



February 8, 2018

The Honorable Barbara Kanninen, Chair  
The Arlington County School Board  
1426 N. Quincy St.  
Arlington, Virginia 22207

*RE: Reed Elementary School –Concept Plan Design*

The Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) held six (6) meetings during 2017 and 2018 to consider Arlington Public Schools’ (“APS’s”) Concept Design Plan for a new elementary school at the Reed School site, all of which were held jointly with the Building Level Planning Committee (BLPC). The PFRC consists of representatives from County Commissions, as well as project specific representatives.

The PFRC’s mission is to ensure that the highest quality of land use planning, design, transportation planning, and other important community aspects are incorporated into civic projects as assigned to the Committee by the Arlington County Board. The PFRC uses the Principles of Civic Design (attached) to inform the design of civic facilities in Arlington.

*Reed Elementary Concept Design Review*

During the most recent meeting on January 24, the PFRC was asked to rank six concept designs from most preferred (1) to least preferred (6). The PFRC overwhelmingly ranked the “Integrated” design as the most preferred design and the remaining five designs received scattered rankings overall. It was clear from the ranking exercise and the PFRC discussion that the “Integrated” design far outweighed all the other designs in terms of preference.

The following discussion is arranged in order of PFRC preferences and reviews the proposed concept designs in context of the Principles of Civic Design and County-wide perspective that PFRC brings the school review process.

***Integrated Design***

This design is the clear preference of the PFRC. The Integrated concept design proposes partial removal of the existing structure and replaces it with a four-story building with 732 seats. PFRC is mindful of the fact that the current school was constructed recently, but still believes that the Integrated concept design is the best choice.

PFRC members support this design because it builds up, not out, and pushes the density toward Washington Boulevard, where it exists currently. This results in the most contiguous open space, which saves trees on site, and does not require the use of County land. PFRC members noted that while the existing building is not old, it was built with much younger students in mind, and would not function well for older students.

Some PFRC members expressed concern about the removal of a building that is not ten years old yet. Others stated some concern that the Integrated concept design was the highest cost per seat.

### ***Bridge***

After the Integrated concept design, which is the overwhelming choice, PFRC members showed a slight preference for the Bridge concept over the Upper/Lower design. In the Bridge design, a new school would be constructed along 18<sup>th</sup> Street with a bridge to a new second story that would be constructed on the existing school. PFRC members appreciated that adding a second story on the existing school could limit the floor plate of the new structure. PFRC appreciated that this option did not extend as much into the open space as the Upper/Lower or Standalone concept designs and did not require County property. PFRC members did raise concerns about the functionality of a bridge and whether this could create choke points. County staff raised issues about the proposed bridge, noting that it is over an existing utility easement. While not strictly prohibited, PFRC members noted that bridging over an easement could create other limitations.

### ***Upper/Lower***

The Upper/Lower concept design would construct a new school for upper grades along 18<sup>th</sup> Street and would keep the existing school for lower grades. PFRC members noted that this choice retains the use of the existing building and does not use County land. While there is a medium loss of open space with this option, the Upper/Lower design does push into the open space as much as the Standalone design, which was a concern of several PFRC members.

The Standalone, East, and North concepts gathered the least support among the PFRC members. These concepts received about half the support of the Bridge and Upper/Lower concepts, and roughly a third of the support given to the Integrated concept. As discussed below, the majority of PFRC members do not believe that any of these three concepts would be practical options for the new elementary school.

### ***Standalone***

The Standalone concept design proposes a new building on the site and the existing Reed building would remain. The new structure would accommodate approximately 732 seats and the existing building could be used to accommodate additional preschool students bringing the total seats at the site up to 1,000 seats.

The joint committee has had much discussion on the topic of increasing the number of seats to 1,000. Some PFRC members pointed out that the County is struggling to provide seats for students and this proposal provides an opportunity to maximize use of the site, however others have suggested 1,000 is too many seats for this site.

The majority of PFRC members were concerned with this design concept and did not believe it was a practical option because it has the largest floor plate and uses County land. Members noted that the library used to be in this location, but has been removed, and expressed concern that a new structure would be placed in that area of the site. PFRC members also expressed concern about the preservation of a Champion tree on this end of the site, if this option were chosen.

A minority of PFRC members believed that the Standalone concept should be supported because it preserves the investment in the existing building, offers the most seats of any of the concepts, and provides the lowest cost per seat.

### ***North***

The North concept design proposes to build a second story on the existing school and construct an addition that extends north into the adjacent hill behind the school. PFRC members opposed this concept because the North concept design would require the removal of too many trees on the hill. In addition, neighbors noted that many area children play on the hill that would be used to develop the school under this design. Lastly, members noted that providing fire access for this concept would be pose a significant challenge, which makes the North concept design not desirable.

### ***East***

The East concept design would construct a new school into the hill on the northeastern portion of the site along N. Lexington Street. The school would provide classrooms for older elementary school students, while the existing school would provide space for lower grades. This option has been included because it is the cheapest design, but it is not supported by PFRC members.

PFRC is concerned that the East concept design would be constructed into the neighborhood's sledding hill. Members also raised issues about increased impervious surface for parking along N. Lexington Street, which is green space currently. While other design concepts propose separate schools (e.g. Upper/Lower), PFRC members expressed concern about the logistical challenges that might arise because of the distance between the proposed new East building and the existing school. Members also raised questions about whether certain functions (e.g. cafeterias) would need to be duplicated because of the distance in building separation, which could add unnecessarily to the building's floor plate.

### ***Other Issues***

#### ***Parking - Design***

Several of the current design proposals call for additional parking lots either on the sledding hill, on the corner property owned by the County which contains a Champion status tree, or in front of the proposed new building which pushes the building further into the existing open space. PFRC encourages APS to continue to explore creative parking solutions that minimize use of open space for parking such as a parking deck

located above the existing rear surface parking lot, or underground parking beneath the proposed building.

*Transportation*

There are outstanding transportation questions related to on-site circulation, pick-up and drop-off, access to VDOT controlled Washington Boulevard for access to a proposed parking deck, and the effect to the surrounding transportation network. PFRC looks forward to taking part in these ongoing conversations and encourages APS and its traffic consultant to work collaboratively with all parties throughout the process.

***Going Forward***

PFRC looks forward to working with APS and BLPC in refining a schematic design for the site that maximizes use of the site while protecting green space, trees, and walkability while respecting parking and transportation needs of the project.

Respectfully submitted,



James Schroll, Chair  
Public Facilities Review Committee

Cc: Mark Schwartz, County Manager  
Samia Byrd, Deputy County Manager  
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Arlington County Board Members  
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Dr. Pat Murphy, Superintendent, APS  
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Benjamin Burgin, APS  
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Attached  
[PFRC Charge](#)  
[Principles of Civic Design](#)