



PUBLIC FACILITIES REVIEW COMMITTEE

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October 26, 2015

The Honorable Emma Violand-Sanchez, Chair
The Arlington County School Board
1426 N. Quincy St.
Arlington, Virginia 22207

RE: Stratford School – Concept Design

The Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) has held six meetings to consider the Arlington Public Schools (APS) concept design plan for an addition and renovation to Stratford School to return it to its previous use as a neighborhood middle school. The PFRC is generally charged with ensuring that the highest quality of land use planning, design, transportation planning and other important community aspects are incorporated into civic projects. The PFRC consists of representatives from County Commissions, as well as project specific representatives. A roster for the PFRC for Stratford is attached.

The PFRC began meeting in April 2015 to review concept designs for the site. The PFRC received a set of site specific principles for urban design along with its charge in June 2015. The primary issues discussed during PFRC review include the historic significance of the site; impacts of the expansion on neighboring park property, trees and Resource Protection Area (RPA); impacts of staff, students, and parents traveling to and from the site; and the associated location of a proposed driveway connection traversing the site and connecting Vacation Lane to Old Dominion Drive.

In August 2015, the School Board and its staff determined that the proposed designs under consideration were too far over budget to proceed. With direction from the School Board, APS staff returned in October with modified designs that reduced the size of the school and came closer to the \$29.2 million budget. PFRC met once since those changes were proposed, on October 15. Ten of 18 total PFRC members were able to attend that meeting, at which straw polls were taken of members present on the location of a building addition and on the existence/location of the driveway noted above.

Building Addition

For several months APS presented a variety of 45,000 square foot proposals for a building addition to accommodate 1,000 total students. Consideration was also made for an eventual second addition to allow 1,300 students. In October, APS proposed a reduced 35,000 square foot version of each of the four location/design options that had been previously presented. Of those, two options fell roughly within the allotted budget, known as the “link” option and the “west” option.

After extensive discussion, PFRC members present unanimously supported the “west” option as the preferred option for an addition citing a variety of reasons. Most notably, this option preserves the historically significant approach to the school from Old Dominion Drive. This addition would occupy an existing parking lot that is currently used by the school but is physically located on Department of Parks and Recreation property. The loss of parking is mitigated with the expansion of a parking lot on the northern end of the site, although this area is located in and on the edge of an existing Resource Protection Area.

While the PFRC did not poll on the matter, there was general support that with this addition and location, further expansion to accommodate 1,300 students in the future would not be advisable and perhaps would prove impossible.

Driveway Connection to Old Dominion Drive

APS staff presented three options for vehicle access across the school property: a “high road” close to the school, a “low road” opposite the field from the school, and no driveway. According to APS staff, APS consultants, and County staff, a driveway is not required to safely accommodate parent drop-off and pick-up traffic at the expanded Stratford; rather improvements to Vacation Lane and other design and access changes should suffice. In addition, the driveway would cost at least \$2.4 million at a time when space for students is being cut. The PFRC straw poll concerning this driveway resulted in the dismissal of a “low road” connection, which drew no support. Further polling on a “high road” vs. no driveway revealed significant and deep disagreement among the ten members present, with a split 6-4 margin supporting the driveway.

PFRC members in support of the driveway cited concerns for student safety, traffic impacts from the new school on the immediate neighborhood, and convenient student drop-off. PFRC members opposed to the driveway option cited a tradeoff in costs between additional educational space and convenience for parent drop-off, concerns that easier drop-off would induce additional traffic, more vehicles at critical intersections on Old Dominion Drive, and decreased open space due to the driveway.

Next Steps

PFRC has an additional meeting scheduled on November 12, at which time it will review any recommended changes, and give additional members a chance to review the proposals and express opinions. Beyond November, the PFRC will meet during the schematic design phase to continue discussion on parking, street improvements, stormwater management, tree protection, RPA, open space, and other site design issues.

Overall, PFRC consideration of the Stratford concept design has been collaborative and supportive of APS staff and architects. APS has committed to working closely with PFRC to continue to address outstanding issues and the PFRC will be working to ensure they are addressed during the schematic design and use permit phases of the project.

Respectfully submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Forinash", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Christopher V. Forinash, Chair (Stratford)
Public Facilities Review Committee

Cc: Mark Schwartz, Acting County Manager
Gabriela Acurio, Deputy County Manager
Bob Duffy, Planning Director, CPHD
Arlington County Board Members
Arlington County School Board Members
Dr. Pat Murphy, Superintendent, APS
John Chadwick, APS
Ben Burgin, APS
Bill Herring, APS
Chris Forinash, Chair, PFRC Stratford
Michelle Stahlhut, CPHD
Steve Sockwell, Chair, PFRC
PFRC members