



FCPS Plans New School at Blake Lane

The Fall 2018 Providence Report indicated that a new school would be built on “Blake Lane (*near* the current Blake Lane Park).” For those of you not familiar with Blake Lane Park, there is no space “near the park” to build a school – the park is it. Blake Lane Park is at 10033 Blake Lane in Oakton, near Rt 123 and Rt.66. It includes ten acres, located in the densest area of Oakton; it is surrounded by town homes and condos where people do not have backyards for their children to play. Blake Lane Park *is* their backyard. The park offers a respite from the noise, the air pollution and the traffic of nearby I-66 and Blake Lane itself.

When the area was first designated to be the site of a school back in the 1970s, the area was surrounded by open space. Now it is one of the few remaining parks in Oakton. Blake Lane Park is Oakton’s only park with open fields and a dog park. The park is constantly in use by kids running around, soccer players, kite flyers, and dog walkers. It is the glue of the community – a place to meet and chat with neighbors. In the midst of a national conversation about providing children with unstructured play time, Fairfax County is planning to eliminate the only space anywhere near Blake Lane neighborhoods where unstructured play can happen. Borge Street Park, which is the only other park nearby, consists of a playground, a basketball court and a very small stand of trees.

The community needs this space – and not only for the obvious reason of preserving nature and viable ecosystems. Studies show that being in nature can mitigate the symptoms of depression – but you must have natural areas. And not just a

small copse of trees on school grounds or a playground, valuable though such spaces can be. Anyone who ever spent time as a child running in a grassy field knows the difference between that and playing in a schoolyard. Plus, once the field is graded, the youth soccer leagues will be vying to play there in the afternoons and weekends, and the field will not be open to the neighborhood children. Currently, there are two fields, and at least one would surely be lost to a school's construction.

The Fairfax County Park Authority has been maintaining the park for over 40 years, while the community reaped the benefits. Blake Lane became a designated site for the Invasive Management Area Program in the winter of 2018. Volunteers, mostly students, spent over 1,000 hours digging and chopping invasive plants – an obvious indicator of how much the community values this space. The Girl Scouts planted a pollinator garden earlier this fall, which unfortunately would be destroyed along with the rest of the park once Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) takes control.

Perplexed and angry, the community united to form a group to save the park: <https://saveblakelanepark.org>. People barraged the county with queries and complaints until finally FCPS agreed to hold a public meeting to respond to the questions. They set the date for Jan. 16, but only confirmed it less than a week before the meeting. FCPS only advertised the meeting on the FCPS website, even though many people living near the park do not have children in the schools and may not have thought to look on the school website. (Community members spread the word.) The announcement also described the park as a “currently undeveloped” site. Words matter, and the connotation of ‘undeveloped’ is quite different than park or green space, which indicated how the county views the park. Proposals to put parkland to other uses besides parks will be a continuing issue with the County because of the limited low-cost land available to the County.

About 175 people attended the meeting at Mosby Woods Elementary School – a high turnout despite parking issues and the snowy streets. Unfortunately, the meeting was poorly planned and people left with their questions unanswered. There were no

microphones or public address system, so many could not hear the discussion. There was no attendance list and no handouts. About 140 questions were submitted on Post-It notes and posted on the wall during the meeting, with no discussion of how they would be answered, other than a vague reference to a website.

Answers to the question “why?” are desperately needed. The kids in other areas of Oakton usually have the big backyards of the suburban dream; other areas have more parks as well. The kids in the Blake Lane neighborhood have only Blake Lane Park, and in effect, the current plan will rob them of their “backyard.” Two years ago, Fairfax County initiated the One Fairfax policy, which commits the county and schools to intentionally consider equity when making policies or delivering programs and services. Simply stated: building at Blake Lane violates this new policy.

As Sierra Club members, you know the vital importance of open space. Please help convince the county to save Blake Lane Park. You can write or call the Board of Supervisors at provdist@fairfaxcounty.gov and the School Board <https://www.fcps.edu/school-board/school-board-members> . You can write letters to the newspaper. Or you can join <https://saveblakelanepark.org>. Only concerted action can save this treasured resource.

Note: The Sierra Club Great Falls Group has not taken a position on this, but if you would like to get involved please contact [Norbert](#).

Here are some pictures of Blake Lane park:



Girl Scouts planting a butterfly garden





Eight photos from the meeting on Jan 16:









