

Docket Item #12
TEXT AMENDMENT #2003-0005

Planning Commission Meeting
November 6, 2003

CASE: TEXT AMENDMENT #2003-0005
PUBLIC SCHOOL ZONING

ISSUE: Consideration of amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to allow for increases in height and FAR for public schools.

STAFF: Department of Planning and Zoning

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION, NOVEMBER 6, 2003: On a motion by Mr. Komoroske, seconded by Mr. Jennings, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of the text amendment. The motion carried on a vote of 6-0, with Mr. Wagner absent.

Reason: The Commission agreed with the staff's analysis regarding the text amendment.

Speakers:

Howard Middleton, representing the Alexandria City Public Schools, spoke in favor of the amendment. He was joined at the hearing by ACPS representatives Margie Walsh, Executive Director, Secondary Programs, and Mark Burke, Director, Planning and Construction.

Julie Crenshaw spoke in opposition to structured parking at the new high school, although she had no opposition to the text amendment.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend approval of the following text amendment:

ARTICLE VII: SUPPLEMENTAL REGULATIONS

Sec. 7-1200 **Zoning for Public Schools**

Notwithstanding any other provisions or regulations in this ordinance, public school buildings may be built, expanded or reconstructed to a size not to exceed a floor area ratio of .60 or a height of 60 feet, if a special use permit is approved.

DISCUSSION

Background

Staff is currently processing applications for the expansion of Minnie Howard and the complete reconstruction of T.C. Williams High School. Early on in that work, Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) staff discussed with the City the fact that neither the Minnie Howard nor the T.C. Williams proposals could be accomplished without a change in the zoning rules. City staff has considered alternative approaches and discussed them with ACPS staff and, as a result, City Council in May 2003 asked staff to consider revising the zoning text to permit both proposals to proceed.

History of Zoning Public Schools Zoning

With the comprehensive amendments to the zoning ordinance in 1992, the zoning for public schools was limited considerably by two major changes. First, all school land in residential areas was zoned for residential development, with the thought that if the school was ever closed, then the reuse of the site would be limited to residential development consistent with neighboring residential areas. Second, and most significantly, with the introduction of the Public Open Space (POS) zone, the land adjacent to school buildings, typically school fields, was remapped to the POS category. The combination of these two actions resulted in several schools becoming noncomplying structures because they exceeded the size permitted for houses in the residential zone applied to the site. Pursuant to section 12-102 of the zoning ordinance, noncomplying structures are not permitted to expand, even with a special use permit.

The attached chart lists each of the existing public school buildings in the city, with the land area, the zoning and the floor area ratio (FAR) for each one. Given the changes to zoning in 1992, the following schools became noncomplying because of FAR: T.C. Williams, Minnie Howard, John Adams, MacArthur, and Mount Vernon. If any of these schools seek to expand the floor area of the existing schools, as Minnie Howard and T.C. Williams are currently proposing, they will not be able to do so under existing zoning rules.

In addition to the FAR problem, the proposed building for T.C. Williams is taller than permitted by the height in the R-20 zone otherwise applicable. We are not aware of any other school that exceeds the allowable zoning height.

Proposed Text Amendment

Each of the public schools are now located within a residential zone, and subject to the same size limitations that apply to houses in those zones. In order to accommodate the proposals for Minnie Howard and T.C. Williams, as well as future additions at other schools that may exceed the residential limitations, staff is recommending that the zoning ordinance include a general provision, that allows a greater FAR and greater height for public schools, regardless of the residential zone in which the school is located.

Although recommended as a general rule as part of the Supplemental Regulations of the zoning ordinance, the new language contains two safeguards.

First, there are size maximums included in the proposed text amendment. Staff is recommending that no public school be permitted that is larger than a .60 FAR or 60 feet in height. This limitation will allow buildings that are slightly larger than the lowest commercial zoning, but smaller than most commercial and some residential zoning. The city's residential zones allow FARs from .25 to 2.5. The commercial zones allow from .5 to 2.5 FAR. Therefore, the numbers, while allowing the currently proposed school expansions to occur, also represent a reasonable size in relation to other potential zoning sizes.

Secondly, the greater size allowed by the new language will require that a special use permit be approved by City Council. Under this regulatory scheme, expanded schools that are limited to the size permitted in their designated residential zone will still be permitted, and no special use permit will be required. On the other hand, if an addition or expansion exceeds those size limitations, then a mechanism will exist by which the proposal may be properly reviewed on a case by case basis and, assuming the proposal is otherwise supportable, will be permitted with a special use permit. Staff believes that the SUP process will allow the city to make distinctions among school locations based on surrounding uses and zones, on locations on major roads, and on whether open space conditions adjacent to the site ameliorate potential building height and mass.

Under this approach, if a larger building is appropriate, then there is a mechanism to allow the larger building; if it is not appropriate, then the SUP process allows the City to reject the proposal. The proposed text amendment provides a mechanism and a process to make such decisions and does not require that the size of a school be dictated by residential zoning.

Minnie Howard Ninth Grade School

Anticipating this text amendment, the application for an addition for Minnie Howard includes a request for a special use permit to allow an increase in FAR. Prior to 1992, the entire Minnie Howard site was located in the R-12 zone, with an FAR limit to .30. In 1992, a large portion of the site, all of the land east of the school building, including the parking lot, was rezoned to POS. The Minnie Howard building, which has not changed in decades, became noncomplying as to FAR, and continues to be. The fields to the east, with the parking lot, became part of the POS zoning, created to apply to publically owned parks and recreation areas.

The schools are requesting a rezoning of the parking lot site, changing it from POS to R-12. In addition, this text amendment is being recommended, allowing an increase in FAR for public school buildings to up to .60 FAR. The R-12 zone now permits an FAR of .30. Assuming the rezoning requested is approved, then the amount of land involved in the school building site is seven acres or 305,316 square feet of land, and the proposed building is 167,494 square feet, for an FAR of .549.

The proposed height of the expanded Minnie Howard building is 38 feet, within the 40 feet height limit of the R-12 zone. See also staff's discussion of surrounding uses, and context of neighboring zoning densities in staff reports REZ #2002 -0005 and DSUP #2002-0045.

Zoning Information for Minnie Howard School site

	Current	Proposed*
Total land area	12 acres	12 acres
R12	5.7 acres/248,893 sq.ft.	7 acres/ 305,316 sq.ft.
POS	6.3 acres	4.9 acres
Building floor area	123, 600 sf net	167,494 sf net
FAR	.50 (R-12 allows .30)	.549
height	33.5' (R-12 allows 40')	38'

* Proposed with rezoning and text amendment approval

T. C. Williams High School

The T.C. Williams High School is located in the R-20 zone. The building site is now a 19.8 acre parcel containing 862,488 square feet of land. The proposed new T.C. Williams building will be located on that parcel as well as on a portion of an adjacent schools parcel currently zoned POS. As part of its application for the new school, ACPS is requesting a rezoning of the portion of that POS parcel that is proposed to be occupied by part of the school building. In addition, this text amendment is necessary because the proposed building will exceed both the FAR(.25) and the height (40 feet) of the R-20 zone.

Assuming the rezoning requested is approved, then the amount of land involved in the school building site will be 23.6 acres or 1, 031,367 square feet of land, and the proposed new school will be 525,002 square feet of floor area, for an FAR of .51. The proposed height of the new T.C. Williams building is 53 feet. Both FAR and height exceed the existing limits in the R-20 zone.

Zoning Information on T.C. Williams High School Site

	Current	Proposed *
Total land area in school site	28.3 acres	28.3 acres
R20	19.8 acres/	23.7 acres/
POS	8.5 acres	4.62 acres
Building floor area	355,000 sf	547,000
FAR	.41(.25 allowed in R-20 zone)	.51
Height	34' (40' allowed in R-20)	53' (highest point)

* Proposed with rezoning and text amendment approval.

Conclusion

In both cases, the expansion of the Minnie Howard Ninth Grade Center, and the new T.C. Williams High School building, staff believes that it is appropriate to review the merits of the proposed building in the SUP review process. Those applications should not be foreclosed because of the zoning. Therefore, for those two schools and for any others in the future, staff recommends that the zoning ordinance be changed, allowing for larger school buildings than presently allowed in the residential zones, but requiring an SUP to ensure that the building is appropriate for its location.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the proposed text amendment.

STAFF: Eileen Fogarty, Director, Planning and Zoning
Barbara Ross, Planning and Zoning

Attachment: Chart of zoning tabulation/FAR study

ALEXANDRIA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ZONING TABULATION: FAR STUDY

SCHOOL	ZONING	LAND AREA			BUILDING AREA			FAR ALLOWED	FAR PROVIDED	POS ZONE
John Adams	R-12	344,124 SF			137,350 SF			.30	.4	174,240 SF
Charles Barrett	RB	149,133 SF			62,760 SF			.75	.42	64,416 SF
Lyle Crouch	RM	87,120 SF			65,645 SF			1.5	.7535	----
Patrick Henry	R-12	570,636 SF			62,400 SF			.30	.11	239,580
Jefferson Houston	RB	244,278 SF			83,385 SF			.75	.34	203,434 SF
Cora Kelly	RB	174,240 SF			69,000 SF			.75	.4	18,148 SF
Douglas MacArthur	R-12	191,664 SF			63,120 SF			.30	.33	692,604 SF
George Mason	R-8	191,664 SF			50,935 SF			.35	.13	----
Maury	R-5	228,690 SF			50,820 SF			.45	.22	56,628 SF
James Polk	R-12, R-20	588,060 SF			76,265 SF			.35/.25	.13	----
William Ramsay	R-12, RA	RA: 77,410 SF R-12: 308,211 SF Total: 385,621 SF			87,650 SF			.30/.75	.23	505,191 SF
Mt. Vernon	R-2-5	191,755 SF			112,730 SF			.45	.59	274,507 SF
Francis Hammond	R-8, R-20	1,089,000 SF			236,125 SF			.35/.25	.22	----
George Washington	RB	764,433 SF			200,600 SF			.75	.26	261,646 SF
Minnie Howard	R-12	305,316 SF (proposed)			167,494 SF (including new addition)			.30	.549	213,444 SF
TC Williams	R-20	1,032,372 SF (proposed)			547,000 SF (proposed new building)			.25	.51	201,247 SF
Samuel Tucker	CDD	649,044 SF			80,180 SF			----	.12	----

Del Ray Citizens Association

PO BOX 2233

ALEXANDRIA VA 22301

ESTABLISHED 1954

To: Members of Alexandria Planning Commission
Eileen Fogarty, Director, Office of Planning and Zoning

From: Amy Slack, Land Use Committee Co-Chair
Sarah Haut, Land Use Committee Co-Chair
Justin Wilson, President

Date: November 5, 2003

Subject: Text Amendment #2003-0005, Public School Zoning. Consideration of a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to allow increases in height and density for public schools.
Applicant: Department of Planning and Zoning

TA # 2003-0005
PC Docket Item #12

At the Land Use committee meeting on November 3, 2003 we discussed the subject text amendment.

A summary of events leading to the existing zoning for public schools and public open space was given. We understand that in 1992, school enrollments were in decline; it was possible that the city could close schools and dispose of the property. The current zoning reflects the adjacent communities' desire to exert control over alternate uses of public schools property that would be compatible with the residential characteristic of the area.

The committee recommended to *take no position on the proposed text amendment. We have no comment on the technical means.* We agree only that the city needs to build schools to fit the enrollment needs.

We welcome your questions and comments. Please feel free to contact Co-chairs Amy Slack at 703-549-3412 or Sarah Haut at 703-838-9060 and President Justin Wilson at 703-299 1576.

TEXT AMENDMENT # 2003-0005

ISSUE DESCRIPTION: Public School Zoning
Consideration of a text amendment
to the Zoning Ordinance to allow
increases in height and density for
Public Schools.

ZONING ORDINANCE SECTION: _____

CITY DEPARTMENT: Planning and Zoning

=====

ACTION - PLANNING COMMISSION: 11/06/03 RECOMMEND APPROVAL 6-0

ACTION - CITY COUNCIL: Approved 6 to 0

Public School Land Use Cases

- TA/Increase in height and density for public schools
- Minnie Howard
 - MPA #2003-0009
 - REZ #2003-0005
 - DSUP #2002-0045
- T.C. Williams
 - MPA #2003-0010
 - REZ #2003-0006
 - DSUP #2002-0044

**Proposed text amendment for
public schools would allow:**

- Increased height up to 60 ft.
- Increased maximum density, up to .60 F.A.R.
- SUP approval required

Minnie Howard Zoning Changes

	Current	Proposed*
Total Land Area	12 acres	12 acres
R-12	5.7 acres	7 acres
POS	6.3 acres	4.9 acres
Building Floor Area	123,600 sq. ft. net	167,494 sq. ft. net
F.A.R.	.50 (R-12 allows .30)	.549
Height	33.5 ft. (R-12 allows 40 ft.)	38 ft.

* Proposed with rezoning and text amendment approval _____

T.C. Williams Zoning Changes

	Current	Proposed *
Total Land Area	28.3 acres	28.3 acres
R-20	19.8 acres	23.7 acres
POS	8.5 acres	4.62 acres
Building Floor Area	355,000 sq. ft. net	547,000 sq. ft. net
F.A.R.	.41 (R-20 allows .25)	.51
Height	34 ft. (R-20 allows 40 ft.)	53 ft.

TEXT AMENDMENT # 2003-0005

ISSUE DESCRIPTION: Public School Zoning
Consideration of a text amendment
to the Zoning Ordinance to allow
increases in height and density for
public schools.

ZONING ORDINANCE SECTION: _____

CITY DEPARTMENT: Planning and Zoning

=====

ACTION - PLANNING COMMISSION: 11/06/03 RECOMMEND APPROVAL 6-0

ACTION - CITY COUNCIL: Approved 6 to 0