



Mason District Council Letter to Building Repurposing Workgroup:  
Repurposing County Property for School Use  
26 May 2016

From: Mason District Council [[masondistrictcouncil.org@gmail.com](mailto:masondistrictcouncil.org@gmail.com)]

Sent: Thursday, May 26, 2016 10:18 AM

To: Cook, John

Cc: Stalzer, Robert; Platenberg, Jeffrey; Bulova, Sharon; Gross, Penelope A.; Corbett Sanders, Karen (School Board Member); Evans, Sandy (School Board Member); McElveen, Ryan (School Board Member); Moon, Ilryong (School Board Member); Hough, Jeanette (School Board Member); McLaughlin, Megan (School Board Member); Strauss, Jane (School Board Member); Hynes, Patricia (School Board Member); Derenak Kaufax, Tamara (School Board Member); Palchik, Dalia (School Board Member); Schultz, Elizabeth (School Board Member); Wilson, Thomas (School Board Member); Mason District Council

Subject: Repurposing County Property - Building Repositioning Workgroup

Dear Supervisor Cook:

The Mason District Council Board has noted with interest the Building Repositioning Workgroup initiative that is seeking opportunities to take advantage of the current high vacancy rate among commercial buildings. One option mentioned on the workgroup website is transitioning buildings from offices to schools, presumably including public schools. This email recommends a suggestion that may be effective for accomplishing such transitions.

The Bailey's Upper Elementary School is in a converted office building in Mason District. The office building, in a heavily traveled commercial district, was converted into an elementary school wholly on blacktop with no green space, no auditorium, and no gymnasium. Despite FCPS's matchless performance in converting the building's interior, Baileys Upper fails to meet Virginia Department of Education guidelines for school facilities and fails to comply with Policy Plan guidelines for schools. Yet the price paid for Bailey's was the full price of a fully-capable elementary school. The Bailey's Upper experience has left many citizens in Mason District skeptical of the notion that direct conversion of vacant office buildings offers a significant opportunity for effectively meeting public school capacity needs.

We would recommend that the county collaborate with the School Board to identify county operations that could be moved off county-owned property where the county-owned property vacated would be suitable for public schools. The operations moved off county-owned property would be moved into available commercial buildings. That is, certain county operations would migrate into commercial space (purchased or leased) and public schools would inherit the county-owned property vacated, a two-step conversion of commercial space into school space. The theory is that it is easier and more natural to convert commercial space into space for county offices than to convert commercial space directly into schools. The recommendation envisions that the cost to clear a county-owned property of unwanted buildings/improvements might average less than \$1m per site, the approximate cost of removing a five-story office building.

Please let us know whether you believe this recommendation has merit and whether the workgroup will be able to include this as one element of its work program.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

The Board of the Mason District Council of Community Associations

Debbie Smith, Chair

Carol Turner, Vice Chair

Clyde Miller, Secretary

Jon Clark, Treasurer