



**ARLINGTON COUNTY
PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION**
2100 CLARENDON BOULEVARD, SUITE 414
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22201



April 4, 2017

Honorable Jay Fisette
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: New Elementary School at Thomas Jefferson Park site

Dear Chair Fisette:

The Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) participated in the Public Facilities Review Committee, as well as the Thomas Jefferson Working Group, and we received a presentation on the New Elementary School at Thomas Jefferson use permit at the March 28, 2017 PRC meeting. We recognize the tremendous time and effort that has been dedicated to the issues surrounding the siting and design of this school, and we offer the following comments on: 1) Using parkland for other purposes and the proposed land lease, 2) appreciation for additional recreational space on the new school site, 3) recommendation to provide additional underground parking, and 4) the need to provide adequate notice of anticipated disruptions.

1) Using parkland for other purposes and proposed land lease

While in general we object to using existing parkland for other purposes, we appreciate that this use permit calls for using the existing parkland surface parking lot for construction of the new elementary school. We also appreciate that the use permit encroaches less intrusively than other considered alternatives upon parkland, recreational amenities, and open space. We support moving forward on a land lease to APS, as this recognizes that the underlying land is county parkland.

2) Increased recreational space

We commend the original Thomas Jefferson School Working Group and the PFRC for working through the myriad issues associated with this site to develop a new school, while simultaneously also increasing the usable recreation space by creating two new play areas and an enhanced recreation space adjacent to Thomas Jefferson Middle School. While the process was long and involved, we believe the resulting plan exemplifies how the county and APS can collaborate to produce a satisfactory result and a valuable new asset for the community. We commend all involved for balancing the needs of the existing middle school, the existing community center and park, the new elementary school and the neighbors.

3) Recommendation for additional underground parking

We understand that the use permit specifies two levels of new underground parking and that APS has established a goal of opening the new elementary school by Autumn 2019. We applaud the wisdom of providing underground parking, and we understand the need to keep the project moving.

Nevertheless, we urge that the County Board in reviewing the use permit seriously and carefully consider increasing the capacity of the anticipated underground parking by, for example, recommending that an additional level (a third level) be provided. Additional underground parking would provide an opportunity to increase the recreational space at Thomas Jefferson Park. Were the parking garage expanded beyond two levels, the existing surface lots adjacent to Thomas Jefferson Park could be used for additional recreational amenities. Given the high cost of land and the increasing demand for our parks and recreational amenities, we should seize every opportunity to increase land available for these uses.

4) Provide adequate notice of anticipated disruptions

The PRC commends county staff, consultants, and contractors for developing a detailed plan to mitigate anticipated disruptions at Thomas Jefferson during the various phases of construction of the new school. However, surprises and other complications inevitably will occur. These will test the patience of citizens already concerned about how the new elementary school will affect recreational amenities and parking in the area. We urge that the County Board in reviewing the use permit and site plan assure that procedures will be implemented to provide the neighboring community and users of other amenities at Thomas Jefferson adequate notice of scheduled disruptions and, if possible, suggested temporary alternatives.

We appreciate this opportunity to share our views with you.

Sincerely,



Caroline Haynes, Chair
Park and Recreation Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Members, Arlington Public Schools Board
Members, Planning Commission
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation