ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3E

TENLEYTOWN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY PARK FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS
CHEVY CHASE WAKEFIELD FORT GAINES

c/o Lisner-Louise-Dickson-Hurt Home 5425 Western Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20015
https://anc3e.org

Meeting Minutes
May 26, 2021, 7:30 pm

The meeting convened via Zoom at 7:32 PM. Commissioners Bender, Cohen, Hall, McHugh and Quinn were in attendance.

Commissioner Bender began the meeting by stating Ward 3 schools, especially Deal and Wilson, are crowded, and the problem is expected to get worse in the coming years. DC has found two sites to place new schools, on part of the Hardy Rec Center field off of Foxhall Rd and at the old GDS lower/middle school off of MacArthur Blvd. At the same time, the DC Council is currently completing the update to the Comprehensive Plan and there are many vacancies in Friendship Heights and there is also space that the city owns over the Tenleytown Library that might be used for school purposes. Bender stated that new development in our neighborhood could be part of the solution to school over-crowding. He then introduced the speakers for the meeting, Michael Porcello, Legislative Director for Councilmember Cheh, Claudia Lujan Deputy Chief, Strategic School Planning & Enrollment for DCPS, and Ruth Wattenberg, the Ward 3 Representative to the State Board of Education (SBOE).

Michael Porcello stated that DCPS convened a working group which found that four new schools were needed in Ward 3: two new elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. The sites being proposed would only provide two of the four schools required to alleviate crowding in the Wilson feeder system. He stated that Councilmember Cheh would like to see a thoughtful, comprehensive solution to the problem and was not happy with the approach the Mayor is taking.

Both Porcello and Claudia Lujan explained the five options under consideration for the two sites:

- At the Foxhall site: place an elementary school (involve a shift in boundaries from Key, Mann, and Stoddart) or move the 3rd through 5th grades from Key, Mann and Stoddart to this site;
- use the GDS site as a middle school, a high school or as a 9th grade academy for Wilson High School.

Commissioner Hall stated that she would like DCPS, the Office of Planning (OP) and the Department of General Services (DGS) to provide a more comprehensive solution to the school crowding problem that addresses crowding at both Wilson and Deal. She stated that there are a number of vacant properties in Friendship Heights, including the Lord and Taylor site, and would like to see the city consider placing a school on that site. The two proposed sites are not well served by public transportation and would not work well for high school kids who are old enough to take public transportation to school by themselves. She stated that if the Foxhall site

were to be used as a 3-5th grade campus, the city should provide school bus service from the other elementary schools so parents could do one drop off/pick up. Finally, she would like the city to increase the economic diversity of new housing units in this area so we can have more diverse schools.

Ruth Wattenberg stated that Ward 3 school will be over-enrolled by more than 2800 students by 2028. But DCPS is working in a vacuum to solve the problem and there are other options that can be put on the table including purchasing other sites and moving school boundaries and the under-enrolled schools should not be ignored.

Ms. Lujan stated that DCPS does not have the same amount of excess space as they used to and that most of the excess space is in Wards 7, 8 and a little bit in Ward 5. They did explore moving Lafayette's Pre-K and many parents did not want to travel across the Rock Creek Park to other locations, so they ended up reducing Pre-k at Lafayette. DCPS has talked with DGS about possibly using the Lord & Taylor and Wardman Marriott sites. Commissioner Bender asked if DCPS is open to a public-private partnership. She replied that it is a possibility. Mr. Porcello added that DCPS does not lease space, it buys it.

Commissioner McHugh stated that Rock Creek seems to be a wall and asked if DC could start a Circulator bus system to move kids around to schools and not rely solely on WMATA. Ms. Lujan stated that from an equity perspective, if they provided buses in Ward 3, they would need to do that elsewhere in the city. McHugh also stated that the city needs to take another look at a comprehensive boundary system that considers diversity. McHugh asked if a middle school could be located at UDC. Lujan stated they also talked to UDC to see if there was any permanent space they can use but there is only temporary space available to DCPS. Porcello stated that DGS will only build on space it owns.

Attendees:

- Stated there are two parts to the problem, space and transportation and the city should be working to provide a solution with the fewest disruptions.
- Thought the city should have thought about how to use the space before they obtained the properties and stated we should not be transporting kids across the city if we want a walkable city.
- Stated that DCPS has giving the same presentation at a number of meetings but has not updated their presentation of their proposed options based on the feedback provided at earlier meetings.
- Was unhappy that the city is not presenting any solutions to the transportation problems at the two proposed sites and stated we need more courage from the city's leadership. At the same time, the River School is looking to build a school in a residential lot when kids might not be allowed to attend a public school in their own neighborhood.

- Stated the proposed sites are in the wrong part of the Ward. Was unhappy that there was no organization or planning without knowing what the end state would look like. They also heard that there was a proposal to move Janney from Deal to Hardy and he opposed that.

Wattenberg stated that families want their children to go to a neighborhood school and they are willing to send their children to other schools when they feel their schools are not sufficient.

Wattenberg also stated there is supposed to be a Master Facility Plan (MFP) for DCPS facilities. Porcello added that under DC law, we are supposed to have a MFP. DCPS submitted one to the Council that was lacking in detail and was more of an inventory than a planning document. The Council would not approve it and DCPS refused to update it. Lujan stated that the MFP provided a lot of data that provided the shortfall projections and the need to build four more schools.

Commissioner Bender asked if the delay in the detailed census data will delay this process. Lujan did not think so.

Commissioner Hall stated that we have one high school in Ward 3, and it is overcrowded. If we build, other schools' boundaries will have to change. We need to hold DCPS to high standards so that no matter what school you go to it is the best possible school.

Wattenberg thought that the city needs to seriously consider the Lord & Taylor site as an option. Bender added the site won't last on the market and asked if Councilmember Cheh would consider getting funding for the site. Porcello replied that there are other priorities in other places. Ward 3 is the only ward where all of the schools have been modernized. Bender then asked if they would support a study to look at commercial opportunities. Wattenberg said she would.

Commissioners concluded by stating: the city has money and should address problems in schools in other Wards in addition to ours; our neighborhood should welcome children from diverse backgrounds; they do not oppose putting schools at the Hardy and GDS sites as long as they are not having kids from the opposite end of the Ward attend those schools; time is of the essence because the vacant properties won't stay vacant for long; we need to utilize the Foxhall Rd and GDS properties and figure out how to solve the other issues as same time; and asked for a study to examine property availability.

The meeting was adjourned by acclimation at 9:12 PM.