington-McGuire)

Playgrounds

There are two playgrounds in Arlington Heights. Both are oriented to younger children. One is located at the Patrick Henry Elementary School. Since it is used by the elementary school during school hours, the hours for open use are limited. The other playground is on the Thomas Jefferson Community Center grounds, next to the Community Center (shown as orange).

The TJ playground gets extremely heavy use, not only by residents of Arlington Heights, which is seeing an increase in the number of families with small children, but also by many families from other parts of Arlington County, and the District of Columbia. The TJ playground is often used by parents with small children who also have older children or adults engaged in other recreation at TJ.

The existing TJ playground is inadequate for the needs of the neighborhood and the community at large. It is small, the equipment is at the end of its life cycle, and there is no sandbox or

swings, which are basics in playgrounds throughout the county. Further, while use of the TJ playground is not restricted, there are times when young children are virtually unable to use the equipment. Due to lack of shade, it is too hot to play on the structures during peak sun hours in the summer. Also, the equipment is frequently used by the middle-school children, who have no play equipment of their own. Unless the tot lot is moved, there will be no long-term solution to either of these problems. The footprint of the lot is too small to accommodate large shade trees. The footprint cannot be expanded because it is hemmed in by the parking lot, the building, and basketball courts.

A solution needs to be found at TJ that meets the needs of both middle school-aged children and younger children. Given the heavy countywide use, improvement of TJ playground equipment should be considered a countywide priority.

Playground Recommendations:

1. Replace and upgrade the tot lot with a new playground for young children, relocated to another area of the Thomas Jefferson complex.
2. Create a new outdoor play area located near the Thomas Jefferson Middle School that is geared toward older children, perhaps with a climbing wall element.
3. Arlington County and Arlington Public Schools should work together to create two playgrounds, appropriately sited, to meet the needs of both preschoolers and middle school children.

Athletic Fields

There are four athletic fields at Thomas Jefferson Community Center (shown in yellow): two full-size rectangular fields, of which one allows permit play only, one smaller rectangular field, and one baseball field. None of these fields are in good condition, except the lower field, because of its low maintenance blue stone. This creates a situation where fields cannot be used for periods of time, and yet they take up the vast majority of the outdoor space at TJ. The pressure from athletic leagues for athletic fields is intense, so lack of efficient use is also an issue. In recent years, some teams have begun playing in an area not appropriate for team sports, at the northeastern corner of TJ, bordering Arlington Blvd. and S. Irving St., which has a large drain and a tree in the middle of it.

The blue stone field which gets the most intense use at TJ has been a problem for the neighborhood. During windy and dry conditions, this field kicks up large air masses of particulates that move across TJ and into neighborhood streets. This dust storm affect is shown in the photographs below, taken from TJ's east parking lot.



View of blue stone field from southeast parking lot at TJ (Photo Credit: Chris Buck)

The particulates cause eye irritation and coughing. This greatly impacts the quality of life of those attempting to use the outdoor facilities at TJ, as well as those in the neighborhood whose streets are affected. There are times when users are forced to leave TJ altogether as a result of the dust. Nearby neighbors have experienced problems with dust coating their cars, and dust making its way through cracks in their homes and into ventilated attics. This problem must be addressed. The county's attempt to address the issue in the fall of 2006 has not worked. Dust storms are still occurring on windy days, such as on February 23, 2007.

Athletic Field Recommendations:

1. All athletic fields at TJ should be upgraded in order to eliminate the impact of dust and grit storms on residents, as well as on those using the fields and other outdoor portions of the TJ complex, and to permit more efficient use of the fields.
2. Increased use of parks and other facilities should be coordinated with the Arlington Heights Civic Association.

Lighting

There are two significant lighting issues relating to the Thomas Jefferson Community Center. One issue relates to quality of life issues. The other issue is accessibility to the outdoor facilities at the Community Center. First, residents living on streets adjacent to the Thomas Jefferson Community Center have long complained about the significant light pollution from the high lights above the athletic fields. Second, lighting in many portions of the facility is inadequate, and presents a public safety hazard. This presents a serious concern, since the public safety concerns reduce the accessibility of the facility to the neighborhood. Further, the lack of adequate pedestrian-friendly lights in the complex may be related to the lighting design for the Community Center. These issues require the attention of the County.

Lighting Recommendations:

1. New pedestrian lighting for areas of the Thomas Jefferson complex is needed. Specific recommendations are included in the Streetlights section of this Plan.
2. Replace field lighting with dark skies lighting, or equivalent technology that reduces light pollution.

Neighborhood Green Space

Despite the amount of park and recreation programming in Arlington Heights, the neighborhood itself has long lacked a sizable and centrally located neighborhood park that could function as an outdoor meeting place for neighbors, or even a place to post neighborhood news. Further, there are no wooded recreation areas in the neighborhood, unless one counts the path around the Thomas Jefferson complex, which has a limited number of trees. The safe use of this path for walkers and runners is limited to daylight hours, however, due to the lack of lighting in portions along the path.

By a large majority, survey results showed that the two top priorities of Arlington Heights residents are to improve trails for walking, running, or bicycling, and to obtain public gardens.

New Park at S. Irving St. and 2nd St. S.

The county is in the process of restoring the green space at the northwest corner of the intersection of S. Irving St. and 2nd St. S., adjacent to the Thomas Jefferson site. This was a site purchased through the land acquisition program, and until recently had homes with school programs in them. During the removal of the homes from this site, the Arlington County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources contracted to "deconstruct" the homes, thus recycling many parts of the homes, which was a pilot program for the county.



Photo Credit: Arlington County Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources

Arlington Heights lacks a centrally located park that could serve as a neighborhood meeting place. The AHCA supports the use of the space at S. Irving St. and 2nd St. S. for neighborhood recreation. Therefore, the neighborhood opposes the inclusion of this property in any joint use agreement with Arlington Public Schools. Due to the lack of unprogrammed green space in the neighborhood, this park area should be preserved for the open use by the neighborhood and others visitors, and for this reason should not be subject to programming for courses or for summer camps, by either the county or Arlington Public Schools. Nor should the park be programmed space for the Arlington County Fair without the express agreement of the AHCA. County staff should work closely with the community on determining an appropriate use for this space.

Arlington Heights Park and “Fourth of July” Park

The neighborhood has two mini parks, Arlington Heights Park (below left) and “Fourth of July” Park (below right). Neither of these parks is large enough to support active recreational activities, and both require landscaping improvements to make them more attractive for passive recreation. Arlington Heights Park, located at the intersection of S. Irving and 9th St. S., has a drinking fountain and a couple of benches. Arlington Heights Park has a drainage problem that needs to be resolved. Standing water in the area is a breeding ground for mosquitoes, causes erosion, which makes the park unusable at times. “Fourth of July” Park, located on S. Garfield St. at Arlington Blvd. has only picnic tables. Safety concerns at “Fourth of July” Park, due to its location adjacent to a major highway make it inappropriate for any recreational use by children. While its location next to a bicycle trail makes it an ideal location for a rest stop by runners or cyclists, “Fourth of July” Park lacks a water fountain.



Photo Credit: Juliet Hiznay



Green Buffers Along Arlington Blvd.

The portions of grass that front Arlington Blvd between S. Hudson and S. Irving streets should be considered a prime area for planting of additional trees and shrubs. This would buffer noise and air pollution, and would make the area more attractive.

Neighborhood Green Space Recommendations:

1. The new green space at S. Irving St. and 2nd St., S. should be devoted to neighborhood park use, and should not be programmed by the county or Arlington Public Schools. Nor should it be used for the Arlington County Fair without the express agreement of the AHCA.
2. The split rail fencing at “Fourth of July” Park should be upgraded with fencing to provide a safety barrier from the highway.
3. A drinking fountain should be installed at “Fourth of July” Park.
4. “Fourth of July” Park should be formally named, and a small sign added to give it proper park status.
5. Landscaping should be enhanced at “Fourth of July” and Arlington Heights parks.
6. The county should improve landscaping buffers on public property between Arlington Blvd. and the neighborhood, working with VDOT as necessary.
7. Plant additional trees and plants on public land.
8. Encourage planting of additional trees and plants on private land.
9. Increase the amount of open space in the neighborhood through the conversion of county owned property to parks, or through the purchase by the county of private property, working closely with residents on appropriate uses. Specifically, at this time a vacant lot owned by the Arlington United Methodist Church on the southeast corner of S. Glebe Rd. at 7th St. S. is now available for purchase. The neighborhood has asked the Arlington County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources to place this property on its potential acquisition list.
10. The Civic Association and the Arlington County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs should work together on a continuing basis to identify and develop further areas within our community for neighborhood park use.

Parks Programming

Recreation

The programming at Thomas Jefferson Community Center is oriented toward providing the entire county with recreation opportunities. Because the facility is shared with Arlington Public Schools, and is heavily used by the middle school students, the number of hours for open use is limited. Residents recognize the needs of the middle school. However, one of the needs that TJ could meet for the neighborhood is an indoor play space for children during inclement weather. The number of Arlington Heights households with small children has increased, and yet there is a perception on the part of many families that TJ not only lacks family-oriented recreation programming, but that the culture of the recreation center is unwelcoming to children.

Arlington County Fair

Every year, Arlington Heights welcomes tens of thousands of fair visitors to the neighborhood. The Arlington County Fair is a wonderful event, which is heavily attended by Arlington Heights residents, especially those with children. The Arlington County Fair Board has made an effort to meet concerns of residents related to parking, litter, traffic and crime during the fair. Each year, there are motor vehicle accidents on the streets closest to the Fair grounds. More coordination would benefit the neighborhood. The staging of the fair at the TJ site has a year-round impact on potential uses and improvements. Due to this impact, it is thought that TJ improvements should be linked financially to the fair.

Park Programming Recommendations:

1. Work with county staff to make the recreation center more welcoming to children. Consider programming oriented to small children, whose numbers are rising in the neighborhood.
2. Establish a standing committee of the AHCA to liaison with the Fair Board and the Arlington County Police Department on suggestions for fair programming as well as traffic, parking, and litter management.
3. Provide a police officer to direct traffic at the intersection of S. Irving St. and Second St. S. for the duration of the fair.
4. Build outdoor year-round toilet facilities on the Thomas Jefferson grounds.
5. Support neighborhood association efforts to engage in fundraising on the Thomas Jefferson grounds during the Arlington County Fair.
6. Explore with county staff and the Fair Board the possibility of increasing ride tickets to the fair in order to set aside funds for improvement of TJ grounds.

Litter & Pets

Litter is a significant problem at the TJ complex and the streets surrounding it. Some dog owners do not clean up after their dogs. Some dog owners allow their pets to run off leash, endangering other users. The lack of code enforcement relating to litter and dogs running off leash impacts the quality of life of residents of the neighborhood.

Litter & Pets Recommendations:

1. The neighborhood should work with Thomas Jefferson Middle School and athletic leagues to encourage responsible trash disposal habits.
2. The county should install additional trash canisters on the TJ grounds near the blue stone field, to the east of the baseball field, to the east of the small rectangular field, and by the par fitness course.
3. The county should invest in trash canisters that can be closed so that trash does not get blown out of the top of the canisters or through the canisters.
4. The county should enforce existing code relating to littering and dogs running off leash.

Parking

Parking at Thomas Jefferson is often inadequate, resulting in cars parking in the neighborhood rather than in dedicated lots. Residents want to minimize parking on neighborhood streets to the extent possible.

Parking Recommendations:

1. The county should work to come up with long term parking solutions on this site.
2. The county should install signs in the parking lots on Second St. and at the entrance to the Community Center indicating the availability of additional parking off Old Glebe Rd. The signs should include a map of where all lots are located.
3. The county should encourage the use of public transportation and walking.
4. The neighborhood should assess streets regularly to determine whether on street parking should be restricted to resident permits.
5. The neighborhood and county police should continue to monitor streets, and require street closures and parking restrictions as necessary to ensure that residents continue to be able to park at their homes during the Arlington County Fair.

Renovation and Redevelopment of Joint-Use Facilities

Thomas Jefferson Middle School is slated for renovation by Arlington Public Schools (APS). This presents many opportunities for the students, teachers, and residents to improve the access, functionality, and appearance of the school. Because the school shares HVAC systems with the TJ Community Center, it is likely that some portion of the Community Center will require work. Arlington Heights residents would like to see APS work closely with the County to ensure that disruption of county programming is minimized, and to ensure that County needs at the facility are being considered as part of the renovation process.

The School Board is considering a 2007 recommendation by the Superintendent of Schools to establish a high school program (known as “STEM”) at the Career Center site, which would focus on science and technology. The Arlington Public Schools’ Multi-Site Study Committee (MSSC) also recommended in 2007 that the site not be sold or leased to private entities. MSSC also recommends keeping the Columbia Pike Library at the same site. No specifications or designs are available at this time for any of the proposed building upgrades or changes. One issue of concern is the need for coordination between APS and the County regarding the cost of upgrading or rebuilding the library, as well as the impact on the recently renovated Fenwick Center.

Due to its location on the Patrick Henry campus, the community is also concerned about the impact redevelopment might have on the safety and well being of students. The AHCA has held meetings and made [public comment](#), as have [individual residents](#), on scenarios currently under consideration, with a focus on the functional aspects of redevelopment. Public comment submitted by the neighborhood regarding redevelopment of the Career Center site is attached as Appendix X. Whatever decisions are made for the Career Center site, additional impact in this area of the neighborhood will inevitably be felt as revitalization gets under way along Columbia Pike. Since Arlington Public Schools has chosen Wakefield High School rather than TJMS or the Career Center it may be many years before capital improvement is undertaken at TJMS or the Career Center. It is important that planning for these sites be comprehensive and up to date with existing traffic and population density when construction is contemplated.

Renovation and Redevelopment of Joint-Use Facilities Recommendations:

1. Arlington Heights should be fully represented on any school committees that address the renovation of TJMS.
2. Arlington Heights residents should be given full opportunity to provide public comment throughout the entire renovation process of TJMS, whether it is programmatic decisions, building design, or construction-related concerns.
3. Due to the joint-use aspect of the site, APS should work closely with the County to ensure that disruption of county programming is minimized, and to ensure that County needs at the facility are being considered as part of the renovation process at TJ.
4. Arlington Heights should be fully represented on any schools committees that address proposed redevelopment of the Career Center.
5. Arlington Heights residents should be provided an ongoing opportunity to comment publicly on any proposed changes to the Career Center site.
6. The central kitchen at TJMS should be relocated off the middle school site to permit flexibility in the redesign and renovation of the middle school.

Traffic Management

Traffic management directly affects the quality of life and the character of the community. Heavy traffic and speeding on our local streets, with the resultant air and noise pollution and danger to pedestrians and neighborhood vehicles, are of major concern to our residents. Residents want curbs, gutters, sidewalks, and pedestrian lighting throughout the neighborhood to help ensure the safety of pedestrians, runners, bicyclists, and motorists. Residents would like to improve air quality and reduce street noise by reducing the number of car trips in the neighborhood. Residents also want improved maintenance of road surfaces and signage.

Survey results showed that:

1. A solid majority of residents surveyed opposed widening any streets in the neighborhood, but particularly Arlington Blvd., S. Fillmore St., and S. Glebe Rd.