

Tara-Leeway Heights Civic Association  
Minutes of Board Meeting of November 8, 2023

- 1) The Board of Directors of the Tara-Leeway Heights Civic Association (TLHCA) met by Zoom November 8, 2023. Directors present were John Ford (Chair), Laura Stout (Vice-Chair), Irene Szopo (Treasurer), John Richardson (Secretary), Sima Nasr, Eric Massant, and Bill Braswell. Directors not in attendance were Alyssa Cowden, Pete Erickson, Matt Fleming, Jon Judah, Dave McGowan, Michelle Winters, Mary Ann Frias, and John Vihstadt. Arlington County Board Member Takis Karantonis was present for the majority of the meeting, taking part in the discussion and answering questions. TLHCA members/residents present were Charlie Moore, Greg Perett, Caroline Kuo, Jon Ware, Sherry Liebes, Karen Zimmerman, Jason (last name unknown), Del Crockett, Sandra Zaswicki, Kim Haun, Derek Gleich, Adam Harrison, Allison Andrews, June Gallagher, Marissa/Anthony Mokabber, Mary Vihstadt, Jo Edwards, Stephanie Thomas, and Sharon (last name unknown).
- 2) Minutes of Meeting of September 13, 2023: The Minutes of the Board meeting of September 13, 2023 were accepted as distributed.
- 3) Westover Day: By general agreement, the inaugural Westover Day held the afternoon of Saturday, September 30 was a success; one estimate was 1,000 visitors. A few neighbors were critical of loud music when the featured band and kids' DJ were playing simultaneously. This issue can be easily remedied if the event is repeated next year.
- 4) Civic Federation: John Ford reported that the Civic Federation (of which he is president) addressed one topic of particular interest at its last meeting -- the future of the Lee Arts Center (LAC) at N Lexington St. and Langston Blvd. Rumors about its future abound, including tearing it down and building a 5-6 story structure that would house art studios and (perhaps) several floors devoted to affordable housing. Concern was expressed over likely loss of green space in the construction process. The location is located a few blocks of TLHCA within the Leeway-Overlee CA. County Council Member Matt DeFeranti and others have participated in the conversation about the future of Lee Center.
- 5) Recent Events: Mr. Ford reported several items of general interest:
  - a) CA Coordination: TLHCA and three other Westover area civic associations are now meeting periodically to discuss issues of common concern.
  - b) Christmas Decorations: Westover CA has committed \$6500 toward purchase of decorative lights that will be mounted in time for this Christmas season. A Santa Claus on the roof of Ayers will be added to the overall celebrations.

6) 18<sup>th</sup> St. and Patrick Henry Dr. Intersection: Mr. Ford then opened up the discussion to comments on this dangerous intersection. He welcomed County Council Takis Karantonis to the discussion, noting that both he and Libby Garvey had met with him and John Richardson in recent months for informal talks and on-site intersection inspection. Mr. Ford welcomed comments from the CA membership. 21 TLHCA residents/members joined the meeting via Zoom call for this discussion. Both sets of comments are summarized below:

- a) Resident Observations: Several residents spoke forcefully about a recent accident at the intersection that they had observed or learned about. They also described “multiple near misses” involving both vehicles and pedestrians. Attorney Jon Ware, who has created and is circulating a petition calling for a four-way stop (with more than 180 signatures to date), said that drivers have only 2.4 seconds in which to react due to the intersection’s location on a hill and sharp curve. Other residents commented that county-installed safety measures (painted warning signs, widened median, speeding notices) are inadequate to the safety challenge. Sympathetic comments by the investigating police officer after the most recent accident, including a promise to support a four-way stop sign, were cited by witnesses. Several participants, mainly parents of children attending Cardinal School, said that they and other parents now cross Patrick Henry Dr. at more distant intersections due to the hazard of using the problematic crossing. All agreed that safety improvements to date are all inadequate. More than one participant said that he/she fears that it may require an injury or death to force the county to take the necessary safety measures. Mr. Ford pointed out that, according to a recent DES (Department of Environmental Services) report shared by Mr. Karantonis, the dangerous intersection does not rise to the danger level required to justify installation of a four-way stop sign. Mr. Ford suggested that a “political intervention” may be required to force action and asked Mr. Karantonis what local residents must do in order to trigger one. Several participants noted that the county has turned down repeated appeals for a crossing guard at the intersection, ostensibly because there are not enough personnel to cover all requirements. One participant pointed out that several other intersections in the neighborhood (e.g., 16<sup>th</sup> and Jefferson) have had four-way stop signs installed despite much less evidence of a safety problem. Others noted that the frequent near misses at the intersection are not recorded and do not become part of the permanent record.
- b) Karantonis Comments: Mr. Karantonis commented frequently, both on his own and in response to participant observations/questions. His key points are below:
  - Politicians listen to citizen concerns, which must be cogent and repeated.
  - Per the DES report, 85% of drivers on Patrick Henry exceed the speed limit at the intersection.

- He considers pedestrian safety a “core issue,” and he is personally invested in the issue.
- He supports “intrusive measures” to ensure safety at this intersection, including “physical interventions” like four-way stop signs.
- There are not enough crossing guards to meet student safety requirements in the county. Guards are poorly paid, although they do receive other employee benefits. He will scour the next budget to see if funds can be transferred to boost crossing guard salaries.
- So-called automatic speeding ticketing is to be implemented on a rotating basis in the county as of January 24. 10 mobile cameras for the purpose will be deployed.
- Anecdotal citizen evidence of a problem should be sufficient to generate positive action.
- In order to generate County Board action, TLHCA should email Board members and tell them to urge the County Manager to take effective action at the intersection. Tell them to “override the manual” that says that our intersection does not meet statistical criteria for action. An “increasing culture of awareness” will help achieve results.
- The street median may actually increase the risk of accidents because drivers are looking at it and not at other cars and pedestrians.
- TLHCA should take advantage of County Board meetings Saturday mornings and “Open Door Mondays” at which to present our concerns and proposals.
- Coordinate with the Cardinal School Principal, who should send a strong letter to the County Board describing the threat to Cardinal students from the intersection.
- Elsewhere, citizen pressure brought about sidewalk construction for students walking to school.

7) Discussion Followup: Mr Ford asked if Mr. Karantonis would be willing to return for the next TLHCA Board meeting set for January 10, 2024; Mr. Karantonis said he would be happy to do so and promised to report back to the association before then. Mr. K. observed that “squeaky wheels get the grease” and encouraged TLHCA to continue citizen action. Mr K. said that he would also see if more County budget money could be found for the Neighborhood Conservation Plan (NCP), which could support issues like our intersection. He did note, however, that the next budget will be “more constrained” due to reduced tax revenue because of the high vacancy rate among Arlington’s commercial buildings. Mr. Ford thanked Mr. K.arantonis on behalf of TLHCA for joining our meeting and providing his insights.

8) There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
John P. Richardson, Secretary