Blake Lane Park Meeting Memo

January 16, 2019

The meeting was conducted by staff of Fairfax County Public Schools.

Also attending were:

- Superintendent of Fairfax **City** Schools and two board members
- Dave Bowden. Director, Planning & Development, Fairfax County Park Authority
- Dahlia Palchik, Providence School board member, and candidate for Providence supervisor
- Erika Yalowitz, candidate for Providence supervisor

There are two most salient points to describe the meeting:

- It was the most poorly prepared public meeting I've ever witnessed.
- Of the approximately 150 members of the public present, all but 2 were hostile to the proposal.

Things did not look good from the start – there was no sign-in sheet to receive email notices, no handouts, no displays, no slide show, and no microphone. The introduction included a reminder that 'different people learn differently', but we soon saw the only method provided to learn was to sit and listen to FCPS talk.

After introductions, the FCPS Director of Design and Construction did most of the talking and answered most of the questions.

A few points made by FCPS:

- Part of the motive for building a new school is an anticipated need by Fairfax City to put more City students in Providence Elementary.
- This will be a joint project with Fairfax County Park Authority to preserve public use open space.
- The small-footprint addition to McNair Elementary is a model.
- The alternate site, Towers Park, presents issues of street access and would require rezoning.
- FCPS has explored purchasing new property in unrelated cases, but land prices are prohibitive.

As the floor was opened for questions, citizens were not asked to line up to speak, but rather spoke from where they were seated. This haphazard procedure, plus the difficulty of hearing anyone without a microphone, increased the atmosphere of acrimony and hostility.

The general public comments followed a few lines:

- Increased traffic on Blake Lane (accompanied by many anecdotes of pedestrian accidents or near misses)
- Loss of green space/play areas in a neighborhood where they are scarce
- The public has been frozen out of the process/kept in the dark.
- Several persons walked out, a few proclaiming 'You are wasting our time!'.

Only one hour was budgeted for the meeting. Sticky notes were provided to leave additional questions on one wall. The FCPS staff made repeated promises to answer all those questions, but it was not clear how they could, since there was no list of attendees.

Near the end, Erika Yalowitz stood and spoke strongly against the proposal. Identifying herself as a candidate for Providence supervisor won thunderous applause.