



March 11, 2005

MEMORANDUM – MANDATORY REFERRAL

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: John A. Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division *JAC*

FROM: Kristin O'Connor for the Department of Park and Planning *KO*
(301) 495-2172

SUBJECT: Mandatory Referral No. 05202-MCPS-1; Eight Classroom and Gymnasium Addition for Farmland Elementary School, 7000 Old Gate Road, North Bethesda, R-90 Zone, 1992 North Bethesda-Garrett Park Master Plan

FILING DATE: February 14, 2005

RECOMMENDATION: Approval to transmit the following comments to Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS):

1. Limit the mandatory referral for this proposed classroom addition to:
 - a. Meet current MCPS' guidelines by adding eight permanent classrooms, while removing all temporary learning cottages.
 - b. Add a separate gymnasium, removing that use from the existing multi-purpose room.
 - c. Relocate the parents' drop-off and pick-up area to a separate location with a separate access point from Old Gate Road.
2. Approval by the M-NCPPC of the final Tree Save Plan prior to issuance of sediment and erosion control permits.
3. Designate MCPS as responsible for grass and trash maintenance around the learning cottages relocated on park property.
4. Provide cut-off fixtures along the gymnasium and classroom addition to minimize light that intrudes into the front yards of adjacent neighbors.

5. Approval of a proper drainage system to protect the natural swale by the M-NCPPC Park Planning and Development Division prior to the issuance of the Park Construction Permit. MCPS must maintain the proposed drainage system until the learning cottages are removed from the park property.
6. Keep the ball fields in use during the year of construction by providing safety measures such as a fence or 10' wide warning track (consisting of 3" of compacted bluestone) to prevent ball players from running into the learning cottages while chasing foul balls. If a fence is installed, it must be located 15 feet away from the playing area. MCPS will be responsible for installing, maintaining and removing the fence and or track at the completion of the addition.
7. The M-NCPPC will not be liable for any kind of damage to the learning cottages and for any kind of harm to the school students by allowing the portables on the park property. MCPS is responsible for restoration of the park property after the portables are removed.
8. Prohibit the storage of materials or equipment on park property without prior approval from the Park Manager or Inspector.
9. Include sustainable design features (including LEED standards) in the plans in accordance with MCPS policies and design guidelines.
10. Include comments from the Mandatory Referral in the park construction permit.

THE PROPOSAL

The County Council approved an addition at Farmland Elementary prior to a full modernization scheduled for 2011. The first phase will add eight classrooms, support spaces, a renovated administrative suite, and a gymnasium. In FY2005, planning funds were approved for a gymnasium. The scheduled completion of the classroom addition will occur in the 2006-2007 school year. The future modernization project was approved to meet the latest school codes, program requirements, and enrollment projections.

There are nine learning cottages currently on the site. During the year of construction, it is intended that the school remain open. Nine cottages will be in use, of which, 6 (six) will be relocated from the east side of the school (and out of the future building area) and onto park property to the rear of the school.

The current project consists of a two-story, eight classroom addition and renovations to the existing elementary school. The new spaces will include classrooms, a computer laboratory, staff offices, new administrative offices, a conference room and a modified health suite. A gymnasium and support spaces (from a different funding source) has also been approved and funded and added to the project.

On the first floor, the proposed design includes four classrooms, one computer room, an instrumental music room, a core of student and faculty toilet rooms, and mechanical/electrical rooms. A lobby, which can be secured from the academic building,

will serve as the main entry to a new gymnasium. A coach's office and storage rooms are provided to support the gymnasium. Classrooms will be located on either side of a central corridor. The gymnasium is an appendage located on the front of the school where it is easily accessed from parking and play areas. An existing non-compliant stairway will be demolished and replaced with a new stairway. A second stairway will be provided at the opposite end of the new building. The design of the second floor mirrors the first floor. A suite of staff offices is provided in the existing administrative suite that includes: a workroom, conference room, and an assistant principal's office. The health suite will be redesigned per the Maryland State Department of Education guidelines. A new entry into the redesigned health suite will allow for another entrance into the existing building.

Finally, one additional access point off Old Gate Road for parent drop-off and pick-up is proposed in this first phase of the modernization. A new stormwater management infiltration trench will be constructed to treat the runoff from the addition and parent drop off loop. A small sand filter will also be constructed to treat the runoff from the basketball courts.

THE SITE

Farmland Elementary School is located in the Walter Johnson cluster, in the Montrose Woods subdivision. The school is bordered to the north by Old Gate Road, Farmland Drive on the east, and the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) ball fields border the school to the south. Along the western boundary are some single-family homes (3 homes border the school's property line) on Hitching Post Lane.

The existing two-story school was built in 1963. The school site is located on 4.83 acres and adjacent to the M-NCPCC local park. Farmland Drive Local Park, located behind the school on 6.7 acres, consists of two softball fields and one soccer overlay field. The M-NCPCC property line runs along the southern edge of the school's property.

There are three curb cuts that provide vehicle access to and from the school. The western-most driveway is an entrance and exit to the loading dock. This driveway also provides M-NCPCC with access to the site for mowing and field maintenance. There are existing parking spaces for staff in this area. The middle driveway is an entrance for staff, parents, visitors and buses. The eastern most curb cut is the exit for the middle entrance. This project will add an on site parent drop off between the western-most exit and Farmland Drive so that parents and buses are separated. The presence of large trees restricts how much of the land can be developed, thus no additional parking will be created.

PARK IMPACTS

During the school construction project duration, ballfield use at Farmland Drive Local Park should not be affected. The relocated cottages will encroach both fields but will include a safety feature (fence or warning track). The relocated learning cottages may have impact on the natural swale so Park Development seeks prior approval of a proper

drainage system before issuing the Park Construction Permit. Throughout the construction, MCPS will maintain the proposed drainage system until the learning cottages are removed from the park property. MCPS will also be responsible for mowing and trash maintenance around all learning cottages relocated on park property. Mowing is required in the area at least once every two weeks or more if weeds grow from the drainage swale. The Commission's crews will continue to mow the ballfields and the soccer overlay.

Park staff visited Farmland Elementary School to look at the site for the addition to the school and to assess potential impact on the adjacent park. For safety reasons, a warning track and/or fencing is proposed along the ballfield closest to the four relocated learning cottages.

ANALYSIS

Master Plan

The subject site is located in the North Bethesda/Garrett Park Master Plan area. While not specifically addressing the addition or modernization of Farmland Elementary, the Master Plan does acknowledge, however, that "public schools are an essential component of community life and should be an integral part of community structure" (p. 239). An objective of the Plan is to "provide for services and facilities that meet the present and future needs of the community" (p. 227).

The Plan also recognizes that "public parkland and recreational facilities play an important role in the well-being of a community" (p. 229). The Master Plan confirms that Farmland Drive Local Park provides a softball field, a baseball field, and soccer overlay field. It is important to keep the park in operation during the year of construction as it serves many different users: the School, Department of Recreation, and local residents. The Master Plan recommends keeping all the fields in safe, playable condition (p. 227). The staff finds the proposal in keeping with the intent of the Plan for this area.

The proposed school classroom addition meets the setbacks, the height limits, and the coverage of the R-90 zone.

TRANSPORTATION

Pedestrian Circulation

Sidewalks exist along Farmland Drive, Old Gate Road, along the bus loop, and between the bus loop and the school entrance. As part of the school's modification, sidewalk connections are proposed between the proposed separate parents' drop-off and pick-up area and the school entrance.

Vehicular Circulation and Parking

The vehicular circulation and parking for the elementary school are as follows:

1. School buses will continue to enter the semi-circular driveway and drop-off and pick-up students in front of the school entrance.
2. The proposed modification relocates the parents' drop-off and pick-up area from its existing location to a separate area with a separate access point from Old Gate Road.
3. The proposed modification would not change the number of parking spaces that are currently available on the elementary school site.

APF/Local Area Transportation Review

The Local Area Transportation Review (LATR) component of the APF review for the school modification was based on adding permanent standard-sized classrooms that replace an equal number of temporary learning cottages. With no net increase in classrooms, the subject modification would not generate any additional peak-hour trips during the weekday morning peak period (7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.) and evening peak period (4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.). Thus, a traffic study would not be required to satisfy LATR.

Under the current *FY 2005 Annual Growth Policy*, Policy Area Transportation Review is no longer included in the APF test (or no longer reviewing the remaining transportation staging ceilings in the North Bethesda Policy Area).

ENVIRONMENT

Forest Conservation

A Forest Conservation Plan exemption was issued for this site. It is a modification of existing developed property and no more than 5,000 square feet of forest will be cleared. In addition, the proposal does not clear forest within a stream valley buffer or on property subject to SPA WQP requirements. The proposal requires no new subdivision plan. There are four specimen trees and 10 significant trees on site. Two significant trees will be removed as a result of construction. A Tree Save Plan has been submitted as part of the forest conservation requirement. The Tree Save Plan must be approved prior to issuance of sediment and erosion control permits.

Environmental Guidelines

There are no forests, wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, erodible soils, or other environmental encumbrances on this site.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater management concept and sediment/erosion control plans shall be submitted to the Department of Permitting Services. Full water quality and quantity control shall be expected to protect the integrity of the Old Farm Branch subwatershed in the Cabin John watershed.

Environmental Design

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) submitted to the County Council a strategic plan entitled Green Schools Focus as required by the County Environmental Policy. MCPS pledged, in the strategic plan, to "Improve system design through introducing latest high performance green building technologies (LEED) to improve sustainability and performance of buildings and reduce operating costs." MCPS will not apply for LEED certification in this project, but will incorporate at a minimum features and materials to enhance energy efficiency, indoor air quality, and on-site stormwater management in the new building.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Luxmanor Citizens Association, Tilden Woods Citizens Association, Old Hickory Woods Citizens Association, and West Montgomery County Citizens Association were notified of the March 17, 2005, hearing by Planning Board staff. To date, there have not been any concerns expressed by the surrounding communities regarding this project.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information provided by the applicant and the analysis in this report, staff concludes that the proposed project would provide Farmland Elementary School with a much-needed classroom and gymnasium addition and renovation. Staff attended many meetings with the school staff, MCPS, PTA members, local residents, and the M-NCPPC Park Manager, Park Construction Section Manager, Park staff, and Park Risk Assessment staff. All parties worked to resolve the environmental, recreational, and park impacts of the proposed project.

Attachments:

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. Existing Site Plan
- C. Proposed Site Plan
- D. Existing First Floor Plan
- E. Proposed First Floor Plan
- F. Existing Second Floor Plan
- G. Proposed Second Floor Plan
- H. Existing Elevations
- I. Proposed Elevations
- J. Memorandum from Transportation Planning
- K. Memorandum from Environmental Planning
- L. Memorandum from Park, Planning and Development