

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Emily Bamford

Perkins Eastman

+1.212.353.7395

e.bamford@perkinseastman.com

PERKINS EASTMAN CELEBRATES GROUNDBREAKING OF OCCOQUAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

New school represents the future of sustainable educational facilities in Prince William County, VA



The Perkins Eastman design team joins the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Occoquan Elementary School.

L-R: Huyen Nguyen, Lina Taheri, Jeannine Otieno, Ken Terzian, Ed Waters (PWCS on-site construction representative), Mike Massey (IMEG), Michael “Buddy” Lint (Occoquan Elementary School principal), Sean O’Donnell, and Omar Calderón Santiago.

Photograph Copyright Perkins Eastman

Washington, DC (September 30, 2024) Occoquan Elementary School, a new elementary school in Woodbridge, VA, has officially broken ground, setting the stage to become the first net zero school for the Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS) district. Replacing the oldest school in Prince William County, VA, the new Occoquan Elementary School, designed by Perkins Eastman, is being celebrated as the vanguard of PWCS’s mission to better educate and support the children and families across the county.

Held on Wednesday, September 25, from 9:30 to 11 a.m. ET, the groundbreaking ceremony featured a lively performance by elementary school students, dressed in brightly colored construction vests, hard hats, and shovels and replete with school spirit, singing and dancing to Kool & the Gang’s “Celebration” to mark the happy occasion. Dr. LaTanya D. McDade, superintendent of Prince William County Public Schools, echoed that energy in her remarks at the ceremony: “PWCS is committed to providing safe and welcoming facilities for all students, families, staff, and community, and this new facility is a shining example of that commitment,” she said. “Our goal is not just to build schools; our goal is to replace industrial facilities with

PERKINS — EASTMAN

improved and sustainable schools. We set a goal that by 2025, PWCS would complete our first Net Zero school, and Occoquan Elementary School is it.”

Babur B. Lateef, chairman-at-large of the PWCS School Board, shared his enthusiasm for the project as well. “Together, we gather to break ground on a project that not just represents the future of education, but also a commitment to sustainability and innovation. The new Occoquan Elementary School will be a beacon of progress, embodying our dedication to providing an exceptional learning environment while respecting and preserving our planet,” he remarked in his speech. “This school will be a place where innovation thrives, where students are inspired to think critically and creatively, and where they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to become the leaders of tomorrow. By harnessing the power of the sun and the earth, we are setting a precedent for future generations, teaching them the importance of sustainability and the impact of their choices on the world around them.”

The ceremony also featured spirited remarks by Earnie Porta, mayor of Occoquan, VA, Richard Jessie, member of the Occoquan District School Board, Lillie Jessie, former representative of the Occoquan District School Board, Deshundra Jefferson, chair of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors, Kenny Boddye, representative of the Occoquan District on the Prince William Board of County Supervisors, Michael “Buddy” Lint, principal of Occoquan Elementary School, and Kimberly Werle, associate superintendent for Eastern Elementary Schools at PWCS.

The new 120,000 sf Occoquan Elementary School building will feature three levels and include educational and support spaces for 850 students from kindergarten through fifth grade. The school will feature six classrooms per grade, along with shared resource rooms and extended learning spaces, two special education classrooms, science and music classrooms, a gymnasium, cafetorium, and a library/media center space, as well as all administrative and support spaces for teachers and staff.

Perkins Eastman designed the new building with the school’s rich inclusive culture, and its motto of “four tribes, one village,” kept deeply in mind. Paying homage to the four tribes—Altruista, Lealtad, Mpango, and Seigo-Sei—the team took great care in honoring the school’s history, traditions, and community-centered ethos, while also embracing its proximity to the Occoquan River. Occoquan Elementary School is situated within a natural setting—a school within a park—where the initial impression of the property is akin to a park. Dubbed “The O” by the school community, the design aspires to establish an educational village that mimics the layers of a forest, showcasing a state-of-the-art, energy-efficient environment that is infused with nature and actively promotes learning opportunities. With sustainability incorporated right from the start of the design process, the new school will feature solar orientation for daylighting, 96 geothermal wells, and construction that utilizes sustainable design principles for high-performance buildings. The school is pursuing Net Zero Energy, as well as LEED Silver certification.

“We are honored to work with Prince William County Public Schools, the students, teachers, and administrators of the Occoquan Elementary School, and its community to realize their vision for a new Net Zero Energy school that will become a model for conservation and resilience and create a healthy, high-performance learning environment that will enhance educational outcomes,” says Perkins Eastman Principal Sean O’Donnell, FAIA, LEED AP, leader of the firm’s K–12 practice. “With these powerful goals, the renewed campus is designed to inspire joy and wonder among the students. Playing off the school’s ‘four tribes, one village’ ethos, the design visually and metaphorically reengages with the school—inside and out—back into

PERKINS — EASTMAN

the Occoquan River ecosystem, providing each child with new, active, and experiential opportunities to help create an even more sustainable future for their historic waterfront community.”

The new Occoquan Elementary School is scheduled to open in Fall 2026.

ABOUT PERKINS EASTMAN

Perkins Eastman is a global design firm founded on the belief that design can have a direct and positive impact on people’s lives. The firm’s award-winning practice draws on its 1,000 professionals networked across 23 studios worldwide. By keeping the user’s needs foremost in the design process, the firm enhances the human experience across the spectrum of the built environment. For more information, visit www.perkinseastman.com.

Renderings available.

###