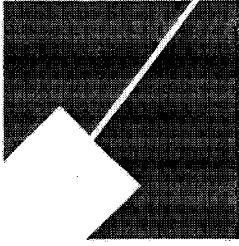


M-NCPPC



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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May 26, 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. 04508-MCPS-1: Downcounty Consortium
Elementary School No. 28 (Arcola Elementary School) – 1820 Franwall
Avenue, Wheaton, R-90 Zone, Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION: Approval with the following comments:

1. Obtain M-NCPPC technical staff approval of the submitted Tree Save Plan;
2. Seek separate mandatory referral approval as well as necessary park construction permits for the design, construction and operation of a Geothermal Heat Pump system, should that system be funded as part of this project and if MCPS seeks to locate the system in Arcola Local Park.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Montgomery County Public Schools is proposing to construct a new elementary school on the site of Arcola Elementary School in Wheaton. The new school will be part of the Downcounty Consortium, which was created in 2000 and includes Blair, Einstein, Kennedy, Northwood and Wheaton high schools. It is needed to alleviate overcrowding at Highland and Kemp Mill elementary schools. The new school is scheduled to open in 2006, and will serve students from kindergarten through the fifth grade.

For the past two decades, the site has been the location of the Washington Christian Academy, which operated a pre-kindergarten through 12th grade private school.

THE SITE

The property is located at 1820 Franwall Avenue, at the intersection of Channing Drive. It is one block south of Arcola Avenue and about six-tenths of a mile from the intersection of Arcola and Connecticut avenues. The school property totals five acres and is adjacent to Arcola Local Park, which totals four acres. The park includes a playground and playing fields. The school property generally slopes from northeast to southwest, with a change in elevation of about 15 feet from the highest point to lowest.

The school site is part of the Wheaton View community. This neighborhood is made up of single-family detached houses in the R-90 Zone.

Arcola Elementary School was built in 1955. The MCPS added a second wing to the school in 1959, and connected the two wings as part of that project. In 1973, a media center was constructed between the two wings. The current building contains 31,600 square feet on a single floor.

Attachment 1 shows the school and its immediate neighborhood. Attachment 2 shows the existing site plan.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

When MCPS determined that a school at this location was a logical solution to capacity issues at nearby Highland and Kemp Mill elementary schools, the agency did a feasibility study on reuse of the existing building. That study concluded that the existing school could not be renovated in ways that would accommodate contemporary educational programs. MCPS decided to demolish the existing building and construct a new one. The proposed site plan is shown in Attachment 3, and building elevations are shown in Attachment 4.

The proposed new school will be in a two-story building whose main entrance will be in the northeast corner of the site, near the intersection of Yates Street and Franwall Avenue. The main entry, administrative offices, media center, and gymnasium will be on the first, or main, level, along with 12 elementary classrooms. The site's topography enables the school to have a second, lower level, which will contain additional elementary grade classrooms, as well as space for pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms. The design allows the kindergarten classes to have direct access to play areas.

The gymnasium, a suite for a day care facility and additional space for educational programs may be part of this project if funding permits. Space for four more classrooms is part of the overall master plan for this school. The new building will contain a total of almost 77,000 square feet, if the build alternates are included. Its initial capacity will be 545 students, but its infrastructure is designed to accommodate 645 students, if the four additional planned classrooms are built.

MCPS has separated the school's bus access from the student pick up and drop off

area. Bus access will be from Channing Drive, on the west side of the school site. The student pick up area will be reached from Franwall Avenue, on the north side of the site. It has been designed as a one-way "loop," with students leaving parents' cars at the school's front door. Parking for 42 cars is located within the pick up and drop off loop. An additional 26 spaces are located adjacent to the bus loop. Sidewalks along the bus loop and the student pick up loop will enable access to the school building from Channing Drive and Franwall Avenue.

ANALYSIS

Master Plan

The 1989 Master Plan for the Communities of Kensington-Wheaton makes no specific recommendations for this property. Arcola Elementary School closed seven years prior to the master plan's completion. A public school at this location is consistent with the master plan's recommendations.

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 is under review.

Stormwater Management—Full water quality and quantity control to protect the integrity of the Northwest Branch watershed is expected as part of this project.

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. This project affords MCPS an opportunity to use sustainable building concepts and procedures. One such sustainable technique, a Geothermal Heat Pump system, is described in the next section. Staff endorses the use of the proposed system, and urges MCPS actively to pursue funding for it as part of this project.

Park Impacts

As part of its efforts to incorporate sustainable engineering techniques into the school's design, MCPS is considering a Geothermal Heat Pump system for heating, ventilation and air conditioning. This system, currently an "add alternate" for which funding is not set, would use a series of underground wells to generate water for heating and cooling. These systems require additional land to site the wells, and the Arcola Elementary School site is too small to serve as a location for the wells. The MCPS has held informal and preliminary conversations with Parks staff about using Arcola Local Park for the underground wells. The effect of installing the wells on the park would be significant, as MCPS estimates that 192 wells, each about five inches in diameter, would need to be sunk and that the wells would require almost 1.75 acres of parkland.

Should MCPS secure funding for the geothermal system, and should the system decide that the park is the most appropriate location for the wells, park construction permits will be necessary. A separate mandatory referral should be undertaken as part of the design, construction and implementation of such a project. Park construction permits would also be required.

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 Attachment 5.

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.

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 will also be established along Franwall Avenue and at the intersection of Channing Drive and Alma Street, on the east side of the school property, to help students and parents reach the school safely.

Public Outreach

The 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 several times in the late fall of 2003, providing 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

Vicinity Map

Existing Site Plan

Proposed Site Plan

Elevations

Memorandum from Transportation Planning unit