

Fall Boundary Initiative

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

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Hello and welcome to episode number 22 of the What's Up, APS podcast I'm your host Frank Bellavia. Welcome back to Season 2. Today we're going to talk about elementary boundaries. We have a new process coming up and joining us on the podcast is Gladis Bourdouane with with Planning and Evaluation Department that's overseeing this boundary process and working with the community and I want to welcome you to the pod cast. First time for you.

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Yes I'm really excited. Thank you Frank and hello to everyone. Thanks for listening.

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OK so let's go ahead and jump right into it. Most families have heard that there's a boundary process going on for elementary schools. Talk a little bit about why we need to do that.

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Well in Arlington public schools we are growing we have rapid enrollment increase so we're going to be looking at 32000 students by about 2026. That's what our projections are telling us. And actually Arlington County 30 year population forecast says that we're going to be at about 260 1000 residents by 2013. So yes Arlington is the place to be and we're happy about that. What are these boundaries.

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Meant to do. Why or why looking at these schools in the fall.

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Well because we are growing rapidly. We do have. Overcrowded facilities and we're looking to alleviate overcrowding in our schools. We're looking to maximize capacity utilization and make sure that we provide environments you know conducive for learning for all of our students and continue that wonderful an excellent education that we offer here in Arlington public schools because of increasing enrollment we are opening new schools. We're going to have the Alice w fleet that's opening in 2019 and we're also going to have Reed opening up in 2021. And so therefore we need to look at our. Boundaries and make sure that we alleviate the overcrowding and that we fill our new schools.

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And I know that creating a new attendance zone not only for fleet but the Montessori part program in Drew is coming out of that. And so talk a little bit about where that's going and and how that works.

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Yes of course we are really excited that the Montessori program is moving from drew over to the Henry building. And so what that means is that we're going to have Drue coming on as a new neighborhood school and we're really excited about that.

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So how many schools are involved in this process in the fall and which ones are they in the fall were gonna be looking at 8 elementary schools and that includes Abingdon Barcroft drew Henry attendance zone in Boston long branch Oak Ridge and Randolph.

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So what's the timeline for changing these boundaries and when will they go into effect.

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So right now we're right in the middle of the fall 2018 boundary process and we're going to have a couple of community engagement opportunities for our community. September 26 for example we're going to have our new getting started community meetings where we will actually provide some scenarios and we're going to have our community members have discussions and inform the process and just to give you a couple of dates. You know we are going to have school board meetings in November and then we hope that the school board will make a decision on December 6 and adopt new elementary school boundaries for the 2018 19 and 20 school year. So that's where we are as far as timeline.

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The reason one of the reasons why they we want them to adopt these in December is because we need to inform parents at the kindergarten information night which is in January that her practice.

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And you know we've done this before and in previous process sees lessons learned. Tell us that it's really important for families to know a year ahead of where their children go to go to school so they can begin planning. It's really important to begin to form those relationships among the communities the families the principals the schools the staff. And it's really important for us to be able to do that. So yes kindergarten information night is set to take place January 28.

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So yes it's important that December 6 is very important to get in touch a little bit more on the building relationships not only it's important for families but it's important for the schools. They need to know who's coming in.

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I'm assuming that it's also because we want our schools to welcome the new families and make them feel at home to know that their new school absolutely well we know that students are going to transition from being at one school to being to another one. Our staff our principals are. Extremely welcoming of all of our families and we're really excited about that. And I know that families will be very excited to know that as well. But yes once a family knows that they're going to go to a different school than they were going to go to. Based on the previous boundaries they can begin to be invited to any open houses any opportunities for socials they can begin to get to know for example the Bat family bilingual liaisons at some of our schools. The principals have opportunities to engage with the families with their communities. Families can know if there are any particular partnerships that they might know about that would be helpful to them. So there are just so many opportunities and yes it's important for planning. You know I have three kids I know a little bit about planning and everything that is involved with that. But really relationships are extremely important to us. And we just want to help with that and anything we can do to alleviate that transition. We know we're going to do it.

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What tools does the planning team use in developing the boundary scenarios that will inform the school board and they'll use to consider adoptions.

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You know our planning team takes a lot of factors into account when we develop boundaries for our schools. It's a data driven process and we actually have policy considerations that really guide that process. If folks are interested in some of our school board policy considerations they can take a deep dive. It's definitely available on our Web page. We look at things such as efficiency in proximity stability which is minimizing the number of times a boundary change affects individual students and alignment avoiding separating small groups of students from their classmates were moving between school levels. We look at demographics we strive to promote demographic diversity when reassigning planning units. We our goal is to maintain attendance zones that are contiguous. You know there are next to each other avoid making any islands and making sure that we have a school within the attendance zone and that they're assigned to attend. And those are really the considerations that we look at engagement and engagement is extremely important because it really informs our process. We want to know how it affects particular families and they really provide us with information that we might not have access to. We also look at two main data sources such as The Fall 2017 10 year projections which provide student enrollment countywide and then we also look at projected enrollment at the planning unit level.

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So that's a lot of things are going to relate to one of the things that gets tossed around out there planning units. If somebody is new to Arlington and doesn't understand. Can you explain what planning units are.

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Yeah. So there is the geographical building blocks of a school attendance zone. Basically it's you know a small Planning Unit contains a small number of streets within a neighborhood and then they're assigned to a specific school. So when we create new attendance zone we will be moving a planning unit or more than one planning unit over from one school to another school. And so you're planning and it's important to know what planning unit you live in because that planning unit potentially might move to the new school or might actually stay at that school. So then you'll be able to be informed about that when we put out scenario maps. You'll be able to see some data behind what happens when we move these planning units over what happens to the efficiency the capacity realization of that building what happens to the demographics of that building what what happens when you look at three year projections. So they are really the building blocks. And it's important to know your planning unit and you can definitely know that just by going to our website.

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And you talked about the school board considerations and you talked about the six and the efficiency proximity stability alignment demographics and continuity. One thing that I want to point out is that an. Elaborate on maybe a little bit is that if a student moves once.

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They're there we try very hard not to move them again within a boundary a process within the grade level. So yes for example we have a couple of schools Abingdon Long Branch. That you know might be involved in this process as well as the 2020 process. But what that means is that where. If you live in a particular planning unit and then it was moved during the fall 2018 process we're not going to take that

planning unit and then move it again in the 2020 process which is just a you know a two year window. So within that students elementary grade level we strive to not move that student twice during a boundary process.

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And I think that's important for families to notice which are very hard to that doesn't happen.

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How is that planning team or your team working with principals and staff at schools to make this transition easier for students and families.

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No we have a wonderful relationship among our departments with the teaching and learning facilities and operations school and community relations. You know are just all of our departments here at Arlington public schools most importantly with our community. Our principals have really informed this process. They've guided us throughout this process. Some of the things that we're considering. Thanks to their input is looking at Piqué across the elementary schools ensuring that preco is accessible to families close to where they live for example. You know it's very important to them that community engagement is a part of the process. They are happy to welcome their new students and happy to welcome their continuing students and create that wonderful environment for their children and for the families and the communities that they serve. This is so important to them and with our community we want to hear from them. We want to be able to be transparent in the information that we put out in our thinking. And we want to have those lively discussions as we look at some of the blended maps that we're putting out. We'll let you know our data driven positions. And we want to hear how it impacts our families. And and and have those lived live discussion. So for us this process is extremely important. It's our work and this is this is where we get up in the morning to do.

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And one of the things that you do all the time and have seen this day in and day out with you guys is you definitely want to meet with families and you've hosted families and at the same sex ed center you've gone out to schools and you've met with them. Do you really want to meet with these families if they have questions you can answer them face to face.

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Absolutely. One of the things I love telling families and having these discussions about is about perspectives. You know it's important for us to hear the many diverse perspectives that there are out in the community and how how it affects different groups. That is really important to us. And in doing so we need to go out into our community we actually meet with specific groups at the school level that have that are already organized so it's very easy for us to meet with specific groups that very specific times ensure that they are informed that there is a boundary process. The schools the eight schools that are involved in the boundary process what's coming up I had you know two years from now and as we continue and getting their feedback in the proposed scenarios you know all of that of course is extremely important. You know we want to make sure that parents are informed and that they also inform the process.

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I know one question that seems to come up a lot especially in the community is Will fifth graders siblings and transfer students be able to stay at their scurred current schools. Yet during this process when we

have our community meetings and of course we're going to post all of this all of our presentations online stuff is going to make a proposal about.

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You know based on the data that we see capacity utilization what we look out in the projections we are going to make proposals about you know what grades of students stay and of course that has an impact on what I just mentioned but also in transportation etc. And then on families themselves it impacts their routine and day to day life. So we will put out some proposals and we want to hear from families about what they think about those so and that'll be coming up I think throughout September 26 getting started community meeting and then we're also going to have a what we heard community meeting on October 17th and folks will also have the opportunity to provide online community input and grandfathering proposals will definitely be a part of that.

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All right you mentioned the September 6 26 getting started meeting and we are meeting in October. What other ways. And opportunities are there for families to be involved in this process.

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So besides those in the online community input will be which will be a questionnaire that runs through from September 26 through October the 9th folks can also send an e-mail to us at NDH at apx dot us within really 24 hours you will receive a response from us. We all read it at staff. It's really important for us to hear our community feedback from that. We also meet individually like I said with some of our school groups. We have already done that we've gone to some civic association. Meetings as well. We have open we have had an open office hours and we will also have another staff open office hours on October 3rd at Kenmore at 7:00 p.m.. Also we put all of this information are on our engage web page elementary boundary process where they can find our presentations easy link to send us an e-mail and all of our data and maps etc. are posted there.

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So we really want to hear from our communities is really important to us.

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I understand there's also and you touched on this earlier. There's a second boundary process coming up. When will that take place in which schools are involved now.

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Yes. We're opening read. And that's set out to open in 2021 so our boundary process for that will be in the fall of 2020. There are going to be 15 schools involved in that process and that will include Abingdon which is also involved in this process. Arlington Science Focus Ashland Barcroft which is also involved in this process. Barcroft is Barrett Carling springs discovery Gleib Jamestown long branch in Long Branch is also involved in this 2018 boundary presses McKinley Nottingham Reed Taylor and Tuckahoe.

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And again reads the New School coming on line so that's one of the reasons why we're doing a second round the process is because those schools down trees have to be adjusted to fill the rebuilding. Correct. One of the things I want to I want to emphasize and I think you can touch on this tool that is that there are no decisions have been made. We don't have. Boundaries already precrime. You guys don't have that.

This is something that you're working on internally and with staff and or with family input over the next month or so to develop these proposals to bring to the school.

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Absolutely Frank. Thank you so much for bringing that up. No decisions have been made. We have been speaking you know really since the summer and have been doing a lot of engagement activities with our families. And you know we have heard a lot of the concerns that they have. They've given us a lot of their input as it pertains to their boundaries and things that concern them or ideas that they have around that we have been having discussions and continue to have those discussions with families. We've walked two with groups of families to different schools and really appreciate the opportunity to have done that. We will continue to do that through of course getting started meetings and what we heard community meetings through the online input through our staff open office hours engagement e-mails that we're receiving. You know we are going to put out some of these blended scenarios that really taking us to consideration the policy considerations of efficiency and proximity stability alignment demographics and contiguity. And it is really our our. Best effort in looking at all of those considerations and really balancing them and then we want to have those lively conversations with our families to see how it impacts them and what are some of the thoughts that they have around the scenarios that you know we have put out. So yeah this is definitely a transparent process and community input is extremely important to this process.

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Where can people get more information.

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Well the first thing I want to do is mention our Web page where families can get all of the information including upcoming dates all of our presentation any boundary scenarios that we're going to put out. They can visit [apx VA at us. Forward slash elementary Dasch school dash boundry dash change](#). And we really urge to visit that Web page often. We are always revising it putting up new information there. Of course if folks have any questions please email us at [Engage at apx at us](#) that is really you know the best way to to get information is on our Web page. We work really mostly with you in our schooling community relations team. We put out information via Facebook and Twitter. Any Images and Instagram we want to make sure that we reach out to folks that way. We. Like I said go to the different schools and try to attend any meetings that are available to us. We have also put out a flyer during back to school night which is tonight for elementary schools for those eight schools that are involved in this process. We're going to put out that same flyer in peach jar. So really we use all of the methods of communications that are available through you know school and community relations as we reach families and we partner with you in providing all of those opportunities to parents. We have ambassadors.

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I was just going to Masterson at each school.

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Yes. If you don't know who your school ambassador for the main school board and superintendent initiatives is or are actually there are more than one for some schools please make sure that you know who they are. We do have a list on our Web page as well of who the ambassadors are but please ask your school staff your principal because they have so much information. Cathy member who is our communications coordinator of engagement. You know and communicates with them Mudcat. Yes. She's

so lovely. She communicates with them on a constant basis not only through you know the weekly messages that she sends out but they're very individual questions that they ask. They have a great relationship and I urge everyone they have any questions please reach out to your ambassador and your ambassador not only will be able to provide you with information but we'll be able to maybe ask a question on your behalf so extremely you know we're so thankful for this program.

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And I will put the web page link to the engage page and the Schoenaerts for the podcast so you can see it there. And again if you have questions or comments you can send them to engage at apx V8 us.

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Go to our main home page one of the images that rotates on the main home page is a link right to that elementary boundary page so it's there to gladdest I want to thank you for joining us. I know that we're about ready to record this podcast. Also in Spanish you're going to be here for a little while longer. I want to thank you for coming in and joining us and being on the podcast to share this information about boundaries.

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Thank you Frank. And if I haven't met you. Community member I look forward to doing that in person as well.

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I want to thank Gladys for joining us. Thank you for listening. You can catch us on tune in and Stitcher were new there this year. So you can find us there you can also find us on apple podcast and Google Play. To download and listen to previous episodes of the what's up as podcast. If you have any questions or you want to hear something on a feature topic email us at apsnews@apsva.us or you can send us a tweet at [@APSVirginia](https://twitter.com/APSVirginia). We look forward to those e-mails and those tweets and sending us some if you have any questions. Again thanks for joining us on this episode of the what's up as podcast and we'll talk to you soon.