



City of Richmond, Virginia
Department of Planning and Development Review
Planning and Preservation Division
City Hall, Richmond, Virginia 23219
804.646.6335 (f) 804.646.5789 www.richmondgov.com

To: Planning Commission
From: Urban Design Committee
Date: August 15, 2016
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of the installation of modular classrooms at J.L. Francis Elementary School, 5146 Snead Road; UDC #2016-30**

I. APPLICANTS

Tommy Kranz, Richmond Public Schools

II. LOCATION

J.L. Francis Elementary School, 5146 Snead Road

Property Owner:

City of Richmond School Board

III. PURPOSE

The application is for final location, character, and extent review of the installation of modular classrooms on the J.L. Francis Elementary School site.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This is a request to install a modular building with eight classrooms and restroom facilities. The Applicant's Report notes that the school is at capacity with additional students set to arrive next year, and that the existing modular classrooms on-site are unsuitable for ongoing use. Richmond Public Schools (RPS) is formulating long-term plans to address the overcrowding, but to address the immediate need the School Board has requested that the RPS Administration provide temporary modular classrooms at J.L. Francis and Miles Jones Elementary Schools.

The Urban Design Guidelines present very strong language against the use of modular classrooms at City schools, affirming a 1995 motion by the Planning Commission stating that "all future modular unit requests, including renewals of currently approved units, will not be considered unless they are submitted with a cost analysis which compares the cost of the modular unit(s) to the cost of constructing an addition or a new school in lieu of the modular unit(s)". The Applicant's Report indicates that the permanent resolution to the overcrowding at J.L. Francis School may involve renovation and expansion of the existing facility, construction of a new school, and/or rezonings. The projected cost of the renovation and expansion option is \$66.3 million.

While not supportive of the use of modular classrooms, the Committee found this is a time-sensitive situation which calls for flexibility in the application of the guidelines. The proposed modular classrooms, connected with a central hallway, providing restrooms, act more as a separate wing of the main building than as a stand-alone classroom like the modular units commonly used to alleviate school overcrowding. After a long discussion with the applicant, the Committee finds that the location, with a short, ADA-accessible

walk from the main building, is the safest and most convenient one from an operational standpoint.

The Committee is comfortable recommending approval of the request for a two-year period in order to provide time to the Richmond Public Schools Administration to obtain funding and implement long-term plans. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval, with the following staff conditions:

- That the Certificate of Occupancy for the modular classrooms contains an expiration date of December 30th, 2018.
- That if the modular classrooms are needed beyond the December 30th, 2018 expiration date, the applicant must obtain an extension from the Planning Commission.

As well as the additional recommendation:

- That renewal the renewal in two years be contingent on visible and submitted planning to address the long-term crowding at the school

Staff Contact: Kathleen Onufer, (804) 646-5207

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

J.L Francis Elementary School is located on Snead Road to the south and White Oak Drive to the west. The remaining borders are wooded land buffers around single family neighborhoods, as well as a medium-density residential neighborhood to the east. The school property and adjacent properties are zoned R-4 (Single-family residential).

The school contains approximately 80,500 square feet of space and was constructed in 1999.

b. Scope of Review

The modular classrooms are subject to location character, and extent review as “public buildings or structures” in accordance with Section 17.07 of the City Charter.

c. UDC Review History

Last year the UDC reviewed, and Planning Commission approved, plans for modular classrooms and cafeteria facilities at Broad Rock and Greene Elementary Schools. A few months ago, the UDC reviewed the same set of modular classrooms for Broad Rock, Greene, and Reid Elementary Schools.

d. Project Description

This is a request to install a modular building with eight classrooms and restrooms on the J.L. Francis Elementary School site, to replace four existing modular classrooms and add capacity. The enrollment capacity for the school, including the existing four modular classrooms, is 586 students. The actual enrollment this year is 585 students, and the projection for 2016-17 is 592 students, increasing to 635 students in the 2021-2022 school year. Richmond Public Schools (RPS) is formulating long-term plans to address the overcrowding, but to address the immediate need the School Board has requested that the RPS Administration provide temporary modular classrooms at J.L. Francis Elementary. The Applicant’s

Report indicates that the permanent resolution to the overcrowding may involve renovation and expansion of the existing facility and/or rezonings. The projected costs of rezonings, buildings additions, and renovations will be \$66.3 million. The estimated cost of delivery/installation and first year lease of the modular unit will be \$21,404.

The proposal is to install a single modular building, 126' in length by 65' in width, containing 8 classroom and restroom facilities. The new classrooms are proposed to be installed to the rear of the school in the area currently containing the on-site single modular classrooms. The modular building will have a covered deck and ADA compliant ramp leading 30' to the main school building; the entire modular building will meet ADA requirements. The 4 existing portables will be removed, for a net gain of 4 classrooms.

The proposed modular classrooms feature hardi-panel exterior siding, steel clad exterior doors with view block, energy efficient exterior windows, a white EPDM roof to reduce heat gain, high efficiency heat pumps, gutters and downspouts. Wall mounted lights will also be installed on the exterior. When placed on-site, the lower portion of the modular classrooms will be skirted in hardi-panel down to the grade to account for changes in topography and to prevent students from getting underneath. Landscaping is not proposed.

The new modular classrooms and dining hall are intended to be installed by the middle of December to allow time for power/water/sewer hookups and for teachers to set-up their new temporary classrooms during the winter break.

e. Master Plan

The subject property is located within the Broad Rock Planning District, as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The Plan recommends Public and Open Space uses for this property, a designation that includes publicly owned and operated parks, recreation areas, open spaces, schools, libraries and other government and public service functions (page 135). The Plan notes that "Existing and projected deficiencies must be addressed in order to bring about needed improvements to City School facilities" (page 76). These deficiencies include elementary schools with modular classrooms, among others.

The Plan contains a list of recommended improvements for City school facilities broken into categories including basic renovation, major renovations, major additions and new construction, and demolitions and closures. Though no details are given on the extent of the improvements, J.L. Francis Elementary School is noted in the basic renovations category (page 78).

f. Urban Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Guidelines state that the "Committee is strongly opposed to the use of temporary modular classroom units by Richmond Public Schools to meet ongoing educational needs". The Guidelines further note that "The UDC supports the City Planning Commission's policy, adopted July 17, 1995, which states that all future modular unit requests, including renewals of currently approved units, will not be considered unless they are submitted with a cost analysis which compares the cost of the modular unit(s) to the cost of constructing an addition or a new school in lieu of the modular unit(s)" (page 16).

- VI. ATTACHMENTS**
 - a. Vicinity Map**
 - b. Application**
 - c. Plans**