

October 22, 2015

Patrick Davis
Coordinator, Facilities Initiatives
Office of the Chief Operating Officer
District of Columbia Public Schools
1200 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

DCPS Responses in BOLD

Dear Mr. Davis,

The School Improvement Team (SIT) is grateful for the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Educational Specifications for Garrison Elementary School Modernization (the “Ed Specs”), as revised October 2015. The Garrison community is committed to the SIT process, Ed Specs, and the design and approval decisions necessary to ensure that our elementary school’s modernization occurs on the timetable announced by the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS); our Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) Jennifer Niles; and the Department of General Services (DGS). The Ed Specs effectively build upon the previous efforts of DGS and DCPS and enable us to move forward with the “High-Level Modernization Process” beginning now at “Step 3: Facility Design & Construction Management.”¹

We appreciate that the Ed Specs’ contemplated Phase One modernization does not include all needed or desired improvements,² but even without these important elements **we are committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure the success of the proposed Phase One modernization, with construction beginning in June 2016.** In addition, we look forward to continuing engagement regarding needed improvements the Ed Specs anticipated for a Phase Two or as an Add-Alternate.³ Thank you for ensuring the Garrison community will have a clear line of communication throughout the modernization process.

1. Impact of Scope of Work on Garrison’s Educational Programming

The Garrison SIT hopes that we can discuss the process by which elements of the scope of work will be prioritized in the event the proposed scope of work in the Ed Specs does not physically fit in the square footage of Garrison’s building?

¹ See, “Garrison School Improvement Team” slides, slide 6, emailed from Patrick Davis to SIT members

² See, Ed Specs at 3 (“Expansion of the media center to current guidelines will be accomplished as part of a future ‘phase II’ project along with modernization of the kitchen/multi-purpose room and site improvements including the play area and fields.”)

³ *Ibid.* See also, Ed Specs at 6-7.

By looking at previous Ed Specs and drawings, it appears that the proposed scope of work might not fit in the building's current footprint. If this is the case, **the SIT is going to have to prioritize the programmatic elements that are most important to excellence of education** and/or think creatively about how things can be made to fit.

Below are some thoughts on how to deal with lack of space:

- Using the currently unoccupied second classrooms for grades 3rd, 4th and 5th as a temporary solution to lack of space while the enrollment grows in the upper grades;
- Not "right-sizing" the classrooms to have more space for what is proposed in the scope of work and what was left out of the scope of work (and have more money to include additional programmatic elements which are currently left out of the scope of work). While 900sqf is generally recognized as the "right" size for classrooms in the ed specs of the school districts in the DMV area, there are a number of examples of DC schools with classrooms far smaller than Garrison's current 700sqf classrooms, and this does not seem to affect excellence;
- Encroaching into spaces which are currently not in the scope of work for programmatic elements which are part of the scope of work, for example by building a science lab/outdoor classroom/storage on the grounds or in the stage area of the gym;
- Moving programmatic elements off site, for example move parts of the admin suite that might become redundant in the future (records?) to a temporary or off site location; and
- Potentially removing one set of stairs (in the event a second floor connector were part of a revised/final scope of work) and therefore gain space for programmatic elements, such as a new/enlarged media center.

All programmatic elements aimed at knitting together the school and the surrounding communities have been obliterated. Specifically, these are spaces within the school that can be used by the community after school hours and on weekends to make more efficient use of our public buildings and, most importantly, add to the opportunities offered to Garrison students and their families. If there were any savings in money or space through any of the thoughts above or otherwise, it would be wise to consider small yet strategic spaces, such as

- Public restrooms accessible from the field without needing to access the school building to allow for greater use of the grounds in the evenings and on weekends to increase activities/opportunities open to students, their families and the community; and
- Storage spaces/closets for community afterschool providers.

The DME made a point of stating that whatever the plans were, it was key that the building be expandable to accommodate prospected future student growth. The

proposed plan does not appear to allow for expansion in the near or immediate term. For structural reasons, the current school building cannot be added onto vertically, and the option to encroach into the field at a later stage makes little sense given the lack of recreational spaces in an ever-densifying neighborhood. The SIT requests that potential future expansion be explicitly taken into account in the design process.

DCPS Response: Thank you for the very thoughtful feedback. You were correct, we did have an issue fitting the current Ed Spec into the layout. Because of this, we reviewed the program with various DCPS Central Office Departments. One of those was our Special Education Department. Outside of the building work, they indicated that they want to find a new home for the PK ELS and 3-5 SLS program. With the Autism program there it was determined that having 5 programs there was not the best solution. The first draft of the layout has those classrooms removed, which allowed the rest of the program to fit.

Increasing the classrooms sizes is important to DCPS. Instruction these days is not rows of desks looking at a teacher and chalkboard. By having larger classroom sizes, it allows for more flexibility and aligns with 21st Century School building standards.

DCPS will evaluate the bathroom access request with DCPS School Security and Operations departments.

We have worked closely to analyze the enrollment at the school and are confident in the projected capacity. If the enrollment patterns change, we will evaluate that at that time. As we work through the site design, we will also keep in mind any future "Phase II" work to ensure we are not restricting any future work.

2. Garrison SIT's Priorities for Out-of-Scope Items

Although we are confident that currently allocated funds will enable DCPS and DGS to move forward with construction in June 2016 consistent with the Ed Specs, should additional funding be identified, the Garrison SIT denotes below (in prioritized order) for including new items into Phase One that are presently out-of scope.

(a) Connector between Two Wings

The proposed Phase One does not include construction of a connector between the two wings of the existing facility, which necessitates the construction of two separate elevators—one in each wing. The lack of a connector is detrimental to the flow of the building and will continue to encroach into instructional time as very young students will need to tackle several sets of stairs to get to “specials” or simply to the library, and mobility-reduced teachers, students, and staff needs to ride two elevators simply to go from one wing of the building to the next. Further, the inclusion of a connector in Phase One would have the significant benefit of adding needed square footage while eliminating the need and the costs associated to building a second elevator.

We understand that DCPS and DGS have worked with a number of schools (*e.g.*, Bancroft, Mann, Hearst, Deal, Lafayette, and Murch) that have successfully demonstrated the unease of traveling from one side of the school to the other as an impediment to effective education and have been modernized accordingly to avoid “institutionalizing” structural dysfunction. Should available funding, costs, or resource allocations change, the additional square footage created by a connector could potentially be used as:

- An expanded and modernized media center in the center of the building (as recommended by guidelines)
- An extended learning commons to provide flexible, shared learning support spaces for various group sizes and activities, which are particularly important where there are special needs and English Language Learners and could provide much-needed space for after school programs.

(b) Window Replacement and Building Facade

The Garrison SIT is pleased with the commitment from DCPS and DGS to undertake the critical task of window-replacement as an Add-Alternate.⁴ We understand that DCPS and DGS is seeking LEED certification for Garrison, and the replacement of the antiquated windows would appear to be necessary to achieve that designation. The Ed Specs note that windows are intended to provide egress from classrooms, and the Garrison SIT queries the extent to which permitting egress is a mandatory requirement.

More broadly, not only do the Ed Specs not contemplate the replacement of the windows in Phase One, but the Ed Specs do not contemplate modernization or improvements to the exterior of the building, thereby leaving the existing exterior exactly as it is except for some cosmetic changes to the entrance. The Garrison community is grateful for the commitments to improve the interior of the facility, but we would be remiss in not noting the embarrassing state of the exterior. In the words of a mother of our community “that building is an eyesore.” We also know from surveys the PTO has administered to the community that the condition of the exterior of the

⁴ See, “Garrison School Improvement Team” slides, slide 11, emailed from Patrick Davis to SIT members October 9, 2015.

building is a significant deterrent to enrollment. Addressing even if only cosmetically the exterior of the building would go a long way in improving our community's willingness to engage with Garrison.

(c) Sustainability and Healthy Foods

The District has invested millions of dollars establishing and implementing the DC Healthy Schools Act and the Sustainable DC policies, and the Garrison SIT looks forward to collaborating to make Garrison compliant with these initiatives in the future. For example:

- The proposed scope of work does not contemplate a distinct PE space to ensure the prospected student population can have PE in adverse meteorological conditions or while other students are using the space as a cafeteria.
- Recognizing that kitchen equipment upgrades and modernization of the kitchen is not contemplated in Phase One, the Garrison SIT questions whether the existing space can be reconfigured to include a cooking kitchen and/or food lab, consistent with the goals of the Healthy Schools Act and curriculum of programs such as FoodPrints.

The Garrison SIT encourages evaluation and discussion of the opportunities to take advantage of the sustainable aspects intrinsic to Garrison's building, which would decrease its operating cost. For example, although Garrison has been recognized as one of the District's best roofs for photovoltaic systems, the Ed Specs do not specifically contemplate the future existence of this system when referring to roof top mechanical units.

(d) Athletic Fields and Recreation

Having a state-of-the-art recreational and play space at Garrison will bring Garrison and non-Garrison families together and further contribute to building the neighborhood community that we want. When the community is finally able to use the Garrison field again, families will no longer have to contemplate moving elsewhere in or out of the city for these valuable resources.

The Garrison SIT is pleased that the Mayor, working with members of the D.C. Council, proposed reprogramming funds to **“Fix a sink hole at the existing site, and construct a brand new playground, recreational field, courts and plaza area for the community.”**⁵ We assume the reprogrammed amount would be in addition to the money DGS

⁵ Mayor Muriel Bowser, \$47 Million in Funding for Residents in All 8 Wards. Accessed October 22, 2015. Available at http://mayor.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/mayoromb/publication/attachments/Vital%20District%20Programs_v6.pdf.

earmarked in order to go forward with the “procurement to grout the voids in the field to prevent future sink hole”⁶.

DCPS Response: Thank you for the feedback here. We are just kicking off the first draft of designs, but we will certainly keep these in mind as budgets start to get formalized. We appreciate the prioritization and will certainly work with you if we think we can get some of these items into the scope.

We appreciate the desire for a separate gym and agree that it’s important to make sure the children have plenty of chances to exercise. As you can imagine, gyms are quite expensive we made the decision to prioritize the other areas of the school with the allotted money. The school will still have gym, and it is actually quite common for DCPS to have a shared gym and cafeteria area.

Yes, the \$3M is in addition to the funds that were identified to fix the sinkhole. DGS and DPR are working to move the additional funding into the project budget. We will closely with the SIT and the community to evaluate the original site design and make any necessary modifications.

3. Garrison Elementary and the Surrounding Community

Garrison Elementary (and the grounds on which it sits) at 12th and S Streets, Northwest have a long and storied history interwoven with the history of the District itself and defined by the community surrounding it. As the neighborhood changed, Garrison changed with it.

The field at 12th and S was a contraband camp of freed blacks and fleeing slaves during the Civil War, and was visited by Abraham Lincoln as he wrote the Emancipation Proclamation. Camp Barker, as it was known, provided much needed protection and a place for education and worship for runaway slaves from Virginia and Maryland. A school has been at this site for the last 150 years.

When the existing structure was built in 1964, it represented part of the commitment to build a Great Society, offering quality education to District residents in the name of the great abolitionist and social reformer William Lloyd Garrison. Just four years later, Garrison and the surrounding community were in the center of the riots started after the murder of Dr. King. For decades following, Garrison and the bars on its windows acted again as a sanctuary in a neighborhood devastated by drugs and ignored by its leaders.

⁶ See, “Garrison School Improvement Team” slides, slide 11, emailed from Patrick Davis to SIT members October 9, 2015.

Garrison’s outward appearance is a monument to neglect. Garrison looks more like a prison designed to keep its wards contained and separated from the community than a haven offering protective barriers. The Garrison SIT is grateful for the newly unified commitment to modernize the interior of the school, and we look forward to a future in which Garrison no longer physically resembles a garrison.

The Garrison community—residents whose families have been here generations and residents who moved in this year—is unified in its desire to see Garrison again become a positive symbol consistent with the improvements in its neighborhood. We are enthused with the changes that have taken place at DCPS and hope that Garrison Elementary will serve as “the anchor for [our] thriving, productive, and growing communit[y].”⁷

DCPS Response: Thanks for sharing this!

Respectfully submitted,

Vanessa Bertelli
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⁷ Ed Specs at 2.