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Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Sean Davis, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

February 1, 2018

REQUEST: Forest Park High School and Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School INSPIRE Plan

RECOMMENDATION: Approval and Adoption

STAFF: Chad Hayes

PETITIONERS: Department of Planning at the request of the community organizations and institutional stakeholders of the Forest Park High School and Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School INSPIRE area

OWNERS: Mayor and City Council and Multiple Private Property Owners

SITE/ GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions:

Forest Park High School, located at 3701 Eldorado Avenue, and Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School, located at 3501 Hillsdale Road, are two 21st Century and INSPIRE schools that are less than one-half mile apart. The quarter-mile INSPIRE area around the schools includes the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Howard Park, West Arlington and Central Forest Park. Forest Park High School No. 406 is situated on a 12 acre parcel. The site is bordered on the north by Belle Avenue and Chatham Road to the south, with Eldorado Avenue to the west. The east side of the school is bounded by a combination of a 12-foot wide alley, a 19-foot wide alley, and a privately owned residential lot. Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School No. 256 is situated on a 3.2 acre parcel. The site is bordered on the north by Liberty Heights Avenue and Maine Avenue to the south, with Hillsdale Road to the west. The east side of the school is bounded by a pedestrian way called Mohawk Path.

Forest Park High School is currently under construction and will continue to serve students in 9th through 12th grade when the building reopens for the 2018-19 school year. The building was built in 1979 and is being renovated to include additions that will extend the building north and east to increase the total size from approximately 182,000 square feet to 203,508 square feet. The additions include an expansion of the existing cafeteria and an art classroom, auxiliary gymnasium, black box theater, and 2,000 square feet of community space. The new school building is expected to have a state rated capacity of 927 students and the enrollment for SY2122 is projected to be 812 students. The project was designed by Smolen Emr Ilkovitch Architects and is being constructed by HESS Construction. The school building and site improvements represent a \$73 million investment.

The Calvin M. Rodwell program currently serves students in pre-kindergarten through 5th grade but will expand to serve pre-kindergarten through 8th grade beginning September 2018. In SY2016 Calvin M. Rodwell's enrollment was 350 students and the SY2022 enrollment is projected to be 629 students. The increase in enrollment is attributed to the closure of the Grove Park Elementary/Middle School program at the end of the 2017-18 school year. Homes that are currently in the Grove Park Elementary/Middle School zone will be re-zoned to the Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary/Middle School zone. The current 37,537 sq. ft. Calvin M. Rodwell building will be demolished and a larger building will be constructed to accommodate the increased number of students. The new school building is projected to open in January 2020 and is expected to be a 3-story building with a gross floor area of 101,670 square feet. The elementary and middle school students will be separated with the elementary students on the 1st and 2nd floors and the middle school students on the 3rd floor. The cafeteria is expected to be situated at the north end of the site with the gym to the south. The new layout will allow for an expansion of the parking lot along Liberty Heights Avenue and will expand the cafeteria to an appropriate size for the school. The Grove Park Elementary/Middle School building located at 5545 Kennison Avenue is expected to be utilized as swing space for Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary/Middle School students during the construction of the new building. Design Collective has been selected to design the new school building.

General Area:

The majority of the INSPIRE plan area is located in the Howard Park and Dorchester neighborhoods in Northwest Baltimore City. Both neighborhoods share Eldorado Avenue as a border, with Dorchester to the east and Howard Park to the west. Both are strong, stable neighborhoods that share many similarities. Howard Park is significantly larger than Dorchester. Liberty Heights Avenue creates the southern edge of Dorchester; Howard Park extends all the way down to the southern tip of Forest Park Golf Course, and west to the city-county line.

Housing, Land Use, and Safety

The majority of the Dorchester neighborhood is zoned for low-density residential buildings. There is an assortment of housing options that include single-family detached homes, single family semi-detached homes, rowhouses in the northeastern section of the neighborhood, and several apartment buildings along Liberty Heights Avenue and Garrison Boulevard. According to the 2014 Housing Market Typology a majority of the Dorchester neighborhood is in the Middle Market Stressed category, meaning there are slightly lower home sales values than the city's average, and there has not been significant price appreciation. This type of housing market may have higher than average vacancy or foreclosure rates. Residential vacancy is relatively low however, with the exception of the 4000-block of Boarman Avenue. A small part of the southern portion of the neighborhood is in the Middle Market category. Middle Market areas are characterized by high homeownership rates and median sales values that are higher than the City's average. On the other hand, they have higher foreclosure rates when compared to more competitive markets and have also experienced slight population loss.

A majority of Howard Park's housing stock consists of large single-family detached homes, several pockets of semi-detached homes, and a few small apartment buildings scattered throughout the neighborhood. Two sections in the community are commercially zoned. The first is located at 5500 Gwynn Oak Avenue which is a two-story building with six ground floor retail

units as well as office space on the second floor. The other commercially zoned area in Howard Park is the business district that stretches from the 4500-block to the 5100-block of Liberty Heights Avenue. There are some residential vacancies but they aren't concentrated in a particular area. Howard Park is categorized as Middle Market as well as Middle Market Choice according to the 2014 Housing Market Typology. Middle Market Choice markets have housing prices above the City's average, strong homeownership rates, and a low vacancy rate.

Within the Howard Park and Dorchester neighborhood boundaries are several large tracts of land. One of those land parcels is the former Garrison Middle School (building #42), located at 3910 Barrington Road, one block east of Forest Park High School. The Garrison Middle School program was closed in 2013 but the building is still operating as swing space for schools undergoing construction as part of the 21st Century program. Garrison Middle School is a historic brick building that was built in 1932. The building is more than 165,000 square feet and sits on 12.1 acres of land that is accessible from Barrington Road as well as Garrison Boulevard. The land is zoned R-3, which is a Detached Residential Zoning District, intended for neighborhoods of detached dwellings located on lots of at least 5,000 square feet. It is comprised of open green space surrounding the school building which is situated in the center of the parcel abutting the northern property line.

Recreation and Open Space

The schools are the hubs of recreational activities in these neighborhoods. Forest Park High School offers residents recreational opportunities with free access to the school's fields and facilities. Forest Park High School has tennis courts, a basketball court, a running track, and an indoor swimming pool that are all available to the public. Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School has a playground that is accessible to children when school is not in session. In addition, students are offered recreational opportunities through the school's many after school programs which include dance, art, music, martial arts, spirit squad, flag football, basketball, and culinary arts.

There are two public parks in the vicinity of Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School and Forest Park High School. Penhurst Park, located at the corner of Garrison Boulevard and Penhurst Avenue, is a small park with a playground, swings, and a limited amount of open space. Hillsdale Park (as it's referred to by many residents) is located a few blocks south of Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School. The largest feature of the park, the 176-acre municipal Forest Park Golf Course, is split into two sides by Hillsdale Road.

Additional recreational opportunities are available for senior citizens at the Forest Park Senior Center on the 4800-block of Liberty Heights Avenue. The Forest Park Senior Center offers line dancing, ballroom dancing, arts and crafts, bingo, aerobics classes, martial arts, and other physical fitness programs. The center also functions as a hangout where seniors go to socialize. The Forest Park Senior Center is a very large building that is equipped with meeting rooms that are frequently used by community groups and neighborhood associations, making it an asset to residents of all ages.

Transportation

There are several major streets in the area including Liberty Heights Avenue and Garrison Boulevard. Liberty Heights Avenue is used by residents heading northwest to points of interest

in Baltimore County as well as those heading southeast to areas downtown and beyond. It is a heavily traveled corridor with exceptional bus service. Under the new MTA BaltimoreLink bus system, Liberty Heights Avenue is one of the 12 CityLink Routes (Lime Route) that service major arteries 24-hours a day. Liberty Heights Avenue is an ideal thoroughfare for motorists seeking consistent and rapid vehicular movement..

Garrison Boulevard is the road that many residents in Northwest Baltimore use when traveling to destinations to the north or south. It consists of one wide travel lane equipped with bicycle sharrows in each direction, as well as street parking on both sides. The limited number of traffic signals and stop signs on Garrison Boulevard make it an ideal street for motorists seeking consistent and continuous movement. Garrison Boulevard also offers access to public transit as it is serviced by the LocalLink 80 bus line which connects to the Rogers Avenue Metro Station to the north. The West Cold Spring Metro Station is another public transit hub within close proximity to the schools. Both of the metro stations are approximately one mile from Forest Park High School and offer convenient and affordable subway service to residents traveling as far northwest as Owings Mills and as far southeast as Johns Hopkins Hospital.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

The request conforms to the goals and objectives of:

1. The Greater Northwest Community Coalition Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan, adopted in 2005
2. Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan, specifically:
 - LIVE Goal 1: Build human and social capital by strengthening neighborhoods.
Objective 1: Expand Housing Choices for all Residents
Strategy 6: Create and preserve mixed-income neighborhoods in Competitive, Emerging and Stable neighborhoods with targeted disposition of City properties.
Objective 2: Strategically Redevelop Vacant Properties throughout the City
Objective 3: Maintain and create safe, clean and healthy neighborhoods.
Strategy 2: Target housing and sanitation code enforcement using the Housing Typology
Objective 4: Target Neighborhood Planning to Leverage Investment
3. Baltimore Sustainability Plan, specifically:
 - CLEANLINESS GOALS: Towards Our Vision of a CLEAN Baltimore
Goal 1: Eliminate litter throughout the City of Baltimore
Goal 2: Sustain a clean and maintained appearance of public land
Goal 3: Transform vacant lots from liabilities to assets that provide social and environmental benefits.
 - GREENING GOALS: Towards Our Vision of a GREEN Baltimore
Goal 1: Double Baltimore's Tree Canopy by 2037
Goal 3: Provide safe, well-maintained recreational space within ¼ mile of all residents.
 - TRANSPORTATION GOALS: Towards Our Vision of a MOBILE Baltimore

Goal 2: Make Baltimore bicycle and pedestrian friendly.

ANALYSIS

The 21st Century School Buildings Program

In the fall of 2010, groundwork was laid to address Baltimore City's aging and inadequate public school buildings. Communities, education advocacy groups, the school system, and other stakeholders built a coalition of support for legislation and funding to modernize Baltimore's public schools. The promise of replaced and renovated schools is meant to help transform student opportunities and achievement, provide jobs and resources to families, and help revitalize neighborhoods.

INSPIRE Mission and Objectives

Each modernized 21st Century school represents tens of millions of dollars of public investment in the neighborhood it serves.

To leverage this investment, and to enhance the connection between the schools and the surrounding neighborhoods, the Department of Planning launched a new program called INSPIRE, which stands for Investing in Neighborhoods and Schools to Promote Improvement, Revitalization, and Excellence. This planning program focuses on the neighborhoods surrounding each of the schools, specifically in the quarter-mile radius around the schools.

Focusing on a limited geographic area allows plans to concentrate impact around the school so that assets and investments support the school as a community resource, build on each other, and continue to expand further into the neighborhood. Recommendations in the plan don't simply stop at a quarter-mile marker; a guiding principle is considering concentration of impact. In this way, the INSPIRE plans respond to the aspirations of the neighborhood and school stakeholders in a way that is achievable.

INSPIRE plans seek to lead to improvements in the environment and in the quality of life for students, their families, and neighborhood residents. The plans will also articulate the community's long-term vision for guiding private investment, and address environmental, social, and economic conditions.

Forest Park High School and Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School INSPIRE Process

From January 2016 to September 2017, Department of Planning staff worked with members of the school and neighborhood communities to better understand their neighborhood experiences, concerns, and needs. Through various community engagement processes including INSPIRE workshops, community association meetings, surveys, and multiple walking tours, stakeholders have helped inform the plan. Recommendations from previous plans – Greater Northwest Community Coalition Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan, Liberty Heights Corridor Comprehensive Real Estate and Economic Development Assessment, and Leveraging Investments in Neighborhood Corridors Strategy (LINCS) for Liberty Heights Avenue and Garrison Boulevard – were evaluated and included where appropriate.

Presentations and notes from workshops can be found on INSPIRE's website:
<https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/inspire-plans/forest-park-high-school-calvin-rodwell-middle-school>

Recommendations

There are two categories of recommendations, Primary Walking Routes Standard Improvements, and Forest Park High School and Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School Area Recommendations.

Primary Walking Routes Standard Improvements

To strengthen the connection between the school and community, the first set of recommendations focuses on blocks that have been designated as "primary walking routes." Standard improvements along these routes will help ensure that students and other community members have safer and more walkable access to the school.

Through commitments from many City agencies, these key improvements will be made along the primary walking routes:

- Bringing sidewalks up to a safe and standard condition
- Repainting or adding crosswalks
- Assessing the need for repairs to ADA ramps at intersections
- Marking Safe Routes to School footprints (Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary/Middle School only)
- Assessing crossing guard deployment
- Pruning and planting street trees
- Assessing street lighting
- Boarding open vacant buildings
- Picking up trash and maintaining vacant lots

Forest Park High School and Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School Area Recommendations

To address environmental, social, and economic conditions, and to help guide future investment, the second set of recommendations is divided into six goals. Recommendations for the Forest Park High School and Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School Planning Area fall under these goals and strategies:

- **Invest in Housing and Market-Strengthening Development Opportunities**
 - Create and Maintain High-Quality Owner-Occupied Housing
 - Promote Strategic Redevelopment Opportunities
 - Improve Retail Businesses and Seek Quality Entrepreneurs in the Community
- **Improve Safety**
 - Promote Public Safety
- **Create Transportation Connections and Access**
 - Improve Street Infrastructure, Traffic Conditions, Pedestrian Safety, and Walkability
- **Create Opportunities for Health and Wellness**
 - Offer Healthy Food Options for Students
 - Create New Places for Play and Recreation in the Community

- **Create an Environmentally-Sustainable and Clean Neighborhood**
 - Make the Neighborhoods Cleaner and Greener

NOTIFICATIONS

Staff has notified by email the Howard Park Civic Association, Dorchester Community Association, West Arlington Improvement Association, Central Forest Park Community Association, Grove Park Improvement Association, the principals, the Family League of Baltimore, ACLU, Live Baltimore, and leaders of the 21st Century Schools Team from Baltimore City Public Schools.

We have also notified 5th District Councilman Isaac "Yitzy" Schleifer, 6th District Councilwoman Sharon Green Middleton, 8th District Councilman Kristerfer Burnett, and members of the 41st Legislative District, including Senator Nathaniel Oaks, Delegate Angela Gibson, Delegate Bilal Ali and Delegate Sandy Rosenberg. Other City Agencies impacted by this planning process were also notified by email of this action, including the Baltimore Police Department, Department of Housing and Community Development, Department of Transportation, Department of Recreation and Parks, Baltimore Development Corporation, Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts, and Department of Public Works.

Copies of the Forest Park High School and Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary School INSPIRE Plan will be available on the Department of Planning website.



**Thomas J. Stosur,
Director**