



June 30, 2016

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

*RE: New Elementary School at Thomas Jefferson –Concept Plan Design*

The Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) held five (5) meetings during 2016 to consider Arlington Public Schools’ (“APS’s”) Concept Design Plan for a new elementary school at the Thomas Jefferson site, three of which were held jointly with the Building Level Planning Committee (BLPC). The PFRC consists of representatives from County Commissions, as well as project specific representatives.

The PFRC process is following two other community discussions involving the proposed school: the Thomas Jefferson Working Group and South Arlington Working Group processes. This process involves the design of a complex site because the site design places a new elementary school on the west side of an existing middle school, theater, community center and park.

Generally the main issues that continue to be discussed are the size and impact of the above ground parking garage, the number of parking spaces, traffic impacts, transportation planning issues, pedestrian flow to school and theater entrances, preservation and use of open space, and preservation and replacement of trees. At present, the PFRC has identified no issues with stormwater management, but will review the schematic design for any problems.

***Building Massing and Design***

APS presented several alternative designs for the new elementary school at Jefferson. Two designs, which became colloquially known as the “biscuit” scheme and another known as the “lobster” or “claw” design, were alternatives presented for final group discussion. Both designs presented certain advantages and disadvantages versus each other. The “lobster” scheme is a four story building, stepping down to three stories, located at the north end of the site with a one-story above-ground parking garage that is largely open around the sides. The “biscuit” design is a more compact four story building. Ultimately, a straw poll of PFRC members showed a preference by a vote of 14 to 7 (with two members not participating) for the “lobster” design as the basis for the Concept Design Plan, although several members expressed reservations about aspects of the design.

***Building***

Members felt that the “lobster” scheme offered certain advantages. Several members felt that the location of the gym at ground level (as opposed to the top floor in the “biscuit” design) was a distinct advantage for the use of the gym. Also, the design pulls massing and structure away from the homes facing Route 50 and South Old Glebe

Road. This design also provides the possibility of a net zero building. Some members also commented favorably on the plan to allow parents to drop-off students inside the garage as decreasing impact on the surrounding community. Lastly, some members like the potential for a design offering a net zero energy building.

As noted, about a third of PFRC members voted against the proposal. Some of those members expressed concern about the location or use of the gym and its impact on nearby neighbors. Others expressed concerns about the impact of additional traffic on roads that neighbors feel currently have traffic design problems. Several members, including some voting for the proposed Concept Design Plan, felt that designs for the parking garage gave too much prominence to the garage and tended to detract from the design of the building.

Other concerns expressed by members had to do with various aspects of the proposed design, including: the design blocks visibility of the theater and middle school entrances, the building is too tall for use by elementary students, and the footprint uses too much green space.

### ***Parking Garage***

A primary concerns in PFRC discussion was the size and prominence of the proposed above ground parking garage. The one-story parking garage, as designed, is located to the south of the proposed elementary school building and is separated from the middle school by fifty (50) feet. The garage is proposed with open edges and would provide for drop-off and pick-up within the parking garage, a feature that many members supported. The number of parking spaces with the garage remains an open issue. PFRC members in an earlier straw poll, supported shared parking with the community center to meet zoning requirements thus reducing the number of spaces in the garage, but the desire of the larger (joint PFRC/BLPC) was unclear.

Many members expressed support for the concept design with the caveat of exploring the possibility of lowering or completely submerging the parking garage. This move would make the playing fields more accessible, provide better visibility to the theater and middle school entrance, and make the site more comfortable for pedestrian and bicycle access. Earlier joint meetings between the BLPC and PFRC showed overall support for a single story garage, but considerable interest in exploring design of a two story underground garage.

### ***Other Issues***

The current design proposal calls for parking on the north side of the site. Several members continue to feel that that there should be no parking to the north.

Several members were interested in any changes to the middle school as a result of building the elementary school. Specific projects mentioned as possible were installation of ground floor windows on the west side of the middle school facing the

new elementary school, and improved elevator access. Members questioned whether these projects would occur and how they would be funded.

***Going Forward***

A member raised concerns about handicap access to the school and playing fields. APS's architect (VMDO) made changes to design to meet these concerns, but the PFRC will be interested in a full review of such access for schematic design. VMDO also continues to working on possible solutions to the fear of light and noise spillover from the gym or playing field into the community. The PFRC will review specific proposals as part of future discussion.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Sockwell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'S'.

Stephen Sockwell, Chairman  
Public Facilities Review Committee

Cc: Mark Schwartz, 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  
Stephen Stricker, APS  
Michelle Stahlhut, CPHD  
Marco Rivero, CPHD