



# Friends of Thomas Jefferson Park

December 3, 2015

Hon. Mary Hynes, Chair  
Arlington County Board  
2011 Clarendon Boulevard  
Arlington, Virginia 22201

Hon. Emma Violand-Sanchez, Chair  
Arlington School Board  
1416 North Quincy Street  
Arlington, Virginia 22207

Dear Ms. Hynes and Dr. Violand-Sanchez,

As the School Board and County Board consider the implications of building a 725-seat elementary school on the grounds at Thomas Jefferson Park, Friends of Thomas Jefferson Park wishes to provide more detailed input relating to design and construction issues. While we continue to believe a new school at Thomas Jefferson Park is not desirable, we have been pleased to raise concerns through the public process. We thank both Boards and staff for addressing concerns through the public process, and for steps taken to ameliorate negative impacts on Thomas Jefferson Park.

Moving forward we remain concerned, however, about community access to park and recreation facilities at Thomas Jefferson Park. We are following the work of both Boards, including the recent joint work session, and for this reason are concerned about project funding.

Functionally, Thomas Jefferson Park already has a large number of uses. As a joint-use facility, Thomas Jefferson Park and Community Center, Theater, and Thomas Jefferson Middle School have suffered over the years from a lack of joint planning at the staff and board level. It has required intense citizen lobbying to ensure that the facilities are in the condition that they are today. The dynamic of separate CIP processes and different priorities by two elected bodies has made it impossible to timely deliver capital maintenance. This is a built-in problem unique to joint-use facilities, and it is one that should concern you as you consider the recommendations of the Community Facilities Study.

We ask that if you select this location for a new elementary school, you commit to fully funding necessary improvements and ensuring the community continues to have full access to park and recreation assets at Thomas Jefferson Park.

We draw your attention in particular to the following items:

1. Underground Parking

Underground parking should be placed near the schools so that the parking is accessible, and it should be designed to permit building on top of it at a later date. This is necessary to preserve parkland and to allow for later redevelopment of the site that could shrink building footprints and thereby increase park and recreation space at Thomas Jefferson Park. There is precedent in the county for designing to specifications that permit future construction. Two examples are Reed and the Ballston garage.

2. Ensure Access to Park and Recreation Assets During Construction

Friends of Thomas Jefferson Park opposes any impact on the outdoor trail or other outdoor recreation space as a result of construction, including use by heavy construction vehicles. Allowing the park area to the east and north of the building to be used for staging would damage park assets and make it inaccessible to the community for long periods of time.

3. Multi-Modal Transportation Concerns

Pedestrian and bicycling access to and from all the school and community programs at Thomas Jefferson Park is important. Numerous serious accidents have occurred in the vicinity, including fatalities at intersections with Arlington Boulevard (Route 50) and children hit by cars on South Second Street. Currently, Thomas Jefferson Middle School and Patrick Henry have higher bicycling and walking rates than many other schools. However, a heavier motorist pattern of use must be expected with a new 725-seat elementary school. This is likely to result in much lower rates of walking and bicycling due to safety concerns. Non-car trips should be promoted through multi-modal design principles.

- The safest pedestrian route for the largest number of students is the south side of Second Street, but the sidewalks on that side between South Irving Street and South Old Glebe Road (crossing guard location) are not ADA compliant. In fact, this stretch of sidewalk is not currently passable with a wheelchair or stroller. This needs to be fixed.
- Bicycling safety on Second Street should be assessed. The county should consider relocating the bicycle lanes (flipping parking to the outside). It should be noted that there is currently heavy use of bicycles at Thomas Jefferson Middle School. Except during inclement weather, all the recently installed bicycle racks are consistently in use.

Multimodal Transportation Concerns, continued

- The county should install 4-way stops at the Irving and Old South Glebe intersections with Second Street and consider signal lights.
- The county should review access to parking and buildings and reduce entry points to eliminate pedestrian-motorist conflicts where possible.
- The county should review traffic flow from South Second Street onto Glebe Road to determine if adjustments to on-street parking is needed.
- The county needs to rebuild Old South Glebe Road. Additional lanes should be considered as well as improved access to Glebe Road and Arlington Boulevard. Setbacks for any new building should be developed with this in mind. Current bottlenecks during drop-off and pick-up are causing very unsafe driving behavior that create daily hazards. Removal of parking lanes would have an unacceptable impact on residents on adjacent streets. During an emergency (e.g., mass shooting on site), it could prove difficult to evacuate and get first responders in and out of the site.

4. Park Asset Use by Students

In addition to preserving community access to the park (including the ability to walk dogs on the multi-use trail), we want to ensure that both elementary and middle school students have access to park enhancements delivered with the project. Currently, middle school students are using the blacktop and green space for outdoor recreation time during lunch. Access to outdoor time is very important to the physical and mental health of students, particularly in a building that has limited daylight. Any design of outdoor space on the west side of the building must accommodate the needs of middle schoolers and address potential use conflicts of students whose ages may range from 3 to 14.

5. CIP Funding for Community Playground

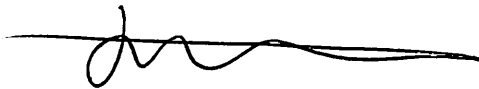
Friends of Thomas Jefferson Park requests that funding currently identified in the county CIP for enhancements at the park be used for park enhancement on the east side of the park. In particular we request that funds be allocated to replace the failing tot lot with a full multi-age community playground designed to current county standards and relocated to a more suitable location, as set forth in the Arlington Heights Neighborhood Conservation Plan. Relocation of the playground would also permit reconfiguration of on-site parking to the east of the community center and improved outdoor access to the gym for special events.

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Finally, our members are important stakeholders in this process. Friends of Thomas Jefferson Park respectfully requests to be represented in the design process through both the Building Level Planning Committee and the Public Facilities Review Committee. Should this project move forward, we believe we can add significant value and help deliver a better community asset both now and in the future.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Juliet Hiznay', written over a horizontal line.

Juliet Hiznay  
President

Cc: Mark Schwartz, Interim County Manager  
Patrick Murphy, Superintendent, Arlington Public Schools  
Mariam Kherbouch, President, Patrick Henry PTA  
Polly Hall, President, Thomas Jefferson Middle School PTA