

South Lake Elementary School, Mandatory Referral, MR 2020027

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Completed: 7/16/2020

Description

Mandatory Referral for the construction of a new interim parking lot and four portable classrooms.

Location: 18201 Contour Road.

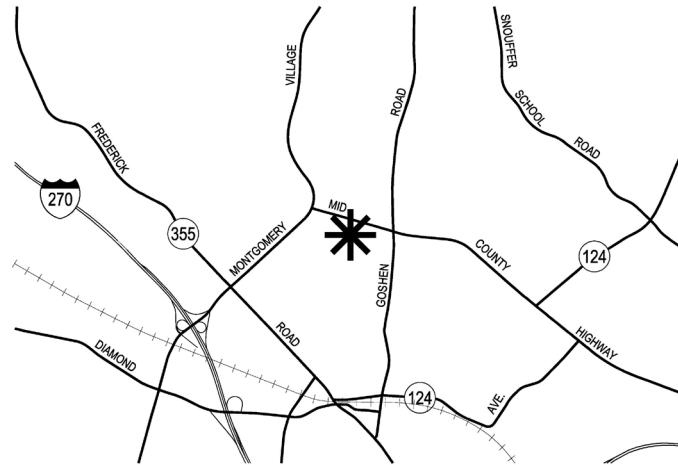
Zone: R-200/Montgomery Village Overlay Zone.

Master Plan: 2016 *Montgomery Village Master Plan*.

Size: 10.20 acres.

Application Accepted: May 27, 2020.

Applicant: Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS).



Summary

- Staff recommends approval to transmit comments to MCPS and the Montgomery County Board of Education.
- The school is located within the Watkins Mill Cluster and the proposed parking lot is an interim feature. A future renovation of the elementary school will address current enrollment deficits.
- Staff recommends that the future new elementary school minimize access points, up to three, and achieve several design principles and consistency with the county's Vision Zero policy.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval with the following comments to be transmitted to MCPS and the Board of Education:

- The Applicant must receive a Stormwater Concept Plan approval from the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (MCDPS).
- The Applicant should consider a narrower new parking area accessed from the parent drop off area to minimize curb cuts and asphalt in front of the school site.
- The future new South Lake Elementary School, which is anticipated before September 2023, should incorporate the following elements:
 - Embrace Vision Zero principles and improve physical health through the encouragement of walking or biking to school in a safe and attractive way.
 - Integrate sustainable site and building design principles and support the county's Climate Change Goals and the Forest Conservation Law.
 - Minimize land dedicated to circulation of cars and buses so it can be used for programming and activities for students as well as the surrounding communities.

INTRODUCTION

This report consists of Planning staff review of the Mandatory Referral for the construction of a new parking area at South Lake Elementary School in Gaithersburg. The construction of this parking area is required to address student enrollment growth at the school, which has required more portable classrooms in the existing parking area. The Planning Board action on a Mandatory Referral is advisory.

Site Description

South Lake Elementary School is located at 18201 Contour Road in Gaithersburg. The 10.20-acre property is located north of Montgomery Village Plaza, which is a shopping center, and is adjacent to several multifamily residential developments to the immediate north, east and west, including the Verandah apartments. Open space and play areas are located east of the school building. All vehicular access, including the bus and parent drop-off areas, are from Contour Road.



Figure 1: Site and Vicinity

Project Description

MCPS proposes to construct a 49-space parking lot on the southern portion of the existing property and to install four new portable classrooms on a segment of the existing parking lot to address enrollment issues. The portable classrooms will impact approximately 25 parking spaces. The proposed temporary parking area will provide parking for school staff only, and will be built with an intermediate asphalt material. The proposed parking area is not designed for multiple uses, such as active recreation, as it is an interim use. A renovation for the existing school has been approved in MCPS's FY21-26 Capital Improvements Program (CIP). The future school renovation is anticipated to be completed by September 2023.



Figure 2: Existing school with new portable classrooms and parking area shown in gray

ANALYSIS

Development Standards

The South Lake Elementary School property is in the R-200 Zone as well as the Montgomery Village Overlay Zone. Public schools, as a publicly owned or publicly operated use, are permitted uses in the zone. The proposed parking is consistent with the development standards of the zone.

Master Plan Conformance

South Lake Elementary School is within the Montgomery Village Master Plan area. The 2016 *Montgomery Village Master Plan* states that “enrollment at South Lake Elementary School is projected to exceed the school’s capacity” (p.32). The Master Plan also notes that enrollment increases in the Watkins Mill Cluster requires that “a variety of strategies should be considered to accommodate additional students resulting from the Plan” (p.31). Currently, South Lake has more than 200 students above its current capacity. The Project proposes to resolve enrollment growth and capacity with the portable classrooms and the temporary parking area as an interim measure until the completion of the school renovation. The Proposal is consistent with the Master Plan recommendations.

TRANSPORTATION

Local Area Transportation Review

The scope of this proposal did not require the submission of a Local Area Transportation Review (LATR) study.

Access

Currently, there are three vehicular access points from Contour Road to the property, including a bus loop and a parent drop-off area. The proposed new parking area will establish another access point along the school’s frontage, on Contour Road. The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) expressed concern that this new curb cut will create additional pedestrian conflicts and is also in close proximity to Tunstall Drive. Planning staff also expressed a similar concern but acknowledges that MCPS will begin renovation of this property within 24 months and the number of access points will be addressed with the renovation. While four vehicular access points may be acceptable as an interim condition to alleviate the capacity issues, Planning staff recommends that MCPS minimize access points for the school renovation to prioritize the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists and reduce conflicts between pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles. Contour Road is classified as a Business District Street (B-4) in the Master Plan with a 70-foot right-of-way. There are existing sidewalks on both sides of the street.

Vehicular and Pedestrian Circulation

The existing bus entrance and exit are located along Contour Road. An existing parent drop-off area is located adjacent to the current bus loop. The existing staff parking lot is in the northwestern area of the property (Figure 2). A new vehicular access point will be created for the proposed parking area. Although the proposed parking area is temporary, staff is concerned about the new curb cut and its relative proximity to Tunstall Drive. Staff recommends that MCPS minimize access points, with a maximum of three access points from Contour Road for the school renovation.

Existing sidewalks provide access throughout the property, including to the open play area and to the existing asphalt play area. A new sidewalk is proposed to link the proposed parking area, which is adjacent to the existing playground.

Parking

The proposed parking improvements will increase the number of parking spaces from 75 to 124, but approximately 25 spaces will be encumbered with four new portable classrooms. Staff recommends reducing the amount of interim parking spaces to the highest degree possible. In addition, MCPS should consider accessing the new parking area from the existing parent drop-off area, even though the property grade is challenging.

As part of the future renovation, MCPS should explore, in consultation with MCDOT, allowing on-street parking along the school's frontage for daily parking needs and allowing these on-street spaces to be used by the public. The future renovation should maximize parking alternatives, rather than utilizing open space for parking, as well as explore alternative uses for surface parking areas during off-peak hours.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Guidelines

Staff approved a Natural Resource Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation (NRI/FSD #42020196E) on April 27, 2020. There are no streams or stream buffers, wetlands or wetland buffers, 100-year floodplains, known habitats of rare, threatened and endangered species, historic resources, or erodible soils on the site. There are steep slopes on the property. The proposed project complies with the Environmental Guidelines.

Forest Conservation

This proposal is exempt from the Forest Conservation Law.

Stormwater Management

A micro-bioretenion area is proposed immediately east of the proposed parking area. As of this report's date, the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (MCDPS) has not approved a Stormwater Management Concept Plan for the project.

FUTURE SCHOOL

A new South Lake Elementary School will be built by September 2023 to accommodate the existing growth in student enrollment. Staff recommends that MCPS incorporate the following design principles for the new school.

- *The new design should embrace Vision Zero principles and improve physical health through the encouragement of walking or biking to school in a safe and attractive way.*
 - Provide clear, well-designed, uninterrupted sidewalks and pathways to link the surrounding neighborhood to the school's main entrance.
 - Minimize the number of curb cuts at streets and sidewalks to reduce pedestrian and bike conflicts with cars.

- Maximize street trees, planter strips, on-street parking and street furnishings between auto travel lanes and sidewalks and plazas to increase pedestrian safety and comfort.
- *School design should exemplify sustainable site and building design principles and support the county's Climate Change Goals and the Forest Conservation Law.*
 - Maximize tree planting to help mitigate heat island effects, cool buildings, minimize stormwater runoff, and remove greenhouse gases.
- *Minimize land dedicated to the circulation of cars and buses so it can be used for programming and activities for students as well as the surrounding communities.*
 - Design parking lots and driveways to provide play areas and courts for students and festival venues during off-peak hours.
- *Schools should be civic beacons within the neighborhoods and communities they serve.*
 - The new school should establish a civic public space that can be used for public events, festivals and celebrations for the school as well as the surrounding communities.
 - Parking lots, although necessary, diminish the visual and civic character of a place and they should be located to the sides or behind the school building where they are generally out of sight from a fronting street, park or plaza.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Planning Department notified local civic and homeowners associations, and other interested parties, of this proposal. As of the date of this report, staff has received no correspondence on this proposal.

CONCLUSION

Staff recommends approval of this Mandatory Referral with the comments noted at the beginning of this memorandum.