

M-NCPPC



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING**

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL  
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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December 9, 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) *fvb*  
Georgia Avenue Planning Team

**SUBJECT** Mandatory Referral No. 05507-MCPS-1 Weller Road Elementary School  
Addition - 3301 Weller Road, Wheaton, R-60 Zone, Kensington-Wheaton  
Master Plan

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

- 1 Prepare and submit, using a qualified professional. a Tree Save Plan for review and approval by the M-NCPPC staff prior to applying for building permits.
2. Provide an updated traffic study to identify needed transportation network improvements if school enrollment exceeds 740 students.

**PROJECT SUMMARY**

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is proposing to construct a classroom addition at Weller Road Elementary School in Wheaton. This addition is designed to alleviate overcrowding at the school, whose enrollment currently exceeds building capacity. The proposed addition, along with the planned opening of a new school on the site of Connecticut Park Elementary School (Downcounty Consortium Elementary School #27), will alleviate primary school overcrowding in the Wheaton High School cluster.

## **THE SITE**

Weller Road Elementary School is located at 3301 Weller Road, about 2,000 feet west of its intersection with Georgia Avenue, in Wheaton. Immediately to the west is A. Mario Loiderman Middle School (the former Belt Junior High School, which reopened last year). Wheaton High School is located several blocks south of the site, on Randolph Road. The school site totals about 10 acres, and includes a combined softball/soccer field. The site is generally level, although there is a significant slope, about 20 percent, down to neighboring homes in the northwest corner of the playing fields. Attachment 1 depicts the site and its immediate vicinity

The school is located in the Greenwood Knolls section of Wheaton. The Glenmont Hills community is to the south, across Weller Road. The surrounding neighborhoods are in the R-60 Zone.

Weller Road Elementary School was constructed in 1953. MCPS built a classroom addition in 1956; added an instructional media center in 1966; and built a gymnasium for the school in 1974. The building contains about 55,200 square feet on a single floor

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Weller Road Elementary School suffers from significant overcrowding. There are 564 students this year in a facility designed for a capacity of 432. Fourteen portable classrooms are in use on the campus. While the opening of a new school on the site of Connecticut Park Elementary School will relieve some of the cluster's overcrowding, the addition of classrooms at Weller Road remains necessary. The addition will contribute to lowering enrollment and to reducing class sizes, an important systemwide policy

The proposed addition will consist of 12 new classrooms and support space, which will include additional administrative offices, specialized rooms for music, reading, therapy and English-as-a-second language studies, and conference space. The addition will be located at the rear of the existing building, and will connect to each of the three existing classroom wings. This location will allow the new addition to be integrated into any future modernization. Current master plans for the cluster contemplate a comprehensive modernization of the school that would be complete in 2013. Enrollment projections forecast an enrollment at Weller Road ranging from 491 in 2006-07 to 481 in 2011-12.

MCPS is proposing no changes to the school's vehicular or pedestrian access systems. The existing 76 parking spaces will remain. Attachments 2 and 3 show the existing and proposed site plans for the school.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Master Plan**

The 1989 Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton makes no specific recommendations for this property. A public school at this location is consistent with the Master Plan's recommendations.

### **Development Standards**

The Zoning Ordinance specifies front, side and rear setbacks for main buildings in the R-60 Zone. No main building may be closer than 25 feet from the street line; it must be 20 feet from the rear property line and a total of 18 feet from property lines on both sides. The school building, with the proposed addition, is 120 feet from the street line, 63 feet from the rear property line and a total of 262 feet from property lines on both sides. The R-60 Zone has a general requirement that building heights not exceed 35 feet. The school building is a single story and is approximately 30 feet high.

### **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. Submission and approval of that plan by technical staff is a condition of the approval of this mandatory referral.

Stormwater Management – The proposed project has an approved Stormwater Management Concept Plan. Full water quality and water quantity control is expected to protect the Wheaton subwatershed.

Green Building Design – MCPS, through a strategic plan called *Green Schools Focus*, has promised to introduce advanced technologies like those encouraged by the U.S. Green Building Council on Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED. While MCPS will not pursue LEED certification for this project, it has agreed to evaluate and, where feasible, use technologies such as high efficiency heating, shielded exterior lighting and low water flow bathroom fixtures.

### **Transportation**

The Transportation Planning Unit of the Countywide Planning Division has concluded that the proposed classroom addition 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 and the 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 the proposed new school operate within the standard for the policy area.

The Transportation Planning Unit also reviewed the existing pedestrian and vehicular access to the school. These systems will not be changed as part of the classroom addition and remain adequate, safe and efficient.

The traffic study prepared for MCPS used a capacity of 740 students for the school, which is significantly greater than current enrollment forecasts. Should enrollment exceed 740 students, Transportation Planning recommends that MCPS provide an updated traffic study for its review

### **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 provided local residents the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the project.

Four civic and homeowners 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 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. Site Plan – Existing
3. Site Plan – Proposed
4. Memorandum from Environmental Planning
5. Memorandum from Transportation Planning