MCPB
Item # 3
10/07/04

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning

October 1, 2004

MEMORANDUM—MANDATORY REFERRAL

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

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

FROM: Khalid Afzal, Team Leader, Georgia Avenue Team (301-495-4650) KA

SUBJECT: Mandatory Referral No. 04505-MCPS-1: Kensington-Parkwood Elementary School Reconstruction, Addition of four classrooms and a gymnasium, R-60 Zone, 4710 Saul Road, Kensington, Maryland, 1989 Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton

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RECOMMENDATION: Approval

DISCUSSION

On September 19, 2002, the Planning Board reviewed and approved, with conditions, Mandatory Referral No. 02502-MCPS-1 for the complete redesign and reconstruction of the Kensington-Parkwood Elementary School located at 4710 Saul Road, Kensington, Maryland. At that time, the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) outlined four classrooms and a gymnasium on the site plan as a possible future addition, but they were not part of the mandatory referral analysis and review by the Planning Board. The MCPS has decided to include four classrooms (as a result of the MCPS's all day kindergarten initiative) and the gymnasium in their plans for construction of the school, which has been awarded and the construction is underway.

Kensington-Parkwood Elementary School is located on a 9.98-acre site in the Walter Johnson High School cluster. The original Kensington-Parkwood Elementary School was constructed in 1952. In 1999, MCPS determined that the most cost effective option to modernize the school was to replace the existing 1952 building with a new building of approximately 63,972 gross square feet, which will now be increased with the four classrooms and the gymnasium addition. The planned capacity of the school remains unchanged as originally proposed at 499 students with a core capacity of 640 students.

The additional classrooms and the gymnasium were shown in outline as potential future additions on the site plans with no estimated time frame. Staff from both agencies did not anticipate that school program changes (all day kindergarten initiative) and the money available to construct the gymnasium would require these spaces to be built as part of the contract for the main building. The MCPS included the gymnasium as Add Alternate 1, and the four classrooms addition as Add Alternate 2 in their construction bids, and has now decided to include these two additions as part of the construction of the main building.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

The proposed addition of four classrooms near the northern edge of the site raises two issues:

1. It would remove a small grove of trees including three significant trees (a 24-inch Cherry and two 26-inch poplars) and a 30-inch specimen poplar located near the northern edges of the site; and
2. It will bring the northern end of the building along Saul Road closer to the adjoining single-family lots.

1. Loss of Trees: The removal of the four trees is especially significant since the Planning Board, the staff, and MCPS worked hard to save these and other trees on the site during the review and approval of the main building in 2002. The Planning Board had asked the MCPS to explore a two-story option for the school building to save some of the trees on the site, and the final approved design was partially two stories to minimize the building footprint and thus reduce damage to existing trees on site.

The construction schedule and time constraints due to the projected school opening in 2005 precludes any redesign of the school to explore options that would either accommodate the additional spaces within the footprint of the main building or modify the current plan to include these additions without damaging the trees. Any major redesign at this stage would also add prohibitive costs to the approved budget for the construction of the school. Staff from both agencies explored various options (place the new classrooms at an angle, cantilever the new structure over the critical root zone, locate the classroom in another area) to save the grove of trees but none were deemed feasible.

In addition to the loss of four trees as a result of the gymnasium and four classrooms addition, two specimen trees previously identified as saved would now be lost due to refinement of architectural and site plans since the approval of the plans in 2002. The applicant has proposed a substantial on-site tree planting as mitigation for the removal of all significant and specimen trees. A revised Tree Save Plan proposes a total of 573 inches of caliper in canopy and understory trees based on 1" caliper replacement for each 1" diameter loss of existing trees.

2. Distance from adjoining properties: The proposed addition of four classrooms also raises some concerns about the distance of the school building from the adjoining single-family houses located near the northern edge of the school. Without the proposed addition of four classrooms, the school building would be approximately 120 feet from the northern property line. With the four-classroom addition, this distance would be approximately 50 feet. Although the new building would be significantly closer to the surrounding properties, staff believes that a 50-foot distance with additional planting and landscaping would be an appropriate setback for the proposed school building.

Staff also looked at the gymnasium addition in terms of its impact on the surrounding properties. The proposed gymnasium addition along the western property line (near Edgefield Road) does not bring the building any closer to the property line than the building as currently approved. It adds approximately 52 feet to the length of the wall facing the single-family house on Edgefield Road, which is currently approximately 95 feet long. The additional planning and landscaping along this wall will minimize the impact of the new building on the adjoining houses.

ANALYSIS

Community Notification

The MCPS staff briefed the local residents and the parents on the proposed four classrooms and a gymnasium addition at a school PTA meeting on June 1, 2004. The local civic group, Parkwood Residents Association, was informed of the gymnasium and the four classrooms addition during its meeting on June 28, 2004. The staff sent a notice of the Planning Board hearing to the president of the civic association on September 13, 2004. Staff also discussed the proposed addition with the civic association president, who expressed support for the proposed addition. Staff has not received any other comments from the community.

Master Plan

The 1989 Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton does not have any specific recommendations or comments for the school site or the adjoining neighborhood. The proposed addition of four classrooms and a gymnasium is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Master Plan.

Development Standards for the R-60 Zone

The proposed school modernization, including the four classrooms and a gymnasium addition, meets the setbacks, the height limits, and the coverage of the R-60 Zone as follows:

Zoning Comparison Table

Requirement	Required/Permitted	Proposed
Setbacks		
Front	25 feet	115 feet minimum
Side	8 feet. 18 feet total for both sides	45 feet minimum
Rear	20 feet	250 feet minimum
Maximum coverage	35% maximum	25%
Maximum building height	35 feet	34 feet

Transportation
A memorandum from Transportation Planning is attached. Since the proposed additions do not add any new students or staff to the proposal approved by the Planning Board in September of 2002, no new traffic analysis was required of the applicant. Any future addition in the maximum approved student enrollment of the school should be the subject of a traffic study.

Environment
The proposed additions are exempt from the requirements of a Forest Conservation Plan. However, the plan must address the mitigation and preservation of any specimen and significant trees through a Tree Save Plan discussed in more detail in the attached memorandum from Environmental Planning.

CONCLUSION

Staff believes that the addition of four classrooms and a gymnasium to the approved building at this stage in the renovation process, combined with the limited acreage, configuration, and topography of the site makes it impossible to accommodate all elements of the school program without impacting the four trees at the northern edge of the site. Saving the four trees would require a redesign of the building, which would lead to additional costs and delays in the school's scheduled opening. Given these constraints the additional tree planting to offset the loss of four specimen trees is an acceptable mitigation measure. Staff therefore recommends approval of the revised building including the four classrooms and a gymnasium as shown on the Landscape Plan and the Landscape Plan–Planting Mitigation for Tree Save Plan.

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Attachments:
1. Vicinity Map
2. Site Plan
3. Landscape Plan
4. Landscaping Plant List
5. Floor Plans
6. Exterior Elevations
7. Memorandum from Environmental Planning
8. Memorandum from Transportation Planning