



**City of Richmond, Virginia**  
**Department of Planning and Development Review**  
**Planning and Preservation Division**  
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To: Planning Commission  
From: Urban Design Committee  
Date: June 15, 2015  
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of the installation of modular classrooms on the Greene Elementary School site, 1745 Catalina Drive**

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**I. APPLICANTS**

Lloyd Schieldge, Richmond Public Schools

**II. LOCATION**

Greene Elementary School, 1745 Catalina Drive

**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 Greene Elementary School site.

**IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

This is a request to install eleven modular classrooms and one modular dining hall on the Greene Elementary School site. The Applicant's Report notes that the school is already over capacity with additional students set to arrive in the fall. 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 both Greene Elementary and Broad Rock Elementary.

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 Greene Elementary School may involve renovation and expansion of the existing facility or a replacement building. The projected cost of the renovation and expansion option is \$11.5 million, while replacing the school with a new one would cost an estimated \$35 million. The total cost to lease the modular classrooms for a two-year period for this school is approximately \$744,682, which includes site work (utilities, stormwater, etc.), installation and monthly rent.

While not supportive of the use of modular classrooms, the Urban Design Committee finds this to be 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 and adjacent to a modular dining hall, 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. The Committee did ask the applicant to consider alternate locations for the modular facilities, which as proposed cover the basketball and tennis courts, and to consider providing additional daylight into the modular facilities.

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 develop long-term plans. The Committee would request that the applicant return to the UDC and Planning Commission with details related to the covered walkway connecting the modular classrooms to the main building, the landscape plans and the stormwater BMP. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee (on a 4-0 vote) recommends that the Planning Commission grant final approval, with the following conditions:

- That the Certificate of Occupancy for the modular classrooms contains an expiration date of June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017.
- That if the modular classrooms are needed beyond the June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017 expiration date, the applicant must obtain an extension from the Planning Commission.
- That the applicant return to the UDC and Planning Commission with details related to the covered walkway connecting the modular classrooms to the main building, the landscape plans and the stormwater BMP.
- That the applicant considers providing more natural light into the modular facilities by either by adding windows, skylights or solar tubes.
- That the applicant considers alternate locations for the modular facilities to eliminate or minimize encroachment onto the play spaces.

Following review by the Urban Design Committee, the applicant has revised the site plan and provided a letter outlining their responses to the UDC recommendations. Those documents are included in this package, and the applicant respectfully requests that the revised site plan is approved at this meeting. At Greene Elementary, in addition to enlarging the modular dining hall from 46'8" x 60' to 70' x 60', the applicant was able to move the modular facilities closer to the main school building, eliminating much of the encroachment of the facilities on the basketball and tennis courts.

**Staff Contact:** Jeff Eastman, (804) 646-6348

## **V. FINDINGS OF FACT**

### **a. Site Description and Surrounding Context**

Greene Elementary School is located on 15 acres bound by Broad Rock Boulevard to the east, N. Kinsley Avenue to the north, Catalina Drive to the west and Cranford Avenue to the south. The one-story school was built in 1955, with additions in 1961 and 1969, and currently contains approximately 41,000 square feet of space in the main building. There are also five modular classrooms on the site that provide additional classroom space.

The school property and adjacent properties to the southeast are zoned R-4 (Single-family detached residential), while the primary zoning to the north and west is R-3 (Single-family detached residential). These areas are improved with single-family detached dwellings. There is one parcel to the north zoned RO-1 (Residential/Office) that is a multi-family dwelling, and Broad Rock Boulevard north of Kinsley Avenue is zoned B-3 (General Business) and improved with commercial buildings.

**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**

The UDC has reviewed, and the Planning Commission approved, several previous requests for the installation of modular classroom at Greene Elementary: two modular units in 2002 approved for a duration of two years; three units in 1997 approved for a duration of one year; one unit in 1995 approved for a duration of two years; one unit in 1992 approved with an unknown duration. Five modular units currently remain on the site.

**d. Project Description**

This is a request to install eleven modular classrooms and one modular dining hall on the Greene Elementary School site. The enrollment capacity for the school (without using modular units) is 390 students. The actual enrollment this year is 532 students, and the projection for 2015-16 is 571 students, increasing to 639 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 both Greene Elementary and Broad Rock Elementary. The Applicant’s Report indicates that the permanent resolution to the overcrowding at Greene Elementary School may involve renovation and expansion of the existing facility or a replacement building. The projected cost of the renovation and expansion option is \$11.5 million, while replacing the school with a new one would cost an estimated \$35 million. The total cost to lease the modular classrooms for a two-year period for this school is approximately \$744,682, which includes site work (utilities, stormwater, etc.), installation and monthly rent.

Unlike the existing modular classrooms on the site, which are stand-alone units, the proposed classrooms will be connected to each other and will also have an 8’ wide central hallway and shared restroom facilities. Currently, students who need to use the restroom have to exit the modular classroom and cross over to the main school. Connecting the classrooms and other facilities results in a structure that is 168’ in length by 65’ in width with just under 11,000 square feet of added space. The modular dining hall facility will be 60’ in length by 46’8” in width with approximately 2,800 square feet of added space. The new classrooms, which will be used for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, are proposed to be installed to the north of and set back from the main school building, covering an existing basketball court and extending eastward over a grassy field. A new sidewalk will connect the classrooms to the bus loop and over to the main school. The new classrooms, sidewalk and ramp will all be ADA compliant.

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 will be provided, but will be minimal due to the temporary nature of the modular classrooms. Unfortunately, due to the compressed schedule, landscaping plans have not been fully developed yet. Due to the size of the modular classrooms, a BMP will be required for rainwater runoff. That BMP will be located to the east of the modular classrooms in the grassy field.

The new modular classrooms and dining hall are intended to be installed by the middle of August to allow teachers to set up their new classrooms and to allow for set-up of the dining facility. Once the new classrooms are in place, the five existing ones will be removed, and the site will be seeded.

**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, Greene Elementary School is noted in the basic renovation and major additions/new construction categories (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**