

**APS South Arlington Group
Meeting #5 – August 12, 2015
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The fifth meeting of the “APS South Arlington Community Working Group” was held at the Walter Reed Community Center, one of the County-owned facilities identified as a possible school site. The meeting was led by the Working Group Chairman Greg Greeley and School Board Member Barbara Kanninen. Others present included John Chadwick and Meg Tuccillo from APS.

Discussion of Group Goals

After the previous meeting the group had discussed numerous possibilities for commercially-available sites. APS staff summarized almost 40 sites in a chart that listed current market values. Many of the properties suggested by working group participants and members of the public were not currently on the market. However, Greg Greeley summarized them as being in the following elementary school areas of South Arlington:

Carlin Springs ES – Primarily the Virginia Hospital land swap site
Abington ES – Wakefield HS/Claremont ES site; Barcroft Park, Jennie Dean Park
Patrick Henry ES – Thos. Jefferson Park; Walter Reed Park/Community Center
Drew ES -
Oakridge ES – Gunston MS/CC and adjacent park; Aurora Hills/Virginia Highland;
River House Site/Vornado

Ultimately the group did not move forward on any choices among these properties. However, the meeting was devoted to a general discussion among members about many issues moving forward.

Several members discussed the need for the group to make recommendations that would actually solve South Arlington’s school overcrowding issue. It was generally acknowledged that a single school, no matter where it was located, could not serve as a “silver bullet” to overcrowding in all South Arlington schools. One person suggested looking at the overcrowding as a sub-regional issue, with Rte. 395 serving as a barrier to redistricting across that divide, resulting in the need for a specific solution for Oakridge; Patrick Henry and Drew creating a “middle area” problem, and Barcroft and Claremont creating a “western” problem. The group should make recommendations that would solve the South Arlington problems and let the County Board and School board figure out the timetable and funds to solve those problems, based on recommendations.

John Snyder argued that we should also be considering policy enrollment issues for South Arlington, including neighborhood restrictions on eligibility for special schools. He argued that any child in South Arlington should be eligible for the immersion or other programs, and that current policies were arbitrary and unfair, pitting neighbor against neighbor. Others argued that the group should stick to its mandate, which was to recommend a site for one 725-seat school and go no farther.

Several members who lived in the Southeast quadrant (south of Rte. 395) argued that a new school located there would require students to be redistricted eastward, but this would even out in later years, as population in Crystal City was expected to grow dramatically, and a second school could be located in the Western part of South Arlington. They argued that an eastward cascading redistricting pattern would work as well as a westward cascading pattern.

Many participants spoke to the need to move the Montessori program out of Drew Elementary, both to allow the Montessori program to operate more efficiently and perhaps even increase in participation. That program could be located in a commercial building—one member reported that it didn't even need a cafeteria, as the students ate in their classrooms. Others argued for a new, stand-alone Montessori structure that would allow the program to expand. One member pointed out that a stand-alone Montessori would benefit North Arlington more than it would South Arlington. More importantly to the crowding issue, moving the program out of Drew frees up 350-400 seats in that school that could be used to redistrict schools around it, particularly Patrick Henry, Barcroft and Abington.

Others encouraged APS to consider developing a new “immersion” school, which would draw students not only from South Arlington but also County-wide. The demand for seats in the current immersion program is large, and this would ease overcrowding in many schools. One member worried that the 13-acre site now owned by Arlington Hospital on Carlin Springs was right on the border with North Arlington, and that if we wanted a solution that would definitely benefit South Arlington children we should choose a site that was located deeper in our territory. Others pointed out that this site could easily house two schools—a neighborhood school as well as a “choice school,” like Montessori or immersion.

Greg Greeley hoped that could begin to narrow the number of sites to be considered. Sarah McKinley asked the members to walk the grounds of the Walter Reed Park and consider taking it off the list. Walter Reed is barely two acres in size, with a modest community center and parking lot that does not even meet the needs of the current programs. The center does not have the ability to add floors and transportation around the facility would also be problematic. One member of the public commented that the center would not be able to accommodate pre-school programs, either, as the center was fully occupied with senior citizen programs during the day.

Other visitors asked that we not consider combining a school with the Aurora Hills Community Center, as that facility was fully occupied with senior citizens. Some members of the group felt that the Virginia Highlands park was large enough to accommodate co-location, and that it could be planned in such a way not to be a detriment to the senior programs, but instead enhance it.

The County has committed to building its next elementary school in South Arlington. But its next move will probably be for a new school in North Arlington, which also has some of the most heavily over-crowded schools in the County. For that reason, planning “program” schools like immersion may carry more political promise, as they benefit both North and South Arlington.

At the end of the meeting Greg Greeley encouraged working group members to take copies of an enrollment chart, so help sort out the cascading redistricting that would be required with each option. (See link at the end of this report.)

Saturday Excursion to Sites

The following Saturday a group of participants attended a guided tour of various sites that had been addressed in the meeting. The sites visited by the group included:

Claremont/Wakefield – One site under consideration is land that lies between Claremont Elementary (an immersion school) and Wakefield High School. There could be shared parking for all three schools. One drawback is the fact that this large field is heavily used and is the only sports practice field that Wakefield has.

Drew School – There is a possibility of building a second elementary at Drew on the front part of the property, with very little loss of parkland. Like many other sites, it would require structured parking.

Barcroft Park – This option would probably involve building a four-story elementary on the existing above-ground parking lot between the Barcroft Community Center and structured parking. This is the only site in Barcroft Park that is NOT located in the flood plain. Sarah McKinley had suggested angled-parking in the parkland across from Barcroft, under the power lines, but County Board Chairman Mary Hynes, who attended the excursion, thought that negotiation over the regional parkland, as well as negotiation with Dominion over the use of space under the power lines, might take years. John Chadwick wanted to explore whether APS could simply add stories to the existing parking garage, which is County owned.

Jenny Dean Park – Located at the southern end of the Shirlington Crescent, it is a large facility, with much of it now being used temporarily for bus storage. Although it has a

lot to recommend it as a school site (large area with access to a major arterial), the entire park is located in the Flood Plain.

Gunston – This option would create an elementary school next to Gunston Middle school and the Community Center, adjacent to the park.

Vornado Property – Vornado discussed the possibility of a land swap with two PTA members participating in the working group, in which three acres of a 37-acre site in Crystal City could be swapped for consideration for higher density in the undeveloped portion of their land. This would be a longer-term negotiation with the County, and there have been no formal offers by Vornado to the County to date.

Aurora Hills Community Center/Virginia Highlands – The Aurora Hills Community Center/Senior Center/Library is due to be revamped in the next decade. With the size of the park, Mary Hynes thought this was a completely viable option. She also felt that the County could easily co-locate facilities on this site, with the possibility that the County Library here could be incorporated with the school but made available to the general public, and that any senior programs could be accommodated.

727 23rd Street, across from the old Linden Elementary School – This commercial property, now on sale for about \$5 million, could become a “swing space” for the Montessori program. Currently the ground floor is parking, some of which would have to be converted for pre-school and first grade programs. The group, however, was more interested in the old Linden elementary, which was deeded over to a program for hiring the handicapped in the 1960’s for \$10. Unlike other de-commissioned grade schools at that time, most of which were demolished for parkland, this school remained intact. There was a large kitchen and cafeteria and excellent grade school space, and backed up to a public park. Several members asked if anyone had approached the program coordinators to determine whether they would consider another “swap,” perhaps having the County buy the commercial property across the street and then taking the school back.

Patrick Henry – Although this was added to the list for consideration, John Chadwick argued that this site had to be considered in light of the planning process APS and the County were planning to conduct, after the South Arlington Working Group had completed its mission. The entire campus area includes the site of the current Career Center and the Fenwick Building, to be empty as of this October. The Fenwick is owned by the County but is located on land owned by the School Board. Some members of the group asked if Henry could be enlarged from its current maximum of 425 seats. The answer was that it didn’t make sense, when APS could get more seats for the dollar by building a new school. Patrick Henry was not built with the option of adding stories. Sarah McKinley pointed out that the original Patrick Henry school was located on the baseball diamond behind the school. It would be possible to build a new multi-floor

school there and then move the Patrick Henry students in when finished, as had been done with Wakefield High School.

Thomas Jefferson Park – the group visited the west parking lot of the Thomas Jefferson Community Center, which officially is parkland but has no real green space. The TJ process had overcome many of the objections of neighborhood civic associations, including the creation of green space on top of structured parking for the school, and the creation of a new entrance for the local theater, which would be next door. John Chadwick also reported that the plans called for one additional lane for the side street in front of the structure, which is not a major arterial. This site will be part of the mix when the group considers its recommendations.

Arlington Hospital site on Carlin Springs – This 13-acre site currently houses some hospital programs, including an urgent care facility. The old hospital here is mostly empty, but its rooms are probably large enough for classrooms. The site includes the old hospital and a very large parking lot. It could probably fit two schools in it, with shared parking. But one of the major drawbacks is the fact that the only accessible street is Carlin Springs, which already has other schools on it—including Kenmore Middle School, Carlin Springs Elementary and Campbell Elementary. There has already been a traffic fatality with one teacher at Carlin Springs, and another traffic accident that left another teacher permanently disabled.

Materials:

Presentation for Meeting #5:

<http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/08122015%20SARL%20Meeting%205%20Draft.pdf>

2014-15 Student Transfer Report:

http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/Transfer_Report_June_2014_2015.pdf

Enrollment Balance Scenario Chart:

<http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/SARL%20ES%20Seat%20Calculator.pdf>