

MCPS Piney Branch ES Feasibility Study: Community Meeting 1

Project/File: 177920324
Date/Time: May 01, 2025 / 7:00pm
Location: Piney Branch ES
Next Meeting: May 15, 2025 / 7:00pm
Attendees: Julie Morris – MCPS
Robbie Badstibner - MCPS
Erika Dworkin - MCPS
Jasmin McDuffie – Stantec, Architecture
Carolyn Frederick – Stantec, Architecture
Sean Lindaman – Clark Azar, Civil
Community Members – See Sign-in Sheets

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

LIMITING FACTORS

- Request for meetings to be virtual or hybrid to reach the wider community.
- QR codes for the surveys should be posted on the school's website for comments from additional community members and parents who were unable to attend the meeting.
- MCPS will review schedules and look at adding an additional virtual meeting.
- Engagement with Takoma Park ES should be considered. Also consider hosting a meeting at TPES.
- Many concerns from parents about transporting kids to holding centers during construction.
 - Due to site constraints adding temporary classrooms onsite is not feasible.
 - MCPS will work with transportation to find the most suitable holding location. All the kids from Piney Branch ES will attend the same holding school. They will not be split up.
 - Many concerns about the distance to the holding schools and the time the kids will be on the buses every day.
- Does the team have information on the 2017 study?
- Many in the community believe the school is in a floodplain due to several flood events in recent years.
 - FEMA does not indicate the site is on a 100yr floodplain.
 - Civil will review any shared documentation about flooding in the community. A geotechnical report will also be prepared as part of the feasibility study.
- Approved zoning changes allow for 150' tall buildings. This will allow 4,000 new units. How will the team plan for this uncertainty? How will this impact the needs of the school and enrollment?
 - The current enrollment is 621. The new building will be designed with a capacity of 644. (about one additional classroom)

- We look ahead 6 years. Enrollment figures take into account many factors including birth rates, planning and development.
 - Some projects are designed with shell space for future classroom build outs.
- From a parent and pool user: The building interacts very poorly with the rest of the neighborhood, especially on Grant where there is a lot of foot traffic. The kids cross through a construction site and an area with no sidewalks. There is an opportunity to make a plaza or gathering space. The school doesn't interact with the playground well, it's a hazard. Need to put thought into making the school the center of the town.
 - Grant used to be closed off with metal bollards. The city worked together to create a berm which captures water that was flooding the adjacent houses and the community center.
- From a parent: There is worry that the building will be demolished, and it will be years before a new school is built due to inadequate funding. Can a timeline be guaranteed?

FAVORITES

- Takoma park lunch and learn is a free summer camp for many low-income students. The camp uses the pool.
 - It is a racial justice issue to remove the pool completely.
- Like that the school provides classroom and community resource spaces.
 - Memorandum of Understanding in 1969 in exchange for the city giving the land.

OPPORTUNITIES

- MCPS has an MOU with parks to use the fields, playground, and basketball courts, but will not allow the school to build on the site.
 - Parent comment: Need parks at these meetings to explain why the school can't be built on the park while the existing school stays open.
- Could the renovation be phased?
 - Phasing can be a safety issue and can be less efficient. Phasing will also increase the construction time.
- The school could be multi-story to take more advantage of the small site.
- If we build on the park, the community would lose a lot of after school activities for several years.
- At the Takoma Park ES school, the parents were able to vote on whether they wanted phased construction or not.
 - The design team will be studying and sharing all options and there will public hearings.
 - The community will be able to provide comment on all the options.

POOL

- There needs to be more communication about the study to pool users.
 - Signs will be posted at the pool entrance.
- Removing the pool is a racial justice issue.
- Pool needs to be more of a community resource.
- Swimming lessons are prohibitively expensive for most people. \$93 for a private lesson.
- Students at Piney Branch receive swim lessons at the pool during PE
 - Three weeks of lessons, twice a year.
 - Lessons focus on water safety, like how to get in and out of the water.
 - Students who can swim need to pass a swim test.
 - The PTA pays for the life guard.

- Former pool manager in the 80's: The pool used to be more of a community resource and it can be again. At one time many schools in the county were taking lessons at the pool. They offered programs like kayaking, scuba lessons, and adult swimming classes. The pool must be programmed properly for it to be an anchor for the community.
- The pool in Silver Spring is inconvenient for this community.
- Former student: Learned how to swim at the Piney Branch pool. He started his own lifeguarding company and has been here since 1985. His mom still uses the pool and is 85. The most important thing is to save the pool. It is a sacred part of the community.
- Former PTA president: Was PTA president when the pool was padlocked by MCPS. The community rose up and stopped the pool from being infilled. They advocated with the City, Council, and Rec Dept. and arranged for County and Adventist Community Services to take over from MCPS.
 - The pool was saved again in 2015.
 - In 2017 the community was asked to pick design options for the renovation and the community only chose options that preserved the pool. They were then told that they had to pick an option that removed the pool.
 - "We will save this pool no matter what it takes."
- Former parent: My son learned to swim here.
- Former parent (Denise Jones): My daughter learned to swim here. It's also an equity issue. Nothing should be taken away from the students.
- Pool user (Wayne Sherwood) – Uses the pool several times a week. The pool is especially important to seniors who would find it very difficult to travel to another pool. Seniors are an increasing proportion of the population in the community and many do not drive or have cars.
- Neighbor, pool user: The Silver Spring pool has no parking. The parking garage is two blocks away which is difficult for elderly and those with handicaps. The hope is for an even bigger and better pool at Piney Branch.
- Neighbor, pool user (Silvie Shaffer): The YMCA has stairs which can be difficult to navigate. The flat entrance at Piney Branch sets it apart.
- Pool supporter (Tony Kasselmann) – The pool is a highly valued part of the community. Regular swimming lessons were provided for the kids in Essex House.
- The pool is sometimes used as a reward for students – pool parties.
- The school has the smallest footprint in the county. They make up for this by having a pool.
- The pool used to be used as a community hub – vaccinations were given at the school, there was a dentist. All that is left is the pool.
- John Gavin – contract for the pool management. Ken Flemmer retired last year.
 - They are interested in comments about how they can make the pool program better.
 - They have an email list of customers of the pool and they will email out info about these meetings.

COMMENTS FROM NOTECARDS

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- Will the cost of the pool vs usage be considered in the decision regarding keeping pool?
- Will the pool be updated with the renovation?
- Who's the pool consultant?
- I tutor at Piney Branch ES and a neighbor now, and have for over 28 years my children both attended PBES and I'm on the board of TP Lunch and Learn, a free summer academic and fun day camp attended by 50-100 children of color from two large apartment buildings in TP where kids learn

to swim. Black children drown 3x more than white children. - Priscilla Laboritz
(plaboritz@icloud.com)

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS (PROVIDED OUTSIDE OF MEETING)

- What steps will MCPS take to ensure better communication with the Takoma Park community, particularly those with children who will be entering Piney Branch in the next few years?
- Who will be distributing the presentation from last night - is there a centralized email or listserv?
- Who will answer the outstanding questions from last night that were not addressed?
- Did MCPS conduct an environmental impact study on the different options and why was this not presented at last night's meeting to explain the preferred options?
- What will happen when the project goes beyond the anticipated deadline and/or there is not a budget passed that supports completion of the project ?
- How will "busing" work since our location is well south of the designated schools?
- What will be the impact on the teachers and have you consulted with their union as required?

The foregoing is considered to be a true and accurate record of all items discussed. If any discrepancies or inconsistencies are noted, please contact the writer immediately.

Regards,

STANTEC ARCHITECTURE INC.

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Sign-in Sheet

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