

A Vision for Lovettsville:

New Park, New Schools and a Revitalized Downtown

The Premise: Lovettsville is already a wonderful residential area, with an elementary school that everybody loves, a library and community center, adequate water supply and sewage treatment facilities, a couple of successful restaurants and a small collection of business and professional operations (although several of these are struggling to survive). The town also has designated parkland and land set aside for new commercial development, but these important future improvements are currently both stalled by the economic downturn and lack of financing.

The School Problem: Two important community amenities Lovettsville lacks – with significant negative impact on its residents and the residents of the greater Lovettsville area – are schools for its middle and high school students, located within a *reasonable* bus ride's distance of the Town. While Loudoun County continues to seek a solution to this problem, thus far the solutions proposed are all too far from the Town, in locations where rural ambiance and traffic would be exacerbated by new schools and where students and parents would receive little or no relief from the long bus rides our children must endure today. Furthermore, the sites already proposed or under current consideration do not comply with the policy of the 2003 revision of the Loudoun County General Plan, which clearly states: **“Whenever possible, new public schools in the Rural Policy Area will be located in or immediately adjacent to the existing villages, towns, and joint land management areas (JLMAs).”** (Emphasis added.) The Rural Policy Area of the county includes virtually all of western Loudoun, including Lovettsville and its environs. This policy recognizes that schools should be as close as possible to the majority of their students, thereby minimizing buss traffic, and that schools are a net contributor to the well-being of communities and the private businesses within them.

The C.L.A.S.S. Proposal: A group of active citizens drawn from within and around Lovettsville – known as Citizens for Lovettsville Area School Solutions (C.L.A.S.S.) -- believe there is a solution to this problem that the community can rally around. The timing creates a unique challenge because this proposal would require adjustment of certain Town and County , plans already advancing including an application for a Special Exception for the Lovettsville Park that is currently before the Board of Supervisors. But we ask Town and County officials to hear us out, look seriously at our proposal, and subject it to debate and deliberation within our elected bodies. We also ask that the idea be put before the citizenry as a whole,

in an open community meeting held as soon as possible, and before formal action is taken with regard to the Special Exception currently being considered for the Lovettsville Park.

The idea, in its simplest form, is this:

- 1) Set aside a portion of the 91-acre parcel currently designated as the Lovettsville Park to locate two future schools: a middle and a high school (projected by LCPS to be needed sometime after 2017) and preserve the remainder of the parcel for planned passive recreation uses.
- 2) Purchase the 74-acre parcel immediately northwest of the Lovettsville community center known as the Schoene tract, currently advertised for sale by the Lennar Corporation; and, develop that tract with active recreational uses currently planned for the Lovettsville Park. This proposal for park use would replace the current subdivision plan for the site which allows for construction of 29 houses.
- 3) Work with VDOT and the County to undertake various traffic improvements including two traffic circles (one at the southern entrance to the town at the current intersection of Berlin Pike and Loudoun St., just south of Lovettsville Elementary School, and the other at the intersection of Lovettsville and Milltown Roads). Together with new egress roads into the proposed school and park sites, these improvements will reroute most buses and cars into both sites *without passing through the center of town*. These improvements could (and, we believe, should) also include construction of sidewalks.

C.L.A.S.S. has been working with a computer design expert to develop concept plans for both sites that preserve ALL the features already developed for the park and place them appropriately on the Schoene/Lennar site, while building on a plan using an existing Loudoun County Public School template for a combined middle and high school campus on the current park site, which would be located immediately adjacent to the elementary school. We have produced two plans, super-imposed on satellite images of the two sites, to show one possible configuration of facilities; they are attached to this document. (Note that two of the unique features of the park design – the water feature and the farmstead – would be retained on the new school site, where they could provide excellent educational potential.)

We understand that the community will have many, many questions – and probably a lot of skepticism – about this idea, and about the timing. However, the County has expressed its intent to purchase middle and high school sites in the very near future. As such, the opportunity for consideration of this alternative will close soon. The best way to address these questions, and to gauge community receptivity to the idea, will be in a series of open community forums, which we'd like to see take place in the near future. But in the meantime, the following Q&A may offer some answers to the most likely community questions:

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Prepared by
Citizens for Lovettsville Area School Solutions (C.L.A.S.S)

Town Center



Questions and Answers

Q: Isn't it too late in the game, considering how much work has already gone into the Lovettsville Park design, to consider placing schools on that site instead, and to start over with the Park?

A: The hard work that Lovettsville's citizens, its town government and the county have put into the Lovettsville Park design will not be lost because all the same recreational features – the equestrian trails, the ball fields, the dog park, the community gardens and the outdoor theater – can easily be accommodated on the Schoene tract. Only two features of the current park site are not transferrable – the “water feature” and the farmstead – as these features were incorporated because of existing site conditions and features. They can still be developed on the school site, with an educational purpose. Engineering site studies will need to be conducted on the new park site, but this will not likely delay the park's actual development because the funding for construction is not currently available and is not expected to be available for a few more years.

Q: Why is it a good idea to place these schools in the town?

A: As seen in Purcellville with the presence of Loudoun Valley High School, having a school in the town brings business to local stores and facilitates students' walking access to after-school activities and part-time jobs. The presence of these schools in Lovettsville could very well help to hasten the development of the commercial portion of Lovettsville Town Center. Further, construction of both the park and the two schools would give downtown Lovettsville a critical mass of citizen activity -- including the library and the community center as well as the schools and park – and these could be connected by sidewalks to create a wonderful family-friendly downtown. Town businesses would be more accessible to the schools for community partner/sponsorships, and proximity would result in faster response times to the schools in emergency situations.

Q: Won't this create horrendous school bus traffic on Broad Way and Loudoun Street?

A: The preliminary design we have in mind will route school traffic *around* Lovettsville's downtown by providing site access from just south of Lovettsville Elementary School and from the intersection of Lovettsville and Milltown roads, with traffic circles at both locations. This means that students arriving from the south, east and west will never need to use Broad Way. The proposed southern traffic circle was initially proposed by VDOT in a meeting with County and LCPS officials in March 2006, when a high school was under consideration at the Miller Tract, across Milltown Rd. from the current park site. Even those coming from the north (New Town Meadows, Kings Ridge, Town Center, Dutchman's Creek, etc.) can simply drive down Berlin Pike to the southern access point to avoid Broad Way.

Q: What cost burdens will the Town and County have to bear?

A: The County, of course, bears the cost of land acquisition for schools, financed through issuance of bonds authorized by voters. Funds have already been approved and the bonds sold to raise land acquisition funds for new schools in the Lovettsville area. The Lovettsville Park site was also acquired by the County this way, with a financial contribution from the town as well. The land itself straddles the town/county boundary. The County would need to purchase the Schoene tract for the new park, presumably crediting the Town with the contribution already made, and transfer the current park site to LCPS. When a similar land “flip” between the Lovettsville Park land and a different parcel for a school was proposed in 2007, County Attorney Jack Roberts offered a preliminary opinion that the trade was likely to be viable from a legal standpoint. However, additional research is needed to determine the specific legal steps required, and additional financial studies would determine the specific costs involved.

According to the Loudoun County Tax Assessment database, the assessed fair market value of the 74-acre Shoene tract is ~\$752,000, although reportedly it was purchased over five years ago by the Lennar Corporation – at the peak of the market -- for \$4-5 million, so the current market price would probably fall somewhere between these figures.

The Town will be required to extend water and sewer services to the new school site. Fortunately, the town currently has fully surplus sewage treatment capacity to meet the schools’ needs – in contrast with the out-of-town sites previously proposed, which would require construction of onsite septic systems. It would probably be necessary to drill a new well for the schools’ use. However, once built the water and sewer systems will be a source of significant revenue to the Town, as the County will pay the Town for usage of both systems. The additional financial contribution LCPS facilities would provide to the Town over the lifetime of the schools would arguably significantly help defray long-term maintenance of the Town’s utility infrastructure.

Q: Will property condemnation be necessary?

A: No. To accommodate the small amount of additional land needed for the southern traffic circle, a small portion of land on adjacent properties may need to be acquired, but this could be accomplished through a trade of land or direct purchase. Also, VDOT and the Town and County may also choose to move the access road slightly north of the point shown on our conceptual drawing to ease any property concerns. Northern access to the schools will be directly off the circle at Lovettsville and Milltown roads. Access to the new park site will be from Lovettsville Rd. next to the cemetery, and possibly from the opposite end of the park, passing through property designated by the town for future commercial development.

Q: Are there other in-town or near-town school sites available?

A: LCPS is currently evaluating middle and high school sites outside the Town boundary but within three miles of the town; however, those sites are both on unpaved roads well off Berlin Turnpike to the southwest of town. Huge investments would be required for road improvements, and construction of schools in either of those locations would cause significant change in the current rural residential environment of that area. Unlike the in-town site, these locations would not permit walking access for any children. They would also require onsite utility construction (including stand-alone water and wastewater treatment plants and drainfields) or more expensive extension of Town sewer lines, with heavy impact on the local area. They would also create development pressures on the surrounding rural land.