

February 11, 2016

Emma Violand-Sanchez
Chair, Arlington County School Board

Dear Chair Violand-Sanchez:

Thank you so much for taking the time yesterday evening to meet with the Aurora Highlands Civic Association (AHCA) and discuss issues of importance to our neighborhood, including the CIP process as well as long-term planning for overcrowding at Oakridge Elementary School. Please also convey our thanks to Zach Larnard for his presentation on the CIP process.

During our discussion, you also asked me to summarize key takeaways so we are all on the same page.

First, we asked about the progress being made with respect to the attached October 15, 2015 joint civic association letter to the County and School Board regarding studying the Aurora Highlands Community Center/Library/Fire House site as a potential multi-use facility including an elementary school, community center, and library. You apologized for not being aware of the letter and committed to bringing it up with County Chair Garvey as a potential agenda item at your next joint County Board–School Board work session on February 19, 2016. We also expressed a desire that there be an opportunity for comment from the community at this meeting when both boards are together. Please let our president, Natasha Atkins, know as soon as possible whether you can accommodate this.

We appreciate your efforts in helping move forward the conversation on this topic. As we expressed at the meeting and as evidenced by the fact that this letter was jointly written by three civic associations, this is an issue that a great number of people in the entire 22202 zip code feel strongly about.

Second, we discussed the status of the November 5, 2015 SAWG Report’s recommendation to “start the process in 2016 to plan for a *second* south Arlington elementary school in the Pentagon City area.” In particular, the working group stated that it:

strongly supports the idea that the School Board work with the County Board to start a process in 2016 – with appropriate community involvement – to find a site for a school in the general vicinity of Pentagon City....The Working Group also advocates that both boards provide funding to support this planning effort.

As you know, as part of its approval of the SAWG recommendations, the School Board directed the Superintendent to prepare a report on options and next steps regarding the possibility of a new elementary school in the Pentagon City area post 2019 due no later than April 1, 2016.

Given it is already mid-February, we expressed surprise that AHCA has yet to be contacted for any “community involvement” in planning for a new elementary school in the Pentagon City area post 2019. Mr. Larnard helpfully pointed out that we could make our views known in the School Board’s CIP community meeting process. However, it doesn’t seem like the spirit of the SAWG recommendation in that respect was to follow the routine CIP process. Rather, it was intended to do some additional, area-specific investigations in the Pentagon City area. You committed to ensuring that the Pentagon City area community would be directly engaged in that process. We look forward to working with you and Arlington Public Schools staff on “plan[ning] for a second south Arlington elementary school in the Pentagon City area.”

Please do not hesitate to contact me or any of the other members of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association's Executive Board if you have any questions or would like to discuss these matters further.

Sincerely,
Robert Sidman
Recording Secretary
Aurora Highlands Civic Association