

The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) the School Board is considering today is certainly different the document we all thought would be developed when this process began earlier this year. COVID-19 has brought with it the weight of a great deal of uncertainty around finances, enrollment as well as our daily operations. That uncertainty is unlikely to go away in the near term and the strains upon our school division are likely to grow. We must work as a community to find innovative and efficient uses of space and money looking at both operational and capital solutions. Unfortunately, the strain from COVID-19 is going to make it even more challenging to ensure we have adequate seats for students across our system and a need to ensure our school buildings are refreshed and maintained to provide equitable learning environments. The 2021 CIP as proposed provides a reasoned and logical interim approach to addressing our most immediate capital needs. More specifically, we appreciate the focus on providing planning funds for seats at all school levels. We recommend that identifying a path forward to ensure not only that we have seats at all levels, but that we have seats in the right places to ensure no part of the county is bearing an unfair burden when it comes to capacity issues.

There is no way to predict how this pandemic and recession will impact student enrollment in Arlington. As we move forward into the 2022 CIP cycle, we encourage the School Board and staff to consider the following:

1. With these challenges come opportunities to create a new vision for facilities in Arlington Public Schools (APS) that is better aligned with instructional goals to be outlined in the PreK–12 Instructional Program Pathways (IPP).
2. It is unlikely that we will see an alleviation of our budget constraints any time soon. How can we identify the most critical capital needs to ensure we are not leaving any schools or students behind?
3. With the elimination of new high school seats Career Center project from this CIP we stand ready to work with staff to identify how to approach this project to bring it into budget and provide services to students.
4. We appreciate the collaboration between APS and the County and encourage continuing to increase this collaboration will be critical to finding efficiencies to maximize our use of existing buildings, buildable sites and resources. We also encourage strong lines of communication between APS and the county planners to ensure that as residential building and development plans change APS has full visibility into the impacts on our schools.
5. Identify how we can maximize and optimize existing facilities including continued review of the placement of options programs. This analysis can and should be guided by the IPP to ensure instructional alignment with facility needs.
6. Because we are going to be under significant budget pressures it will be important to ensure that we understand the maximum capacity of our school facilities and what the limits are that would obstruct quality and equitable instruction.
7. The challenges we face may be bigger than we realize today and will require our school division to think differently and broadly about the way we approach learning spaces and capital projects in order to work within budget constraints while simultaneously addressing future needs.
8. How can we better reconcile our facility locations with transportation needs in order to better optimize transportation services to minimize costs?

The FAC stands ready to work with staff to address these questions and those that will come to light as our new reality continues to evolve.