

Agenda Item 1-B: Long Range Student Population Forecasting

PLANNING COMMISSION SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

POLICY RESEARCH

Topic: Long Range Student Population Forecasting

Summary of Planning Commission Schools Committee Discussion

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) produces two projection sets each school year to forecast student membership. One projection set is produced in the fall for a five year horizon and the fifth year of this set is used for the Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The second set is a six month projection produced in the spring which is used to determine the enrollment for the upcoming school year. Projections within the five year horizon are accurate; however, the accuracy of student projections diminish beyond the five year horizon.

Methodologies used for student membership projections.

- Total student membership is compared to historical membership patterns.
- Births by elementary school boundary are compared to the kindergarten class five years later.
- Kindergarten class membership is compared to the previous school year's 12th grade class.
- Cohort progression – Each grade level cohort of students is compared to the previous year to understand the difference over time.
- Analysis of population and housing forecasts, housing trends and new housing construction.

Factors impacting the predictability of student projections.

- Students attending school within a different boundary from which they reside. This may occur for program access.
- Replacement of existing housing stock with larger homes.
- Lifecycle of existing housing, changing demographics, economic conditions, and multiple occupancy of dwelling units.
- Mixed use development creates uncertainties for projecting student enrollment.
- FCPS estimates of student yields resulting from planned new housing are based on countywide averages. Student membership projections for the CIP utilize a different methodology, based on localized analysis of demographics, housing types and school trends, resulting in more accurate projections.

Suggested Planning Commission Recommendation – Non-Land Use

Student population forecasting by FCPS are accurate within a five-year horizon; however, the accuracy of student population forecasting diminishes beyond a five-year horizon. Seek resources to produce long-range student population forecasts beyond a five-year horizon in collaboration with the Comprehensive Planning studies. This also may include developing a system for two-way communication such as a dashboard between the county and FCPS summarizing future growth in each Planning District.

Suggested Planning Commission Recommendation – Land Use

Amendments proposed to the following Comprehensive Plan language from the Public Facilities element of the Policy Plan:

FAIRFAX COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, 2017 Edition, Public Facilities, Amended through 7-25-2017, pages 5-9

Objective 6: Acquire sites for schools or educational facilities through negotiation, dedication, or condemnation. This may include the siting of schools or facilities in high density areas or on parcels of limited size.

Policy a. Place schools on parcels meeting the optimum number of general locational criteria. Sites should be evaluated by the following factors:

- Safe and convenient accessibility to pedestrian and road networks, and transit where available.
- Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R.) to accommodate expansion, when the school is originally sized below the maximum efficiency standard for that type of school.
- Compatibility with adjoining planned and existing development and with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Aesthetically pleasing physical qualities with appropriate engineering features (e.g. soils, topography).
- Proximity to other public facilities, such as police and fire and rescue services, public parks and libraries.

Policy b. Locate school sites, when situated in areas conducive to pedestrian traffic, to take advantage of maximum walking distances of one mile for elementary schools and one and a half miles for middle schools, high schools, and secondary schools.

Policy c. Locate middle schools, high schools, and secondary schools, and when possible, elementary schools, where they can be served by public water and sewer. When elementary schools must be located in non-sewered areas in order to serve their target student population, well and septic can be utilized if no other alternative is available.

Policy d. Acquire school sites, when land dedications cannot be obtained, as far in advance of construction as possible, to ensure availability of both the preferred location and the necessary site features. Plan for acquisitions through the Capital Improvement Program and the Comprehensive Plan.

Policy e. Encourage site dedications which provide sufficient F.A.R. to meet locational criteria.

Policy f. Coordinate the acquisition and design of the site's active recreation areas with the Fairfax County Park Authority and other agencies. This will ensure maximum opportunities for co-location and efficient use of recreational and other facilities.

Policy g. As part of the development and redevelopment process, encourage commitments for school renovations and additional capacity where permissible.

Policy j. Coordinate with Fairfax County Public Schools and County staff to periodically review long-term projected growth and development impacts to school capacity.