



July 21, 2005

**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) *fyb*  
Georgia Avenue Planning Team

**SUBJECT:** Mandatory Referral No. 05503-MCPS-1: Parkland Middle School  
Modernization 4610 West Frankfort Drive, Rockville, R-90 Zone, Aspen  
Hill Master Plan

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**RECOMMENDATION:** Approval to transmit the following comments to Montgomery  
County Public Schools (MCPS):

1. MCPS must prepare and submit a separate mandatory referral application should it decide to construct a future classroom addition;
2. The project should conform to all applicable development standards set out in the Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance;
3. MCPS should install additional landscaping on West Frankfort Drive to screen the parking and drop off area from confronting homes, and the additional landscaping should be reviewed by staff of the M-NCPPC;
4. Staff of the M-NCPPC must approve the submitted tree save plan;
5. Design modifications proposed by the staff of the M-NCPPC should be implemented, including relocation of a proposed broad jump pit, and installation of a fence to prevent unwanted vehicular intrusions into Parkland Local Park;
6. A park construction permit is required for any work on park property;
7. The school's parking areas should remain open for permit-holding playing field users until November 13, 2005, to allow a complete season of permitted field use.

## **PROJECT SUMMARY**

Montgomery County Public Schools is proposing to modernize Parkland Middle School in Aspen Hill. MCPS plans to demolish a portion of the existing structure and build a two-story classroom addition, which will reduce the building footprint and allow classrooms to be grouped by grade level. Parkland Middle School is part of the Downcounty Consortium and has been burdened in recent years by significant overcrowding. To alleviate this problem, MCPS plans to reopen the former Belt Junior High School, which will allow the modernized school to reduce its enrollment considerably. Parkland Middle School is expected to open in 2007, with an initial enrollment that is a third less than this year's enrollment, which was 1,226 in the 2004-2005 school year.

## **THE SITE**

Parkland Middle School is located at 4610 West Frankfort Drive, in the Bel Pre Woods section of Aspen Hill. The school is near the intersection of West Frankfort and Marianna drives, about one-half mile from the intersection of Aspen Hill Road and Marianna Drive. The school's property totals about 9.2 acres and is adjacent to Parkland Local Park, which is 8.5 acres in size. The local park contains several softball fields and a soccer field. The properties are generally flat, but there are slopes along the east and west boundaries. The eastern boundary, between the school and houses on Marianna Drive, is particularly steep, about 30 percent, with the homes 14 feet to 16 feet higher than the school. The western boundary, between the park and houses on Arctic Avenue, is gentler, about 20 percent, with the homes about 12 feet lower than the park. Mature trees are located along both boundaries.

As noted above, the school is located in the Bel Pre Woods community. The school and the surrounding neighborhood are in the R-90 Zone.

The school was built in 1963, and MCPS completed a classroom addition three years later. The building totals about 142,000 square feet on a single floor.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

MCPS plans to demolish about two-thirds of the original single-story building, while retaining the 1966 addition. The main entry will remain on West Frankfort Drive, with a new canopy that clearly indicates its location. The school's administrative suite will be relocated to this area to improve supervision of the school's entrance. In addition to the administrative offices, the first floor will also house the media center, and classrooms for general education, the sciences, art, music, and special and alternative education. The cafeteria and gymnasium, which includes a stage, are located in the original structure. The second floor will contain classrooms, science labs and computer labs.

The modernized school has been designed to group middle school students together by grade and to allow their classrooms to be used for small group projects or for more traditional lectures. While the school's core facilities—its gymnasium, media center and cafeteria—will be designed to accommodate a maximum of 1,000 students, the

building's initial capacity will be 820. The modernized school will have about 141,800 square feet of space when it is complete. MCPS has identified an area suitable for additional classrooms, but no addition is part of the modernization plans or part of this mandatory referral review. Should a classroom addition be built, a mandatory referral will be necessary.

MCPS has separated the school's bus access from its student pick up and drop off area. The student pick up and drop off area will remain in front of the school's main entrance. The area will function as a loop, with drivers entering the school grounds from West Frankfort Drive at the western end of the property and returning to West Frankfort Drive at the eastern end. The parking area will include 104 parking spaces for teachers, administrators and visitors.

A new area devoted solely to buses will be located on the eastern side of the property. Part of the reason for designing a two-story classroom addition is to create sufficient space for the new bus access area; the smaller building footprint enables the bus access area to be located away from the park, which means that students need not cross the drive aisle to reach the park for physical education classes or recess. Buses will enter the school grounds from West Frankfort Drive and leave from Renn Street, which is located on the south side of the property. Because the proposed bus access area allows access from West Frankfort Drive to Renn Street, MCPS is proposing to include lockable access gates at both ends of the drive aisle, which would be locked when buses are not on school grounds.

## ANALYSIS

### Master Plan

The 1994 Aspen Hill Master Plan makes no specific recommendations for this property. The Plan acknowledges that the Board of Education relies on a Capital Improvements Program to renovate existing buildings when necessary. The Plan supports modernization of existing public schools.

### Development Standards

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Required</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Lot width at street line	25 feet	470 feet
Main building setback from street line	25 feet	240 feet (West Frankfort Drive) 55 feet (Renn Street)
Main building side setback	25 feet both sides	215 feet both sides
Main building height	35 feet	35 feet, four inches
Main building height if site plan approval sought	40 feet	
Building coverage	30 percent	25 percent

MCPS staff believes that modifications can be made to bring the building height within the required development standards and recommends that the Planning Board include in its comments a request that the modernized school meet applicable development standards.

The Zoning Ordinance also requires parking facilities in residential zones to meet the setback standards of the applicable zone. The requirements are the same as those for main buildings noted above. The proposed bus access drive meets these standards. A portion of the student pick up and drop off area does not meet the standard for setbacks from the street line, although it should be noted that the existing parking facility does not currently meet standards. Site constraints appear to make redesign of the parking area to meet development standards infeasible. Additional landscaping on the West Frankfort Drive side of the student pick up and drop off area would ameliorate the setback distance issue as well as meet the screening requirements set out in the ordinance. MCPS is proposing additional screening on the eastern side of the property, between the bus access drive and the backs of homes on Marianna Drive. This additional screening, in combination with the steep slope and existing mature trees, should provide adequate protection for adjacent homes.

This report recommends that the Planning Board transmit as part of its comments a request that the project meet all applicable development standards.

### **Environment**

The Environmental Planning Unit of the Countywide Planning Division recommends approval of the mandatory referral, subject to a condition discussed below.

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.

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, proposes no forest clearing within a stream buffer, is not on a property subject to Special Protection Area Water Quality Plan requirements and does not require a new subdivision plan. The property is subject to a Tree Save Plan, and approval of that plan by technical staff is a condition of the approval of this Mandatory Referral. The Tree Save Plan has been submitted, and it is under review.

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, or 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. While MCPS will not pursue LEED certification on this project, the agency intends to use sustainable building techniques and has indicated that it will evaluate its building techniques in light of LEED criteria and attempt to maximize conformance with LEED guidelines.

### **Park Impacts**

The Park Planning and Resource Analysis Unit has reviewed the proposed mandatory referral and recommends its approval. The unit has several design modifications aimed at maintaining access to the park from the school and protecting it from unwanted intrusions. The unit recommends that the broad jump pit shown adjacent to the local park be

moved to the south. Its current location is in the area Parks maintenance vehicles would use to reach the fields for lawn mowing and other maintenance. The unit also recommends replacement of the existing guard rail that separates the school's drive aisle on the western side of the property, adjacent to the local park. A permanent barrier in this area would prevent cars from driving onto--and damaging--the playing fields. The unit recommends a six-foot black chain link fence similar to, but shorter than, the fence proposed for the nearby tennis courts. The fence should run from the tennis courts to the southern end of the critical root zone of tree 706, a 26-inch Ash tree near the northwest corner of the school property. Breaks in the fence would allow students onto the fields for physical education classes. The unit requests ongoing access to the park for its maintenance vehicles during construction.

Because the local park uses middle school parking areas for community access to the playing fields, and because the modernization project requires the property to be completely closed during construction, the fields, which are generally used by permit, will be closed during construction. The Park Planning and Resource Analysis Unit is considering using the construction period to renovate and rehabilitate the existing fields.

The attached memorandum from the Park Planning and Resource Analysis Unit contains detailed recommendations that should be followed as the project moves forward.

### **Transportation**

The Transportation Planning Unit of the Countywide Planning Division has concluded that the proposed reopening meets the requirements of Local Area Transportation Review. Because the modernized middle school will have fewer students and staff than the existing middle school, the proposed project results in fewer peak hour trips than are currently generated, which means that no traffic study for the proposed project is necessary. Should a permanent classroom addition be built, which would allow enrollment to approach core capacity, a traffic study may be necessary.

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. Crosswalks proposed for all entrances to the site enhance safety as well. Proposed sidewalks are located along the outside of driveways serving the student pick up and drop off area, reducing the need for pedestrians to cross in front of cars moving along drive aisles. The proposal also includes sidewalks that will allow pedestrians and local residents to walk from West Frankfort Drive to Renn Street on the east and west sides of the school without walking in drive aisles.

### **Public Outreach**

MCPS convened a facilities advisory committee to review designs for the proposed project. The committee included a number of neighbors of the school, and met four times in the fall of 2004, providing local residents the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the project.

Three civic associations in the vicinity of the proposed new school were notified in writing of this mandatory referral hearing. No comments had been received at the writing of this staff report.

## **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 Aspen Hill Master Plan. This report has noted two areas in which the proposed project does not meet development standards, and recommends comments for transmittal to MCPS. It also recommends areas for additional landscaping and requires the approval of the submitted tree save plan. With those comments, the staff recommends approval of this mandatory referral and transmittal of the comments.

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### **Attachments**

1. Parkland Middle School Vicinity Map
2. Existing Site Plan
3. Proposed Site Plan
4. Proposed Elevations
5. Environmental Planning Unit Memorandum
6. Park Planning and Resource Analysis Unit Memorandum
7. Transportation Planning Unit Memorandum