
Stonegate Elementary School, Mandatory Referral, MR2021035

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Description

Request to build new elementary school at 14801 Notley Road.

Location: 15 feet east of intersection Fieldstone Road in Silver Spring, MD

Acreage: 10.26 acres

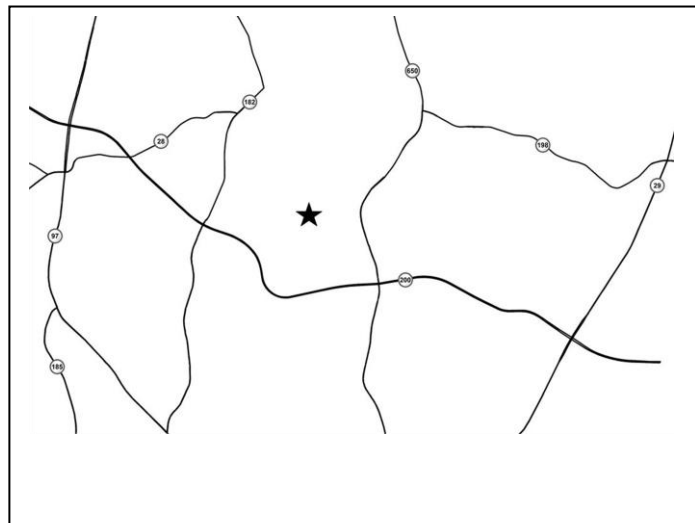
Zone: R-200

Master Plan: 1997 Cloverly Master Plan

Applicant: Montgomery County Public Schools

Accepted Date: July 7, 2021

Review Basis: 20-301 et seq. of the Land Use Article, Mandatory Referral



Summary

- Staff recommends **Denial** of the Mandatory Referral MR2021035
 - Stonegate Elementary School is the primary civic institution in this neighborhood. The layout, as designed, makes the parking lots, drop-off and pickup areas, and bus loops the prominent features from the public right of way, Notley Road. However, Master Plan recommendations and Vision Zero require the public/civic institutional structures to activate and front onto the public realm, while providing safe and adequate pedestrian and rolling options for all residents.
 - The Application does not support the vision of the 1997 *Cloverly Master Plan*.
- There are two items for Planning Board review for this project: The Preliminary Forest Conservation Plan and the Mandatory Referral.
- This memorandum covers Staff review and recommendations for the Mandatory Referral. The review and recommendations for the Preliminary Forest Conservation Plan are covered in a separate memorandum.

Staff recommends transmitting the recommendation of **Denial** to the Montgomery County Public Schools and the Montgomery County Board of Education:

Parking should never be the dominant feature of our public/civic schools.

As a primary civic building within the Stonegate Neighborhood, this building should be iconic and the front should be fronting onto open spaces, civic plazas facing onto a street connecting to the primary entry of the school. The urban design of the Site should consider the building orientation, parking location, relationship to the streets, relationship to adjacent residential communities, and to the main neighborhood street. Parking should be out of the way and to the side or rear of the building. All in all, this building should be defining streets, supporting the public realm, framing open spaces and a very important iconic element of the greater community. The current design eliminates any sense of community building and community framing, and does not support the Master Plan objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Site Description

The Stonegate Elementary School site consists of 10.26 acres, Parcels C and D (identified in Deeds recorded at B. 3612 P. 689 and B. 4022 P. 421) respectively, located at 14811 Notley Road, Silver Spring ("Site") and zoned R-200. The Site is bounded to the north and south by residential development, to the west by Notley Road, and to the east by Montgomery Park property. A stream valley buffer for Rolling Stone Tributary (a tributary of Northwest Branch) exists on the south and east sides of the site. There is 0.92 acres of forest onsite along the east and southeast portions of the Site. Additionally, individual trees ring the existing school use. The Site is within the boundaries of the 1997 *Cloverly Master Plan*.

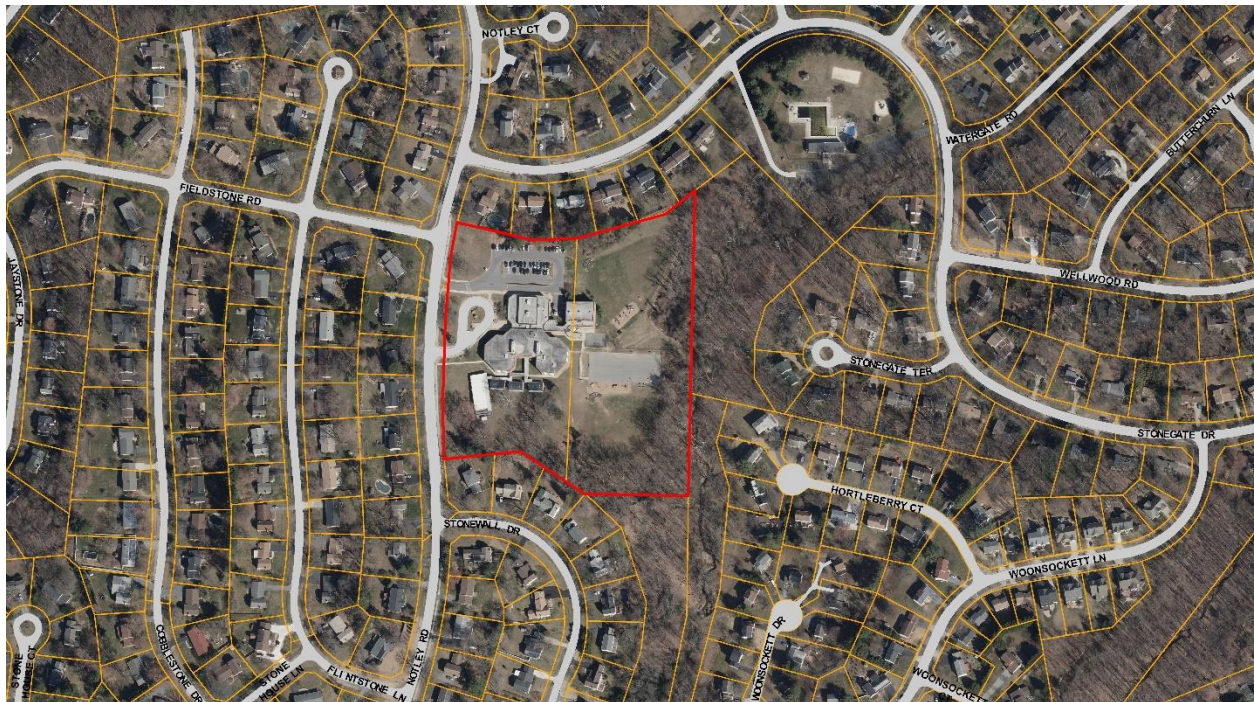


Figure 1: Aerial Photograph of Vicinity

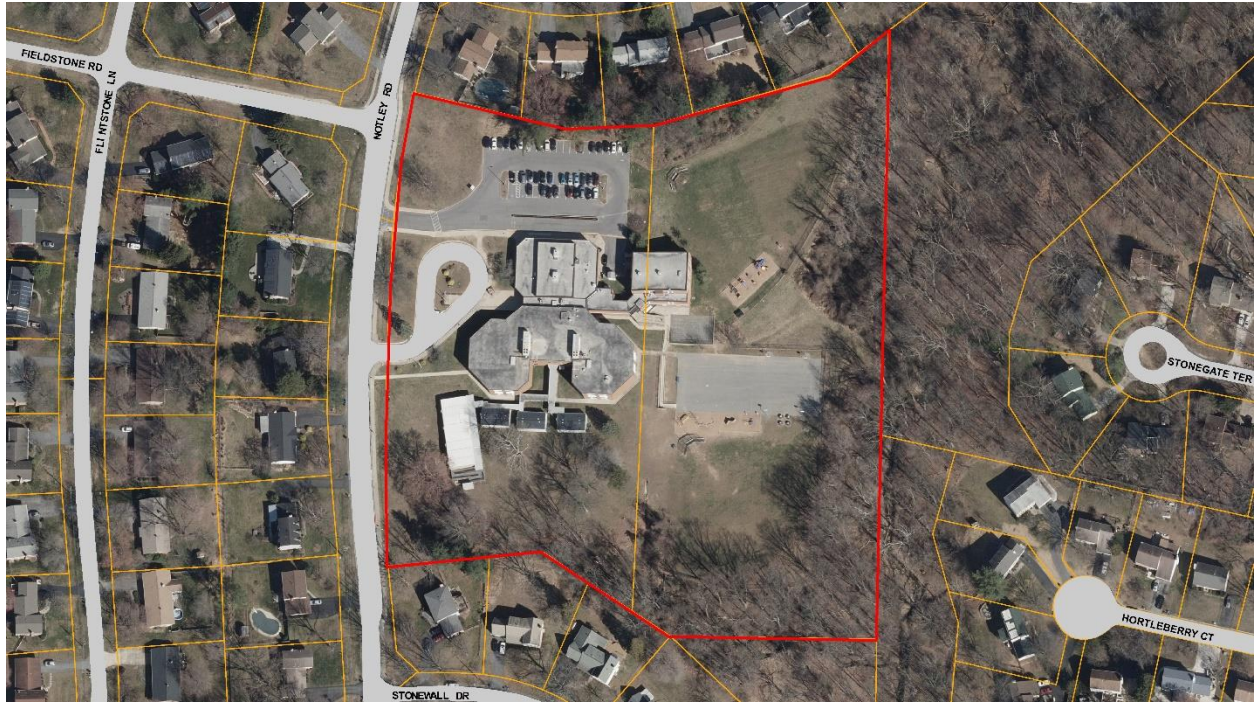


Figure 2: Aerial Photograph of the Site

Project Description

Montgomery County Public Schools (“Applicant”) is proposing to raze the existing school and replace with a newly constructed Stonegate Elementary School. The project is proposed to be completed in July of 2023. The school will provide program spaces for Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Grades 1 through 5 when completed.

The proposed site plan situates the new building near the northern center of the Site, the parking, bus loop and student drop-off loop are located on the western side of the Site along Notley Road, and the ballfields and play areas are located on the southeastern portion of the site.

The existing school, temporary classrooms, play areas and associated infrastructure are planned to be removed and replaced by a new building, play areas and associated infrastructure. The foundation of the existing gymnasium wing will remain and continue to be used for the new building. The new 3 story building includes approximately 84,130 square feet of gross floor area. The existing parking lot situated to the side of the property is proposed to be relocated along the frontage of Notley Road.

The new school will increase the program capacity of the school and will provide an enhanced learning environment for the students.

The plans include two drop off and parking loops that connect to Notley Road. The north loop will be used for school bus drop off and faculty parking and the south loop will be used for student drop off and additional faculty and visitor parking. ADA compliant paths will be provided to the building and the various play areas from the drop off loops and parking areas. In addition, concrete walk connections will be installed to provide access to the walks next to Notley Road.

Stormwater management requirements for the project will be met with the installation of micro-bioretenion facilities and bio swales that were chosen due to their ability to conform to existing Site features. These practices will be concentrated around vehicular impervious areas whenever possible but will also be used to manage runoff from the building rooftop and play areas.

Utilities, including water, sewer, gas, and electric services will support the needs of the new facility.

SITE DESIGN

Applicant's Proposal

The proposed site plan situates the new building near the northern center of the Site, the parking, bus loop and student drop-off loop are located on the western side of the Site along Notley Road, and the ballfields and play areas are located on the southeastern portion of the Site. The proposed site design provides on-site staging areas for buses, 91 parking spaces, and on-site student drop-off queuing.

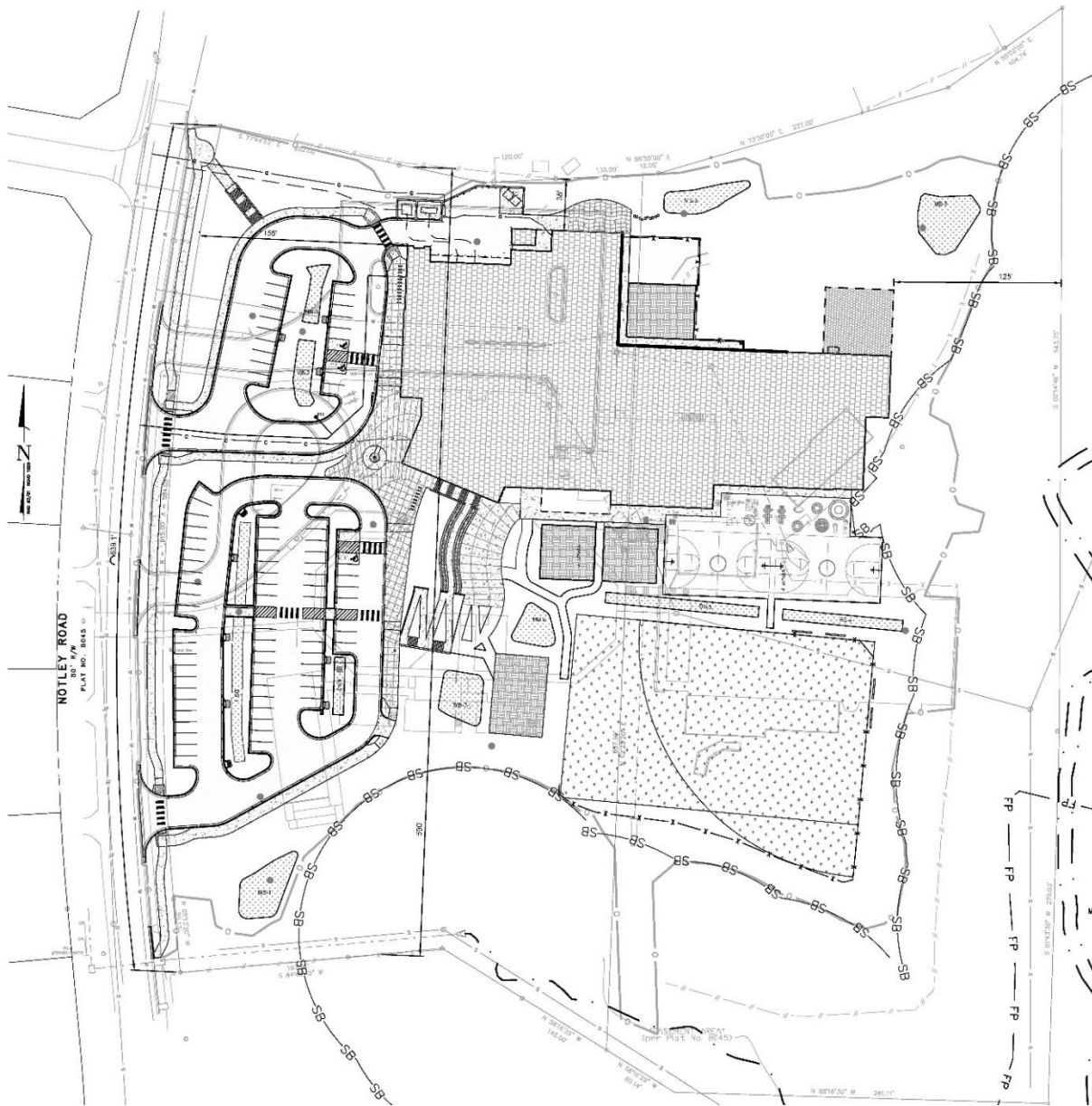


Figure 3: Proposed Site Layout

Staff's Recommendations

Staff acknowledges that MCPS is dealing with difficult topography at this specific Site and staff appreciated their efforts to incorporate that topography into the building. Staff also appreciates MCPS's attempts to save some construction costs through the recycling of the existing gym's structural columns and beams. However, design elements should be incorporated into the school that provide a greater presence to the public realm of the existing street and maximizes the student, teacher and visitor pedestrian and bike connections to the school. Parking should never be the dominant feature of our public/civic schools. The new building footprint should front the street, and parking should be expanded from its current location at the side of the school with fields behind. A parallel parking lane should be

created along the edge of Notley Road that can be used for bus loading and pick up in the morning and evening, which would allow guest parking and neighborhood parking in off hours. This would dramatically reduce the amount of asphalt on Site, and make the parking useful for the school and neighborhood 24/7.



Figure 4: Staff Concept Sketch

Applicant's Response: The Applicant did not respond to a request for a meeting to discuss the project prior to the Planning Board hearing and they noted in their ePlans response to staff comments on design issues, "MCPS Division of Construction will plan to address this issue at the Planning Board meeting."

Building Design

The building design, sustainability, landscape and lighting are generally sufficient. However, it is hard to properly evaluate these items when the site design is out of context with the surrounding neighborhood.

Sections and Elevations

The proposed building exterior features a contrasting stone veneer pattern that articulates and reduces the apparent massing and identifies the functional spaces of the interior. Well-placed window openings establish the façade rhythm and bringing natural lighting into the internal circulation areas.



Figure 5: Front Elevation Drawing (west)



Figure 6: Side Elevation Drawing (south)

Sustainability

The project will be designed and constructed with an emphasis on the environmental sustainability. The architecture and engineering systems will align with Montgomery County Public Schools facility management sustainability principles to ensure long term operational effectiveness. The project will comply with the Montgomery County Amendments to the International Green Construction Code (IgCC). The school will be designed and constructed to meet requirements of the Maryland High Performance Building Program by conforming with Green Globes Certification.

Key features related to the sustainability include the following:

- Encouraging alternative transportation to the new facility by providing bike racks.
- Managing stormwater to reduce surface runoff quantity and improve quality.
- Using highly reflective roof surfaces to reduce heat gain in the building.
- Installing water conserving and low-flow plumbing fixtures in the new addition.

- Optimizing the energy performance of the building by providing a highly energy efficient building envelope, lighting system, and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems (HVAC).
- Optimizing equipment selection, installation, and operation of new HVAC equipment through commissioning of the energy systems.
- Adhering to construction indoor air quality management plans and using low emitting building materials to safeguard occupant health.
- Providing a high level of occupant control over individual lighting and thermal comfort to promote an enhanced indoor environment in the new building.
- Using construction materials that are recycled and regionally manufactured for the new addition.
- Maximizing daylight in classrooms.
- Minimizing background noise level from HVAC systems in classrooms and control reverberation time with sufficient sound absorption materials.

Landscape and Lighting

The submitted Landscape Plan (Attachment D) proposes tree and ornamental shrub plantings throughout the Site, ornamental trees bounding the stormwater filtration areas, and foundation planting along the building line. Shade trees and ornamental trees are proposed for the surface parking areas. The lighting plan proposes a mixture of lighting types including fixtures on poles and various wall mounted lighting. The lighting plan shows no light spill at the Site boundaries; however, it is recommended that any lighting fixtures near the right-of-way at the entrance be equipped with cut-off shields to limit spill beyond the Site boundaries.

Operating Hours

The school's hours of operation vary and comply with the standard MCPS school schedule. The school also has a year-round program and is operated throughout the summer as well as the general school year. On typical school days, the hours of operation are 8:50 am to 3:05pm.

Parking

Staff and visitor parking along with a student drop-off loop will be accessed from Notley Road along the west side of the Site and will provide access to the main entrance of the building. The proposed site design provides on-site staging areas for buses, 91 parking spaces, and on-site student drop-off queuing. There are no standard parking rates for elementary schools and final determination of parking adequacy is at the discretion of MCPS. The proposed parking, while adequate for faculty and staff, may cause limited visitor parking, and the location and design inhibits safety and access for pedestrians and rollers to the school entrance.

ANALYSIS

Neighborhood Compatibility

The Site is currently occupied and being used as the existing Stonegate Elementary School. The character of the proposed building will create an attractive and inviting school building for the community; however, the siting of the building detracts from its form and function within the neighborhood.

While the proposed building is architecturally compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, MCPS has missed an opportunity to engage the neighborhood and create a civic presence and gateway into the community.

Master Plan Conformance

The subject Property is located within the Suburban Communities region of the 1997 Cloverly Master Plan area. The Suburban Communities region is located west of New Hampshire and south of Norwood Road.

Provide for attractive land uses that encourage opportunity for social interaction and promote community identity (p. 8 of Master Plan).

While the land use is not changing it is remaining an Elementary School site the site design diminishes the positive effect on the community and limits the social interactions between the public and the school. As previously stated in the Site Design section on pages 6 and 7, a greater presence to the public realm of the existing street that maximizes the student, teacher and visitor pedestrian and bike connections to the school. Parking should never be the dominant feature of our public/civic schools. Like in many other recent school designs, staff believes that the school could have been pushed forward to the street and parking could have been designed to be at the side of the school with fields behind.

Protect headwater streams in the Northwest Branch by assuring that ultimate subwatershed imperviousness remains within the 10 to 15 percent range that the generally acceptable limit for protection of coldwater stream systems in Maryland and by discouraging individual developments with high site-imperviousness (p.84 of Master Plan).

The proposed project is currently at 27% imperviousness and while its over the 10-15% recommendation for the region the region itself is still within that range. Additionally, this is an existing school site which is being demolished and being replace with a comparable use and imperviousness so the net effect on the watershed is below the recommendations of the Master Plan. However, as discussed in the Site Design section on page 7, MCPS could create a parallel parking lane along the edge of Notley Road that can be used for bus loading and pick up in the morning and evening, which would allow guest parking and neighborhood parking in off hours. This would dramatically reduce the amount of asphalt on site, and make the parking useful for the school and neighborhood 24/7.

TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS

Master-Planned Roadway and Bikeways

According to the 1997 Cloverly Master Plan and the 2018 Master Plan of Highways and Transitways, Notley Road is designated as a two-lane Primary Residential street with a 70-foot-wide right-of-way (ROW). Per Plat No. 8045, recorded in 1965, the right-of-way along Notley Road is 80-feet, so the Applicant is not proposing any additional dedication of right-of-way.

This Application is proposing the recommended 10 ft. wide sidepath along the property frontage of Notley Road per the *2018 Bicycle Master Plan*.

Access, Circulation and Parking

Vehicular access to the site is proposed via two one-way loop driveways off of Notley Road. The bus loop will be located separately on the northwest side of the building, adjacent to the main entrance to the school. The northwestern loop will accommodate busses for pickup and drop off operations and faculty parking. The southwestern loop will accommodate passenger vehicles for additional staff and visitor parking as well as parent pick-up and drop-off operations. The Site is designed with access for motorized vehicles as the priority, while access for walkers and rollers is secondary to access for motorized vehicles. The proposed circulation and parking do not support the public realm and pedestrian safety. The proposed configuration of the school site also does not define the streets or provide a sense of safety and urban design appeal to the public. See Figure 7, Access Circulation.

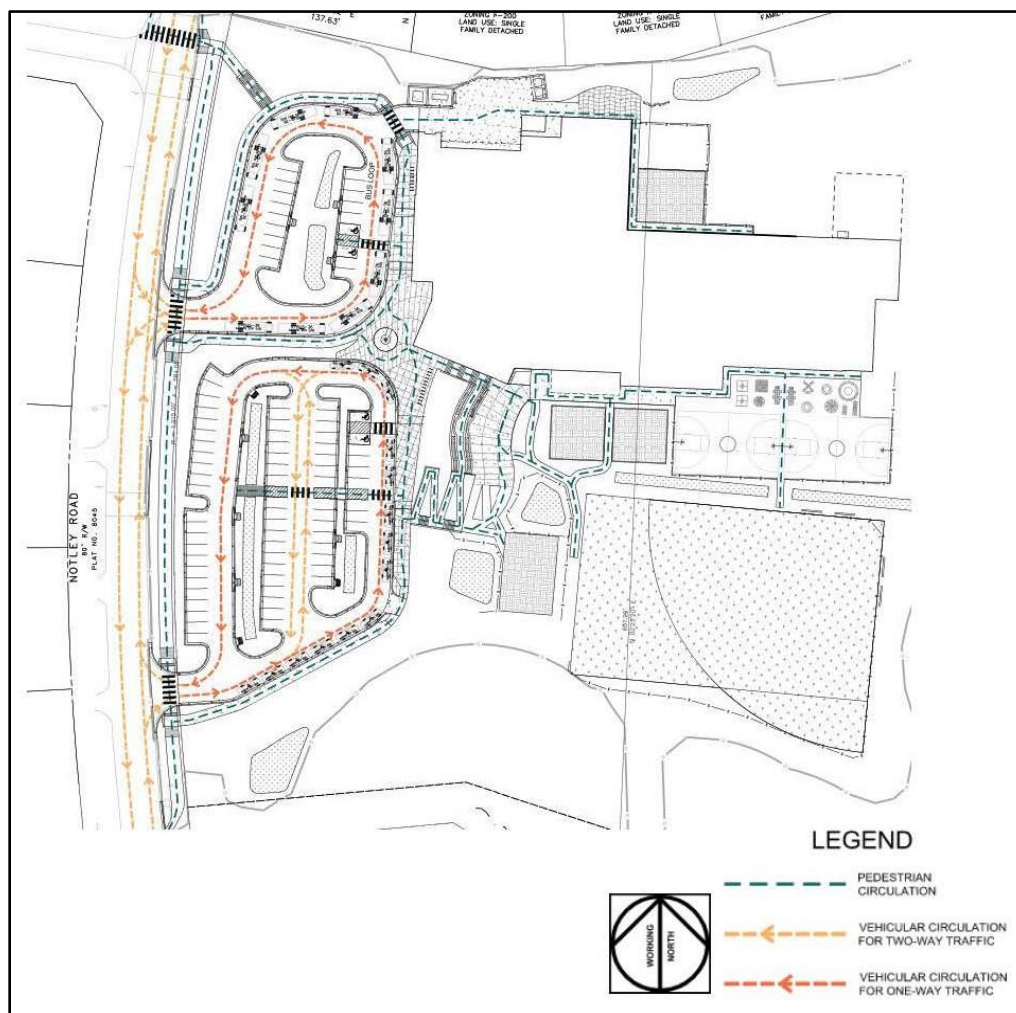


Figure 7: Access Circulation

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

The school site will provide a 10-foot wide sidepath along the property frontage of Notley Road that will connect to the proposed 8-foot wide internal sidewalks that are immediately adjacent to the bus and passenger vehicle drop off loops. The school is proposing to provide 12 short-term bicycle racks in the front of the building.

Internal to the proposed site, pedestrian circulation is adequate and efficient. ADA complaint ramps and 5-foot wide sidewalks will be provided to allow safe access to the internal school amenities, play areas and fields. The prominent location of the parking lots and bus loop provides an auto-centric layout causing an unsafe environment upon entering the proposed school site. Staff recommends that the Applicant considers an alternative design that brings the school closer to the street front to maximize bicycle and pedestrian connections as well as make the school a part of the neighborhood, rather than setback behind pavement, parking lots and bus loops. See Figure 7, Access Circulation.

Local Area Transportation Review

The existing school has an enrollment of 501 students with the proposed expansion to 740 students, an increase of 239 students. The Application for a public elementary school facility with an increase of 239 students is predicted to generate 211 AM peak hour person trips and 54 PM peak hour person trips. As the Application generates more than 50 peak-hour person trips, a full traffic study was required to satisfy the LATR Mandatory Referral guidelines. The study followed the 2016-2020 Subdivision Staging Policy (SSP) and related Local Area Transportation Review Guidelines. Since the existing Stonegate Elementary School was closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, driveway counts and site-specific trip generation rates were not possible. Therefore, the trip generation rates found in the Institute of Transportation Engineer's (ITE) 10th edition were used to generate trips for the full 740 student core capacity for the proposed expansion as shown in Table 1, *Trip Generation*.

Table 1: Trip Generation Table

Use	No. of Students	AM Peak Hour			PM Peak Hour		
		In	Out	Total	In	Out	Total
Existing Elementary School (ITE 520)	501 students	181	155	336	39	46	85
Proposed Elementary School (ITE 520)	239 students	86	74	160	20	21	41
Total Students	740 students	267	229	496	59	67	126
Net New Vehicle Trips				(176)			(44)
Total Net New Peak Hour Person Trips				211			54

The Traffic Study was submitted on January 29, 2021 and revised on April 8, 2021 and analyzed the following intersections to determine if they met LATR congestion standards:

1. Bonifant Road at Pebblestone Drive
2. Bonifant Road at Notley Road West
3. Bonifant Road at Notley Road East
4. MD 650 at Stonegate Drive

5. MD 650 AT Bonifant Road

The LATR test for the Cloverly Policy Area uses the Critical Lane Volume (CLV) congestion standard of 1450. All intersections are located in the Cloverly Policy Area, which has a Critical Lane Volume (“CLV”) standard of 1,450. All operate below congestion standards and no improvements are necessary at this time as shown in Table 2, Critical Intersection Capacity Analysis

Table 2: Critical Intersection Capacity Analysis

Intersection	Traffic Conditions			
	Existing		Total Future	
	AM	PM	AM	PM
<i>Cloverly Policy Area (CLV 1,450)</i>				
Bonifant Road at Pebblestone Drive	432	559	501	577
Bonifant Road at Notley Road West	390	593	594	648
Bonifant Road at Notley Road East	401	576	458	593
MD 650 at Stonegate Drive	464	651	473	621
MD 650 AT Bonifant Road	684	854	708	860

There are no planned developments identified in the general vicinity of the site.

A Signal warrant analysis was performed at two intersections; the intersection of Bonifant Road and Notley Road West and the intersection of New Hampshire Ave (MD 650) and Stonegate Drive/Windridge Acres Court. Staff recommends that these locations be re-evaluated at a later date when schools reopen to full capacity and traffic volumes return to pre-pandemic levels.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Guidelines

A Natural Resources Inventory and Forest Stand Delineation (NRI/FSD) #420211510 was approved by Staff on March 12, 2021. The Site is within the Northwest Branch watershed, a Use IV designation. The Site contains 0.92 acres of forest, Stream Valley Buffer (SVB), and 100-year Floodplain. See the Forest Conservation staff report (Part A) for a complete analysis.

Forest Conservation

The Application meets the requirements of Chapter 22A of the Montgomery County Forest Conservation Law. See the Forest Conservation staff report (Part A) for a complete analysis.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND NOTIFICATION

Representatives from Montgomery County Public Schools held public meetings virtually via videoconference to discuss the impact of the project with the surrounding community. This application has been noticed, and staff has not received correspondence as of the date of this report.

CONCLUSION

Based on information provided by the Applicant and the analysis contained in this report, Staff concludes that the proposed Mandatory Referral for the Stonegate Elementary School will not be

compatible within its Site context or in substantial conformance with the Master Plan. However, the Application meets the applicable regulatory standards and guidelines for the environment.

Staff recommends **denial** of the Mandatory Referral and recommends this be transmitted to the Montgomery County Public Schools.

Attachments:

1. Proposed site plans
2. Traffic Study
3. Elevations
4. Landscape and Lighting plans