



Richmond Public Schools
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
Darin D. Simmons, Jr.
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October 11, 2019

Re: 813 N 28th Street
Application No. COA-060187-2019

Ms. Jones:

Richmond Public Schools (RPS) does not agree with the Commission of Architectural Review's deferment for the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of the George Mason Elementary building. In fact, we believe that any continued deferment of action may jeopardize the City and RPS' ability to provide the necessary green space when the school opens in August 2020. This would cause RPS to absorb significant operational costs for the school as we provide supplemental activities and programming to meet physical education requirements at the school, while this issue is resolved.

In response to the request to examine all feasible options to the demolition of the 1922 section of the building, RPS believes that many of the proposed considerations are not feasible due to a lack of available funding. The three new schools that the City and RPS are building are being funded through the increase to the meals tax, which was projected to provide \$150 million dollars of additional City debt capacity. Current project budgets estimate the total cost of the three schools to be approximately \$146 million dollars, and RPS plans to use remaining funds for the design of a new George Wythe high school. With each of the new school construction projects, funding is a key constraint that has been publicly noted and discussed. Each of the Commission's suggested considerations are addressed below.

- **Find an appropriate New Use and rehabilitate the building**
Neither RPS nor the City has a programmed use nor sufficient funding for the rehabilitation of the 1922 section of the George Mason building. Moreover, integrating the current building into the design of the new building would not have been feasible given our timeline to have the new school ready by September 2020. Doing so would have required students to vacate the 1922 section of the building, which would have led to a major disruptions in school operations and caused overcrowding on the site. The building would require extensive and very costly

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renovation to abate asbestos material, replace all plumbing, electrical, and mechanical systems, and make design changes to bring it into compliance with today's building code, safety, energy efficiency and ADA requirements.

- **Relocation of the structure to a compatible site**
In addition to considerable costs estimated to move the structure to a different site, the design, structure, and condition of the 1922 section makes the relocation of the building technically unfeasible. Further, RPS does also not own a suitable site for a relocation or a programmed use for the building on a new site. Any such attempted relocation, even if rebuilt brick by brick, would entail the costly design modifications and upgrades discussed in the previous paragraph.
- **Resale of the property to an individual committed to suitable rehabilitation or relocation**
While RPS does not have a need for the building, RPS does need the property to come close to meeting minimum space guidelines for new school construction. Given the school's capacity of 750 students and Virginia Department of Education guidelines related to space requirements for a school of this size, RPS requires the property to provide needed recreation/play areas for the school and the community. Because of this, RPS does not believe the resale of the property to an organization committed to the rehabilitation of the building is a feasible option and that doing so would deprive the school and community of the necessary greenspace.
- **Preservation of important architectural elements of the building**
To preserve elements of the building, RPS would propose using brick from the 1922 structure in the creation of the fence columns for the new school. Though there would be an unforeseen project cost associated with this, we believe the added cost would be manageable given the salvage and reuse of old bricks in lieu of buying new brick.

Thank you for your review of our concerns and our discussion of the feasibility of the recommendations presented at the September 25, 2019 CAR meeting. We hope that the Commission will take these responses into consideration and grant approval for the complete demolition of the existing George Mason Elementary School.

Sincerely,



Darin Simmons, Jr.
Chief Operating Officer
Richmond Public Schools