

Building the New Patrick Henry School

Good evening Chairman Graf, members of the School Board, Dr. Crawley, Patrick Henry parents and other Alexandrians. I am Mark Huddle, the Patrick Henry PTA President. I am here this evening to talk about the building of the new Patrick Henry School. I looked up the definition of **school** and the first entry was: **An institution for educating children.** We have a job as School Board, Community Leaders, and citizens of Alexandria to remember that the main focus of our discussions should be **the building of the very best institution for educating children possible** and not be sidetracked by colors of paint, materials used for the facades and driveway locations. These are items that can and will be changed in later designs as things are finalized and studies are completed.

During the last meeting there was some concern on the design of the school with regards to how it will look in the neighborhood... Patrick Henry was built in 1953, while the surrounding houses were built in the mid to late 50's to the 70's. The Shirley-Duke apartments now known as Foxchase Apartments were built in the 1940's after World War II. Should we design the school to look like the Apartments as they were the original character of the neighborhood before the any of the houses were here? The difficulty of building in such a diverse and mixed neighborhood is that you can never satisfy everyone.

We are premature in worrying about parking lot entrances for the school when the location/placement of the building is the most important issue. No one knows how much traffic the future Rec department clientele will generate on a regular basis, but if we don't provide adequate parking for everyone, won't they will just end up parking in the neighborhood streets. This would also only upset the neighbors and it is completely avoidable. One of the earliest designs from Sorg Architects had a bus loop on the Latham Street side but there were considerable objections to its placement for aesthetic reasons. We could put a parking lot all along the Latham Street side of the school instead of green space and only have it accessible only off of Taney Avenue. We could swap the teacher parking to the other side of the school and have the kiss-and-ride and Rec Center parking on the East side of the school instead. The additional Green space would then need to be incorporated on the east side next to Foxchase Apartments. While it might be the least attractive option, it should quell the issue of parking lot entrance on Latham. I would strongly suggest we consider this as an option if our discussions are going to focus on driveway entrances and parking lots.

I think everyone agrees that for the Feasibility Study option that is least disruptive to the children's education is **New Building Option 2**. This option doesn't require relocation to temporary space or Trailers, which are much more disruptive to the children's education. The students can stay in the current building where they are out of harm's way. I was always curious as a child and would have wanted to climb around a construction site if I could, so keeping the buildings separate is the best way to eliminate the distractions and possibility of students getting into the construction site.

The other Feasibility Study options require the use of swing space and trailers to house some if not all of the students. **Trailers are not a good option.** Students should not have to put on winter coat and boots to trudge through snow or rain to go to the cafeteria, their music class or some other activities in the main building. This would be detrimental to their education just by the amount of time lost going from place to place.

When someone moves into a neighborhood, they may decide to check on which school their current and future children will be attending. The better a school performs the more the potential property owner will be willing to pay to move there, which means greater property values and more revenue

back to the city... It is a cycle; you reap what you sow. Currently we have 602 students in PK to 5th grade at Patrick Henry. Our last year's Virginia State Scores were 72.8% for Reading, 77% for Math which are sharp increases from the previous year. We are no longer the lowest school and are now in the middle quadrant. Our Title 1 Percentage is 81.5%. Yet we have increased our TAG identified students to 35 with these numbers only expected to get higher next year.

The new school will not be a house or an apartment so it should not look like either. The New Patrick Henry School design should be one that excites and stimulates children's imaginations to be anything and everything that they can be. This School should be the destination and focal point in the neighborhood not an oversight and something that blends into the background. This neighborhood grew around this school and it was once the heart of that community. We have an opportunity to make a first class school for the children, if it is designed around how to best utilize the space, making it the heart of the community again.

This new school will showcase the great work our teachers and administrators are doing and, most importantly, the kids who "Work Hard to Get Smart". These kids are amazing, as I have watched them work, and they give me a lot of hope for the future. I think we all need to "Work Harder to Get Smarter" for the **New Patrick Henry PreK-8th School...**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mark Huddle

Patrick Henry PTA President and Proud Father of 2 Great PHES Students