SITE SELECTION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION

FOR

GAITHERSBURG CLUSTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

January 11, 2018
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A Site Selection Advisory Committee (SSAC) was formed in November 2017, to select a site for a potential Gaithersburg Cluster elementary school as an option to address student enrollment growth and challenges associated with a planned school addition project at Gaithersburg Elementary School. The SSAC members reviewed the following publicly-owned sites:

- Charlene Elementary School #1 (Hunter’s Woods Local Park) surplus school site
- Charlene Elementary School #2 surplus school site
- Emory Grove Center
- Centerway Local Park (Stewartown Junior High School) surplus school site
- Woodwards Road future elementary school site
- Crown Farm future high school site
- Jeremiah Park future elementary school site
- City of Gaithersburg Kelley Park
- Washington Suburban Sanitation Commission maintenance facility, located at 111 West Diamond Avenue
- County-owned former Public Safety Training Academy.

Because of the timing, availability, and location of some of the sites, the SSAC members voted during their second meeting to remove five properties from further consideration. The sites removed included four privately-owned sites, which will not be further discussed in this report.

The SSAC members recommend the City of Gaithersburg Kelley Park site be the location of a new Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School. This site is located at 400 Victory Farm Drive in Gaithersburg. It would be the first new elementary school site in the Gaithersburg Cluster since 1988. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Division of Construction staff believes a new elementary school can be accommodated on the site while maintaining the City of Gaithersburg ball fields. An alternative site with the next highest point rating is the WSSC site, located at 111 West Diamond Avenue in Gaithersburg.

The attached report will be posted for public review and comment and forwarded to the City of Gaithersburg Mayor and City Council for consideration and discussion. In late February 2018, the superintendent of schools will make his recommendation to the Board of Education as part of the FY 2019 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2019–2024 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) process. In March 2018, the Board will conduct a work session on the
recommendation, hold public hearings, and take action on the recommended site. There is no proposed opening date for a new Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School at this time. A boundary study for a new elementary school will be conducted approximately one year prior to the school’s opening.

The remainder of this report presents background information about the candidate sites, details regarding the site selection process, the two publicly-owned candidate sites, and the analysis of these sites by the SSAC members.

**BACKGROUND**

In the 2014–2015 school year, a *Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School Capacity Study* was conducted to determine whether additions to cluster schools could address the projected space deficits. Along with additions to existing schools, a new elementary school also was considered. On October 15, 2015, the *Findings of the Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School Capacity Study* were released. The study concluded challenges existed with both approaches—additions or a new school—including concerns regarding future student enrollment, size of schools, and potential reassignment of students. Also, the study recommended consideration of available capacity in adjacent clusters.

As a result, the former interim superintendent of schools recommended a *Tri-Cluster Roundtable Discussion Group (Roundtable) for the Gaithersburg, Col. Zadok Magruder, and Thomas S. Wootton Clusters*. The roundtable would review school student enrollments, utilization levels, and facility options at the three adjacent clusters to more broadly address student enrollment growth and space deficits in the Gaithersburg Cluster. With respect to the Gaithersburg Elementary School addition feasibility study, a number of challenges were revealed during the process. For example, existing site constraints would require the construction of a structured parking system, which raised both safety and security concerns. Also, with minimal site opportunity to construct the addition, several options were explored for a two- or three-story addition, raising questions related to program adjacencies, potential difficulties in navigating the building, as well as passive security opportunities. Finally, while a second cafeteria would ensure students had sufficient time to eat lunch, recess for students would be impacted as a result of the additional footprint of the new building on the site.

Based on the challenges that were discovered during the feasibility study process for the addition at Gaithersburg Elementary School, as well as the absence of a solution in the approved CIP to address the overutilization at Rosemont and Strawberry Knoll elementary schools, the superintendent of schools recommended the evaluation of a new elementary school in the cluster. The Board authorized formation of a SSAC to evaluate site options for a new elementary school. Exhibit A lists the members of the SSAC and Exhibit B illustrates projected student enrollments for Gaithersburg Cluster elementary schools.
The Gaithersburg Cluster spans the following four master-planned areas of the county:

- City of Gaithersburg Master Plan. The 2008 City of Gaithersburg adopted Community Facilities Master Plan identified one high school site at Crown Farm. The Community Facilities Master Plan did not identify a need for elementary school sites because capacity in Gaithersburg Cluster schools, with the exception of Strawberry Knoll and Summit Hall elementary schools, were projected to be largely under capacity. Gaithersburg Elementary School which is now 75 seats over capacity was projected to be 190 seats under capacity.

- Gaithersburg Vicinity Master Plan.

- Montgomery Village Master Plan. The Montgomery Village Master Plan discusses school capacity issues and identifies the need to address those issues through school addition projects or school boundary changes. However, the plan also mentions a new school site may be needed in the future and sites such as Centerway Local Park and other sites should be considered at the time of site selection.

- Shady Grove Sector Plan. The Shady Grove Sector Plan envisions one elementary school site in the former Jeremiah Park service area. The proposed location has not been identified because development plans for the area of the current Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Transportation Depot have yet to be developed.

The following five elementary schools serve the more populated southern portion of the Gaithersburg Cluster—Gaithersburg (opened in 1947), Washington Grove (opened in 1956), Rosemont (opened in 1965), Strawberry Knoll (opened in 1988), and Summit Hall elementary school (opened in 1971). The northern portion of the Gaithersburg Cluster is served by Goshen, (opened in 1988) and Laytonsville elementary schools (opened in 1951).

MCPS staff in the Department of Facilities Management facilitated the site selection process. The SSAC was comprised of community members and county agency staff with a wide range of expertise. The SSAC met twice—the first meeting was held on November 14, 2017, and the second meeting was held on December 5, 2017. Both meetings were held at the MCPS administrative offices located at 45 West Gude Drive, Rockville, Maryland, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
The site selection process enables staff in the Department of Facilities Management to work with county agencies, the Montgomery County Council of Parent and Teacher Associations, Inc. (MCCPTA) representatives, and homeowner associations when considering sites for school construction. The SSAC for Gaithersburg Cluster elementary school focused on recommending an elementary school site that meets specific criteria outlined in Board of Education Regulation FAA-RA, *Long-range Educational Facilities Planning*, and is physically suited and appropriately located to best serve students within the Gaithersburg community.

**CRITERIA**

MCPS has established criteria important to the evaluation of school sites. Many of the criterion relate to the suitability of sites for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. MCPS has adopted LEED as a design standard for all MCPS construction projects. The following criteria are important to the selection of suitable MCPS school sites:

- **Location**—Candidate sites should be located within the targeted site search area of the Gaithersburg Cluster and adjacent to residential uses. If possible, sites should be located to allow students to walk to school. Since a large amount of residential development is under way in Gaithersburg, site selection should consider the location of existing schools, the build-out of planned residential areas, and the long-term need for additional elementary schools.

- **Acreage**—A minimum usable site of 7.5 acres that is capable of fitting the instructional program, including site requirements. The 7.5 acres is based on an ideal leveled site, and the size may vary depending on the site shape and site constraints.

- **Topography/Environment**—Sites that are fairly flat and level are preferred. When flat sites are not available, a “balanced site” in which soils in higher elevations can be used to fill low elevation areas are preferred to minimize having to transport soil to or from the site. Topography also is examined to determine the location of wetlands and sensitive environmental areas that may render a portion of the site unusable. Existence of mature trees and steep slopes should be considered as these factors could increase development costs or render portions of sites unusable.

- **Access**—Access to sites in terms of road adequacy, traffic, length of road frontage, and potential entrance and exit points is to be considered. The ideal site would have access to a primary subdivision road that consists of a 70-foot right-of-way. Sites that have at least three points of access are preferred because school bus access can be provided separately from student drop-off, staff, and visitor access. Community sidewalks are preferred to enhance safe student walking access to the school.
• **Utilities**—Sites must have access to public utilities, including water, sanitary sewer, natural gas, and cable.

• **Physical Condition**—Existing and planned uses adjacent to sites are considered to ensure compatibility with a positive and rewarding learning environment. Excessive noise, distracting activities, or hazardous industrial-type uses on adjacent land would not be conducive to education. There should be no evidence of toxic or hazardous waste on sites. Some sites may have existing buildings and infrastructure that must be demolished to allow for new construction.

• **Availability and Timing**—Site availability is considered in instances where a site must be transferred from public ownership or purchased from a private owner. Additionally, in the Gaithersburg Cluster, timing of development in various areas is a consideration in identifying a preferred site.

• **Cost**—Most master-planned school sites can be acquired at no cost. If no master-planned sites or publicly-owned property are available, then the cost to acquire a site in private ownership needs to be considered.
The SSAC initially considered a total of 14 sites. However, during the second meeting the committee voted to remove five sites from consideration due to timing, availability, and potential high costs. The SSAC rated and scored the six remaining sites, which included two master-planned candidate sites. A description and photographs of each elementary school candidate site follows. The map below shows the location of the candidate sites. The private site will not be identified in the report or future discussions.
Charlene Elementary School #1 (Hunter’s Woods Local Park)

The 10-acre site was conveyed by the community developer to the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPCC) in 1981. The property is located between Framingham Drive and Ridge Heights Road in Gaithersburg. The local park abuts the Charlene surplus school site and is located within the northern area of the Gaithersburg Cluster. It is in the Goshen Elementary School service area but is in close proximity to the Strawberry Knoll Elementary School service area boundary. Public utilities are available in the area. The site is relatively flat with ball fields and playground equipment. This site was identified as Charlene Elementary School site #1 because it abuts the surplus school site and is under the same ownership. Either this property or a combination of Charlene Elementary School sites #1 and #2 could possibly accommodate an elementary school.
Charlene Elementary # 2

The 9.95-acre site was conveyed by MCPS to Montgomery County in 1983 and was subsequently conveyed to the M-NCPPC in 1986. The site is a 9.95-acre property, located between Framingham Drive and Ridge Heights Road in Gaithersburg. The surplus school site is located within the northern area of the Gaithersburg Cluster and is in the Goshen Elementary School service area, but in close proximity to the Strawberry Knoll Elementary School service area boundary. The site is heavily wooded with a possible stream valley buffer running through the center of the property. Public utilities are available within the area.
Emory Grove Center

The 10-acre Emory Grove Center site, located at 18100 Washington Grove Lane, Gaithersburg, is owned by the Board of Education. It currently serves as an elementary school holding facility for other elementary schools within the mid- and upper county areas while those facilities are undergoing major capital construction. Losing this facility would impact future capital projects since this location is the only available holding facility serving mid- and upper county elementary schools. Public utilities are available on site. The site is relatively flat around the main building. In the rear of the building, the site slopes slightly down toward the ball fields. The site abuts Johnson’s Local Park and is located in the Col. Zadok Magruder Cluster.
Centerway Local Park (Stewartown Junior High School)

The 20.03-acre surplus school site, owned by the M-NCPCC, is located within the Watkins Mill Cluster and abuts Whetstone Elementary School. The site could easily accommodate a new elementary school due to its size and topography. The site is located in the northern portion of the site search area. The site is identified within the Montgomery Village Master Plan as a possible future elementary school site. Public utilities are available in the area. The site is relatively flat with a drop between the upper and lower fields.
Woodwards Road Future Elementary School Site

The 11-acre property is owned by the Board of Education and includes two parcels of 8.38 acres and 2.67 acres. The site is located just outside the perimeter of the Strawberry Knoll Elementary School service area and is in close proximity to the northern boundary of the Gaithersburg Elementary School service area. Access is provided via Emory Grove Road. Public utilities are available within the area. MCPS leases a portion of the property to telecommunications providers. The topography has relatively flat areas with some depressions and rises. Trees have grown within the center of the site over time and the western side of the property has forest.
Jeremiah Park Future Elementary School Site

The Shady Grove Sector Master Plan identifies an elementary school site at the county-owned former joint agency maintenance facility. No specific sites have been identified for dedication since the timing for site develop is at least several years in the future. The topography is flat with no trees or streams. The site currently houses the MCPS Transportation Department’s administrative offices and Shady Grove Bus Depot. Access to the site would be provided via Crabbs Branch Way. Public utilities are available to the site.
City of Gaithersburg Kelley Park

The 27.68-acre site is owned by the City of Gaithersburg and is centrally located within the Gaithersburg Cluster at 400 Victory Farm Drive in Gaithersburg. The property contains three lighted baseball/softball fields, tennis courts, a playground, and open spaces. The City of Gaithersburg operates several sports programs from this location. The topography is relatively flat with some depressions and rises. The site contains a stream valley buffer on the south side of the property. There are sidewalks along Victory Farm Drive providing an opportunity for walking students.
Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission Maintenance Facility

The 7.98-acre site is located at 111 West Diamond Avenue in Gaithersburg and is owned by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. It is centrally located within the site search area. Multi-family, single family, and townhouse communities are in close proximity of the site. Access is provided via West Diamond Avenue. The site is flat and contains several buildings, parking areas, and a fueling facility. The site has a small stream bed on the south side of the property. Public utilities are available to the site.
Crown Farm Future High School Site

The 30-acre master-planned high school site is currently owned by the City of Gaithersburg. Use of the site is subject to an annexation agreement, which requires the site to be developed as a high school within a 20-year timeframe from the annexation date or the site will revert to the City of Gaithersburg for a public recreational use. The property is located at 9410 Fields Road in Gaithersburg. The Board of Education recently adopted a resolution to begin planning for a future high school on the site. The site is a large, open area, relatively flat, with a stream and forest on the southern end of the site.
During the course of the SSAC’s discussions, MCPS staff reviewed each site under consideration. The SSAC members discussed the candidate sites in terms of the site selection criteria previously outlined and further expanded upon during the meeting. The SSAC also discussed the sites in context of the recommendations and goals set forth in the Board of Education’s August 31, 2017, resolution to expand the options to address the capacity issues within the Gaithersburg Cluster.

All publicly-owned candidate sites met the criteria for size—over seven acres. Several sites were much larger and were determined to be more appropriate for a middle or high school. It was also determined that all sites were suitable for an elementary school program. All sites had utilities available on the property or could be extended to the sites. Several sites were eliminated due to availability within the timeframe of the capital planning window. These included two private sites, the Jeremiah Park site, and the former Public Safety Training Academy site. Several sites were removed from consideration due to location, including the Charlene Elementary School #1 (Hunter’s Woods Local Park), and the Charlene Elementary School #2 surplus school site. These sites were considered too far north from the most heavily impacted schools located within the lower portion of the cluster. The SSAC members voted to remove the remaining private sites due to cost, availability, physical condition, and location. The properties that remained on the SSAC list of potential sites included the Centerway Local Park (Stewartown Junior High School); Emory Grove Center; City of Gaithersburg Kelley Park, 111 West Diamond Avenue; Woodwards Road future school site; and the WSSC maintenance facility.

The Emory Grove Center is located a short distance east of the Gaithersburg Cluster within the Col. Zadok Magruder Cluster. The property is not centrally located and would require busing Gaithersburg Cluster students, while students living on the east side of Washington Grove Lane across from the holding school site may not attend because they attend Col. Zadok Magruder Cluster schools. The 10-acre site is suitable for an elementary school and abuts Johnson’s Local Park, which provides an opportunity to share ball fields. However, the greatest impediment to using this site for a new elementary school is its current status as an elementary school holding facility. There are no other holding facilities located in this area of the county. Loss of this facility would impact future capital projects.

The City of Gaithersburg Kelley Park is located centrally in the cluster and has many positive attributes. The site is located off a primary residential street with sidewalks allowing for a larger number of students to walk to school. The street frontage along Victory Farm Drive provides good visibility for a public building. The 27.68-acre park site also provides an opportunity for a shared school/park facility. Similar partnerships with the City of Gaithersburg include Lakelands Middle School/Lakelands Park and the Gaithersburg Aquatic Center located at Gaithersburg Middle School. The topography in the
area where a school could be located is relatively flat. However, a stream running along the southwestern property boundary may present some challenges to citing a school without impacting the current configuration of the fields. This site was most highly rated by the SSAC.

The WSSC maintenance facility site, located at 111 West Diamond Avenue, also is centrally located. It is in a more urban area near Olde Towne Gaithersburg. Access currently is provided from West Diamond Avenue but could be provided from Water Street. Improving traffic flow and pedestrian safety along West Diamond Avenue would be paramount to making this a successful site. The 7.98-acre site is relatively flat and is currently developed as a WSSC maintenance facility. The negative aspects of the site include the existing buildings and fueling facilities. The property would have to be purchased from WSSC unless another arrangement could be negotiated. Also, the site would not be readily available due to the acquisition process and the requirement for WSSC to relocate operations. Despite the challenges, this site was selected as the alternative to City of Gaithersburg Kelley Park.

The Woodwards Road future elementary school site is owned by the Board of Education and is readily available for new elementary school construction. The SSAC members believed the location on the north side of Mid-County Highway was not as ideal as other sites, which were more centrally located in the search area. The site is also located within the Col. Zadok Magruder Cluster. Additionally, Emory Grove Road is a narrow two-lane road with no sidewalks. Walking would not be an option for most students. Access to and from the site may be difficult during morning and evening travel times. Traffic and pedestrian accessibility were a concern for the SSAC.

The final site evaluated by the SSAC was Centerway Local Park (Stewartown Junior High School), located in Montgomery Village. The site was large enough, had good access from Centerway, and had relatively flat topography. The SSAC believed the site to be too far north of the areas experiencing capacity issues. The site also abuts Whetstone Elementary School. While this site is identified in the Montgomery Village Master Plan as a possible elementary school site, the SSAC believed reserving the site as a future Middle School site was a more prudent option.

**CONCLUSION**

The committee rated the candidate sites by using a criteria evaluation grid and reached consensus for two sites.

The SSAC recommends that the City of Gaithersburg Kelley Park site be recommended as the site for a new elementary school, with the WSSC maintenance facility site recommended as an alternate. The City of Gaithersburg Kelley Park site offers the best range of site characteristic, including access, cost, availability, location, and consistency with LEED™ criteria. In making its recommendation, the SSAC points out that retention of open space is very important and that every effort should be taken to preserve as much open space as possible.
# Exhibit A

## Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School Capacity

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## Cluster Information

- ES Utilization: 109%
- ES Enrollment: 4287

ES Utilization: 109%
ES Enrollment: 4300
112%
4411
109%
4502
110%
4544
111%
4615
114%
4700
114%
4740
124%
5150
Exhibit B

GAITHERSBURG CLUSTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SITE SELECTION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mr. Seth P. Adams
Director, Division of Construction
Montgomery County Public Schools

Ms. Sonja M. Bloetner
Leader, Latino Student Achievement Action Group
Montgomery County Public Schools

Ms. Carolyn Garvey
Gaithersburg Cluster Coordinator
Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations

Mr. Peter J. Geiling
Team Leader, Real Estate Management
Montgomery County Public Schools

Ms. Maren Hill
Planner, Area 2, Montgomery Planning
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Ms. Linda L. Hoover
Transportation Cluster Manager
Shady Grove North
Transportation Administration
Montgomery County Public Schools

Mr. Craig Howard
Senior Legislative Analyst
Montgomery County Council

Ms. Lisa C. Howard
Data Analyst, Real Estate Management
Montgomery County Public Schools

Mr. David Humpton
Executive Vice President
Montgomery Village Foundation

Ms. Angela Jones
Co-Chair
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Parents’ Council
Montgomery County

Ms. Adrienne Karamihas
Acting Director, Division of Capital Planning
Montgomery County Public Schools

Mr. Keith Levchenko
Senior Legislative Analyst
Montgomery County Council

Ms. Erika López-Finn
Capital Improvements Program Budget Analyst
Office of Management and Budget
Montgomery County Government

Ms. Monica Marquina
Legislative Affairs Manager
City of Gaithersburg

Ms. Catherine Matthews
Director, Upcounty Regional Services Center
Montgomery County Government

Ms. Joli A. McCathran
Mayor
Town of Washington Grove

Ms. Melissa McKenna
Citizen
Montgomery County

Mr. Paul Mortensen
Senior Urban Designer, Director's Office
Montgomery Planning
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Mr. Joe Nelson
Representative
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Parents’ Council
Montgomery County

Ms. Victoria Kelly Robles
Area Vice President
Damascus, Gaithersburg, Col. Zadok Magruder and Watkins Mill
Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations

Mr. Tony Tomasello
City Manager
City of Gaithersburg
Exhibit C
Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School
Site Selection Advisory Committee (SSAC)
December 5, 2017
SITE EVALUATION GRID

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Criteria</th>
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<td>Total Score</td>
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* Scoring System: SSAC members placed a score in each cell to rate the specific criteria for the specific site.
Place a "+1" in the cell to indicate the site is "good" on the specified criteria.
Place a "0" in the cell to indicate the site is "average" on the specified criteria.
Place a "-1" in the cell to indicate the site is "poor" on the specified criteria.
Exhibit D
Service Area Maps

GAITHERSBURG ES SERVICE AREA MAP—UPDATED PUBLIC SITES ONLY
SSAC GAITHERSBURG—MEETING 2

GOSHEN ES SERVICE AREA MAP—UPDATED PUBLIC SITES ONLY
SSAC GAITHERSBURG—MEETING 2
WASHINGTON GROVE ES SERVICE AREA MAP—UPDATED PUBLIC SITES ONLY
SSAC GAITHERSBURG—MEETING 2

STRAWBERRY KNOLL ES SERVICE AREA MAP—UPDATED PUBLIC SITES ONLY
SSAC GAITHERSBURG—MEETING 2