



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: May 16, 2016
RE: **Final Location, Character and Extent Review of the installation of modular classrooms on the Broad Rock Elementary School site, 4615 Ferguson Lane; UDC 2016-15**

I. APPLICANTS

Lloyd Schieldge, Richmond Public Schools

II. LOCATION

Broad Rock Elementary School, 4615 Ferguson Lane

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 Broad Rock Elementary School site.

IV. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This is a request to install twelve modular classrooms and restroom facilities as part of one modular building on the Broad Rock 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) has developed long-term plans to address the overcrowding, but those plans are contingent upon the allocation of necessary funding. Until that funding is allocated, the School Board has requested that the RPS Administration provide temporary modular classrooms at three Southside elementary schools: Broad Rock, G.H. Reid, and Greene 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 Broad Rock Elementary School will involve redistricting, with potential additions and renovations to the surrounding schools that would accept students currently assigned to this one, or a new elementary school.

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 and existing modular building, 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. While it is not preferable to locate the classrooms in the front of the main school building, the proposed location is the safest and most convenient one from an operational standpoint, adjacent to the bus loop and across from the school's main entrance, with clear sightlines and circulation.

The Urban Design Committee had many questions about the duration of use of the modular buildings currently on site, which at Broad Rock had been one year. Richmond Public Schools Staff clarified that they did not intend to seek renewal of the modular classrooms at Broad Rock Elementary, and that this site more than the other three was envisioned as a temporary situation. RPS presented on the need for construction dollars to move forward with their comprehensive facilities plan across the district and particularly the Southside.

The applicant was also asked to clarify the budgetary cost, which had not been provided in the application. The rental of the modular building runs about \$130,000 a year, and that initial sitework and installation costs ran between \$500,000-\$600,000. RPS staff clarified that the lifespan of the units could be up to 35 years, but that that was in no way the intent of RPS to use modular buildings on a long-term basis.

The UDC was comfortable recommending approval of the request for a two-year period in order to provide time to the Richmond Public Schools Administration to move forward with long-term plans and obtain funding; they were particularly concerned that RPS should advance planning & design for replacement schools and/or renovations before any modular buildings should receive renewals of their Certificate of Occupancy. Therefore, the Urban Design Committee voted to recommend 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.
- And the recommendation that the renewal in two years be contingent upon visible and submitted planning to address long-term overcrowding at the school.

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V. FINDINGS OF FACT

a. Site Description and Surrounding Context

Broad Rock Elementary School is located on 9.6 acres bound by Ferguson Lane to the north, Dorset Road to the east, Jervie Drive to the south and Broadingham Road to the west. The two-story school was built in 2012 and currently contains approximately 92,000 square feet of space. The new school was constructed on the fields behind the old school, and when it was completed, the old school was demolished. This has resulted in a large setback for the current school, which fronts on Ferguson Lane.

The school property and adjacent properties to the north, west and south are zoned R-4 (Single-family detached residential), while the primary zoning to the east is R-3 (Single-family detached residential). These areas are improved with single-family detached dwellings. There is an area fronting on Broad Rock Boulevard to the north of the school that is zoned B-2 (Community 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 reviewed, and the Planning Commission approved, the plans for the new Broad Rock Elementary School in 2010. The school was opened in 2012. Last year the UDC reviewed, and Planning Commission approved, plans for modular classrooms and other facilities at Broad Rock and Greene Elementary. There is thus a modular dining facility, a modular classroom building identical to the one proposed, and a series of ramps existing on the site.

d. Project Description

This is a request to install twelve modular classrooms in one structure that includes restrooms on the Broad Rock Elementary School site. The enrollment capacity for the school (without using modular units) is 650 students. The actual enrollment this year is 889 students, and the projection for 2016-17 is 927 students, increasing to 995 students in the 2019-2020 school year. The Applicant’s Report indicates that the permanent resolution to the overcrowding at Broad Rock Elementary School will involve redistricting, with potential additions and renovations to the surrounding schools that would accept students currently assigned to this one. The projected cost of those additions/renovations is \$5.2 million.

The proposed building will be 177’ 8” x 65’ and have twelve classrooms ranging in size from 633 sq ft to 729 sq ft arranged around a central hallway and restroom facilities. The proposed building would be part of a modular array that includes another 12 classroom modular building as well as a modular cafeteria; it will be connected to the main building, the parking lot, and these other facilities by concrete sidewalks. The building will also have a covered deck and ADA compliant ramp leading to the existing modular buildings; the building will meet all ADA requirements.

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 and dining hall will be skirted in hardi-panel down to the grade to account for changes in topography and to prevent students from getting underneath. No landscaping is proposed because of the temporary nature of the modular classrooms.

The new modular classrooms and dining hall are intended to be installed by the middle of August; RPS will have to submit for renewal of modular building annual permits in May 2017 in accordance with the conditions of prior approvals.

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. Broad Rock Elementary School is noted in the demolition and on-site facility replacement 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**