

APS Research Question: How do other jurisdictions integrate school facilities needs in land use studies, such as sector plans, which often increase permitted residential densities?

Our commission approached the research this question in these three parts because we wanted to understand the process by which schools are or are not included in land use studies, examine best practices and processes used by other jurisdictions and then make recommendations on how to strengthen, improve or add new processes which we feel would better integrate schools in needed comprehensive land use planning.

The three parts of our discussion were:

- 1) How does ACG/APS planning currently work to include schools in land use studies, such as sector plans?
- 2) What did we learn from looking at examples from other jurisdictions?
- 3) What changes would need to occur for ACG/APS to include schools in land use planning processes, such as sector plans?

CURRENT PROCESS

ACG and APS planning processes have historically been separated. The County Board oversees general land use planning and daily operations for County public facilities. The School Board works independently to plan for new schools and changing enrollment. The Boards share fiscal resources and each develop a biennial Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that plans for capital investments in ten year increments. In recent years the Boards have worked to better integrate planning so that it might be more successful and agile to a growing and changing community in land constrained Arlington. While significant progress has been made there has not yet been a process created or implemented for schools to automatically be included in land use plans including sector or area plans.

- 1) How does APS determine when we need schools and how do we site them when we decide that we need them?

APS works independently from the County to identify the need for a site for new school. As student enrollment grows beyond current capacity a need for a new school or when enrollment reaches a level that can no longer be accommodated with operational changes such as boundary changes and relocatable classrooms a site for a new school becomes necessary. That need is captured in the AFSAP which captures demographic changes, enrollment projections and shapes priorities for the CIP. Once a new school or project is included in the CIP

the process is started to find sites. If the need for a site for a new school is determined in an area of the county that APS property alone would not accommodate APS identifies that need and communicates that need to ACG by stipulating the need in the CIP. This sets in motion various, often joint, processes that would identify a site for a new school.

2) How are schools included in existing county planning processes?:

While existing school sites have recently been included in the General Land Use Plan (GLUP) map there is not currently a defined process for ACG to include schools in a sector plan or comprehensive, long range land use studies that plan growth looking out several decades. There are examples of schools being included in a sector planning process but it was primarily the result of APS already owning property in the area being studied. Members of working groups to advocate for a school are not automatically included as stakeholders in these studies.

We discussed the Comprehensive Plan (CP) which guides the development of the County and serves as a decision-making tool for the County Board and supporting commissions. Arlington County's CP has eleven plan elements one of which is the General Land Use Plan (GLUP) which serves as the primary guide for future development in the County. In land use planning, such as sector plans, existing elements of the master plans defined in the CP, such as parks, transportation, and historic preservation, help guide recommendations decisions for CIPs and other land use planning. Since schools are not part of CP there is not a specified process to include them in priorities for County and as a result have not always been included in long range land use planning.

Land use studies, such as area and sector plans, help guide future development by examining impacts of growth on the capacity of existing transportation, public spaces and community facilities. The scope of these studies plans for phased site development for three to four decades. For example, the ongoing Pentagon City Planning Study examines forty years in scope. Past county land use studies have not included sites for new schools or a process by which the impacts of countywide population growth would impact the need for additional school capacity (although it does appear likely that schools will be included in the Pentagon City Planning Study).

An example of a school site that was considered as part of a sector plan is the Wilson School (now HB Woodlawn/The Heights) which was considered as part of the WRAPS process. It was considered as part of the sector plan was because APS already owned the property and had defined the need for a school in that part of the county.

2)EXAMPLES FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Alexandria Long Range Educational Facilities Plan

We first examined and discussed the Alexandria "Long Range Educational Facilities Plan"¹ which we found to have been created under many relevant and parallel conditions to Arlington. APS and ACPS experiencing same challenges of growth and space. Alexandria was looking for a true partnership between school system and city government and needed to reach some consensus on the problem in order to identify solutions. Alexandria, like Arlington was facing enrollment growth, some aging buildings within their division, very limited school sites and until recently, no need to connect school and land use planning.

ACPS plan recommends that schools be included in new area plans in order to establish place holders for future schools. The plan also recommends guidelines for more urban school models and 21st century educational facilities and open spaces.

The Commission found this example to be an apt one for APS/ACG to consider. We discussed how sector plans are 30 year long range plans and including schools in these plans, as the ACPS plan stipulated, would prepare APS/ACG with identified sites.

Concurrency/ Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (AFPO)

Commission discussion of concurrency in Florida and a Montgomery County, Maryland Subdivision Staging Policy (SSP) began with the understanding that because of the Dillon Rule in Virginia it does not enable any jurisdiction to have an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (AFPO).

The Commission examined the idea of concurrency and a law that was adopted in Florida in 2005 which added schools to the list of public facilities that were subject to the statewide concurrency system.

The Commission also discussed the Montgomery County, Maryland Subdivision Staging Policy (SSP) which was established as a response to student enrollment growth. The SSP "defines the Annual School Test for development application review – it provides the thresholds for moratoria and determines whether adequate school facilities exist in a project area."² This policy would create a moratorium on development in areas that did not have available capacity in schools.

While there was some support from Commissioners for the concept of concurrency and of tying some kind of process which would respond to the impacts of increased density many expressed concern beyond the fact that it would take changing Virginia legislation to put such a process in

¹ https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/07/Alexandria_LREFP_2015.pdf

² <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/countywide/growth-and-infrastructure-policy/schools/>

place for Arlington. Concern was expressed for the idea of limiting housing development in Arlington because of housing shortage in Arlington, especially an affordable housing shortage.

The discussion of the Montgomery County also centered on the premise that while such a policy might work there it would not work in Arlington because Montgomery County has land and we don't. If Arlington created a process which would put a moratorium on development because of school growth it could impact our ability to achieve many of our established goals already within our comprehensive plan. Energy efficiency was an example which often comes with development. As we replace existing units with new units they are built with increased energy efficiency and higher LEED standards. As Arlington looks to find a process which responds to growth and generating density a balance must be sought because the truth is development is what helps us stay an attractive economic place.

Our investigation of the work of other jurisdictions found appealing aspects of Florida's concurrency or the Montgomery County moratorium but found that they were "heavy hammers" that would not be a good tool for Arlington. It was clear, however, that Arlington needs to pull additional levers to tie increased density to the need for additional public facilities. It has to be built into the planning process that looks both short term and long term. This kind of integrated planning needs to be a part of each and every process in order to make sure that we are holding ourselves, our commissions and the developers accountable.

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan

The commission discussed the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan³ (FCCP) which includes schools. The FCCP defines the roles of the County Board and the School Board in planning for school sites. The School Board is granted a supervisory role in selecting school sites and determining the manner in which school properties shall be used while the Planning Commission is granted implementation oversight of land use concerns and objectives. The FCCP also includes objectives for land acquisition, considerations for adaptive reuse of buildings for schools, for co-location of other community facilities such as libraries.

Recommendations:

JFAC appreciates the question that APS asked us to explore about schools and their inclusion in county land use planning. We had robust discussion that led us to the following recommendations:

³ https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/07/FairfaxCo_PublicFacilitiesPolicyPlan_2019.pdf, Pages 6-9.

- 1) **Arlington County should include schools and public facilities in the Comprehensive Plan** and create a process by which schools are automatically included in sector plans. In questions what changes would need to occur to include APS in sector plans the clearest answer would be to include APS and other public facilities as an element in the Comprehensive Plan. It currently takes effort to get schools to be considered as part of any long range planning or sector planning. It is not automatic in the same way parks or transportation or other element of the Comprehensive Plan.
- 2) **Create a process which captures and codifies the impacts of increasing density on future school enrollment and ensure sure that all future sector and land use studies incorporate schools and sites for potential new schools.** This process should work to quantify the impact from new development (as the current process does for transportation, infrastructure, run off water, etc.) so that it can be better understood when there is a tipping point; when overcrowding becomes such a burden that new a new facility is needed.
- 3) **The County should have a needs assessment process that parallels the APS AFSAP and is transparent.** The APS biannual AFSAP process clarifies school utilization rates and projected future needs. JFAC has noted that the County lacks a similar structured and transparent process to assess its own facilities utilization and projected future needs. JFAC further notes that the last several years have brought an increased level of dialog between APS and County planning staff, including the very encouraging sharing of demographic data and projections. The County has taken the initial step of inventorying its facilities and creating a map that is now part of the GLUP. As soon as possible, the County should launch a formal facility needs assessment process that incorporates learning from the AFSAP process. In the interim, the information sharing and dialog between APS and the County should continue.
- 4) **Include schools in ongoing land use studies such as the Pentagon City Planning Study, the Langston Boulevard Study Area, and the Clarendon Sector Plan Update.** Absent a codified process by which schools are included in County land use studies this would create a precedent for future studies and ensure that impacts to school growth are accounted for in these long range planning studies. Lessons could also be learned from the inclusion of schools in these ongoing studies and establish best practices and an understanding of what worked in the process and what might be added to allow the process work in a more beneficial way.
- 5) **Define/refine a process to identify sites so that when a need arises, the siting process may be applied.** The Community Facilities Study Report (CFSR)⁴ proposed siting principles and a process to be used for County and School facility projects that need a new physical location identified. While the CFSR outlined this process which included when and how it would be implemented it has not to date been fully utilized.

⁴ <https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Community-Facilities-Report.pdf>, Pages 146-157.