

Minutes
Walkersville Planning Commission
Walkersville Burgess and Commissioners
Joint Workshop

January 9, 2018

Commission Chairman Dick Brady called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. with members David Ennis, Tim Pollak, Mike Kuster, Ray Santullo, Gary Baker, and John Zimmerman in attendance. Also present were Town Burgess Chad Weddle and Town Commissioners Donald Schildt, Mary Ann Brodie-Ennis, Debbie Zimmerman, and Russell Winch, Town Manager Gloria Long Rollins, Town Planner Susan Hauver, Frederick County Public Schools Chief Operating Officer Paul Lebo, Frederick County Public Schools Facilities Planning Supervisor Beth Pasierb, and Frederick County Board of Education president Brad Young.

Frederick County Public Schools: Plans for Relocation of Rock Creek School to Walkersville Middle School site

Chairman Brady noted that the Frederick County Board of Education had selected the Walkersville Middle School site for relocation of the Rock Creek School. He welcomed the FCPS staff in attendance.

Mr. Paul Lebo, FCPS COO, apologized for misunderstandings and lapses in communication during the site selection process. He noted that the staff needed direction from the Board of Education before they could meet with the elected officials of the affected jurisdictions. They are now at the step in the process to involve the town in serious discussions regarding the plans for the new school.

Ms. Pasierb noted the following in her presentation:

- The Rock Creek School serves 100 of the most medically fragile and seriously disabled students in the school system.
- The age of students ranges from 3 to 21 years old.
- The school was built in 1972 and has never had a major renovation.
- The width of the corridors and size of classrooms do not accommodate well the staffing, equipment, lighting and technology needs of modern special education students.
- FCPS considered several alternatives for building the new school, including the option to stay on the site shared with Waverly Elementary School. Waverly Elementary needs to be expanded and both new schools would not fit on the site.
- FCPS initially considered 70 sites and pared it down to 7. Consultants conducted the analysis of the sites. The Walkersville Middle School site ranked the highest after their analysis. After much deliberation, the BOE voted to select the WMS site.
- The conceptual site plan in the site selection report is meant to show that the school facility could be accommodated on site; it is not the site plan that will be submitted for review.
- The school is scheduled to open in the fall of 2021, after two years of design and one year of construction.
- The school typically serves 80 to 100 students; they will design for 120 students.
- All students, with the exception of 1 or 2, arrive at school on a bus. The school is currently served by 20 buses.

Those in attendance offered the following questions or comments:

- How would a needed expansion of Walkersville Middle School be handled? FCPS staff noted that the school is not expected to go over capacity over the next 10 years. The design capacity of the middle school is already larger than the preferred capacity for a middle school as set forth by BOE policy.
- Walkersville schools are falling behind the rest of the County in terms of the size/design/age/technology of the facilities. (classrooms are adequate; requirements for core areas have changed)
- How many fire/rescue calls are generated by the school? (will have to check)
- The conceptual plan does not show stormwater management areas, and the older facility is lacking in this area. How will they be accommodated on site? (To be determined)
- Will the Town Planning Commission have input in the design phase? (a site plan will be submitted in six months+)
- Maryland Avenue residents do not want their street used for access to the school beyond what it is used for now. (FCPS would like to add staff parking to be accessed from Maryland Avenue).
- The middle school already experiences extreme traffic congestion in the morning and afternoon. Access to Walkersville via Route 15, MD 26 and MD 194 is inadequate. (Access points and on-site circulation will be modified and hopefully improve the traffic congestion and circulation issues)
- Teachers park on Nicodemus Road for easier ingress/egress.
- Tearing down the old library and using the space for site access would improve the traffic issues on site.
- The traffic problems are due to too many parents driving their children to school when bus service is available.
- The addition of a parking lot in an area in front of the middle school that is currently green will be unattractive.
- Parts of the back parking lot used by teachers flood so are not usable in wet weather.

BOE President Young noted that he did not vote to select this site; he feels the school should be more centrally located in the County. Rock Creek School is a “magical” place that should be visited to appreciate what goes on there. He said that the school does not have many evening activities and there is less traffic to and from the site than a typical school. Mr. Young also described the challenges the BOE faces in providing school capacity in developing parts of the County vs. renovations and updates to older facilities. The renovations/updates tend to get pushed back. The technology budget has increased to provide technological improvements in all the schools.

Additional questions/comments from those in attendance:

- Playing fields on WMS site are hardly used. The community needs are primarily met at Heritage Farm Park and the school’s use by the physical education program is limited. Lunch recess is limited to the fenced paved area.
- Plans for the school would provide for a covered connection from Rock Creek School to WMS to allow students to have access to their peers. The proximity of the WES/WHs campus is also a benefit.

- Vocational needs? (Less than the SUCCESS program). School provide some vocational training.
- The area is located in karst and blasting might be necessary. There is a history of sinkholes on the site.
- The neighbors on Georgetown Road could be impacted by the construction. Many retirees are located on adjoining parcels.
- The school will have a therapeutic pool.
- FCPS is required to design the school in conformance with LEED silver requirements.
- FCPS should consider renaming the school “Fountain Rock School” since Rock Creek is not found in Walkersville.
- Sewer capacity might be limited due to limitations of Ceresville pump station.
- The property is located within the Town’s Wellhead Protection Area.
- The walkway from the Mill Run development should be worked into the site to allow pedestrian access from Mill Run to Frederick Street.
- Several in attendance expressed opposition to the addition of another entrance to the school property from Frederick Street. A traffic study is needed. Parking for 160 employees is needed. The buses that are currently parked on site will be moved to the bus facility planned on Hayward Road.
- The construction project page on the FCPS website (www.fcps.org) will provide updates. The design committee meets every other week; the next meeting is scheduled for January 18 at 9:30 am in the FCPS board room.

Mr. Brady thanked everyone for coming and announced upcoming meeting dates.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan J. Hauver