

APS New Elementary School #1

Building Level Planning Committee

Meeting Minutes

Issued 9/18/2012

Date: September 12, 2012
Location: Williamsburg Middle School
Time: 7:00pm to 8:30pm
Theme: *Food for Thought*

The meeting started promptly at 7:00pm. The group sat in chairs closely arranged around a display screen. John Chadwick welcomed the group and turned the meeting over to Wyck Knox.

Wyck asked each member of the group to introduce themselves and state one concern or desire about the project that is foremost in their thoughts.

Wyck re-presented our findings from the 6 September (first) BLPC meeting. "Traffic flows" topped the list of ideas and concerns offered by the group. Surprisingly (to us,) "sustainability" received little mention.

Wyck invited the group to complete individual surveys highlighting the relative importance of key concerns/ideas and collected them for tabulation.

Per our review of a preliminary parking study from several months ago, Wyck reviewed current conditions at the Williamsburg Middle School site, including student enrollment figures and staff size, as well as traffic counts and peak hours for busses and automobiles delivering students. Currently, the morning half-hour from 7:30 – 8:00 a.m. represents the busiest concentration of middle school traffic, with 560 cars entering the site. (We presume that some of those cars are driven by teachers and remain on the site.)

John Chadwick introduced the challenge presented by parking requirement provisions of the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance. Per current regulations, an additional 571 parking spaces would be required on this site to accommodate the new elementary school along with an expanded middle school. Further, all required parking must be on site – street parking may not be included in the calculation per the current code. An illustration was presented showing the effect of that extent of parking; it covers the majority of the open space on the west side of the campus such that only one soccer field remains. While no one recommends applying this much parking to the site, we felt it would be useful to describe in graphic terms the consequences of the current zoning code.

John emphasized that this problem is not unique to the Williamsburg site, that parking challenges will only become more difficult in highly urbanized Arlington. He stressed that resolving the parking problem was crucial to the success of this project and of others to follow. To that end, he introduced Toole Design Group, national leaders in analysis and recommendations for parking, traffic flow as well as "Safe Routes to School."

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Diane Lambert of Toole offered a synopsis of the capabilities and expertise of the Toole firm. She explained their role in developing a multi-modal school travel plan, utilizing baseline information that would be gathered very soon in a carefully coordinated survey. Traffic patterns, parking usage and existing infrastructure will be studied, both on weekdays and weekends. Recommendations will be made regarding walking patterns and radii, accessibility and safety improvements for pedestrians and bus routings. The school transportation plan will be published in late November. John noted that Tuckahoe, Nottingham and Jamestown school zones are all being studied.

Wyck then introduced our long-time plumbing and electrical engineers, 2rw of Charlottesville, and explained our desire to collaborate with mechanical and lighting specialists CMTA Engineers of Louisville, KY. Tony Hans of CMTA offered an explanation of Net-Zero Energy principals, which – simply stated – equalizes a building’s energy expended with its energy produced. Tony emphasized the importance of reducing consumption first, then filling the remaining gap with renewable energy sources. Net zero buildings have tremendous potential as teaching tools through curricular integration. Tony also highlighted the exciting potential for students to become ambassadors of their own building.

Ken Thacker of VMDO then briefly discussed the importance of school planning and construction phasing with a paramount regard for student safety. Several analytical diagrams of the site were discussed. Ken then presented three different illustrative site vignettes, each with different attributes helpful in comparing and contrasting potential new school locations. At present, we have no “favorite.” The school and site amenities were equalized to the extent possible; 250 total parking spaces on the site along with approximately 100 on-street spaces are suggested as a recommended compromise between actual needs and the current zoning ordinance. Each of the schemes suggests a central traffic spine with a different approach to vehicular clearance: i.e. a pedestrian promenade only, a part-time bus driveway at specific times of day and an unrestricted, through driveway to improve vehicular flow across the site and distinctly separate the two schools. Each of the schemes also showed various options for adding classroom (as well as library and cafeteria) space to the existing middle school, and considered how those options would impact the design of an adjacent middle school. Each vignette includes positive and negative descriptors, and Ken noted that for every subjective ‘pro’ or ‘con,’ a reasonable counter-argument could be made.

The majority of the comments offered by the group were in relation to traffic issues. Suggestions included preserving “the grove” of existing trees, studying an alternative roadway on the western edge of the site, and moving the MS entrance to the east side / first floor if advantageous. Due to mandated staggered bell times, a shared bus loop is possible. John acknowledged that there was no doubt that this project would “transform” the site. Left unanswered was the question of how closely should the two schools be to one another. Ken emphasized that each of the schemes – and more – would continue to be studied in greater detail.

Wyck then presented the evening’s survey results **CREATE GREAT SPACES FOR CHILDREN** received the most votes and was the only unanimous selection. John clarified that all presentations would be available on the APS website and will remain there until project completion.

End of Meeting.