

Theodore A. Black
Chair, Arlington Career Center BLPC/PFRC

April 5, 2022

Arlington County School Board
Dr. Francisco Durán, Superintendent

Dear Chair Kanninen and School Board Members,

Summary

The goal of the BLPC/PFRC engagement was to consult with stakeholders in the community to shape the concept design of the new ACC facilities. The process revealed notable gaps between wants and needs among segments of the community and Arlington Public Schools (APS). The charter for the BLPC excluded the long-term goals for the ACC campus; however, many involved in the process wanted that information and needed it to factor into their considerations. Some people also wanted the facility from the previous ACC processes while APS needed to stay within fixed costs well below that vision. APS wanted to separate the issues of the overall site development from the specifics of the ACC project and needed time to gather and analyze data for the master plan. At the same time, the students and staff at ACC want and need basic common areas, space for all classes, and modern technologies designed for their instructional programs. The gaps yielded the unfortunate outcome that support for the overall concept design from the civic associations most effected by the new ACC project range from strongly disagree to neutral while support for the building and other elements ranged from agree to strongly disagree. Nevertheless, the ACC concept design that you are considering for adoption on April 28 incorporates all community inputs; and it addresses issues of appropriate massing, a more welcoming segmented building that provides outdoor space, preserving the field and providing a plaza area for students and the community, and general agreement that the parking garage is best situated on South 9th Street toward South Highland Street. Tentative concepts for the bus transportation were developed and need further refinement, and concerns about the overall transportation planning can inform further planning in the next stage of the project. This planning should pay attention to requirements in the Americans with Disabilities Act, plus the goal of providing safe and easy access for those with impaired mobility and for the public to safely use amenities. While we collectively work on these outstanding issues, the majority of the BLPC supports the design concept before you. This vision for the new ACC almost certainly comes as close as a facility can to enabling and empowering students to excel and succeed in areas of study that are critical to our community.

Process

The BLPC and PFRC conducted a three-month virtual process to review and provide feedback on the Arlington Career Center (ACC) concept design that concluded on March 30. The School Board directed the Superintendent to include the project in the proposed FY 2023-32 Capital Improvement Projects. The School Board also provided concise parameters for the BLPC and PFRC to consider for the school building, field, and parking garage in the BLPC charter and excluded considerations about the long-term use of the site, which will be addressed in a separate process. APS staff, Arlington County Government (ACG) staff, and the chairs closely collaborated to optimize communications with the BLPC/PFRC members and to gather their feedback for the APS design team as they developed the concept design. We adopted the PFRC Principles of Civic Design to inform our assessments about how the project met community goals based on an ACG staff recommendation, and this collaboration was integral to the success of the effort. The approach helped focus discussions and provided a framework to maximize the effectiveness of time that members spent in our meetings. We also provided advance materials for each meeting and asked the members to review them to be prepared for substantive discussions during small group breakout sessions at the first two meetings, which included a general overview at the start with a wrap up and public comment at the end. These materials were also available on the APS Engage website and the ACC Project webpage ([Engage with Us! - Arlington Public Schools \(apsva.us\)](https://www.apsva.us/engage/with-us/) and [Arlington Career Center Project - Arlington Public Schools \(apsva.us\)](https://www.apsva.us/engage/with-us/acc-project/)) so that committee members could use them with their stakeholders and community members could provide similar feedback. The concept design evolved after these two meetings, and the BLPC and PFRC met separately to consider the proposed concept at the March meeting. The APS design team is presenting this ACC project concept on April 7 for School Board action on April 28.

The three BLPC/PFRC meetings for the ACC project were virtual on Microsoft Teams. Various technology issues and logistics challenges occurred during the meetings, and members were sometimes frustrated. Significant issues arose when trying to use the Teams polling function for the BLPC at the third meeting, and BLPC members received a subsequent poll via email after the meeting to ensure we captured all opinions. While the technology was challenging and we need to ensure opportunities for full inclusion of persons with disabilities, the virtual format recorded the general and breakout sessions to provide greater transparency and permanent record in addition to standard notetaking.

Concept Design Development

The School Board BLPC Charge specified parameters for the project that included:

- A maximum total project cost of \$170.48 million (school and parking garage)
- Use of the PFRC Principles of Civic Design
- The process does not include the long-term use of the Career Center Campus
- Project requirements with a preliminary site plan diagram
- Base and Alternative Educational Specifications
- The plan will be included in the Superintendent's Proposed FY 2023-32 CIP

The APS design team was responsive to BLPC/PFRC feedback and community inputs and incorporated the following elements in the concept design:

- Step the mass of the building from south to north with five floors (approximately 77ft) down to three floors (approximately 47 ft)
- Segment the building to create more inviting contours and space along S. Walter Reed Drive
- Create multiple outdoor spaces, including the plaza, for students and the community
- Locate the main entrance on the S. Walter Reed side
- Maintain a curb cut on S. Walter Reed Drive for flexibility in bus operations
- Affirmed preference for the parking garage on South 9th Street - balancing footprint, height and preserving as much open space as possible, details in next phase
- Accessible parking closer to the school buildings and library, possibly curbside is necessary
- Terraces of some configuration make the building attractive and may provide learning spaces
- Further development of the transportation plan needs:
 - Ensure buses can operate efficiently onsite with easy access
 - Minimize vehicle impact on South Highland Street
 - Refine parking needs and locations
 - Identify drop off and pick up locations
 - Factor in ACG Complete Streets project
 - Ensure safe interactions between pedestrians and vehicles

In preparation for the third BLPC/PFRC meeting, the members were asked to consider nine statements about the final concept design and prepare to respond:

Be prepared to state if you **strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree** with the following statements:

1. I support the overall ACC concept design.
2. I support the overall ACC building design.
3. The massing of the new ACC building fits the PFRC Principles of Civic Design.
4. I support the configuration of the new ACC building to provide useful public space.
5. I support the multi-use plaza concept for space outside the new ACC building.
6. I support the proposed parking garage and its general configuration.
7. I support the proposed school bus and service vehicle movement on the site.

Open ended response

8. Identify additional concerns with the proposed concept design
9. Identify specific areas of the project that should receive further development or focus during the schematic design phase of the ACC project scheduled for May 2022 to September 2022.

Most of the BLPC members registering their opinion agreed or strongly agreed with the seven statements seeking to measure their support for the ACC design concept. As noted under Process, there were problems with the polling function capturing all BLPC member responses during the meeting, and a follow-up poll was emailed to gather inputs. Specifics about responses for each statement are in the spreadsheet accompanying this letter, and the video record of the March meeting is available on the APS Engage website and the ACC Project webpage ([Engage with Us! - Arlington Public Schools \(apsva.us\)](https://www.apsva.us/engage))

and [Arlington Career Center Project - Arlington Public Schools \(apsva.us\)](http://apsva.us)). One representative from the local civic associations was neutral about the overall concept design while the other representatives strongly opposed the overall concept design. Their concerns about the long-term future of the Career Center Campus, the location of the building, the size of the field and open spaces, community amenities (including the lack of an auditorium), bus and traffic, and construction timelines were factors in their positions on the overall concept design while two representatives were neutral or supported some more specific aspects of the project and all had the opportunity to provide inputs for the concept. As captured above in the feedback to the design team, the BLPC raised several issues about transportation and parking that remain a concern and need to be addressed going forward in the process.

Characterizing the ACC Project

Some in the community lament that the current concept design does not warrant the label of “Jewel of the Pike”. The conclusion is subjective and has no definitive answer; however, two observations may provide other characterizations for the new ACC. First, the location returns to a heritage of past school frontage along South Walter Reed Drive prior to moving Thomas Jefferson Junior High (Middle) School to its current location and the construction of the existing Career Center. While still close to Columbia Pike, the school will be on an important north/south road in the county; symbolically, connecting with all parts of the county as an option school. Furthermore, we often do not appreciate the significance of names that we regularly encounter. Dr. Walter Reed was a Virginian, a Major in the U.S. Army, and pathologist and bacteriologist who led efforts that identified the source of typhoid and proved that mosquitos transmit yellow fever. Perhaps, it is appropriate for an education facility focused on project-based learning; Science, Technology, Engineering & Math; and Career and Technical Education to be located on Walter Reed.

Thank you to all who have shaped and developed the current concepts.

Sincerely,

Theodore A. Black

Theodore A. Black
Chair, Arlington Career Center Project BLPC

CC:

Brian Stockton, Chief of Staff, APS

Lisa Stengle, Executive Director, Planning and Evaluation