



February 7, 2017

The Honorable Jay Fisette, Chair
The Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22201

RE: Use Permit for Wilson School

On February 1, the Public Facilities Review Committee (the “PFRC”) met to review an Arlington Public Schools (or “APS”) use permit application for the new Wilson School. The use permit is expected to come forward to the County Board in February 2017. The PFRC has met nine times since 2015 to discuss the evolving design for the Wilson school including a meeting discussing the proposal to locate a temporary fire station on the school property. The February meeting is expected to be the last meeting of the Wilson PFRC.

The APS design team, represented by its architect from Leo A. Daly, presented an overview of the use permit submission. Generally speaking, the main issues discussed after the overview were parking and the on-site garage, the location of an elevator in Rosslyn Highlands Park, and the Memorandum of Agreement between APS and the Department of Parks and Recreation (“DPR”).

The main points of discussion are detailed below:

Parking

A primary, outstanding issue for the Wilson school is the question of how much parking is sufficient? Another important question is where should it be located?

APS proposes an ultimate condition would set forth a requirement for up to 192 spaces consisting of 100 guaranteed off-site spaces in the neighboring Penzance garage as well as 92 spaces located on-site. The latter would be in a parking garage to be constructed after the temporary fire station is relocated.

Arlington County staff also gave a presentation. In its presentation staff contended that 100 guaranteed spaces are sufficient and there has been no demonstrated need for an additional 92 spaces. Staff’s reasoning was that the location of Wilson in the Metro-served corridor, as well as ample commercially available parking, particularly for night-time school function, in the area around the school site, makes construction of additional spaces unnecessary. In addition, staff believed there was adequate time before the fire station’s removal to assess the need for parking. Hence, there was no need to make a decision now on whether to build or not build a parking garage parking need not be made a part of the use permit consideration.

The PFRC had a lengthy discussion about these opposing views. Some members felt that design for 192 spaces might be excessive as technology shifted toward driverless cars. Other members felt that County staff was making arbitrary assumptions about the future transportation alternatives that school faculty and parents would choose in visiting Wilson. But other members felt the Wilson site, as an urban school in the Metro corridor, was the ideal place to plan for reduced parking. In further discussion some members expressed support for APS's need for flexibility in the future of using additional spaces should aides, substitute teacher, parents or even students require them. Some members felt that APS's planning was reasonable. Currently APS has 146 spaces at the Stratford school site and the need for additional short term spaces over time was easy to envision. However other members were receptive to County staff's argument that the cost to users was a consideration; there was no need now to provide so much free parking. A straw poll showed that PFRC members were evenly divided as to (1) whether parking should be on-site or off-site and (2) whether the appropriate amount was 100 parking spaces or up to 192 spaces.

Field Design

Some members were concerned about the design that plans for an elevation of the playing field on the northwest corner. As a result, some percentage (approximating up to 10%) of the surface of the playing field is lost for playing use. APS, however, does plan to use the elevated area for seating or other purposes. The discussion revealed that the elevation was due to a need to add height over the parking garage. Some members felt that the parking garage resulted in inferior urban design due to the playing field's non-welcoming appearance to pedestrians on adjacent 18th Street and the loss of use of a portion of the playing field.

Memorandum of Agreement between APS and DPR

In response to previous PFRC and Parks and Recreation Commission requests, APS and the County's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) have entered into a Memorandum of Agreement regarding Operations and Cost Sharing and Construction of the APS lighted synthetic turf athletic field, the Level Two Terrace, as well as interior amenities such as the gym, cafeteria, library, and theater/auditorium. The PFRC did not review the MOA because it was still under attorney review and was not available for PFRC comment. DPR staff provided a summary of the proposed MOA. PFRC members wanted assurance that janitorial and security services were part of the MOA and DPR staff said those were taken into account.

Other Aspects of Site Design or Use Permit Conditions

The Location of the Elevator between Penzance and Wilson School

Several members were concerned about the proposed of an elevator that provides access between Penzance's parking garage and the school. It will be a standalone structure located in the middle of Rosslyn Highlands Park along the east side of the school. Several members were concerned about the awkward location in the park, its exposure to the elements, and a safety hazard for students existing the elevator onto a

path. Suggestions to solve the issue included creating a tunnel or direct connection underground between the garage and the school, which members felt could likely be achieved economically, or moving the elevator to the Penzance building.

Field Lights

There was also a brief discussion regarding athletic field lights highlighted a concern of a member regarding possible impacts of glare from the proposed LED lights on neighboring residents. Another commissioner requested additional information from DPR regarding the hours and evening operation of the lights.

Historic Preservation

APS said that it had met with Historic and Landmark Review Board (“HALRB”) and described its efforts to address historic preservation. A couple of members continued to express a desire to incorporate materials from the existing historic Wilson school into the new design beyond the agreement made with the HALRB.

Site-Specific Conditions

Unlike previous school projects, such as Abingdon or McKinley schools, the site specific conditions associated with the Wilson use permit were not yet available for review by the PFRC. The PFRC therefore has no comment about such conditions, but suggest they should be reviewed with some care by the Planning Commission and the County Board.

Conclusion

As the February 1 meeting is likely to be the culmination of the PFRC process with respect to Wilson, I offer a couple of general observations. First, the design of the school itself is an exciting, architecturally superior building of which Arlingtonians can be proud. Second, Wilson will be an urban school and planners should view the site with this perspective. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen Sockwell". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

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
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