

**APS South Arlington Group
Meeting #4 – July 29, 2015
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The fourth meeting of the “APS South Arlington Community Working Group” focused on possibilities to site a new elementary school on commercial 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.

Communication within the Working Group

After the previous meeting, numerous members of the Committee sent e-mails to the group with various comments about siting issues. Many group members commented that this e-mail discussion was very helpful. Meg Tuccillo reported, however, that the County Attorney would not allow this to continue, because any discussions among more than two of the Committee members at one time would constitute a “meeting” of the group that did not have proper prior notice.

APS, however, does have a mechanism by which anyone can submit comments on the process on the APS web site, under “More School Seats.” One member suggested that such a site could be developed by APS that would only allow comments from participants and alternates, so the process wouldn’t degenerate into an ARLnow scenario.

Fairfax County’s Upper Bailey Elementary

Lauren Ford, the architect who supervised the renovation of a commercial building to create Fairfax County’s Upper Bailey Elementary School, gave a presentation about that process. The Bailey Elementary School experienced a dramatic increase from an immigrant population and became the most crowded elementary school in all of Virginia, with 1,400 students. Half of them were housed in 20 trailers, which eliminated almost all green space.

Fairfax had the opportunity to purchase a five-story Class B commercial office building about a mile away, which was in foreclosure. The building cost \$9 million to purchase, which was about \$90 per square foot. It spent another \$10.5 million to renovate. The county was in a desperate situation to relieve overcrowding so this

required a very short decision-making process. The team created the renovation plan in six weeks and work was done over the summer.

The project was able to move ahead quickly because it only required interior changes to the building, so permitting was much simpler. The building itself was in good shape. Office buildings actually work very well for classrooms. This building had wonderful views of the Airport and Washington DC, which was inspirational for students. The fact that students are doing more walking up and down stairs has also been considered beneficial. Office space on the ground floor was used for administrative offices, so the kids are all on the upper floors, which also enhances their security.

The downside to this project is that it would not be possible to put younger grades (pre-K, K or 1st grade) at entry level, so this building would require major renovation to accommodate younger kids. The ceiling heights restrict gym space; instead, several areas in the school were turned into “exercise studios” type spaces. So gymnasium or auditorium space would have to be dealt with separately. Phase II of the project would take some of the large parking area (required for commercial office space but not necessary for the school) and build a separate gym/auditorium, with an outdoor track area, in the adjoining, unused parking lot.

This new school is not really within walking distance of neighborhoods. Instead, parents continue to bring their kids to the old school, and the older kids are then bused to Upper Bailey in the morning. In the afternoon the transportation is reversed, with the older kids bused back to the old school, which allows them to join younger siblings for the trip home.

Parents did have input into the decision to develop the new school, but they were willing to live with the trade-offs. Anything was better than having all their kids in trailers. Is this a trend? Ms. Ford stated that her group was seeing similar projects being planned in Atlanta and other cities.

APS Searches for Commercial Space

John Chadwick introduced Phil Meany of Meany Oliver, who has conducted numerous searches for commercial space on behalf of the school system. He has been looking for spaces similar to the one in Fairfax County, but he says the numbers don't add up. To build the shell of an office building (not including interior build-out) costs about \$150/sq. ft. The Fairfax deal, under foreclosure, was about \$90/sq. ft. This means that the property was underpriced. No such deals exist in Arlington. Meany believed that the price in our community would more likely be in the \$400-\$600/sq. ft. range. Building a new school from scratch would cost about \$250-\$350/sq. ft.

John Chadwick also discouraged the group from considering leases. If the County signed a 15-year lease on a building and spent money renovating the building's interior it would lose that money when the lease expired. The County and APS prefer to own their sites.

Another issue was how the Arlington bond process might be affected. Any purchase price of property for schools would come out of the budget that the County has given APS for building the next school. If the County leases land, the cost of the lease would have to come out of the regular County budget.

Commercial Sites

The group began a discussion of possible sites put forward by group members, as well as those identified by staff. The original plan for the evening was to present these plans and then have members identify the top choices. However, the discussion became unwieldy. There wasn't enough information presented for people to feel comfortable with the choices. Lauren Ford, the architect, suggested that staff put together a chart listing each address, pertinent information about the site (like size, etc.), its availability, and market value. Such a list could help members make rational selections. This suggestion was supported by the group. Greg Greeley will present such a list at the next meeting, and the group may make selections at the beginning of that meeting, before moving on to the next segment of deliberations, which will focus on program issues.

The following is a list of properties that were discussed at the meeting.

Vornado site. Shona Colglazier and Beth Hicks, two members from Oakridge PTA announced that they had been invited to a meeting with the management of Vornado, a major developer in Arlington that owns 37 acres in Crystal City near the Virginia Highlands park. Vornado has already built three high-rise apartment buildings in the neighborhood, over the objections of neighbors. They want to build three market-affordable and one affordable housing development on the remaining acreage, but they know that this would dramatically increase density, a major point of contention in the neighborhood. They made the suggestion that it might a possibility for Vornado to donate three and a half acres of their property near the Virginia Highlands Park to be used as an elementary school, as a concession to the increased density they desire. This was viewed by the group as a positive development. However, one of the PTA members reminded the group that the deal would have to be fully vetted in that neighborhood, and it would be a contentious discussion.

4-Mile Run. John Snyder proposed looking at 4160 Four Mile Run, where Curry's Auto Service, the adjacent gas station and 7-11 are located. There would be a number of advantages to this parcel, which is zoned industrial. First, it is next to Barcroft Park and

its existing parking garage, so there would be opportunities for shared facilities. It is also on a major street. Building a school at this site would not jeopardize park land or green space. Unfortunately, these properties are not currently on the market.

Penske Site. John Snyder also proposed 4110 Columbia Pike, site of Penske truck rental and a 7-11 at the corner of George Mason and Columbia Pike. This site is next to Doctor's Run Park, which has a nice play area. It would be very close to Barcroft school. Again, this property is not currently on the market.

Hospital Property. Other members encouraged the group to consider a parcel of land on Carlin Springs Road, near the current Carlin Springs elementary, that is now owned by Arlington Hospital, but may become County property as a result of a land swap. Sarah McKinley asked if this was really a viable alternative, since the Arlington Board had given no indication of the process of this swap or any time frame in which a decision would be made. Arlington Board Member John Vihstadt reported that the County was moving forward and was expected to consider this in the not-too-distant future. Several people wondered if the site was "too close" to the existing elementary school. Others thought that could be an advantage. Carlin Springs might be one school that could be split into an "upper" and "lower" school, allowing kids from both walk to school. One member asked whether APS would allow that kind of split. APS Board Member Barbara Kanninen responded that that could be accommodated.

Existing Apartment Buildings. Architect Lauren Ford reported that she had identified two existing apartment buildings, very close to public parks, that might be conversion possibilities. One was on 18th Street near Highland Park, a six-story building on 1.8 acres. The second was a four-story building near Eads Park on 1.3 acres. Neither were currently on the market, but the owners might be approached.

Shirlington Crescent. There was less discussion about the Shirlington Crescent at this meeting. Lisa Turcios had forwarded several flood plain maps showing Barcroft Park and areas east along 4 Mile Run, including Jennie Dean Park, that would be affected by the projects of the 500 year "floodway." Most of the flood region ends at Shirlington Road. Parcels in the northeast segment are not in the floodplain, including Shirlington Rd. LLC. One person asked about the impact of the Virginia Concrete Company. Edie Wilson noted that dust was a problem and she wouldn't want school children next to the plant.

Crystal City 727 23rd Street. One member asked that we consider a vacant office building at 727 23rd Street in Crystal City, a 23,000 sq. ft. building with three floors of offices and parking underneath, now on the market for \$4.9 million (\$209/sq. ft.). She noted that it was across the street from a former school and in an area of the County that definitely lacked elementary schools. Phil Meany and John Chadwick both panned the

building. There would be no ability to house younger grades who needed street-level access to the outside. And the building filled the entire site, with no real green space.

Transition Space/Program Issues

Some members argued that we needed to consider transition space, which might be temporary space for some programs. Use of the former Artisphere was mentioned as one possibility. Others mentioned special programs for the ABC store site in Shirlington.

Alisa Cowan urged us to consider moving special programs, like the Career Center, to places that were NOT neighborhood school territory, and consider siting magnet programs in close proximity to neighborhood schools (although not in the same building).

A woman from Drew's Montessori program urged the group to find a solution to the long-standing problems of combining the neighborhood school program and Montessori together at Drew, which has resulted in seven separate school principals for that facility in less than five years.

Another member asked the group to consider moving Pre-K and K classes out of all the schools to help overcrowding in general. John Chadwick said if APS did that, they would be looking at a facility that could house at least 10-12 classrooms.

The group adjourned without any firm decisions. Meg Tuccillo will put together a list of possibilities, outlining basic information for each, and send that out for consideration. Greg Greeley noted that this process would hopefully not only identify a good site for the next school, but for future possibilities as well.

Materials:

Presentation for Meeting #4:

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/Arl%20County%20Population%20Map%202015.pdf>

Shirlington Crescent Flood Plain

<http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/CrescentFloodplains.pdf>

Jennie Dean Flood Plain

<http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/JennieDeanFloodplains.pdf>

Barcroft Park Flood Plain

<http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/BarcroftFloodplains.pdf>

Flood Zones

<http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/Floodplain.jpg>