

Paul Holland  
Chair, Education Center BLPC

February 5, 2019

Arlington County School Board  
Dr. Patrick Murphy, Superintendent

Dear School Board Members and Dr. Murphy,

The Education Center Building Level Planning Committee (BLPC) is pleased to offer our response to the Education Center Reuse Schematic Design developed in collaboration with Arlington Public School, Arlington County, Studio 27 Architecture, and Grove/Slade. The members of the BLPC were pleased to participate in this process and recognize the significance of our task: the first adaptive reuse of an existing office building for educational purposes.

### **Project Parameters**

The Education Center Reuse Project was included in APS's FY2019-28 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The renovation of the Education Center was initially planned to increase the capacity of Washington-Lee (W-L) High School with options to adapt the space for future instructional and grade level changes. The BLPC was also asked to: support APS Strategic Plan Goals, specifically for healthy, safe, and supported students; address capacity by providing 500-600 high school seats; open by start of school 2021; spend a maximum project cost of \$37 million, using every effort to spend less.

### **The Process**

The BLPC and Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) met five times between September 2018 and January 2019 to provide guidance to the staff and architects charged with redeveloping the Education Center and to review and refine design concepts. There was one site tour, including the interior of the building, as well as an open Community Meeting in November. The committee meetings were well attended and characterized by lively, active participation by all members. We were consistently impressed by staff's commitment to the public engagement process and by the knowledge and expertise of the consultants (Studio 27 and Grove/Slade) retained to facilitate this public process.

The work of the BLPC focused on two main areas of discussion: site design and proposed off-site transportation considerations.

### **Site Design**

The site design was developed based on the existing Arlington County Principles of Civic Design. These principles of civic design are intended to: inform the design of civic facilities; ensure facilities meet community goals and are attractive, durable, and functional; supplement existing County planning documents and policies; and ensure that each project is reviewed individually.

In addition to the project's stated goal of adhering to the County's principles of civic design, a number of other site related factors were discussed. These are summarized in the following sections:

1. *Site Layout:* Site layout discussions focused on the general character and location of amenities. The BLPC also considered the pedestrian and traffic circulation on the site. In particular, the Committee considered travel times for students crossing the Washington-Lee campus, as well as access to the Education Center building. One key point of discussion was the quantity and location of vehicle and bicycle parking. There was support among the members of the Committee for a second bike parking area, including the option to provide some covered parking within the I-66 garage. It was noted that space for scooter parking should also be provided on the campus.

While the existing site circulation will remain the same, the Committee also stated a strong preference for a new ground connection ramp (slope 1:12) from the Education Center to the existing High School building that would apply universal design principles. There was interest in further exploring the feasibility of partially covering the walkway and ramp between the Ed Center and W-L, particularly if a pedestrian bridge is not included in the project scope. Regarding site layout and aesthetic improvements, the Committee supported the proposed plaza and roof terrace improvements, in particular those that could be utilized to augment outdoor learning spaces.

With regard to site design, the Committee was presented with two options for the treatment of the rear parking lot and whether a portion of the lot should be redeveloped into a multi-use sports court adjacent to the Education Center building. The base scope envisioned the painting of a multi-use court on existing asphalt. The alternative scope proposed leveling the court space, improving the court surface, and adding greenspace to the area. There was a clear consensus among the members of the BLPC for the alternative option, although the Committee recognized that cost considerations should be factored into this potential improvement. It is notable that the Ed Center expansion will increase the student population by a quarter, and this court space is the only proposed increase in outdoor athletic space. Further, the alternative scope also includes a reduction of non-permeable surface area which has associated environmental benefits associated with storm water runoff.

The committee also discussed the location of the bus pick-up and drop-off (PU/DO) area, with a number of questions raised related to the current and future bus utilization by high school students. Given the commitment of APS to walkable, neighborhood schools, there were valid points raised related to the future need for dedicated bus parking and PU/DO locations. The Multimodal Transportation Analysis (MMTA) says “the APS Education Center project is unlikely to produce substantially greater bus demand”, but the report goes on to recommend both new bus loading and unloading in front of the planetarium and student PU/DO on Quincy Street. Vulnerable road users have significant safety concerns with these proposed changes. It is the opinion of the Chairman, and other members of the BLPC, that alternatives, such as greater coordination with the existing ART bus infrastructure, could be utilized for student transportation to reduce transportation demand.

The Committee also reviewed possible designs related to a pedestrian bridge connecting the education center with the existing high school. Due to the existing budget considerations, the Committee did not devote significant discussion time to this potential bridge. While this alternative was presented to the Committee, we did not make a recommendation on it. However, concern was expressed that any bridge would detract from the Education Center building’s iconic design that the Committee worked to preserve.

The representatives of the aquatics community appreciated the staff’s recommendation to maintain the existing dedicated, time-limited, parking spaces so that patrons who choose to drive can access the pool

facility. Time-limited spaces on the north side of this lot will also serve visitors to the Education Center building or the planetarium. The options to locate of the vehicular PU/DO area generated significant discussion. Additional perspective on this element of the plan is provided in the Transportation Considerations section below.

*2. Building Appearance:* The committee reviewed the character and strategy for glazing replacement and were presented with two options at our final meeting for consideration. Option A has operable windows consistent across the façade in the same rhythm as the existing mullion pattern. Option B has operable windows in a different pattern. Both options presented for Committee consideration incorporate glass frits. Glass frits respond to the need for High Performance Learning Environments and energy use needs. The frits also visually blend with the constantly changing environmental reflections and ensure that the pattern is only visible up close. Both options considered by the Committee anticipate providing interior shades to mitigate the most intense solar exposures.

Following significant discussion, there was general agreement among the Committee for Option A, the option preferred option for APS Staff. Under Option A, the frit will only be visible up close, the frit will not impact the view from within the classrooms to the outdoors, and the frit will help avoid overuse of shades which would have greater visual perception and impact to views. For option A, there was also a discussion of the potential for wider windows at the base. However, following a discussion among the Committee, pursuing this option was rejected due to cost considerations.

It should also be noted that the Committee was pleased to hear from Arlington County's historic preservation staff, and interested community stakeholders, who strongly endorsed Option A. While the Education Center was not designated a local historic district by the Arlington County Board, the Committee is pleased that the outcome of the reuse is in keeping with the historical architecture of this facility.

*3. Building Layout and Design:* Building layout discussions focused on the location of entrance(s) into the building, and the location and sufficiency of major public space(s) inside the building. There was general agreement that the proposed community-related uses on first floor are generally sufficient for the planned W-L extension. However, should the building be repurposed for a stand-alone school, essential common areas are lacking in the proposed design. Staff acknowledged that another structure may have to be built in order to accommodate all common areas necessary for a potential stand-alone school. The Committee also supported the proposed interior shading treatments and other improvements to optimize the student learning environment.

## **Transportation Considerations**

While the Committee generally reached consensus on the site design questions and alternatives, there remain significant questions related to the transportation considerations for the site. These questions are summarized below.

Two options presented by the transportation consultant related to the proposed student PU/DO area along Quincy Street and the pedestrian crossing at 14<sup>th</sup> St N and N Quincy St. Option 1 provided for enhancing the existing bike lane by painting the lane green, improving signage, and enforcing procedures for safely entering/existing vehicles in the PU/DO lane. Option 2 envisioned relocating the current bike lane to the Quincy Street curb with bollards, if necessary, to separate the parking/PU/DO lane from the bike lane, and using the parking/PU/DO lane to buffer the bike lane from through traffic.

Option 2 would also require the removal of the center island, which affords some protection for vehicles turning left into the Ed Center or the Buck property parking lots, and curb extensions along this segment of Quincy Street. Option 1 was preferred by staff based on traffic counts, and included a commitment by staff to monitor the usage of the PU/DO/Bike space to determine if additional safety enhancements were needed.

Cycling advocates had deep concerns for any proposal that placed the student drop off in conflict with the bike lane. There was general support from the cycling community for moving student drop off to in front of the planetarium and for a protected bike lanes along Quincy Street. The Ballston Virginia Square Civic Association (BVSCA) did state a preference for a protected bike lane to be adjacent to the curb; although this was done with significant concerns. With regard to the pedestrian crossing treatment both a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB) and a High-intensity Activated Crosswalk (HAWK) signals were provided as recommended options by the traffic engineer. The HAWK has approximately 25% greater driver compliance rate than the RRFB. Given the reported low compliance rate of the RRFB by drivers at the 15<sup>th</sup> St N and Quincy St crossing (450' away), and the likelihood high school and elementary students, as well as community members use of the crossing the BVSCA strongly prefers the HAWK signal, in addition to a slight majority of the BLPC members.

Safety and usage concerns about both options were raised by Committee members, resulting in several additional "Option 3" proposals, with a request that staff look again at this issue to ensure that the best proposals are being recommended. Based on this discussion, a straw poll showed seven votes for Option 1, no votes for Option 2, and six votes for some yet TBD Option 3. Because of the diversity of option, some members abstained. The Committee strongly encourages a detailed review of the second bus lane's PU/DO area. While we understand this will be part of the site plan conditions and use permit, doing so will help address some (but not all concerns) raised by members of the Committee and community.

In general, while there was some support for Option 1, it was the feeling of the members that the Committee support a different approach and new ideas related to the bike lanes adjacent to the proposed drop-off area. While we understand the timelines association with the project, the Committee continues to encourage the County and APS staff members to collaborate and identify a new approach for this section of Quincy Street in collaboration with the Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee. The BLPC encourages a future review of the transportation conditions to consider the "opportunity costs" of lost bike usage along this stretch of Quincy Street. From the multiple discussions held by the BLPC, it is the overall feeling of the Committee that the Quincy Street transportation options presented do not fully satisfy the constituencies represented or future student population.

Although the Committee did not take a vote, there was general support for the removal of metered parking on the west side of Quincy Street This would be replaced with time-limited parking enforcement. Currently, the metered parking spaces are virtually unused. Time-limited parking would increase options for school, pool, and planetarium visitors, without creating incentives for users of these facilities to search for parking in surrounding neighborhoods.

### **Additional Thoughts**

The members of the BLPC appreciated staff's response relative to our request for draft read-ahead materials to be provided to the members prior to the meetings. It is our hope that future BLPC and PFRC

processes will follow this practice: draft presentations should be provided to the membership approximately 48-hours prior to the meeting.

With regard to the building's education specifications, we appreciate the expertise of the APS professional staff in developing these specifications. However, it is the belief of the Chairman that the process would benefit from completed Education Specification prior to the start of the BLPC process. Having these specifications determined prior to the BLPC process would provide greater clarity and guidance as the Committee address the design and transportation elements of the building.

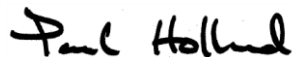
## **Conclusion**

The Education Center Reuse schematic design and campus layout responses by the BLPC are the result of a thoughtful community engagement process. For the site design aspects of the project, the Committee reached a clear consensus on three main areas of discussion. With regard to the site layout, the Committee supported the alternative scope-envisioned sport court. For the building appearance, there was clear consensus among the Committee for Option A. Finally under the building layout and design topic, the Committee supported community uses on the main floor of the Education Center and treatments that optimize the learning environment.

With regard to transportation, the Committee's recommendations did not obtain overwhelming support. There was slight preference for Option 1. However, it was the feeling of the members that the Committee support a different approach and encourage County and APS staff to explore new ideas related to the bike lanes adjacent to the proposed PU/DO area.

I'd like to recognize and thank all the members of the BLPC for their steadfast commitment to the process and their engaged participation in many hours of meetings. I'd also like to recognize and thank the many spouses, partners, and families who make the continued participation of so many Arlington activists and staff possible. We couldn't do this work without them. Thank you for your commitment to doing what's best for all of Arlington students. I appreciate the difficult decisions you make on our behalf on a regular basis. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to help shape and comment on the Education Center Reuse BLPC Project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Holland". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Paul Holland  
Chair, Education Center BLPC