

# South Arlington Elementary Working Group – Final Report

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## Summary

The South Arlington Elementary Working Group was established by the School Board to analyze site options for a new neighborhood school in south Arlington and provide input on related instructional program moves. The School Board invited every civic association in south Arlington and every Parent Teacher Association in south Arlington to nominate representatives for the Working Group, in addition to some community groups. The Working Group met from June through November for a total of over 24 hours. It reviewed data related to school populations, projections, and performance in addition to a wide variety of sites owned by APS, the County and the private sector.

The south Arlington community representatives ultimately agreed upon two strongly held—and interlocking—recommendations for 2019, and one additional recommendation regarding school needs beyond 2019.

**First**, the Working Group overwhelmingly preferred that APS **build** a new home for the Henry Elementary School at the Thomas Jefferson site. In doing so, the Working Group recognized that building this new school has already been delayed and that further delay is untenable given school population projections.

**Second**, the Working Group paired this site selection with plans to **move** the Montessori Program out of its current location at Drew to the current Henry Elementary School building, opening 400 seats at the Drew Model School. This pairing was important for two reasons. It provides needed capacity for multiple schools in south Arlington and, by separating the two programs currently housed on the Drew campus, it helps to ensure that both programs can be more successful and focused in the future.

**Third**, the Working Group overwhelmingly concluded that a second south Arlington elementary school will be needed in the Pentagon City (or “22202” zip code) area. Working Group members support the School Board working with the County Board to start a process in 2016 to **plan** for a *second* south Arlington elementary school in the Pentagon City area.

## Background

The Arlington Public Schools’ (APS) 2014 Capital Improvement Plan included \$50,250,000 to fund a new 725-seat elementary school to serve south Arlington’s growing student population<sup>1</sup>. In June 2014, Arlington Public Schools (APS) identified as its preferred location the Thomas Jefferson site.

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<sup>1</sup> The Capital Improvement Plan can be found online at <http://www.apsva.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=2283>

The Arlington County Board then formed the Thomas Jefferson (TJ) Working Group<sup>2</sup> to consider the feasibility of building a new elementary school at the Thomas Jefferson site. The TJ Working Group concluded in January of 2015 that an elementary school “could” be built on the Thomas Jefferson site but did not come to conclusion on whether it “should” be built there. On January 27, 2015, the County Board decided not to grant approval, at that time, for use of the Thomas Jefferson site for a new elementary school. The County Board stated that it would be willing to reconsider the APS request at any time if key information, including a further analysis of other potential County and APS sites and/or school additions, in addition to impacts on instructional programs were to be provided to the Board for discussion with the community.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of the County Board’s decision, the School Board established the South Arlington Elementary Working Group (SAWG) in June of 2015. The School Board invited every south Arlington civic association and every south Arlington PTA to nominate representatives and alternates to participate in the Working Group. The School Board also invited additional community groups to nominate representatives, including Edu-Futuro, the Arlington Montessori Action Committee (AMAC), the Arlington League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the Arlington Latino Network, the Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization (CPRO), the Arlington National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Advisory Council on School Facilities and Capital Programs (FAC), and the Dream Project. There was a total of 42 members and 27 alternates. The Working Group was charged with analyzing site options for a new neighborhood school in south Arlington and providing input on related program moves with the overall goals of addressing crowding and enhancing instructional opportunities in south Arlington elementary schools. As such, the Working Group did not focus on additions to existing facilities.

An initial community forum was held in early June to introduce the community to the process and to begin to gather input. The South Arlington Working Group held its first meeting on June 25, 2015 and continued to meet through the summer and into the fall, with a total of 12 meetings and 3 community forums, for more than 30 hours of deliberation and discussion. The Working Group was given broad latitude in its discussion of various potential sites, including both APS and the County-owned property in south Arlington as well as large private sites. One of the early meetings was dedicated to the consideration of every APS-owned site in south Arlington. In another early meeting, Working Group members focused on all County-owned properties of sufficient size in south Arlington and then members nominated those sites they wanted to consider further. Additionally, the Working Group members tried to identify other viable sites for consideration by the group, including parcels and properties that belong to developers and other private-sector owners. Finally, to help Working Group members understand the particulars of the possible sites, APS organized a bus tour with staff available for questions and answers.

In addition to the 12 working group meetings and the initial community forum, the Working Group held two additional community forums in October. The first meeting provided updates on

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<sup>2</sup> The Thomas Jefferson Working Group information can be found online at <http://projects.arlingtonva.us/plans-studies/land-use/thomas-jefferson-site-evaluation/>

<sup>3</sup> This was summarized from the County Board motion dated January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015. <http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2015/01/TJ-final-County-Board-motions-012715.pdf>

the progress thus far and the second shared information to be included in the final report. Members of the public were welcome to observe all SAWG meetings. These observers were welcome to ask questions and make comments during a reserved period of time at the end of each meeting and at all of the forums.

Throughout this process, working group members represented their organizations, shared information back to their individual groups as much as possible, and sought input from their organization's members. APS actively promoted the process in a variety of channels. In addition to making simultaneous interpretation available for meetings, APS staff prepared presentations in Spanish and shared them with each school's bilingual resource assistant. These staff members then held meetings in their schools to allow for discussion opportunities for their Spanish-speaking parents in that language. The Working Group also had a booth at the Arlington County Fair to inform and engage members of the community about potential school locations.

## Concerns for South Arlington Schools

In addition to discussing potential sites for new elementary schools in south Arlington, Working Group members discussed other concerns related to instructional opportunities in south Arlington schools. At the first meeting, Working Group members identified their top considerations in selecting a site for a new school. Of the eleven criteria identified, the Working Group determined the most important considerations to be the following:

- 1) Diversity Issues<sup>4</sup> (including how to balance the student demographics in our schools)
- 2) Area of greatest need (*i.e.*, is the site located where the students will need seats in 2019)
- 3) Time Constraints (*i.e.*, can APS build a school at the site by 2019)
- 4) Programs (such as Montessori, STEM, and Spanish immersion)
- 5) Green space preservation
- 6) Opportunities (including opportunities for joint use and building facilities that are flexible)

Diversity issues were ranked as the most important consideration for the members of the Working Group. The Working Group did not define success in terms of addressing south Arlington's diversity issues. However, the Working Group did dedicate a full meeting to reviewing the status of student achievement at south Arlington elementary schools. It reviewed data to better grasp the disparities between schools and clustering of demographic groups.

Below is a summary of some of the demographics in south Arlington's neighborhood schools.

### Race & Ethnicity

While on average 49% of APS elementary school students are white, the share of these students was lower as of the 2014-2015<sup>5</sup> school year at all south Arlington elementary schools. There are substantial differences at some neighborhood schools in south Arlington. The following three schools have the greatest difference from the county average: Carlin Springs (5.6%), Randolph (9.1%), and Hoffman-Boston (13.8%).

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<sup>4</sup> The working group did not specifically define diversity, but conversations were generally inclusive of multiple forms of diversity including racial, ethnic, cultural, language, and socio-economic.

<sup>5</sup> Data can be found at <http://www.apsva.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=1116>

### Free & Reduced-Price Lunch

The percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch is an indicator of economic status. The countywide average for students obtaining free or reduced-price lunch benefits is 31.4%<sup>6</sup>. The share of these students was around that level or above it (as of the 2014-2015 school year) at all south Arlington elementary schools. The following three schools have the highest difference from the county average: Carlin Springs (81.4%), Randolph (80.5%), and Barcroft (65.7%).

### English Language Learners (ESOL/HILT)

The countywide average for students receiving services as English Language Learners is 24%. The share of these students was above that percentage (as of the 2014-2015 school year) at all south Arlington elementary schools. The following three schools have the greatest difference from the county average: Randolph (63%), Carlin Springs (61%), and Barcroft (53%).

### Achieving a Better Balance

Many Working Group members called on the School Board to make decisions about programmatic and school-district boundary changes in such a way that purposefully improves the demographic balance among schools rather than increasing the concentration of specific communities. Diversity in our schools is a worthy goal. All parents want schools that are convenient, and all children must be equally valued and respected.

There was no clear consensus with the Working Group membership on how to address this perspective. Some members felt that simply adding schools can't by itself fix the demographic disparities amongst schools. Moreover, building additional schools cannot resolve the challenges experienced at a handful of south Arlington elementary schools where English language learners outnumber students who speak English at home. They felt that, while APS schools with large numbers of ESOL/HILT students do get extra resources to accommodate this challenge, a more even and thoughtful process for distribution of all students among schools would help.

Other members noted that the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction (Connie Skelton) did a good job of showing the Working Group that ESOL/HILT students have outstanding educational outcomes in Arlington. She showed a graph indicating that once the students had attained English proficiency, similar numbers of former English language learners and native English speakers take advanced courses in Arlington Public Schools.

Many group members spoke of the importance of the planning factors used by APS for resource allocation. This is essential to serving a diverse population. School boundary changes were beyond the scope of the Working Group's charge. But, there were many observations throughout the process that APS may need to take a new approach in creating attendance zones to provide valuable diversity in all Arlington schools and strike a better balance among schools across the County. To this point, the Working Group agreed that further consideration and study is needed to comprehensively address imbalances among Arlington schools.

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<sup>6</sup> Data can be found at <http://apsva.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=1113>

The Working Group also briefly discussed the opportunity (or lack thereof) for students to opt into a choice school as an alternative. A number of Working Group members felt that APS should give serious consideration to the criteria determining admittance to a choice school.

### **Areas of Greatest Need**

Another concern expressed by Working Group members was the impact of future development on school crowding. Over the last several years, the growth in the student population principally came from Arlington's existing stock of single-family homes. A concern for the future is the number of new multifamily apartment units that are planned for Arlington, particularly in the transit corridors such as Rosslyn/Ballston, Columbia Pike, Lee Highway, and Pentagon City/Crystal City.

As of the 2nd quarter of 2015<sup>7</sup>, there were 2,391 new housing units under construction and an additional 6,552 new housing units approved for construction for a grand total of 8,943. Most, though not all, are multifamily apartment units. Even using the current APS generation factor for elevator apartments of 0.08, these new housing units would be expected to produce 715 new students or the equivalent of a full-sized elementary school.

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<sup>7</sup> Data can be found at <http://projects.arlingtonva.us/data-research/development/quarterly-tracking-report/>

## Site for an Elementary School in 2019

A substantial majority of the Working Group preferred to build a school on the Thomas Jefferson site that would be opened by the start of the 2019-2020 school year. The Working Group's preference is that this school becomes the new home for Henry Elementary School, and that the Montessori Program moves to the existing Henry building. With this program move, the Drew Model School could be focused on a single neighborhood program and 400 open seats would be available to help relieve crowding in south Arlington. Improving the instructional program at the Drew Model School was a priority for the Working Group.

### Rationale for Thomas Jefferson Site

The Thomas Jefferson site is located in the Henry attendance zone and adjacent to 4 other south Arlington attendance zones: Barcroft, Randolph, Drew and Hoffman-Boston.<sup>8</sup> So, a new school in the Henry attendance zone would be able to relieve capacity shortfalls in up to 6 attendance zones directly by shifting boundaries. By 2019 the five south Arlington attendance zones are projected to have a seat deficit of 571. Capacity relief for other south Arlington schools would require shifting programs or changing additional, non-adjacent attendance zones.

The Working Group recognized that the Thomas Jefferson site is well positioned to relieve crowding at Barcroft and Henry, both of which are near the top of the projections for seat deficits in south Arlington schools by 2019. However, the Thomas Jefferson site is not well positioned to relieve crowding at Oakridge, which is also near the top of the seat deficit projections. To address this, the Working Group paired building the new school at the Jefferson site with moving the Montessori Program. This opens seats at Drew Elementary School, which are in a location that can more easily relieve crowding at Oakridge and Abingdon. This may also open seats at Hoffman-Boston through the potential relocation of some Montessori Pre-K students from Hoffman-Boston to Henry. Figure 1 below shows that 7 of the 8 attendance zones in south Arlington are either in or adjacent to the attendance zones (Henry and Drew) where APS would be creating open seats.



*Figure 1. Elementary attendance zones adjacent to Henry and Drew*

<sup>8</sup> It is also adjacent to the Long Branch attendance zone (which includes students from south Arlington). Long Branch's seat deficit was not included in the figures listed here. Due to its location north of Arlington Boulevard, Long Branch PTA was not included in the set of PTAs that participated in the SAWG.



Working group members noted that the Thomas Jefferson site also provides the benefit of being located close to the geographic center of Arlington as a whole, thus potentially providing flexibility for serving north Arlington in the future should that be deemed desirable. Working group members also noted that the underground parking included in the TJWG concept designs was an important element in the overall site selection. Finally, Working Group members did raise concerns about traffic around Thomas Jefferson, particularly on Old Glebe Road and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street South.

### Thomas Jefferson Site Background

The Thomas Jefferson site was one of the three locations selected by the Working Group in September for further analysis. This site is adjacent to the Thomas Jefferson Middle School, the Thomas Jefferson Community Center and the Thomas Jefferson Park. The Jefferson Middle School site is 8.6 acres and hosts the 892-seat Jefferson Middle School, a Community Theater and a Community Center.

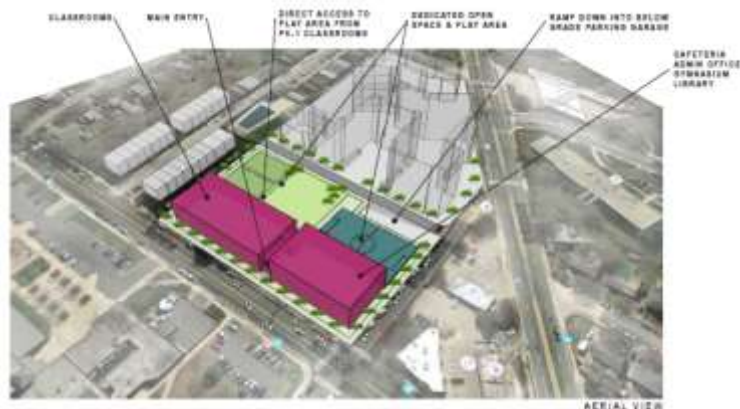
The *Thomas Jefferson Community Center* features a game room, art studios (pottery, photography, jewelry and wood working), gymnasium, drinking fountain and restrooms, lockers, showers, a dry sauna, and Wi-Fi. The spacious fitness facility boasts one of the few public indoor tracks in northern Virginia. It also hosts afterschool programs for teens. The *Thomas Jefferson Park* has lighted basketball courts, lighted tennis courts, a diamond field, a lighted grass rectangular field, a lighted synthetic turf drop-in field and a fitness trail.

The Thomas Jefferson site has been extensively studied by Arlington County and Arlington Public Schools as a part of the work of the County's previous Thomas Jefferson Working Group. That Working Group concluded that a school could be built on the site, but was divided as to whether a school "should" be built on the site.



Figure 2. Test Fit for Elementary School from Thomas Jefferson Working Group

As the South Arlington Elementary Working Group was concluding its work, the possibility of locating a school on the neighboring property called Dominion Arms, a complex built in the early 1950's, was raised by a number of the members of the Working Group. The group reviewed a potential test fit for a school as well as the process for the change to the General Land Use Plan (GLUP) that would be needed at the Dominion Arms site. The Dominion Arms owner is seeking an increase in residential density on the site in exchange for contributing land for a school as a public benefit. The surrounding community was divided on the site's viability, and cited concerns regarding parking and traffic. The information provided to the Working Group demonstrated that it was by no means certain that the necessary GLUP change would occur in order to site a school on that location. In reviewing the process required for a GLUP process review and zoning change and then for school construction, it was clear that opening a school by 2019 on the Dominion Arms site – if it was indeed determined to be tenable and supported by the community – would be quite challenging and potentially impossible. Ultimately, a large majority of the Working Group indicated that the Thomas Jefferson site was preferred over the Dominion Arms site.<sup>9</sup>



*Figure 3. Test Fit for Elementary School Next to Dominion Arms*

As the Working Group looked at instructional configurations for a school at the Thomas Jefferson site, two possibilities had the most interest:

- Moving the Henry School to the new building and relocating the Montessori Program to the current Henry building. The additional capacity in the Drew Model School would be able to relieve overcrowding at several adjacent schools.
- Moving the Henry School to the new building, relocating the Montessori Program to the current Henry building and moving the Hoffman-Boston STEM program to the current Drew building. Space at Hoffman-Boston could be used to help relieve overcrowding at Oakridge or for launching a new STEM secondary program.

<sup>9</sup> Nothing in this report, however, prevents the owners of the Dominion Arms site from requesting a change to the GLUP so the community could determine if the Dominion Arms property should have increased density in exchange for space for community benefits. If the County approved a change, there are a wide variety of potential non-school uses for the site proposed.



These two Jefferson configurations received more interest from the Working Group than any other configuration. Of the 30 Working Group members that indicated a preference, 22 selected the first Jefferson configuration as their preferred option and 3 selected the second Jefferson configuration as their first preference. None of the configurations at Drew or Gunston received much interest. For those other configurations, they were preferred by, at most, one or two of the 30 members who indicated a preference.

Additionally, since Hoffman-Boston would be part of the boundary changes, it is important to note that the school site is hard to access. For Hoffman-Boston to help relieve crowding at Oakridge, there would need to be improved routes into and out of the Arlington View neighborhood. APS should consider working with the County to create access from Army Navy Drive. This is an existing safety issue and especially important if students from the current Oakridge attendance zone were moved to Hoffman-Boston.

## Site for an Elementary School After 2019

While the Working Group recommended putting the 2019 school at the Thomas Jefferson site, it also concluded that there will be a need for another new elementary school within the current Oakridge boundary by the mid-2020's. Several of the possible sites that were considered for an elementary school within the current Oakridge boundary were not available for a 2019 opening because of the time needed to plan and engage the community. It is therefore vital that the siting process for a new elementary school within the current Oakridge boundary begin soon.

Accordingly, the Working Group strongly supports the idea that the School Board work with the County Board to start a process in 2016 – with appropriate community involvement – to find a site for a school in the general vicinity of Pentagon City. This process should address the multiple needs in this area, including a school, a library, a community center, parks, athletic fields and equipment storage. The Working Group also advocates that both boards provide funding to support this planning effort.

### Pentagon City Background

The Working Group noted that APS has projected that capacity shortfalls will continue to increase in south Arlington beyond 2019. The most recent APS projections for 2024 show that south Arlington elementary schools will have a deficit of over 650 seats even *with* the new 725 seat elementary school in operation. Most concerning is the projection that Oakridge Elementary School would be 493 seats (or 170%) over capacity with nearly 1200 students.

Because of this growth forecast, there was a substantial degree of interest among the Working Group members to re-establish<sup>10</sup> a second elementary school east of Interstate 395. Of particular interest were several potential sites adjacent to Pentagon City. This area is in the current Oakridge attendance zone and, because of its geography, adjacent to only 2 other attendance zones: Hoffman-Boston and Drew. A school in the current Oakridge attendance zone would be able to relieve capacity shortfalls in 3 attendance zones directly by shifting boundaries. By 2024 these 3 attendance zones alone are projected to have a seat deficit of 656.<sup>11</sup>

The working group considered three possibilities, including two sites belonging to the public sector and one privately owned site: Aurora Hills Community Center, Virginia Highlands Park, and River House. In addition, the Working Group was made aware of emerging possibilities at sites on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street South, including the former Nellie Custis Elementary School that would be well positioned to help Oakridge. But, the Working Group was not in a position to explore this further.

The *Aurora Hills Community Center* has a senior lounge and two multipurpose rooms. It is a joint use facility shared among Arlington Department of Parks and Recreation, Arlington Public Library and the Arlington Fire Department.

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<sup>10</sup> Previously, there had been a second elementary school in the Oakridge attendance zone, the Nellie Custis Elementary School on 23<sup>rd</sup> St. South. It is now owned by Linden Resources.

<sup>11</sup> Note that this does not account for any shifting of capacity and boundaries as a result of opening a new elementary school in 2019.

The *Virginia Highlands Park* has six lighted tennis courts, two lighted basketball courts, two lighted softball fields, a volleyball court, a spray park, petanque courts, a rectangular grass field, and a lighted synthetic turf field. This heavily used complex is 27.5 acres in size and has 105 total parking spaces.



*Figure 4. Virginia Highlands Park, Aurora Hills Community Center, and Old Fire Station #5*

The *River House* apartment complex is owned and managed by Vornado/Charles E. Smith. The River House apartment complex stretches across approximately 36.6 acres and has three towers: the 16-story Potomac House, the 16-story Ashley House and the 13-story James House. On August 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, Vornado/Charles E. Smith submitted a revised special General Land Use Plan study request to Arlington County. In this request, the property owner identified two locations that could potentially be suitable for a new elementary school. One location is on Joyce Street in front of Ashley House. The second location is between Lynn and Kent Streets behind Ashley House. Vornado indicated that as a part of their development plans they could offer land to the County as a community benefit, and that this land was sufficient for APS to build an elementary school. This offer would be contingent on the County granting permission to increase the density permitted on the River House site.



*Figure 5. Test Fits for Elementary School on River House Site*

The Working Group was informed, however, that none of these sites would be available to open a new elementary school by 2019, and the Working Group did not consider them as viable options for a 2019 school. In particular, members of the working group who come from the Oakridge attendance zone noted three issues. First, Oakridge students alone could not fill a second school. Second, it would be challenging to pull a large number of students into a new school here from the west side or across I-395. And finally, that a school here could not effectively relieve the overcrowding at Henry and Barcroft.

Working Group members pointed out that the Pentagon City area has advantages over the Gunston site. To site a school at Gunston would cause all new attendees to travel across the Oakridge boundary from east to west to attend the school. The school in Pentagon City area would have improved walkability because it is adjacent to many students and not adjacent to Oakridge ES.

The Working Group requested conceptual drawings showing how a school could fit with the community center or the park. APS staff indicated that simply showing a school would not properly address all the future needs for this site, which includes the community center, the library, parks and the fire station. APS staff, however, were certain that they could successfully work with the County and other stakeholders to properly plan to fit all these uses on-site for a school that could open beyond the 2019 timeframe.

Additionally, the County Board has provided their position in a letter addressed to the Chair of the School Board. In this letter, the Chair of the County Board stated, "The idea of a redeveloped joint community facility and school at the current Aurora Hills Community Center & Library site clearly merits additional Boards and community discussion." The letter continued to note "A combined project in this location may be a perfect candidate for the first application of any Boards-adopted recommendations from the Community Facilities Study."

## Other Sites Considered

### Drew Elementary School

The Drew Elementary School site was one of the three locations selected by the Working Group in September for further analysis. The Drew Elementary School site is 8.4 acres and hosts both the 674-seat Drew Elementary School and the Charles Drew Community Center. The Community Center features a multipurpose room with 80-person capacity, a gymnasium that hosts teen/adult drop-in basketball, public access computers and public Wi-Fi. It is also adjacent to Drew Park, which is home to one of Arlington's newest playgrounds and a public spray ground.

This property is in the Drew attendance zone and adjacent to 5 other attendance zones: Abingdon, Randolph, Henry, Hoffman-Boston and Oakridge. So, a new school in the Drew attendance zone would be able to relieve capacity shortfalls in 6 attendance zones directly by shifting boundaries. By 2019 these six attendance zones are projected to have a seat deficit of 667. Capacity relief for other schools would require shifting programs or changing additional, non-adjacent attendance zones.

The Working Group recognized that the more central location of the Drew site means it is well positioned to relieve crowding at Oakridge, Henry and Barcroft, three south Arlington elementary schools near the top of the projections for seat deficits by 2019. Drew is adjacent to Oakridge and Henry. And, while it is not directly adjacent to Barcroft, it is adjacent to 3 of the 4 schools next to Barcroft (Henry, Randolph and Abingdon).

Working Group members also brought up the point that locating two elementary schools on the Drew campus would limit the flexibility on how those schools could be used. Generally it will require that the schools be paired as upper and lower neighborhood elementary schools or that one school be designated as a neighborhood school and the other school be designated as a choice school.

As the Working Group looked at instructional configurations for a school on the Drew campus, three possibilities were introduced by the members:

- Moving the Drew Model School (or graded program) to the new school and retaining the Montessori Program in the current Drew building.
- Merging the Drew Model School and Hoffman-Boston School in the new building; retaining the Montessori Program in the current Drew building; and using the space at Hoffman-Boston to relieve crowding at Oakridge.
- Pairing the new school with Drew Model School as an upper elementary/lower elementary combination and moving the Montessori Program to Hoffman-Boston Elementary School.





*Figure 6. Test Fits for Elementary School near Drew ES*

While there was initial interest in studying the Drew campus as a site for a new elementary school, only 4 members indicated that any of the Drew configurations were their first choice. Two members preferred the second option and two members preferred the third option. Working group members expressed concerns about the achievement-related issues at Drew and felt those should be addressed well before the anticipated changes that would come with the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

Finally, a number of members from the Working Group felt that the Drew campus location should be reserved as a location for a potential neighborhood middle school instead of a second elementary school.

### **Gunston Middle School**

The Gunston Middle School site was one of the three locations selected by the Working Group in September for further analysis. This site is adjacent to both Gunston Middle School and Gunston Park and Community Center. The Gunston Middle school site is 20 acres and hosts the 932-seat Gunston Middle School. The *Gunston Park and Community Center* is a 10-acre park with three lighted tennis courts, lighted softball field, lighted basketball court, picnic shelter, rectangular

grass field, lighted synthetic turf rectangular field. The facility also includes a large indoor “bubble” synthetic turf field. The Community Center (which is co-located with Gunston Middle School) has a public computer lab, conference room, fitness room, gymnasium, three multipurpose rooms, a teen lounge, and a preschool room. There is a large theater that provides numerous opportunities to Cultural Affairs performance groups.



*Figure 7. Gunston Park*

This property is in the Oakridge attendance zone and adjacent to 2 other attendance zones: Hoffman-Boston and Drew. So, a school in the Oakridge attendance zone would be able to relieve capacity shortfalls in 3 attendance zones directly by shifting boundaries. By 2019 these three attendance zones are projected to have a seat deficit of 338.<sup>12</sup> Capacity relief for other schools would require shifting programs or changing additional, non-adjacent attendance zones.

The Working Group recognized that the Gunston site is well positioned to relieve crowding Oakridge, but it is not well positioned to relieve crowding at Barcroft or Henry. (Oakridge, Barcroft and Henry are all near the top of the projections for seat deficits in south Arlington elementary schools by 2019.) Additionally, Working Group members noted that in 2019 the current Oakridge attendance zone would not have enough students to fill a new school without extending boundaries to the west of I-395. To address this, one possibility the Working Group considered was to move the Immersion Program from Claremont and establish Claremont as a neighborhood school. This opens seats that are in a location that can help relieve crowding at Barcroft, but would still require cascading boundary changes to relieve crowding at Henry.

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<sup>12</sup> Note that this seat deficit would be reduced if the Montessori program were moved from the Drew campus.

Working Group members also brought up the point that the Oakridge attendance zone is in need of a school on a site in the eastern half of its boundary. To site a school at Gunston would cause all new attendees to travel across the Oakridge boundary from east to west to attend the school. The school would have limited walkability because of its adjacent location to the current Oakridge ES.

As the Working Group looked at instructional configurations for a school on the Gunston campus, two possibilities were introduced by the members:

- Pairing the new school with Oakridge Elementary School as an upper elementary/lower elementary combination and expanding the attendance zone for Oakridge
- Moving the Immersion Program to the new school and converting Claremont Elementary into a new neighborhood school



*Figure 8. Test Fits for Elementary School near Gunston MS*



While there was initial interest in studying the Gunston campus as a site for a new elementary school, only one member indicated that any of the Gunston configurations were their first choice. This one member preferred the second option. Relocating the south Arlington immersion elementary school was not a popular option. Members of the Claremont community expressed their strong preference that the immersion program should remain in their neighborhood. Nor did any families of children currently enrolled at Claremont Immersion School call for this change of location.

The Working Group recommends, however, that the Gunston site be included in any future deliberations regarding schools that may be needed in the Oakridge attendance zone.

### Henry Elementary School Site

The Working Group was interested in studying the Henry Elementary School site as a potential site for a school. The Henry school site is adjacent to 4 other south Arlington attendance zones: Barcroft, Randolph, Drew, and Hoffman-Boston (as well as Long Branch in north Arlington). So, a new school in the Henry attendance zone would be able to relieve capacity shortfalls in up to 6 attendance zones directly by shifting boundaries. By 2019 the five south Arlington attendance zones alone are projected to have a seat deficit of 571.



*Figure 9. Career Center & Henry Elementary School Campus*

An expansion for the Career Center was already included in the FY2015-24 CIP. In the fiscal year 2016-2025 Arlington Facilities and Student Accommodation Plan (AFSAP), APS staff have recommended that the School Board develop a broader community engagement process to provide input on development of the entire Career Center and Henry campus before adoption of the capital project at the Career Center in the FY 2017-26 CIP. These stakeholders would include civic associations, the County Library system, the Henry Elementary School community and Northern Virginia Community College (which would be providing dual-enrollment courses on-site). Because of this, APS staff recommended it would not be appropriate to consider a new school or an addition to Henry because that might limit some future redevelopment of the site.

Additionally, Working Group members felt that the combination of the students at Henry, a new school with 725 more students, and the proposed addition of up to 1,300 secondary students at the new Career Center high school would be too much density for the site.

Because of the anticipated planning process and the concerns about density for the site, the Working Group did not recommend the Henry Elementary School property as a site for a new elementary school.

### Wakefield High School Campus

The working group was interested in studying the Wakefield High School campus as a potential site for a school. The Wakefield High School campus is next to the Claremont Immersion School and located in the Abingdon attendance zone. It is adjacent to 5 other attendance zones: Carlin Springs, Barcroft, Randolph, Drew, and Hoffman-Boston. A school in the Abingdon attendance zone would be able to relieve capacity shortfalls in 6 attendance zones directly by shifting boundaries. By 2019 these 6 attendance zones alone are projected to have a seat deficit of 447.

APS staff presented test fits that show an elementary school on Chesterfield Street, across from the Claremont Immersion School. As the Working Group discussed this site, there were particular concerns about the traffic constraints. Claremont neighborhood residents expressed deep concerns about the feasibility of this arrangement for many reasons. Notably, they pointed out that Chesterfield Street is only two lanes wide with a hairpin turn located very near the entrance to Claremont Immersion School.





*Figure 10. Test Fits for Elementary School on the Wakefield High School Campus*

The Working Group did not recommend the Wakefield High School property as a site for an elementary school, in part because of the likelihood that the campus will need to accommodate additional secondary students in the medium term should APS growth continue at current levels. The Working Group recommends that this site be included in any future deliberations regarding anticipated needs for high school and middle school capacity, particularly expansion needs for Wakefield HS.



## Other Sites and Considerations

### Virginia Hospital Center Site

In April 2015, Virginia Hospital Center (VHC) publicly appealed to the Arlington County Board for a land swap that would allow the hospital to expand onto the adjacent five acre Edison Complex, which was vacated in the consolidation of the County's Department of Human Services at the Sequoia Center. At the time, the County Board said that it views the continued success of VHC as important to the entire Arlington community, both for the purpose of providing high-quality health care, and for the economic benefits of having a major hospital in Arlington.

In September 2015, the Arlington County Board approved a non-binding letter of intent with the option to purchase the Edison complex. This would allow VHC to move forward with developing a master plan for the expansion of the hospital on N. George Mason Drive. Terms of the sale have not been finalized but would include cash, land, or some combination of both.

A potential land swap could include the VHC property at 601 South Carlin Springs Road. This property is 11.57 acres and it includes natural resources and existing facilities. The natural resources include a historic spring, the county's only population of Three Lined Salamanders and a resource protection area. The existing site houses several medical facilities, surface parking lots and signal-controlled access to Carlin Springs Road. Thus, the Working Group studied the Carlin Springs site as a possible location for an elementary school.

This property is in the Carlin Springs attendance zone and adjacent to 2 other south Arlington attendance zones: Abingdon and Barcroft (as well as Barrett and Ashlawn in north Arlington). Therefore, a school in the Carlin Springs attendance zone would directly relieve capacity shortfalls in up to five attendance zones by shifting boundaries. By 2019 the three south Arlington attendance zones together are projected to have a seat deficit of 212.

The Working Group noted that because of the proximity of this location to Carlin Springs ES and Campbell ES, it would be difficult to establish a neighborhood boundary. Therefore, most of the ideas discussed by group members included using the VHC Carlin Springs site as the permanent or temporary home for a choice program such as a 3<sup>rd</sup> Spanish immersion school, the Montessori Program or another program designed to help address socioeconomic diversity in schools. The location near the middle of Arlington would provide opportunities to address overcrowding and diversity at schools on both sides of Arlington Boulevard. Working Group members also raised the idea that the VHC Carlin Springs site could be used as swing space.

The Working Group also noted that Carlin Springs Road can experience substantial traffic backups, which should be included in the conversation about additional schools on Carlin Springs Road.

Additionally, since the County's agreement with VHC has not been fully negotiated and the County does not yet own this VHC property, the Working Group was concerned that choosing this site would not allow a new elementary school to open in south Arlington by Fall 2019.

The Working Group recommends that the School Board encourage the County Board to engage all relevant stakeholders in a public deliberation process that includes potential school needs if the Carlin Springs property becomes part of a future land swap with the Virginia Hospital Center. There are many potential uses for this property, including the creation of more APS seats.

### **Immersion Program Expansion**

Currently, Arlington Public Schools has two Spanish immersion elementary schools: Francis Scott Key Elementary School and Claremont Immersion School. Key School or Escuela Key was a pioneer in two-way immersion programs. The 50-50 immersion program was established at Key School in 1986 beginning at first grade and adding one grade each year as the initial cohort advanced. Kindergarten was added in 1991. Claremont Immersion School opened in September 2003 as Arlington's second dual-language immersion elementary school, uniting what had been two smaller programs located previously at Oakridge Elementary and Abingdon Elementary.

Students at Key and Claremont spend half of their day in a Spanish-language classroom learning math, science, and Spanish language arts, in addition to music or art in Spanish. They spend the rest of the day learning English language arts, social studies, and physical education, plus either music or art in English. The curriculum in both languages matches what is taught in other APS elementary schools.

The two Spanish Immersion elementary schools are over capacity. As of September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 723 students are enrolled at Key Immersion School, which is 70 over capacity. The Claremont Immersion School had 727 students, which is 128 over capacity. The current waiting list for Key is 21 and 27 for Claremont.

Additionally, access to the Immersion Program is not equally available to all students across the county. While, APS has established boundaries that channel about half of the county's elementary school districts into one school or the other, some students are guaranteed access to immersion programs based on where they live. This includes students who live in the Key, Abingdon, Hoffman-Boston and Oakridge attendance zones. Also, students living in the Jamestown and Taylor attendance zones gain preference over others who are interested in the Key Immersion School and live in school districts zoned for it.

Some working group members have noted that the current admissions policies create apparent inequities between neighborhoods, and believe the School Board should re-examine the admission policies to give all of Arlington's children an equal chance at enrolling in the choice schools. These policies could also be restructured to better maximize capacity relief.

A number of Working Group members have expressed interest in a third Spanish immersion school. They believe an additional immersion school could achieve multiple goals:

- Provide access to a Spanish immersion elementary school education to more APS students whose families want to choose that option for their children
- Improve educational outcomes for more APS students who live in Spanish-speaking households
- Guarantee access to an immersion elementary school to all younger siblings of current immersion students

- Balance the student demographics by providing compelling educational opportunities at schools located in neighborhoods that have substantial Latino populations.
- Continue making preferential access available for children who live within walking distance of these choice schools. This practice mitigates traffic problems, builds good relationships between the choice program and the surrounding community, and reduces the number of buses required to transport students to and from school each day.
- Create an opportunity to reduce overcrowding at Key and Claremont, which is far greater than at other choice schools.

Working Group members noted that other choice options could be implemented as well. One suggestion, for example, was to create a choice STEM program at Hoffman-Boston Elementary School.

### Non-Public Sites

In addition to the APS-owned sites and the County-owned sites, the Working Group members reviewed the potential use of non-public sites for schools. The Working Group had a presentation on how Fairfax Public Schools was able to convert a vacant office building into the new Bailey's Upper Elementary School. A key message from that presentation was the fact that the vacant commercial building was a rare opportunity, and that Fairfax Public Schools had to move quickly to take advantage of that opportunity.

Another important point from Fairfax Public Schools' experience with Bailey's Upper Elementary is that non-public sites may not be suitable for a traditional, pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade elementary school. Fairfax used the office building for an *upper* elementary school because it did not have the ground-level access needed for the younger elementary students. When considering non-public sites, APS should be flexible on how the sites could be used for instruction.

Working Group members submitted various non-public sites for discussion, and ultimately focused on three locations: River House, Dominion Arms and the Virginia Hospital Center (VHC) site on Carlin Springs Road. (These three sites are discussed in more detail in other sections of this document.) While none of these sites are available immediately, they could, with enough time and attention, become part of the solution for school crowding. Additionally, other non-public sites could be considered as temporary swing space in the future.

Due to the nature of the real estate market, APS and the County have limited ability to influence when sites belonging to the private sector might become available for purchase or lease. And, there were a number of sites of interest to the Working Group that are not currently available. For example, there are several buildings on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street South in Aurora Highlands (including the former Nellie Custis Elementary School) that could, at some future point in time, be paired with Oakridge in an upper/lower elementary configuration.

The working group recommends that APS regularly review available non-public real estate for potential sites that could be used to relieve school crowding. Additionally, the Working Group recommends that APS and the County proactively approach potentially interested property holders for opportunities to acquire sites that could help reduce school crowding. This proactive

approach has worked well for smaller sites that have been acquired to expand existing parks, and it could be useful for schools as well.

## Sites Reviewed but Not Recommended

SAWG examined several sites that included parks and other County land. Because these are not owned by APS, the County Board indicated that any such properties, if selected for serious consideration by SAWG, would need its permission for detailed concept development. As an alternative, the Parks & Recreation Department prepared a special report with key characteristics of each site.<sup>13</sup>

### Barcroft Sports and Fitness Community Center Parking Lot

The *Barcroft Park and Sports and Fitness Community Center* is a 65-acre park that includes four lighted diamond athletic fields, one lighted diamond synthetic turf field, one lighted rectangular synthetic turf athletic field, two lighted tennis courts, a lighted basketball court, a handball court, batting cages, a sand volleyball court, two playgrounds, and a sheltered picnic area. The park is also home to the nonprofit Phoenix Bikes. This park houses the *Barcroft Sports and Fitness Center* that is home to Arlington's gymnastics center and also includes a multipurpose gymnasium, which is slated for conversion into a new space dedicated to the County's over-subscribed gymnastics program within the next few years. It also has a boxing training gym, a fitness room, and a wellness studio. This facility has 292 total parking spaces in a deck, a lot by the center, and a parking lot near Field 6.



Figure 11. Barcroft Park Flood Plain Map

<sup>13</sup> This report is available on the APS More Seats web site at [http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/APS South Arlington Site Analysis 8 24 15 web.pdf](http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/APS%20South%20Arlington%20Site%20Analysis%208.24.15%20web.pdf)



The working group was initially interested in studying the Barcroft Sports and Fitness Community Center parking lot as a possible site for an elementary school. This parking lot is in the Abingdon attendance zone and adjacent to 5 other attendance zones: Carlin Springs, Barcroft, Randolph, Hoffman-Boston and Drew. A school in the Abingdon attendance zone would be able to relieve capacity shortfalls in 6 attendance zones directly by shifting boundaries. By 2019 these six attendance zones are projected to have a seat deficit of 447. Capacity relief for other schools would require shifting programs or changing additional, non-adjacent attendance zones.

The working group noted that a substantial portion of Barcroft Park is in a flood plain. However, the parking lot was one of the two accessible open spaces that were not in the flood plain. The other accessible open space was an even smaller parking lot and the stadium diamond that has recently been constructed as part of a \$5 million partnership with George Washington University. The question was raised about the potential to move that facility to another location, such as Long Bridge Park, but the costs for that were unknown.

The group asked that the APS staff provide conceptual drawings showing how a school could fit on the parking lot space. The APS staff presented a concept that showed an “upper elementary” school built above the existing parking lot. Because of the relatively small size of the parking lot, the school would need to have 5 levels elevated above the parking lot (effectively a 6-story building). The existing parking lot would be used for bus drop off, parent drop off and building services. A play area could be built on top of the adjacent parking structure and connected to the upper levels of the school, or the students could walk around the existing parking structure to use the existing play ground. Because there would be no classroom access on ground level, younger students should not be assigned to this school. Instead, it could be used as an “Upper Elementary” for older elementary school students.



*Figure 12. Conceptual School Drawing – Barcroft Parking Lot*

After all this information was considered, the APS staff recommended against building a school on the Barcroft Sports and Fitness Community Center parking lot. There would be substantial constraints on the building design and use. There would also be additional expenses related to building on such a constrained site and for the play area over the existing parking structure. If this



site were to be used in the future, APS would need a long-term collaboration that included substantial reconfiguration of the facilities.

The Working Group did not recommend the Barcroft Sports and Fitness Community Center parking lot as a site for a school.

### Properties In and Near Jennie Dean Park

*Jennie Dean Park* is a 12-acre park with two lighted tennis/pickleball courts, a lighted softball field, a lighted youth baseball/softball field, a basketball court, picnic shelters, and a playground. Adjoining the park is the Shirlington Park area that includes a fitness trail on one side of the stream and county's largest dog park on the other. Using park bond funding, the County has acquired additional parkland that stretches another 4.1 acres along South Four Mile Run Drive and includes a resource protection buffer along Four Mile Run Stream. The parcel known as the Laporte property, which was purchased with park bonds, is part of this, and it is currently being used as a temporary staging and storage area for ART buses. It will be restored and added to Jennie Dean in 2017.

Adjacent to the park is the 3700 South Four Mile Run Drive a joint use facility shared between Arlington Department of Parks and Recreation and Arlington Economic Development, housing staff offices and artists in residence. In addition, it houses DPR's Scheduling and Registration Office, a small theater, and multi-purpose rooms. Adjacent property to 3700 includes the Old Signature Theatre.

Jennie Dean Park has 23 total parking spaces and 3700 South Four Mile Run Drive has 40.



Figure 13. Jennie Dean Park and Area Map

The working group was initially interested in studying the properties around Jennie Dean Park as a possible site for an elementary school. These properties are in the Abingdon attendance zone and adjacent to 5 other attendance zones: Carlin Springs, Barcroft, Randolph, Hoffman-Boston and Drew. A school in the Abingdon attendance zone would be able to relieve capacity shortfalls in 6 attendance zones directly by shifting boundaries. By 2019 these six attendance zones are

projected to have a seat deficit of 447. Capacity relief for other schools would require shifting programs or changing additional, non-adjacent attendance zones.

The working group was informed by the Parks & Recreation Department report that Jennie Dean Park and most of the surrounding properties are in a flood plain. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidelines counsel against siting elementary schools on flood plains. “Avoidance of flood hazard areas is the most effective way to minimize the life-safety risk to students, staff, and the citizens who rely on these facilities, as well as to minimize the potential for damage to buildings and other elements of schools.” (FEMA P-424, 2010).<sup>14</sup> The Working Group also heard that the County plans to begin a comprehensive planning process for the Four Mile Run and Shirlington Crescent area in 2016.<sup>15</sup> Finally, working group members noted that many areas of the park are in the resource protection area.

After hearing the concerns with the flood plain and the future planning efforts, the Working Group ultimately did not ask that the APS staff provide conceptual drawings showing how a school could fit on the site. A few members of the Working Group felt that a site in this vicinity could be possible, and that its feasibility should be explored in more depth.



*Figure 14. Jennie Dean Park and Flood Plain Map*

After consideration of the information provided by Parks & Recreation about this area, the APS staff have recommended against building a school on any of the properties surrounding Jennie

<sup>14</sup> This FEMA document can be found at [http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1530-20490-4431/424\\_ch5.txt](http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1530-20490-4431/424_ch5.txt)

<sup>15</sup> [http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2014/06/SC-FourMileRun\\_PrePlanningPresentation\\_June2014.pdf](http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2014/06/SC-FourMileRun_PrePlanningPresentation_June2014.pdf)

Dean Park. There would be substantial challenges and expenses related to building in a flood plain and in a resource conservation area, particularly if the school were to include underground parking.

The Working Group did not recommend further consideration of the properties in and around Jennie Dean Park as a site for a school.

### **Walter Reed Community Center and Park**

The *Walter Reed Community Center and Park* is a 5.9-acre site that has three tennis/pickleball courts, a basketball court, a garden, a playground, 5 multi-purpose rooms, a senior lounge, a wellness studio, a public computer lab, a conference room, a game room, and a gymnasium. Walter Reed is an actively-used joint facility shared between Arlington Department of Parks and Recreation and the Department of Human Services. This facility has 74 total parking spaces.



*Figure 15. Walter Reed Community Center and Park Flood Plain Map*

The working group was interested in studying the Walter Reed Community Center and Park as a possible site for an elementary school. The community center is in the Henry attendance zone and is adjacent to 4 other south Arlington attendance zones: Barcroft, Randolph, Drew, and Hoffman-Boston (as well as Long Branch in north Arlington). So, a new school in the Henry attendance zone would be able to relieve capacity shortfalls in up to 6 attendance zones directly by shifting boundaries. By 2019 the five south Arlington attendance zones alone are projected to have a seat deficit of 571.

The working group noted that the community center was relatively new and a school on this site would take up a majority of the park's open green space. Ultimately, the group did not ask that the APS staff provide conceptual drawings showing how a school could fit on the site.

After this information was compiled, the APS staff have recommended against building a school at the Walter Reed Community Center and Park because of concerns for the ability to fit in the available, un-programmed space.

The Working Group did not recommend the Walter Reed Community Center and Park as a site for a school.