

**Next Steps for New Neighborhood Elementary School at Jefferson  
Oakridge Community Meeting  
March 15, 2016, 7:00 p.m.  
Oakridge Elementary School (live streamed on Periscope)**

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**School Board:** Emma Violand-Sanchez, Reid Goldstein

**APS Staff:** John Chadwick, Meg Tuccillo, Lionel White, Zach Larnard, Connie Skelton, Lynn Wright  
(Oakridge Principal)

**County Staff:** Michelle Cowan, Pete Lusk, Anthony Fusarelli

Approximately 75 community members

Meeting convened at 7:09 p.m.

Opening exercise: “Me too!” (M. Tuccillo)

Opening remarks (E. Violand-Sanchez)

Introductions (J. Chadwick)

Presentation (L. White)

- Background
- South Arlington Working Group Process
- Next Steps
- Historic Enrollment at Oakridge
- Oakridge Enrollment Highlights
- Oakridge Enrollment Projections 2016 – 2025
- Projected Oakridge Seat Needs
- Projection Data

Presentation continued (J. Chadwick)

- What We’ve Heard
  - APS and the County are excited about this opportunity and that the community supports a new school in this area.
  - CIP Process: CIP is adopted by School Board in June of even-numbered years (this CIP will be adopted in June 2016); bond referendum then goes to vote in November; two years later, APS reevaluates the CIP to consider current conditions (so even if something is not in this ten-year CIP, that doesn’t mean that it won’t be in the next CIP two years later).
- Boundary Change Process
  - The boundary change process scheduled in the 2017-18 school year will be implemented in the 2019 school year.
  - Once the boundary is established, the school’s PTA will begin immediately to help build the community around the new school, welcome new families, ease transitions, etc.

- If boundary changes occur with Oakridge, APS will work very closely with community to make it a positive experience for everyone involved.
  
- Oakridge Boundary 2015
  - There is a strong community sense of a geographic divide in the form of 395 surrounding the Oakridge attendance zone.
  
- Non-Capital Steps to Alleviate Crowding
  - Internal space modifications or room conversions of spaces that don't currently house classrooms could be considered.
  - Use available room for more relocatables (there are currently six at Oakridge). These can be used for administrative and support space, as well as classrooms.
  
- APS Support
  - The Department of Instruction plays a strong role in these discussions and considerations.
  
- Collaboration with County (Michelle Cowan)
  - There has been extensive collaboration between APS and County staff regarding the Aurora Hills Community & Senior Center & Library opportunity.
  - The site is one of the more “interesting” sites in terms of uses: Senior Center, Fire Operations, Library. There is a unique mix of uses.
  - In terms of investment plans for the site, a planning process for a “facelift” of the community center portion of the site was included in the CIP adopted by the County Board in 2014. Improvements have been slated for 2018, but the County Board accelerated the investment (understanding that the site may be suitable for future redevelopment).
  - The County and APS are currently working to align their CIPs.
  - What do we do next with Aurora Hills? Because there are so many different uses, we need to go through an extensive planning and engagement process. That kind of engagement process will take time.
  - Funding is a critical component, especially when there are many competing priorities that need to be balanced.
  - The community facility study addressed joint and co-location of uses, which makes a lot of sense.
  - APS and County will continue to work closely to align funding and timing.
  
- South Arlington Working Group Preferences (J. Chadwick)
  - Recommendation that Henry Elementary move to new elementary school at Thomas Jefferson.
  - Recommendation that Montessori be moved to Henry, which will open up 400 seats at Drew Model School.
  - Begin to plan for another elementary school in this area of Arlington (which is the topic of discussion this evening).

## Next Steps

- March 17: Superintendent's Recommendation on Preferences 1 through 3 of the South Arlington Working Group Report presented to School Board as an information item
  - April 1: Report to School Board on Preference 4 of the SAWG Report
  - April 7: The Superintendent will present a report as a monitoring item responding to the Board's request for possible options for a new elementary school in South Arlington post-2019.
  - April 7: School Board action on the Superintendent's recommendation on preferences 1 through 3 of the SAWG report.
  - Visioning session for the future of Drew Model School (E. Violand-Sanchez).
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## Panel Questions (7:42 p.m.)

**Q: Arthur Fox (signatory of recent letters to School Board): We are asking to include funding in the 2016 CIP to launch a facility study process and develop a conceptual plan for a new school. Finding land in Arlington is very challenging and we need to hone in now on the process of building a new school in this area. Thousands of new units are coming online in this area and only a few hundred students will totally tip the scale. We're not asking for capital funding, but for architectural expenses. We had hoped to hear from APS about this tonight. Can you provide any indication of whether the recommendation will include funding for conceptual planning of new school in 22202?**

A (JC): We don't need to put that in the CIP because it can be funded from other sources. We will likely not find the funding in the next year, but we will work hard to prioritize it over the next two years.

**Q: The first three SAWG recommendations were taken seriously, but the fourth one hasn't been taken seriously at all. It seems that part may have been lost between SAWG and now. The fourth recommendation was not just limited to Aurora Hills; it was for the Pentagon City area in general. There are other sites that could provide potential to move more quickly.**

A (JC): We won't complete the school at Thomas Jefferson until 2019. There are three other major building projects going on and we have limited bonding capacity. Private sites have constraints as well — we cannot rely on developers' schedules and potential offers until they are actually realized. It is not as easy as it may seem. In the future, we hope to do deals with private developers, but the timing is uncertain.

A (MC): The County does pursue acquisition of private property. It is a very expensive and time-consuming process, even if the other side is negotiating in good faith. The project would need to go through lengthy zoning and land use processes. We also need to factor in the cost of land acquisition, which can be very expensive. We work as hard as we can to make the process as efficient as we can, but it is complex.

A (AF): With respect to the River House development, Vornado has put forth an amendment request that is associated with adding 1,000 residential units to their existing site. As part of that application, there was discussion of considering whether a school facility would fit on that site. Vornado amended their application to show a school as a potential option, but there has been no commitment on their part and there is no guarantee that what they are proposing would be approved. Lots of time and process would be needed to work those details out.

**Q: Aurora Highlands Civic Association: I am hearing a lot of conflicting information. First is that we can't start the process for two years, but the recommendation was made to start this process now. I don't understand why we can't be looking at private sites. The County has eminent domain power, but it takes time. On the one hand, I hear we can't start now, but on the other I hear we need to start now.**

A (EVS): For many years APS has been looking at different sites, not only because we needed to build a new elementary school, but also we also need to deal with growth at the high school level. In the immediate CIP, what we have on the front burner are funds for the new elementary school, Stratford Middle School, and a new school at the Wilson site. As an educator, I am not an expert at these types of discussions, but we are always looking for sites; and in two years, we will be re-evaluating the CIP.

A (RG): We are also constrained by available staffing resources in committing to delivering three schools by 2019 (in addition to other expansions like McKinley, Fenwick, and Abingdon).

**Q: Future Oakridge Parent: I am new to this process, but it's all that people are talking about. What is the other option? A potential new school would solve for potential future growth. But if the answer isn't a new school, what is the other option?**

A (JC): We are going to build a new school at Thomas Jefferson and there will be a boundary change associated with that. Future needs will be based on increased enrollment. Needs beyond that will be addressed in the next CIP. We are very concerned about the growth of the number of students in this area and will continue to monitor it very closely.

A (EVS): Our priority right now is to open the new elementary school at Thomas Jefferson and look at the 400 seats that will free up at Drew. In two years, we will review this again as part of the new CIP to see where the projections for Oakridge are at that time. We understand that more young families are staying in apartment buildings and that has an impact on this particular school. We also have international students who are coming to Oakridge for a short time, which impacts enrollment. We are always looking at program opportunities that will help relieve crowding at Oakridge.

A (RG): The current Oakridge projections do not yet show the impact of any boundary changes associated with the new school at Jefferson (and the 400 seats that will then open up at Drew).

**Q: You are not going to be moving 400 Oakridge students to Drew or else you will be pulling apart an entire community. You might move 200; so if you don't build a new school in this area, the only option in 2020 is to do another boundary change. We need an alternative solution to boundary changes — that alternative was to put in writing that you will start now to plan for a new school so the answer in 2020 is not that it will take 10 years to find and build out a site. Every time Oakridge is overcrowded the answer cannot be another boundary change.**

A (EVS): I agree that we need to start planning; but the problem we are having now is the funding. But that doesn't mean we can't do it. We are saying that in two years when we review the CIP, it will be more realistic to earmark the funding then. We can start looking for land now.

**Q: When I first came here many years ago, there was a Nellie Custis school on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. The community was told at the time that the property would stay in the County's hands, but unfortunately it was sold shortly thereafter. I would suggest you take that property back, and use the facility that is there now on a temporary basis and build up from there.**

A (JC): It is private property at this point; we have looked at the property records. APS transferred it to the County and the County sold it to a private property owner. It is not available for sale at this time.

**C: It is discouraging that we are here tonight when the SAWG recommendation is going to the School Board tomorrow except for the fourth recommendation of the SAWG, which was to provide a planning process for a new school in this area. There is no commitment regarding another school in 22202 or 22206 while all the other recommendations are being acted upon. By boundary changing this very unique area, you are not creating a neighborhood school. You are looking at these boundary changes as a permanent, not a temporary solution.**

**Q: Your projections take into account the multi-family development, but what about single family homes that are turning over to young families? How do your projections historically stack up against actuals?**

A (JC): We have analyzed our projections against actual enrollment data, and our projections have been very accurate over time.

**Q: I have been attending these meetings for a long time and the numbers are never right.**

A (LW): Enrollment fluctuates daily. In terms of the Oakridge projections, the information is available on our website and last year's projection was within 10 students, so it is very accurate. We do take single-family homes into our projections. Our planning factor for single-family homes is critical to our projections.

**Q: Can you provide Oakridge projections and actuals over the past 10 years?**

A (LW): Yes, we will provide you with that information.

**Q: We deal with significant fluctuations from year to year at Oakridge. Our capture rate data is a critical piece of information. A question for Connie: Instructionally (and budget-wise as well), are budget figures based on the September 30 projections? And if they are, then the addition of 30 or 40 students over the course of a year would have a significant impact on the budget requirements for our school. The lack of space to move also has a real impact on this school environment, particularly at the younger grades. It's an important point to take into consideration.**

A (CS): You raise an interesting question about staffing. We are currently in the process of establishing staffing levels on a school-by-school basis. After July 1, if we find we need an additional section, we will address that through our contingency funding. We try very hard not to take a teacher away once they have been allocated to school. A staffing committee meets regularly and addresses needs raised by school principals. These types of issues are dealt with essentially every week.

A (EVS): We understand that the challenges of overcrowding are significant. We hear this throughout the County. We strive to provide the best education regardless of the crowding situation. This is the first time that I have seen this kind of sustained enrollment growth. I want to thank the staff and the dedicated parents. This is a challenge. I understand that there isn't a space where all children can meet, that the lunch periods are short, etc. We are working to be as responsive as possible.

**Q: I would like to return to the CIP question. Thank you for listening to our concerns about this, but I am discouraged by the discussion regarding next steps with regard to the Aurora Hills opportunity. Funding for a feasibility study is being put off to the next CIP. Why wouldn't we start planning for that now; even if we can't start now, why can't we include it in CIP now?**

A (JC): It is likely that we will recommend that the study be done, but there likely won't be funding available for the study in this CIP. We have other pressing needs right now and limited bonding capacity. In the last CIP, we had a major project at the Career Center (\$150M). We are reevaluating that project now, and those funds will very likely be redistributed and will free up capital funds to look at other projects. We also develop the Annual Facilities and Student Accommodation Plan (AFSAP) in the odd years, which will take a hard look at our needs to accommodate student growth. We will continue to work with our colleagues at the County to align our planning. As we have discussed, they will need to proceed through a long process given the different uses on the site.

A (MC): John is exactly right; the County Board is interested in the redevelopment of the Aurora Hills site but there is a process that goes along with that given all of the different user groups.

**Q: Where do we get a commitment from someone — APS or the County Board — that the feasibility study will be done?**

A (RG): We will find the money to conduct the feasibility study so that the funding for the Aurora Hills site can be included in the next CIP assuming that the results of the feasibility study support the proposal and it is aligned with County planning for the site.

**Q: Oakridge is a great school now, but if you don't do something now to address the concerns of parents of incoming students, you will have a rebellion on your hands due to the uncertainty that has been created. Boundary changes are inevitable — we understand that — but make them short-term, and come up with a long-term solution.**

A (RG): We only have so many options when it comes to dealing with crowding; but currently there aren't sufficient seat deficits at Oakridge to commit to building an additional school in 22202. That may change in the future, but that's the situation right now.

**Q: Why are you only looking at the Aurora Hills site for this feasibility study?**

A (JC): We did look at many sites as part of the SAWG. Aurora Hills is one of the few sites that allows us the opportunity to work together with the County to achieve benefits for APS and a wide range of community stakeholders. We think it's an opportunity to do something really terrific.

**Q: We need a clear answer and commitment on the funding and timing of the feasibility study. Let's start the process now.**

A (RG): The feasibility study will not get funded through the CIP; it's not capital. We will use the results of that study to determine if it warrants moving forward with the site.

A (JC): That's what we are going to do, but we need to do that as part of a collaborative effort with the County and that will take time given the wide range of user groups and stakeholders involved. We will do it; but we won't be able to do it right now.

A (MC): Using Lubber Run Community Center as an example, we talk to a wide range of users, look at what other community centers are doing, evaluate the constraints of the site, etc. We can work on that, but it will take time because of the diversity and unique nature of the programming at Aurora Hills.

**Q: Can you please just remember this conversation? We don't want to have this discussion again. If the County isn't ready to do the study until the next CIP, then make the commitment now so we don't have to keep asking for this again and again.**

A (RG): We want to find a solution. The County wants to find a solution that addresses their interests. It's going to depend upon what the feasibility study says. The positive message here is that we all

want to do it. Not every neighborhood has a willingness for this kind of effort. It's a matter of working out the management details with the County.

**C: I suggest APS and the County take a page out of Parks and Recreation's book about acquiring property adjacent to sites so they are "ready to jump" as soon as the adjacent or nearby sites become available. And also, we all need to think more broadly about what a neighborhood school is. My neighborhood school isn't walkable, they do exist in Arlington. But just because a school isn't walkable, that doesn't mean it doesn't represent a "neighborhood". A community forms around a school even if it isn't walkable. Students can cross 395 out of Oakridge just as easily as students can cross 395 into Oakridge.**

**Q: Aurora Highlands Civic Association: To follow up on comment made earlier regarding Nellie Custis: Why is the feasibility study only focused on Aurora Hills? Maybe there won't be room there, so why would we put all our eggs in that basket? We should be evaluating other opportunities in 22202 that might play a role in addressing the needs of the community and APS.**

A (JC): One of the reasons we review the CIP every two years is because new opportunities come up. It is unfortunate that Nellie Custis is no longer an APS or County asset, but it is private property now.

A (RG): Not exactly sure how big Nellie Custis is, but it likely wouldn't accommodate the size of elementary schools we are committed to building now (725 students). Something else could happen there, but we don't currently have a policy that says we would develop a different sized school or program.

**Q: Oakridge PTA President: There are currently 815 students at Oakridge, and we do fluctuate, but we generally fluctuate up and stay higher. We have a hard time with PE because there are so many kids. We have kids waiting in line for lunch, missing recess so they can have lunch. Are there modifications that can be made now to better accommodate the crowding?**

A (JC): As you know, Swanson and Williamsburg will be handling significant crowding until the new middle school at Stratford is ready to come online. We have worked very closely with both schools to address those challenges. For example, we now have a gymnasium relocatable (currently at McKinley). We will work together with you to figure out the best way to accommodate the needs at Oakridge while we wait for longer-term crowding solutions.

Closing Remarks (E. Violand-Sanchez and R. Goldstein)

- Thank you for your comments and for working with us tonight. Our door is always open — do not hesitate to contact us. Please send us your questions. This is going to be an ongoing discussion.

Meeting adjourned at 9:09 p.m.