

November 29, 2023

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

We are writing on behalf of the Joint Facilities Advisory Commission (“JFAC”) to share our feedback and recommendations on the Superintendent’s proposed CIP Direction that was presented to the School Board as an information item at the November 9, 2023, School Board meeting. These recommendations and feedback were discussed at the November 15, 2023, JFAC meeting and were unanimously approved in substance by members present.

On October 20, 2023, Wells Harrell, the JFAC Vice-Chair, and I sent an email to the School Board and to our County Board liaison, Libby Garvey, with the intention of providing additional clarification and explanation to JFAC’s October 2, 2023, recommendations on the Pre-CIP Report. We used the below language to explain the perspective JFAC takes regarding CIP planning and to guide the discussion of our feedback on the proposed CIP Direction.

*“We understand the CIP to be a financial planning document that balances needs and priorities, as informed by relevant data, research, and other information provided within the Pre-CIP Report. The CIP process examines each of the defined and prioritized needs under the parameters of debt service limits, the budget (including impacts of debt service to the operating budget), and timing. This process can and should create a plan that defines affordable and timely solutions for all priorities.*

*However, to find this balance, context matters. Each project or proposal must be considered in context of other needs, timing, available funding, enrollment projections, and planning for long range site and facility use. We are now in an environment where opportunity costs may be significant, such that committing to one project prevents moving forward on a future project—even if it is a high priority.*

*As you consider your CIP Direction, we encourage you to be clear about what APS’ priorities are, how particular capital projects reflect those priorities, and whether there are any trade-offs.”*

The above language was also utilized to formulate our guiding questions:

- *Does this proposed CIP Direction:*
  - *Create a plan that defines affordable and timely solutions for all priorities?*
  - *Respond to budget parameters?*
  - *Demonstrate an acknowledgement of long-range planning and collaboration between APS and the County?*

- *Consider each project or proposal in context of other needs, timing, available funding, enrollment projections, and planning for long range site and facility use?*
- *Establish a process by which tradeoffs are transparently considered?*

JFAC commends this CIP Direction that, if followed, could put APS in a position to answer all the above guiding questions affirmatively in an adopted CIP. We support the aspects of this proposed CIP direction which could develop a CIP in collaboration with the County Board that defines balanced priorities, considers each project or proposal in context of other needs, and responds responsibly to budget parameters. As a joint commission that serves an advisory role to both the School Board and the County Board we applaud the joint planning that this proposed CIP Direction represents.

Set forth below are JFAC’s recommendations on four aspects of the proposed CIP Direction:

- Budget
- Long-Term Renovations Report and Methodologies
- Trades Center Optimization Study
- Future Phases of the Arlington Career Center (“ACC”) Campus

### Budget

Given that the Arlington County government (“ACG”) faces a multimillion-dollar budget shortfall due to the high commercial vacancy rate, the expected drop in assessments of commercial property values, and the increasing cost of public debt (among other factors), APS and ACG will need to be mindful of capital expenditures and impacts of the debt service to the operating budget. It will be imperative to clearly articulate priorities, define needs, and demonstrate that options have been transparently explored.

At the November 9, 2023, School Board meeting, the Superintendent’s proposed CIP Direction presentation described the budget constraints and stated that “For FY 2026-32, each year is limited to \$25M bond issuance”.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Duran explained that these \$25M placeholders were guidelines and the exact amount would be determined based on final adopted budget numbers that will be available in April and through discussions with ACG. If APS needs more than the \$25M bond issuance guideline or needs to plan to receive less from ACG, it is important that priorities are clearly articulated and demonstrate affordable and timely solutions and that the tradeoffs for all decisions are transparently considered and communicated.

We appreciated the discussion between the School Board Members, Dr. Duran and staff at the November 9, 2023, School Board meeting that recognized that the School Board and the County Board would need to clearly define and articulate priorities and work together to balance tradeoffs for limited bond issuance.

---

<sup>1</sup> School Board Meeting, Nov. 9, 2023, [School Board FY 2025-2034 Capital Improvement Plan \(CIP\) Direction Presentation, Slide 7.](#)

## Long-Term Renovations Report and Methodologies

JFAC commends APS for undertaking the Facility Evaluation Report for the Long-Range Plan to Renovate Existing School Facilities (“Long-Range Renovation Report”) and the Facility Condition Assessment Report (“FCA Report”). The reports and their underlying data provide an objective look at existing school facilities and create a source of information that will be an extremely valuable planning tool for APS to inform this CIP and future CIPs.

We support the recommendation to review and align local projects with the Minor Construction Major Maintenance (“MCMM”) 10-year project list based on remaining useful life and identified associated costs. JFAC also supports identifying five major infrastructure projects for inclusion along with estimated costs and alignment with bond capacity.

JFAC recommends that APS designate planning for a major renovation project as a priority beyond the feasibility/deep dive studies in the FY2025-34 CIP to include language in the list of recommended direction for new projects designating it as a priority.

- JFAC suggests adding language to the list on slide 11 of the November 9 CIP Direction presentation<sup>2</sup>: “Long-Range Plan to Renovate Existing Facilities – Feasibility Studies, TBD Major Renovation Project”
- It is important to include this designation for a TBD major renovation project in CIP Direction to articulate that it is a priority as that will be necessary when it comes to discussions with ACG over bond capacity. It will also provide notice to ACG to also begin planning if the TBD major renovation project will be for a facility that would require collaborative planning and/or funding.
- A major renovation project was given a placeholder in the FY23-32 CIP for “Long Range Plan to Renovate Existing Facilities (inc. swing space, if needed)” in the amount of \$68.85M.
- Other capital expenditures in this CIP would be balanced against this as a priority.

The FCA Report data shows that there are schools with notable educational space inadequacies that would require more resources, time, and planning than a major infrastructure project to address. Those schools need the assurance that finding a solution to their identified needs and educational space inadequacies is a priority.

JFAC discussed the recommended number 3-5 of “deep dive” studies and suggest that APS consider a maximum of 3 instead. Our reasoning behind this suggestion is that planning for the completion of only one major renovation project will likely be fiscally possible in this CIP cycle given the limited bond capacity and commitments to address other priorities. It is important to consider that the estimated schedule for completing a major renovation project following a deep dive study

---

<sup>2</sup> School Board Meeting, Nov. 9, 2023, [School Board FY 2025-2034 Capital Improvement Plan \(CIP\) Direction Presentation, Slide 11.](#)

is 3-5 years<sup>3</sup>. If those projects are staggered such that each one begins only after the last one ends, it would take 15-25 years to get to address 5 identified schools, over which time there could be shifts in available funding, enrollment (increasing or declining) or other notable changes that could make the deep dive studies done now less relevant.

We also recommend that deep dive studies also explore if there are solutions that could be made operationally to remedy some of the educational space and common space inadequacies. For example, if a school shows educational or common space inadequacies could some of those inadequacies be addressed, at least in the short term, by making policy and operational changes such as reducing the stated permanent capacity and possibly moving programs?

JFAC also suggests that as APS and ACG examine new projects and plan for facility upgrades, renovations, and rebuilds that it begin to consider climate resilience to new pressures created by climate impacts such as the frequency of more severe storms.

### Trades Center Optimization Study

JFAC fully supports the proposed CIP direction to work in collaboration with the County's Department of Environmental Services (DES) to develop a Trades Center Operational Space Feasibility Study. We commend the collaborative and long-range planning that is exemplified by the proposed goal of determining "a sustainable long-term path forward for core functions at the Trades Center to support the County and APS".<sup>4</sup>

JFAC also commends the sustainability goals that are supported by the investigation into electrifying the school bus fleet and the alignment with the County's Community Energy Plan (CEP) goals. We suggest that as APS pursues these goals that they maintain alignment with the County's plans for the ART Bus fleet.

We also recognize the importance of this long-range planning for the Trades Center site and its visioning and planning also impacts planning for other ACG locations.

### Future Phases of the Arlington Career Center Campus

JFAC supports the proposed CIP Direction that would determine the relocation of MPSA and the reuse of the legacy Career Center through a public process that considers the context of other needs, timing, available funding, and planning for long range site and facility use. The decision should be made with consideration of updated enrollment projections, overall operational efficiencies, and align with APS instructional visioning and planning processes.

---

<sup>3</sup> School Board Committee of the Whole (COW), Oct. 24, 2023, [Facility Condition Assessment \(FCA\) Report for the Long-Range Plan to Renovate Existing School Facilities](#) Presentation, Slide 4.

<sup>4</sup> School Board Meeting, Nov. 9, 2023, [School Board FY 2025-2034 Capital Improvement Plan \(CIP\) Direction](#) Presentation, Slide 15.

The proposed public process that will determine the reuse of the legacy ACC building will be important during discussions and collaborative planning with the County Board over the \$25M placeholder bond availability. It will allow the opportunity for APS to "show their work" and demonstrate that all options have been examined, a cost benefit analysis has been completed, and that the final decision is balanced with other priorities and fiscal constraints.

### Recommendations/Feedback

JFAC supports this proposed CIP Direction that, if adopted and followed, would define affordable and timely solutions for all priorities, respond to fiscal constraints, demonstrate an acknowledgment of long-range planning and collaboration between APS and the County, and establish a process by which tradeoffs are transparently considered.

In closing, we want to reiterate and underscore some of the above recommendations and feedback:

- JFAC recommends that APS designate planning for a major renovation project as a priority beyond the feasibility/deep dive studies in the FY2025-34 CIP include language in the list of recommended direction for new projects designating it as such.
- JFAC recommends that APS consider a maximum of 3 "deep dive" studies and that feasibility studies also include the examination of operational solutions to address FCA Report identified deficiencies.
- JFAC supports that the reuse of the legacy ACC building and the relocation of MPSA be determined through a public process so that the solution is balanced with other priorities, fiscal constraints and tradeoffs are transparently considered.
- Given the projected fiscal outlook due to revenue shortfalls APS and ACG will need to be mindful of capital expenditures and impacts of the debt service to the operating budget. It will be imperative to clearly and articulate priorities, define needs, and demonstrate that all options have been transparently explored. School Board and the County Board will need to work together to balance tradeoffs for limited bond issuance and transparently communicate those tradeoffs with the public.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this proposed CIP Direction and for the broader-context planning that it represents.

Sincerely,

Stacy Snyder, JFAC Chair  
Wells Harrell, JFAC Vice-Chair