

**Alexandria City Public Schools**  
**School Board Meeting, January 23, 2020**  
**Comments from Andrew S. Wilson**

Good evening. My name is Andrew Wilson and I live at 2406 Taylor Avenue, near George Mason Elementary School. I was not aware of the request to provide a written summary until I arrived home at 5:35 pm, so I will apologize for any typographical errors.

I am here to address the concerns raised by the “premature” release of a plan for the redevelopment of the school site. I have not seen this plan but have heard many concerns and it is referred to in a letter from “Mr. O.” Frankly the letter raises more questions than it answers. (Our son went to this school over 20 years ago, so please excuse me as I do not know who Mr. O is or why he was tasked with the response. ) What I do know is a little about how local government does and should work. I have been in local government service for over 32 years, in the Cities of Alexandria and Fairfax. The “prematurely” released presentation was prepared by someone, for some reason and at some cost. Now that it is out there, transparency demands that the questions of who, why and how much be answered.

Second, the presentation that you are to be shown tonight seems to have been prepared as hastily as my written comments. It starts with some facts ( I assume the current student count and available space are facts ), adds some assumptions ( increase in student population and attendant need for facilities ) and leaps to the conclusion that a new building is needed. There is no basis provided for the assumptions and no analysis given for the conclusion. Given the limited development in the surrounding community, why is the population of this school increasing? As our elected school board, please ask these critical questions as the presentation is given. I have significant concerns with the way the information is presented, in the interest of time I will spare you further criticism, but I will recommend a review of any of Doctor Edward Tufte’s books on visual presentation of information.

The core business of ACPS is the education of the students. This is a challenging, rewarding and vital job. I support the modernization of schools. As the Fire Marshal and Building Official for over 20 years, I worked with the school board, architects and contractors to modernize four schools and maintain safety while the schools continued to operate during construction. Nothing will keep a fire marshal awake at night as much as that; so I recognize the challenges. I question why ACPS would divert attention from this core function of education and attempt to enter the realm of affordable or workforce housing. From experience, I know that this is also a challenging, vital, and potentially rewarding area. It is also difficult and hard to get right. The city of Alexandria has a Department of Housing and also supports the Alexandria Rehabilitation and Housing Authority. This is their field, I suggest that these roles should be separate from ACPS.

The ACPS website states that roughly \$68 million is planned for improvements at George Mason Elementary ( up from an earlier estimate of \$45 million ), part of an overall plan to spend a half **Billion** over the next ten years. You are asking us to trust you with a major investment.

Regrettably, I must note in closing that the reputation of the City of Alexandria for transparent governance has been damaged by recent reporting regarding the interactions between key city agencies regarding the “road diet” on Seminary Road. Lack of communication at the beginning, and an attempt to coerce retroactive approval at the end, have led to recriminations between these agencies and a reduction in trust by the citizens.

Please take steps now to prevent a similar crisis in our schools.