



Takoma Park City Council Meeting – March 7, 2018

Agenda Item 2

Voting Session

Resolution Regarding School Facilities

Recommended Council Action

Vote on resolution expressing City Council's position regarding public school facility needs.

Context with Key Issues

On February 14, the City Council held a Work Session discussion on public school facility needs and the recommendations of the Site Selection Advisory Committee for a Downcounty Consortium Elementary School. As a result of that discussion, the Council asked to consider a resolution expressing its position.

Recently, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Superintendent Jack Smith made his recommendation to the Board of Education on the subject, recommending that the planned expansion of Piney Branch Elementary School proceed while postponing a decision on a new elementary school in the southern part of the Downcounty Consortium area. The recommendation will be discussed by the Board of Education in March.

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.

City staff 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.

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 and the Superintendent's Recommendation, can be found at this link:

<https://takomaparkmd.gov/initiatives/project-directory/montgomery-county-public-schools/>

| Introduced by:

CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

Resolution 2018-

Resolution Requesting that the Montgomery County Public Schools Consider a New School Site in the Takoma Park Area

- WHEREAS**, Montgomery County Public Schools convened a committee to review and recommend sites for a new elementary school in the Downcounty Consortium area to alleviate overcrowding in the schools; and
- WHEREAS**, the Committee recommended Forest Grove Elementary School, 9805 Dameron Drive, Silver Spring, as the first choice for a new elementary school, and MacDonald Knolls Elementary School, 100611 Tenbrook Drive, Silver Spring, as the second choice, both locations outside the Beltway; and
- WHEREAS**, no sites within the City of Takoma Park were included as finalists for a new school, despite the growth in the City's school age population; and
- WHEREAS**, MCPS's past school enrollment projections have significantly under-estimated student population growth in this area and, with the coming of the Purple Line and the zoning changes in the Takoma Langley Crossroads and New Hampshire Avenue Corridor, an increased demand for housing for families is expected; and
- WHEREAS**, the proposed expansion of Piney Branch Elementary School, on the smallest MCPS school parcel, will not be sufficient to address the need for elementary school space in the Takoma Park area; and
- WHEREAS**, MCPS's criteria for site selection undervalued important factors such as ~~racial equity measures, with an elementary school aged population that is 73 percent non-white in Takoma Park;~~ walkability; operational costs of busing; and impact on sustainability efforts; ~~as well as the impact on a large number of non-white students, with 73 percent of the students at Takoma Park Elementary, Piney Branch Elementary, and Rolling Terrace being students of color;~~ and
- WHEREAS**, MCPS and Montgomery County do not have a process in place for siting new schools when no available site is identified in a Master Plan, nor does MCPS have criteria established to address the use of park land and open spaces for schools sites and requirements for replacement of those lands; and
- WHEREAS**, Montgomery County ~~will could~~ deny approval of proposed developments if a location does not have Adequate Public Facilities, including school capacity, thereby limiting the redevelopment of the New Hampshire Avenue corridor, ~~which is a transit-oriented area and the redevelopment of which is a~~ long-standing goal of the City ~~and County~~ established with the Council adoption of the New Hampshire Avenue Corridor Concept Plan in 2008 and the Montgomery County Takoma/Langley Crossroads Sector Plan.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND THAT the City of Takoma Park requests that Montgomery County Public Schools locate a new school in or near Takoma Park to accommodate the growing population of school age children.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT MCPS and Montgomery County continue to allocate the funds required for the expansion of Piney Branch Elementary School which is necessary to partially accommodate the growing population of school age children.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, in addition to other nearby sites, MCPS study the feasibility of using the Washington Adventist Hospital campus, which meets the criteria for school site selection, for the location of a new school. The City has recently learned new information regarding the timing and availability of the Hospital campus, which will be vacated in 2019.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the City of Takoma Park [or City Council] requests that MCPS and Montgomery County develop a process for siting new schools when no available site is identified in a Master Plan, as well as develop criteria to guide the use of parkland and open space for schools, determining when and under what considerations the use of parkland is acceptable for a school site and specifying the replacement requirements. Privately owned land should be given serious consideration, especially in dense Downcounty locations, with both the short-term costs of land purchase and the long-term costs of busing students weighed into decisions. Walkability, sustainability, and the development of strong community schools should be important factors in decision-making about school sites.

Adopted this ____ day of _____, 2018.

Attest:

Jessie Carpenter, CMC
City Clerk