

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
c/o Department of Environmental Services  
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 801  
Arlington, VA 22201

April 17, 2013

Mr. J. Walter Tejada, Chairman  
Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Ashlawn Elementary School Expansion

Dear Chairman Tejada:

The Environment and Energy Conservation Commission (E2C2) has been following with much interest the ongoing design processes for the new elementary school and the Ashlawn Elementary School (ES) expansion. Through active participation on the Public Facilities Review Committee (PFRC) as well as occasional presentations at our meetings, we have been kept informed and up to date on the progress of the ongoing designs. E2C2 continues to be pleased to see Arlington Public School's (APS) commitment to sustainability carried into these design processes, and we applaud the continued efforts of APS to reduce APS' overall ecological footprint as well as provide excellent educational opportunities.

At our February 25 meeting, APS staff and design team presented the progress on the Ashlawn ES expansion. The expanded space is being designed using the LEED scorecard as a guide, but will not pursue a LEED-NC certification because of the restrictions LEED places on expansions. APS is also taking the opportunity to upgrade many of the critical, energy-intensive items in the original building (e.g., HVAC equipment) so that the building as a whole will function more efficiently. Finally, APS will be retrofitting the existing building with waterless urinals. These are admirable steps to developing a more sustainable educational space for the Ashlawn students. There are some critical transportation, energy, and environment issues, however, that we hope APS will take time to address more completely than it has to date.

*Oppose the Manchester Street Option for New Parking and Parent Drop-off:* To address critical parking shortage on the existing site, the revised site layout calls for re-configured parking and parent drop off areas at Ashlawn, with a new entrance off North Manchester Street to a large parking/drop off area. The neighborhood, both at the Building Level Planning Committee (BLPC) meetings as well as at the public hearing hosted by E2C2 on March 18, has expressed concerns regarding increased traffic and safety for students as well as loss of green space and increased stormwater runoff with this new configuration. While we recognize that both the PFRC and the BLPC have supported this option, E2C2

is overwhelmingly opposed to this option and agree with the views expressed by many neighbors that the new surface will result in increased stormwater flows as well as degraded air quality due to cars idling in the loop road waiting to pick up or drop off students. Although requiring a few extra safety precautions, the use of existing parking available in Bluemont Park would eliminate the need to increase impervious surface and stormwater flows onsite and reduce the number of cars stuck idling on the proposed loop road. E2C2 thinks this option should be investigated due to reduced environmental impacts as well as overall cost savings.

*Incorporation of Traffic Demand Management (TDM):* We also understand that APS incorporated some TDM concepts when determining the target parking for the site. We did notice, however, that presentation materials did not include improved bus service as a key TDM option, and as far as we know it was not explored. Much of the transportation focus was on improving pedestrian and bike access, but given the relatively high walk/bike rates to Ashlawn (nearly 30% of the students walk or bike) it seems unlikely that this percentage can be increased very much. We hope, however, that while APS conducts a broader system-wide TDM they will look to incorporate additional TDM principles that will minimize vehicles and maximize lower carbon options. We feel that providing increased bus service to Ashlawn students should be at the top of the list as a means to reduce vehicle mode share. APS should view buses like public transit—clearly a top priority approach in Arlington for reducing vehicle mode share. From E2C2’s perspective, the environmental benefits are clear, with the added benefits of cutting back the added impervious area and retaining green space.

APS should also explore mode choices within the school walk zone (1 mile) and maximize new street and pedestrian paths to access the building. The 1-mile walk (i.e. “no bus”) zone for Ashlawn is pretty unique among Arlington elementary schools in that a relatively large portion of it (~50%) does not require crossing any major roads. As a result, it should be relatively easy to walk/bike to Ashlawn from a safety perspective.

Exhausting all of these and other options (e.g., offsite parking at Bluemont Park) should be a top priority for APS before embarking on the very costly (economically and environmentally) new parking/drop off solution.

*Energy and Environment:* Since the project team does not want to pursue LEED-NC certification, we strongly encourage that the intent of LEED is met, or that alternate certification (e.g., Energy Star or LEED for Commercial Interiors) be explored. The intent is not to achieve certification necessarily but to identify energy targets and focus on energy and water best practices in design and construction phases when those elements can be more easily incorporated. APS could also partner with the County to maximize energy efficient lighting, and could incorporate standard site plan language we have helped develop that relates to interior lighting efficiency.

*Coordination with County Programs:* Finally, at our meeting APS staff indicated that current budget constraints hampered their ability to incorporate additional energy and environmental conservation elements into the expansion. E2C2 believes, however, that

there may be opportunities to partner with County staff to look for opportunities to share costs for some elements that would provide benefits to both the APS and the County. Specifically, we think there are opportunities within the portions of the site undergoing reconstruction to exceed the County's stormwater management requirements (for example, replacing conventional paving with permeable paving). There also may be opportunities to provide additional stormwater controls to address chronic flooding and erosion problems that have been observed on portions of the site that will not be affected by the new construction. By working with the County to coordinate these opportunities (both funding and construction), APS can further enhance the sustainability while contributing to the County's stormwater management and Chesapeake Bay TMDL goals. Similarly, APS could further coordinate with the County's energy manager to look for other funding sources that could assist with maximizing the energy efficiency of the new and original space.

We thank APS for the opportunity to provide input on the Ashlawn ES expansion design and sustainability alternatives. We look forward to seeing continued commitment to sustainability in this and other ongoing designs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shannon E. Cunniff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Shannon Cunniff  
Chair

cc: Arlington Public School Board  
John Chadwick, APS