



# City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## STAFF REPORT

April 8, 2015

### 15.2-2232 REVIEW – HCPS PROPOSED NEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (GARBERS CHURCH ROAD)

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

**Applicant:** Harrisonburg City Public Schools

**Tax Map:** 117-D-1, 2, & 6

**Acreage:** 10.8 +/- acres

**Location:** 720, 776, and 810 Garbers Church Road

**Request:** Public hearing to consider a request to review the proposed Harrisonburg City Public Schools new elementary school site per City Code Section 10-1-6 to determine if the public facility is in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan as provided by the Code of Virginia Section 15.2-2232.

#### LAND USE, ZONING, AND SITE CHARACTERISTICS

The Comprehensive Plan designates this area as Low Density Mixed Residential. This designation states that these large undeveloped areas located at the edge of the City are planned for residential development containing a mix of large and small-lot single family detached dwellings and attractive green spaces. Planned “open space” (also known as “cluster”) developments are encouraged. The intent is to allow innovative residential building types and permit creative subdivision design solutions that promote neighborhood cohesiveness, walkability, connected street grids, community green spaces, and protection of environmental resources. Such innovative residential building types as zero lot-line development and patio homes will be considered as well as other new single family residential forms. The gross density of development in these areas should be in the range of 1 to 6 dwelling units per acre.

The following land uses are located on and adjacent to the property:

**Site:** Undeveloped/vacant property, zoned R-1

**North:** Heritage Oaks Golf Course Clubhouse and parking lot, zoned R-1

**East:** First Tee of Harrisonburg, zoned R-1

**South:** Single family detached homes, zoned R-1

**West:** Across Garbers Church Road, Harrisonburg High School, zoned R-1

#### EVALUATION

Last summer the Harrisonburg City School Board unanimously voted to build a new elementary school on 10.8 +/- acres of City owned property along Garbers Church Road across the street

from the athletic facilities at Harrisonburg High School. With the hope of having the elementary school open by fall 2017, Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS) continues to work with engineers and architects regarding the engineered layout and the design of the new building. As part of the vetting process for this new public facility, the site is under review per City Code Section 10-1-6, which stipulates that “if a public facility subject to Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia is not already shown on the comprehensive plan, the planning commission shall determine whether the location, character and extent of such public facility is in substantial accord with the comprehensive plan as provided by Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia and the terms and conditions set forth therein, as may be amended from time to time.”

As a reminder, the Code of Virginia Section 15.2-2232, among other things, states that when a locality has adopted a comprehensive plan, “it shall control the general or approximate location, character and extent of each feature shown on the plan.” Public buildings or public structures, among others, are listed by the Code as features that unless already shown on the plan “shall not be constructed, established, or authorized, unless and until the general location or approximate location, character, and extent thereof has been submitted to and approved by the commission as being substantially in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan or part thereof.”

After review, City staff finds the proposed new elementary school site is in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan. First, from a long term land use perspective, although the property is zoned R-1, Single Family Residential District, the Comprehensive Plan designates this property as Low Density Mixed Residential—a designation it has had since the Plan’s 2004 update. (Previous Comprehensive Plans, the 1991 and 1998 updates, had this area designated Low Density Residential.) The current Low Density Mixed Residential designation is often associated with the promotion of clustered development allowed by R-6 and, depending upon the actual proposed development, R-7 zoned communities. It is also possible for R-2 and R-3 residential densities to work in such planned areas, if, for example, the development utilized smaller lot areas and dimensions for detached single family homes. As is typical in many cities, Harrisonburg’s public schools have a history of being compatible with and desirable in neighborhoods. Although there is not an existing neighborhood surrounding this location, Garbers Church Road is accessible to several neighborhoods and, as described above, has been planned for single family neighborhood development for quite some time.

From a zoning perspective, the existing zoning and all of the districts mentioned above, permit public schools as a by right use.

Goal 10 of the Comprehensive Plan is “to develop and maintain a safe and convenient transportation system serving all modes of travel, such as automobile, pedestrian, and bicycle and mass transit;” and in working toward this goal, the site is suited well. Garbers Church Road is designated as a collector street with four travel lanes and sidewalk on the western side of the street. Garbers Church Road is served by an arterial street to the north (West Market Street) and a collector street to the south (Erickson Avenue), both providing access to and from the site and offering good bus routing options to different areas of the City. Although improvements will likely be needed, Garbers Church Road should be able to better handle the traffic generated by a school of this size than if the school were built interior to an existing neighborhood, where such traffic could be viewed by some as a nuisance while also being a more confined and difficult location to provide needed improvements. The vision expressed by the Comprehensive Plan in promoting neighborhood schools (Objective 5.3) is also consistent with the idea that areas for

new school locations that are most compatible with our Comprehensive Plan would be those within or directly adjacent to residential areas, but yet accessible to collector and arterial streets.

The site location is positioned well for working toward Objective 10.2, which along with trying to “develop strategies that reduce motorized traffic demand on City streets” is “to promote alternative modes of transportation.” Several multi-use paths are planned in this western section of the City to connect Westover Park, Thomas Harrison Middle School, Hillandale Park, Harrisonburg High School, and now, potentially, the proposed elementary school. The multi-use paths are generally shown as several different connections in the 2010 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which is a component of the Master Transportation Plan in Chapter 11 of the Comprehensive Plan. As illustrated in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, the westernmost multi-use path connection of the above described system is planned to intersect Garbers Church Road in front of Harrisonburg High School, which is only about ¼-mile from the proposed elementary school site. Efforts should be made to connect into this planned multi-use path during the design and construction of the elementary school.

Although outside the scope of staff’s review for the site’s conformance with the Comprehensive Plan, staff took the opportunity to offer comments to HCPS regarding site design matters. Issues brought to their attention included that the project will be required to meet the site design requirements of the City’s Design and Construction Standards Manual including erosion and sediment control and stormwater management regulations. We also noted there could be transportation improvements associated with the site—as there would be for any public school at any site in the City—to support safe and efficient multi-modal access. The Department of Public Works noted that some type of transportation study might be needed to determine what impacts could be generated and to outline any appropriate solutions. HCPS and their design team should work closely with the Department of Public Works to determine what kind of analysis might be needed.

The Department of Public Utilities noted the water and sewer facilities in Garbers Church Road are very likely adequate for the proposed school. The 16-inch waterline is a major transmission main for the City and is expected to be capable to deliver both the domestic and required fire flows to the site. Water pressure is likely adequate, but must be validated as the engineer provides more detailed design. The sanitary sewer in Garbers Church Road is an 8-inch main and should also be capable to meet the domestic demands of the school. Further verification of both water and sewer demands and capacities will be required during the preliminary engineering report, which is a pre-requisite for comprehensive site plan submission.

The Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation (HDPT) would like the design of the site to ensure buses are not mixed with parents dropping-off and picking-up students. At this time, they believe a separate bus lane and potentially a traffic signal may be needed to allow buses to exit the property in an efficient and safe manner.

Finally, staff reminded HCPS that Planning Commission must review and approve the number of off-street parking spaces desired for the site. Per Section 10-3-25 (12) of the Zoning Ordinance, “proposed off-street parking spaces [for elementary schools] shall be programmed by the applicable school authorities as necessary to meet state standards for use and consideration of site locations, then submitted to the planning commission for comprehensive site plan review.”

As explained above, staff believes the proposed elementary school site is in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan and recommends the Commission communicate the same findings to City Council.