

Advisory Council on School Facilities and Capital Programs (FAC)

Chair: Kelley Litzner

September 15th, 2023

Pre-CIP Findings and Recommendations for Arlington County School Board

Background

Per guidance from the Arlington School Board at the final SY2022-2023 meeting in June 2023, a sub-committee of FAC members met for three virtual sessions from July – August 2023 to review the Arlington Public Schools (APS) Pre-Capital Improvement Plan (Pre-CIP) Report. Additionally, members of FAC attended community table sessions from July – September 2023. APS staff hosted these sessions to ensure transparency and dissemination of Pre-CIP information to the public, and to allow for comments and questions prior to an APS request for FY 2025-34 CIP guidance from the Board.

The following represents the FAC's overall assessment of each major aspect of the Pre-CIP and includes recommendations for further exploration or improvement. Areas of dissent that do not align with overall FAC findings were addressed through additional requests for information to ensure that Member concerns are communicated to the Board.

Overall Assessment

In general terms, FAC concurs with APS recommendations for Boundary Planning and Rebalancing, including movement of the Immersion program out of Gunston to alleviate overcrowding; the framework for the Long-Range Plan to renovate existing facilities, including swing space for renovation projects; and the associated policy changes and studies (environmental, Minor Construction/Major Maintenance, school capacity, etc.) designated for review and revision over the next CIP cycle. APS recommendations are in keeping with the 2018-2019 FAC Annual Report, which highlighted the need for long-term planning, swing space for students during renovations, the need for a whole-of-APS boundary process, and the need for accurate forecasting data to support the facility and boundary planning processes. These recommendations also account for updated post-pandemic capacity projections and the recommendations by FAC in the 2022-2023 Annual Report.

Additional Findings and Recommendations

The 2023 Pre-CIP Report covers a wealth of detailed information. When cross-referencing the main report with the attached appendices, the logic, data, and trade-offs for each recommendation are clearly articulated and are consistent with various APS Board Advisory Committee and Building Level Planning Committee (BLPC) recommendations over the last 5-7 years. FAC sub-committee members communicated with APS staff in a Question/Answer format during the summer working session to highlight areas requiring additional clarification and potential improvement prior to the FAC's first academic year session on September 13th.

Below are key topics of interest to the community for further consideration. In keeping with FAC's advisory role, comments are framed in terms of whether FAC agrees with Pre-CIP Report recommendations or alternatively would add to or modify these recommendations.

1. Future Phases of Arlington Career Center (ACC):

- a. Options to develop the old ACC to house the Montessori Public School of Arlington (MPSA) appear in Appendix L. Members of the Arlington community continue to question why the ACC is not used as swing space instead of Nottingham (or an alternative school) and why the cost has gone up from the initial placeholder value of \$15M.
- b. FAC recommends highlighting the extensive ACC BLPC process (and its prior instantiations) that went into re-imagining the entire ACC campus, including the logic behind building an entirely new ACC, repurposing the old ACC for MPSA in lieu of keeping the Patrick Henry Building on-site, and putting a \$15M wedge into the previous CIP budget request to ensure that funds existed to get started on renovations for the old ACC.
- c. FAC recommends that APS summarize the factors that influenced these decisions, including: comments (Table 1, Page 3 of Pre-CIP Report) which outline the construction and non-construction projects previously approved in past CIPs and planned for upcoming CIPs; a Board mandate and commitment to the local community for a maximum seat capacity and new green space on the ACC site; the likely need for major Patrick Henry renovations (based on the Long-Range Planning results that will be published in Fall 2023); the benefit of expanding MPSA in a central location accessible to underserved populations that will help alleviate overcrowding in South Arlington; the enhanced requirements for housing a traditional elementary school in the ACC while still needing a home for MPSA's current PreK – 5th population; and the limitations to – and effects on – the ed specs (i.e. outdoor learning and properly-sized common spaces) for each of the three potential programs the campus would house if all three buildings remain.
- d. APS should also directly address the financial projections for MPSA – and any renovation – considering the trade-offs between renovations for each facility covered by the planning sub-categories for the Long-Range Planning Process as part of the trade space when considering swing space locations.
- e. Per a FAC request in 2022-2023, FAC recommends publication of data pertaining to enrollment in each CTE class offered at the ACC compared to the capacity for the class, and for data regarding which classes were "over-requested", by how many students, and whether "waitlists" for these classes are presently maintained.

2. Capacity Issues:

- a. Planning Units (Page 24 of Pre-CIP Report and Appendix H): FAC recommends that the Board authorize an exercise to have FAC and neighborhood community association members "rank" the list of planning unit "boundaries" from most important to least important in terms of defining small communities (i.e., planning units) that would all go to the same school.
- b. Managing Enrollment (Page 23 of Pre-CIP Report): FAC recommends that the Board authorize an exercise to have FAC and neighborhood community association members "rank"

the list of “Tools to Manage Enrollment” from most-ideal to least-ideal for the impact on students, impact on families, impact on budget, impact on capital improvements, etc.

- c. FAC requests a briefing on the pros/cons for moving Immersion from Gunston to one single school instead of two, to include impacts on capacity, transportation, and academics. The Pre-CIP highlights that both options were considered with the single-school move denoted as the overall APS staff recommendation, but the basis for this recommendation was not clear in the actual report and has since been reconciled between various APS departments. Amending the final Pre-CIP report to reflect these items will help clarify why the single school is preferred over two locations.

3. Swing Space:

- a. Overall, APS clearly articulates the need for swing space and the benefits of having children located in a school that is not undergoing renovation. It also articulates the cost trade-offs related to repurposing an elementary school vs. several other options as well as the capacity discrepancies between South and North Arlington. Repurposing an existing elementary school also has schedule benefits, allowing APS to begin renovations sooner and returning children to their home schools in a shorter amount of time than other swing space alternatives requiring major construction.
- b. Understandably, community table sessions and comments have highlighted the displeasure of the Nottingham community with respect to this plan. While considering the needs of this community, FAC considers the needs of all elementary schools and students in Arlington and concurs that Nottingham is an ideal choice for swing space, consistent with the use of swing space for renovations in past decades.
- c. FAC recommends utilization of the results of the Long-Range Plan for Renovating School Facilities as an additional means for evaluating the efficacy of using Nottingham (or another school) as swing space. Using these factors – as applied by a third-party consultant – to evaluate the highest facility renovation needs in the county will serve to clarify the trade-space involved in renovating specific schools, the priority order for each, and the additional expenses and potential savings inherent in moving those populations to/from their home schools during the renovation process.
- d. FAC requests an updated analysis of the bussing expenses related to moving students from one community to the next, as well as considerations such as before/after-care, sports, after-school classes, and other activities typically offered at an elementary school.
- e. As there is no formal Transportation Advisory Committee in FY2023-2024, FAC recommends that a member of the Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) and FAC join the JFAC’s transportation committee to maintain awareness of transportation issues and solutions within the County.

4. Planning Unit Data for Middle School Boundaries:

- a. While these boundaries are not scheduled for release by APS Staff until September, they have generated a wealth of feedback from the community.
- b. FAC recommends that APS staff provide updated data and recommendations at the October or November sessions, working with FAC to assess whether the boundary process makes practical sense for the community or requires further review before going to the Board.
- c. FAC recommends providing an estimated time frame, based on projected enrollment, for which the boundary changes will effectively balance Middle School enrollment (e.g., 3-5 years, 5-10 years, etc.).

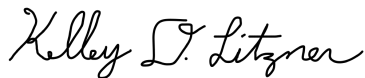
5. Sustainability:

- a. The FAC 2023-2024 Annual Report highlights the need for a continued focus on sustainability.
- b. Per the Report's recommendations, FAC recommends "...that a FAC subcommittee be formed to focus on sustainability goals for facility design and construction. This would present an opportunity for FAC to collaborate with the Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Sustainability (SACS) and think holistically about sustainability for both facilities and operations. Results of this effort could include recommendations for a formal definition of sustainability for APS; refining APS policies related to sustainability with attention given toward creating and maintaining optimal learning environments; and finally, developing goals and language to be incorporated into the next BLPC charge."

Conclusion

FAC sub-committee members found that the Pre-CIP report was thorough, data-rich, and offered extensive insights into APS staff's thought processes for a variety of FY2025-34 CIP topics. FAC supports the overall recommendations in the Pre-CIP report and supports Board CIP guidance based on the Pre-CIP. FAC requests a response from APS staff on its findings and recommendations above at the next scheduled FAC meeting and looks forward to engaging with staff and the Board on CIP issues in the coming school year.

Sincerely,



Kelley Litzner
Chair 2023-2024