

October 2, 2023

Dear Chair Dorsey, Chair Diaz-Torres, and members of the Arlington County Board and Arlington School Board,

We write on behalf of the Joint Facilities Advisory Commission (“JFAC”) to share our initial recommendations regarding APS 2023 Pre-Capital Improvement Plan Report (“Pre-CIP Report”) and the Superintendent’s recommended actions within the report. Our intention was to respond to the parts of the Pre-CIP Report and the Superintendent’s recommendations¹ within that report that align previous JFAC discussions and are relevant to our charge and mission as a joint APS and ACG county-wide commission that works to take into account the needs and perspective of all of Arlington. These recommendations were unanimously approved in substance at JFAC’s September 27, 2023 meeting.

As a general matter, JFAC lacks all the information needed to determine whether the Superintendent’s recommendations outlined in the Pre-CIP Report are well-supported by data, whether they address APS’ highest-priority facilities needs, and whether they are consistent with APS’ financial constraints. In particular, JFAC lacks information about which schools will be identified as needing renovations by the Long-Range Plan to Renovate Existing School Facilities Report (“Long-Range Renovation Report”), how much those projects will cost, and what alternatives have been considered. JFAC will issue further recommendations and comments after the Long-Range Renovation Report is issued.

Set forth below are JFAC’s recommendations on four aspects of the Pre-CIP Report:

- The proposal to renovate at least one school as soon as feasible and repurpose Nottingham Elementary as swing space
- The proposal to proceed with phase 2 of the Arlington Career Center (“ACC”) project
- The ongoing collaboration between APS and Arlington County
- The need for long-range planning and flexibility in light of budget constraints.

Renovations and Swing Space

JFAC supports renovating existing school facilities that need them. The leveling of enrollment growth in projections provides an opportunity to invest in updating existing schools that have needed attention but had to wait during the era when APS was facing rapid enrollment growth and had to spend available funds and time bringing new seats online to accommodate that growth. We note that seventeen schools have not had a major renovation in the past twenty years.²

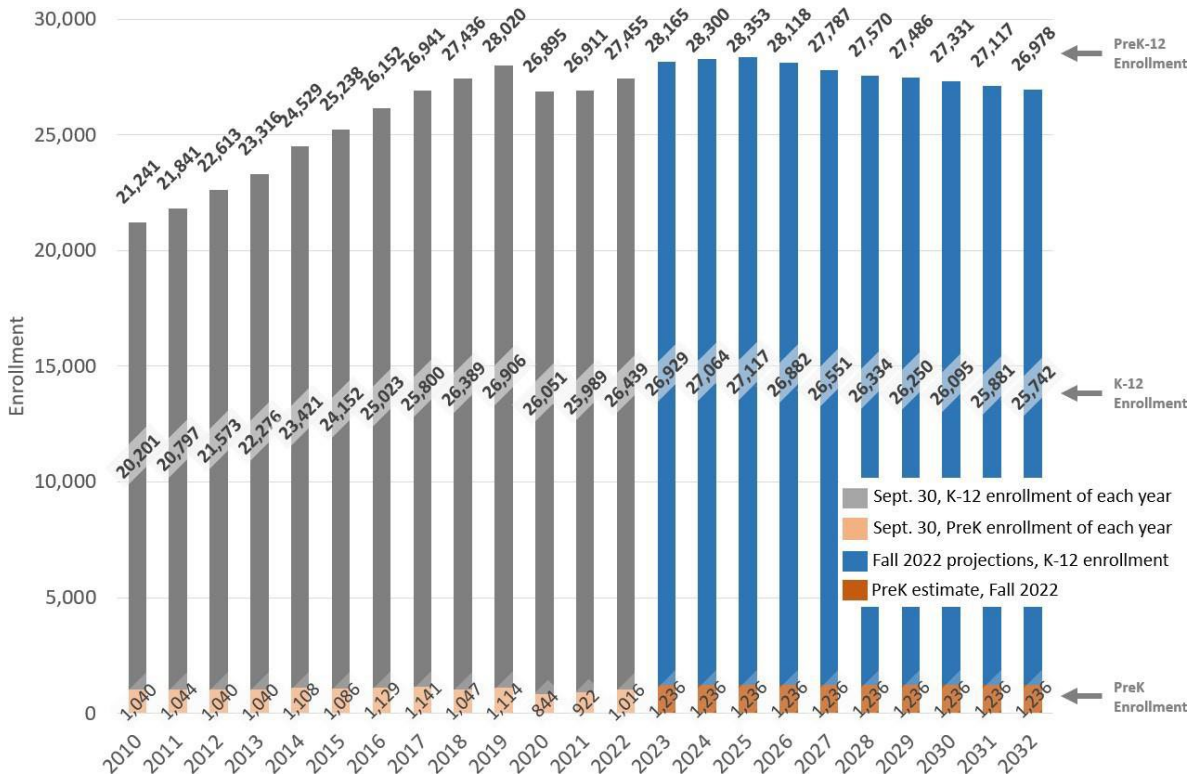
The K-12 enrollment projections presented within the Pre-CIP Report show a short term modest growth (0.4% from 2022-2027) and an overall decline by -2.6% in the 2022 to 2032 timeframe.³ This decline leaves every school level (ES, MS and HS) with more seats than students.

¹ When a specific school or program is mentioned in JFAC recommendations, it is in response to the school or program that was mentioned in the Superintendent’s recommendation.

² https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2023/05/Optimization_Study_SY20_21_Final_rs.pdf, pp. 101-02, Tables 16-18.

³ <https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2023/06/Pre-CIP-Report-2024-2033-Finalv2.pdf>, p. 7.

This is following a decade where APS spent available time, energy and capital resources addressing the seat and facility needs of the 42% enrollment growth between 2009 and 2019 where enrollment reached 28,000 students, adding about 7,800 K-12 students within that period.⁴



2023 Pre-CIP Report Chart 1: PreK to Grade 12 Historic Enrollment for Sept. 30 of 2010 to 2022 and Projected Enrollment for Fall 2023 to 2032

With additional information, JFAC could also support creating swing space that could be used to relocate students away from a school facility under major renovation, as opposed to having them remain in the school and work around the renovation. Renovations that, for example, create health and safety risks for students in the facility, or cause so much noise as to significantly disrupt learning, may require moving the school program of the renovated facility to swing space during the renovation. Using swing space in this way during renovations saves time and, under the right circumstances, can lower costs and reduce disruption to the learning environment.

JFAC recommends that flexibility be a criterion for swing space so that there are options for long term use of the swing space and for future plans for the facility. If there is a need for swing space in perpetuity, APS should demonstrate that need. JFAC encourages APS to give consideration to the long-term consequences for any facility used as swing space, including the options for repurposing the facility after it is no longer needed for swing space and if the facility could also accommodate swing space for secondary students if needed. APS should also project the length of time for which the facility is expected to be used for swing space and explain how the plan takes into account any long-range county development plans.

⁴ <https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2023/06/Pre-CIP-Report-School-Board-Work-Session-6.29.23.pdf>, Slide 11.

JFAC does not feel that sufficient data has been presented to support repurposing Nottingham as swing space. More information is needed to confirm that it is the best option. We plan to provide further recommendations after APS issues its Long-Range Renovation Report.

Phase 2 of the Career Center Project

JFAC supports moving forward with a new ACC building, maintaining a site maximum student capacity of 2570, and eventually demolishing the existing Montessori Public School of Arlington (“MPSA”) building for green space.

JFAC believes that APS should consider the renovation for a new school for MPSA as part of the decision process, overall options and budget and be prioritized based on the findings of the Long-Range Renovation Report.

If the planned renovation for the legacy Career Center for MPSA moves forward, JFAC recommends that APS design the facility to consist of flexible and easily adaptable spaces.

JFAC further recommends that the School Board consider ways to save costs on this project and evaluate alternative solutions.

Collaboration and Alignment Between APS and the County

JFAC fully supports ongoing and systematic collaboration with Arlington County.

JFAC commends the ongoing work with Arlington County to develop enrollment projections and to estimate the potential enrollment impact from proposed new housing. JFAC also commends the continual efforts of APS and County staff to improve on the methodology and data to develop these projections.

We recommend in future Pre-CIP Reports that the collaboration section also include any projects that need future collaborative planning (the Trade Center comes to mind).

We also recommend that CIP direction for APS and for ACG align, that identified joint projects are included in both, and that APS and ACG align in their expectations of the need of available debt capacity and plan accordingly. If previously planned projects need to be postponed or eliminated in order to open up additional bonding capacity JFAC recommends initiating that planning in the CIP direction.

As a joint commission for both the School Board and County Board, with a charge to consider the alignment between the CIPs of APS and the County, JFAC fully supports the efforts of APS to provide the same level of detail and transparency as the County in their CIP proposal, Pre-CIP Reports, and CIP direction. JFAC recommends that the County modify its own CIP process to incorporate the equivalent of a Pre-CIP Report for County facilities and to consider joint projects, joint use of facilities, and long range plans with APS.

Funding and Long-Range Planning

JFAC recommends that the School Board consider including one or more alternative scenarios in its direction on the 2025-34 CIP that explore cost saving measures. This will allow APS to make any necessary adjustments in the

