



March 29, 2017

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

RE: Use Permit for the New Elementary School at Thomas Jefferson

On March 15, the Public Facilities Review Committee (the "PFRC") met jointly with the Building Level Planning Committee (BLPC) to review an Arlington Public Schools (or "APS") use permit application for the New Elementary School at the Thomas Jefferson ("TJ") site. The use permit is expected to come to the County Board in April 2017. In total, the PFRC met nine times since 2015 to discuss the TJ project and seven of those meetings were joint with the BLPC. The process led to an extended discussion of an evolving design for the New Elementary school. The March meeting was likely the last meeting of the PFRC for this project.

General Comments

The agenda at the March meeting focused on presentation and discussion of the final design and use permit conditions. The APS design team, represented by its architect from Wyck Knox from VMDO Architects, presented an overview of the use permit submission. Generally speaking, PFRC members believe that the design of the New Elementary School has made significant progress from the concept design level and the PFRC continues to support the current design.

There was also a brief overview of standard school conditions and the schedule for the project as well as an update on the design of the school and surrounding landscape, sidewalks, and streets. At that time, the final use permit conditions were still being negotiated between staff of the County and APS. The PFRC therefore briefly reviewed a set of standard use permit conditions, but did not review any site-specific conditions that may have been subsequently added to the use permit. The Planning Commission and County Board should therefore assess any non-standard or site-specific conditions with some care.

The group discussion highlighted a few issues that continue to be of concern. These include: a need for additional improvements along 2nd Street S. (such as, the treatment of the corner of 2nd Street S. and S. Old Glebe, improvements to sidewalks on the south side of 2nd Street), the lack of parking for theater productions or church functions during construction, pedestrian flow (whether or not gates are needed along S. Old Glebe), and exclusion of the community from the final landscape design.

Corner of 2nd Street S. and S. Old Glebe,

The actual use of the parking lot on the corner of 2nd Street S. and S. Old Glebe Rd. continued to be up in the air as of the time of the March meeting. APS has proposed no

plans for changing the use of the lot, but offered an alternative design as a backup plan. Several members pointed out that this part of the site is a prominent corner, since it is adjacent to 2nd Street and provides a civic presence, and felt that APS could better utilize the site for something other than parking. Some PFRC members commented that APS should be more creative in its design; they preferred that this prominent corner be reimagined as green space. A few members also felt that the lot should remain as additional parking to serve the site, particularly if APS needs the space to meet its parking requirements. A suggestion, that several members supported, was to consider the use of shared parking of the northernmost lot along 2nd Street (nearest existing tennis courts) instead of the current APS design which would continue the current use of the prominent corner for parking.

Further improvements along of 2nd Street South.

The group discussed the need for improvements to the south side of 2nd Street S. between Irving and S. Old Glebe Road. Currently there is heavy pedestrian use of the crossing from South Irving Street. Members suggested additional study and perhaps improvements of this heavily used crossing. Members also expressed frustration with the condition of the sidewalks along the south side of 2nd Street. There are several pinch points along the sidewalk due to the location of utility poles in the sidewalk. All of these improvements are not currently part of the site design.

Parking for theater productions during construction

Several members of theater groups and a church group attended the final PFRC meeting and spoke with concern regarding parking for theater productions during construction. The theatre is used by at least five different non-profit theatre groups throughout the year who are concerned about the loss of dedicated parking spaces while the new school is being built. There was a general acknowledgement that parking during construction for all the on-site uses would be constrained. At the time of the March meeting, APS had no plan for how to accommodate theatrical patrons or churchgoers with on-site parking or how to handle audiences with some other approach. APS and County staff agreed to continue looking at the parking issue.

Pedestrian flow from S. Old Glebe

There was a discussion about whether or not gates or fencing is needed along S. Old Glebe, specifically near the path across the site that leads to the theater. Some members felt that this pathway should be open at all times to provide a more inviting pedestrian experience along S. Old Glebe. There were some members that felt a movable gate would be sufficient for this purpose.

Final Landscape Plan

APS presented a landscape plan with its submission. However, the plan received no input from the community. Several PFRC members had previously expressed a desire to be a part of any planning efforts.

Conclusion

The March 15 meeting was most probably the culmination of PFRC consideration of the New Elementary School at the Thomas Jefferson site. The PFRC is supportive of the site design, particularly the use of underground parking for this site, and feels that APS has been responsive to concerns that members raised along the way. However, the site is a complex site with many users of the facilities. As noted, the PFRC did not do a detailed review of the use permit conditions and some issues remain that bear further discussion.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen Sockwell".

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
Jeff Chambers, APS
Ben Burgin, APS
Steve Stricker, APS
Michelle Stahlhut, CPHD



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
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Stephen Stricker, APS
Michelle Stahlhut, CPHD
Marco Rivero, CPHD



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 2nd 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

TJ PFRC Membership

PFRC Core Members (Current)		
#	Name	Represents
1	Stephen Sockwell	Chair / PC Rep
2	William Patrick Staderman	Seat 2 - DAC Rep
3	Stephen Hughes	Seat 3 - PC Rep
4	Scott Dicke (Chair) or Designate Mike Hannah	Seat 4 - E2C2 Rep
5	James Schroll	Seat 5 - PC Rep
6	Stephen Baker	Seat 6 - FAAC Rep
7	Todd McCracken	Seat 7 - APS Rep
8	Jeffrey Certosimo	Seat 8 - Housing Commission Rep
9	VACANT	Seat 9 - At Large
10	Heather Obora	Seat 10 - APS Rep
11	Terri Hume Prell	Seat 11 - At Large
12	Elizabeth Gearin	Seat 12 - PRC Rep
13	Chris Slatt (Chair) or Designate Michael Perkins	Seat 13 - TC Rep
14	VACANT	Seat 14 - At Large
TJ Project Specific Members		
13	Lander Allin	Alcova Heights
14	Molly Calkins	Arlington Heights
15	Maureen Critchley	Arbors of Arlington
16	Jordan Cross	Dominion Square TH
17	Lisa Turcios	Dominion Arms Apartments
18	Jessica Paska	Sports Commission
19	Rene Gornall	County Fair
20	Carrie Johnson	At-Large
21	Nora Palmtier	Urban Forestry
22	Juliet Hiznay	Friends of TJ Park
23	Greg Greeley	APS FAC