

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY CONSERVATION COMMISSION
c/o Department of Environmental Services
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705
Arlington, VA 22201

June 22, 2015

The Honorable Mary Hynes, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Hynes,

The Environment and Energy Conservation Commission (E2C2) is aware of the controversy surrounding the implementation of capital improvements at Ashlawn Elementary School and of recent e-mails from the Ashlawn community to Arlington Public Schools (APS), Arlington County (AC) staff, and the County Board. E2C2 reopened discussion on the topic briefly at its May 18, 2015 meeting to ascertain what had transpired since the Commission's last letter to the Board, to determine whether any new issues were within E2C2's purview, and to explore those issues. The purpose of this letter is to 1) comment on one new issue identified at the May meeting and 2) document that E2C2 has acted consistent with its charge to "review proposed County facility structural improvements" on the Ashlawn project through research, analysis, and documentation of findings and recommendations included in its three letters written on the topic (this letter being the third).

Analysis

To summarize E2C2's prior actions, this Commission sent the Board two letters (April 2013 and March 2014) commenting on aspects of the Ashlawn Elementary School expansion and the associated Environmental Assessment (EA), and recommending to the Board ways to improve community engagement and the EA process. Both letters are attached. A brief summary of the latest E2C2 analysis, findings, and recommendations from the May 2015 meeting is as follows:

- To inform its analysis, E2C2 reviewed erosion and sediment control(E&S)/stormwater management (SWM) information provided by the Ashlawn community via e-mail and received input from County staff in person at the May commission meeting.

- Several issues were raised in emails from the Ashlawn community and photographs of standing water at Ashlawn and the surrounding area from recent storms were provided. Of the issues raised, the E&S/SWM issue falls within E2C2's purview and had not directly been addressed in a prior E2C2 letter to the CB.
- County Staff informed E2C2 that:
 - o To protect Four Mile Run from discharges of silt during construction, several drains had been blocked causing surface water to accumulate at the site. Silt fences installed across the swale reduced erosion but contributed to the standing water. Over time, the water would drain to underground pipes but first the soil needed to be stabilized. When the site is stabilized (grass grows in), the drain plugs can be removed to avoid the standing water. If the site isn't sufficiently stabilized, sediment could, under severe weather conditions, be discharged to Four Mile Run.
 - o The biofiltration basin (rain garden) was still under construction at the time of the issues discussed above, and due to unanticipated ground water issues the rain garden was being reengineered to drain properly.
 - o DES reviews E&S/SWM control plans and is responsible for enforcement.
 - o A DES review of the E&S/SWM plans in the Ashlawn Use Permit determined that minimum standards were met. Staff acknowledged that, during construction, the planned erosion control efforts were insufficient to prevent the accumulation of standing water..
- Information from two separate sources, the community and County staff, indicate that the standing water was caused by a construction problem.

Findings & Recommendations

Given that the latest issue is a construction matter rather than a plan or proposal for improvements, E2C2's role in and ability to address the issue are limited. However, the Commission will continue to play an active role in subsequent APS project planning processes and review the associated EAs. We explored whether additional changes to the EA process (other than those already recommended in prior letters) were necessary and determined that none were. This analysis was based on information available to E2C2 at the time of its May 2015 meeting, but we understand that APS and AC staff have been monitoring the issue and may possess additional information. E2C2 recommends that the County Board take the following actions:

- **Conduct an After-Action-Review (AAR):** Instruct County staff to conduct a transparent and inclusive AAR of events, document findings and lessons learned, and specify ways to prevent similar issues from arising in the future. E2C2 stands ready to participate in such a review. E2C2 has already seen APS and County staff adapt their processes and we commend them for their efforts to date, but we view the AAR as a step further and a mechanism for making additional procedural improvements grounded in a public process. As part of the AAR, we recommend that staff consult with the County Attorney to review APS's standard construction contract to ensure that erosion and sediment controls can be fully enforced.
- **Improve Communication & Issue Resolution:** Instruct County staff to work with APS to develop a protocol for communicating deviations from project plans or Use Permits to the public to track and resolve issues that impact nearby residences and businesses. Ensure adequate County and APS staff resources are available to make it effective.

E2C2 recognizes that the Ashlawn community takes on risk each day that passes without an effective solution in place, and we hope for a swift resolution. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this issue.

Sincerely,



Scott Dicke, E2C2 Chair

cc: APS Board

John Chadwick

Scott Prisco

Cathy Lin