

## Tara-Leeway Heights Civic Association

March 19, 2009

The Honorable Barbara A. Favola, Chair  
The Honorable Jay Fisette, Vice Chair  
The Honorable Mary Hynes  
The Honorable Walter Tejada  
The Honorable Christopher Zimmerman  
Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Blvd. Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Opposition to Proposed Closure of Westover Library

Dear Ms. Favola, Mr. Fisette, and County Board Members,

On behalf of our neighbors and the residents of our neighborhood, the Tara-Leeway Heights Civic Association (TLHCA) would like to express our strong opposition to the proposal to close Westover Library as of July 1, 2009, pending the opening of the new Westover Library building in October. Given budget realities, we suggest a compromise, that would allow the County to realize some of the projected savings while preserving this essential facility for use by the community during a critical period - the summer.

According to the information presented by the Library Director at a March 17, 2009 meeting at Westover, that also can be found on the County's website, <http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/ManagementAndFinance/budget/page68807.pdf>, the proposed closing of Westover on July 1 for three months will result in an estimated savings of \$32,000, or approximately \$10,000/month. In addition, it is our understanding that the projected savings are expected to be realized through reductions in staff, and not through savings in building expenses, as the building will be maintained at ambient temperatures during this period.

We recognize that the County Board is facing a revenue shortfall for FY 2010 and has difficult choices to make. These are challenging times for everyone. However, we respectfully submit that the fairly miniscule savings to be realized from closing Westover from three months do not justify the cost and impact of this upon the community.

According to the Library's own statistics, Westover is among the libraries with the highest usage rates across the County, particularly in the area of youth services. Closing the library during the summer, when school is out, is therefore a particular hardship. The library's role in the community cannot be exaggerated: as a resource for seniors, adults, and families; for children of all ages; as a "safe place" for summer activities; and through its Summer Reading and other educational programming, as a means of supporting and furthering children's reading prowess. In a summer where financial difficulties may cause families to cut back on summer camp

expenses (as the County also is proposing), the availability and accessibility of the Library is even more essential. For residents who are of necessity cutting back on expenses such as utility bills, or car costs, the availability of a safe, air conditioned public space, within walking distance, also is essential. Again, all of this is to be weighed against a projected \$10,000/ month savings from closing Westover on July 1. We submit that the savings simply do not justify the cost.

The TLHCA therefore urges you, the County Board members, to reject the proposal to close Westover entirely from July 1 through the opening date of the new building. However, we recognize that budget cuts have to come from somewhere. Therefore, TLHCA suggests as a compromise that **the current Westover Library be closed as of Labor Day weekend, i.e., Friday, September 4, 2009**. In other words, the library would remain open during the summer while children are out of school. Since ambient temperatures are to be maintained anyway to preserve the collections, this will result in little or no additional expense.

As Ms. Kresh can confirm, the TLHCA and the rest of the Westover community are ready and willing to volunteer in whatever way we can, whether to help keep the library open during July and August, or to help pack it up and move into the new facility when the time comes. That message was communicated loudly and clearly during her meeting at the Westover library on March 17.

Thank you for your consideration.

The Tara-Leeway Heights Civic Association

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Ted Stump, President