MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education
From: Joshua P. Starr, Superintendent of Schools
Subject: Elementary School Site in the White Flint Sector Plan

The Montgomery County Planning Board is expected to review the redevelopment plan for the White Flint Mall this fall. The proposed redevelopment includes 2,459 residential units and a mix of office, retail, and hotel uses. White Flint Mall redevelopment represents about one-fourth of the 9,800 residential units provided for in the White Flint Sector Plan (adopted in 2010). Due to the large number of residential units in the sector plan and the estimate that 410 elementary school students will be generated by build-out of the plan, an elementary school site was identified on the south side of the White Flint Mall property.

Staff in the Department of Facilities Management has expressed concerns to Montgomery County Planning Department officials and staff about the size and location of the school site on the White Flint Mall property. It is important that the Board of Education provides comments to the Montgomery County Planning Board prior to their review of the White Flint Mall redevelopment plan. I recommend that the Board of Education approves the attached letter to Ms. Francoise M. Carrier, chair, Montgomery County Planning Board. This letter expresses our concerns about the identified school site, suggests an alternative location on the property, and requests that the school site be placed in reservation for future school system use.

WHEREAS, The White Flint Sector Plan provides for the construction of up to 9,800 housing units in an area served by the Walter Johnson Cluster schools, and the existing elementary schools in this cluster will be unable to accommodate the additional students generated by the sector plan; and

WHEREAS, The White Flint Sector Plan includes a small elementary school site on the south side of the current White Flint Mall property; and
WHEREAS, The White Flint Mall redevelopment is expected to be reviewed this fall by the Montgomery County Planning Board; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the attached letter be transmitted to Montgomery County Planning Board chair, Ms. Francoise M. Carrier, and the Planning Board members.

Attachment

JPS:jlc
October 22, 2013

Ms. Francoise M. Carrier
Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
Vice Chair, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland  20910-3760

Dear Ms. Carrier:

The purpose of this letter is to provide the Montgomery County Board of Education’s (Board) position on the elementary school site that was designated in the White Flint Sector Plan to be located in the southern portion of the White Flint Mall property. I understand that the Montgomery County Planning Board anticipates taking action later this fall on the White Flint redevelopment. I believe it is helpful to provide some background on the history of our effort to obtain an elementary school site.

Background

During development of the White Flint Sector Plan, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) staff worked closely with Montgomery County Planning Department (MCPD) staff. MCPS staff estimated that the 9,800 housing units planned in the White Flint Sector Plan would generate approximately 410 elementary school students, 380 middle school students, and 330 high school students. The number of elementary school students required an elementary school site be identified in the sector plan and a number of options were reviewed. Due to the high density of development planned in the area, finding a site of adequate acreage was difficult.

On October 13, 2009, the Board of Education adopted a resolution which recommended that a 4.3–acre site, known as “White Flint Park North”, be shown in the sector plan as the future elementary school site. This property is located behind White Flint Mall and adjacent to the White Flint Neighborhood Park. However, following the Board’s preference for the White Flint Park North site, MCPD staff expressed concern regarding the suitability of this site because it would be compromised by future road alignments which would reduce the useable acreage of the site to about 2.5 acres.

In fall 2009, the County Council Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee reviewed the sector plan and PHED members directed MCPD staff to develop an alternative location for the school site. This collaboration resulted in the identification of the 4.2–acre “White Flint Mall South” site that is located on the south side of the White Flint Mall property. An alternative site of 5.4 acres, known as the Luttrell/Higgins property, located on Executive Boulevard at Woodglen Drive, was identified, but this property was considered difficult to acquire and would require full purchase as compared to dedication.

On December 8, 2009, the Board of Education adopted a resolution recommending the 4.2–acre White Mall Flint South site be designated for a future elementary school. A copy of the resolution was forwarded to the Montgomery County Council, and the White Flint Sector Plan was adopted in 2010 with
Recent Developments

Since the White Flint Sector Plan was adopted in 2010, it has come to the Board’s attention that the designated White Flint Mall South site is now compromised by revised road alignments. What was originally a 4.2-acre site has been reduced to approximately 3.6 acres. MCPS Department of Facilities Management (DFM) staff evaluated the reduced White Flint Mall South site and has found it to be significantly compromised for the construction of an elementary school.

Also of concern is the prospect that the site would not be dedicated in whole by the property owner since the approximately 2,500 housing units planned at the White Flint Mall property constitute about 25 percent of the 9,800 units planned in the White Flint Sector Plan. Therefore, it is our understanding that MCPS can expect dedication of only 25 percent of the value of the property and purchase of the other 75 percent.

Due to concerns about the White Flint Mall South school site, DFM staff met with MCPD staff and proposed that the school site be returned to the originally preferred location—the White Flint Mall North site. In this location, the 2.5-acre site would be the location for the school building and a portion of the adjacent 8.5-acre White Flint Neighborhood Park would be available for playfields.

Since the adopted sector plan currently requires the property to be dedicated in full to the Montgomery County Department of Parks, we anticipated that it would be dedicated in full to MCPS. This dedication would save the county the cost of acquisition of expensive land in the sector plan area; and in addition, the park portion of the site could continue to be available to the public. The collocation of schools with park properties is a common and effective method of land conservation in Montgomery County. This year, 46 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, and 7 high schools are collocated with parks.

DFM staff has evaluated the White Flint Mall North site and has determined that an elementary school can be constructed at this location. However, in meetings with the Montgomery County Planning Department and the Montgomery County Department of Parks, we have found firm resistance to this proposal and a view that an elementary school cannot be constructed at the White Flint Mall North location. Also, there is the understandable concern that the adopted White Flint Sector Plan designates this land for park use.

Recommendation

Based on the considerations outlined above, the Board of Education favors collocating the elementary school with the White Flint Neighborhood Park at the White Flint Mall North location.

We appreciate that this creates a dilemma for you in terms of the adopted sector plan designation of this property for a park. However, if there is any measure the Montgomery County Planning Board can take to reassign the school site to the White Flint Mall North location, we would be grateful. If this action is successful, we believe we will have achieved a viable future school site.
However, if you do not support our request, or if you believe that it is not possible at this time to reassign the location of the school site, then we request that the Montgomery County Planning Board restores the original 4.3 acres that was provided at the White Flint Mall South site. This was the size of the site when the Board of Education adopted the October 13, 2009, resolution recommending this site be designated for a new elementary school.

We request the 4.3–acre site be put in reservation for a period of 20 years. This timeframe is necessary due to the extended timeframe for build-out of the White Flint Mall redevelopment and other properties in the sector plan. We anticipate it will take many years before sufficient enrollment exists in the sector plan area to require the opening of a new elementary school at the White Flint Mall South site. The 20-year timeframe also takes into consideration the time it will take MCPS to obtain county approval and funding for construction of an elementary school on the site.

Finally, please stipulate that this property would be subject to partial dedication commensurate with the share of residential units the redevelopment represents of the 9,800 total units in the sector plan (approximately 25 percent).

Thank you for your consideration of my comments and your support of our public schools. If I may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Christopher S. Barclay
President

Copy to:
- Members of the Montgomery County Planning Board
  - Mr. Crispell
- Members of the Board of Education
  - Mr. Geiling
- Dr. Starr
  - Mr. Song
- Mr. Bowers
  - Ms. Bradford
- Dr. Schiavino-Narvaez
  - Ms. Krasnow
- Dr. Statham
  - Mr. Riley
- Dr. Zuckerman
  - Ms. Wright