



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

February 20, 2004

MEMORANDUM – MANDATORY REFERRAL

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: John A. Carter, Chief *JAC*
Community-Based Planning Division

William Barron, Eastern County Team Leader *WB*
Community-Based Planning Division

FROM: Calvin Nelson, Jr., Planner Coordinator, Eastern County Team *CN*
Community-Based Planning Division (301-495-4619)

SUBJECT: Mandatory Referral No. 03603-MCPS-1, Northwood High School
Modernization and Addition, 919 University Boulevard West, Intersection
of Arcola Avenue and University Boulevard – Kemp Mill Master Plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Approval with the following comments to be
transmitted to Montgomery County Public Schools
(MCPS):

1. The applicant must comply with stormwater and sediment control regulations of the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services.
2. Coordinate with the State Highway Administration (SHA) and the Department of Public Works to investigate operational pedestrian access and safety improvements along University Boulevard between Arcola Avenue and Caddington Avenue.
3. Provide a traffic study to identify any needed transportation improvements if the enrollment exceeds 1600 students.
4. The project is encouraged to use sustainable building design techniques in accordance with the U.S. Green Building Council on Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED).

BACKGROUND

Northwood High School is located at 919 University Boulevard (Maryland Route 193) between Arcola and Caddington Avenues. Constructed in 1956, Northwood was closed because of declining enrollment. Since 1989, it has been a holding facility for various high schools while their buildings were being modernized. Rockville High School is currently using the facility until the end of the school year. Northwood High School is a part of the Downcounty Consortium (DCC) that also includes Montgomery Blair, Albert Einstein, John F. Kennedy, and Wheaton High Schools, and its feeder middle schools and elementary schools. Beginning this year, Grade 8 students in the DCC will be able to choose, based on their interest, from one of the five high schools. Each school is developing a variety of challenging academy programs designed to capture students' interests. Each academy will help students explore possible career pathways and prepare for higher education. Northwood High School will offer four thematic academies: Academy of Environmental Sciences; The Gilder Lehrman Academy of American History; The Humanities and Film Academy; and the Academy of Political Science and Public Advocacy. The school will partner with the University of Maryland, College Park, to provide unique educational opportunities for students.

Due to the growing student enrollment within the DCC, Northwood High School will reopen with a ninth grade in August 2004. The high school will add one grade each year, over the next three years. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) proposes to expand the high school's core spaces over the next several years.

Subject Site

The subject site and adjacent properties are all zoned R-60. Properties and uses surrounding the subject site include: a 150-foot wide State Highway Administration right-of-way along the northern boundary; the Mariner Health nursing home further to the north; single-family detached homes in the Forest Knolls neighborhood to the east and south; single-family detached homes across University Boulevard to the west; townhomes across Arcola Avenue to the northwest; and University Towers and the Warwick Apartments further to the west off Route 193. On the west side of the site, there is a single point of vehicular access to the school off University Boulevard.

The site is currently improved with a partial two-story building, a football stadium field, a baseball field, four tennis courts, practice fields, 410 parking spaces, and a bus staging area for 9 buses. The site slopes up from University Boulevard to the front of the building at approximately 5% and levels off to the rear of the site. There are sidewalks along both sides of University Boulevard and Arcola Avenue in the vicinity of the school, and a paved pathway leading from the parking area across the SHA right-of-way to the intersection of Conti Place and Northwest Terrace.

On July 30, 2001, the Planning Board recommended approval of a mandatory referral for a telecommunications facility on the school site. As of this date, however, the telecommunications carrier—Nextel—has not constructed the monopole. When architectural plans for the school reopening were being developed, there were concerns by Northwood's Facility Advisory Committee that the monopole would be seen from the

building entrance to the school. In addressing this concern, Nextel has indicated that it would relocate the proposed monopole to an area between the basketball and tennis courts near the northern boundary of the site, a location that is preferred by the Facility Advisory Committee. If this becomes the new proposed monopole location, an application for a mandatory referral must be resubmitted.

Description of Project

The school site comprises 29.5 acres. When constructed in 1956, Northwood High School contained 151,002 square feet. Since that time the school has received an extensive remodeling and three additions, to bring the present school size to approximately 226,632 square feet. Northwood's current student capacity of 1,600 students will remain unchanged. The new additional space is slated for expanding the core spaces of the school including: a new administration suite, a new instructional media center, a new greenhouse, and an expanded cafeteria and kitchen. The added space totals 26,208 square feet and would provide a core support space sized to accommodate a 2,000-student enrollment. All areas affected by the proposed additions will be designed to meet Americans with Disabilities Act Architectural Guideline (ADAAG) requirements as well as national and local building codes including fire, life safety, and health codes. The new additions will also incorporate the ANSI/ASHRAE/IES Energy Efficient Design for New Buildings.

The Facility Advisory Committee has also identified additional program objectives for Northwood, however funding is not available in the current budget. The following items are being bid as Add Alternates should additional funds become available: science laboratory improvements; technology education laboratory improvements; cafeteria expansion; ceiling tile replacement; repainting; toilet improvements; window replacement; and updating telecommunications.

The proposed plans for Northwood High School is in conformance with all setback, height and coverage requirements for the R-60 Zone.

ANALYSIS

The Master Plan

The 2001 Approved and Adopted Kemp Mill Master Plan describes the site as being within the Forest Knolls neighborhood. The Kemp Mill neighborhood is located north of the State Highway Administration property; the University Towers neighborhood is located in the northwest quadrant of the intersection of Arcola Avenue and University Boulevard; and the Sligo Woods neighborhood is located southwest of the site across University Boulevard West. The Master Plan recommends that if the school undergoes a non-school reuse, then consideration should be given at that time to co-locating senior housing on the site. The Master Plan also recommended acquiring the SHA right-of-way (adjacent to the school site) from University Boulevard to Northwest Branch Park for parkland. This will provide a park connection between Sligo Creek and Northwest Branch parks.

Transportation

The Transportation Planning Unit of the Countywide Planning Division offers the following comments as part of the transportation requirements related to the approval of the subject application:

1. Provide a traffic study to identify any needed transportation improvements if the enrollment exceeds 1600 students.
2. Investigate operational pedestrian access and safety improvements along University Boulevard between Arcola Avenue and Caddington Avenue.

A consultant retained by MCPS completed a traffic study to satisfy requirements of Local Area Transportation Review (LATR). The Transportation Unit has reviewed that traffic study and has concluded that all affected intersections in the area will operate within the congestion standard of 1650 Critical Lane Volume (CLV) for the Kensington/Wheaton policy area. The existing trips from the site were used as the basis for projecting the future trips from the school. This is due to the similar characteristics of the existing use and the future school use. The distribution of site traffic was also based on the existing turning movement at the school.

The site has one vehicular access point from University Boulevard. This is a stop sign controlled access with channelization to improve safety for vehicles turning in and out of the site. There will continue to be a clockwise one-way loop around the campus for all vehicles entering the site. The entrance is currently designed in a way that vehicles entering and exiting the site pass each other to the right, a maneuver that is counter-intuitive.

MCPS considered separating the egress and ingress driveways and revising the direction of traffic on the internal circulation loop around the campus to counter-clockwise flow.

Adequate sidewalks exist along University Boulevard, Arcola Avenue and Caddington Avenue. There are walking paths connecting the neighborhoods to the north and south to the school. The nearby intersections of University Boulevard with Caddington Avenue and Arcola Avenue have push-button controlled pedestrian signals for safe and easy crossings.

Additional improvements at the nearby intersections could be made to enhance pedestrian safety. Operational improvements could include changing pedestrian signal phasing to increase crossing time and providing additional pedestrian signing and marking. These operational improvements should be investigated and pursued immediately. Other improvements might include physical treatments such as improving median refuge areas along University Boulevard, reducing the turning radius at intersections, and additional pedestrian signing and marking.

The MCPS staff recommends further review and monitoring of traffic conditions after school opens before reconsidering conceptual plans for potential access and circulation changes. Staff suggests that MCPS also monitor pedestrian safety of a period of two

years and return to the Planning Board if additional physical improvements for either vehicular or pedestrian access and safety are pursued.

The site is located within the Kensington-Wheaton Policy Area, which has a remaining capacity of 2,770 jobs and 2,531 housing units as of January 31, 2004.

Parking – The proposed building additions will reduce the number of parking spaces from 410 to 356. With a school capacity of 1,600 students, there will be 160 school staff, leaving approximately 196 parking spaces for students and visitors. MCPS staff notes that the number of parking spaces for Northwood would be slightly less than other County high schools. For the first two years of Northwood's reopening, most students because of their age, will not be able to drive. MCPS also notes that there is an area located on the northwest corner of the site, previously used for the driving school, that could be developed for additional parking. If there is a parking problem in the future, then neighborhood parking permits for those streets in the vicinity of the school, would have to be implemented.

Environment

Environmental Planning staff recommends approval of the Mandatory Referral with the following conditions:

1. The project is encouraged to use sustainable building design techniques in accordance with the U.S. Green Building Council on Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.
2. The applicant must comply with stormwater and sediment control regulations of the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services.

Environmental Guidelines – The site is not within a Primary Management Area or Special Protection Area.

Stormwater Management – There are no stormwater management facilities currently functioning on the school site. New stormwater facilities are required for areas that will be disturbed by the proposed building addition and ancillary paved areas. The Department of Permitting Services (DPS) has granted a waiver from quantity control and approved a concept plan for new quality control facilities for areas that will be disturbed by the proposed construction. Quality control measures include the use of structural sand filters to treat an area of paved parking equivalent to the new building additions. Northwood High School has also agreed to use porous pavements and to consider the use of low impact technology such as green roofs for quality control.

Forest Conservation Law – An existing Forest Conservation Plan approved in 1966 and modified in 2000 covers the property. This Mandatory Referral is exempt from Forest Conservation Plan (FCP) requirements because the proposal involves modifications to an existing developed property. The Planning Board previously approved construction in 2000 and environmental issues are not significantly affected by the proposed additions. A Tree Save Plan is not required because no forest or specimen trees will be removed. There are specimen trees on the property however,

and efforts must be made to protect those that are near the limits of disturbance for the proposed construction.

Sustainable Building Design (Green Technology) – The staff encourages the use of sustainable building design in all public projects, in keeping with the work of the U.S. Green Building Council on Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED. As part of the renovations and new additions, MCPS may be able to incorporate building materials that employ sustainable or renewable technologies and, to the extent possible, MCPS is encouraged to pursue and implement use of such materials.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The project Design Team, met almost bi-weekly with the Facility Advisory Committee from January 22, 2003, until the Facility Advisory Committee approved the Schematic Design Concept on April 10, 2003. Each meeting was held in the school and was attended by community members, neighbors, parents, teachers, and members of the Facility Advisory Committee.

On December 19, 2003, staff notified local citizens associations, adjoining and confronting property owners, and other interested parties, of the proposed hearing date of the mandatory referral. Notices were sent out again on January 22, 2004, informing them of the rescheduled date of the public hearing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the staff analysis of environmental and transportation requirements, and the land use recommendations of the Master Plan, staff concludes that the proposed use is consistent with the Master Plan, meets the requirements of the R-60 Zone, the Forest Conservation Law, and is in conformance with the Environmental Guidelines.

CN:ha: g:\nelson\m.referral.northwood.doc

Attachments:

1. Vicinity Map
2. Existing Site Plan
3. Proposed Site Plan
4. Transportation Planning Memo
5. Environmental Planning Memo