

Tuesday, June 27, 2017

To the Members of the Alexandria Ad Hoc Joint City-Schools Facility Investment Task Force:

We appreciate your lending your expertise by serving on the Alexandria Ad Hoc Joint City-Schools Facility Investment Task Force. We are providing information about the capacity problems of Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) at the secondary level.

We formed our group to draw attention to the capacity crisis at the secondary schools in ACPS. Our group is comprised of Mark Eaton (former School Board member and chair) and his wife, Brooksie Koopman, Yvonne Folkerts (former School Board member and chair) and her husband, Brian, and Marc Williams (former School Board member) and his wife, Nancy.

We organized a town hall meeting on school capacity with Vice Mayor Justin Wilson last fall and we published letters to the editor (see the links below).

<http://www.alexandriagazette.com/news/2016/oct/05/alexandria-letter-time-stop-talking-about-talking/>

<http://www.alexandriagazette.com/news/2016/nov/16/letter-editor-fulfill-cip-proposal/>

TC Williams High School's Instructional Leadership Team formed a Capacity Committee two years ago and Mark Eaton, the English Department Chair, has been active on that committee. The Capacity Committee is concerned about the overcrowding and its negative effects, particularly on our neediest students (see the link below). Also see the attached letters, one from the Capacity Committee and the other from the ACPS secondary school PTA Presidents.

<http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2017/mar/09/letter-editor-prioritize-minnie-howard/>

We believe that data from ACPS featured in our letters provide a compelling and urgent case that Alexandria needs additional secondary capacity. We think the most practical approach is to build a true secondary building for T.C. on the Minnie Howard site (Minnie Howard was built as an elementary school). The May 25 ACPS budget adoption press release said, "T.C. Williams King Street campus will get six relocatable classrooms from [for] this fall , with the construction of a new building, potentially at the Minnie Howard campus, beginning in FY 2021." The budget adopted by the School Board in May includes \$100,000 to begin planning this year for this new building. You can see the School Board's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget here:

<http://esbpublic.acps.k12.va.us/attachments/3d14bf10-70f5-42c3-9e50-5ab0991cefea.pdf> .

We hope that the Board will stay on track with its original intent when it adopted its CIP budget in December 2016. At that time, the Board said, "[t]he secondary planning process would start in September 2018 with the formation of an internal work group that would create a process of engagement, review recommendations from the feasibility study, School Day Committee and Long Range Education Facilities Planning documents." Of course, the grade configuration and programmatic aspects of a new secondary building will involve detailed planning discussions by the Board and T.C. and central office staff and others.

Our sense is that the City Council and City Manager Mark Jinks are receptive to increasing our secondary school capacity by rebuilding Minnie Howard. For example, in April, Mayor Silberberg advocated in an op-ed for “funds for a rebuild of the T.C. Williams Minnie Howard campus, a middle school and an elementary school” and Mark Jinks, in his February budget message earlier this year, proposed funds “to build a new ninth grade center, a new middle school, and eventually a new elementary school when enrollment increases justify it”.

Although the situation has been complicated because we will have a new Superintendent and new leadership in the ACPS Facilities department, we believe that beginning construction in FY2021 is not sufficient given the significant current and projected overcapacity at the secondary level. In addition, we know that the task force will hear compelling cases for various ACPS and City capital projects, including school modernization, but the steady and unprecedented enrollment surge in recent years at all grades makes capacity issues more urgent. We are hopeful that the task force agrees and makes building a new secondary building for T.C. at Minnie Howard its highest recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you.

Best regards.

Mark Eaton and Brooksie Koopman
Yvonne and Brian Folkerts
Marc and Nancy Williams