

MEETING MINUTES  
COMMUNITY OUTREACH MEETING  
NORTH COLUMBIA FIRE STATION  
Howard County Government

7:00 pm, March 25, 2021

Virtual Webex Meeting.

On March 25, 2021, a virtual community outreach meeting was held to discuss the proposal of New North Columbia Fire Station at 10745 Clarksville Pike, Columbia, MD 21044.

The meeting started at 7:05 pm to allow time for late arrivals due to technical difficulties.

Kimberly Pruum, Director of Constituent Services and Community Partnerships, Office of County Executive served as the moderator. Ms. Pruum welcomed the attendees.

Below is the outline of this meeting minutes:

- 1) The Need of New Fire Station in the North Columbia Area
- 2) The Fire Station program and Scope
- 3) Park Redevelopment Plan
- 4) Similar Fire Station Examples
- 5) Project Schedule
- 6) Questions and Answers
- 7) Additional Questions and Answers after this meeting.

## **1. The Need of New Fire Station in the North Columbia Area**

*Fire/EMS Chief, William G. Anuszewski, presented following:*

Construction of the new three-bay, North Columbia Fire Station is currently planned at Cedar Lane Park East located off MD-108. Modeled after the design for the Waterloo Fire Station that will be starting construction in the coming weeks, the North Columbia Fire Station will feature a sustainable design including bunk rooms, fitness and locker rooms, a kitchen and living spaces, and office space.

The North Columbia Fire Station is sorely needed as an interim replacement to the existing Banneker Fire Station. The current Banneker facility is severely undersized, has aged past its useful life and has a poor Facility Conditions Index rating, presenting a sub-standard working environment for first responders and other staff currently working at the facility. Employees and units currently assigned to the existing Banneker Station will relocate to the North Columbia Fire

Station during the Banneker redevelopment. Once the Banneker redevelopment is complete, the normally assigned employees and units will return and staffing will be added for North Columbia.

Additionally, the North Columbia Fire Station is needed to respond to recent growth patterns and increasing call demands in north Columbia and the Greater Columbia area. The proposed location off Route 108 will provide easy and direct access for emergency and fire response, improving response times in the north Columbia area that are currently slower than response times in other parts of the County.

The most recent call demand diagrams in the presentation illustrated the need for an additional fire station in the North Columbia area for the public safety. Recent reports show that the North Columbia area is in a “red zone” which represents an 8 minutes-drive or longer response time. The 8 minute threshold is the time that a fire typically spreads beyond the room of origin and will result in increased casualties and loss of property. The proposed location at Cedar Lane Park East along Rt. 108 is well situated to reduce response times and safely serve the North Columbia area.

## **2. The Fire Station program and Scope**

*Mark Stromdahl, Bureau Chief of Facilities, Department of Public Works, presented the current fire station scope:*

The proposed new 1 story fire station, 14,200 sf, includes three apparatus bays for fire trucks and ambulances, support spaces such as offices, kitchen, day room, exercise room, locker room, bunk area and 24 parking spaces. Two flashing traffic signals will be installed on Route 108 for traffic control. A new traffic study will be conducted to identify and resolve any traffic issues along Route 108 coordinated with state highway. The existing park entrance drive will remain for access to the existing park and the fire station. Extensive landscape buffers are planned between the fire station and adjacent neighborhoods. This project is targeting LEED Gold certification to meet Howard County Sustainable Design Initiative including photovoltaic (solar) roof panels and a geothermal system.

## **3. Park Redevelopment Plan:**

*Jason Thompson, Park planner, Department of Recreation and Parks, presented the proposed site plan for the Fire Station and new park enhancements for Cedar Lane East:*

The new fire station is located on the northern end of existing natural turf field #7 at the Cedar Lane Park East. To offset the loss of this field for the new fire station, existing natural turf field #8 will be converted to an artificial turf field, similar to the artificial turf fields at the Cedar Lane West. The scope will include field improvements, turf warm-up area and new LED field lights with the sharp cut-off which eliminate light pollution by only lighting the field. Other upgrades include new bleachers with press box and connecting walkways to the existing parking lot and toilet facility. All other existing pavilions, playground, tennis and basketball courts shall remain.

The added lights and conversion to artificial turf help offset the loss of field #7 because artificial turf fields are usable in most weather conditions (excluding snow) and the added lights will allow for more hours of use.

Additionally, the space between the new fire station and the existing parking lot will be developed for both pickleball (8 lighted courts) and as an exterior adult fitness training area. The added pickleball courts will bring the total count of 10 pickleball courts in Howard County. These upgrades also support the Howard County Age Friendly Action Plan, in which all ages can play and use this park.

This park hasn't had a significant upgrade for a long time. The proposed upgrades will update the park to meet the current trends in recreation and park experience.

#### 4. Fire Station Case studies in Howard County.

*Mr. Mark Stromdahl and William G. Anuszewski presented the following:*

Approximately 1/3 of the existing fire stations in Howard County are located close to a residential area: Banneker, Long Reach, Bethany, and the new Elkridge Fire station (See diagram in the presentation slide). The fire stations are aware of the importance to be a good neighbor and have avoided any significant complaints from the adjacent neighborhoods. The fire stations are not born out of commercial/industry but out of the community to serve the neighborhood.

#### 5. Proposed Schedule

*Mr. Stromdahl presented the project schedule:*

As a part of SDP(Site Development Plan), a community meeting will be scheduled. We anticipate the next meeting will be in or around June 2021. After the completion of the SDP, we plan to bid the project in April of 2022 with an expected project completion date of October 2023.

#### 6. Questions and Answers

**6.1 (Comment) This fire station is not only for the community safety but also for the firefighter's safety. To provide proper medical aid, car accident emergency response, and extinguish a fire, reducing the response time saves not only public and community but also fire fighter's life tremendously. Last three years, we have had a terrible injury on one of our members since we engaged the fire fight late on the scene. We also need to make sure the correct staffing to provide the right amount of fire fighters on the accident scene, and the new north Columbia fire station will be the solution of the current problem. Additionally, the fire station also will be a place to visit and engage kids for education, which bring substantial benefits to the community. Overall, the north Columbia Fire station will bring a great value to the community.**

**6.2 (Question) The first station will make noise and decrease the value of our home. Can you move it to another place?**

(Response) Our proposal of new traffic lights can resolve the noise issue. The primary reason when we need a siren is trying to get traffic attention. The proposed new traffic lights can reduce the use of siren and airhorn dramatically. Also, in low traffic times like midnight, we are not likely to use those noise devices when traffic is clear. Currently, if there is any incident along the Route 108 area, the fire vehicles coming from Ellicott City or Clarksville or Banneker use lighting and siren anyway to clear traffic. We can never promise complete silence since the emergency vehicle must use lights and audible devices as emergency vehicles as part of Maryland Law. However, with the proposed traffic control device, we can dramatically reduce the noise concern.

**6.3 (Question) Any damages on the existing park?**

(Response) The park is not damaged but renovated and transformed to meet the current trends and recreational changes. Field #7 is going to be removed but as our plan shows, there will be plenty of new landscape, pickleball courts, fitness equipment and the artificial turf field upgrades to give you a better park experience in cooperation with Fire and Rescue as best we can.

**6.4 (Question) I totally understand the critical need outside of 6 minutes. Could you give us exact area and specific address for the critical call? Can you show how many calls are not meeting right now and what the projected amounts are?**

(Response) The specific address is private information and it can't be shared. The current graphic doesn't have an indication to show how many calls are not meeting the requirement since we are using an average time. We don't believe that it doesn't show much difference. However, we can provide the information later to you, so please let us know your contact information.

**6.5 (Comment) Pickleball players are currently 3.6 million in the US, and the number has doubled in the past five years. It is a fun and easy sport to learn and attract all ages, including kids, young adults, and seniors, as a family sport. It is an excellent socializing sport with competitions with fun, and it is one of the rapid growth sports in the US.**

In Howard County, we are playing in several facilities in a primarily shared tennis court, which has been challenged since our sport plays differently. Our significant objective is to advocate dedicated pickleball courts available for both our members and the public so more people can enjoy this nice sport. We are enthusiastically in support of the proposed eight pickleball courts associated with the new fire station. We look forward to working with Howard County Recreation and Parks to help grow our community's sport.

**6.6 (Question) Can current parking space handle the need of new pickleball courts and upgraded turf field?**

(Response) Current existing parking can handle the new pickleball courts and the upgraded turf field. We also can manage the park activities, not to exceed the current parking capacity. If we discover a significant problem in the parking lot in the future, we may increase the parking capacity. However, it is currently not under consideration in the proposed plan.

**6.7 (Comment) I am Peter Engel, executive director of the Howard County Housing Commission. I will speak about the housing plan at the Banneker fire station related to the North Columbia fire station project. The 2018 housing study shows that half of all senior rental households have a rent burden in Howard County, which means they are paying more than 40% of their income for rent. For low income, we have 155 senior units and currently 1,692 household is looking for the senior housing. Those between 30% and 60% of median income are 28,150 households looking for 900 units in Howard County.**

By any measure, there is an extreme shortage of housing for low- and moderate-income seniors who are our parents or grandparents who may have lived in the community for a long time.

The Banneker Site would not solve all these problems, but it would produce 100 units of low and moderate-income housing for seniors. The North Columbia fire station is a critical element, and we are hoping it moves forward.

**6.8 (Question) I think we all realize and understand the importance of Fire Safety and keeping our community safe. Route 108 is a very congested area, and this fire station can make the traffic worse with noise. The other concern is the light pollution created by the part used at night. We don't want the fire station with light pollution created by pickleball courts and field in our quiet backyard.**

(Response) We are using an LED light fixture with a sharp cut-off where the light ends at the field. This will be very compact and much more difficult to see from outside as light pollution. Once you are out of 30 feet off the field with existing tree buffers, you can't see any light for surrounding residents.

**6.9 (Question) Can you speak about operation schedule of pickleball court and any other sport activities?**

(Response) Currently, all programs end at dusk, with lights the programs will end at 10:30 pm. This is same as Cedar Lane West Park.

**6.10 (Question) We don't want that in our back yard. Howard county has plenty of other area to build this facility and sport activity. Please take this space further out in Howard County. We don't want it in our backyard.**

(Response) We have studied multiple locations, but we don't own most of the areas we need to build the new fire station. Since we own this land (the proposed location), we only need to spend money developing the building and park facilities rather than buying additional land.

**6.11 (Comment) I want to talk about outdoor fitness equipment. During the pandemic, people are confined indoors and need more outdoor space to breathe fresh air. This fitness equipment in the proposed plan creates a great opportunity for the Howard county resident to exercise regularly for their physical and mental health, even in the pandemic, since we can keep proper social distancing with outdoor air.**

**6.12 (Question) What is the reason to put the fire station at the location along with the 150-resident community? Can we move it further west and east?**

(Response) We selected the fire station location based on the service need. The further you move it away from the area (proposed new fire station) where the service need, the less reason to even put a fire station. Further West or East out of the response zone wouldn't resolve the problems that we have.

**6.13 (Question) Can Centennial Park along Route 108 be the new fire station location since it has plenty of land? If not, can the four residential houses purchased by the county be the location of the new fire station?**

(Response) The Centennial park property was purchased from the State with program open space funding, a restricted covenant where we can't locate any other items except park-related amenities. Also, we bought the four residential houses along Route 108 with the same program open space funding. We can maintain the residential housing but cannot develop the property to any other use for the same reason as Centennial park.

**6.14 (Question) Can the Board of Education site along route 108 be the possibility of the new fire station?**

(Response) The Board of Education site has their own plans for the land along Route 108 for the school system, and it is not an option for the new fire station development.

**6.15 (Question) Mr. Thompson mentioned the LED lights have been used in other locations. Could you let us know the name of park?**

(Response) It is Rockbun Park.

**6.16 (Question) We heard that another location that Howard County extensively studied. Why does Howard County move it from that location?**

(Response) The earlier location next to the Harper Choice Middle School couldn't move forward since the Board of Education canceled the MOU with Howard County. Since that land was needed for required field space for the school, the Board of Education decided that it is not a viable option to give up the land for the fire station.

**6.17 (Question) Currently, there is a lot of foot traffic from Elliots Oak Road to this park over our property. Is there any plan to resolve the foot traffic on trails around this park?**

(Response) We don't have any specific plan for now. However, we can see the issues and provide possible solutions in this project. As constituent questions or concerns arise in the future, let us know so we can look into solutions.

**6.18 (Comment) I am a member of the age-friendly outdoor spaces and building workgroup and strongly support this park's proposed recreational facilities, including age friendly equipment and areas.**

**6.19 (Question) What is the process of this project development, and where are we in the process? Is this fire station project already approved (a done deal), or is there any room to justify it for the new location?**

(Response) As a part of the project process, we have to file an SDP, which requires at least one more community meeting to get technical approval. We also are asking for additional funding in the capital budget to move forward, requiring approval from the county council members.

**6.20 (Question) Route 108 is a highly congested road. This project will add more traffic which is very much a concern on the entire adjacent neighborhood. Adding pickleball courts with upgraded field attracts more people in this quiet community, and as the resident, I am extremely upset about this project.**

**Also, I believe that toxic chemicals tend to be used, which is very dangerous to the community. How would you address these concerns?**

(Response) We are going to perform a traffic analysis in the SDP design process. If the traffic study shows a significant problem on the community, the project won't be successful in getting SDP approval, which is an important aspect of the SDP's technical review process.

For the toxic wash chemical, the building provides an oil and chemical separator, and no toxic chemicals or oil will go directly into streams at all.

**6.21 (Question) Can you address the issue of late operation hours in the park? For example, there is vandalism in the community because of the late operation in the park.**

(Response) Currently, we don't have any problems with other Howard county parks. The fire station is a 24-hour operation facility with a tight security system that could bring more security to prevent vandalism from the communities.

**6.22 (Comment)** I appreciate this opportunity to convey the Howard County Housing Affordability Coalition Support for the proposed North Columbia Fire Station. This project is a critical next step to implement downtown Columbia's plan to obligate 900 new affordable housing units. Building this fire station enables the Banneker Fire Station's redevelopment with 100 units of critically needed senior affordable housing as well as resolving public safety issues in the North Columbia area.

**6.23 (Question)** Is this temporary fire station for the Banneker Fire Station renovation?

(Response) This is a permanent fire station to resolve the public safety issues in the North Columbia Area.

**6.24 (Comment)** Both Blandair and Western Regional park show an excellent example of how the park creates better values to the community. Currently, two fields are running at the same time to create congested traffics. One field with longer operational hours may be able to develop less congested traffic problems. I strongly suggest working on any issues that we face with the county experts to develop this project further.

**6.25 (Comment)** Please share any concerns and additional questions to the me or Tae. Information is below. Thanks for your participation.

**Kimberly Pruim**

Director

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## **7. Additional Questions and Answers**

**7.1 (Question) Will the county have any further interest in learning the opinion of the residents?**

(Response) We welcome community feedback. If you would like to share your questions, concerns or feedback, please email Tae Jung ([tjung@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:tjung@howardcountymd.gov))

**7.2 (Question) Is Elliots Oak Road going to be used to access points south, or will it only be used to service the Longfellow neighborhood?**

(Response) Elliots Oak Rad is not considered to be the park access in our proposed plan. Elliots Oak Road can be only used for the Longfellow neighborhood.

**7.3 (Question) Our house backs against the park and is separated from the park by a thick strip of woods which provides habitat to deer, foxes, woodchucks, songbirds, woodpeckers, hawks and numerous other forms of wildlife. The woods also adds to the atmosphere of peace and seclusion we enjoy in our backyard and was a major selling point for us when we bought our house. It was mentioned in the meeting that landscaping would be performed between the park and firehouse project and the neighboring homes. Will this involve removing any of the wooded area, and if so, how much?**

(Response) Our proposal doesn't not remove the tree buffers between the park and residential area. We are planning to plant more trees for increasing tree buffers.