

Advisory Council on School Facilities and Capital Programs (FAC)

Chair: Kelley Litzner
Vice-Chair: Cynthia Hilton

December 11th, 2023

Summary of FAC Recommendations and Comments for the Arlington Public Schools (APS) Long-Range Plan to Renovate Existing Facilities Methodology

Background

The Arlington School Board and APS Staff representatives to the FAC requested a review of the Long-Range Plan to Renovate Existing Facilities Methodology (the “Methodology”). The following represents the FAC’s overall assessment of each major aspect of this plan and includes recommendations for further exploration or improvement as well as points of agreement and disagreement with JFAC recommendations published in November 2023. Areas of dissent noted by FAC Members that do not align with the overall FAC findings will be addressed through additional requests for information from APS staff to ensure that Member concerns are communicated to the Board.

FAC received an overview of the Methodology at the November 2023 meeting. Following the meeting, Methodology documents and a template covering major points of interest were posted to a joint document site for review and comment by individual Members. The FAC Vice-Chair compiled all comments and synthesized them into the summary findings below.

Findings and Recommendations

Based on comments submitted by Members, the FAC provides the following summary findings and recommendations for consideration by the Board and APS Staff to inform FY25-34 CIP Guidance. Overall, the FAC:

- Supports the current Methodology, which uses agreed upon criteria to provide objective Facility Condition Index (FCI) and Building Characteristic Index (BCI) scores to identify priority facility repair, renovation, or reconstruction projects. While other tools and methods may exist, no better assessment tool has been proposed. The current Methodology provides a comprehensive, data-based view of individual schools and the APS system as a whole.
- Supports limiting the number of school studies [est. \$1M for “deep dive” (DD) studies] that can reasonably be accommodated, given available funds. The Methodology should be used to identify five (5) candidates but DD no more than three (3) in a CIP cycle to save on costs, unless there is an obvious need to go over that number. Getting ahead of the CIP and bond/funding capacity is not prudent from a cost/benefit stand-point.
- Supports flexibility for Staff to decide based on available funding which top-ranked projects go forward, recognizing that extenuating and/or mitigating circumstances may result in second- or third-ranked projects advancing before those schools with greater needs that may require a more comprehensive, expensive, and long-term renovation plan.
- Does not support JFAC recommendation to remedy educational space inadequacies by reducing the student load for the space. This option leads to other issues such as equity and cost (e.g., whether a child is taught in classes with similar numbers or is “advantaged” by smaller class sizes; or teachers who are expected to teach dissimilar student loads; or the costs of hiring extra teachers to accommodate more classes in smaller educational spaces).

- Does not support JFAC recommendation naming Thomas Jefferson Middle School as the top priority school at this juncture. This recommendation raises expectations for some and will frustrate others. Any prognostication of priorities needs to let the process play out so that all schools and communities have the opportunity to see how APS evaluated their needs and have time to digest and understand the overall plan and priorities.
- Recommends that any costs associated with evaluation and repair/renovation/reconstruction of joint facilities should be shared with the Arlington County Government.
- Supports systematically updating baseline FCI information but does not support the staff recommendation that the data be updated no more frequently than every five (5) years. A five-year refresh gap does not fit the two-year work cycle APS has followed for decades for CIP/Bond preparation and enactment. That said, a two-year refresh is likely too soon to be useful. FAC recommends that the gap be reduced to four (4) years to coincide with a “Bond” year so that the data will be available for use in the development of the following year’s CIP.
- Recommends that data collection and reporting should be flexible enough to allow new criteria in the future (or removal of current criteria) as district priorities, policies, and standards evolve.
- Recommends inclusion of Pre-K numbers in school planning. As Pre-K programs (e.g. VPI) grow, these students have additional needs that affect school facilities, including toileting and space constraints (Example: a “full” VPI classroom may have a maximum of 18 students but removes 25 seats from that school’s capacity). These and other “hidden” or non-accountable factors are not readily apparent in the analysis but will affect long-range planning.

Areas for Further Consideration

While supporting the Methodology, the FAC recommends that APS Staff review a number of issues with the Methodology (in no order of priority):

- Weighting of deficiency criteria. Not all assessment criteria merit the same urgency, even if deemed deficient. Weighting scale needs to be explained, along with prioritization. Example: the Williamsburg roof appears “red”, but the roof may still be usable for several years, or the renovation may be possible over a summer period without class disruption. These details will be important for explaining to each community how to understand the data associated with their individual schools and the overall prioritization.
- Balance between using available funds for DD assessments (est. \$1M/study) vs. using those funds to repair, renovate, or replace near-term facility deficiencies.
- Timing of DDs and project launches. Studies should affirm the highest immediate priorities that can be addressed in the next two-year CIP. Each two-year CIP allows (and should allow) for course correction, with the caveat that altering course from one CIP cycle to the next has the potential to incur timing issues and additional expenses that increase for changes made to previous CIP plans occurring earlier in a cycle vs. changes made to plans later in a cycle.
- Building Criteria. Some potential criteria appear to be missing. Examples include middle school PE changing rooms; all-gender restrooms; educational space based on accessibility; and emergency evacuation systems for those with disabilities. FAC recommends reviewing criteria and noting those that may be candidates for inclusion in the next Methodology planning period.
- Relevance of some FCI criteria. FAC notes a need to scrub criteria to remove items that, even if deficient, would not materially change the overall priority ranking of that facility (e.g. occupancy sensors or fireplaces).
- Terminology concerns. Workbook tabs corresponding to building characteristics are labeled “BC” (not BCI) and those related to facility conditions are labeled “FCA” (not FCI), adding to confusion over definitions. Whenever possible, APS should use streamlined and consistent

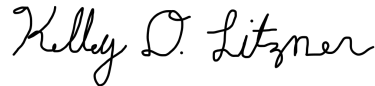
terminology, acronyms, and color-coding (e.g for clarity, replacing “BCI” (index) with “BCA” (assessment) to better reflect the broader BC evaluation criteria).

- FCI calculation. “Stoplight” coding of deficiencies is useful, but more explanation is needed as to how these ratings and other listed data should be interpreted by the public to avoid confusion and misunderstanding of ratings.
- MC/MM Funding. While this Methodology includes categorization for MC/MM funding, its primary focus is on long-range planning. In considering funding and trade-offs for future upgrades, the Board and Staff should prioritize MC/MM whenever feasible. Not every school can or should be renovated completely, and a 500-seat building will not look like a 750-seat or a 1,000-seat building. MC/MM and other intermediate funding is a core capability for APS upgrades and should be funded appropriately in each CIP cycle to ensure that modifications and repairs that maintain and improve schools with minimal disruption to students and faculty can be made as needed throughout the school year.

Conclusion

FAC Members found that the Methodology was thorough, data-rich, and offered solid quantitative and qualitative metrics for assessing and prioritizing APS renovation plans and factors. FAC supports the overall Methodology and is prepared to assist APS Staff in implementing the Board’s FY25-34 CIP Direction. FAC requests a response from APS Staff on these findings and recommendations at the next scheduled FAC meeting and looks forward to engaging with Staff and the Board for the balance of the school year.

Sincerely,



Kelley Litzner
Chair 2023-2024