

TARA-LEEWAY HEIGHTS COMMUNITY NEWS



www.taraleewayheights.org | May 2022

JOIN our next meeting virtually!



The Tara-Leeway Heights Civic Association will host its virtual annual meeting on May 11 at 7pm via Zoom. Check our website at taraleewayheights.org for a link to join the session.

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This newsletter was brought to you by your neighbors.

Hi Neighbors!

Vision Zero is an internationally-recognized set of principles first developed in Sweden in the 1990s to eliminate traffic deaths and injuries. It is now accepted in many areas around the world – including in Arlington County. The County Board endorsed a Vision Zero action plan in May 2021, and your Tara-Leeway Heights Civic Association is pleased to report that less than a year later, the county has implemented a major Vision Zero traffic improvement project for our problematic intersection at Patrick Henry Drive and N 18th St.

You may recall that your TLHCA partnered with the PTAs of both Cardinal Elementary School and Swanson Middle School late last year in urging the county to implement measures to mitigate the danger to both motorists and pedestrians at N 18th St and Patrick Henry Drive. We followed up this Spring with individual visits by two different county board members which included a walking tour of the site and surrounding area. The board members witnessed first-hand the obscured sight lines for drivers and pedestrians at the intersection, and acknowledged the risks.

The result? Within the past two weeks, crews have been at work around the intersection installing new signage and changing out some older markers. The county issued the following announcement April 25:

The intersection of Patrick Henry Dr & 18th St N was identified in coordination with APS in 2021 when Cardinal Elementary, a new neighborhood school, opened and generated more pedestrian activity across Patrick Henry Dr.

Data collection on Patrick Henry Dr confirmed speeding concerns cited by the community and led to this pilot project. This pilot will add new school crossing signage, speed signage, and pavement markings intended to (1) reduce vehicle speed traveling on Patrick Henry Dr and (2) increase visibility and awareness of people crossing at 18th St N.

Over the next several months, we will assess before and after conditions (vehicle speeds and driver yielding behavior to people in the crosswalk) and use the findings to determine whether to consider applying the same treatment at similar uncontrolled arterial pedestrian crosswalks near schools throughout the County.

We are gratified at this positive response from the County, and encourage you to join our efforts by sharing your impressions of how traffic flows at the intersection after the new measures are applied.

Another safety measure applied is a 20-mph speed limit enforced up to a distance of 200 yards from the school grounds. This will affect traffic in the Westover area, so please be mindful of this.

We hope to see you at our virtual annual meeting on Wednesday, May 11 from 7:00–9:00 p.m. A Zoom invitation is available on our website, taraleewayheights.org.

Thanks,

John Ford, President, Tara-Leeway Heights Civic Association

Community News

Weathering the Storms: How Ayers Survived

By **John P. Richardson**

Ayers Hardware and Variety, on Washington Boulevard in the Westover shopping area, is a venerable community institution in business since 1948 under two owners, the late John Ayers and Ron and Wilma Kaplan, whose two children, Kristy and Keith, manage it today. Ayers, a World War II Okinawa veteran, opened the store in 1948 and became a local hero who sponsored sports and civic groups and gave candy to the kids before his death in 1976. Ron Kaplan, a Johns Hopkins engineering graduate who worked for the Naval Research Institute but wanted to be his own boss, bought a variety store in Clinton, Maryland that he sold when he saw the devastating impact that “big box” stores would have on independent businesses in the area. Kaplan, however, wanted to remain a retailer, making an unsuccessful bid for the Ayers store that was accepted by a nephew a year after John Ayers’ death. The Kaplans maintained the informal atmosphere of the store, making few changes other than changing the “shoplifters paradise” shelving (open trays) to the more practical, current design.

Kristy Peterkin had other career objectives in mind when she majored in Library Science at James Madison University, with a Master’s degree from the University of Maryland, and her father asked her to help him out at the store “for a year” that has never ended. Ron Kaplan continues to handle payroll for the store but at 89 has decided that he is entitled to more time off; he and Wilma spend a lot more time at their beach property these days. Kristy has sons aged 18 and 20; Keith has a son 14, but both siblings have a schedule that assures that one of them is on hand at all times. Another fixture at the store is Alva Robey, who went to work for John Ayers in 1961 and has been with the

Kaplans from the beginning.

Kristy said that her greatest pleasure – and greatest frustration – is working with Ayers’ “very loyal” customers, some of whom represent “three or four” generations of local residents. She said that in some cases Ayers staff become almost like “members of the family” for customers who may just need someone to talk to and share with. Kristy conceded that their relationship with customers has changed in recent years – some are impatient and do not act as though they respect people in retail. Ayers also has to deal with the nationwide shortage of workers in retail and other service industries. Kristy said that people simply don’t apply for jobs in retail any longer, which has meant, among other things, that Ayers has had to shorten work hours because staff are not available. She noted that Ayers provides fair salaries, paid leave, and holidays, but the jobs sometimes go begging. The COVID pandemic has made all of these problems worse.

The July 2019 flood, which literally inundated the store and flooded the basement holding 2/3 of the inventory up to a height of seven feet, was a disaster for Ayers and other Westover stores, including Westover Market. Two storm drains in the rear parking lot join immediately next to Ayers’ conveyor door leading to the basement, funneling the maximum amount of water into the store; the Kaplans had to open the street-level doors in order to let the flood waters OUT! Between loss of inventory, temporary power costs, and cleanup, Kristy estimated that their net loss has been ca. \$180,000 beyond the strong community response, the only bright spot for Ayers and the other affected retailers. Kristy said that for weeks, “the community fed and cared for us,” bringing unsolicited meals and drink, as well as insisting on leaving cash with the Kaplans, at first reluctant to accept the money but unable to return it to insistent donors. A major

‘Go Fund Me’ campaign raised many thousands of dollars, of which ca. \$45,000 came to Ayers. Kristy acknowledged the generosity of the building owners, Rucker Properties, in underwriting emergency power supplies for several weeks after the flood.

Kristy Peterkin looks to an increasingly challenging future for independent store owners like the Kaplans. Besides employee shortages, she pointed to supply chain difficulties since the Amazons, Home Depots, and Targets dictate both item and price decisions to manufacturers, forcing stores like Ayers to go along and reducing their bargaining leverage. The COVID pandemic simply made everything more difficult. Kristy and Keith will inherit Ayers Hardware and Variety at some point from their retired parents. Kristy is hopeful that Ayers’ long tradition of service to the community and loyal customers will continue to keep it as an anchor in Westover.



Help Support TLHCA

Each year, we ask every household within our boundaries for an annual contribution of \$10. Please consider a donation for 2022-23 below. Funds are used for neighborhood events, guest speakers, and other investments in our community. Additional donations are always welcomed and appreciated.

We offer two payment options:

- 1. PayPal:** go to our website at taraleewayheights.org. And click on our PayPal link to pay with your PayPal account or a credit card.
- 2. Check:** mail us a check using the form to the right.

Annual Dues and Donations to TLHCA (May 2022—May 2023)

Name _____

Address _____

Email ** _____

☐ Family Membership (\$10)

☐ Additional Contribution In the amount of \$ _____

Mail check to: TLHCA, P.O. Box 50022, Arlington, VA 22205

** Please provide an email address to ensure receipt of the TLHCA Newsletter which is distributed electronically periodically throughout the year.



Community Center May Be Permanently Closed

We're all familiar with the Lee Community Center at the corner of N Lexington St and Langston Blvd. The LCC has filled a variety of public functions for nearly 100 years on that site, but the building is deteriorating and its future is uncertain. Its location puts the Lee Center and the playgrounds behind the building on the radar of the County's Plan Langston Boulevard (PLB) initiative which is designed to revitalize this pivotal North Arlington transit corridor. PLB staff have been considering various outcomes for the aging LCC building.

No final decisions have been made yet about the Lee Center, but we understand that County planners do not presently envision either rehabilitating the building or replacing it as a purely community center. There is some discussion of erecting a mixed-use private/public use structure at the front of the site along Langston Blvd., but our neighbors to the north in the Leeway-Overlee civic association may prefer to see the



present building site simply returned to green space.

Meantime, the artists who have crafted beautiful things at the LCC for many years returned to the building when County health officials deemed it safe for them to do so in early February. Informal word from the County is that if/when the HVAC system or another key building component such as the fire-retardant system in the building

fails, the artists will need to find a new home, possibly in South Arlington, and the building will be closed pending a decision on its fate.

Your TLH civic association has been in touch with the County Board to register our strong support for retention of the site as dedicated open space or continued use for a community center or other public purpose. No decision is expected imminently.

Tara-Leeway Heights by the Numbers



Tara-Leeway Heights made it into Arlington Magazine's Top 10 neighborhoods in Northern Virginia!

www.arlingtonmagazine.com/10-great-neighborhoods-2022



Our own Big Walnut Park is the only county park within Tara-Leeway Heights boundaries. Please join your TLHCA in caring for it.



JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST!

We estimate that we only have email contact information for about half of our residents. We can better serve you with information and, potentially, with emergency notices, if we have current contact information. Please help us by filling out the attached form or add your email address to our listserv so you can get updates, newsletters, and alerts straight to your inbox. Our Winter 2022 newsletter will be sent via email.

taraleewayheights.org

Neighborhood Updates

Flood Protection for our Neighborhood

We all remember the devastating flood of July 2019 that impacted so many of our neighbors' homes and property and did major damage to the merchants in our Westover Village shopping center. Your TLHCA joined with our neighboring civic associations soon thereafter to seek remedies to prevent future such disasters. One major result of our efforts is on full view right now, adjacent to the Cardinal School.

Cardinal School- Underground Stormwater Detention Vaults Construction Timeline

	2022												2023					
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
Mobilization/initial construction activities																		
Pile Driving & Support of Excavation																		
Vault 1 - Excavation																		
Vault 1 - Precast Modules Installation																		
Vault 1 - Vault 2 & Existing Stormwater System Connections																		
Vault 2 - Excavation																		
Vault 2 - Precast Modules Installation																		
Vault 2 - Existing Stormwater System (Lexington St) Connections																		
Site Restoration (play fields & landscaping)																		
Street repaving																		

Construction work on our massive new stormwater detention vault began in early February, and will continue at least through the 2022-2023 school year.

As initial excavation is winding up, installation of precast concrete modules will continue through this summer on the main vault that will lie beneath the large school playing fields. Please bear in mind that a second, smaller vault will subsequently be installed beneath the flat area atop the sledding hill immediately adjacent to N Lexington St.

We have all noticed that traffic along N Lexington St. between N 18th St. and N 19th St. has been pinched to accommodate dump and delivery trucks moving to and from the construction site. Following recommendations from our members who live in that area, County officials have installed better pedestrian signage and have lined the affected stretch of N Lexington St. for vehicle and pedestrian safety. Your TLHCA is in regular contact with county project managers; please let us know of concerns at our email address at tlhcapresident@gmail.com and we will forward them to the appropriate county officials.

