



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

October 14, 2004

MEMORANDUM—MANDATORY REFERRAL

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

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

Khalid Afzal, Team Leader *KA*
Georgia Avenue Planning Team

FROM: Frederick Vernon Boyd, Community Planner (301/495-4654)
Georgia Avenue Planning Team *fyb*

SUBJECT: Mandatory Referral 04502-MCPS-1: Downcounty Consortium Elementary School #27 (Connecticut Park Elementary School) Reopening - 12518 Greenly Drive, Wheaton; Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION: Approval, with the following condition:

- Submit a Tree Save Plan showing root pruning and tree protection fencing along the limit of disturbance for tree number 13 and for the 24-inch and 22-inch maple trees on either side of the new entrance on Bushey Drive

PROJECT SUMMARY

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is proposing to reopen Connecticut Park Elementary School in Wheaton as a public elementary school. This school will be part of the Downcounty Consortium, which was created in 2000, and is designed to alleviate crowded conditions at Viers Mill, Weller Road and Wheaton Woods elementary schools. When it opens in September 2006, it will serve students from Pre-Kindergarten through the fifth grade.

For the past two decades, the building has served as the Connecticut Park Center, housing MCPS adult education programs, General Equivalency Degree programs, staff training classrooms and parent resource offices.

THE SITE

Connecticut Park Elementary School is located in the Connecticut Avenue Park community in Wheaton, north and west of the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Randolph Road. The site is bounded by Greenly and Bushey drives on the east, Barbara Road on the west, Elby Street on the south and Weller Road on the north. It totals 9.17 acres. To the east, across Connecticut Avenue is the Greenwood Knolls community. North of the school is the Stoneybrook Estates neighborhood. An aerial view of the vicinity is attached.

The site has been graded to maintain the playing fields and buildings at the same elevation. From the playing fields, there is a steep slope to Elby Street and a more gradual slope to Greenly Drive. The site also slopes to Weller Road in the northern part of the site, which has allowed a portion of the building to have a second story. The school building is centrally located on the site, with parking to the east, nearer Bushey Drive, and playing fields to the west, towards Elby Street. The school is reached from Greenly Drive.

Connecticut Park Elementary School was built in 1954. A two-story addition was completed in 1959, adding eight classrooms. MCPS closed the elementary school in 1983, but retained ownership and use of the land and buildings, establishing the Connecticut Park Center for adult education and other resource programs.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The existing school building will be renovated to bring it into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It will be designed to support 640 students and will include full-day Kindergarten. The primary improvements will be a new two-story 12-classroom addition with an entrance on Weller Road and a new multipurpose room with a media center. The multipurpose room will include a stage and athletic courts. It connects the two existing wings of the school building. MCPS has also included three "add-alternates." To meet the objectives of the MCPS class-size reduction initiative, one add-alternate provides six classrooms. A second provides a separate gymnasium and the third provides for a county-supported day care center.

If all three add-alternates are constructed, the resulting facility will be 91,491 square feet in size. The add-alternates have been considered as part of this review.

Access to the site and circulation within the site will remain largely unchanged. The main entrance will remain on Greenly Drive, but will be moved to the corner of the building. To separate bus traffic from automobile traffic, the new design eliminates the connection between the bus loop and the school's main parking lot, creates a separate entrance to the parking lot from Bushey Drive and establishes a student drop off area at the new entrance to the school. The parking aisles provide a one-way route around the parking lot to the drop off area and back to the Bushey Drive entrance. The parking lot will contain a total of 75 spaces.

The MCPS proposal alters the existing configuration of recreational facilities at the school. It proposes to reduce slightly the size of the paved play area on the west side of the school to accommodate the classroom addition and create a new Kindergarten play area on the Greenly Drive side of the school near the main entrance. One existing softball field is to be removed and replaced with a larger rectangular playing field that can be used for several sports.

Drawings of the existing site plan and the proposed site plan are attached.

ANALYSIS

Master Plan

The Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan does not make specific recommendations for this site, which had been closed for six years when the Plan was completed. A public school at this location is consistent with the Plan.

Environment

The Environmental Planning Unit of the Countywide Planning Division recommends approval of this mandatory referral, with the condition that a Tree Save Plan prepared by a qualified professional be submitted and approved by the M-NCPPC Environmental Planning staff.

Environmental Guidelines—There are no stream valley or other environmental buffers on this site, and it is not within a Primary Management or Special Protection Area.

Stormwater Management—Full water quality and quantity control shall be expected to protect the integrity of the Rock Creek watershed.

Forest Conservation—A Natural Resource Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation has been approved for this application. An exemption to the Forest Conservation Law has been granted because the proposed project modifies an existing development, involves not more than 5,000 square feet of forest clearing and proposes no forest clearing within a stream buffer. It is not on a property subject to Special Protection Area Water Quality Plan requirements and does not require a new subdivision plan. There are four specimen trees on the site; three are in good to very good condition and one is in poor condition. The attached memorandum from the Environmental Planning Unit provides details on the effects of the proposed project on these trees.

Sustainable Building Design—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 (LEED). The proposed new additions for this project offer an opportunity to use building techniques and materials that apply sustainable building design concepts and procedures. MCPS is encouraged to consider LEED-related building designs and materials as part of this project.

Recreation Facilities

The Park Planning and Resource Analysis Unit of the Countywide Planning Division has reviewed the recreation elements of the Connecticut Park Elementary School reopening and concluded that the proposal can be approved. Its review notes that establishing a new sports field increases the flexibility of the school's facilities, recognizes the needs of a diverse community and adds to the inventory of fields for youth sports. The unit's memorandum, which is attached, recommends that the remaining softball field receive a "skinned" infield, and a new perimeter fence. The memorandum also recommends that areas behind the field's backstop, now overgrown, be cleared of excess vegetation. Finally, the memorandum notes that an area shown for future learning cottages is also part of the new sports field and would conflict with use of that field. It recommends relocation of the learning cottages, if needed, to an area outside the field's boundaries.

Transportation

The Transportation Planning Unit of the Countywide Planning Division has concluded that the proposed reopening meets the requirements of Local Area Transportation Review. A complete discussion of the staff review is in the attached memorandum from the unit.

A consultant retained by MCPS completed a traffic study to determine the impact of an elementary school on the local transportation network at peak periods. Transportation Planning has reviewed that traffic study and concurs in its finding that affected intersections in the area will operate within the congestion standard (1,600 Critical Lane Volume) set for the Kensington-Wheaton Policy Area. To determine future traffic through affected intersections, transportation engineers add the number of peak period trips generated by the proposed use to the number of existing trips. (There is no significant number of trips from approved, but unbuilt development.) They then assign future traffic to those intersections they consider critical and compare the results to the congestion standard for the area. As the Transportation Planning memorandum indicates, the critical intersections for Connecticut Park Elementary School operate within the standard for the policy area.

Transportation Planning also reviewed the proposal's site access and circulation design. The unit concurs that separating bus and automobile access enhances both safety and efficiency. A full network of sidewalks in the school's neighborhood will allow walking students to reach the school safely. Intersections in the vicinity of the school have adequate pedestrian signals and marked crosswalks as well.

Public Outreach

Montgomery County Public Schools convened a facilities advisory committee to review designs for the proposed project. The committee included 13 neighbors of the school. The committee met several times in the spring of 2004, providing local residents the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the project.

Civic associations in the vicinity of Connecticut Park Elementary School were notified in writing of this mandatory referral hearing. No comments have been received to date.

CONCLUSION

The proposed project meets the applicable standards and guidelines for the environment and it meets applicable guidelines for adequate public facilities. A public school at this location is consistent with the Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan. The staff recommends approval of this mandatory referral and transmittal of the comments.

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Attachments

1. Vicinity Map
2. Existing Site Plan
3. Proposed Site Plan
4. Memorandum from Environmental Planning Unit
5. Memorandum from Park Planning and Resource Analysis Unit
6. Memorandum from Transportation Planning Unit