

Location - where should facilities be located in order to provide accessibility, support planned land uses, and adequately serve their function.

Character and Extent - the quantity of the facility which should be constructed in relation to the population, the appropriate facility size, and design requirements to achieve neighborhood compatibility.

Other - factors which must be addressed to provide an acceptable level of service or community or user benefit.

EDUCATION

Fairfax County residents are offered a full and varied range of educational opportunities through the county's public school system and the presence of both a community college and a four-year university.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) is the major provider of education in the county. FCPS, which has been nationally recognized for excellence and is one of the largest school systems in the nation, has a wide range of educational facilities that accommodate instructional programs for county students from kindergarten through grade 12. In addition to accommodating educational programs, school facilities are used to meet the county's recreational and cultural needs through programming by the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services. Generally, separate facilities are provided to serve up to three levels of education:

- Elementary _____ kindergarten to grades 5/6
- Middle _____ grades 6/7 and 8
- Secondary _____ grades 7 through 12
- High _____ grades 9 through 12

Additionally, FCPS has an extensive adult education program, and many specialized educational programs. Special education programs serve mentally and physically handicapped students, ranging in age from 18 months to 22 years. The Family and Early Childhood Education Program (FECEP), formerly known as Head Start, is a preschool program operated primarily in elementary schools for children ages 4 and 5.

The Constitution of Virginia delegates the supervision of public schools to the school board of each locality. Virginia school boards are not county agencies. The Virginia Supreme Court consistently has acknowledged that the power to select school sites and to determine the manner in which school properties shall be used is essential to the school board's supervisory role.

Pursuant to Virginia Code annotated Section 15.2-2232 when a proposed public school facility is not featured in the Comprehensive Plan, the School Board must submit the proposed facility to the Planning Commission for a determination of whether the general, or approximate location, character, and extent of the proposed facility is substantially in accord with the Comprehensive Plan. The text, objectives, and policies appearing in this portion of the Policy Plan are planning guidelines and are not intended to negate the School Board's constitutionally vested

authority for school site selection, school design, or the most appropriate method to house and accommodate Fairfax County public school students. On the other hand, to the extent that the text, objectives, and policies of this section reflect land use rather than programmatic concerns, they will be implemented by the Planning Commission, as required by Virginia Code, Section 15.2-2232.

The fundamental element in capital facility planning for public schools is determining future memberships, a complex procedure which continues to be refined. The school system employs multiple methodologies for projecting student populations.

Planning for schools is particularly difficult in areas with transient populations, such as Northern Virginia. This problem is compounded in Fairfax County by development, and a multitude of variables which alter enrollment levels, such as transfers to and from private schools, in and out migration rates, and changing family compositions in existing housing stock.

FCPS strives for precise facility planning, in order to mitigate costs associated with over-estimates and yet ensure adequate physical space for students and programs. The need for facilities and additions is determined by comparing available capacity in an area and the projected students for that area. Capacity is an estimate of the number of student spaces available within an educational facility which takes into account the following factors: educational specifications for elementary, middle and high schools; or elementary and secondary schools; program requirements; and appropriate student-teacher ratios. For example, program requirements can alter space allocations within a building if they utilize additional space, such as the addition of a room for computer training. Changes in student-teacher ratios can alter the number of classrooms required for a given number of students by modifying how they are organized into classes and scheduled into rooms.

Student membership forecasts, coupled with capacity estimates and facility standards, provide the framework for capital facility planning. Locational criteria assists in site planning, identification and selection.

The next 20 years will prove a significant challenge in maintaining and improving the county's high standards for educational facilities. In addition to keeping pace with technological advances and demographic fluctuations, FCPS must acquire school sites or buildings in an ever-tightening real estate market. Land and building acquisition, construction of schools or lease of buildings will compete with other community facilities for available land and funding resources. While providing for new facilities is expected to be a major focus for FCPS, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the rehabilitation of existing facilities will compete for limited facility funding. Therefore, every effort should be made to ensure that projects cost-effectively meet FCPS requirements.

Location

Objective 6: **Acquire sites for schools or educational facilities through negotiation, dedication, or condemnation. This may include the siting of schools or facilities in high density areas or on parcels of limited size.**

Policy a. Place schools on parcels meeting the optimum number of general locational criteria. Sites should be evaluated by the following factors:

- Safe and convenient accessibility to pedestrian and road networks, and transit where available.

- Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R.) to accommodate expansion, when the school is originally sized below the maximum efficiency standard for that type of school.
 - Compatibility with adjoining planned and existing development and with the Comprehensive Plan.
 - Aesthetically pleasing physical qualities with appropriate engineering features (e.g. soils, topography).
 - Proximity to other public facilities, such as police and fire and rescue services, public parks and libraries.
- Policy b. Locate school sites, when situated in areas conducive to pedestrian traffic, to take advantage of maximum walking distances of one mile for elementary schools and one and a half miles for middle schools, high schools, and secondary schools.
- Policy c. Locate middle schools, high schools, and secondary schools, and when possible, elementary schools, where they can be served by public water and sewer. When elementary schools must be located in non-sewered areas in order to serve their target student population, well and septic can be utilized if no other alternative is available.
- Policy d. Acquire school sites, when land dedications cannot be obtained, as far in advance of construction as possible, to ensure availability of both the preferred location and the necessary site features. Plan for acquisitions through the Capital Improvement Program.
- Policy e. Encourage site dedications which provide sufficient F.A.R. to meet locational criteria.
- Policy f. Coordinate the acquisition and design of the site's active recreation areas with the Fairfax County Park Authority and other agencies. This will ensure maximum opportunities for co-location and efficient use of recreational and other facilities.
- Policy g. As part of the development and redevelopment process, encourage commitments for school renovations and additional capacity where permissible.

Objective 7: Distribute administration and maintenance facilities to conveniently serve the areas they support where feasible.

- Policy a. Locate Area Administration buildings in the school areas they are intended to serve.
- Policy b. Locate maintenance and operation facilities to afford greater convenience, efficiency and reduction of travel time.

Character and Extent

Objective 8: Locate schools on sites which meet or exceed minimum state size guidelines where feasible.

- Policy a. Ensure that minimum site size conforms to the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance F.A.R. requirements. This may result in the acquisition of sites that do not conform to the state suggested guidelines.

Objective 9: Design schools and educational facilities to allow for optimal site utilization while providing optimum service to, and compatibility with, the local community.

- Policy a. Design schools to maximize a site's utility, while providing for safety and aesthetics. Provide for possible future expansion and allow for efficient flow of traffic. Provide adequate stacking space and circulation for school buses, student drop off, and offstreet parking, as required. The impact of school traffic on local road networks should, to the extent possible, be minimized.
- Policy b. Design and construct schools with appreciation for, and attention to, environmentally sensitive lands.
- Policy c. Locate schools in relation to residential or mixed-use areas, the road network, traffic patterns and transit where available to optimize the resulting safety and convenience for students, residents, and commuters. When possible, elementary schools should be located in, or on the periphery of, residential or mixed-use areas to ensure proximity and convenience for students and the local community.
- Policy d. Provide for compatibility between schools and adjacent properties with appropriate screening and fencing, in accordance with the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance. When designing and constructing schools, preserve as much mature natural vegetation as possible.
- Policy e. Design buildings for educational purposes so that intensity and character are compatible with surrounding planned and existing development.
- Policy f. Consider Area Plan design guidelines, as appropriate, for schools and buildings for educational purposes.
- Policy g. Consider co-location of different levels of education and other types of programs, with the option of shared facilities such as cafeteria, gymnasium, auditorium, library, and administrative offices.
- Policy h. Consider co-location of schools with other public uses such as a library or a recreational center.

Objective 10: Consider adaptive reuse of buildings for public schools and educational purposes.

- Policy a. Consider properties such as office, commercial, or other buildings for conversion to education facilities.
- Policy b. Consider commercial sites to offer programs such as Transitional High Schools, Family and Early Childhood Education Program (FECEP)/Head Start and distance learning. These sites could also provide services to the community.

- Policy c. Consider alternative spaces for outdoor recreation, such as converted rooftops and underutilized surface parking lots. Coordinate with the Fairfax County Park Authority or other organizations for efficient use of recreational facilities for both school and community use.

Objective 11: Encourage optimization of existing schools and other facilities, whenever possible and reasonable, to support educational and community objectives.

- Policy a. Build additions, when appropriate, to minimize the need for new facilities. Analyze carefully the costs and benefits associated with construction of an addition as compared to a new facility.
- Policy b. Consider the expansion of existing school facilities identified on the Comprehensive Plan map as a feature shown of the Comprehensive Plan provided the proposed expansion has received prior approval by a public bond referendum, is included in the county's currently adopted Capital Improvement Program, and does not significantly impact the character of the existing facility and its compatibility with the surrounding area.
- Policy c. Provide temporary facilities as required to respond to short term student population accommodation needs.
- Policy d. Encourage parity between older and newer schools and facilities through renovation. Apply the same educational specifications used as a guide in the construction of new school facilities for planning the renovation of existing facilities. Consider expected future utilization rates when proposing renovation projects.
- Policy e. Continue the practice of serving local communities for scouting, senior citizen programs, and other neighborhood based activities through the use of school facilities. Provide access to school grounds for community use of recreational facilities.
- Policy f. Continue the practice of working in collaboration with the Fairfax County Office for Children and other organizations for the provision of space for before and after-school child care services.
- Policy g. Continue the practice of allowing the Park Authority and other organizations to utilize sites before school construction begins.
- Policy h. Provide space for other public service needs, when possible and reasonable, in underutilized schools.
- Policy i. Consider co-location of multiple education facilities on school sites.