

ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL ON SCHOOL FACILITIES  
AND CAPITAL PROGRAMS

YEAR END REPORT 2014-2015



*Rendering of the Expanded McKinley Elementary School*

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**1. Introduction**

This is the annual report of the Arlington Public Schools (APS) Advisory Council on School Facilities and Capital Programs (FAC) prepared for the School Board of Arlington, Virginia.

The FAC assists the School Board in the continuous, systematic review of school facilities and the biennial and long-range Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The 15-member Council is appointed to two-year staggered terms, and members may be invited to serve for up to three consecutive terms. APS staff members actively assist the Council in its work, as do liaison officers from other Arlington councils. FAC meetings are held once per month from September to June. Special work sessions are occasionally scheduled as needed. The Council appoints from its membership subcommittees that meet as their tasking requires. Members are regularly invited to serve as members of Building Level Planning Committees (BPLC), “Ambassadors” to neighborhood schools, community and County groups (including the Parks and Recreation Commission), and on special task forces.

All FAC meetings are open to the public. Agendas and minutes are posted on the APS website. Interested citizens are welcome to briefly address the FAC during the public comment section of each meeting. Community groups may request an invitation to brief the FAC on topics of mutual interest.

This school year provided a variety of opportunities for the FAC to engage with APS staff and leadership, and collaborate with parents and community members in wide reaching public meetings. The FAC offered analysis and advice to the School Board on critical facility improvements, capacity and enrollment issues, and growth in the county, all of which impact the educational experience for our children. The FAC provided input into APS projects and planning efforts at all stages of development.

The FAC continued to enjoy a close partnership with APS Facilities and Operations. We specifically thank John Chadwick, Scott Prisco, Meg Tuccillo, Lionel White, and their teammates for their efforts on behalf of Arlington’s students. This year we also opened a dialogue with the APS Department of Instruction on how well designed and maintained facilities can enhance the learning process.

The past year’s work is outlined below.

*Staff Comment:*

*Facilities & Operations (F&O) staff greatly appreciates the FAC's contribution of time, analysis, and advice on capacity and enrollment growth issues, Design and Construction for capital projects, and Maintenance for Minor Construction/Major Maintenance and preventive maintenance projects. Facilities and Operations staff is indebted to the members of the FAC for their support of its activities, their wisdom, creativity, and their role as ambassadors for APS within the Arlington Community.*

*Staff would particularly like to acknowledge the work of Jason Rylander as chair and Kelly King as vice chair. In addition, we would like to thank Jason Rylander Jennifer Jackson, and Janine Velasco for six years of service as a FAC member. We would also like to thank Rebecca Hunter for her years of service, and wish her well in her new endeavors. We would also like to acknowledge the additional time and commitment expended in the following planning processes: Western Roselyn Area Study Group (Kelly King and Heather Obora), Thomas Jefferson Working Group (Greg Greeley and Janine Velasco), McKinley Building Level Planning Committee (BLPC-Kelly King), Abingdon BLPC (Christian Dorsey), Stratford MS BLPC (Jeff Turner), Wilson BLPC (Miles Mason), Planning Facilities Review Committee (Heather Obora), plus all of the evening and Saturday meetings during the APS extended CIP process (attended by all of the members).*

## **2. Capital Construction**

With the completion of the three new comprehensive high school buildings, the FAC's attention is now focused primarily on expanding capacity at the elementary and middle school levels.

2.a. Ashlawn Elementary School: Phase 1 of the newly expanded Ashlawn Elementary School opened on schedule at the start of the school year, providing an additional 225 seats for a new capacity of 684 students. A new wing was seamlessly added to the school, and includes a greatly expanded library, multiple classrooms, and innovative design features such as hallway "wash-up" sinks. Phase 2 of the effort was completed in December, and includes a modernization of the preexisting building and the centralization of spaces for instructional "extras" such as music and art. Final landscaping and site work will be completed in June, according to APS.



*New Wing of the Expanded Ashlawn Elementary School*

2.b. Discovery Elementary School: Construction work on New Elementary School 1—now officially named “Discovery Elementary School” by the School Board in honor of former Arlington resident John Glenn and the Discovery Space Shuttle in which he flew as a senior astronaut—is progressing on schedule despite a particularly cold and wet winter, according to APS. The exterior walls are up and work is moving ahead on the interior. APS plans to open the school at the start of September 2015, providing seating for up to 630 students, in a 98,000 square foot building. The school is designed to be at least at the LEED Gold level (possibly at the Platinum level) and “Net Zero Energy” so that, over the course of a year, it will produce as much energy as it consumes. With active encouragement by APS, a Discovery PTA has been formed, and cars can already be seen in the neighborhood with Discovery Elementary School bumper stickers. The work of the FAC Ambassadors was one of the factors leading to public acceptance of the need to build a new school on this site.



*Discovery Elementary School Building Façade Installation*

2.c. McKinley Elementary School: APS projects that work will begin this summer to expand McKinley Elementary School to house an additional 241 students and make other needed improvements to the site and existing building. The construction contract was awarded on 30 April. In preparation for this project, tree removal began in late winter as requested by the County to cause the least disruption to wildlife and habitats. Construction at McKinley will take place between June 2015 and September 2016 with a planned opening of the renovated space and addition for the start of the 2016-2017 school year, according to APS. An artist's rendering of the expanded school is on the cover of this report.

2.d. Abingdon Elementary School: Planning and preliminary work continues for the renovation and expansion of Abingdon Elementary School, which the School Board determined to be a priority project due to recurring problems with the existing infrastructure. The School Board has approved a preliminary conceptual design. Construction work, according to APS, will add 12 classrooms to house an additional 136 students, and significantly improve existing spaces, and is scheduled to be completed by September 2017.



*Schematic Design Rendering of Abingdon Elementary School Expansion*

2.e. H-B Woodlawn/Stratford Programs and Wilson Site: In December the School Board voted to relocate the H-B Woodlawn and Stratford programs from their current facilities at the Stratford site on Vacation Lane to a new building to be built on the site of the former Wilson School in Western Rosslyn, following a set of recommendations from the FAC that were drafted by Kelly King.

Members of the FAC actively participated as members of the Western Rosslyn Area Planning Study (WRAPS) effort, which provided a series of recommended guiding principles to the County Board for the creative re-use of the site, which includes the Wilson school, a fire station, recreation space, housing, and commercial property.

The new school will provide seats for 775 students and will include innovative learning spaces for the H-B Woodlawn students (that they are helping to design) and custom facilities to meet the special needs of the Stratford students.

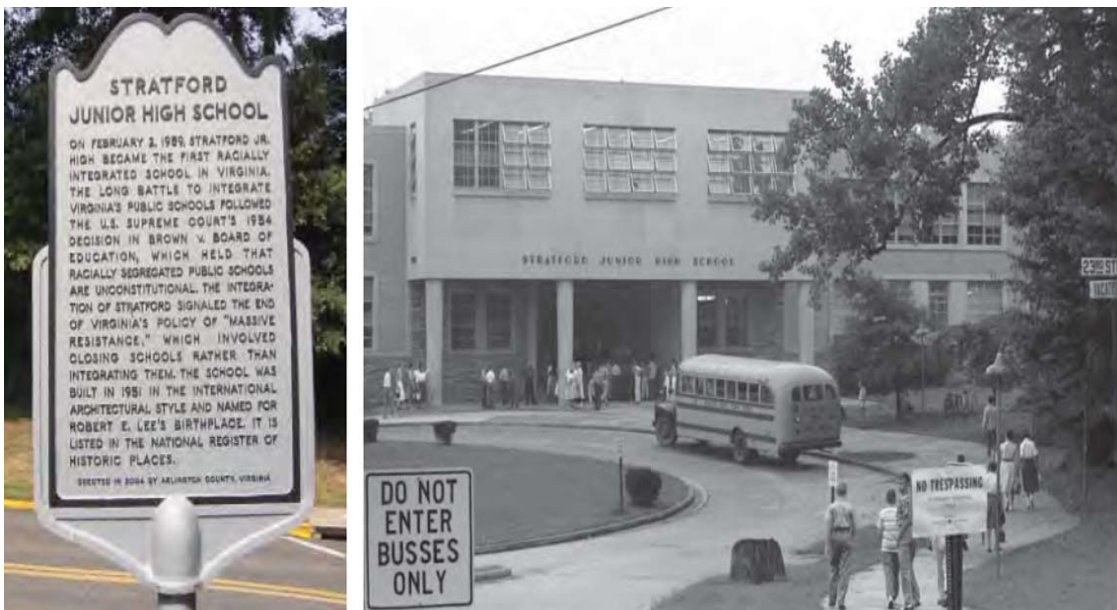
Although the FAC preferred maximizing the use of the Wilson site by building a 1,300 facility—as outlined in the 2014 CIP—we are nonetheless very excited about this project. The site offers tremendous potential for creative, transformative urban design that will serve our students and the community for generations to come.

FAC members will continue to provide input through the design and construction phase and some will serve on the APS BLPC and the Arlington County Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) of the project.



*Wilson School Site Plan Diagram Illustrating WRAPS Boundary*

2.f. Stratford Site: The Stratford building, which once housed the first racially integrated public school in Virginia, will be expanded and renovated to house a 1,000-seat neighborhood middle school that will alleviate serious overcrowding in the Williamsburg and Swanson Middle Schools. FAC members will provide input through the design and construction phases and will also serve on the BLPC for this project.



*Stratford Junior High Historic Marker and Photograph of First Day of Integration*

2.g. Washington-Lee High School Renovation: APS has also been studying how to better utilize its secondary schools. In April the School Board approved a design and construction schedule to renovate portions of Washington-Lee High School to house an additional 300 students. Work should be completed by November 2015, according to APS.



*Washington-Lee High School Plan to Increase Capacity*

2.h. Thomas Jefferson Site: Finally, the members of the FAC were highly disappointed when the County Board failed to approve, at this time, construction of a new elementary school on the Thomas Jefferson Middle School site, citing the need for continued study and analysis of alternatives. Construction of a new elementary school in South Arlington was a critical component of the 2014 CIP and remains a high priority for the FAC. The Council devoted much discussion time to considering alternatives, and looks forward to actively reviewing and vetting alternatives recommended by the Staff and Board. At present it is not clear how capacity needs will be met in South Arlington or whether it is still possible to build and open what was dubbed New Elementary School #2 by 2019 as intended. The FAC encourages open and transparent discussion of site alternatives with affected communities and urges the School Board and County Board to work together to publicly evaluate potential sites so that a community-supported decision can be made in the next year.



*Staff Comments:*

*It has been an extremely busy year for capital projects trending toward what will be the norm until APS enrollment begins to decline. As has been true in the past, the contributions of FAC members remain critical to the success of our projects. We especially appreciate the willingness and contributions of the FAC members as they serve as representatives on the Building Level Planning Committees (BLPC) and engage the community as advocates for our ongoing capital projects. Their role in assisting our project communications to the various stakeholders has been instrumental.*

### **3. Projection/Capacity Subcommittee**

#### **3.a. Enrollment and Projections**

Continued enrollment growth is one of the most acute challenges facing APS. Total enrollment in 2014-15 was 24,529 students, according to APS, and has been increasing annually since 2005. In the past 10 years, enrollment has grown by more than 6,000 students, a 33% gain. This reflects both the increase in the total population of Arlington County and the increase in the average number of students enrolled per household (called the “student generation factor”). Arlington County has grown from a total of 189,453 in the 2000 Census to 207,627 as reported in the 2010 Census. Census population estimates indicate that growth is continuing with a reported 2013 estimate of 224,906, which is a rapid increase of 8.3 percent in just three years. At the same time, the student generation factor for single-family homes has grown from 0.36 in the 2005-2006 school year to 0.42 in the 2013-2014 school year. The increase in students coming from single-family homes during this time period was greater than the increase in students coming from all other types of housing combined.

This year saw continued and accelerated growth at all levels of APS. We have seen a greater than 2% growth trend since 2008, but the 2014-15 school year saw growth of 1,213 students or 5.2%, according to APS. We now anticipate approximately:

- An additional 1,500 elementary school students by 2019, plus another 900 students by 2024 (the equivalent of more than three elementary schools)
- An additional 1,400 middle school students by 2019, plus another 400 students by 2024 (the equivalent of two middle schools)
- An additional 1,800 high school students by 2019, plus another 1,800 students by 2024 (the equivalent of two high schools).

We frequently hear concerns that APS projections are not reliable. Taking this concern to heart, the Arlington Community Facilities Study brought in outside experts in the field

of school projections to review the APS methodologies. They noted that APS is using the methods preferred by school demographers and that APS projections were within industry standard limits in about half of the last 11 years. They concluded that the error rate in the projections is “acceptable for a fast-growing district such as APS.” These experts have also recommended specific areas for improvement.<sup>1</sup> This public discussion of the APS projections will be helpful in maintaining and sustaining public support for capital improvements going forward based on staff projections. The FAC looks forward to continuing to work with staff to improve and refine our projections capability.

### 3.b. Boundaries

This year the FAC also considered staff proposals for a North Arlington Boundary Refinement Process. The process initially impacted five planning units: 1607, 1608, and 1609, which are roughly in the Westover neighborhood, and 1410 and 1411, which are roughly in the Bluemont neighborhood.

The Superintendent’s initial recommendation generated considerable community concern, and FAC members questioned whether it was the best way to balance enrollment among McKinley, Ashlawn, Nottingham, Tuckahoe and Jamestown Elementary Schools. The FAC was particularly concerned that it could not evaluate some of the proposed moves without an understanding of the complete plan, including relocations of programs. Plans for program moves, however, were not disclosed to the FAC along with the boundary recommendations. Instead, the FAC was informed that program moves would be designed to improve the delivery of services to the students in those programs and that parents of affected students would have to be informed prior to any public announcements of the moves.

After deliberation, the FAC could not offer an informed endorsement of the boundary refinements. Given the robust involvement of the FAC in community outreach and planning for the previous successful North Arlington boundary process, this outcome was disappointing for the FAC. The FAC supports greater collaboration and understanding of the relationship between facilities planning and instruction. We believe the public needs to understand this relationship as well. We hope that future boundary processes will include, at the outset, a description of the instructional goals and options so that the FAC and the public can better understand and comment on proposed program moves and associated boundary changes.

The FAC supports the need for periodic boundary adjustments to balance attendance among specific schools, but more work is needed to develop a process for these changes that is transparent and efficient. The FAC cannot endorse recommendations without complete information. Although program relocations are the purview of the

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<sup>1</sup> The consultant’s report is available here:  
[http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/04/CFS\\_SC5\\_MethodologyReviewReport.pdf](http://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/04/CFS_SC5_MethodologyReviewReport.pdf)

Superintendent, we believe the public is best served by outlining in advance the implications of any boundary decisions. Asking the FAC or the School Board for a decision on boundaries without a full understanding of the instructional and facilities goals and implications does not serve the public and creates discord in the community.

### 3.c. Interim Crowding Measures

APS devoted much of the second half of the school year focused on two areas: 1) interim measures to relieve crowding in North Arlington middle schools (relief that is needed until the opening of the new Wilson facility and the renovated Stratford building), and 2) long-term relief for South Arlington elementary schools. APS studied the use of relocatables on APS and County owned sites, the relocation of programs (including Montessori), the use of APS and County facilities (such as the Reed Community Center, the Madison Center, and the Fairlington Community Center) and the use of vacant public buildings in the County. In the end, it was determined that growth in 2015 will be accommodated with program changes and relocatables. Plans beyond 2015 have yet to be finalized. Although the FAC has been in communication with APS throughout this process we have not been able to provide substantial analysis and feedback as the options were evolving at a rapid pace through the winter and spring months.

### 3.d. Integration of Facilities Planning and Instruction

The FAC invited the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Connie Skelton and her team to a meeting earlier this year to discuss the relationship between facilities and instructional goals. This has been a longstanding concern for the FAC and was one of the reasons why the FAC initially approached the Superintendent in 2013 with the idea of establishing a Superintendent's Committee to evaluate the role of choice schools, programs, and facilities in a holistic manner. Specifically, we sought input on how to evaluate suggestions that arise repeatedly from the public, such as the feasibility of a 6th grade academy or a new Montessori school located outside of the Drew building. In general, the FAC is pleased with the increased involvement of Instruction throughout the capacity planning process but continues to have many questions about the advisability of potential capacity generating solutions from an instructional standpoint. We continue to seek guidance on these issues.

Our work is not just about bricks and mortar; we strive to ensure that the education and safety of our students remains a critical factor in all facility-related decisions.

With the projected growth during the next decade and beyond, it is certain that additional schools, school expansions, programs, and boundary changes will be needed to balance school capacity against the need for more seats for students. Choice programs and instructional delivery options will need to be continually evaluated to determine their impact on student projections and capacity.

*Staff Comment:*

*We look forward to continuous progress in providing the subcommittee with timely information to empower informed recommendations and decisions. We appreciate the additional effort and support that the subcommittee extended in the North Arlington Boundary Refinement Process, interim measures to relieve crowding in North Arlington middle schools and the long-term relief for South Arlington elementary schools.*

#### **4. FAC Involvement in Community Planning Activities**

This year saw an increased focus at the level at the County Board level on balancing school capacity needs with other county programs. To that end, the County charged its Long Range Planning Committee with the task of evaluating the County Manager's Public Land for Public Good (PLPG) report, which reviewed publicly owned lands in the county for their potential for schools or affordable housing. FAC chair Jason Rylander submitted detailed comments on the PLPG report and was asked to participate as a guest member of the Long Range Planning Committee to provide perspectives on school issues during its deliberations on the report.

FAC members also participated in a number of County studies/working groups during the school year as described below:

##### **4.a. Western Rosslyn Area Planning Study**

Two FAC members actively participated in the WRAPS effort. This group began in May 2014 with the charge of providing feedback and guidance to County Staff on the development of an Area Plan of the land that encompasses the Wilson School, Fire Station #10, a park, a convenience store, an office building and a 33-unit multifamily development. The group's 9-month charge included the following:

- Review and refine diagrammatic site layouts for a new school development site, identifying a preliminary preferred alternative for subsequent review by the PFRC within six months
- Develop specific land use and urban design recommendations for the balance of the site
- Develop an overall Area Plan that provides the framework for future coordinated development that is complementary and in keeping with the area context.

The group met regularly to discuss challenges, such as building locations, building heights, streetscapes, traffic implications, maintaining green space, the location of the firehouse, and pedestrian flow and safety. WRAPS developed "Guiding Principles" with

the intention that they would help the next phases of development, which for APS are the PFRC and BLPC for the Wilson site. The WRAPS process proved frustrating for FAC members and it became evident not all information was discussed openly throughout the process. County staff provided their own draft Guiding Principles to APS in April for the Strafford and Wilson projects--that were subsets of the WRAPS Guiding Principles--and additional principles for the PFRC to consider. Now that WRAPS is concluding and the PFRC and BLPC processes are beginning, the FAC has hopes that APS will be able to construct a building on its land that is appropriate to meet the needs of the students and the community.

#### 4.b. Thomas Jefferson Working Group

Two FAC members served on a working group chaired by Planning Commission member Carrie Johnson to evaluate the use of the Thomas Jefferson site for a new elementary school. The County Board established this working group after neighborhood and parks advocates expressed opposition to the selection of the Jefferson site as the School Board's preferred alternative for a new elementary school in South Arlington. The group met regularly to address challenges, such as building locations, building heights, streetscapes, traffic implications, maintaining green space, pedestrian flow, and safety.

The group was charged with determining whether a new school could fit on the property and still provide existing community amenities. Staff and architects developed a number of innovative design schemes that actually increased the amount of useable park and field space by placing a new turf playing field over underground parking to the west side of the existing Thomas Jefferson Middle School.

Ultimately, the group agreed that a new school facility *could* be built on the site but was unable to reach consensus on whether it *should* be built at that location. Community concerns continued to focus on impacts to green space and traffic, but a critical issue was the School Board's decision not to determine what kind of program the school would house and what impact that could, in turn, have on nearby elementary schools such as Patrick Henry, Campbell, and Claremont.

In light of the report, the County Board voted 4-1 to reject the Thomas Jefferson site pending a full analysis of sites and potential additions in South Arlington, including "feasible non-construction strategies." The County Board stated the School Board could return with a new proposal for the Jefferson site after it completes this review.

#### 4.c. Arlington Community Facilities Study Group

Three FAC members are participants on the new Community Facilities Study Group. Members of the group were appointed by the County Board and are drawn from advisory committees, citizen groups, and neighborhood associations, but serve in their capacity as private citizens. School Board members Nancy Van Doren and James Lander are ex officio members of the committee.

The Study Group meets twice monthly, and members also participate in additional subcommittee meetings. Its charge is to examine, reconcile and report on demographic and economic forecasts. The group has been asked to examine the following questions:

- What are Arlington's needs for schools, fire stations, recreation, and storage for vehicles and other items?
- In the context of changing demographics and economics, what opportunities and challenges are there in our aging affordable multi-family housing stock?

The Study Group intends to develop considerations for the siting of schools and other public facilities. A final report is due in November 2015.

*Staff Comment:*

*Closer coordination between the County, APS, and Arlington community is a clear theme for this year. We are grateful for the participation FAC members provided on the various committees and subcommittees organized to address the competing demands for public land use in our community.*

## **5. Minor Construction/Major Maintenance (MC/MM) and Infrastructure Bonds**

The FAC has noted the continued success of the APS MC/MM program. MC/MM funding was maintained at high levels despite the budget crisis and this year over \$5 million was invested in projects such as repainting, carpet replacements, retiling, new gym and cafeteria floors, a new playground, new cafeteria table/chair sets, theater safety and equipment upgrades, multiple HVAC upgrades, parking lot resurfacing/stripping and continuing to strengthen APS' safety profile. Security was also improved significantly with enhanced quantity and quality in respect of the APS security camera network and vastly improved 800MHz radio connectivity.

MC/MM funds were planned and incorporated into both the Ashlawn and McKinley renovation projects where renovations were rolled into the project along with the associated MC/MM funding. Roofing/HVAC bond funds enabled projects at Ashlawn and McKinley Elementary Schools to incorporate additional upgrades to the existing parts of those schools.

The effectiveness of the MC/MM program and its positive impact continues to be reflected in continuously reducing requests for projects from individual building managers as they collectively see and acknowledge the effectiveness of the rolling program of maintenance. Though good progress has been made on some aspects of HVAC, especially preventive maintenance, there is still a ways to go and recruiting

suitably qualified technicians at the top end of the skillset remains a major challenge. HVAC remuneration will form part of the upcoming pay study being conducted by APS.

As budgets continue to be constrained, the FAC recognizes that difficult decisions will face APS and the School Board. The FAC recommends that the strong historic commitment to MC/MM be maintained since it is clear that performing ongoing maintenance and repairs is ultimately less costly than delaying improvements. Such delays end up costing more in the long run and test the sustainability of APS facilities.

*Staff Comments:*

*Staff appreciates the FAC's strong ongoing commitment to planned, proactive maintenance. Despite the obvious need for top focus on the seats-for-students, the FAC has continued to give necessary time, attention and support to MC/MM funding levels and infrastructure bonds.*

*Staff hopes that in the coming year FAC may be able to help foster further significant progress in the areas of HVAC Preventive Maintenance and recruitment of senior level HVAC technicians.*

## **6. Going Green and Sustainable**

APS remains firmly committed to building and operating environmentally friendly schools that are assets to the surrounding community. All new major construction is designed to be at least at the LEED Silver level. Of particular note this year was the building of a geothermal heating and cooling field as the final element of construction at the new Wakefield High School, and construction of the new Discovery Elementary School, which was designed to be “net zero” energy in terms of energy consumption. When Discovery Elementary School comes on line, staff will need to understand how the systems interact. Window shades, lights, HVAC units and solar panels will all be a part of creating “net zero” building energy.



*Geothermal Element Being Installed at Wakefield High School Well Field*

The FAC shares the concerns of the Superintendent's Sustainability Advisory Committee about energy efficiency and building maintenance. With an increased student population, there is an added demand on the buildings and their systems, and increased wear and tear on everything from bathroom fixtures to floor tiles. Increased energy efficiency to heat and cool the buildings, including for evening community programs, becomes more important. This is a particular issue with the number of older buildings serving APS students, not all of which have been upgraded to more energy-efficient systems. We noted with interest that APS has developed a formal preventive maintenance process for Wakefield High School that should increase the useful life of the building, while saving money in operations.



*Completed Mechanical Room at Wakefield High School*

*Staff Comment:*

*Sustainability is a core value for APS and Staff appreciates the support of FAC in our efforts to promote sustainability both on major projects and for smaller initiatives throughout our district. Staff feels the Sustainability Committee liaison to the FAC is important and encourages continued participation, communication, and collaboration. FAC's continued attention to operations and maintenance and the impact it has on sustainability is appreciated. We are extremely excited about the Net Zero Energy Discovery Elementary School and appreciate all of the support and commitment to this initiative and all of the sustainability efforts we have put forth in the past year.*

## **7. Liaison Activities**

The FAC continues to expand its outreach and interaction with other APS and County advisory groups. We regularly welcomed representatives from the Teachers Council on Instruction, the County Council of PTAs, the Arlington Education Association, the



Administrative Council, the Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee, the Multi-Modal Transportation and Student Safety Special Committee, and the Sustainability Advisory Committee. These liaison officers ensure we have robust two-way communications with these Arlington community and professional groups on topics of common concern.

## **8. FAC Meeting Venues**

The FAC continued its practice of regularly meeting at APS locations throughout the county to acquaint its members with representative school facilities, particularly those at the focus of current discussions. The school's principal typically conducted a building tour prior to the FAC business meeting, providing the opportunity to informally discuss how the facility's design and maintenance impacts the program of instruction.

This year the FAC met at the following locations:

H-B Woodlawn Secondary Program/Stratford Program: Principal Frank Haltiwanger provided a detailed tour of the facility, including the special facilities used by the Stratford program, and the synergy that has developed between the two programs.

Ashlawn Elementary School: Principal Judy Apostolico-Buck showed the FAC members how the new wing, with its greatly expanded library, had been creatively integrated with the preexisting facility, and how renovations to the original structure will enable the school to better meet the needs of the growing student population.

Education Center: The Ed Center is the venue of choice for the initial organizational meeting of each school year, and for special work sessions that are held as needed.

McKinley Elementary School: Principal Colin Brown provided a tour of the building and site prior to construction. He noted planned areas of internal renovation, including common spaces and the main office (needed for security purposes), the location of the renovation and site drainage issues.

Swanson Middle School: The FAC focused on the capacity problem at this school, which has been repeatedly expanded over seven decades.

Wakefield High School: The final FAC meeting of the year was held at Wakefield, to better understand the innovative design features of this school.

## **9. Priorities for the 2015-2016 School Year**

The 2015-2016 school year will pose significant challenges for the FAC, APS staff, and the School Board. Opening Discovery Elementary on time and within budget remains a

top priority, as will the construction of new additions and associated renovations at McKinley and Abingdon Elementary Schools.

Critical decisions must be made to address elementary crowding in South Arlington. The County Board's decision to deny the construction of New Elementary School #2 at the Thomas Jefferson site has caused, in our assessment, considerable disarray. Much work needs to be done to evaluate interim and permanent solutions for South Arlington. Currently, it appears the intended opening of a new elementary school in South Arlington by 2019 may slip to 2020 or beyond.

The FAC remains committed to constructing a new school in South Arlington, unless and until the School Board and staff develop alternatives that equitably provide the 725 elementary seats needed to address projected 2019 enrollment. The FAC has been eager to participate in the process of vetting interim solutions but to date, to our dismay, most options and details are being discussed only at the staff and Board level.

Additional work will be required to address middle school and high school crowding, which will only grow more acute in the years ahead. To that end, planning for a new high school at the Career Center – as called for in the 2014 CIP – should begin promptly, with the full participation of neighbors and affected communities. Given this year's experience with contentious community processes at Wilson and Jefferson, the FAC cannot stress strongly enough the need to begin a public dialogue about this facility as soon as possible.

Moreover, 2016 will require approval of a new CIP. The CIP has typically set forth APS' vision for addressing its capital needs. With three new members since the Board approved the 2014 CIP, it will be incumbent upon the School Board to either reaffirm the Board's prior vision or set forth a new compelling alternative so that the public understands how we will address critical capital needs.

The FAC looks forward to providing its recommendation for how best to address these issues, but we need to ensure transparency and direction from APS staff and the School Board as to what alternatives are desired and feasible as a function of instructional value, technical feasibility, and budgetary constraints. We remain particularly concerned about the lack of a plan to address instructional and capacity needs at Drew Model School, and recommend that the School Board fully evaluate the Montessori program that is housed there, determine its commitment to the program, and decide whether that remains the best location for the program.

The FAC applauds current efforts by APS staff to maximize the use of existing buildings through projects like the Washington-Lee renovation, which will increase capacity by 300 students. The FAC cautions, however, that similar gains may not be possible at all schools as each building poses its own unique challenges and some (most notably Swanson and Williamsburg Middle Schools) may already exceed their maximum effective size.

With enrollment projections continuing to rise, the FAC continues to believe that new construction is required and that county-owned lands will likely have to be part of the solution. The FAC is concerned that meaningful evaluation of county sites for schools appears to be on hold pending completion of the Community Facilities Study Group's work. To that end, the FAC sent a letter in April to the chairs of the County and School Boards urging that analysis of feasible county-owned sites begin forthwith. The FAC routinely hears suggestions from the community about potential sites and supports open and transparent discussion of site options. If certain County-owned sites are off-limits for discussion, then that should be clearly communicated to the public so that attention can be focused on feasible options.

We also note that the rebounding economy will likely affect the cost of these projects. It is highly probable that future construction costs will be higher, perhaps considerably higher, than in recent years, posing political and budgetary challenges for new and existing projects. Already, bids received for the McKinley project were higher than anticipated; requiring cuts in scope and an increase in the project costs. This resulted in APS reducing the scope of the Abingdon project to meet the established budget. Given the increasingly complex nature of future projects (Wilson, in particular), APS staff will need to be especially scrupulous in budgeting and contracting. Likewise, the School Board may need to plan for additional funding, as feasible, to ensure that projects are completed as planned. Reducing or eliminating features after projects have received community input and won community support will lead to difficult conversations.

For the 2015-2016 School Year, FAC plans to address the following issues:

- Complete site review and selection of a new elementary school or multiple additions/renovations in South Arlington
- Develop a community participation plan for revising South Arlington boundaries as needed to balance facilities after new construction
- Continue to develop solutions to short and long term needs of elementary school overcapacity in certain schools in North Arlington
- Develop a community plan for revising North Arlington boundaries for middle schools for the best use of facilities once construction at the Stratford site is completed
- Develop solutions to meet the short-term needs of middle school overcapacity in North Arlington
- Develop and implement a community participation plan for potential construction at the Career Center site

- Participate in the development of an innovative and transformative design for the new school at the Wilson site
- Monitor progress of the McKinley and Abingdon renovations
- Develop and implement a community participation plan for the 2016 CIP
- Help improve the accuracy and transparency of APS enrollment projections to ensure that decisions are made with the best information so that the community can better understand and support future needs.

At the time this report was being drafted, we became aware that the County is in negotiations to purchase property on North Quincy Street, directly across the street from the Ed Center. We understand that the County may consider allocating part of this property--assuming the sale is finalized--to school uses, according to press reports. Although the proposed timeline for the purchase, which will stretch until at least 2019, does not help APS address its immediate needs, the FAC is quite interested in how the property could be used to benefit Arlington's students.

## **10. Closing**

As the FAC completes its 2014-15 work year, we thank the members of the Arlington School Board, especially our liaison Abby Raphael, and APS staff members, including Benjamin Burgin, John Chadwick, Michael Freda, Amy Jones, Keith Klein, Jim Meikle, Scott Prisco, Meg Tuccillo, and Lionel White, who contributed their time and energy to make this a highly productive year. In addition, the FAC is grateful to the following citizen liaison officers who regularly attended FAC meetings and actively contributed to our work: Gerry Collins (Arlington Education Association), Greg Lloyd (Sustainability Advisory Committee), and Bill Schimmel (Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee).

Notes:

All photos are courtesy of APS

Except as noted, all information is based on material provided by APS. Recommendations and opinions are those of the FAC.

The citizen members of the  
Arlington Public Schools  
Advisory Council on School Facilities and Capital Programs prepared this report  
for the Arlington School Board

Arlington, Virginia

June 2015

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