



Takoma Park City Council Meeting – February 14, 2018 Agenda Item 4

Work Session

Discussion of School Facility Needs

Recommended Council Action

None – discussion only.

Context with Key Issues

Public schools are important community facilities. Besides providing the educational facilities that are needed, the location, size and design of these facilities are important to families, neighborhoods and the larger community.

In Takoma Park, the public schools are becoming overcrowded and the elementary schools that serve most of the community's children are on small land parcels with limited room for expansion. The increasing number of children in the Takoma Park area surprised the staff of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and MCPS is now rushing to plan building expansions and looking to identify sites that may be used for a new elementary school.

MCPS staff has consulted with City staff and the community on options to provide more classroom space at Piney Branch Elementary School and Community Development Manager Rosalind Grigsby participated as a member of the Site Selection Advisory Committee for a Downcounty Consortium Elementary School. During these discussions, City staff have suggested that several privately-owned parcels in the City be considered for an elementary school. Those parcels are the former Washington-McLaughlin Christian School on Poplar Avenue, the former Johns Nevins Andrews School on Elm Avenue, and the Washington Adventist Hospital site which may become available. (Please note that the owners of these properties may not wish to sell their sites to MCPS. Any discussions about such a sale would be between the property owners and MCPS.)

City staff has expressed some concerns regarding the MCPS site selection process, both through a letter to Superintendent Smith and as a Minority Report to the Site Selection Advisory Committee's Report. Staff noted that the search criteria seemed limited and the process rushed. At least one community member on the Site Selection Advisory Committee has expressed concern that any criticism of the MCPS search process may result in valued programs being removed from area schools.

It is clear that MCPS is in a difficult position, trying to find space for a large number of students, within a short period of time, in a densely-developed area where standard school buildings are not easily accommodated and costs are likely to be high.

The City Council may choose to weigh in on the Site Selection Advisory Committee Recommendation for a Downcounty Consortium Elementary School. The report is open for public comment until March 22, when it will go to the Board of Education. (The Superintendent will issue his recommendation regarding the Report on February 20.)

The City Council may also choose to transmit its thoughts on school facility issues in general to the Board of Education or to the County Council.

Council Priority

A Livable Community For All
An Environmentally Sustainable Community

Environmental Impact of Action

To be determined. Reuse of developed sites is a standard practice in sustainable development. Use of sites within walking distance of students reduces the need for bus and car transportation, and the energy use and emissions associated with those vehicles.

Fiscal Impact of Action

To be determined. While building in a densely-development area may be more costly for the School District, there may be operational savings (such as reducing the need for busing). A new school in the most appropriate location may reduce the need to expand other schools.

Racial Equity Impact of Action

A large proportion of elementary school students in Takoma Park are persons of color. Adverse impacts to these students could come from being in crowded facilities, in schools without specialty programs, or in schools requiring long bus rides.

Attachments and Links

Many documents, including the Site Selection Advisory Committee Recommendation for a Downcounty Consortium Elementary School, can be found at this link:
<https://takomaparkmd.gov/initiatives/project-directory/montgomery-county-public-schools/>