



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: December 21, 2015
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of the installation of modular classrooms on the Miles Jones Elementary School site, 200 Beaufont Hills Drive**

I. APPLICANTS

Lloyd Schieldge, Richmond Public Schools

II. LOCATION

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 Jones Elementary School site.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This is a request to install seven modular classrooms on the Jones 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 Jones Elementary. This past summer similar requests were made and granted for modular classrooms to address overcrowding concerns at Broad Rock and Greene 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 Jones Elementary School will involve redistricting, with additions and renovations to surrounding elementary schools that would then accept students currently assigned to Jones Elementary. The projected cost of the additions/renovations and redistricting is \$66.3 million, while an addition to just Jones Elementary (the same size as the modular classrooms) is anticipated to cost just under \$2 million. The total estimated cost to lease the modular classrooms for one year for this school is \$421,404, 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 and 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 is comfortable recommending approval of the request for a two school-year period in order to provide time to the Richmond Public Schools Administration to develop 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 June 30th, 2018.
- That if the modular classrooms are needed beyond the June 30th, 2018 expiration date, the applicant must obtain an extension from the Planning Commission.

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

V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

Jones Elementary School is located on 11.14 acres on the western side of Beaufont Hills Drive, one block north of Midlothian Turnpike. The two-story school was built in 1999 and contains approximately 80,500 square feet of space.

The school property was formerly the site of an apartment complex and is zoned R-48 (Multi-family Residential). The adjacent properties to the east and north are zoned R-7 (Single and two-family Residential) and are developed with single-family detached residential dwellings. The property to the west is zoned R-3 (Single-family Residential) but is developed with an apartment complex authorized by a Special Use Permit in 1995. The properties to the south, along Midlothian Turnpike, are zoned B-3 (General Business) and are developed with a variety of auto-oriented commercial uses.

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 reviewed and the Planning Commission approved the plans for the construction of the school in 1998.

d. Project Description

This is a request to install seven modular classrooms on the Jones Elementary School site. The enrollment capacity for the school (without using modular units) is 592 students. The actual enrollment this year, including 43 students in the pre-K program, is 684 students. The total enrollment is expected to grow by another 25 students in the 2016-2017 school year before leveling off to a total of 573 students in 2024-2025. 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 Jones Elementary. This past summer similar requests were made and granted for modular classrooms to address overcrowding

concerns at Broad Rock and Greene Elementary Schools. The Applicant's Report indicates that the permanent resolution to the overcrowding at Jones Elementary School will involve redistricting, with additions and renovations to surrounding elementary schools that would then accept students currently assigned to Jones Elementary. The projected cost of the additions/renovations and redistricting is \$66.3 million, while an addition to just Jones Elementary (the same size as the modular classrooms) is anticipated to cost just under \$2 million. The total estimated cost to lease the modular classrooms for one year for this school is \$421,404, which includes site work (utilities, stormwater, etc.), installation and monthly rent.

The proposed classrooms will be connected to each other and will also have an 8' wide central hallway and shared restroom facilities. Connecting the classrooms and restroom facilities results in a structure that is 112' in length by 65' in width with just under 7,300 square feet of added space. The new classrooms, which will be used by the 2nd grade students, are proposed to be installed to the west (rear) of the main school building, covering a portion of a mulched playground area and extending westward over a grassy field. The equipment within the mulched playground area will be removed but will not be reused as it does not meet design criteria for new playground equipment in terms of safety and ADA compliance. Stairs and an accessible ramp will connect the classrooms to the paved playground surface and over to the main school. The students will occupy the modular classrooms for class only, and will return to the main building, accompanied by a teacher, for gym, lunch, library time and other functions.

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. Due to the temporary nature of the modular classrooms, the applicant does not propose to provide any landscaping.

The new modular classrooms are intended to be installed over winter holiday to allow teachers to set up their new classrooms over the 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).

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**