



NRCA, P.O. Box 3242, Alexandria, VA 22302

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Erika Gulick
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Re: NRCA Comments on Joint City-ACPS Facilities Master Plan

Dear Ms. Carraway and Ms. Gulick:

The North Ridge Citizens' Association ("NRCA") appreciates the opportunity to comment on the above-referenced process to develop a Joint City-ACPS Facilities Master Plan ("JFMP"). During the short time available, we have consulted our Board and offer the following comments and recommendations:

Summary of Comments and Recommendations of North Ridge Citizens' Association

1. We appreciate the extension of the public comment period from thirteen business days to twenty days, but given the fact that long-term planning—and many individual public facility projects—would be governed by the JFMP framework, we recommend that in future no less than sixty days be provided for public input. Given the scope and importance of the capital needs assessment summary, comments should be allowed through the fall/winter community engagement period ending in December.
2. The five statements of principle are generally laudable. We recommend a sixth principle, as follows: Local community engagement and input will be solicited in a timely manner to allow comment on reasonableness, feasibility and impacts of a project on its neighborhood.
3. We expect that North Ridge residents will be provided adequate time to assess specific recommendations that City and ACPS staff may be considering for the renovation or replacement of the George Mason Elementary School facility, including any potential impacts on the adjacent City recreation facility, parklands, and mature tree canopy.
4. As previously stated (see April 17, 2020 letter), NRCA strongly opposes co-location of any housing on ACPS sites or adjoining recreational spaces. Such sites (including George Mason Elementary School) are scarce in Alexandria and are already heavily subscribed for appropriate educational core and community-use functions (see public comments from Feb. 13, 2020 Open House). We will be looking carefully at all shared use proposals.
5. The draft materials, including the feedback survey, contain general statements such as "share school sites with other public uses" that are vague or overly broad, and do not allow for residents to clearly understand what is being proposed and to provide meaningful input. A full summary of survey comments should be released to the public.
6. We expect full transparency and vigorous public engagement during consideration of any changes and improvements to other facilities in and near North Ridge, such as Charles Barrett Elementary, Charles Barrett Recreation Center, Chinquapin Recreation Center, Minnie Howard Campus and T.C. Williams High School. The City should also give decision-making weight to neighborhood input as part of the JFMP's content.

7. Any proposal that could lead to consideration of fundamental changes to zoning or potentially drastic alterations to process in connection with planning and design of City and ACPS facilities should be subject to open discussion, and, if pursued, should ultimately be put forth for a City Council vote. NRCA holds the position that: 1) zoning changes must take into account all applicable comprehensive area plans for those areas under consideration; 2) there must be demonstrated need for zoning changes; 3) any zoning changes must be consistent with surrounding uses; and 4) zoning changes must be consistent with the orderly development of public services, such as transit (see NRCA letter to Planning Commission, March 3, 2020).
8. Proposals to “build up, build under, build over” will need significant vetting, particularly for low-density zones like North Ridge. What makes sense in a densely-built area near a Metro station may not make sense in a single-family residential area, particularly if facilities would not conform to zoning restrictions, would conflict with neighborhood character and livability, or would place additional strains on co-existing infrastructure (e.g., stormwater runoff, sanitary sewers, utilities, transportation, parking, et cetera).
9. We expect that we will have sufficient notice (90 days) and comment (60 days) opportunity to comment on any proposals to co-locate housing units at school sites.
10. In keeping with the full commitment regarding the JMFP’s scope (see City Staff PowerPoint Presentation, Feb. 14, 2020), park and recreational site improvements should be prioritized along with the other projects contained in the JMFP capital needs assessment list.
11. Since some projects are funded from alternate revenue streams, we recommend that all of City-managed grant or loan funded projects be included on separate needs assessment lists showing their relative priority over time.
12. Once a project in our neighborhood is approved for initial funding, we ask that the City or ACPS designate a particular person (with back-up) to be our NRCA liaison for the duration of the project.
13. A minimum of sixty (60) days notice should be given to each neighborhood civic association to comment on all capital needs assessment lists each year during the consideration by the School Board and the City Council of the City Manager- and School Superintendent-proposed CIPS.
14. The materials discussing the JFMP and process to date need to better incorporate the 200+ public comments submitted at the T.C. Williams High School open house (Feb. 13), including those opposing: colocation of housing and other non-core uses for ACPS sites, increased densification in neighborhoods zoned for low density, and failure to protect open and green spaces, including environmentally-critical urban forest and our dwindling mature tree canopy, in keeping with the City’s own guidelines. As noted in previous communications, increasing density in existing low-density neighborhoods increases impervious surfaces and thus water runoff, while reducing trees that also soak up the water.
15. The JFMP should outline in writing what happens if the City is faced with a capital facility funding shortfall during the planning process for public facilities, which is likely to occur given the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to engaging with you as the planning process moves forward.

Sincerely,



Chuck Kent
President, NRCA

cc: Mayor and City Council Members
City Manager

Enclosure