



Charles County Public Schools

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October 20, 2020

Commissioners of Charles County
200 Baltimore Street
La Plata, MD 20646

**Re: School Allocation Policy Changes
Comments from Mike Heim, CCPS**

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Mike Heim. I am the Assistant Superintendent of Supporting Services for Charles County Public Schools. One of my responsibilities with the school system is to analyze student enrollment trends to develop an annual Capital Improvement Program to address enrollment growth through proposed construction projects, facilitate redistricting meetings, and to develop a preventive maintenance plan for existing buildings.

I realize growth is inevitable based on Charles County's proximity to the metropolitan area. I am not opposed to growth as long as it is managed in way that the infrastructure (schools, roads, water and sewage) needed to support population increases are in place or have sufficient funding to address needed upgrades.

The original proposal presented to the Commissioners on June 2, 2020 limited the granting of exemptions to Option 1 (The Development District) or Option 2 (The Opportunity Zone). The amended draft that includes other PFA's (Priority Funded Areas) greatly increases the number of areas of the county that could see development occur for schools that do not have access to public water and sewage. Even if construction funding is available for new construction or additions, there are concerns with increased enrollments at schools on private wells and septic systems due to demand loads. The State (IAC – Interagency Commission on School Construction) strongly encourages that new school facilities be served by public water and sewage.

It's all about teaching and learning.

Steven M. Andritz
Director of Planning & Construction

April K. Murphy
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CCPS suggests not including PFA's outside of the Opportunity Zones, such as areas of Hughesville, Benedict, Bel Alton, Newburg, Swan Point, Cobb Island, White Plains, and the towns of Indian Head and La Plata for possible exemptions from school seat allocations if they meet one of the three criteria:

- #1 WURC Zone – Waldorf Urban Redevelopment Corridor Zones.
- #2 Mixed-Use.
- #3 contain 25% Affordable/Workforce Housing.

The majority of CCPS school facilities are located in PFA's, but the rural schools that are located in PFA's have space/land limitations that may prevent the option to construct an addition to the building or the ability to add relocatable classrooms along with the aforementioned concern of a lack of access to public water and sewage. Schools in the rural PFA's are more difficult to provide relief during redistricting because of the large attendance zones they serve and the dispersion of students. Additionally, the length of bus rides can exceed 45 minutes. Longer bus rides can lead to behavioral issues and other safety concerns.

School system staff has suggested to Planning and Growth Management staff issuing 400 allocations a year instead of the proposed 800 allocations a year for Priority Development Projects. The proposed 800 allocations could double the amount of yearly allocations available through all sources including St. Charles (per Docket 90), the school allocation waiting list, bulk allocations, DRRA, and the Towns of La Plata & Indian Head.

We all need to take the time to familiarize ourselves with potential changes to La Plata's policy that could greatly increase the number of available allocations issued by the town. The town may issue 5,000 school seat allocations through 2032. Typically, the town issues less than 100 per year. The change in policy would allow upwards of 500 allocations per year so there needs to be collaboration between the town and county government so the school system does not get caught in the middle.

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CCPS needs sufficient construction funding to keep up with enrollment growth through added capacity at schools, but cannot direct all funding to new construction while ignoring needed renovations. The average age of a CCPS facility is around 27 years of age so funding is needed for renovations and major systemic upgrades or replacements. An MOU should be created between county government and CCPS to detail how the school system will be adequately funded to address future enrollment growth in a manner that does not negatively impact students.

Students have the most to lose when adults who make decisions that influences a student's education do not work together and take into consideration how these changes can affect a student's ability to learn.

Sincerely,

Mike Heim
Assistant Superintendent of Supporting Services
Charles County Public Schools

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