Attachment 1

Montgomery Planning Staff Comments on School Capital Projects in the Board of Education's Request of MCPS' FY25-30 Capital Improvement Program

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Comments for Newly Proposed Projects in Board of Ed's Request

James H. Blake HS, Addition (2028):

300 Norwood Rd, Silver Spring 20905

- Johnson Road is designated as a rustic road by the 2023 *Rustic Roads Functional Master Plan* Update. Rustic roads are historic and scenic roadways that reflect the agricultural character and rural origins of the county. Roads designated in the Rustic Roads Program have been determined to have valuable characteristics and are to be preserved under Chapter 49 of Montgomery County Code, Streets, and Roads. When the Council classifies a road as a rustic road, the Council identifies the significant features of the road that must be preserved when the road is maintained or improved.

- The rustic section of Johnson Road begins at the high school entry drive. The design and construction of the classroom addition project should respect the characteristics of this road, which is completely forested with large trees that provide a closed canopy overhead.
    - The tree canopy along Johnson Road is a significant feature of the road that must be preserved according to the Master Plan Update (page 191 of the *Rustic Roads Functional Master Plan).* Therefore, the addition being built should not encroach on the existing trees near Johnson Road.
    - If additional parking is included as part of the capital project, it should not be placed along Johnson Road.
- Existing bike racks do not meet county standards. Replace the existing racks with at least 44 inverted u style racks near the main entrance to the school.
- Consult with Montgomery Parks regarding the need for review of the project's potential impact on Northwest Branch Recreational Park.

Paint Branch HS, Addition (2028):

14121 Old Columbia Pike, Burtonsville 20866

- Improve pedestrian connections to adjacent neighborhoods where possible.
- Plant large species canopy trees along Old Columbia Pike, along sidewalks to create a pedestrian buffer, and in parking lots to mitigate heat island effects.
- Existing bike racks do not meet county standards. Replace the existing racks with at least 50 inverted u style racks near the main entrance to the school.

Mill Creek Towne ES, Addition (2028):

17700 Park Mill Dr, Rockville

- Make the site more accessible and safer for pedestrians and bikes.
    - Plant large street trees along pedestrian paths between the street and sidewalk to provide shade and a buffer from vehicle traffic.
    - Existing bike racks do not meet county standards. Replace the existing racks with at least 9 inverted u style racks near the main entrance to the school.

Cold Spring ES, Major Capital Project (TBD):

9201 Falls Chapel Way, Potomac 20854

- If a new building is built, place it close to Falls Chapel Way and provide the main entrance and front of the building towards the street.
    - The bus drop off may be brought to the front of the building, but the parking lot should be tucked away to the side or back of the building.
    - Providing on-street parking on Falls Chapel Way can help slow traffic.
- Make the site safer and more accessible for pedestrians and bikes.
    - Provide wide sidewalks in front of the building, and plant street trees for shade and buffer from vehicular traffic.

    - When a sidewalk crosses a driveway entrance, bring the driveway up to the sidewalk elevation rather than ramping the sidewalk down to the street elevation.
    - Construct a separated bikeway (sidepath) along Falls Chapel Way as identified in the *Bicycle Master Plan*.
    - Connect a pedestrian path to the existing Copenhaver Park trail and consider extending the trail to a loop around the site or field.
    - Preserve and improve the pedestrian link from Copenhaver Dr. to the school site, and consider providing a similar connection to Orchard Brook Dr.
    - Existing bike racks do not meet county standards. Replace the existing racks with at least 12 inverted u style racks near the main entrance to the school.
- Plant large canopy trees along pedestrian paths and try to preserve existing trees.
- Any proposed impact on Montgomery Park's property will require review through the Concept Review process.
- Provide drainage improvements and stormwater runoff reductions on MCPS property to protect downstream aquatic resources.
- Consider including a gym with a full-sized basketball court (without locker rooms) in the program that can accommodate students in a larger elementary school and be made available to the community after school hours.
- Consider the addition of solar panels on roofs to support the county to achieve its *Climate Action Plan* goals through a net zero energy school design.

Damascus ES, Major Capital Project (TBD):

10201 Bethesda Church Rd, Damascus 20872

- If a new building is built, orient it to the corner of Ridge Rd and Bethesda Church Rd, so that it has a face fronting Ridge Rd.
    - Parking and fields should be placed to the west of the building, away from Ridge Rd.
    - Driveway cuts should be on Bethesda Church Rd.
- Improve the safety and accessibility of the site for pedestrians and bikes.
    - Provide a crosswalk from Schoolyard Ct across Bethesda Church Rd.
    - Ramp driveways up to sidewalk elevations, where crossing, instead of ramping sidewalks down to the street elevations.
    - Align pedestrian paths and connect sidewalks to provide accessibility to the new townhouse development to the north.
    - Provide large canopy street trees along both roadways.
    - Per the Bicycle Master Plan and the Complete Streets Design Guide, provide a 10-foot-wide sidepath with a minimum 6-foot-wide street buffer on the north side of Bethesda Church Road.
    - Existing bike racks do not meet county standards. Replace the existing racks with at least 36 inverted u style racks near the main entrance to the school.

- Consider including a gym with a full-sized basketball court in the program that can be made available to the community after school hours.
- Consider the addition of solar panels on roofs to support the county achieve its *Climate Action Plan* goals through a net zero energy school design.

Whetstone ES, Major Capital Project (TBD):

19201 Thomas Farm Rd, Gaithersburg 20879

- If a new building is built, place it on the corner of Thomas Farm Rd and Centerway Rd, towards the street edges.
    - Pedestrian paths should be provided along the street where the front of the building will be facing.
    - Parking should be tucked away towards the side of Thomas Farm Rd and Keymar Way.
    - Provide large canopy trees along driveways and roadways to buffer pedestrians and to mitigate heat island effects.
- Add 16 inverted u style racks near the main entrance to the school.
- Any proposed impact on Montgomery Park's property will require review through the Concept Review process.
- Create a stronger pedestrian connection between the park and school sites.
- Provide drainage improvements and stormwater runoff reductions on MCPS property to protect downstream aquatic resources.
- Investigate existing drainage from MCPS property onto parkland and restore draining on both sites.
- Consider including a gym with a full-sized basketball court in the program that can be made available to the community after school hours.
- Consider the addition of solar panels on roofs to support the county achieve its Climate Action Plan goals through a net zero energy school design.

Priority List for Installing Bicycle Parking Spaces at Schools

- The Bicycle Master Plan Biennial Monitoring Report, 2021-2022 recommends prioritizing the installation of bicycle parking at the schools identified in the table below:

Table 1: Highest Priority Schools for Bicycle Parking Upgrades with Estimated Costs

School Name	School Type	Title I/Focus or High FARMS Rate	Shortage of Adequate Bicycle Parking Spaces	Estimated Cost
Dr. Ronald A. McNair	ES	N	32	$3,000
Glenallen	ES	Y	38	$18,000
Bells Mills	ES	N	32	$11,000
Poolesville	ES	N	28	$12,000
Sligo Creek	ES	N	34	$20,000

Olney	ES	N	32	$8,000
Thomas W. Pyle	MS	N	76	$24,000
Silver Spring Int'l	MS	Y	54	$28,000
North Bethesda	MS	N	62	$23,000
Rosa M. Parks	MS	N	48	$17,000
Westland	MS	N	54	$13,000
Bethesda-Chevy Chase	HS	N	124	$54,000
Quince Orchard	HS	N	90	$49,000
Walt Whitman	HS	N	112	$26,000
Walter Johnson	HS	N	114	$40,000
Total			**930**	**$346,000**

- Ten Title I/Focus or schools with high FARMS rates should be considered for priority funding over the next six years, including the schools identified in Table 2:

Table 2: Priority Title I/Focus or Schools with High FARMS Rates

School Name	School Type	Title I/Focus or High FARMS Rate	Shortage of Adequate Bicycle Parking Spaces	Estimated Cost
Rolling Terrace	ES	Y	36	$16,000
Stedwick	ES	Y	36	$22,000
South Lake	ES	Y	34	$20,000
Arcola	ES	Y	32	$17,000
Roberto W. Clemente	MS	Y	60	$26,000
Forest Oak	MS	Y	48	$23,000
Eastern	MS	Y	50	$21,000
White Oak	MS	Y	50	$21,000
Sligo	MS	Y	48	$5,000
Gaithersburg	HS	Y	124	$60,000
Total		**N/A**	**518**	**$231,000**

Previously Transmitted Comments Applicable to Projects in the Early Pre-Construction Stage

Burtonsville ES, New Location & Facility (2026):

Northeast Consortium ES #17 site, Saddle Creek Dr

- Planning fully supports the relocation of Burtonsville ES.
    - The current site is located behind auto-oriented commercial strip malls with no adjacency to residential properties.
    - The new site being proposed for the relocation is adjacent to residential neighborhoods and accessible by walking/biking.

    - It was dedicated to MCPS as result of a recommendation from the 1997 Fairland Master Plan.
- At the new site, the building should be fronting the street as much as possible, with parking to the side or rear.
- The site design should encourage walking and biking.
- The triangular part of the lot can be considered for use as fields and active recreation.

Highland View ES, Addition (2027):

9010 Providence Ave, Silver Spring

- The Providence Avenue driveway should be a prominent entry to the school.
- The current location for portables would be the preferred site for an addition.
- The existing pathways that link the school to adjacent neighborhoods should be maintained or even expanded to more areas of the neighborhood.
- The two street entrances that are currently separated by a median should be connected to each other to create a clear auto, bike, and pedestrian roadway through the site. Expanded parking could be located in front of the school behind a line of street trees adjacent to this newly connected driveway. This would help dissipate traffic to several neighborhood streets and reduce congestion along single streets.

Damascus HS, Major Capital Project (2027):

25921 Ridge Rd, Damascus

- The new building, or addition, should be built towards the corner of Ridge Road and Bethesda Church Road so that the school defines the corner and is an integral part of the adjacent neighborhoods and mixed-use development.
    - Buildings facing streets should have windows that help activate the street, create a relationship between pedestrians and building inhabitants, and help to foster safety through eyes on the street.
    - The parking lot could be placed to the south of the building, allowing the school to front onto Ridge Road with a drop off aisle and direct relationship to the street and sidewalk.
    - If the school is not rebuilt/expanded towards the northern end of the site along Bethesda Church Road, then the hill adjacent to the playfields should feature trees rather than just manicured grass. This would help reduce storm water runoff, reduce heat island effects, and help expand portions of the forested area associated with Magruder Branch.
- The sidewalk on the school side of Ridge Road should be created as a shared use path 10 feet wide with a minimum 6 ft buffer from traffic - dense spacing of street trees can protect pedestrians and bicyclists from traveling cars.
- It seems there is very little outdoor space/plazas/courtyards for students. Some exterior space should be created for student and faculty use.
- Consider facilitating fields of solar panels on the roof.

Eastern MS, Major Capital Project (2028):

300 University Blvd E, Silver Spring

- The 2018 *Bicycle Master Plan* recommends a side path along the East University frontage. Minimum 10ft wide, with an 8 ft landscaped buffer from traffic, given that University Blvd is a six-lane road.
- If the building were to be replaced, it should be reconstructed orthogonally to the East Franklin Avenue and University Boulevard frontages and located closer to the corner, providing a main entrance along Franklin that can be seen and easily accessed from the adjacent sidewalk network.
    - Parking can be located to the eastern side of the building between the school and playfields. Additional playfields could be expanded towards the southern side of the school.
- The relationship between the school and the pedestrian/bike network needs to be improved.
    - Prominent tree-lined sidewalks should be in front of the school along both University Boulevard and Franklin Avenue, which are highly used streets, to provide buffer to pedestrians and bikers.
- Planning staff supports the separation between buses and car drop-off, but not to the detriment of pushing the building footprint farther into the site. If the building were to be replaced, the vehicular access drive that currently connects the two separate driveways should be removed to allow the new building footprint to occupy that space.
- There are three curb cuts on Franklin Avenue. In compliance with Vision Zero and access management best practices, staff recommends consolidating to a maximum of one curb cut on each frontage, especially since this is a median-divided boulevard.
- Consider adding a curbside parking lane along East Franklin Avenue that allows for bus drop off and loading during school days and provides car parking at other times. Buses could then turn around the central median to return to University Blvd.
- Consider saving some of the interior or fronting court trees for a new courtyard or open space locations within a new school.

Magruder HS, Major Capital Project (2029):

5939 Muncaster Mill Rd, Derwood

- The main entrance of the school should face the street, not the parking lot. This front should have a primary entry and possibly a plaza for civic gatherings, hang out for students, and public art or memorials.
    - Consider removing the front drop-off lane to create a front civic plaza with access to a wide sidewalk along Muncaster Mill Road.
    - If the front drop-off lane were to remain, it should be parallel parking only – angled front-in parking facing the street diminishes the civic character of the school and creates a ‘retail strip’ type character.
- Consider creating a driveway or narrow street from the traffic circle on Heartwood Drive directly east of the school to the west along the edge of the school site to Muncaster Mill Road. This new drive/road could link the adjacent residential neighborhood to the school, reduce

curb cuts along Muncaster Mill Road and help focus parking and bus loading along the school's southern side, allowing expansion of the school to the north.

    - Consider having car pick-up at one side of the school and bus drop off and pick-up along the eastern curb of Muncaster Mill Road. Buses could park to wait for students in a toe to tail parking configuration to maintain safety.

- The building currently fronts onto Muncaster Mill Road with sidewalks extending north and south of the school, but there is no sidewalk in front of the school. There should be a shared use path along the edge of Muncaster Mill Road 10 feet wide with a minimum 6 feet buffer from traffic, with a planting strip that is lined with street trees. Street trees should also be planted adjacent to the curbs at the existing sidewalks north and south of the school.
    - The County Executive is recommending funds in the 6-year CIP for a bikeway on Bowie Mill Road and part of Muncaster Mill Road, so adding a sidepath in front of the school would leverage the investments in those bikeways.
- It seems there is very little outdoor space/plazas/courtyards for students. Some exterior space should be created for student and faculty use.
- Consider facilitating fields of solar panels on the roof.

Piney Branch ES, Major Capital Project (TBD):

7510 Maple Ave, Silver Spring

- The 2018 *Bicycle Master Plan* recommends one-way separated bike lanes along the Maple Avenue frontage.
- Maintain the building's proximity to Maple Avenue and create a more pleasant and inviting park/plaza character along the street. Grant Avenue should be reconfigured to provide a building elevation that frames the street across from the Takoma Park Town Hall, Library, and Community Center rather than just providing service docks and garbage cans.
    - Consider removing the parking lot in front of the school. Parking could be located on the east side of the site and accessed near Lee Avenue.
    - If a new building or addition were to be built, it should be positioned at the west of the current building's location to frame the corner of Grant and Maple Avenues. It could move closer to Maple Avenue to allow for additional outdoor space to the north of the building.
- Enhance pedestrian access from the sidewalk network to the school entrance. Planning Staff's understanding is that most students arrive at this school by walking or biking.
    - The sidewalk should be either separated from the street curb with a planting strip, or tree wells can be provided within the wide sidewalk. Street trees should be planted along the street curb in front of the school to buffer pedestrians and school bikers.
- Enhance the building's relationship with the park behind the school, including potentially rooftop recreation, and continue to take advantage of the grade change between Maple Avenue and the park.
- Consider allowing buses to use the parallel parking area along Maple Avenue for pick-up and drop-off. It could be used by area residents in non-school hours. If a new school is built,

consider locating car drop off along Grant Avenue or within the parking lot to the east of the school.

- Consider sharing use of facilities with the adjacent community center.
    - Explore opportunities to keep a pool as an amenity to the students and community.
    - If the school building were to be moved closer to Maple Street, play courts could be located to the north of the building and shared by the community center in off-school hours.
    - Consider working with the City of Takoma Park, Montgomery County Parks and Montgomery County Department of Recreation to create a larger junior high sized gym.

General Comments Regarding School Site Design

- Site design should promote schools as safe, accessible, civic public buildings by:
    - Emphasizing street presence by moving buildings forward to the street edge.
        - All schools should be designed to support both the school and neighborhood equally, with a strong civic presence along the public realm of the street, and to support safe bicycle and pedestrian access.
    - Deemphasizing vehicular circulation by narrowing drive aisles and placing bus circulation away from school fronts.
        - Consider options to reappropriate road right-of-way (ROW) for bus drop off locations, similar to what is done for high quality transit (bus lanes, bus shelters). This would negate or reduce the need for on-site bus circulation and parking.
        - Look into using the parallel parking area on street frontages for bus drop off and pick up. This is being done throughout the country and would save a significant amount of impervious paving (typically asphalt) on the school sites. There should be agreements between the Montgomery County Department of Transportation and MCPS to use this parallel parking area for bus use during school hours.
- Improve neighborhood bike and pedestrian accessibility and promote *Safe Routes to School* goals by:
    - Designing and constructing bikeways and walkways recommended in master plans and the *Complete Streets Design Guide* that are along the building frontage, and dedicating right-of-way to do so where required.
        - The cost required to design and construct facilities should be integrated into the budget.
    - Improving existing sidewalks and bike paths along school frontage and extending beyond school property into neighborhoods.
    - Providing additional bike and pedestrian access points to school grounds to provide cross-connectivity.

    - Providing county-approved bike racks in line with recommendations in the Bicycle Master Plan Biennial Monitoring Report, 2021-2022, pages 76-81. Bike racks should be provided at a rate of 1 per 20 programmed capacity, using inverted-u style racks.
    - Minimizing the number of curb cuts on roads.
- All new schools and school additions should be designed to help the county achieve zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 – a current Council and Executive goal for the county.
    - Attempt to make net zero energy schools through the addition of solar panels, geothermal heating and cooling, gray water reuse, engineered mass wood construction, EnergyStar plumbing and electrical fixtures, and/or natural daylighting, etc.