

April 7, 2022

The Honorable Barbara Kanninen, Chair
The Arlington County School Board
Suite # 260
2110 Washington Blvd
Arlington, Virginia 22204

RE: Arlington Career Center –Concept Plan Design

Background:

The joint Building Level Planning Committee (BLPC) and the Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) for the Arlington Career Center (ACC) was reconvened in 2022 by Arlington Public Schools after a two-year hiatus. The ACC was included in the FY 2023-2032 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The goal of the BLPC/PFRC engagement process was to consult with stakeholders in the community to shape the concept design of the new ACC facilities. The School Board provided parameters for the BLPC and PFRC to consider for the school building, field, and parking garage in the BLPC charter and excluded considerations about the long-term use of the site, which is to be addressed in a separate process. The School Board BLPC Charge specified parameters for the project that included:

- A maximum total project cost of \$170.48 million (school and parking garage)
- Use of the PFRC Principles of Civic Design
- The process does not include the long-term use of the Career Center Campus
- Project requirements with a preliminary site plan diagram
- Base and Alternative Educational Specifications
- The plan will be included in the Superintendent's Proposed FY 2023-32 CIP

The APS design team was responsive to BLPC/PFRC feedback and community inputs and incorporated the following elements in the concept design:

- Step the mass of the building from south to north with five floors (approximately 77ft) down to three floors (approximately 47 ft)
- Segment the building to create more inviting contours and space along S. Walter Reed Drive
- Create multiple outdoor spaces, including the plaza, for students and the community
- Locate the main entrance on the S. Walter Reed side
- Maintain a curb cut on S. Walter Reed Drive for flexibility in bus operations
- Affirmed preference for the parking garage on South 9th Street - balancing footprint, height and preserving as much open space as possible, details in next phase

- Accessible parking closer to the school buildings and library, possibly curbside is necessary
- Terraces (exact configuration to be determined) make the building attractive and may provide learning spaces
- Further development of the transportation plan needs:
 - Ensure buses can operate efficiently onsite with easy access
 - Minimize vehicle impact on South Highland Street
 - Refine parking needs and locations
 - Identify drop off and pick up locations
 - Factor in Complete Streets project
 - Ensure safe interactions between pedestrians and vehicles

APS staff, Arlington County Government (ACG) staff, and the project Co-Chairs closely collaborated to optimize project communications with BLPC/PFRC participants, and to gather feedback for the APS design team as they developed the ACC concept design. The BLPC/PFRC adopted the PFRC Principles of Civic Design to inform our assessments about how the project met community goals based on ACG staff recommendations. This approach helped focus discussions and provided a framework for discussion and focused the time spent by members during our meetings. The APS design team is presenting this ACC project concept as an informational item on April 7 for School Board action on April 28.

Process:

The joint BLPC/PFRC held three meetings on January 19, 2022, February 16, 2022, and March 30, 2022. All meetings were virtual and included the appointed members of the BLPC and PFRC and were open to the public. For the first two meetings, after a presentation by staff, attendees were split into smaller breakout rooms with both a facilitator and notetaker to provide feedback on the project, to be further incorporated into the evolution of plans for the ACC at the next meeting and guide county staff. There were some technical challenges with the room assignments in the first two meetings, but overall, these issues were resolved during the course of the meetings.

The third meeting was structured differently than meetings one and two. For the third meeting, after the staff presentation, attendees were split into two groups based on appointment to either the BLPC or the PFRC. Members of the public in attendance were randomly assigned to either group. Members of the PFRC (and BLPC in their group) were asked to complete a series of feedback questions by identifying whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with a series of statements. There were also two open discussion prompts at the end of the list. The feedback questions were as follows:

1. I support the overall ACC concept design.
2. I support the overall ACC building design.
3. The massing of the new ACC building fits the PFRC Principles of Civic Design.
4. I support the configuration of the new ACC building to provide useful public space.
5. I support the multi-use plaza concept for space outside the new ACC building.
6. I support the proposed parking garage and its general configuration.
7. I support the proposed school bus and service vehicle movement on the site.

Open-Ended Prompts

8. Identify additional concerns with the proposed concept design
9. Identify specific areas of the project that should receive further development or focus during the schematic design phase of the ACC project scheduled for May 2022 to September 2022.

Unfortunately, the polling functionality within Teams did not operate for the third meeting, but the PFRC group was sufficiently condensed that we were able to collect relevant feedback both verbally and using the hand-raise functions built into Teams.

Feedback:

Overall, the process revealed some tension between APS's stated priorities and community goals for the ACC site. The charter for the BLPC excluded the long-term goals for the ACC campus; however, many members of the joint BLPC/PFRC involved in the process requested guidance on long-term plans in order to fully be responsive to site decisions and understand the potential impact of decisions made today. This included a discussion around possible future uses for the remaining ACC building. APS has been clear they want to separate the issues of the overall site development from the specifics of the ACC project and needed time to gather and analyze data for the master plan. Responses to the feedback questions from the third meeting showed more agreement than disagreement regarding support for the ACC Concept Design, Building Design and massing of the proposed ACC building according to Principles of Civic Design. There was a greater split among respondents regarding whether the proposed ACC building configuration will provide useful public space, although the majority of the group was overall supportive of the proposed multi-use plaza for the outside space at the new ACC. The discussion of the parking garage configuration and the transportation flow onsite (including school bus and service vehicle movements) again split the group between agreement and disagreement. There was discussion about the appropriate size needed for the garage, and whether or not the proposed four hundred spaces is appropriate for site requirements.

Most significantly, the parking garage discussion yielded significant feedback that the garage ought to be underground, and that the proposed cost differential/savings from an aboveground garage did not justify such a design decision. Multiple PFRC members commented that a below ground garage could yield more preserved greenspace on the site, which was viewed as a priority. There was also interest in exploring the possibilities for a green roof on the garage. Regarding the proposed plaza concept on the site, there was support for this design concept overall, but concern that the plaza was not large enough to allow for significant public programming, such as farmers' markets. The plaza size is certainly something that should be addressed during the schematic phase of the project. The parking garage configuration and site access discussion raised concerns about bike access to the site and concerns that the parking was too far away from site entrances for those with disabilities. Additionally, the community expressed some concerns about placing two large parking garages next to each other, and thus creating a "tunnel effect" on the street. Regarding onsite transportation, overall, the feedback to having exits on Walter Reed and S. Highland streets was positive. There was concern expressed that the overall volume of buses servicing the site would be overwhelming and not be sustainable on the site itself. This included a discussion of the plan for phased construction on the site, and

what impact road closures might have on Walter Reed Drive. More information about the possibility/need for on street staging of buses on the site was requested.

The open feedback questions yielded general concerns from the PFRC about the lack of a long-term plan for the site and the challenges of how to address open space provisions when we do not yet know which buildings will be staying/going. Regarding the forthcoming schematic design, there was interest expressed regarding the likely sustainability footprint of the ACC and what achievable electrification targets would be possible. Further discussion around the garage considered what current and future needs for parking might be and how to plan for that longer term future (including a garage that can be adapted for alternative uses down the line). There were also questions about the internal acoustics of the ACC, especially related to the location of the gym on the third floor and ensuring that sound was sufficiently controlled so as not to impact other building uses.

Ultimately there is recognition amongst the PFRC that this is a largescale, long-term undertaking which will greatly shape both the experience of the students and community members using the new ACC facility and the communities surrounding it. These stakeholders continue to seek guidance for long-term plans for the site in order to provide the most reflective and responsive feedback possible.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to engage with this process through the joint BLPC/PFRC.

Respectfully submitted,

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Public Facilities Review Committee

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