

Environment and Energy Conservation Commission Draft

Summary of July 27, 2015 Meeting
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Azalea Conference Room

Members Present: Scott Dicke, Irwin Kim, Kari Klaus, Patrick Kenney, Mike Hanna, Claire O’Dea, Gabriel Thoumi, Sarah Meservey, Christine Ng

Members Absent: Noor Khalidi, Alex Sanders,

Guests: Kevin Cahill,

Staff Present: Adam Segel-Moss (DES), Joan Kelsch (DES), Scott Prisco (APS), Ajibola Robinson (APS),

1. Public comment

Nelly Custis Park: Stacey Meyer provided public comment on Nelly Custis Park. She lives in Aurora Hills near Crystal City. Ms. Meyer lives across the street from Nelly Custis Park. She noted that a plan was created to improve Nelly Custis Park that would cost nearly a million dollars. She noted a significant drainage issue at the park. The area was once a parking lot and then returned to park. She explained that significant ice forms on the surface and on the street during the winter. Drainage has also been an issue during warmer months as rain drains from the field directly to the storm sewer during significant rain events. Ms. Meyer asked that changes be made that improve the drainage area and not make it worse. She asked that any improvements actively incorporate engineering to manage the drainage issue. She asked for Commission support to include more engineering and project review of any potential project. Kari noted that it sounds reasonable to ask that engineering specialists look at the project and that an Environmental Assessment may be helpful.

Abingdon Elementary: Aristoteles Chronis noted that since September last year he has been involved in counseling many residents near the Abingdon project. He noted that the initial project scope included net zero, geothermal, and other environmental benefits. As the process has unfolded, the project changed significantly and the environmental benefits have been reduced or eliminated. The playing field and natural area have all been reduced in place of parking, a bigger addition, and less environmental benefit within the school. He asked that the Commission significantly consider stormwater mitigation and environmental impacts.

Jim Hurysz has been concerned about this project since inception. He noted Ashlawn, McKinley, and Williamsburg as poorly executed projects that set a precedent of concern for this project. Mr. Hurysz noted significant stormwater issues that currently exist at the site. The impacts from the school already impact South 28th Street, Fairlington tennis courts, and other surrounding areas. Jim offered to send photos to the Commission of the flash flooding. Mr. Hurysz does not believe that the process is ~~not~~ in the interest of the students, residents, or anyone else. He expressed concern about the potential number of activities “crammed” into this site from past experience with Parks, APS, and other County activities. He also believes that the project is not focusing on the longer term needs of the County. He feels that the project that is proposed will have inadequate space within 5-7 years just as Washington-Lee experienced. He is also concerned that relocatable trailers will be placed here again taking up more green space. General issues he noted are stormwater, erosion and sedimentation, loss of energy efficiency within the new and old buildings, no renewable features, and the potential for excessive programming at the park area.

Commissioner Christine Ng asked for clarification regarding issues at the park. Aristotle noted that once the inner track area is amended it will be open less for neighborhood use since it will likely be programmed more by Parks staff and others.

Mary Robinson shared a number of the concerns already mentioned. Residents turned over engineering reports that they did independently. She expressed concern about the impervious pavement as it increases that it will create issues with the soil and moisture from homes near the school.

2. Abingdon Environmental Assessment

Scott Prisco started the presentation by addressing issues noted by the public. He clarified that when this project was presented to the BLPC, it was presented with high expectations for net zero and a high bar which was a goal, not a commitment. During the process there was a huge escalation in the cost of construction. The project carried a 3-4% buffer. In the industry, there was a 10% spike in construction costs which had a huge effect on a \$20 MM project. Before APS staff presented to the School Board the project team had to value engineer out several items. Staff had high aspirations to reach for net zero, but when the budget was restricted, APS listened to the BLPC which specifically noted the importance of addressing moisture and stormwater issues.

APS is very concerned with the increased imperviousness and possible impacts to Fairlington and the surrounding communities. Mr. Prisco noted that the majority of BLPC members voted to maintain green space near the track and increase the parking near the front of the school.

Mr. Prisco noted that the field size is a youth size field. To address concerns raised by the public he noted that youth recreation sized fields cannot be used as intensively as other park areas. APS has heard concern about this space being overused but that is not a possible reality given the available space.

Safety was a big issue that was noted and a goal was set to create a bus loop. This allows sidewalks to prevent pedestrians trespass between vehicles. The gymnasium is being moved to the front of the school. Since community uses occur day and night, this will be a large access improvement.

Presently, many classrooms are windowless. As part of this renovation, many classrooms are being relocated to the exterior wall of the building so that there are views and natural daylight.

98 parking spaces are required for the project. 83 would be located onsite, while 15 Fairlington Villages spaces may be approved to reach the total. Christine asked for clarification on previous drawings and numbers.

Scott Dicke noted that one of the initial considerations was about the possibility of a net zero school. Aji noted that when the School Board mandated the project, net zero wasn't mandated by the School Board. Design and Construction set the net zero goal. No funds were allocated to the project budget to achieve net zero. Scott Dicke asked why the project won't achieve net zero ready as an alternative. Scott Prisco noted that the envelope and geothermal won't be available to upgrade. The building was renovated in 1964, 1970, and 1990. The older windows remain from the 1990 renovation and not all will be upgraded.

APS agreed to document site conditions, cracks, and moisture conditions before, during, and after construction. Court Bridge Two has experienced different settling of their foundations. APS clarified what marine clay is and the associated impacts when water hits it. Soils can expand and contract depending on moisture conditions that can impact structures.

Mike Hanna noted that there is concern that, even with this monitoring, what the outcomes might be if impacts are found. He noted concern that if impact is found that it could result, for example, in a new curtain walls, deep trenching, or other significant environmental mitigations that would impact tree canopy or have other unintended environmental impacts.

Mike asked about stormwater impacts related to relocatable trailers. It was noted that all relocatable trailers installed within the past 3 years include stormwater BMPs that capture roof runoff and infiltrate it slowly.

The project noted that 152 will be removed, a handful will be relocated, and 320 will remain. 150 trees will be installed to replace the removed trees. Some of the trees being removed are already dead which is why the replacement is lower than the number of removed trees.

Mike asked what the current maintenance plan is for APS regarding pervious pavement. Mr. Prisco noted that staff thought about this issue and decided to put pervious surface on the running track. That surface won't be salted or sanded and should not require the same maintenance as a walkway or road. The fire lane will need to be cleared and may need some maintenance.

Mike asked if APS developed specific MS4 permit requirements. What strategy is implemented to meet those? Mr. Prisco noted that APS is working closely with the County, construction staff, and engineers. Mike noted that in 3-5 years DEQ is going to set specific requirements to meet thresholds. Aji noted that Cathy Lin knows about the requirements and is focused on the DEQ targets. Aji noted that the project is overdesigned to the stormwater requirements.

Mr. Seymour noted that over engineering is important. Overall the 2.5 pounds reduction target is right at the required threshold. Mr. Seymour echoed concerns noted by Mike Hanna.

Mike Hanna noted that the County is able to trade credits with the water pollution control plant reductions that help it achieve MS4 and DEQ targets. Mike noted that APS doesn't have that luxury and will need to look at redevelopment to achieve those targets. He suggested that this project explore ways to overengineer since APS will be required to meet targets in the future.

Scott Dicke noted that there seemed to be an issue at Ashlawn regarding the bioretention. Mr. Prisco noted that soil boring was taken at the Ashlawn site. A spring was found after excavation which wasn't visible in the soil boring samples. At that point, during construction of the bioretention basin, significant investigatory and design changes needed to happen which have delayed the project.

Mike Hanna noted that silt fence was used as the sole way to contain E&S issues. The issues and concern were that DES and the County didn't have leverage to stop work on the contractor.

APS wasn't happy with the contractor and their work and agreed that the issue has taken more time than expected. He noted that the site is sitting until planting season. He noted that trees and vegetation can't be planted in the height of summer as the planting warranty would be void.

John Seymour asked about erosion and sediment control for Abingdon. Mr. Prisco noted that at this time the project is still in design and mitigations haven't been included yet. He noted that once the E&S plan is complete, it may be shared with E2C2. APS is open to feedback at that point. Mr. Prisco detailed the complexities involved in synchronizing phasing and how this precipitates different E&S measures. Without a final project the phasing isn't known and therefore the E&S plan can't be drafted. John Seymour expressed understanding about the complexities involved and asked that APS continue to keep the Commission in the E&S loop and afford the Commission the opportunity to review and provide comment. APS agreed.

The July EA included the most current LEED scorecard. There are many credits in the "maybe" category, however the project is being conservative about what it can achieve. More will likely be achieved. All water fixtures will be replaced with high efficiency fixtures.

Kevin Cahill provided an update on the energy elements of the current and proposed project. He detailed the different elements of the building, renovation periods, and the associated code R-values. He noted that the current code requires double and triple any thresholds that had been previously been met.

The current Abingdon EUI is currently 60 which is somewhat better than the average. The reasons are many (e.g. operating hours, type of building, summer use, etc.).

A replaced roof was evaluated. It would save 17.5% of the energy on the building. The entire roof will be replaced to achieve these gains.

The building does not have an ideal solar orientation for window replacement. Replacing windows would only reduce energy use by 1.5%. At this time it doesn't make financial sense, APS staff noted, but may be included if bids come in low. It will be included as an 'add alternate'.

Lighting was evaluated and a 6.5% energy reduction was possible. Occupancy sensors, dimmers, daylight sensors, and LED lights will all be incorporated. All new spaces will all have LED lights. The existing classrooms will be upgraded to efficient T-5 lights.

Gabriel asked about building automation training. Mr. Prisco noted that all trainings are videotaped so that as staff turnover, the information is retained.

A variable refrigerant flow is being proposed for the new spaces. 23% of energy is projected to be saved. Any electric heat in the building is being removed and will be served by the VRF systems, as will be the new spaces.

Scott D. asked about the solar and geothermal cost effectiveness. Mr. Prisco noted that it was a more comprehensive evaluation. It was about all of the elements, not just solar or geothermal. Once it was realized that the budget was so constrained, the solar and geothermal had to be removed. Mr. Prisco noted that he would prefer to have done the geothermal since solar could be added at another time through a PPA or some other mechanism.

Scott D. asked if the rooftop space is being planned to maximize solar power generation at a future date. Mr. Prisco noted that it is a goal to have solar on every school. Sarah M. asked what the possibility is to get infrastructure in place to get solar at a future date. Mr. Prisco noted that the budget is so crunched for seats at APS, that a significant 'what if' spend on solar-ready wouldn't be justifiable. However, Mr. Prisco indicated that space for future electrical equipment could be a low-cost preparatory step. APS noted the feedback.

John Seymour asked why the project isn't seeking LEED certification. One of the biggest issues that APS has is the acoustical targets in LEED. In order to get the noise reduction it would be very expensive to retrofit the existing items.

Christine asked about the certainty of the Fairlington Village parking spaces. The indication is that they will allow for the use of the spaces, however nothing is certain with any Board vote.

The Commission discussed the project and agreed to draft a letter for review and approval at the August 24 E2C2 meeting. Christine agreed to draft a letter.

Several members of the public continued to ask for additional opportunities to provide input. It was iterated that all comments are still welcome and may be submitted to the Commission prior to the August meeting.

Any letters, photos, or general input may be submitted to Adam Segel- Moss, the E2C2 liaison. He will be sure to forward any information to all E2C2 members.

3. Parks Update

Bernadette Grullon provided an update on the Parks Capital Maintenance Projects as well as the Neighborhood Conservation projects. The list outlines the names, location, description, Environmental Assessment (EA) status, and other project notes. Ms. Grullon noted that every project must comply with all County, State, and Federal policies and standards.

Not all projects are subject to the EA process but may have some impacts on the environment. The Commission expressed concern that green space is being reduced by play areas. Ms. Grullon noted that new regulations are now in effect that weren't in existence when existing play areas were original built. This means that as play areas are updated they must meet current codes and standards. This includes, as an example, the increase in the footprint as multi-age play areas must have buffer distances between each play area. ADA requirements may also necessitate expansion of impervious areas.

The goal of the Capital Maintenance Projects is to maintain the existing infrastructure. Examples include roads, sidewalks, infrastructure, etc. Parks has a similar charge to meet community demand, make them safe, and update facilities as needed.

Bernadette reviewed the Capital Maintenance project list to detail each project's scope and EA status.

Kari asked if the Virginia Highland Park is being replaced with the same equipment. Bernadette noted that it was being replaced with the same equipment. Mike Hanna asked if the area was increasing. Bernadette noted that when the sites are upgraded they must comply with all policies, regulations, standards and guidelines. This requires them to increase in the footprint. The Commission and Parks staff discussed process and who decides if the replaced equipment and expanded space exceeds neighborhood or community comfort. Parks staff noted that it was their responsibility to coordinate community feedback and weigh needs versus space.

Kari asked for clarification on what was new and existing. Bernadette clarified that the court sizes were increasing but that the facilities being installed were a replacement of existing. Mike noted that with each Parks project, greenspace is getting smaller. There is no process for Parks that weighs impervious play areas versus actual green and open park space. The conflict seems to be that mandatory policies and standards dictate larger facilities. The Commission asked that staff consider this increase in impervious space and park facilities versus retaining actual green open space.

Scott asked that the Commission explore the nexus between the EA process and these Park projects.

John Seymour asked if it is the Parks staff stance that determine if project are exempt from the EA process. Mr. Seymour noted that it seems too simple that everything Parks does is exempt from an EA process. Given the financial costs and impacts of Parks, it seems that there is more that could be done to mitigate environmental impacts. John noted that he doesn't feel there needs to be an absolute 'no net loss' of Parks, but that there should be some process that evaluates overall expanding play areas and shrinking natural areas. He also expressed that the Park projects discussed at the meeting are far more than just "maintenance."

Christine asked about an issue of multiple projects within a single park. She explained that each project is under 5,000 sq. ft., and wouldn't rise to the threshold of an EA, but together they would qualify. She noted that this type of piecemeal process is eroding open natural space in almost all parks. Bernadette noted that neither Capital Maintenance nor NC Park projects are intentionally piecemealed. The amount of improvements at certain parks are so costly that funding to cover all the necessary work is not approved in one single fiscal year. In addition, to facilitate funding for some of the higher cost projects, Arlington County frequently will fund the design and construction phases in separate funding cycles/years.

The Commission discussed the possibility of focusing on the Public Space Master Plan. This would be the best place to address some of the projects and their continued expansion into open natural place.

Gabriel noted environmental justice as it relates to these projects. Gabriel agreed to send staff information on environmental justice.

Bernadette noted just how much Parks staff works to mitigate environmental impacts, such as tree removal and stormwater mitigation. The goal is to spend most of the project dollars on the recreational features while minimizing environmental impacts. Staff works closely with Urban Forestry and Ms. Grullon noted the Virginia Highlands project as an example. She noted that it is an area where Parks staff foresaw a significant potential for environmental impact. Staff coordinated to review tree impacts and project design.

Claire noted that the Virginia Highlands project is a great example of where the EA process could be used to evaluate environmental impact. If a project is going to have environmental impact, the Commission can help to validate the process or provide a voice to the community for these projects.

Scott asked what initiates a project for Parks. Bernadette noted that a project begins when it is assigned to staff from leadership. Scott clarified that the Commission's role is to be the conduit between the community, staff, and the Board on environmental issues. Without knowing what starts a project it is very hard for the Commission to integrate into the process.

Following some discussion, the Commission and staff noted that the list of Capital Maintenance and NC projects isn't long. The Commission discussed how to receive and review projects. It was suggested that the Commission could receive the list and attend meetings on projects. Since there are ~10 per year there would only be a few that are notable to track and be involved in.

The Commission sees a need for further discussion with DPR staff about EA terms and definitions (e.g. maintenance, repair) and interpretation of AR 4.4 screening criteria in the context of NC and Capital Maintenance projects. Claire noted that presumably these projects on the list would be big enough or impactful enough to include in an EA. However, without any further detail or definition of terms it is hard to evaluate further. The Commission agreed to continue this discussion and agreed that the EA process revision should be on the fall agenda.

4. Legislative Letter Review and Approval

The 2016 Legislative Priorities Letter was approved as amended and shall be sent to the County Board.

5. Meeting Summary Review – June 2015

Approved as amended

6. Old/New Business

John provided an update on the Williamsburg lighting process. He noted that the process is slated to take a full year and provide a recommendation at the end of the process. Mr. Seymour noted that the real issue is likely mitigation, not *if* lighting can be prevented entirely.

Claire mentioned that progress with the Public Spaces Master Plan is again delayed. If the Commission wants to write a letter about the importance of distinguishing open/green/natural space, then it would be a letter written in advance to support the position of the Commission.

Christine noted that the Wilson and Stratford Schools are in the PFRC meetings process. The meetings have been split into consecutive 3 hour meetings. The BLPC occurs three times per month.

Mike noted that Fort Myer is shutting down bike access. The bike element of the Master Plan is being delayed.

Scott noted that Long Bridge Park is embarking on a needs assessment. The assessment will also explore feasibility of public private partnerships as well as use partnerships with neighboring jurisdictions.