

**Loudoun County School Board**  
**Statement of Justification**  
**Special Exception (TLSE 2019-0009) for Catoctin Elementary School Addition**  
**October 28, 2019, Updated March 18, 2020**

The Loudoun County School Board (School Board) requests a special exception for an approximate 5,500 square foot (SF) addition at Catoctin Elementary School. The expansion is planned at the rear of the building and will be utilized for three-classrooms, a resource room, an office and storage space. Up to 6,000 SF are requested to allow for adjustments at final design. It is also proposed to upgrade the fire lane access and implement safety and security improvements at the front of the building (within the existing footprint). The 17.53-acre property is located at 311 Catoctin Circle, east of the Catoctin Circle/Dry Mill Road intersection and is more particularly identified as PIN 231-15-4538. The existing one-story school is approximately 76,800 SF and has a base capacity of 697 students; the current enrollment is 658 (September 30, 2019). The classroom addition will increase the base capacity to 743 students. One of the three classrooms will be for programming space and will not add new seats. For the 2019-2020 school year the hours of operation are 7:50 a.m. (classes start) to 2:35 p.m. (dismissal). When not in use for school purposes, the County Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PR&CS) programs the facilities for various uses. There is a County After School Activities Program (CASA) operated from dismissal to 6:00 p.m. PR&CS also programs the fields for various sport teams when available. (The fields are not lighted.) LCPS and County PR&CS have a long-standing working relationship to provide these community services to the public.

Catoctin Elementary School opened in 1966. The property is zoned R-4, Single Family Residential. The southeast corner of the site is within the Airport Impact Overlay (AIO) District, within the 60 decibels one-mile buffer. Both the existing building and the proposed additions are outside of the AIO. The R-4 District currently requires a special exception for the public school use. In accord with the guidance received at the pre-application conference, this special exception request is limited to the expansion area. The School Board Adopted FY2020-FY2025 Capital Improvement Program includes funding for this project with a planned opening in the 2021-2022 school year.

### **Special Exception Criteria**

Section 3.4.6F. of the Zoning Ordinance specifies the criteria utilized by the Town of Leesburg in the consideration of a special exception application.

**A. The proposed use will not adversely affect the use of neighboring properties.**

The surrounding land uses are single family residential:

North: Catoctin Circle, Residential, Prospect Hills, Crestwood Hamlet, & Belmont  
South: Residential, Rosestone Court and White Oak (future)  
East: Residential, Crestwood Hamlet  
West: Residential, Prospect Hills

The Town Plan designates the property as Major Institutional, within the Central Policy Area. The Major Institutional designation recognizes the services that institutional uses provide to the community. Residential policies in the Town Plan provide that schools, places of worship, and community centers are appropriate in residential areas. Policies also promote the protection of residential uses and compatibility between uses. Site design, the location of the facility, access, building height, scale, massing and buffers are measures utilized to ensure compatibility.

The proposed classroom addition will be no closer to existing residences than the current building which is 160 feet from the western property boundary and 214 feet from the eastern boundary. The distance between the existing building and Rosestone Court is 400 feet. The distance between the classroom addition and the future White Oak development to the south will be approximately 355 feet. Access, building height, scale and massing will not substantially change. The addition is designed to be consistent with the existing building architecture.

Section 12.8.1 of the Zoning Ordinance, Buffers and Screening, provides in part that buffer-yard requirements apply to all new construction constituting more than fifty (50) percent of the existing structure. The existing school building is 76,802 square feet. The proposed addition seeks up to 6,000 SF. At the pre-application meeting, buffering and screening were reviewed. Staff recommended providing landscaping in the “open gaps” along the southern and eastern property boundaries. The future White Oak subdivision to the south depicts a 25 foot in width S2 buffer along the common property boundary with the school on their preliminary subdivision plan. There is a gap in the landscaping adjacent to the Rosestone Court neighborhood and a few openings along the Crestwood Hamlet neighborhood to the east. Evergreen trees are proposed for these open areas as a part of this Special Exception plan. Overall, the requested minor addition will not adversely impact the adjacent properties and the proposed landscaping will afford increased buffering between the uses.

- B. The use shall comply with applicable zoning district regulations and applicable provisions of the adopted Town Plan, including but not limited to the Plan’s Land Use Compatibility policies.**

The zoning of the property is R-4, Single Family Residential, permitting up to 4 dwelling units per acre and various compatible uses. Public schools are permitted by Special Exception. While the existing school facility has operated on the property since 1966, there is not an existing special exception. A special exception is required for the building expansion. The proposed addition complies with the development standards of the R-4 District and meets additional development standards related to parking, lighting and similar requirements. The proposed school will also comply with policies of the Town Plan including compatibility between uses (detailed in Item A. above), energy efficiency, provision of community facilities, walkability, and safe, convenient, and efficient transportation.

**Parking.** There are 101 existing parking spaces. The Zoning Ordinance requirement is 40 spaces. There are 89 staff employed at the school and the addition is anticipated to add two teachers for a total of 91. Two of the existing parking spaces are proposed to be removed to create a turnaround as requested by the Fire Marshall. Sufficient parking is available to serve the school use.

**Landscaping.** As detailed in the prior section (A.), landscaping is proposed to fill in the open areas between the school and the adjacent neighborhoods of Rosestone and Crestwood. The proposed trees are evergreen to provide for year round screening.

**Lighting.** There are two existing pole lights, one at each parking lot. No additional pole lights are planned. Wall mounted building lights and recessed canopy lighting will be added to the addition. Lighting will be shielded and directed downward. A lighting plan is included in the Special Exception Plan.

**Setbacks, Lot Width, Lot Area, and Height.** The proposed addition meets or exceeds the R-4 development standards. The existing building and proposed addition are predominately one story, approximately 15 feet in height. The gym portion of the building is taller at a height of approximately 25 feet.

**Compatibility Between Uses.** Catocin Elementary School has existed for 50+ years. Neighborhoods have grown around the school making it an integral part of the community fabric. As described in Sections A and B, the facility is physically compatible with the adjacent uses; as a center for education, the school affords a local public service and serves as a focal point for the neighborhood. It is conveniently located allowing many of the surrounding families walkable access.

**Energy.** LCPS was one of three school districts nationwide honored with the Federal Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Energy Star Sustained Excellence Award in April 2019. [The other two were Evergreen Public Schools in Vancouver, Washington and the Des Moines, Iowa Public School District.] This is the third straight year LCPS has been awarded the Sustained Excellence Award, the EPA's top tier recognition. LCPS has been an Energy Star Partner for twenty years and is committed to reducing costs and promoting energy efficiency. LCPS implements a comprehensive approach to sustainability by incorporating measures from leading programs including Energy Star, Green Globe, LEED, and the U.S. Department of Energy into design, construction and operational practices. The addition will incorporate energy efficiency measures.

**Community Services.** Catoctin Elementary School will continue to provide educational services to the community. The addition will afford a small increase in capacity and incorporate additional safety measures.

**Walkability.** Catoctin Elementary has an established walk zone. For the 2019-20 school year there are 99 potential walkers. There are sidewalks throughout the adjacent neighborhoods and along Catoctin Circle. Crosswalks are available at Valley View Avenue and Catoctin Circle as well as at the site entrance to the west of Prospect Place. The preliminary subdivision plan for the future White Oak development to the south depicts a future pedestrian connection to the school site. LCPS staff contacted the developer, Stanley Martin Companies, LLC, to gain an understanding of the White Oak development phasing and timing of the proposed pedestrian connection. Due to the time difference between when the proposed addition will be constructed (next summer, if approved) and the White Oak development, Stanley Martin offered to build the section of trail to be located on the school site when they build their trail within White Oak. This will allow proper alignment, consistency in trail construction, and construction of the trail when there are students to the south that would utilize the trail to access Catoctin Elementary School. It will also avoid conflicts with implementation of the landscaping buffer. LCPS will work with the developer and appreciates the willingness to construct the connecting link.

**The location, size and height of buildings, structures, walls and fences, and the nature and extent of screening, buffering and landscaping shall be such that the use will not hinder or discourage the appropriate development and use of adjacent or nearby land and/or buildings.**

This Special Exception seeks a minor addition to the rear of an existing building. The existing structure and proposed addition will be 14 feet (one story) in height, with the

existing gym at approximately 25 feet in height. On three of the four sides of the property residential housing has been developed. To the south, a residential preliminary subdivision is proposed. There is nothing about the use that has or will hinder or discourage development or use of the nearby properties. Often a nearby school is seen as an asset to the residential community, particularly elementary schools.

**C. The proposed use will be such that pedestrian and vehicular traffic generated will not be hazardous or conflict with the existing and anticipated traffic in the neighborhood and on the streets serving the site.**

The proposed addition will generate minimal traffic. The traffic impact study filed with the application finds that all study intersections operate at an acceptable level of service in the future with the proposed development. No improvements are recommended for the approximate 6,000 SF addition. The existing road network will accommodate the additional trips (17 trips in the a.m. school peak hour, 7 trips in the p.m. school peak hour and 38 daily trips).

In the summer of 2019 the Town of Leesburg approved signage to restrict westbound left turns along Catoctin Circle at the main entrance to the school during school arrival and dismissal times. The “no left turn” signage has been posted. The traffic study has taken this restriction into account for the analysis of site traffic. Access to the school will be via a right turn from Catoctin Circle during the peak arrival and dismissal times.

**SUMMARY**

The proposed addition to Catoctin Elementary School complies with the zoning requirements, is compatible with the policies of the Town of Leesburg Comprehensive Plan and complies with the Special Exception approval criteria of Section 3.4.12 of the Zoning Ordinance. The addition will not adversely affect neighboring properties nor hinder or discourage their use. The site is served by public utilities and an existing transportation network that will readily accommodate the minor traffic increase, both vehicular and pedestrian. The school use provides a needed public service and the proposed addition will enhance the educational opportunities. Your support is respectfully requested.