

**Arlington Community Facilities Study
Study Committee Meeting #7 – May 13, 2015
Prepared by Sarah McKinley, Columbia Heights Civic Association**

Major conclusions:

- **The community process for identifying and building Fire Station #3 took over 22 years and involved a Relocation Task Force that focused on open and transparent processes. Lessons learned included: the importance of communication between the County Board and citizens; wide participation by citizens and the local neighborhoods; the importance of defining the scope of work for the siting task force with a firm deliverable date; ensuring that sites are not limited artificially; and making decisions using fact-based criteria.**
- **The Arlington Mill Community Center was a process that took about 11 years and included major changes in program design. APS was initially a partner in the project but then dropped out to pursue a faster track elsewhere. The first private partner dropped out when the recession hit. But perseverance pays off. Lessons learned included: the advantages of working with the Form-Based code, which streamlined the approval process and helped built public support for a mixed-use development; combining parking and some construction between the community center and affordable housing created substantial savings; portions of the building were not completed, allowing flexibility and resulting in savings for future expansion of services. But renting retail space in public buildings continues to be problematic.**
- **The Thomas Jefferson Working Group was launched in 2014 to evaluate TJ as a site for a new elementary school in South Arlington and was given less than a year to make recommendations on whether a new school should be built on the site. The TJ site is the home of a combined Middle School and community center, in the midst of a very busy park. The group used public involvement to identify goals for decision-making, which included retaining the wooded end of the park with no significant loss of green space or recreational programming. The group identified pros and cons of building on the site, and while it did not reach consensus on the advisability of building there at this time, it did make recommendations for design principles, including: structured parking; improving green space, community amenities; address construction needs and transportation issues. Lessons learned included: using cooperative planning among staff and citizen managers and using County and APS staff as consultants; group involvement in shaping recommendations and reports; and taking sufficient time to inform and involve the public.**

Case Studies of Siting Processes

The seventh meeting of the Arlington Community Facilities Study included three presentations of case studies in which Arlington sought community input on siting decisions. This meeting was attended by County Board Member John Vihstadt, Arlington School Board members Nancy Van Doren and Barbara Kanninen.

Co-Chair Ginger Brown opened the meeting with a brief overview and noted the many meetings by the various subcommittees. The May 27 Facilities Study meeting will focus on CIP Basics, to be held at the Parks & Natural Resources Operations Building, 2700 S. Taylor Street. She also encouraged everyone to attend the June 2 Public Open House on the facilities study process at the Courthouse Plaza Lobby, Noon – 3 p.m., 4-6 p.m. and 6-9 p.m.

On April 30 the School Board issued an update on school needs, predicting we would be short 1,000 seats in S. Arlington and announcing a new broad-based process for site selection. It hoped to issue a decision on South Arlington site options in December 2015, with a new school built before fall 2019.

Two of the case studies presented outlined multi-year processes, while one was a much shorter process, less than one year in length.

Case Study – Fire Station #3

Nancy Iacomini, Chair of the Fire Station #3 Relocation Task Force, outlined the first siting case study. This siting required an understanding of its historic roots. In 1919 the Cherrydale Volunteer Fire Company erected its first station on Lee Highway. By the 1940s the county replaced the voluntary units with a paid Fire Department work force. The County housed equipment in the Cherrydale Station, which was built by the African-American community. This case study spanned the longest time, about 22 years, from 1989, when the County began deliberations, to 2011, when the New Fire Station #3 opened.

In 1989 the County established an Advisory Committee for the relocation of Fire Station #3. By February of 1990 the Committee reported listed eight sites, with the “Nichols site,” next to the historic station, ranked first. By November of that year Arlington residents approved a \$2.5 million bond for land acquisition and design/construction of the new fire station. In 1993 the County began pursuing acquisition of the Nichols site, voting unanimously in May 1994 to start the acquisition process.

Other plans were also moving forward. In June 1994 the County Board adopted the Cherrydale/Lee Highway Revitalization Plan, which included the new Fire Station #3 at the Nichols site, indicating that the station would be a “placemaker” for the neighborhood. In November 1994 voters approved another bond for \$2.76 million to acquire land and construct Fire Station #3.

In 1999 and 2000 the County Fire Department commissioned a fire station location analysis from two consulting firms, Gordon Routley and TriData Corporation. But plans didn’t move fast enough. In 2002 a local developer, Ed Peete Co., filed a site plan application to put a mixed use condo building/townhouses and single family houses on the Nichols site. The County had not been able to purchase the property and no alternative fire station was given. To the dismay of community activists, the County approved the site plan for the “Bromptons at Cherrydale” development on the Nichols site.

By the fall of 2002 the County initiated a public process to find an alternative site. In February 2003 the county established the Fire Station #3 Relocation Task Force. By August of that year the Committee filed its report. Despite firm plans for development, the Nichols site remained the first choice. The second choice was the Koons Toyota Dealership site and third with the Brown’s Honda site.

In August 2004 the County announced that the fire station would be on the Koons Toyota site, but not on Quincy Street frontage. Instead, the facility would open to the rear of the site, on Old Dominion Drive. In December of that year the County created the Design Working Group, chaired by Planning Commissioner Eric Dobson and including Cherrydale residents and citizen commissioners.

Several years passed. In December 2005 the County approved Site Plan #396, General Land Use Plan (GLUP) amendment and rezoning. In 2007 the County and community held a brief discussion of reverting the location to the Nichols site, now called Bromptons, because of structural issues with the site plan building. By July 2008 the County concluded its land swap deal with Toyota to site Fire Station #3 on Old Dominion.

In 2008 the County began parking garage construction for joint use by the Toyota Dealership and fire station. Actual construction of the fire station followed in 2009/2010. The new station received multiple industry awards, while the historic Cherrydale Firehouse continued in use by the Cherrydale Fire Company.

This process was lengthy and involved substantial community involvement. Twenty one citizens were appointed to the 2003 Task Force (16 from civic associations). The group conducted 13 meetings, which included public comment periods for citizens not on the Task Force. The meetings were held at the historic Cherrydale Fire Station

and Central Library, and meeting summaries and other information were placed on the County's web site. Decisions by the Committee were made by public balloting of task force members. The emphasis was on finding the best site and not considering questions of land ownership or acquisition. Members carried back information to their civic associations/groups using list serves, newsletters, etc.

The task force used conclusions from the 1999 Routely report and concluded that the site should be within ½ mile radius of Five Points intersection. The group applied 17 criteria to all potential sites, which included response times to northern Arlington, space for a 3-bay station, and the desire not to locate next to parks, churches or schools. The task force considered 17 initial sites, which were researched by individual task force members who then made presentations to the full Task Force. Task Force members developed a standard template/questionnaire to be used in each presentation. The Task Force narrowed the sites from 17 down to 6. Widely-attended public forum allowed the public to give comments. In August the Task Force held another round of public balloting, which narrowed the selection to three specific sites.

Lessons learned:

- Communication between County and citizens is paramount
- Wide participation should be sought, with inclusion of neighborhoods affected
- Process should be collaborative and owned by all. This involved citizens making their own presentations and evaluations.
- There are advantages to separating the siting from the design process
- Define the scope of work for the siting task force, with a firm "deliverable" date
- Don't presuppose or take sites off the table without comparing them to the agreed-upon criteria
- Don't limit sites artificially
- Use fact-based criteria to identify sites.

Case Study: Arlington Mill Community Center

Jennifer Smith, Columbia Pike Revitalization Coordinator with the Department of Community Planning, Housing & Development, presented the second case study, on the development of the Arlington Mill Community Center. The siting process for this facility was also lengthy – from 2002 to 2013, about half the time it took to site the Fire Station.

In 1996 the County purchased a vacant Safeway at Dinwiddie Street and Columbia Pike for \$2.35 million, and spent \$1.66M to renovate the building. In 1998 the County leased 63% of the facility to APS. In turn, APS intended to move to the old Shirlington

Library site after five years. But in 2002, APS and the County decided to jointly fund and build a shared facility at Arlington Mill, which would serve as a community center, continuing education high school and site of the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP). The plan was to allocate the space 50-50 between County and School programs. This dovetailed with the “Columbia Pike Initiative – A Revitalization Plan,” which was approved by the County Board and envisioned the Arlington Mill site as a “civic building.”

In 2002-2003, a work team consisting of County and APS staff, community members and the design team developed an overall vision for the building and its programs. This process included public forums and work sessions and offered a more diverse set of services than typically offered at community center. It was also much bigger than most community centers.

In 2004 the County established the Arlington Mill Steering Committee headed by Linda LeDuc to develop a schematic design, using the 2003 Community Process Report. In early 2005 design work began, but by September the County and APS decided to proceed independently on their respective programs. APS wanted to moved ahead at an alternate site with a shorter timeline. The County was interested in pursuing a public-private partnership to help finance the community center. The 2005 update of the Columbia Pike Revitalization Plan emphasized mixed-use development and affordable housing.

In the Winter of 2005-06 the County finalized the community center program, including community preference for a larger gym and flexible classrooms. By the summer/fall of 2006 the County issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for a private development partner. In November 2006 votes approved a \$26 million bond to construct the center. In May 2007 the County selected Public Private Alliances (PPA) as a joint development partner. Meanwhile, the Arlington Mill Review Committee continued to hold meetings that allowed for public input.

The proposal fell under the Columbia Pike Form-Based Code, a 6-story mixed use community center/retail/residential building with three stories of below-grade parking, public plaza, and 5-story residential building in the rear to accommodate 131 market rate and 61 committed affordable housing units. In June 2008 the County Board approved a use permit for the project. Then came a major monkey-wrench in the process. With the downturn in the housing market, PPA was unable to secure financing for the market rate portion of the development.

By December 2009 the County Board directed staff to proceed with a modified, phased plan for a community center and plaza, including a parking structure. This plan eliminated the residential portion of the building, although the Board committed to developing at least 61 affordable units on the remainder of the site. In June 2010 the

County gave an initial go-ahead to relocate the Columbia Pike Library to the Arlington Mill site, a decision the County Manager quickly withdrew due to strong community support for maintaining the library at its current location within the Career Center.

By September 2010 the County board had issued an RFP for a new development partner and approved a Use Permit amendment that would separate the community center from the residential building, and reduced the building height from six stories to five stories for the community center.

By October 2010 the County selected Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH) as the new development partner. This was facilitated by the State's approval of the use of public-private partnerships. The height of the residential facility was reduced to four stories to produce 122 units, which would be 100% committed affordable units, including 13 permanent supportive housing units and some for lower-income households. The County built the entire parking lot. Co-locating both facilities reduced costs by \$75,000 per unit.

The Community Center opened in 2013 and the residential units opened a year later. Lessons learned:

- The County seized the opportunity to acquire an available site without a definite long-term plan
- Later community engagement and broader Columbia Pike planning led to the vision of a mixed-use project
- The Form-Based Code anticipated civic buildings along the corridor. Its design standards allowed for a streamlined process as well as community support for mixed-use development.
- The Neighborhood Steering Committee was critical to site programming and design
- Persistence pays off – keep working the deal, even when market events intervene
- The County maximized height and building space at the time of construction, with portions of the building left unfinished to allow for future expansion, making it less costly if the county adds on later.
- Constructing the parking garage upfront saved on total project costs
- Community center retail space not yet occupied, with difficulties of locating in a public building
- Form-based code approval allowed housing to meet ambitious timeline without delaying community center construction
- Affordable housing can be a good partner. Reduced land costs allowed APAH to leverage equity and provide housing at lower income tiers. It met the County goals of locating affordable housing near transit and providing community center programs and amenities to residents.

Case Study – Thomas Jefferson Site Evaluation

Carrie Johnson, Chair of the Thomas Jefferson Working Group, provided the third case study, which conducted its business in a much more contracted timeframe than the first two. Also, unlike the process to develop a site for the fire station, the group had no choice over the site.

In 2014 Arlington Public School announced that Thomas Jefferson was the “preferred site” for a new school in South Arlington. The proposed project would add 725 seats at a cost of about \$50 million, to be completed before September 2018. What was not included in the group’s charge was any information about what kind of school it would be—whether a neighborhood school or a county-wide choice program. That decision would not be made until April 30, 2015.

Arlington County gave APS the ability to review the Thomas Jefferson site for a new elementary school. This site already had an interesting history. Over half of the land belonged to the County, and the middle portion, upon which Thomas Jefferson Middle School and Community Center sat, belonged to APS. The site also hosts the County Fair every year, and is a heavily used public park.

The County charged the working group with evaluating the Thomas Jefferson site and make a recommendation on whether or not an elementary school should be built on any part of the site. The group could make a recommendation for siting a new school at a particular location within the TJ site, in which case it would develop general conditions and design principles. Or it could recommend not to site any new school at TJ based on specific findings. The group consisted of 20 people, including County Board Member Mary Hynes, APS Board Member Emma Violand-Sanchez, representatives of seven neighboring civic associations, and representatives of various commissions, advisory councils and other groups.

The group identified goals for decision-making. It included retaining the current wooded eastern end of “TJ Park,” ensuring no significant loss of green space or recreational programming, maintaining a cohesive park, considering impacts of traffic and parking, safety and compatibility with the adjacent neighborhood, and ensuring that the community center remained available for use.

APS had provided four different conceptual layouts for consideration. The working group conducted walking tours of the site and an open house to acquaint the public with the options as well as opportunities for feedback.

The working group generally agreed that a new elementary school could physically fit on the western side of the campus, under certain conditions, like structured

parking with play space on top. But the working group remained divided on the question of whether a new elementary school should be built on that site right now. It united in recommending the list of site-specific design principles for any school construction. It also agreed on the desirability of open, transparent, community-based, coordinated long-range planning for parks, schools and other needed facilities.

It listed pros and cons for building a new school at TJ. While it could not reach consensus on the issue of recommending the site for immediate use, it did make recommendations for conditions and design principles:

- Add, recover or improve green space
- Maintain TJ Park and community programs
- Anticipate and address construction needs
- Improve community amenities
- Meet student recreation needs separately
- Include structured parking
- Address transportation issues fully
- Provide early, open community process to decide school programming

Carrie Johnson included information from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) with steps to improve community collaboration. The pros and cons of the collaborative process:

- Having no surprises is absolutely crucial
- Openness & information sharing takes time.
- Opportunities for meaningful input for all participants includes releasing documents before they are finalized
- Cooperative planning among staff and citizen managers and using County and APS staff as consultants
- Mutual respect
- Frequent check-ins to help stay on course and on schedule
- Group involvement in shaping recommendations & reports.

In this process, Carrie reports that she served as the primary writer, but with 15-18 editors. There were no minority reports and no separate staff reports. In January 2015 the County board affirmed that: the area east/north of the APS property (TJ Park) will remain as is for open space and recreational uses; no approval for a new school at this time, although it was willing to reconsider when and if the school board provides a broader analysis of South Arlington student needs; any new school at Jefferson should be on the Northwest corner, with multi-storied compact buildings, structured parking, dedicated play areas and traffic improvements; and a commitment to partner with APS on

interim and permanent facilities to gain 725 elementary school seats in South Arlington by 2018.

Carrie reports that, while the working group did not result in a permanent plan, she believes that the process will reduce the decision-making for the next school site by at least two months. Her working group conducted its research and made its recommendations in less than one year.

Materials:

Agenda:

http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/05/CFS_SC7_Agenda.pdf

Opening Remarks:

http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/05/CFS_SC7_Opening.pdf

Presentation: Case Study on Fire Station #3

http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/05/CFS_SC7_FireStation3.pdf

Presentation: Case Study on Arlington Mill Community Center

http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/05/CFS_SC7_ArlingtonMill.pdf

Presentation: Case Study on Thomas Jefferson Elementary School

http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/05/CFS_SC7_TJSiteEvaluation.pdf

Resource: Fire Station #3 Relocation Task Force Report (2003)

http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/05/CFS_SC7_FireStation3Report.pdf

Resource: Thomas Jefferson Working Group Final Report (2015)

<http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2015/01/TJWG-Final-Report-011615.pdf>