



May 8, 2015



The Honorable Roger Berliner
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Councilmember Berliner:

Thank you for your letter of May 5, 2015, in which you ask for clarification in regard to concerns that have been raised by the Luxmanor/Old Farm communities regarding the possible collocation of Rock Terrace School with Tilden Middle School. As a part of the *Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2015–2020 Capital Improvements Program (CIP)*, the Board of Education approved a Roundtable Discussion Group (Roundtable) on November 17, 2014, to explore the possible collocation of Rock Terrace School and Tilden Middle School. Subsequent to the work of the Roundtable, on March 23, 2015, I submitted a recommendation for Board action to collocate Rock Terrace School as part of the revitalization/expansion project for Tilden Middle School. The Board held a work session on this matter on April 14, 2015, followed by a public hearing on April 27, 2015, and is scheduled to take an action on this matter at its meeting on May 12, 2015. Responses to your questions follow.

Question 1

When was the decision made to relocate Tilden Middle School to its original location on Tilden Lane and why?

Response

In November 2009, as part of the FY 2011–2016 CIP, the Board adopted the plan to relocate Tilden Middle School from the current Woodward facility to the Tilden Holding Facility, located on Tilden Lane. With the reopening of Northwood High School in 2004, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) lost its high school holding school facility. By relocating Tilden Middle School back to the Tilden Lane location, the Woodward facility, which formerly served as a high school, will become the secondary school holding facility for both middle and high school revitalization/expansion projects after the completion of Tilden Middle School. This plan has been well supported by the Walter Johnson Cluster community.

Question 2

What opportunities have there been for the community to weigh in on this decision to relocate the middle school?

Response

The superintendent of schools recommended the relocation of Tilden Middle School from the current Woodward facility to the Tilden Holding Facility in October 2009 as part of the FY 2011–2016 CIP process. Consistent with MCPS Regulation FAA-RA, *Long-range Educational Facilities Planning*, the Board held a work session on November 5, 2009, and public hearings on the superintendent’s recommendations on November 11 and 12, 2009, before taking action on the FY 2011–2016 CIP on November 19, 2009, which included the relocation of Tilden Middle School to the Tilden Lane site. All subsequent CIP documents have included the plan to relocate Tilden Middle School to the current Tilden Holding School site when the school is revitalized/expanded. Civic groups that are registered with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission were notified each year of the release of the superintendent’s recommended CIP document, and public hearings on the CIP were held in November of each year. No opposition or concerns were expressed regarding the relocation of Tilden Middle School to the Tilden Lane site since the Board took action in November 2009.

Question 3

What decisions have already been made with the new Tilden Middle School regarding square footage and enrollment capacity? If in fact these decision points have occurred, what parameters were used to guide the determination? For example, is the acreage of the Tilden Lane site large enough to programmatically accommodate the proposed new middle school?

Response

For the Roundtable process, staff in the Department of Facilities Management developed a preliminary space summary that lists all of the required programmatic spaces to support the Tilden Middle School revitalization/expansion project. The space summary was developed using the programmatic space needs for a new MCPS middle school and the projected enrollment for Tilden Middle School. The projected enrollment for Tilden Middle School for the 2020–2021 school year is approximately 1,050 students. Based on this enrollment projection, the proposed capacity for the future school would be approximately 1,200 students. The estimated gross square footage (GSF) for Tilden Middle School will be approximately 150,000 GSF, which is consistent with new MCPS middle schools. These figures are preliminary and would be refined during the feasibility study process and subsequently finalized during the design process.

As part of the Roundtable process, an architect developed preliminary site concept plans to allow the Roundtable to discuss the facility and site implications of the possible collocation of Rock Terrace School and Tilden Middle School. The architect was provided with the building and site requirements for both schools. The results of the architectural analysis confirm that the Tilden Lane site, which is 19.7 acres, is large enough to accommodate both schools.

Question 4

At what stage in the planning process for a new school does a feasibility study occur and what does that entail?

Response

The feasibility study would be the next stage of the planning process. The purpose of the feasibility study is to work with involved stakeholders, including the community, to evaluate existing conditions in greater detail; to explore multiple building and site options for a proposed project; and to develop probable cost estimates for each option to include in the CIP budget request. At the conclusion of the process, a feasibility study report is prepared that evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of each option. It is important to understand that, at times, a Roundtable process will precede the feasibility study when the Board needs to make a decision on a programmatic matter, such as a possible collocation for a special education school.

Question 5

At what stage in the planning process for a new school does a traffic study occur and what does that entail?

Response

The traffic impact analysis will be conducted during the feasibility study and possibly updated during the design phase based on additional requirements posed by permitting agencies. As part of the traffic impact analysis, a traffic engineer counts the number of buses and cars that drop off and pick up students at a school in the morning and afternoon and projects the number of drop offs for the new school based on projected enrollment and staff increases. The traffic engineer analyzes the impact of the traffic on the nearest intersections and signals and develops appropriate recommendations to mitigate the concerns raised by the neighbors and community-at-large. The permitting agencies review the findings and suggested recommendations and determine the requirements for the project.

Question 6

What are the plans for the existing building on Old Georgetown Road which currently houses Tilden Middle School?

Response

As mentioned in the response to Question 1, the plans are to utilize the Woodward facility as a secondary holding school for middle and high school revitalization/expansion projects. Long term, the Woodward site may be an important part of MCPS' efforts to address high school growth in the Bethesda area. Elementary school enrollment in the Bethesda area has increased significantly; that growth is starting to move into the secondary schools. In addition, there are several developments and proposed new sector plans that currently are not incorporated in the projected enrollments for the Bethesda-area clusters—Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Walter Johnson, and Walt Whitman.

Although an addition is planned at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School that will expand capacity to 2,400 students, the school's limited site size makes any further expansion extremely difficult. The Bethesda Downtown Plan, which is in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster, is under review and could bring additional housing development beyond what currently is planned. Enrollment at Walter Johnson High School is projected to grow to 2,800 students; this figure does not include the future phases of the White Flint Sector Plan. A feasibility study for an addition to Walter Johnson High School is under way to explore options to increase the school's capacity to 3,200 students. The Westbard Sector Plan also is under review and could potentially increase the enrollment at Walt Whitman and/or Bethesda-Chevy Chase high schools. Given the potential growth, it is possible that MCPS will need a new high school in the Bethesda area in the future. The Woodward site, approximately 29.8 acres, is the only Board-owned site in the Bethesda area large enough to house a high school.

Question 7

How was the decision to collocate Rock Terrace with Tilden Middle School made and what process was followed, including outreach efforts?

Response

Rock Terrace School was assessed for revitalization/expansion program in the 2010–2011 school year as part of the Facilities Assessment with Criteria and Testing (FACT) assessment. The FACT assessment revealed that Rock Terrace School was in the worst condition and most in need of a revitalization/expansion project among the secondary schools assessed that year. Board Policy IOB, *Education of Students with Disabilities*, strives to provide students with disabilities the opportunity to interact with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent

possible. In order to provide Rock Terrace School with a modern and up-to-date facility and meet the goals of Policy IOB, the previous superintendent recommended the collocation of Rock Terrace School with Tilden Middle School as part of the *Superintendent's Recommended FY 2016 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2015–2020 CIP* in October 2014.

Tilden Middle School was selected as the ideal school for the following reasons:

- The site is centrally located in the Walter Johnson Cluster with easy access to major highways.
- Both Tilden Middle School and Walter Johnson High School serve students with similar disabilities.
- Its size of 19.7 acres is adequate to accommodate both programs.
- The site is relative flat and has access from two streets to provide several options to address the transportation needs of both schools.
- With an anticipated completion date of August 2020, Rock Terrace School can be located in a modern facility at the earliest possible time.

The other schools that were considered for possible collocation are:

- Argyle Middle School
- Eastern Middle School
- Col. E Brooke Lee Middle School
- Col. Zadok Magruder High School
- Newport Mill High School

These schools were not as ideal because of site size, location, difficult site conditions and/or the schools serve special education students with different disabilities.

On November 16, 2014, the Board approved a Roundtable to explore the possible collocation of Rock Terrace School with Tilden Middle School prior to the superintendent of schools making a recommendation on this matter. Consistent with MCPS Regulation FAA-RA, *Long-range Educational Facilities Planning*, all the Roundtable meetings were open to the public, and observers were provided an opportunity to ask questions at the end of each meeting. At the beginning of the process, a public information meeting was held. At this meeting, MCPS staff members presented the Roundtable charge and process and answered questions from the attendees that included community members. At the conclusion of the Roundtable meetings, a second public information meeting was held where MCPS staff members and the architect presented the process, criteria used, site concept plans, and answered questions. At the second public information meeting, the attendees provided input through a feedback form, which was summarized by MCPS staff. I considered the input provided from the community-at-large before making my recommendation.

After my recommendation was submitted to the Board, the Board and I have received numerous letters and electronic mail from the community-at-large. In addition, the Board held a public hearing on this matter on April 27, 2015. The Board will consider all of the input received prior to making a decision on the collocation at its May 12, 2015 meeting.

Question 8

Was a feasibility study done to determine if the collocation is programmatically appropriate for Tilden Middle School and to ascertain if the Tilden Lane site is adequate for the physical structure that will be needed to accommodate both programs?

Response

As noted in the response to Question 4, conducting a feasibility study would be the next step in the process. However, as part of the Roundtable process, an architect was hired to evaluate the programs for the two schools and develop preliminary concept plans to determine the feasibility of collocating the two schools on the Tilden Lane site. All of the preliminary concept plans developed by the architect confirmed that the Tilden Lane site is adequate to accommodate the building and site requirements for Rock Terrace School and Tilden Middle School.

Question 9

If the collocation is approved by the Board of Education, what opportunities will there be for community input moving forward and specifically, what will the community be able to weigh in on during the facility planning process?

Response

As with all major school capital projects, a series of community meetings that are open to the public will be held during the feasibility study and subsequent design processes. Invitations will be sent to the adjacent neighbors and civic associations to participate in the feasibility study, subsequent design processes, and to provide input and share their concerns on various options that are developed for the collocation. Additionally, the meeting notices will be posted on the

MCPS and school websites, and a sign will be erected on the grounds of the Tilden Lane site to inform the community. The community will have an opportunity to provide input on all aspects of the options being developed during the feasibility study process. When funding is appropriated, the design process will follow the feasibility study. During the design process, a series of community meetings will be held to further develop the concept plans into a preliminary plan that will be presented to the Board for its approval.

I hope these responses are helpful to clarify the questions that have been raised. If you have any further questions, please contact Dr. Andrew M. Zuckerman, acting chief operating officer, at 301-279-3626 or Mr. James Song, director, Department of Facilities Management, at 240-314-1064. We appreciate your continued support of our schools and the needs of our students.

Sincerely,



Larry A. Bowers
Interim Superintendent of Schools

LAB:AMZ:JS:dss

Copy to:

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