



**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: August 15, 2016  
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of the installation of modular classrooms at Miles Jones Elementary School, 200 Beaufont Hills Drive; UDC #2016-31**

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**I. APPLICANTS**

Tommy Kranz, Richmond Public Schools

**II. LOCATION**

Miles Jones Elementary School, 200 Beaufont Hills 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 Miles Jones 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. 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 Miles Jones 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, 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. The Committee finds that the location, with a short, ADA-accessible walk from the main building and near the other modular building, is the safest and most convenient one from an operational standpoint.

After a long discussion with the applicant, 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 conditions:

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

And 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**

Miles Jones Elementary School is located on Beaufont Hills Drive with the Midlothian commercial corridor to the south and housing on all other sides. The school itself is in the R-48 zoning district; the neighborhoods surrounding it are in the R-7, R-48, and R-3 residential zoning districts. The Midlothian corridor is a B3 strip commercial corridor.

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 Miles Jones Elementary School site to add capacity. The enrollment capacity for the school is 592 students, plus 114 additional students in the existing modular classroom building for a total functional capacity of 706. The actual enrollment this year is 712 students, and the projection is for continued growth. The District installed a six classroom modular building during the Winter Break of 2015-2016 in an effort to alleviate overcrowding, but is now proposing an additional eight classroom building to further address ongoing enrollment growth.

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 Miles Jones Elementary. The Applicant's Report indicates that the permanent resolution to the overcrowding at Miles Jones Elementary School 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 on axis with the existing modular building; this installation will cover an asphalt play area. ADA-accessible walkways will connect the main school building and the two modular buildings; the entire modular building will meet ADA requirements. The two modular buildings will be surrounded by playground equipment and grassy field.

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 Midlothian 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.

**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**