



September 30, 2016

The Honorable Nancy Van Doren, Chair  
The Arlington County School Board  
1426 N. Quincy St.  
Arlington, Virginia 22207

*RE: New Elementary School at Thomas Jefferson – Schematic Design*

On September 21, 2016, the Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) met jointly with the Building Level Planning Committee (BLPC) to discuss and review Arlington Public Schools' (APS) final schematic design for a new elementary school at Thomas Jefferson. The associated use permit is expected to come forward to the County Board in the spring of 2017. The PFRC has now met eight times in 2016, six in conjunction with the BLPC, to discuss the evolving design for the new school.

The APS design team, represented by its architect VMDO and Toole Design Group (Toole), presented the schematic design. The design has steadily changed and evolved during the process in response to concerns from the community. As presented, the PFRC supported the current design. PFRC members felt the final design represents superior architecture and liked the use and location of an underground parking garage. The PFRC voted to support the proposed schematic design 9-3 with one abstention. The main points of discussion are detailed below:

### **Transportation**

Generally speaking, transportation issues related to student drop-off and traffic circulation in the area were the largest issues and still remain outstanding.

#### ***Student Pick-up and Drop-off***

Previous iterations of the site design included a raised parking garage resulting in a covered and convenient student drop-off area deep within the site. The schematic design proposes parking completely underground which eliminates the covered student drop-off option on-site. PFRC members believe the underground parking garage is a much improved site design, however there were concerns expressed. One concern was that the use of the two lane drop-off, which assumes that many parents will do a U-turn after dropping off or picking up students, may create a bottleneck. Although a Toole consultant addressed these issues at the meeting, PFRC members would like more information about how the pickup and drop-off patterns will actually work.

#### ***Second Street/Old S. Glebe***

PFRC members remain interested in planning for traffic flow at the primary intersection of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Old S. Glebe Road. Members would like more information about both the impact of any additional traffic and improvements to deal with the impact.

## **Pedestrian Flow**

Some members advocated improvements to the pedestrian connections between the pedestrian bridge crossing Arlington Boulevard and the theater at the existing Thomas Jefferson Middle School. Also, members would like more detailed information about expected pedestrian movement to the northeast of the school and from parking areas to the theater.

## **Landscaping**

PFRC members thought that particular attention is due the trees and buffer area at the north side of the site directly adjacent to single-family homes facing onto Arlington Boulevard. Members recommended that APS work directly with these residents in determining preferred landscaping on this portion of the site.

## **Height**

The schematic design proposes a building height of four stories, which exceeds the zoning code height limit of 45 feet. Most members of the PFRC supported the schematic design proposal of a taller building as consistent with the context of the surrounding buildings. A few members remained concerned about both the height and proximity of the school to surrounding residences. In discussion members noted that the PFRC, over the course of reviewing several schools, has repeatedly recommended building higher, and more vertical as opposed to horizontal, to preserve open or recreational space. Members learned that Arlington County staff are currently working on revisions to zoning standards related to height and setbacks for schools in recognition of the changing needs of the community.

## **Other Issues**

The PFRC looks forward to participating in the continued refinement of the design including parking, street improvements, stormwater management, tree protection, open space, and other outstanding issues regarding site design and off-site impacts. Members wanted additional information about the differing impact or likely use of the proposed design on current users, such as the county fair. Members also expressed a strong desire to provide input into both landscaping and playground design. As a general proposition, the new elementary school at Thomas Jefferson process has demonstrated the value of a collaborative process with APS and County staff, and PFRC members would appreciate an ongoing opportunity to share our views with the School Board.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen Sockwell". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Respectfully submitted,".

Stephen Sockwell, Chair (Stratford)  
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  
Jeffrey Chambers, APS  
Ben Burgin, APS  
Steve Stricker, APS  
Megan Haydasz, Chair, BLPC  
Michelle Stahlhut, CPHD