

Appendix C-1

MCPS Role in County Land Use Planning, Zoning, Subdivision Review, and Growth Policy

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) collaborates with the Montgomery County Planning Department (MCPD), the Montgomery County Planning Board (Planning Board), the Montgomery County Hearing Examiner, and the Montgomery County Council (County Council) in a range of planning activities that impact school enrollment and facility needs. These activities are discussed below, from the more general and long-range activities to the more specific and short term activities.

County Land Use Planning

The Planning Board, working with MCPD staff, creates local master plans and sector plans to set forth the land use vision for those areas. The sequence of steps in the development of master plans begins with the MCPD staff development of plan scenarios and collection of community input. At this early stage, and throughout the plan development process, MCPS staff provides MCPD staff with estimates of the number of students that will be generated under various housing scenarios. If housing scenarios generate enough students to require one or more school sites, then these sites are included within the plan area. The MCPD staff recommended plan works its way through Planning Board review and recommendation. Finally, the County Council reviews the Planning Board recommended plan, making any changes it deems appropriate. Ultimately, the County Council takes action to approve the plan.

The identification of school sites is the primary form of input MCPS provides on land use plans. MCPS monitors the implementation of land use plans once they are approved, and works in close coordination with the MCPD staff and developers to ensure changes in land use are incorporated in school facility plans.

Zoning

The implementation of master plans does not occur until the County Council approves a Sectional Map Amendment (SMA). An SMA is a comprehensive action that identifies various zones to be applied to individual tracts of land, as recommended in the master plan. Once the SMA is adopted, property owners have the right to subdivide their properties according to the zoning. On occasion, property owners may request rezoning of their land to allow projects that they believe are consistent with the intent of the master plan. MCPS provides comments on rezoning applications that include housing. These comments include estimates of the number of students that would be generated under the proposed rezoning and the projected utilization levels of schools that serve the property in question. These comments

are submitted to MCPD staff during the review of the rezoning, and as requested, to the County Hearing Examiner during review of the rezoning request.

Subdivision

Subdivision plans are submitted by property owners when they are ready to develop their land. Subdivisions are reviewed by MCPD staff and modifications to the plans may be worked out between staff and property owners prior to the plan going to the Planning Board for approval. Once a preliminary plan is complete, a public hearing is held before the Planning Board and action is taken. The Planning Board has the sole authority for review and approval of subdivision applications.

There are numerous considerations that come into play in reviewing a subdivision plan. The Planning Board must determine if a proposed subdivision is consistent with the area master plan and zoning of the property. The Planning Board also must determine if the area of development is “open” to subdivision approval given the results of the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) and County Growth Policy. In regard to the school test of the Growth Policy, one of three conditions may exist when reviewing residential subdivisions:

- First, there may be adequate capacity in the school cluster serving the property. In this case there are no conditions on subdivision approval related to schools.
- Second, schools in the cluster serving the property may be overutilized and require that a school facility payment may be collected as a condition of subdivision approval. This payment is collected when building permits are issued for the subdivision. These payments are reserved for school capacity projects in the cluster where they are collected.
- Third, schools serving the property may be so overutilized that development approvals may not be granted until capacity is adequate (through a future capital project or a decline in enrollment).

The thresholds for the second and third conditions are outlined below in the discussion of the County Subdivision Staging Policy. MCPS staff also provides comments on the impact of subdivisions that abut school system property. Once a preliminary plan of subdivision is approved by the Planning Board, an estimate of the number of students the plan will generate is incorporated in enrollment projections for schools that serve the property. Appendix P-2 describes how enrollment projections are developed.

County Subdivision Staging Policy

Since 1973 the Montgomery County subdivision regulations have included the APFO, with the goal of synchronizing development with the availability of public facilities. (County Code, Section 50-35 (k).) In response to strong growth pressures in the mid-1980s, the County Council enacted legislation to direct the Planning Board's administration of the APFO. This legislation originally was known as the County Growth Policy. More recently the name of the policy was changed to better reflect its purpose. The policy is now called the Subdivision Staging Policy. The policy is currently under review by County Council with action anticipated on or before November 15, 2016. Any relevant approved changes will be added to the next Educational Facility Master Plan. The APFO and Subdivision Staging Policy have nothing to do with the location, amount, type, or mix of development. These determinations occur in the master planning and zoning processes. The role of the Subdivision Staging Policy is the staging of subdivision approvals commensurate with adequate facility capacity. The two main areas of public facility capacity considered in the policy are schools and transportation facilities.

The County Subdivision Staging Policy, which prescribes the school test of facility adequacy, is reviewed on a four year cycle. The Subdivision Staging Policy is presently under review by the Montgomery County Council. The test will be updated subsequent to Council action. The school test of facility adequacy is conducted annually based on the latest enrollment forecast and adopted capital improvements program. The three tiered school test evaluates school utilization levels in the 25 cluster areas at the

elementary, middle, and high school levels. If school utilizations exceed certain thresholds, action on subdivision applications are prescribed. Each year, MCPS prepares the data on cluster school utilizations for the school test, and the Planning Board adopts the results of the school test prior to July 1st. The test results are in place for the following fiscal year. The Subdivision Staging Policy school test thresholds are:

- Subdivision applications in clusters with enrollment levels between 105 and 120 percent of MCPS program are required to make a facility payment to obtain approval. This payment is calculated at 60 percent of the marginal cost of the students generated by the subdivision on school construction costs.
- Subdivision applications in clusters with enrollment levels above 120 percent may not be approved until the utilization level falls below 120 percent. The results of the school test for FY 2016 are shown in Appendix I. This test reflects enrollment projections developed in the fall 2015 and approved school capacity projects in the County Council adopted FY 2016 Capital Budget and Amended FY 2015–2020 Capital Improvements Program.
- In the case of clusters that exceed the 120 percent threshold, the County Council may include a “placeholder” capital project in the adopted CIP to avoid moratorium. The placeholder includes funds that will bring the cluster just below the 120 percent threshold. In the following CIP cycle, the Board of Education supersedes the “placeholder” capital project with a request that will bring the utilization of the cluster below 100 percent.

Appendix C-2

MCPS Enrollment Forecasting

The prediction of school enrollment involves the consideration of a wide range of factors. The demographic makeup of communities is the foremost consideration. In addition, characteristics of schools, such as the programs offered and changes within school service areas (such as new housing), can influence enrollment. Economic activity at the local, regional, and national levels also influences the accuracy of enrollment forecasts. Developing a forecast that extends from 1 to 15 years requires assessment of current local events in light of broader, long-term trends. Forecast accuracy varies depending on the geographic scope of the projection as well as its time span. Accuracy is greatest when enrollment is projected for large areas for the short-term (one or two years in the future). Accuracy in forecasts diminishes as the geographic area projected becomes smaller and as the forecast is made for more distant points in the future. Therefore, a one-year countywide forecast for total enrollment for all schools will have less error than forecasts that extend further into the future for individual schools.

The MCPS enrollment forecast is developed after an annual study of trends at the county and individual school levels. The grade enrollment history of each school is compiled and updated annually. Analysis of this history uncovers patterns in the aging of students from one grade to the next. Extrapolating these patterns enables the forecast for each school to be developed. This approach, termed the cohort-survivorship method, is the most widely accepted and applied school enrollment forecasting method.

MCPS projections, prepared in the fall of every year, extend through the upcoming six years for all schools, and for the tenth and fifteenth years in the future for secondary schools. The actual September enrollment at each school is used as the basis from which projections are developed. The cohort-survivorship method “ages” the student population ahead through the grade levels at each school to the desired forecast years. For each school in the system and for the entire system, calculations of the net change in grade level enrollments as students transition from one grade to the next are developed. These enrollment change amounts are applied to current grade enrollments in order to project future enrollment in the grades system wide and at individual schools. For example, system wide, and at many schools, the number of Grade 1 students typically exceeds the number of kindergarteners the previous year. This example is usually the result of parents choosing private kindergarten for their children, and then enrolling them in public schools beginning in Grade 1. (This is less of a factor now that MCPS offers full-day kindergarten at all elementary schools and the share of county students in public schools, compared to nonpublic schools, increases.) Similar trends in the amount of “grade change” are discernible for each grade system wide, and at individual schools. Each school is unique, and projections must be sensitive to population dynamics in the communities served by the school, and the specific trends in the cohort movements through the grades.

Migration to Montgomery County by families with preschool and school-age children has yielded substantial numbers of new students. This source of enrollment growth was especially significant in the 1980s and 1990s, when a large number of new subdivisions were being built and turnover of homes in older communities hit record levels. Though the draw of migrating households to the county is now more moderate, migration continues to be a key factor that is incorporated into enrollment forecasts. Forecasters add these new students by tracking enrollment changes in schools and by tracking residential building plans, construction, and sales activity in developing areas of the county. Estimates of student yield from subdivisions are applied to the forecast for the school that serve the development after the projected building schedule is considered. Recently, MCPS has received more students from county private schools and fewer students have left the county to attend school in other jurisdictions. These trends have led to marked increases in enrollment despite the poor economy.

Because of the uncertainty that surrounds both short- and long-range forecasts, MCPS forecasts are revised each fall. In addition, the one-year forecast is revised each spring. The primary purpose of evaluating the upcoming school year forecast is to increase the accuracy in making staffing decisions and to place relocatable classrooms where needed. The evaluation assesses the enrollment change in each school from September, when the original forecast was made, to the time of the spring revision. In areas of the county that are developing, an assessment of the rate of housing construction also is made. In some cases, administrative or Board of Education actions, such as a change in a school service area, also may affect enrollment changes.

The most difficult component of the enrollment forecast is predicting kindergarten enrollment. To develop forecasts for kindergarten, an annual review of resident birth records compiled by the Maryland Center for Health Statistics is undertaken. Births in nearby jurisdictions to mothers who reside in Montgomery County are included in the records that are reported at the county level. These records provide a general measure of potential kindergarten enrollment five years in the future.

Analyzing the relationship between actual and projected county births—kindergarten enrollment five years after the birth year—enables ratios of kindergarten enrollment to births five years previously, to be developed. These ratios are then applied to more recent birth numbers, and projected births, to develop the total kindergarten enrollment forecast for MCPS. Kindergarten enrollment forecasts are then developed for each school, using recent trends in kindergarten enrollment at the school. Individual school kindergarten projections are then reconciled to the countywide kindergarten forecast at the end of the process. Kindergarten trends are reevaluated each year through close coordination with school principals.

Continuous efforts are underway to increase the accuracy of forecasting techniques. Advances continue to be made in the use of computers for the retrieval and analysis of demographic and facility planning data. For this reason MCPS is increasing the use the county Geographic Information System (GIS). This GIS system contains extensive demographic and land-use data that is used

in the forecasting and facility planning processes. Ties between MCPS planners, county planning agencies, the real estate and development communities, and community representatives enable an ongoing exchange of information relevant to forecasting. This pooled knowledge is a valuable resource in the inherently difficult job of predicting the future.