

# THOMAS JEFFERSON WORKING GROUP

FINAL REPORT TO THE ARLINGTON COUNTY BOARD



JANUARY 16, 2015

Assistance to the Thomas Jefferson Working Group was provided by staff from Arlington County and Arlington Public Schools, in addition to a consultant team from Toole Design Group and VMDO Architects. Following is a roster of the TJWG members, alternates, and board liaisons:

## BOARD LIAISONS

COUNTY BOARD	Mary Hynes
SCHOOL BOARD	Emma Violand-Sanchez

## WORKING GROUP ROSTER

CHAIR	Carrie Johnson	
AT-LARGE	Stacey Whyte	
PFRC- PLANNING COMMISSION	Steve Sockwell	Nancy Iacomini (alt.)
PFRC- TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION	Michael Perkins	
PFRC- E2C2	Mike Hanna	
PFRC- PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION	Elizabeth Gearin	Peter Hage (alt.)
ARLINGTON HEIGHTS CIVIC ASSOCIATION	Stephen Hughes	Megan Haydasz (alt.)
ALCOVA HEIGHTS CIVIC ASSOCIATION	Lois Koontz	Maura McMahon (alt.)
ASHTON HEIGHTS CIVIC ASSOCIATION	Gregory Morse	Caroline Rogus (alt.)
BARCROFT CIVIC ASSOCIATION	Daniel Weir	Eric Harold (alt.)
DOUGLAS PARK CIVIC ASSOCIATION	Alison Tomlinson	Allegra Jabo (alt.)
LYON PARK CIVIC ASSOCIATION	John Goldener	Kathleen McSweeney (alt.)
PENROSE CIVIC ASSOCIATION	Andrew Moore	
ARLINGTON COUNTY FAIR BOARD	Rene Gornall	Isabelle Kohler (alt.)
APS FACILITIES ADVISORY COUNCIL	Janine Velasco	
APS FACILITIES ADVISORY COUNCIL	Greg Greeley	
FRIENDS OF TJ PARK	Jim Presswood	Juliet Hiznay (alt.)
SPORTS COMMISSION	Craig Esherick	Doug Ross (alt.)
THOMAS JEFFERSON MIDDLE SCHOOL PTA	Polly Hall	
URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION	Nora Palmatier	Dean Amel (alt.)

January 16, 2015

Hon. Mary H. Hynes, Chair  
Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Blvd.  
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Hynes and Board Members:

It is a pleasure to submit the final report of the Thomas Jefferson Site Evaluation Working Group (TJWG) for consideration by the County Board.

The Board created the 20-member TJWG in August in response to the School Board's designation of county-held land at Thomas Jefferson as its preferred site for a new elementary school serving south Arlington. The TJWG was charged with evaluating the site, already occupied by a middle school, a busy community center and a much-used major park, and recommending whether a new school should be built anywhere on the site, and if so, what guidelines and conditions should be applied.

After ten meetings, substantial analysis and support by county and APS staff, many community comments, and lively discussions, our conclusions can be summed up as follows:

- The group generally agrees that a new school could physically fit on the western side of the Jefferson site, if it is a multi-story building with a compact footprint and structured parking capped by green play areas, and if it is governed by specific provisions to minimize harm to TJ Park, existing community resources and activities, and the neighborhood.
- The group is divided as to whether a new school should be built at Jefferson immediately. Arguments for both positions are set forth in our report. We urge readers to consider them all.
- We are united in recommending a list of site-specific guidelines, conditions and design principles to be applied to any school construction at Jefferson now or in the foreseeable future.
- We are also united in endorsing open, community-oriented school and county facilities and open space planning that is far more comprehensive than the short-term, single-site process we have just worked through. We welcome the countywide study launched by the County Board and School Board this month, and trust that the TJWG's experience, especially our successful community engagement, can inform that larger initiative.

On behalf of the working group, thank you for the opportunity to tackle these issues and help shape sound policies to meet our growing community's needs for both park space and schools.

Sincerely,



Carrie Johnson, *Working Group Chair*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

BACKGROUND	2
WORKING GROUP PROCESS	3
SITE DESCRIPTION & ANALYSIS	4
EVALUATION OF POSSIBLE NEW SCHOOL	6
BROADER CONTEXT & PLANNING ISSUES	10
FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS	11
APPENDICES	
<i>APPENDIX A - GUIDELINES, CONDITIONS &amp; DESIGN PRINCIPLES</i>	<i>A.1</i>
<i>APPENDIX B - BUILDING SCHEME OPTIONS FROM APS</i>	<i>B.1</i>
<i>APPENDIX C - TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS</i>	<i>C.1</i>
<i>APPENDIX D - WORKING GROUP CHARGE</i>	<i>D.1</i>



# BACKGROUND

---

Arlington's growth, with school enrollment projected to increase nearly 23 percent to over 30,000 by 2023, has intensified the pressures on many community facilities, including public schools and parks. As one step to expand school capacities, the School Board in June 2014 included in its FY2015-2024 Capital Improvement Plan up to \$50,250,000 for a new elementary school in south Arlington, with Thomas Jefferson as the preferred site. Arlington voters authorized bond funding for this and other school capital investments in November 2014 with nearly 75% in support.

Because the Jefferson site is currently shared by a middle school, community center, and park, with 18.49 acres of the total of 27.11 acres controlled by the County, County Board concurrence is required. The Schools CIP called for a final siting decision by January 31, 2015. If the Jefferson site is not approved, the alternative stated in the CIP would be additions and renovations at two south Arlington elementary schools, subsequently identified as Barcroft and Randolph.

In response to the School Board's action, the County Board in August created the Thomas Jefferson Site Evaluation Working Group (TJWG). The group was charged with evaluating the site within a framework of stated county goals and policies, and making a recommendation by the end of January 2015 as to whether or not an elementary school should be built on any part of the site, and if so, what guidelines and conditions should apply (see Appendix D for a full copy of the working group charge). The TJWG's 20 Board-appointed members represent various county advisory commissions, nearby civic associations, school-related groups and users of the site. Its charge emphasizes community engagement and collaboration with all stakeholders and with County and Arlington Public Schools (APS) staff. A working group roster and list of participants can be found on the back of the cover.

# WORKING GROUP PROCESS

---

The working group met ten times between mid-September and mid-January. These meetings, all at Thomas Jefferson Middle School and open to the public, included a kickoff walking tour and overview of current uses of the site; review of background materials assembled by county staff; APS staff and consultant presentations on school capacity challenges, elementary school siting and design concepts, and transportation and parking; public comments; and lively group discussions. The group presented a preliminary report to the County Board at a work session on December 2nd that was also attended by School Board members, and received Board guidance for the final phase of its efforts.

The interested community has been extensively informed and engaged. Meeting agendas and all materials provided to the working group have been posted on the project's website at <http://projects.arlingtonva.us/plans-studies/land-use/thomas-jefferson-site-evaluation>. A community open house on October 18th attracted more than 130 people and generated over 200 responses on feedback forms at the event and online. Forty-nine other comments were submitted through the website. Individual working group members and alternates have reported to their organizations, conducted surveys, and brought community perspectives and input back to the working group.

The group has proceeded in a collaborative spirit, respecting each others' concerns and working diligently to build consensus wherever possible without taking formal votes. The effort has been aided immensely by the work of very able, energetic staff. County staff from the departments of Community Planning, Housing and Development (CPHD), Parks and Recreation (DPR) and Environmental Services (DES) have provided strong professional and logistical support. APS staff and consultants have responded to many requests for information and prepared a number of detailed presentations for the group and community.

Every member of the working group has had the opportunity to review and contribute to this report.

# SITE DESCRIPTION & ANALYSIS - EXISTING CONDITIONS

---

The Thomas Jefferson site is bounded by Arlington Boulevard on the north, South Irving Street on the east, 2nd Street South on the south, and South Old Glebe Road on the west. It excludes a row of single-family homes along the north edge of the site facing Arlington Boulevard.

The immediate neighborhood, part of Arlington Heights, is residential in character except for a small commercial enclave at 2nd Street South and South Glebe Road. To the east and southeast of the Jefferson site are blocks of single-family homes. Directly south of the school across 2nd Street South are townhouses and a seven-story apartment building set back from the street. To the west between South Old Glebe Road and South Glebe Road are single-family homes, duplexes and a complex of apartment condominiums in five buildings, each four stories tall.

In the late 1960s the 27-acre site Jefferson site, then sparsely developed, was assembled by the County as the new location for what was then called Thomas Jefferson Junior High School. The school was paired with a county-run community center in an innovative partnership described in a 1972 brochure as a jointly funded, jointly operated “community growth center” serving the “interests of all ages” for education, recreation and the arts. The last two lots on the site’s southeast corner were purchased in 1989 and 1991 and added to the park.

The property has three major parts. Its western section is a long, roughly triangular stretch of county-held land totaling 3.83 acres. This parcel includes a landscaped knoll with trees near the corner of 2nd Street South but is mostly occupied by surface parking, drive aisles, sidewalks and a paved plaza serving the entrances to the middle school and theater.

In the center is a rectangular section of 8.62 acres held by Arlington Public Schools. This contains the building that houses Thomas Jefferson Middle School, the theater, and the community center and large gymnasium. TJMS has a capacity of 982 seats and is the only International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IBMYP) in Arlington. The TJMS community utilizes the community parts of the Jefferson site for sports practices and after-school clubs, and has created a community garden on the east side of the theater which is maintained by students and volunteers.

In recent years APS and the county have undertaken several projects (at a total cost of around \$12M) to renovate parts of the building, repair earthquake damage to the theater, upgrade the HVAC system, and fix drainage and foundation problems. Neither APS nor the County has near term plans for replacement or further major renovation of the building.

To the east of the building is the 14.66-acre county-held property known as Thomas Jefferson Park. This large parcel stretches east to South Irving Street and includes a buffer strip between the school parcel and the houses to the north along Arlington Boulevard. Along the north and east sides of the park are wooded, sloping natural areas containing a number of significant trees of various species, including oak, hackberry, and black locust. The park is encircled by a measured fitness trail. A landscaped path and seating area have recently been added near the corner of 2nd Street South and Irving Street. The center of the park features two large, lighted rectangular fields – a fenced grass field used mainly for scheduled youth and adult soccer, and a synthetic turf field for drop-in play-- plus two unrestricted-use playgrounds, a diamond used primarily by youth baseball, lighted basketball and tennis courts, and passive open spaces. Along 2nd Street South are surface parking lots that serve the community center and park.



The park's contours provide an elevated edge along Arlington Boulevard, with the fields and courts stepping down so that the southern border is nearly level with 2nd Street South, affording open views and easy access into the park.

The clustering of so many recreational assets in a central location has made Thomas Jefferson Park very popular and heavily used year-round. According to DPR, participation in outdoor sports such as soccer and baseball there has gone up about 30% in the last two years. Participation in fitness and other indoor activities at the community center has increased about 8%. The annual Arlington County Fair, which occupies the whole indoor/outdoor complex, attracted over 60,000 people last August. Other special events in the gymnasium and theater performances draw thousands more.

Since FY 2006 the County has invested \$1.75 million in upgrading the fields and other outdoor amenities, and \$1.36 million on indoor improvements. The adopted County CIP includes \$5.5 million in FY 2017 for replacement of the tennis and basketball courts, the playground and other park elements, along with upgraded lighting, fencing and drainage.

In terms of transportation, the TJ site has both advantages and challenges. The area is accessible on foot and by bicycle from all directions, including the well-used bridge over Arlington Boulevard, though pedestrian paths between the northwest corner of the site and Glebe Road and nearby bus stops could be improved. There are bike trails flanking Arlington Boulevard and bike lanes along 2nd Street South from South Old Glebe Road east almost to Washington Boulevard. The area is served by several bus routes.

For vehicular access, the primary route is 2nd Street South, classified as a minor arterial, which has several entrances to the parking for the community center and park, plus the building's loading dock. That street connects with South Old Glebe Road, a local principal street, for access to the western parking lot, school bus loop, drop-off area, and entrances to the school and theater. South Old Glebe Road becomes clogged during school drop-off and pickup peak periods, to the point that some street parking used by nearby residents has been prohibited during the morning rush so buses can maneuver more easily. The intersections with 1st Road South and especially 2nd Street South, which are not fully controlled, become congested and hazardous, especially when no crossing guard is present to help walkers and bikers. The connection to east-bound Arlington Boulevard via the frontage road from South Old Glebe Road is problematic at peak periods. The Arlington Boulevard intersection with Irving Street has been hazardous for many years.

Parking in the several lots on the TJ site totals 364 spaces, including 11 ADA-compliant spaces. Recent surveys by APS consultants show that when school is in session, slightly under half of those spaces and adjacent on-street spaces are occupied. Overall, those studies indicate that the on-site parking is sufficient for everyday school and community activities and most events, except the largest gatherings such as back-to-school nights and the County Fair.

# EVALUATION OF POSSIBLE NEW SCHOOL

---

In its charge to the Working Group, the County Board set forth the following site-specific goals:

- Retain the current wooded eastern end of the park “as is”
- Ensure no significant loss of green space and no net loss of recreational programming
- Maintain a cohesive park
- Ensure that the community center would remain available for use
- Enhance safety on existing pedestrian walkways and bikeways
- Give adequate consideration to neighborhood impacts of traffic and parking
- Ensure that building massing is compatible with the adjacent neighborhood

The group was also charged with evaluating school proposals against an array of general policies and criteria that include conformity with adopted county goals, impacts on current programs and public services, mitigation of adverse impacts, appropriate design, opportunities for program consolidations and efficiencies, and considerations of cost, timing and feasibility.

Within that framework, the TJWG reviewed several options presented by APS consultants for a new elementary school with a capacity of 725 seats, plus a 300-seat addition to the middle school. Expansion of the middle school is not in APS’ current 10-year CIP, but APS staff and the group agreed that potential locations for an addition should be included in the review in order to maintain options and identify any implications for overall site design.

The concepts presented by APS showed four possible locations for a new elementary school:

- along 2nd Street South where the basketball and tennis courts are now (Scheme 1);
- in the northwestern part of the site (Scheme 2);
- along the south end of the existing building (Scheme 3), and
- at the north end of the existing building with some functions on each side of the theater (Scheme 4).

An earlier concept with the new school in the northeast quadrant of TJ Park was shelved by APS in light of the County Board commitment to keep that wooded area undisturbed. In addition to new building locations and tentative massing, each scheme included possible siting of outdoor elements such as dedicated elementary-school playground and play areas, bus loops and drop-off areas, parking, and any existing park or garden areas or entrances that would have to be moved. See Appendix B for building scheme drawings.

While these options were drawn as separate schemes, the TJWG reviewed them as preliminary concepts with many features such as entrances, on-site traffic routes, plazas and play areas that could conceivably be moved or mixed with aspects of other schemes. Thus a positive reference to a location or element in a given scheme should not be taken as an overall endorsement of that scheme.

The TJWG’s review focused on assessing the concepts in relation to the Board’s site-specific goals and related issues. The group did not have enough time, information and energy for a thorough evaluation of each concept in relation to all of the general policies and criteria in the Board’s charge. Nor did the group dig deeply into cost estimates given by APS because the proposals were so preliminary and undetailed.

Within those parameters, the TJWG reached the following site-specific conclusions and policy recommendations related to possible school construction. These points have been summarized in proposed guidelines and design criteria and are intended to provide a framework for evaluation of any future new building or addition on this site by the county and community.

**PROTECTING TJ PARK:** The simplest way to protect this irreplaceable area and its natural and recreational resources is to maintain the entire county-held parkland east and north of the school essentially “as is”. This would not rule out all future changes in the park’s layout and features, for instance to improve facilities and enhance park users’ experience, but would require such changes to be in keeping with a County plan developed with ample input from users and neighbors of the park. Such projects might include relocating the general-use playground, upgrading the courts, and enhancing the community center’s entrance and the grassy patches between the east wall of the gym and the walkway next to the fields.

A policy of preserving the park’s features and cohesiveness rules out placing a new school building along 2nd Street South, east of the community center, as suggested in one APS scheme. A structure there would block the open physical and visual access into the park that helps make it appealing and safe. The space needed for a school building plus its dedicated playground, drop-off lanes and other appendages would also probably obstruct access to the community center and require relocation of the courts. Convenient parking for school and community uses would have to be structured. All in all, this concept would crowd and impose burdens on the park and recreational amenities, while leaving the large paved area west of the middle school unchanged.

This analysis does not entirely eliminate the possibility of locating future parking beneath courts or other recreational features along the southern edge of the park as part of a comprehensive plan that converts some current surface parking to another appropriate use. However, any new parking structure there would have to be depressed enough to keep its roof at or below the current elevation of the courts so no new physical or visual barriers are created.

Keeping the park safe and friendly for users of all ages also precludes introducing a school bus loop or other everyday vehicular traffic along the east side of the building, where park users congregate and go back and forth between the community center and the park.

In keeping with the policy of no net loss of recreational programming, community access to the park’s playground and fields during and after school hours should not suffer if the student population increases. An elementary school will need its own dedicated playground and other recreational spaces for physical education, recess and extended-day activities. If a middle-school addition is proposed, the likely impacts of heavier use of the park’s fields should be assessed in advance so mitigations can be included in the project. In either case County-APS joint use agreements should be revisited.

**OTHER PARTS OF THE SITE:** The areas south and west of the existing building offer more potential for siting a new school, provided that it is a multi-story building with a compact footprint and structured parking with green space or student play areas on top. Such a design, while not yet the norm for Arlington public schools, is appropriate where space is at a premium. It is doubly justifiable when county-held property – not yet built on, although disturbed and paved-- is being committed to development, even for a public purpose as vital as education.

Among the other siting options presented by APS, the one that would sandwich a new school on both sides of the theater, as drawn in Scheme 4, is complicated in design and could be operationally very awkward in such proximity to the middle school. It would also displace the community garden, which has become an important resource for the school and community and should be kept where it is if possible. If the garden

has to be moved, a new location should have the key attributes of plentiful sun, a convenient water source, and proximity to the middle-school classes who nurture it.

In contrast, locating a new school around the south end of the middle school, as proposed in Scheme 3, could have the most compact footprint and allow for good coordination of building systems with the middle school. It would, however, take up much of the existing plaza and parking at the entrance to the community center, leaving that entrance obscured. The community-center parking would have to be replaced, perhaps by structured parking to the east. Play space for the elementary school could wind up being fragmented. From an environmental standpoint, this concept as presented would have some pluses but also the minuses of crowding elements of the park and leaving the large western surface parking lot as is.

The concept that is generally most appealing would place a new school on the northwest part of the west parking lot, as shown in APS' Scheme 2. Parking would be provided in a one- or two-level structure, at least partially underground, with the elementary-school playground and other dedicated play areas on its roof. Next to the parking structure, the walkways and entrances on the west side of the middle school could be redesigned to make them more attractive and address longstanding issues of accessibility. The two schools could share a bus loop, though each would have its own drop-off area. This approach would have least impact on the community center and the park, while adding usable recreational facilities and not significantly increasing the total amount of impervious surfaces on the site.

**PARKING:** Supply may be less an issue than cost. The preliminary analysis by APS' consultants found that the current on-site supply is not fully used on weekdays and could handle the added demand of an elementary school without short-changing the middle school, community center and park. A modest number of additional spaces might be needed if the middle school were enlarged as well. These findings, while encouraging, should be rechecked for any specific project to be sure school-related drivers can park on site and don't compete with residents for on-street spots.

One clear conclusion from the working group's charge and analysis is that structured parking will have to be an integral part of any new school project that can fit into the Jefferson site. This should be viewed not as a luxury but as a necessary and manageable means of compressing the footprint of development and adding green rooftop area. The alternatives – all problematic-- would be to eliminate needed parking, expand surface lots at the expense of green space, or acquire more land. The cost of structured parking should therefore be included in cost projections for any school project. The working group welcomed indications at the December work session that County Board members recognize this need and are willing to explore financial strategies with the School Board.

**TRANSPORTATION:** Analysis so far suggests that the major impact of an elementary school would be to replicate, slightly later, the congestion that occurs now at middle-school arrival and dismissal times. If morning bell times were separated by an hour, for example, the wave of middle-school bus arrivals and parent drop-offs would be over before the elementary-school wave appeared. At afternoon dismissal times, the traffic volumes are more variable and spread out because of after-school activities. The heaviest congestion is during the morning drop-off peak. That points to the particular importance of traffic management strategies for any middle-school expansion which would make that peak even more intense.

At the TJWG's request, APS' consultants did study the transportation differences between a neighborhood elementary school and a choice school. They concluded, in short, that a neighborhood school would have fewer buses and many more students walking than a choice school; the percentage of parent drop-offs would be about the same. The full analysis can be found on the project website.

Transportation issues, including the location of entrances and safe routes for walkers, would be a major focus of the detailed staff and community review that would precede County approval of any new school. However, existing problems are serious enough to be tackled right now. APS' consultants suggested various improvements at 2nd Street South/South Old Glebe Road that could improve peak-period traffic flow at that over-stressed intersection and enhance safety for walkers and cyclists. Spot improvements at other crossings were also proposed. The County should pursue these as vigorously as resources allow (see Attachment C for examples of possible spot improvements).

In addition to the traffic issues right around the TJ site, residents of Arlington Heights and Penrose have expressed concern about the wider, longer-term neighborhood impacts of increased school-related traffic if more seats are built at Jefferson and the Career Center several blocks away also expands significantly as proposed in the out years of the Schools CIP. While these questions go beyond the scope of the TJWG's capacities, they are flagged here for attention during the in-depth review of any future project on the site.

**CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS:** Given the variety and popularity of activities at Jefferson, project staging and construction could be very disruptive – for middle-schoolers right next to the project, for theater groups and their audiences, for users of the community center and park, and for the County Fair. School construction on this site would significantly impact the Fair's programming and attendance, and could force it to an alternate location. Noise, dust and heavy traffic could also cause problems for neighbors, especially those just to the west and north. Careful planning well in advance and candid discussions with affected stakeholders and County staff will be needed to minimize such problems, and find workarounds or alternate locations – including an interim location for the Fair if needed – if community activities are unavoidably interrupted or access and parking significantly reduced.

# BROADER CONTEXT & PLANNING ISSUES

---

In a community as space-challenged as Arlington, decisions involving investments in new facilities and changes in the use of existing public spaces are best made through open, comprehensive planning that evaluates many sites and options and enables all interested parties to discuss proposals and alternatives and make informed comments to elected officials.

In contrast, the TJWG has faced major frustrations and constraints. The study was given a very short deadline. It was focused on a single well-used site that had already been targeted for a major new project. Only one alternative was presented, involving two other sites (Barcroft and Randolph), without the time or information for thorough public comparisons of the benefits and shortcomings of each option, much less other approaches. Crucial information about school plans and programming was not available from APS. Moreover, there was no guiding framework of countywide public facility plans and siting policies.

Working group members repeatedly expressed frustration about the information vacuum regarding major planning and programming issues that the School Board has not yet publicly addressed. The first is whether the proposed new elementary school would be a neighborhood or a choice school. This is not just a question of whether more walkers or buses would arrive every day. The answer has large implications for the future of Patrick Henry Elementary School nearby. It affects nearby neighborhoods' involvement and identification with the new school. It determines which south Arlington students might enjoy the new facilities, and starts the complex process of program relocations and boundary changes through which additional seats at Jefferson might relieve enrollment pressures at Oakridge and other overcrowded schools farther south.

Despite these community questions and concerns, the working group was advised that the School Board will launch a process for determining the programming of a new school only if and when building it has been approved.

APS is also not ready to unveil specific plans for expansion of the Career Center to a 1600-seat high school, which is proposed in the adopted CIP to occur in stages between FY 2020 and 2022 at a total cost of \$153.4 million. This too stirs up concerns about the future of Patrick Henry and the cumulative impacts of school expansion in Arlington Heights. Yet so far the neighborhood has not been given definite commitments to open, community-oriented planning for the Career Center/Henry site.

In addition to its strong endorsement of more comprehensive County and APS facilities planning, the working group urges the School Board to improve the sequencing of APS decision-making so that community input and planning for construction and programming can be better aligned.



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

---

The TJWG's final rounds of discussion have generally reinforced and further informed the findings and recommendations in our December 1, 2014, preliminary report.

The group was charged with recommending whether a new elementary school should be located anywhere on the Jefferson site, and if so, under what guidelines and conditions. We have read that as asking both whether a new school could be added to the site without undermining the stated County goals, and whether in broader policy contexts a new school should be built at Jefferson immediately.

**FIRST**, the group generally agrees that a new elementary school could physically fit on the western side of the Jefferson campus, provided that it is a multi-story building with a compact footprint and structured parking capped by green play areas. Any such project should also be governed by site-specific guidelines, conditions and design principles that promote environmental best practices and minimize adverse impacts on TJ Park, community activities, and the immediate neighborhood. Those provisions, called for in the group's charge, are discussed further below.

**SECOND**, the working group remains divided on the question of whether a new elementary school should be built at Jefferson right now. The following summarizes the major arguments on each side, with the caveat that members may share a conclusion without agreeing on every point.

Those who support immediate construction of a new elementary school at Jefferson offer the following reasons:

- The need for seats is so urgent that construction cannot be postponed in hopes of better remedies. This proposal has been thoroughly vetted and its practical problems seem manageable, while issues raised by the Barcroft and/or Randolph communities have not gotten comparable attention.
- A new school, even with structured parking, is likely to provide more additional seats at a lower per-seat cost than additions at Barcroft and Randolph, the only alternative identified by APS.
- Jefferson is extremely well located for a new school, because the nearby Columbia Pike corridor is forecast for strong residential growth, the site's central location offers long-term flexibility as capacity needs change, and the site is served by major and minor arterials and public transportation, while Barcroft and Randolph are served only by neighborhood streets.
- From an environmental standpoint, this project, with the proposed guidelines, is not objectionable because it would not disturb major trees or other natural resources, would not greatly increase storm-water runoff, and could replace some paved areas with new play space.
- Co-location with a middle school and a park with recreational features allows for the shared use of facilities, can minimize new impervious coverage, and offers future flexibility as student age demographics may change.
- The needed seats cannot wait on the one-to-two-year process of the new facilities study committee, which must first define criteria and processes for site identification. Moreover, actual site evaluations will reasonably point to the TJ site in addition to others that are likely to be required for future schools.

Those who oppose immediate construction of a new elementary school offer the following reasons:

- Building on the west parking lot, which is designated as parkland, would permanently foreclose redesigning that space for sports and recreational use, and would instead convert county-held open space to other uses despite widespread community opposition to any loss of parklands.
- The decision to build should not be made without open discussion of the programming of a new school, the ripple effects on other south Arlington schools, the future of Patrick Henry, and compre-

hensive planning for the Career Center/Henry campus. APS should also explain how building at Jefferson is the best relief for overcrowding at Oakridge and other schools several miles farther south.

- Such a large commitment should be deferred until the Arlington Community Facilities Study, being launched by the County Board and School Board, has made a comprehensive inventory of school and park needs, developed siting criteria, and formulated overall policies on the wise use of open space and other finite resources.
- APS has not done a true, in-depth alternatives analysis that would consider more locations, including underused County facilities, plus strategies such as reprogramming, better space utilization, and relocation of choice programs that might provide more seats where needed more quickly and with less strain on APS' bond capacity.
- The authorized cost of \$50.25 million does not include the cost of structured parking or other public costs that should be recognized, such as the value of the county parkland and the adverse effects of overburdening a site that so many Arlingtonians rely on for healthy recreation.
- Construction at Jefferson should not rush ahead without coordination with County plans for improvements to the park and/or community center.

**THIRD**, while divided about whether a project should proceed, the TJWG is united in recommending the list of site-specific guidelines, conditions and design principles listed in Attachment A for application not only to an immediate project, if any, but also to any free-standing school or addition proposed at Thomas Jefferson in the foreseeable future. These provisions, in conjunction with general county and APS policies and regulations, will help identify the community assets and uses that should be protected, flag potential problems for early investigation, and suggest ways to minimize harm. Much less detailed than use permit conditions, they should be taken as a starting point for thorough evaluation of a specific proposal by its planners and architects, the Public Facilities Review Commission and other panels, and the community at large.

**FOURTH** and finally, the TJWG agrees on the desirability of open, transparent, community-based, coordinated long-range planning for parks, schools and other needed facilities. We also recommend comprehensive or master planning for major county and/or school sites such as Thomas Jefferson and the Career Center/Henry campus. Having endorsed these initiatives in our preliminary report in December, we welcomed the January 1st announcement of the Arlington Community Facilities Study being undertaken by the County Board and School Board with broad public involvement.

One product of this effort should be clear policies and creative strategies to meet community needs for schools and other facilities while preserving and expanding the parks, recreation and open space that Arlington's growing population also wants and needs. Schools and parks are both essential for healthy individual and community growth and should be planned together, not pitted against each other at site after site.

As our arguments for and against immediate school construction suggest, the County Board's decision about building at Thomas Jefferson could make the proposed elementary school there one of the last major projects launched before the broader study-- or one of the first evaluated in accord with it. In either case, the TJWG's experience can inform the larger work. Despite the arbitrarily narrowed focus and timeline of the TJWG, the community engagement process was a very productive one. Reaching out to many different groups in the community to solicit feedback was helpful to our deliberations and stimulated community discussion and comments to elected officials as well. The major stakeholders represented on the group were able to discuss issues in depth, learn from each other, and create specific guidelines that show what the most important community interests and values are. This is a reasonable road map for further and future community engagement as Arlingtonians continue to address the challenges of growth.

# APPENDIX A      *GUIDELINES, CONDITIONS & DESIGN PRINCIPLES*

---

In addition to general County and Arlington Public Schools (APS) policies and rules governing construction of public facilities, the following guidelines, conditions and design concepts should be applied to any school construction on the Thomas Jefferson site:

1. Because parks and open space are such valuable community assets, a project adding any other use on such lands should be accompanied by efforts to add, recover and/or improve green areas and usable open space on the site.
  
2. To protect the area east and north of the APS/County property line (the area generally known as “TJ Park”), the following conditions should be met:
  - a. The area should be maintained essentially “as is,” with existing conditions and features unchanged and undisturbed, with the possible exception of structured parking as noted in c. below, or improvements made in accord with a master or other plan developed by the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) with community input.
  - b. To preserve public safety and a sense of openness, clear views and pedestrian access from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street South through the trees into the park should be maintained.
  - c. Any structured parking located on this portion of the site should be coordinated with DPR plans for the park and designed to be wholly or partially depressed, with recreational amenities above, with its top no higher than the pre-construction elevation of the ground or basketball or tennis courts, so as not to impede views and access into the park.
  
3. Locating an elementary school on the site should not result in any significant loss of green space or recreational programming. To minimize construction impacts, coordination among APS, DPR and major stakeholders (the County Fair Board, theater users and others) should be maintained during planning and all phases of construction on the site:
  - a. Development of the site should be jointly planned in order to maximize the value and benefits of APS and county capital investments.
  - b. The existing community center and indoor and outdoor park and recreation functions and activities (i.e., art studio, woodshop, County fitness center, basketball courts, measured trail, etc.) should be maintained.
  - c. The integrity of a consolidated park should be maintained, with amenities relationally located (i.e., tennis practice wall located adjacent to tennis courts).
  - d. Any relocated amenities should be rebuilt to current DPR standards.
  - e. Construction and staging areas should be carefully planned well in advance to minimize impacts on nearby residents, middle-school students, and users of the park, community center and theater. If community activities are unavoidably interrupted or access and parking reduced, APS and County staff should work closely with those affected to find alternatives, including interim locations for theater groups and the County Fair if needed.

4. An elementary school or middle school addition should minimally impact the surrounding community:
  - a. Any new structure should be designed with multiple stories and a compact footprint. Building massing and height should be consistent with the neighborhood.
  - b. Any development and related driveways and parking areas adjacent to private homes should have adequate setbacks and green buffering to shield neighbors from excessive noise and lights.
  - c. The planning and design of any new elementary school should consider possibilities for future renovation and expansion of the community center and middle school, to ensure those facilities can continue to meet the needs of their respective users into the future.
  
5. The value of existing community amenities at the TJ site should be recognized and enhanced in the course of school construction:
  - a. APS should seek opportunities to improve existing community amenities and areas used by the general public, whether on school-held or county-held property (i.e., the community center entrance, the outdoor area along the east wall of the existing middle school, and walkways and plaza areas outside the theater).
  - b. APS development of the site should recognize the value of the TJ Community Garden, an existing amenity not expressly noted in the working group's charge, and keep it in its current location if at all possible. If relocation is required, the new location should have ample sun, a convenient water source, and proximity to the middle school.
  - c. The measured trail should not be harmed, interrupted or shortened by any development of the site. Everyday vehicular circulation, including school buses, should not be permitted on the measured trail or on the walkway between the wall of the gym and the fields.
  - d. The entrance to the community center may be relocated or enhanced, but should not be blocked, visually obstructed or hidden from street view by a school building.
  
6. The recreation needs of additional students should be accommodated without impinging on general community use of the park:
  - a. Planning and design of an elementary school campus should include plans for the indoor and outdoor play space, including a playground, as needed to meet requirements for elementary -age physical education, recess, and extended day programs on that campus.
  - b. In the event of middle-school expansion, the impacts of additional students on TJ park fields and other facilities should be evaluated in advance and any needed upgrades of those features included in the project.
  - c. The joint use agreements between the County and APS should be updated to reflect changes in school enrollment and recreation needs.

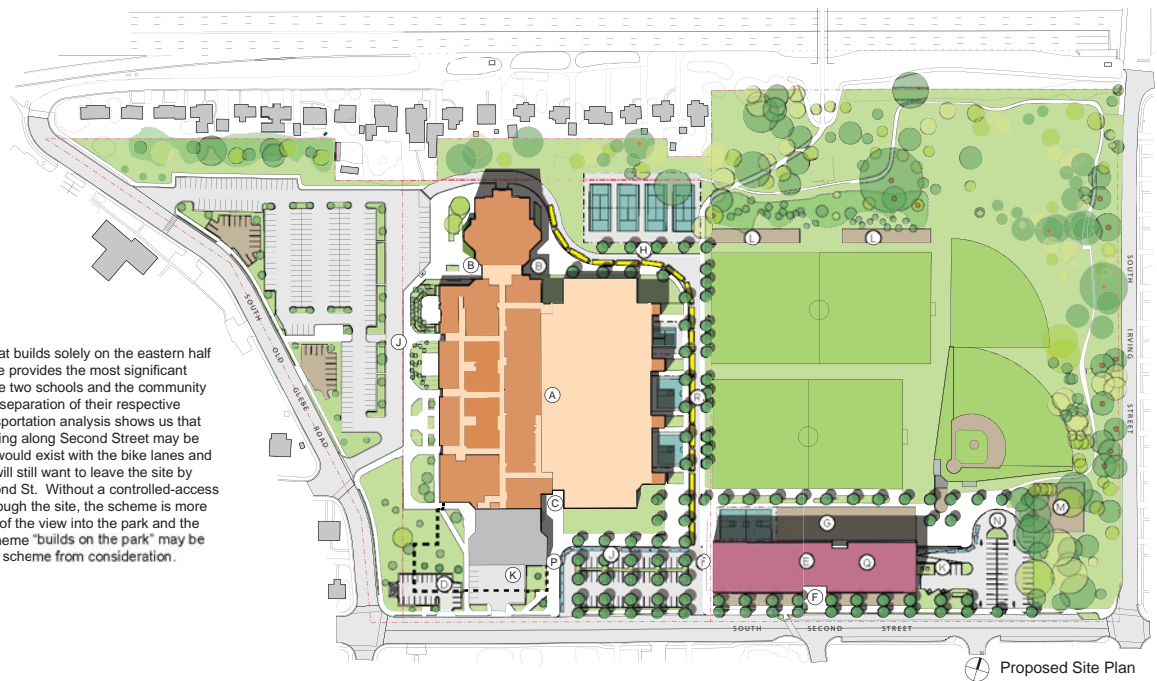
7. A comprehensive, well- planned approach to parking on the site should incorporate the following:
  - a. On-site parking should be conveniently located where needed for the various uses of the site, and adequate on-site vehicular and bicycle parking should be provided for everyday activities and most events.
  - b. On-street parking should be preserved for nearby residents' use to the maximum extent possible.
  - c. Structured parking, at least partially underground, should be part of any plan for a new elementary school at this site. All costs and funding sources associated with that parking should be identified early as part of the school's overall cost.
  
8. Any proposal to locate environmental or energy-related features (i.e., major stormwater management facilities or geothermal wells) anywhere on the site should be considered early in project planning, with thorough disclosure and community discussion. Further, such projects should be planned and coordinated with County plans for the site and scheduled County major maintenance or improvements of the area involved.
  
9. Any school development should require a comprehensive transportation solution which, among other points:
  - a. Reduces the impacts of traffic flow in the surrounding community;
  - b. Increases safety, convenience and connections to the site for walkers and cyclists;
  - c. Provides efficient school bus access as well as parent-drop offs on the site in a manner that improves traffic conditions for residents and commuters as well as school-related travelers; and
  - d. Provides for periodic APS/County review and adjustments of traffic patterns and controls if needed to address problems.
  
10. The determination of school programming for any new elementary school on the site (i.e., neighborhood versus choice) should be made through a transparent and engaged community process in advance of planning and design of any new elementary school.





## SCHEME ONE

As the only scheme that builds solely on the eastern half of the site, scheme one provides the most significant separation between the two schools and the community center – and the most separation of their respective vehicular traffic. Transportation analysis shows us that bus drop off &/or queuing along Second Street may be problematic: conflicts would exist with the bike lanes and the majority of buses will still want to leave the site by traveling west on Second St. Without a controlled-access bus lane/play alley through the site, the scheme is more challenging. Blocking of the view into the park and the perception that the scheme “builds on the park” may be enough to remove this scheme from consideration.

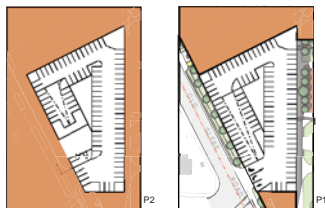
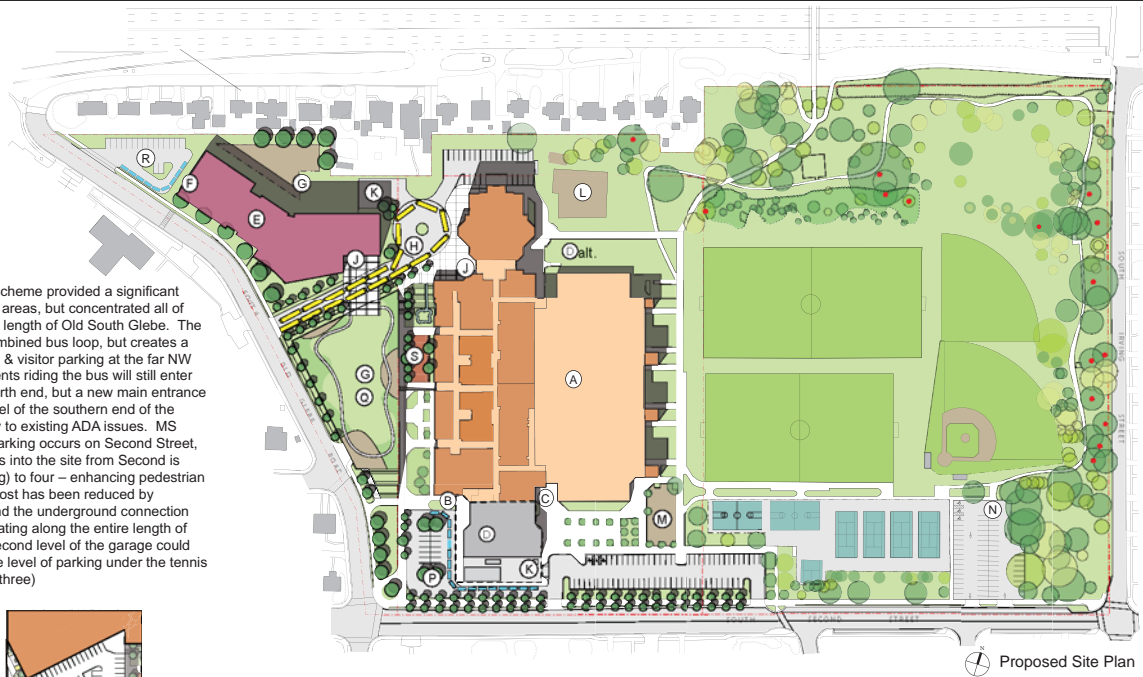


Plan of Proposed Below-Building Structured Parking and parent-drop off.

- (A) Existing TJ Middle School + Community Center
- (B) Middle School Entrance
- (C) Community Center Entrance
- (D) Area of future MS expansion
- (E) New Elementary School
- (F) Elementary School Entrance
- (G) Dedicated ES play space
- (H) Combined ES/MS Bus Queue/Drop
- (J) MS Auto Queue/Drop
- (K) Service Yard
- (L) Community Garden & Playground
- (M) Community Playground
- (N) Playfield Drop-Off
- (P) Future MS Entrance
- (Q) Parking beneath Building with dedicated ES auto que & drop
- (R) Multi-use space for bus queuing, fire lane, pedestrian path, and play areas.

## SCHEME TWO

The original version of this scheme provided a significant net gain of play/recreational areas, but concentrated all of the traffic on just 50% of the length of Old South Glebe. The revised scheme keeps a combined bus loop, but creates a new ES parent drop-off loop & visitor parking at the far NW corner of the site. MS students riding the bus will still enter Thomas Jefferson on the north end, but a new main entrance is created on the ground level of the southern end of the building, providing a remedy to existing ADA issues. MS parent drop-off and visitor parking occurs on Second Street, and the number of driveways into the site from Second is reduced from seven (existing) to four – enhancing pedestrian safety. Structured parking cost has been reduced by eliminating drop-off lanes and the underground connection to the ES, and by not excavating along the entire length of the MS. (The cost of the second level of the garage could also be weighed against one level of parking under the tennis courts as shown in scheme three)

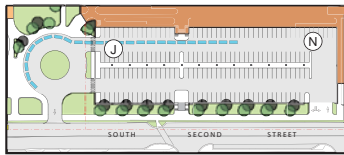


Proposed Parking Deck Plans

- (A) Existing TJ Middle School + Community Center
- (B) New Middle School Entrance
- (C) Community Center Entrance
- (D) Area of future MS expansion
- (E) New Elementary School
- (F) Elementary School Entrance
- (G) Dedicated ES play space
- (H) Combined ES/MS Bus Queue/Drop
- (J) Bus rider entry
- (K) Service Yard
- (L) Community Garden
- (M) Community Playground
- (N) Playfield drop-off
- (P) Dedicated MS drop-off, visitor parking
- (Q) Parking beneath elevated field, opening on to pedestrian plaza.
- (R) Dedicated ES drop-off, visitor parking
- (S) Existing “pits” on west side of MS are joined to create a plaza with an at grade opening into the parking structure

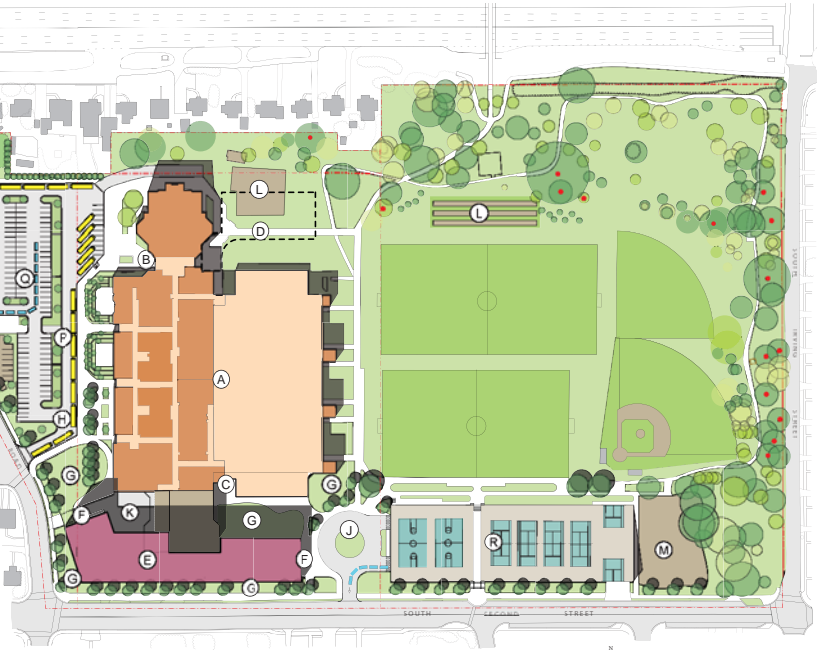
SCHEME THREE

The previous version of scheme three was incomplete, as it didn't allow for adequate queuing and turning space for buses. The revised version keeps the existing west parking lot as-is. MS parent drop-off and combined MS/ES bus drop-off occurs in the existing lot. Elementary school bus riders will enter on the second level of the new school, by way of a ramp circling around a dedicated ES play area. Fenced pre-K, K and Grade 1 play and garden areas open directly from ground level classrooms along the south side of the new school, with additional new playgrounds located immediately north of the building. (All rooftop play space has been removed) The main entrance to the ES is on the east side, with a new drop-off loop and queuing/parking semi-submerged beneath reconfigured tennis and basketball courts built to current standards. A new community playground, 3 times larger than existing, is provided in the location of the current "tennis court lot". The number of driveways along Second is reduced from seven to two and a new grand staircase entrance is provided into the park.



Proposed Parking Deck Plan

- (A) Existing TJ Middle School + Community Center
- (B) Middle School Entrance
- (C) Community Center Entrance
- (D) Area of future MS expansion
- (E) New Elementary School
- (F) Elementary School Entrance
- (G) Dedicated ES play space
- (H) ES Bus Queue/Drop
- (J) ES Auto Queue/Drop
- (K) Combined Service Yard
- (L) Community Garden (relocated in future?)
- (M) New Community Playground, 3x larger
- (N) Playfield Drop-Off
- (P) MS Bus Queue/Drop
- (Q) MS Auto Queue/Drop
- (R) New courts over parking with a grand staircase entrance to Park.



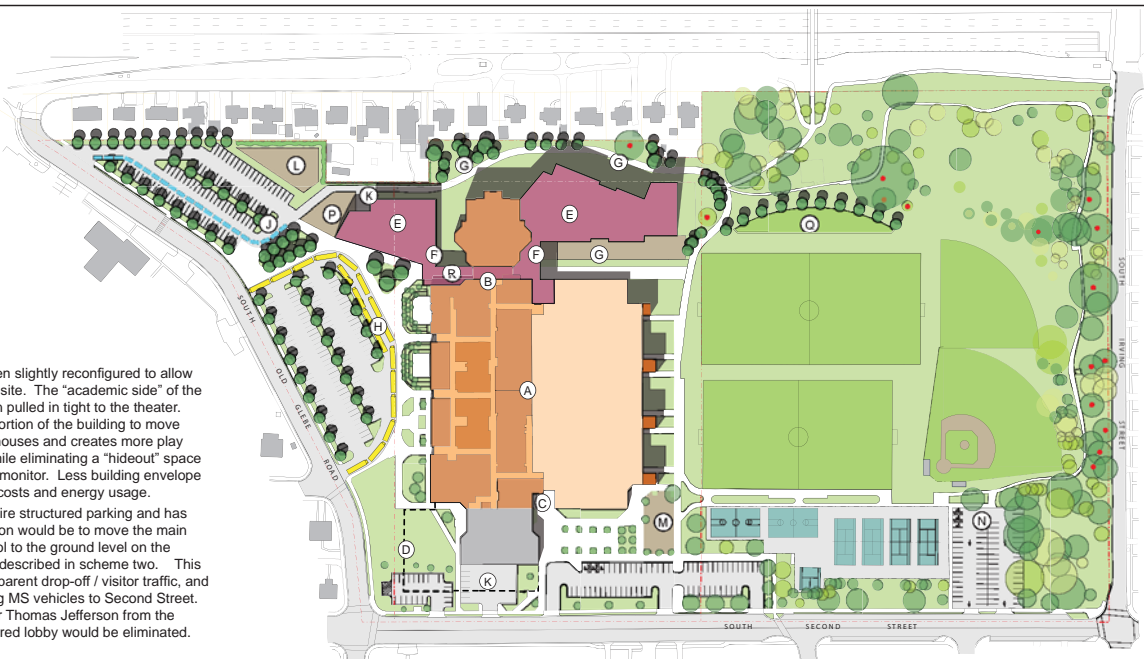
Proposed Site Plan

SCHEME FOUR

The west parking lot has been slightly reconfigured to allow all of the buses to queue on-site. The "academic side" of the building (east side) has been pulled in tight to the theater. This allows the three story portion of the building to move further away from adjacent houses and creates more play space north of the school while eliminating a "hideout" space that could be a challenge to monitor. Less building envelope area also reduces both first costs and energy usage. As this scheme doesn't require structured parking and has the lowest cost, another option would be to move the main entrance of the middle school to the ground level on the south end of the building as described in scheme two. This would separate ES and MS parent drop-off / visitor traffic, and relieve congestion by moving MS vehicles to Second Street. MS students would still enter Thomas Jefferson from the north, but the need for a shared lobby would be eliminated.

No structured parking is required in this scheme.

- (A) Existing TJ Middle School + Community Center
- (B) Middle School Entrance
- (C) Community Center Entrance
- (D) Area of future MS expansion
- (E) New Elementary School
- (F) Elementary School Entrance
- (G) Dedicated ES play space
- (H) Combined ES/MS Bus Queue/Drop
- (J) Combined ES/MS Auto Queue/Drop
- (K) Service Yard
- (L) Community Garden
- (M) Community Playground
- (N) Playfield Drop-Off
- (P) School Garden
- (Q) Sloped Lawn Spectator Seating
- (R) The ES, MS and Auditorium share a common entrance. During school hours, this space serves as an access controlled corridor linking the western and eastern halves of the ES. The east half houses all classrooms, while the west half houses the cafeteria, media center, art, etc. - spaces that could remain open after hours for community use.










Proposed Site Plan



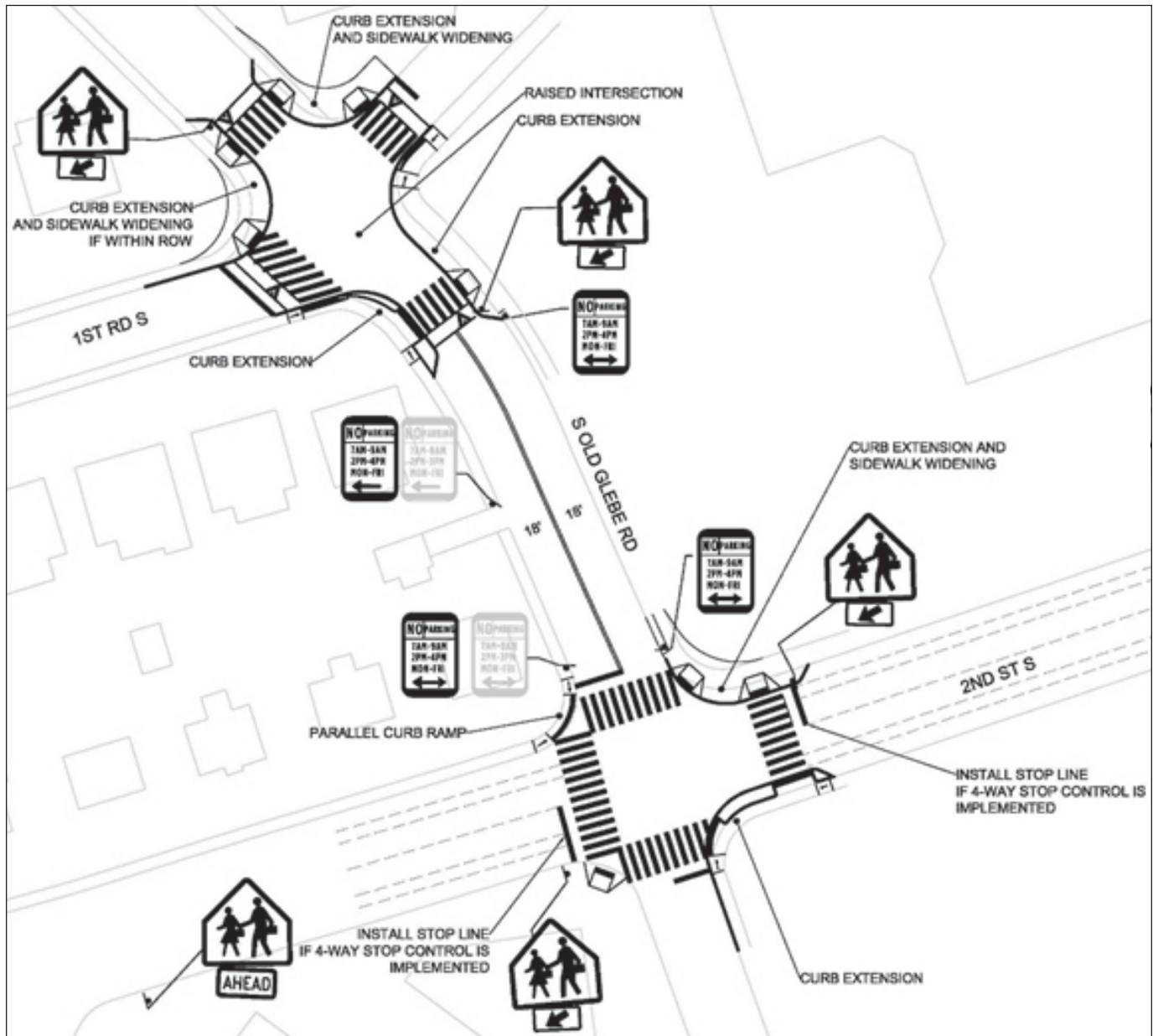


DRAFT INFRASTRUCTURE RECOMMENDATIONS AROUND THE TJ SITE

Facilities

-  Capital Bike Share Station
-  Art Bus Stops
-  Metrobus Stops
-  Jefferson Middle School Walk Boundary
-  Walk Routes
-  Toole Design Group Recommendation (all schemes)
-  Toole Design Group Recommendation (depends on site layout)

## POTENTIAL MITIGATIONS ON SOUTH OLD GLEBE ROAD



- Signs and markings
- Curb extensions
- Corner radii reduction
- Raised intersection/crossing
- Improved sight lines
- Curb ramp improvements
- Improved accessibility (ADA)
- Intersection control
- Improved bus operations



**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

---

<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

**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.