

## Policy Area 9: Quality School Facilities



### Key Words and Phrases:

Citizen Comments from Town Meeting (literal, unedited):

### DESIRED FUTURE

#### Quality Schools

- Be sure schools are not overcrowded
- Protect Laughlin & SFD Elementary schools
- Attractive schools without mobile classrooms
- Continued good schools

### UNWANTED FUTURE

#### Overcrowded, Substandard Schools

- Overcrowded schools
- Do not abandon Laughlin Primary
- Poor school facilities
- Decline in quality of public schools
- Over populated schools

Town Council/Zoning Board Comments From Joint Kick Off Meeting:**Plan Ahead for Infrastructure and Service Needs**

- Growing up too fast without keeping up with fire safety and school already at capacity
- Schools too small for growth
- Worry about divisions: new roads, schools (4), geographic size

The preceding *key words and phrases* were gleaned from (1) the Town Meeting for the Comprehensive Plan and (2) the Joint Kick-Off Meeting of the Town Council and Zoning Board. In addition, these key words and phrases were supplemented by an interview with representatives from the Guilford County School System, including local staff and volunteers directly involved with Summerfield Elementary school. This information was employed to generate the following **Common Objective** and related **Policies for Quality School Facilities**.



### Common Objective for Quality School Facilities

The Town of Summerfield shall continue to work closely with Guilford County Schools and local public and private school leaders to support the construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance of high quality schools serving the community. Schools should be located and designed to be accessible to the neighborhoods around them. Access to such schools by walking and biking should be encouraged, provided that safety and security issues are addressed. Rather than functioning as single purpose “factories to educate children”, schools in Summerfield should serve as true community centers, providing meeting space for community gatherings, recreational events, and other functions. Mobile classrooms should be avoided.

### Policies for Quality School Facilities

**Policy 9.1: ADVANCED PLANNING FOR THE LOCATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF NEW PUBLIC SCHOOLS** serving Summerfield should be a joint effort between the Guilford County School Board and the Town. The Town shall work proactively to engender a close working relationship between the two governmental authorities.

**Policy 9.2: New and rehabilitated schools in Summerfield should be integrated with the DESIGN OF THE COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOODS** around them.

**Policy 9.3: Site planning for TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT** in the vicinity of schools, including **PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE SAFETY**, shall be given careful attention. On-street and off street travel corridors within walking distance of all schools should be a priority for construction of sidewalks, bike paths, and pedestrian trails.

**Policy 9.4:** The Town, through its development review process, and in coordination with the County, shall encourage OFFERS OF LAND for the siting of new public schools, particularly in conjunction with the development of nearby neighborhoods. Acceptance of such offers shall depend upon location criteria and other factors.

**Policy 9.5:** The CO-LOCATION AND JOINT DEVELOPMENT of public parks and recreation facilities in conjunction with public schools shall be encouraged.

**Policy 9.6:** School design and access should give a high priority to SECURITY CONCERNS, during both school hours and after hours activities.

**Policy 9.7:** Schools should be viewed as a social and cultural cornerstone of the community they are intended to serve. FUNCTIONS DURING NON-SCHOOL HOURS might include, for example, senior activities, fitness classes, youth recreation, and clubs.

## Notes and Commentary:

### *Schools as Infrastructure-- Their Influence on Growth*

When discussing how infrastructure influences growth and development, roads, and utilities such as water and sewer lines typically come to mind. Yet schools have been shown to be just as important in influencing growth as pipes in the ground or pavement on the street. Public schools are now and will continue to be an important consideration in planning for infrastructure and growth patterns in the Summerfield area.

Research has shown that building new schools on large sites far removed from existing town centers, called “school sprawl” or “school giantism” can have far-reaching impacts on school children, school districts, and the larger community. The following paragraphs are excerpted from a paper prepared by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation that explains this view<sup>13</sup>:

*“Educators and parents express concern that large schools reduce educational outcomes, particularly for at-risk youth. Schools that are more distant can diminish student participation in extra-curricular activities, parental involvement, and taxpayer support. Students are walking and cycling to school less, which contributes to alarming rates of childhood obesity. Many suggest that the growing physical disconnect between schools and community helps create a level of student anonymity and social alienation that sets the stage for tragic events like Columbine.*

*Smart growth groups, which traditionally have not weighed in on educational matters, are now questioning the same trend. Rather than build shopping mall schools at the edge of town, smart growth advocates*

*In 1969, 41 percent of school transportation in the United States meant walking or biking. By 2001, this number declined to 13 percent. Over the same time period, children being driven or driving themselves to school rose from less than 20 percent to 55 percent.*

**When Biking and Walking Are Better For Kids, Why Do Parents Drive Children to School?**

Fall 2009 CURS Update, UNC-Chapel Hill, Noreen McDonald, Author

<sup>13</sup> “Education and Smart Growth: Reversing School Sprawl for Better Schools and Communities”, Sam Passmore, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, published by the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, 2002.

*encourage the continued use of existing schools and the construction of new schools on infill sites within existing neighborhoods.*

*Smart growth advocates' interest in neighborhood schools dovetails with education reformers' interest in small schools, presenting an important opportunity for collaboration. Scattered efforts are underway across the country addressing the shared interests of educators and smart growth advocates. Much remains to be done, and funders and leaders from all sectors have an important role to play.” (from the abstract)*

Further, the same paper notes the strong influence of a “good quality” school on growth and development around it:

*“...It is well understood that school quality determines where many families will choose to locate within a region...Even families without school age children are impacted as school quality has a significant influence on residential property values.” (page 3)*

Thus, in much the same way that a new sewer line can have a major influence on the location of growth in an area, so too can actions taken by a school board concerning the location of new schools play a significant role in the decisions of developers and homebuyers as to where to construct their homes. Further, the size and degree to which the school is physically connected to the community around it can have a major influence on the educational environment and culture of the school.



Fortunately for Summerfield, the Guilford County School Board concluded long ago that Summerfield Elementary School is deserving of renovation and improvement, rather than demolition and relocation. Plans are underway for a major updating and addition to the school facility. A Building Advisory Team is working closely with the architect selected for the project; the objective is to help see that the renovation is attuned to local area needs. The design of the addition provides access to the media center and cafeteria/auditorium for community events and accommodates after hours parking for community activities at the school, park, and baseball fields.

## North Carolina Safe Routes to School Program

According to information compiled by the North Carolina Safe Routes to School Program, only 15 percent of children living near a school walk or bike to that school today. This compares with nearly 90 percent a generation ago. As a result, about 25 percent of morning peak hour traffic is made up of parents driving students to school. The percentage of vehicles on the road becomes even higher the closer you are to a school, with lengthy traffic tie-ups at school entrances the norm in many places. By motivating students to walk or bike to class, and by providing safe, off-street facilities to accommodate them, traffic congestion can be reduced, air quality improved, and rates of childhood obesity eased.<sup>14</sup>

Under the NC Safe Routes to School Program, grants are available to municipalities like Summerfield in four categories<sup>15</sup>:

### Action Plan Service Awards

*Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Action Plans are intended as a beginning point for a Safe Routes to School program. By developing an Action Plan, a local group of individuals become committed to making the changes required to get more children walking and biking to school. The Action Plan provides a framework through which obstacles to safe travel can be systematically identified, and then solutions and implementation actions may be prioritized. Perhaps most importantly, the Action Plan provides the structure needed to keep an SRTS program going, even as members of the original SRTS School Team move on.*

### Infrastructure Grant Reimbursement Program Overview

*Infrastructure grants provide funds for planning, design, and construction. Any agency that is willing and able to enter into a reimbursement agreement with NCDOT and has the authority to construct and/or install and maintain infrastructure is eligible to apply. Funding requests may range from \$100,000 to \$300,000 per project. \$3.5 million is set aside to fund SRTS infrastructure projects*

### Non-Infrastructure Grant Reimbursement Program Overview

*Non-infrastructure grants provide funds for education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation programs and activities. Any state, local or regional agency, tribal government, school or school district, or non-profit organization is eligible to apply. Funding requests may range from \$10,000 to \$50,000. \$400,000 is set aside to fund Non-infrastructure projects.*

### NCDOT Highway Division Funds

*A portion of SRTS funds have been allocated to each of NCDOT's 14 Highway Divisions to fund infrastructure projects on state-maintained roads. Projects must be within 2 miles of a school serving grades K-8 to be eligible. These funds are primarily intended for safety improvements ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000, and must improve conditions for walking and biking to school. Projects that only improve motor vehicle or bus access are not eligible for this or Infrastructure Grant funding.*

*Schools that are more distant can diminish student participation in extra-curricular activities, parental involvement and taxpayer support. Students are walking and cycling to school less, which contributes to alarming rates of childhood obesity. Many suggest that the growing physical disconnect between schools and community helps create a level of student anonymity and social alienation that sets the stage for tragic events like Columbine.*

**Sam Passmore  
Charles Stewart  
Mott Foundation  
2002**

<sup>14</sup> Press release quoting Leza Wright Mundt, the NCDOT Safe Routes to School coordinator.

"NCDOT AWARDS ITS FIRST SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL FUNDS", Friday May 16, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Funding categories and descriptions provided here have been excerpted and/or paraphrased from the NC Safe Routes to School website:

[http://www.ncdot.org/transit/bicycle/safety/programs\\_initiatives/Safe\\_Routes.html](http://www.ncdot.org/transit/bicycle/safety/programs_initiatives/Safe_Routes.html)

### ***What is the Future for Laughlin Primary School?***

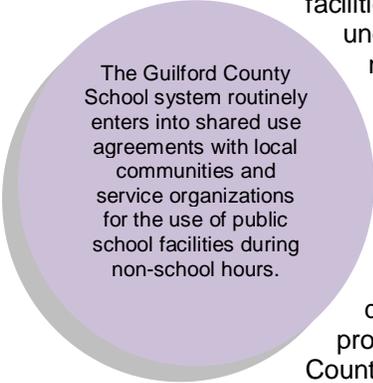
Laughlin Primary School is located off Summerfield Road about 2000 feet north of Town Hall. Originally built as a “school for negroes” during the days of segregation, Laughlin School has in recent years served in a supplementary capacity to relieve overcrowding at Summerfield Elementary. Currently, the school serves kindergarten and first grade students, allowing Summerfield Elementary to accommodate second through fifth graders. With renovations soon to be underway at Summerfield Elementary, Laughlin will likely take on yet another role as various parts of the elementary school are vacated for construction. That is, as different sections of Summerfield Elementary undergo rehabilitation, Laughlin may be expected to accept the lower grades for a time, and then switch to accommodating the upper grades.

After the renovation of Summerfield Elementary is complete, it remains uncertain as to what will become of Laughlin Primary School. The School Board has closed the school at least once before, only to reopen it to accommodate growing numbers of students in the Summerfield area. Located on an 11-acre site, the property is of sufficient size and location to be attractive for several alternative public uses. (e.g. town hall, library, community center, senior center, etc.) The Town of Summerfield Town Council went on record in 2003 with a formal notice of interest in acquiring the property from the School Board upon final closure of the school.

### ***Shared Use of School Facilities***

The Guilford County School system routinely enters into shared use agreements with local communities and service organizations for the use of public school facilities during non-school hours. Parts of school facilities that typically come under such agreements may include outdoor athletic fields, gymnasiums, and media centers (i.e. libraries). Issues that may arise as a result of such after-hours use include energy costs (lighting and HVAC systems), bathroom use, janitorial service, and security concerns. As new schools are built and older ones are renovated, many of these issues are being addressed through zoned heating and cooling systems and zoned security areas.

This type of shared use involving County school properties is highly desirable in that it maximizes the use of publicly-owned facilities, and provides for community based activities at very cost effective levels to the County's taxpayers.



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