

# Board of Education PARSIPPANY-TROY HILLS TOWNSHIP

Morris County, New Jersey

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## PRESS RELEASE

January 25, 2021

### Impact Housing Developments will have on our Schools

The Parsippany-Troy Hills Township Board of Education presents this Open Letter to the residents of our community to share concerns about the magnitude and speed in which overall development will be occurring in town. Rest assured, the Board has no argument with Affordable Housing. However, the questionable enrollment projections that have been provided by the developers leave the Board with a very real concern over its ability to continue to appropriately house and educate students.

Increased student enrollment will impact our school community in the following ways:

- **Class sizes** across all grade levels will increase and many classes such as Art, Music, and GRO will need to be relocated to traveling carts which provide students and staff with significantly compromised settings;
- The **district's Capital Fund**, traditionally used for ongoing facility upgrades, maintenance, and repairs, will need to be diverted in order to retrofit non-traditional classrooms to accommodate more students;
- **School attendance zones** will eventually need to be redrawn to relieve overcrowding in affected schools resulting in increased transportation costs and student time on buses. This could potentially displace some students from their current home school and require them to attend another school within the district;
- **A referendum** to fund the cost of construction for additions to existing schools or adding new school buildings would have to be developed.

#### IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

- Tax Increases to Residents
- Need for Referendum
- Increased Class Sizes
- Facility upgrades Postponed
- Re-districting

Close to 2500 dwelling units - 2047 on the West side of town and 451 on the East side of town - are under consideration and will impact schools which are already at capacity. If approved, these projects are likely to be completed within two years. Historically, the trend in Parsippany has been **0.4** students enrolled in school per dwelling unit. Where will we educate the additional 1,000 children moving into these developments and those who we can expect from future developments?

The NJ Department of Education does not allow school districts to build a new school or expand a school building based on an *anticipated* increased student enrollment. Rather, the district must first experience the increased enrollment and demonstrate that this increased enrollment is impacting the educational program prior to the state approving any construction project. Additionally, the NJ Department of Education does not provide direct financial assistance for new or expanded schools except in certain circumstances which are not present in Parsippany. This leaves considerable expense to be borne by the school district and ultimately the taxpayer. Given the timeline for a referendum and subsequent construction, it is likely that students and staff will experience overcrowded conditions for at least 2-3 years before a new building could open.

Without taxpayer approval, school districts generally cannot increase the tax levy in any one year by more than 2%. While some adjustment is permitted for enrollment growth, it will nevertheless be extremely difficult to handle increased enrollment without additional revenue sources. Currently, the district provides education for more than 7300 students and employs more than 765 teachers and more than 600 additional support staff. With increased enrollment, the district will need to employ additional teachers and staff to educate these new students, transport these students, and find adequate instructional space. The school district will need revenue sources to pay for this.

The 1515 Route 10 development was negotiated by the Township, and re-approved on December 15 with the provision of a [PILOT](#) (Payment in Lieu of Taxes), agreement which cripples the school district by diverting tax dollars that would otherwise go to the schools to the Township and, to a lesser extent, the County. This means that the developer pays the Township direct payments instead of traditional property taxes. We appreciate the Township Council's pledge to provide a certain dollar amount per child to the school district, as well as their promise to deny future PILOT offerings. However, the current PILOT agreement(s), along with the other proposed developments which may also be granted PILOTs, have the potential to severely affect the school district's ability to continue the exemplary education our students presently receive.

We do not expect the town leaders to ignore the Affordable Housing mandates. We do expect them to exert stronger control over future development, recognize the serious impact development will have on our students, schools, and taxpayers, and be a proactive partner with the Board of Education in finding workable solutions. The Board strongly encourages the Township to study the approaches taken in other NJ communities to slow the progress of development in their towns and secure funding for new schools and infrastructure.

The Parsippany-Troy Hills Township School District is proud to be a diverse learning community. There is a difference, however, between being a robust, welcoming, and diverse community and permitting unfettered growth which does not account for the impact on our children. The proposed residential developments will have an adverse effect on the current taxpayers, students, staff members, and overall school district. There are many potential solutions that can and should be considered in order to mitigate these adverse effects while accommodating development and associated affordable housing which conforms to the Township's new Master Plan.

The Board of Education welcomes shared and proactive communication with the Township so that we may properly plan for additional enrollment in the schools without negatively impacting current taxpayers, residents and students. The Board encourages residents to stay informed on the status of planned residential developments within the Township and remain engaged in these important and necessary conversations.

**Following is a list of the projects presented to the Township for residential and mixed use development:**

- 1515 Route 10 - 498 residential units (*Source: December 15 Town Council Meeting*)
- Cherry Hill Road (An application is before the Planning Board to construct two five-story apartment buildings with a combined total of 325 dwelling units. *Source: Parsippany Focus, January 5, 2020*)
- Powder Mill Plaza West (An application was heard by the Zoning Board of Adjustment on February 5, 2020 to build a multi-story residential apartment building containing 180 rental units. *Source: Board of Adjustment Agenda for February 5, 2020*)

- 1050 Littleton Road behind St. Christopher's Church (An application is pending before the Zoning Board of Adjustment to build 156 dwelling units with a mix of assisted/memory care and independent living units. While not impactful on school enrollment, this project will have a significant negative impact on infrastructure and traffic.)
- Lanidex Plaza (An application was presented to the Planning Board on March 9 for two (2) 6-story multi-family midrise buildings containing 525 units and an additional 75 townhomes.)
- Westmount Plaza, 808 Route 46 (Owner has proposed 313 units in a mixed-use building to replace the former K-Mart.)
- Weichert, 169 Johnston Road (Approved December 21, 2020 for 69 Units and 18 affordable units.)
- Mack-Cali Campus, 2 and 3 Campus Drive (Owner proposes 410 residential units in two new multi-family apartment buildings.)
- 750 Edwards Road (Owner has proposed 114 residential units.)
- 887 Edwards Road (Owner has proposed 24 units in two multi-family buildings.)
- Watersedge Homes, 16-18 Intervale Road (The Township has already approved an additional 32-unit townhome project.)