

Happy New Year

The First Night Alexandria fireworks turned the low cloud cover above the waterfront a rainbow of colors as revelers ring in the New Year at the foot of King Street. Story, more photos, page 4.

PHOTOS BY
JOHN BORDNER
GAZETTE PACKET



Incomplete School Request

School Board discusses scope of capital needs.

BY DAN BRENDEL
GAZETTE PACKET

“The budget tells a story,” said School Board chair Ramee Gentry, reiterating her characteristic budget season motto. The schools’ 10-year capital budget was adopted on Thursday, Dec. 20.

The division’s FY 2020-2029 capital improvement program, or CIP, adds up to \$479 million, including \$43 million in FY 2020. These figures serve as a request to the City Council, which council

will weigh against all the city’s other infrastructure needs during the public budget process this spring.

To add seats for growing enrollment, the total requested amount would buy high school capacity expansion; renovations or replacements of three elementary schools; and two new schools, one of which could serve as temporary “swing space” to house students while other projects are underway, before converting to its permanent new use. It’d also buy \$96 million worth of major repairs to existing

facilities, such as HVAC repair or replacement.

The schools’ total request this year includes an additional \$20 million (5 percent) for the 9-year period overlapping last year’s 10-year CIP. Of that amount, \$16 million occurs in FY 2020 alone, representing a 58 percent increase over what council previously approved for that fiscal year. The FY 2020 increase owes to an additional \$8 million (65 percent) over what the School Board requested last year for non-capacity items; plus advancing \$7 million, previ-

ously budgeted for FY 2023, to overhaul the schools’ transportation facility.

The relatively large swing in FY 2020 contrasts with how a CIP ought ideally to work, as described

last year by an advisory task force that weighed in on both the city and schools’ capital budgets. According to the task force’s final report, while a CIP “is neither a SEE SCHOOL BOARD, PAGE 16

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School Board Discusses Scope of Capital Needs

FROM PAGE 1

firm commitment to a particular project nor a limitation to a particular cost," it "is a key element in planning and managing future debt service requirements." Projects in years 1-3 should be the "most concrete," given a "reasonable forecast of economic conditions (absent an unexpected and highly impactful event);" years 4-6 are "less certain;" and years 7-10 are "highly speculative."

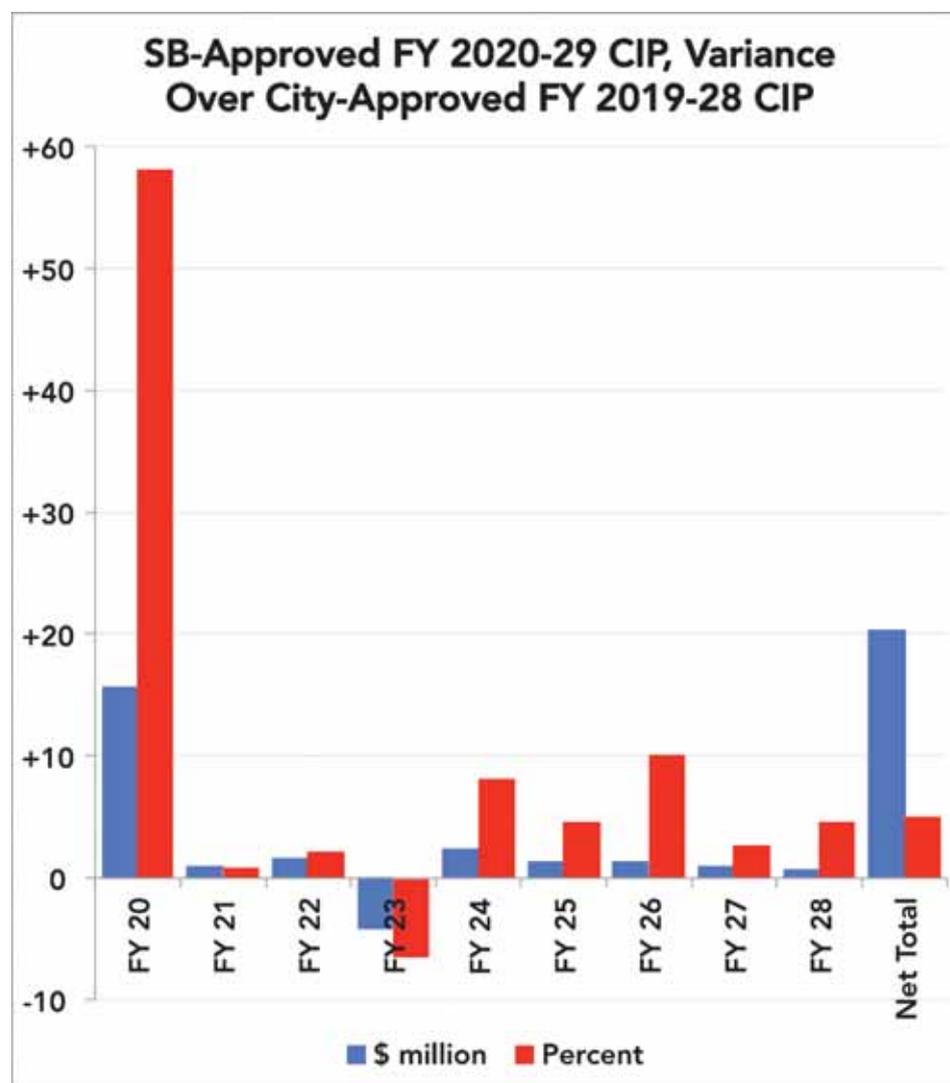
Asked to comment on the stability and predictive capacity of the CIP, the schools administration said in a statement: "All the major projects in 2020 were in previous CIPs. The timing of them may have been adjusted according to the urgency."

Moreover, Dr. Gregory Hutchings, the schools' superintendent, cautioned that the present CIP derives from building condition assessments that are already several years old. He expects that a new round of assessments, currently underway and due this spring, will warrant additional future cost increases.

"I think that our future CIPs are going to be a little more aggressive, and they're going to have to be, based on the data we receive. I just don't want to make an assumption [in this year's CIP] as to what the data's going to tell me, because I could be wrong," he said. "It did take us some time to get into the situation [of deferred maintenance] that we're in, and it's going to take us some time to get out of [it]."

The schools' CIP also describes in words additional items the School Board thinks it needs, but decided to exclude as budgetary line items.

"Even with the projects included in the FY 2020-2029 CIP, a significant capacity and building condition need will remain unaddressed," according to the budget adoption motion. In particular, "there is no solution for middle school capacity needs included in this CIP." While the School Board intends



Comparing the 9 years that overlap between this year and last year's ACPS 10-year capital budgets indicates a relatively modest increase overall, but a substantial increase in FY 2020.

"to pursue interim measures," it calls on council "to identify the resources to address the need beyond the CIP"

Similarly, the School Board tweaked its budget document to say: "The School Board

supports a budget strategy that will allow [the division] to address urgent repair and renovation needs that may arise and are not reflected in the current CIP budget and will therefore need to be addressed outside of

the budget calendar cycle. The School Board requests that City Council ... create a mechanism for such requests, such as a reserve fund designated for urgent repair and renovation projects."

Though ultimately voting 8-1 in favor, several School Board members chafed, in varying degrees, at such statements' vagueness.

Outgoing School Board member Chris Lewis said: "If we're going to ask for what we need, we need to put it in there in dollars. ... The best way we inject the full needs of the school division into that community conversation [about competing demands on public resources], before we apply the fiscal constraints, is in this first round of budgeting, before we go into a work session with City Council, and then adjust on the back end. To me that's a better philosophy and approach to doing a budget."

"It manifested itself last year as a problem. City Council and the city manager were very clear when they passed the budget that they 'fully funded ACPS,' and we know that wasn't true because we didn't ask for everything we needed," he said at an earlier work session.

Outgoing School Board member Bill Campbell agreed, saying that the city "out-politicked" the schools. Campbell's was this year's sole dissenting vote. "We've been overcome by a number of issues that have to be taken care of, and it's probably almost more than we can afford. But somehow we have to let the city know that this must be done," said School Board member Margaret Lorber, who begins a new term this month. She hopes the public will galvanize in order "to raise taxes for education. I've met a lot of people who would pay more taxes if it were for education. The school system needs more funding, and that's what this is all boiling down to." Find more at www.acps.k12.va.us/budget.

Potholes Beware, City Has New Weapon for Patching

FROM PAGE 3

ter," said Jeff Duval, the city's director of Transportation and Environmental Services. "Now we're going out there one time to repair the pothole," he added.

During the colder weather, cold patches aren't as good as a fully mixed hot patch which are only mixed at the hot plant which is open in the spring. Normally the city has to wait for better weather to give the potholes a good hot asphalt patch, but with this new patch maker, hot patches can be made on-site and will last longer.

The asphalt recycling machine cost the city \$86,425 which includes a three-year maintenance plan, said city spokesperson Sarah Godfrey. The city calculates the cost per pothole goes from roughly \$210 per patch, to \$60 per patch

with the new machine since it is a more permanent fix "resulting in significant annual savings," Godfrey said.

Potholes are primarily caused by freezing and thawing cycles where water expands and contracts in small cracks in the asphalt. "They are an unfortunate part of the annual changing of seasons in every city, and in Alexandria we repair about 5,000 potholes each year during our annual spring blitz," said Craig Fifer, director, Office of Communications and Public Information. Fifer recommends using the city's online pothole reporting system as well. According to the city's "potholes by numbers" graphic, February is the big month for repairing the potholes. In 2015 for example, 5,949 potholes were repaired, but out of that figure,

only 963 service requests were turned in through the city's online reporting system. In 2016, 2,067 potholes were repaired during the month of February. These were cold patches though, and the new hot-patch machine should increase the numbers.

The city has 560 lane miles of roads to repair and pave. Since the City of Alexandria is primarily responsible for the city roads, there is some money in the budget for this, but the city also looks to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) State Revenue Sharing Program as well to leverage grant



The city Transportation and Environmental Services' asphalt recycler.



Asphalt seams are a good place for the freeze and thaw process to start, like this one at Duke and Pitt streets.

opportunities as they become available, according to the City of Alexandria. In July 2018, VDOT announced that the city will be awarded an additional \$1,000,000 through the FY 2019 VDOT Primary Extensions Grant to pave sections of Duke Street and will

allow for additional paving and related sidewalk improvements to be completed this fiscal year.

See city's potholes report at www.alexandriava.gov/Potholes.

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 PAGE 15

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FEBRUARY 14, 2019



ACPS Superintendent Dr. Gregory Hutchings lays out his "100-Day" vision at T.C. Williams High School last Wednesday, Feb. 6.

'Raise the Bar for All Kids'

Public schools chief to boost rigor, equity.

BY DAN BRENDEL
 GAZETTE PACKET

Having analyzed the situation over the first 100 days of his tenure, Superintendent Dr. Gregory Hutchings laid out his vi-

sion, principally for "equity," for the public school system's future.

"Equity is the number one reason why ACPS is not the number one school division in this state, in the country," he told a crowd of parents, teachers and

SEE 'RAISE THE BAR', PAGE 8

'Tragedy on the Potomac'

McClellan to keynote Friendship Firehouse breakfast.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
 GAZETTE PACKET

Jim McClelland, a professor of history and the dean of liberal arts at the Alexandria Campus of Northern Virginia Community College, will keynote the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association's 245th annual meeting and breakfast Feb. 18 to kick off the city's George Washington Birthday celebration of events.

McClelland is the author of the two-volume American history text "Historical Moments: Changing Interpretations of America's Past" as well as numerous journal articles. His presentation will be "Tragedy on the Potomac," the story of a day in the history of Al-

exandria that began with "great joy and ended in a disaster that traumatized the nation and altered the course of American history."

McClelland is the recipient of The University of Texas at Arlington's 1997 Distinguished Alumni award, described by the school as "the highest honor the university can bestow on one of its graduates." He has graduate degrees from the University of Texas at Arlington, George Washington University and Union Institute and University at The Institute for Policy Studies. In 2012 he was named a Living Legend of Alexandria.

The Friendship Firehouse breakfast is the traditional kick off to the city's George Washington

Right to Organize

DASH bus drivers to begin collective bargaining, following clashes over unionization.

BY DAN BRENDEL
 GAZETTE PACKET

The Amalgamated Transit Union, representing local DASH bus drivers, will begin collective bargaining negotiations next week, on the heels of a successful unionization effort in November.

DASH drivers voted overwhelmingly to unionize — 97 in favor, 13 against, 21 abstentions — in a Nov. 15 election overseen by the National Labor Relations Board. They'll fold into ATU Local 689, which represents transit workers, including Metro employees, throughout the region. Local 689 in turn affiliates with the Amalgamated Transit Union, which covers the U.S. and Canada.

The union and DASH management will begin collective bargain-

ing negotiations on Tuesday, Feb. 19. DASH General Manager Josh Baker thinks the process could take most of a year.

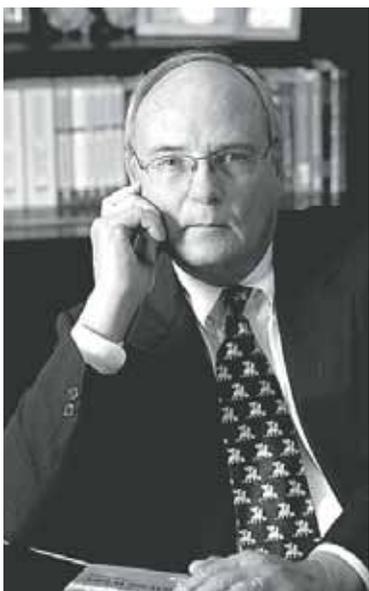
Negotiations come in the wake of several points of contention last fall between drivers, the union, and DASH management.

PAY AND BENEFITS

DASH pay is "lower" and "slower" than other regional bus systems, said Tyler Boos, a DASH driver. DASH drivers' top pay grade, which takes 20 years to reach, is \$29 per hour. That compares to \$34 and 5 years with WMATA Metrobus, and \$32 and 5 years with Fairfax Connector, according to Chris Townsend, a union organizer.

"Unfortunately, we are simply not yet in a stable enough fiscal

SEE RIGHT TO, PAGE 20



Jim McClelland

PHOTO BY JOE BLEACH

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'Raise the Bar'

FROM PAGE 1

others in a packed T.C. Williams cafeteria last Wednesday, Feb. 6. "Every single discussion all revolved around inequities that we have in our schools — [which] sometimes we're afraid to discuss, sometimes we don't even know are there, it has become so normal," he said.

Equity, often a fuzzy term in political discourse, doesn't mean equality in Hutchings' view.

"We've got to go from equality to equity," he said. "It's not about everybody getting the same thing. It's not about every school having the same budget, ... the same number of supports. It's about making sure everybody has what they need."

Much of Hutchings' vision builds from the book, "Building Equity: Policies and Practices to Empower All Learners," by Dominique Smith, et al., which he's distributed to staff and the School Board.

Smith and her co-authors describe the difference between equality and equity this way: "Equality is rooted in the concept of fairness, and a fair race is impossible when its various runners start at variable distances from the finish line, and the course takes them over very different terrains. Similarly, providing equal access to the stairway does not promote fairness to those who use wheelchairs. Achieving equity requires that

this fact be acknowledged — and that we build a ramp alongside every stairway."

A basic building block for equity is "physical integration," meaning that, as much as possible, students of different gender, background, etc. mix together. This echoes a major theme from the school system's recent audit on its policies and practices relating to students with disabilities.

"At least 85 percent of the [special education] students in this school district are [of] average to above-average intelligence," said Terry Werner, the schools' director of specialized education. Some might need a little more personalized attention, but overall they should face the same challenging material as non-disabled students in regular classroom settings.

Hutchings would apply this principle broadly, in terms of both student composition and academic rigor. He proposes conducting an "equity audit" of each school in the division.

"This is a topic that everybody gets nervous about, that we don't want to talk about, but we do have some modern-day ... segregation in our classes," he said last Wednesday. "You should not be able to walk into a classroom and know this is a 'low-performing' class, or this is an 'honors' class. ... If kids have never been exposed to rigor before they walk into T.C. Williams' doors, they are probably not going to be success-

ful in an A.P [Advanced Placement] or honors course, period. So we have set them up for failure and we have caused the problem of not having children of color in some of these classes."

He believes that many students do not face sufficient rigor as part of their core curriculum, and that this constitutes a deep, systemic failing in the school division at present.

"We have very low expectations in some of our general education classes," especially in middle school, he said in a subsequent interview. For example, "right now, only honors students are required to do a science [fair] project. ... That should not be optional. ... The science project may not be the same caliber for every student, but every student should understand the concept of it and know how to do a project. ... When I saw it, I was appalled. ... We shouldn't say, oh, they're 'general ed,' they can't handle that. Raise the bar for all kids, give them the necessary supports, and we will see them achieve."

School Board member Margaret Lorber says she agrees with Hutchings' take on the "equal-equity dichotomy." She doesn't necessarily think students should be graded against different yardsticks, but she agrees that coursework should in some measure account for students' different individual situations. For example, in evaluating a science project should, one should whether a student's parent is a physicist or works three jobs and doesn't have much time to help, she said.

"I agree that our school division needs to prioritize equity. We need to end segregation in our schools and provide all students

with access to a challenging curriculum," said School Board member Michelle Rief.

Asked if, in addition to his characteristically positive and affirming leadership style, he intends to turn the screws on division staff and educators, he said: "Absolutely. ... Don't let the warm-and-fuzzy fool you." He plans to set higher expectations for teachers, but also provide them the professional supports to achieve.

Hutchings believes equity concerns pertain not just to students, but also to parents and families.

"Our under-served and our under-represented families ... feel that they do not have open access. They sometimes don't feel that the PTA is the place that they want to go," he said. "What I heard was that, because the PTA traditionally has been our more affluent families, educated families, in most cases our white population, that some [non-white and immigrant] families ... just don't feel they have anything in common."

He affirmed the PTA Council's nascent efforts "to bring meetings to the community," such as perhaps expanding the practice of conducting meetings at differing settings and times of the day.

Lorber agrees that equitability in parents' access to the administration is a persistent challenge. Inasmuch as the barriers are logistical rather than social, she thinks the school system has improved in recent years. For example, the division now provides translation services and publishes major announcements and resources in English, Spanish, Amharic (Ethiopian), Arabic. Lorber also applauded outreach efforts of the schools' Family and Community Engagement (FACE) program.



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High School Expansion: Next

School system takes steps toward honing final plan.

BY BRIDGETTE ADU-WADIER AND DAN BRENDEL
GAZETTE PACKET

The Alexandria City Public Schools administration specified certain elements of its planning for high school capacity expansion on Thursday, April 25, though other elements remain fuzzy.

The city and schools' current budget earmarks \$119 million for the project — the second single largest capital investment on the city's horizon after sanitary sewers.

But how that money will be spent remains undetermined. The School Board is weighing two options: (1) Superintendent Dr. Gregory Hutching's recommended "Connected High School Network," which would comprise a network of smaller campuses citywide; and (2) another comprehensive high school. Here's what new for their consideration:

9TH GRADE INTEGRATION

Whereas freshmen are currently set apart at T.C. Williams' Minnie Howard campus, the administration recommends incorporating grades 9-12, regardless of the decision regarding the School Board's Connected High School Network.

"We will not be dividing our student population by grade level. ... Minnie Howard will not stay a

ninth-grade campus," said the schools' Erika Gulick.

The decision stems from a 2017 "Grade Level Feasibility Study," briefed to the School Board last May.

NARROWED CAPACITY PARAMETERS

The administration estimates that it needs 312,000 square feet of new facility space to accommodate 1,600 more students. Those figures represent major downward revisions from December estimates of 409,500 square feet for an additional 2,100 students. The revision owes in part to including the high school's early college program, which would put students at the local community college.

The school division earlier determined that a comprehensive high school should accommodate no more than 1,650 students — a close match to the revised figures. However, land availability remains a constraint. A new stand-alone high school, including fields, parking, etc., would require about 20-30 acres, according to school division COO Mignon Anthony.

RE-PURPOSING MINNIE HOWARD

To use land it already has to address immediate capacity needs, the School Board earlier instructed Hutchings to draw up plans to expand Minnie Howard.

"We do think we have flexibility at Minnie Howard," said Gulick.

The administration is working with the city's planning and zoning department to modernize Minnie Howard, as well as analyze other properties that could accommodate 1,600 additional students.

Minnie Howard spans 12 acres, according a site

SEE EXPANSION, PAGE 22

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As Luck Has Had It



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Aside from the fatigue I experienced a few columns ago, this immunotherapy infusion is, and has been, quite manageable.

My biggest take away so far is that I've had no real quality of life issues, as had been the case with my previous chemotherapy/alimta infusions. With that drug, I had post-infusion eating challenges and for nearly a week after the fact, felt less than mediocre.

Moreover, I wouldn't say I felt like I had cancer, but I certainly was reminded of it — if that makes any sense.

And even though I do have some minor side effects from my current immunotherapy infusion, I am reminded nevertheless, that I have cancer. Not because of how I feel, as was the case previously, but because of how I look — and because of what I feel.

I am referring to my "Adam's apple" tumor. Not only can/do I 'look' it all the time but quite often, depending on how I move my head: forward/downward, I can feel it too.

I have to tell you, feeling it as I do, and looking at it as often as I do: every day, is unsettling.

My whole approach to this living-with-cancer life has been to compartmentalize it a la Jerry Seinfeld and "the vault." Out of sight has helped keep some things out of mind. And when things are out of mind, it's much easier to make believe.

And making believe has been one of my methods of "operandi" since Feb. 20, 2009. That's the date (you bet I remember) when my internal medicine doctor called me at work with the results of my previous week's biopsy: "malignant," he said.

Up until that call, the previous six weeks' diagnostic pursuit had been interesting in a curious kind of way wondering what all the goings on were about and when all these inconveniences would end. And not for a minute during this entire process did I ever think I'd be diagnosed with a "terminal" disease: non-small cell lung cancer, stage IV. I figured, to the extent I figured at all, that the process would result in much having been done about nothing.

Boy was I wrong!

I still remember — and laugh when I recall the phone conversation I had with my thoracic surgeon after he had received the results of my PET scan: "You lit that thing up like a Christmas tree," he said.

Presuming that wasn't good news, I replied: "I hear there are false positives all the time which is why these scans aren't used a lot." (A perfect example of a little knowledge in the wrong mouth.)

I can't recall if the doctor snickered before he said the following: "Well, then your scan was a world record false positive." I don't know if I grasped the obvious at that point but soon a surgical biopsy was ordered and the rest is Kenny-with-cancer history, a history with which many of you regular readers are all too familiar.

And that's a familiarity which I hope has not bred contempt. Because even though it's my life — and I'm stuck with it (as the old saying says), it need not be yours. I can well imagine and appreciate how living with and/or seeking out negativity is not likely to improve any one's lot in life. (I try to avoid it every day.)

To that end, I have always tried to tread lightly and write with a soft touch since I've been cancer-centric beginning June 10, 2009, when I published my first column on the subject: "Dying To Tell You, Sort Of." And in so doing, I've tried to see the light amid the darkness and be thankful for any in between.

I can't say it's been fun, but it's funny how things have turned out: alive and reasonably well, 10-plus years later.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.

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NEWS

Expansion

FROM PAGE 5

study. But the city government would give some leeway in zoning restrictions, allowing a facility up to 60 feet tall, or 4-5 stories, on that site.

HONING PROGRAMMING & SITE SELECTION

Toward defining new high school programming, which in turn will drive space requirements and site selection, the administration will establish an advisory "Educational Design Team." The team will comprise 11-15 school personnel, including student representatives. In developing their recommendations, the team will consult with "Industrial Advisory Boards," which will comprise community representatives from business, government, higher education and nonprofits.

The administration says it will evaluate site options according to a weighted index of both qualitative and quantitative factors, including: promotion of the "educational vision," land/building availability and price, ability to address capacity deficits at other grade levels, community support or opposition, local economic impact, etc.

Zoning at George Washington Middle School would allow about 500,000 square feet of facility space, which is more than enough to accommodate the schools' needs, said School Board member Michelle Rief.

"[Could we] build another high school at G.W. and build another middle school somewhere else?" she asked.

G.W. and Francis Hammond middle schools both have zoning allowances for facilities larger than current T.C. Williams King Street and Minnie Howard.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The city and schools' budgets allocate about \$15 million in FY 2020 (begins July 1) for project planning and \$103 million in FY 2021. They also set aside \$30 million for land acquisition, which the high school project could end up tapping into.

However, budgeted project costs could change within the next year.

"The design and the programming are going to have to inform what our [FY] 2021 request [to the city for funding] will be. It will be modified somewhat from what's in the [budget] now," said Anthony.

City Manager Mark Jinks said: "I have always considered the \$119 M more as a large interim placeholder than a precisely calculated amount. ... The high school solution/sites are not yet fixed and when that is better known a more firm calculation could be made. The Virginia local government system which bifurcates taxation and funding from the educational decision making creates interesting dynamics which is why it is vitally important to have a solid working relationship between the City and Schools (both at the staff and elected levels) so the discussion of needs and funding can occur collaboratively rather than occur as if on two separate planets. I think that the City and the Schools should be able to find an acceptable balance between educational facility needs and funding realities."