



Arlington Heights Civic Association
Arlington, VA 22204

May 10, 2023

Honorable Christian Dorsey, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201
cdorsey@arlingtonva.us

Re: Use Permit Application (UPER23-00012) for the Arlington Career Center Project

Dear Mr. Dorsey,

We are writing on behalf of the Arlington Heights Civic Association (AHCA) regarding Arlington Public School's (APS) Use Permit application (UPER23-00012) for the Arlington Career Center Project located within the Arlington Heights neighborhood.¹ The Use Permit application is rapidly moving through County review. We have serious and ongoing concerns about the following issues that, to date, APS has not addressed. We ask that the County Board require these concerns be addressed before approving the Use Permit application.

- 1. Ensure final condition is limited to two school buildings.** The final condition of the current Use Permit application delivers three buildings—the new Arlington Career Center (ACC) building, the legacy Career Center building, and the Patrick Henry building, which is home to the Montessori Public School of Arlington (MPSA). Although we support constructing the new ACC building for Career Center/Arlington Tech students and refurbishing the legacy Career Center building for MPSA students, we cannot support a final condition that leaves three large buildings with inadequate green/open space.

The Use Permit application should be revised to show a final condition of no more than two buildings and appropriate green/open space at the site of the former Patrick Henry building. APS has set the expected combined enrollment of the Career Center and MPSA to 2570 students, and we believe the site is not able to support any students beyond this number.²

¹ Arlington Heights is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Arlington County and is home to over 1,000 households living in single-family homes, historical duplexes, multi-family housing, condominiums, and apartments.

² The School Board has set a maximum capacity of 2570 students, which appears to be based on 1795 ACC students and 775 MPSA students. *See, e.g.,*

2. **Ensure final condition delivers adequate green/open space and replaces identified public facilities.** The final condition of the current Use Permit application lacks sufficient open/green space, appears to substantially increase impervious surfaces, and removes several community amenities identified in the Arlington Public Spaces Master Plan (e.g., diamond field, basketball court, large open green space, and two playgrounds).³ We want to ensure that the green/open space lost to the new ACC building is replaced at the northwest corner of the site, and, to the greatest extent possible, the final condition of the Use Permit includes community facilities available to the public after school hours.
3. **Ensure proper fencing and after-hours access to playgrounds.** We are particularly concerned that the final condition of the Use Permit delivers play areas that will be behind six-foot fencing along the corner of South Highland Street and continuing eastward on 7th Street South. Six-foot fencing is inconsistent with the vast majority of other playgrounds at APS school sites,⁴ unwelcoming to the public, and inconsistent with the Public Spaces Master Plan.⁵ Indeed, the current six-foot fencing also has a documented history of being locked after school hours.

Although we are not asking for the current six-foot fencing to be removed, *we are asking that any new fencing* is limited to four feet in height, which is appropriate for the site.⁶ Access to playgrounds within a 5-minute walk is an important equity issue, especially for children living in an urban area. The children living in Fillmore Garden Apartments, for example, have no community play structures and therefore heavily use the playground located across South Walter Reed Drive. We want to ensure that children living in Arlington

[https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/arlington/Board.nsf/files/C88QF26869B7/\\$file/G-1%20CIP%20Direction-%20Presentation.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/arlington/Board.nsf/files/C88QF26869B7/$file/G-1%20CIP%20Direction-%20Presentation.pdf) (slide 12).

³ See Arlington Public Spaces Master Plan (adopted April, 2019) (“PSMP”), p. 182 (setting forth access standards for community amenities), available at <http://arlingtonparks.us/psmp/main/mobile/index.html>.

⁴ For example, the fencing surrounding the playgrounds at Alice West Fleet elementary school—also located in Arlington Heights—are four feet in height. Although we understand that MPSA has a large number of pre-K students, several other South Arlington elementary schools have similar numbers of preschoolers: MPSA (105 pre-K), Hoffman-Boston (83 pre-K), Dr. Charles R. Drew (84 pre-K), Carlin Springs (96 pre-K), Alice West Fleet (78 pre-K). Pre-K enrollment data available at https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U-Mem_281_Membership-SummaryAll.pdf.

⁵ See, e.g., PSMP, p. 53 (setting forth equitable access for recreation, including on “school grounds and fields,” as the PSMP’s first “strategic direction”).

⁶ Arlington County classifies both South Highland Street and 7th Street South adjacent to the Patrick Henry building as “neighborhood minor” streets. See <https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2019/07/StreetFunctionalClassif.pdf>. The County identifies South Old Glebe Road (location of Alice West Fleet) as “neighborhood principal.”

Heights and the surrounding neighborhoods have equitable access and opportunity to use the new playgrounds.

4. Ensure proper sidewalks and streetscapes around the entirety of the Career Center site.

The final condition of the Use Permit delivers sidewalks around the current Patrick Henry building that do not comply with Arlington County's streetscape standards, even though APS plans to disturb the ground adjacent and around these sidewalks. We want to ensure the sidewalks are wide enough for the several thousand people (students, staff, parents, etc.) who will be using the Career Center site daily. We ask that the Use Permit be revised to include proper sidewalks around the *entirety* of the Career Center site. Relatedly, we ask that the use permit include proper streetscaping around the *entirety* of the Career Center site. At a recent public hearing, APS stated that they do not want to "waste taxpayer money" to improve the sidewalks/streetscaping around the entirety of the site; however, this approach is wholly inequitable.

5. Ensure the entire Career Center site meets appropriate environmental standards. It is unclear from the Use Permit application whether the final condition complies with Arlington County's high standards for environmental design. For example, it does not appear that the new ACC building will be built to the same environmental standards as other recently built schools, such as Cardinal Elementary, the Heights Building, and Alice West Fleet Elementary. Moreover, the impact of the final condition on biophilic design, stormwater management, and impervious surfaces does not appear to have been addressed in the final condition of the Use Permit application.

6. Parking garage condition. We appreciate APS's hard-working and dedicated teachers and staff, and are glad that they will have a place to park on the Career Center site. We want to ensure the parking garage has adequate parking to meet identified needs. Additionally, we want to make sure the parking garage meets a high architectural standard, including having conditions in the Use Permit application ensuring the exterior shields the nature of the parking garage while providing adequate light.

The Arlington Heights neighborhood is currently home to more public schools than any other neighborhood in Arlington County: Alice West Fleet Elementary School, Montessori Public School of Arlington, Thomas Jefferson Middle School, Arlington Career Center (including Arlington Tech), and the Arlington Community High School. We are proud of our close ties with APS, and have been supportive of the wide array of schools that are part of our community. That said, we continue to have serious and ongoing concerns with the Use Permit application that should be addressed. We are happy to discuss our concerns further, and to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you for your consideration,

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