

**APS South Arlington Group
Meeting #3 – July 15, 2015
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The third meeting of the “APS South Arlington Community Working Group” focused on possibilities to site a new elementary school on County-owned property. The meeting was led by the Working Group Chairman Greg Greeley and School Board Member Barbara Kanninen. Arlington Board Member John Vihstadt was in attendance as well as County staff.

The group was given a list of community centers and facilities (primarily parks) and were asked to “nominate” specific sites as possibilities for siting an elementary school. The following is a list of sites proposed and discussed:

Barcroft Park. Barcroft is a large park on Four Mile Run Drive. The specific site proposed was an existing above-ground parking lot, which lies between the Barcroft Community Center and a large parking garage. The school could also share gym facilities with the Community Center. It was proposed that additional above-ground parking could be created across the street on Four Mile Run in the area set aside for an electric transmission line. Currently there is a bicycle path and community gardens on that side of the street. Slanted parking could be accommodated. This plan would not result in any loss of park land. One concern raised was whether the transmission lines would pose any kind of EMF danger for a school, which was dispelled by another citizen with experience in this issue.

Jennie Dean Park. The Jennie Dean Park is a large space farther west on Four Mile Run Drive with very few facilities now located on it. WETA, an anchor establishment in Shirlington with significant community support, has some facilities in the park. Members argued that it would be easily accessible by bus. Several people spoke in opposition to this site. Bob Duffy, Planning Division Chief of the Department of Parks and Recreation, confirmed that the park will be part of an 18-24 month-long Master Planning Process to begin in January 2016. The Parks Department has allocated funds for the study as well as Phase I construction of park facilities. Others noted that it was next to the largest dog park in Arlington. Others were concerned that the park was located on a flood plain. Proponents commented that the flood plain didn’t stop this site from being considered as a first-priority site for affordable housing.

Virginia Highlands Park/Aurora Hills Community Center. Virginia Highlands is a large park with a lot of heavily-used facilities, including an existing but aging Community Center and a public library. The Community Center is due for a major upgrade, but County staff believe it could serve the community for another 20-25 years.

The Community Center and library are near a fire station, so that might compromise having a school nearby. One member suggested placing a school on a softball field located on the opposite side of the park. Another member noted that there are six private homes on the south side of the park whose backyards face the park. Purchasing those properties and incorporating the land into the park would enlarge the park and might prevent any net loss of park land. Another observer noted that the siting of the community center and library were part of a deal with neighboring residential developments and that adding a school might jeopardize its zoning. One advantage of this site is its proximity to several large proposed housing developments, which will undoubtedly house additional school children. It is also close to Oakridge, one of the most overcrowded schools in South Arlington. Building here would help alleviate overcrowding in this sector. The group agreed that this site would be considered in its entirety, with various possibilities for siting.

Walter Reed Community Center and Park. Although the Walter Reed Park is small compared to some other parks, it was nominated because it is centrally located in South Arlington, it is not close to any other school, and it would be paired with an existing community center. It could relieve overcrowding in several schools and there could be flexibility for other uses. One participant noted that instead of a school located on this park, the community center could be used for pre-k and kindergarten to relieve Patrick Henry and get rid of some of the trailers.

Ft. Barnard Park. The Ft. Barnard dog park is adjacent to community gardens and small County-owned buildings, located on Walter Reed Drive, a street that could accommodate school buses. Greg Emanuel, Director of Environmental Services, noted that the facilities are tied to the County's water system with a large underground pipeline infrastructure. Building at that site might impinge on critical infrastructure.

Gunston Community Center-Haley Park. Jane Rudolph, Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation, noted that the Gunston Community Center was actually built into the existing Gunston school. As it is very close to the James W. Haley Park on S. Meade Street, it was agreed that this should be considered as one combined site.

Eads Park. Located near Crystal City, it was nominated without much discussion.

Long Bridge Park. This location has a significant amount of space, but several drawbacks, including: it is not located near heavy populations of school-age children, very few kids would be able to walk there, transportation would be extremely difficult because of its proximity to Rte. 395, and the lack of public transportation options.

Carlin Springs Hospital Property. There is a significant piece of property on Carlin Springs Drive, north of the existing Carlin Springs school, that the County hopes to

acquire as part of a land swap with the Arlington Hospital. While at the selection process the property received a few votes, it was decided that it would be considered at the next meeting as a commercial property.

At the end of the discussion, each participant was given three dots to place on their choice facilities. Four sites emerged as “top tier” with an additional two as second tier:

First Tier Sites:

Virginia Highlands Park/Aurora Hills Community Center – 24

Walter Reed – 17

Barcroft Park – 15

Jennie Dean Park – 15

Second Tier Sites:

Long Bridge – 5

Eads – 5

Not to be considered further:

Hospital site – 4

Ft. Barnard – 2

Additional issues raised included potential boundary changes resulting from various choices; the constraint imposed by the timeframe of completing the school in time for the 2019 school year; and the friction between building on park land vs. maintaining the county parks. Staff were urged to provide information about any siting or other restrictions on any of the sites; funding sources for using these sites; funding restrictions on their use; and future major housing or commercial development in South Arlington.

Materials:

Presentation for Meeting #3:

http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/07152015%20SARL%20Meeting%203%20Draft_revised_web.pdf

Map of Arlington County Population by Census Block:

<http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/Ar%20County%20Population%20Map%202015.pdf>