

**STATEMENT BEFORE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND  
Budget Hearings  
November 10, 2004  
Statement for the Record  
(Accompanied by Short Summary for Oral Presentation)**

**Ambassador Sandy Vogelgesang  
West Bradley Citizens' Association (WBCA)  
Board Member  
9009 Charred Oak Drive  
Bethesda, MD 20817  
301-365-2347**

**Subject: Seven Locks Elementary School - Replacement School on Kendale Road –  
Funding in the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2006 Capital Budget and  
Amended FY 2005-2010 Capital Improvements Program (CIP)**

My name is Ambassador Sandy Vogelgesang. I am speaking in behalf of the West Bradley Citizens' Association. We, together with other civic organizations, represent a coalition of over 5000 families who want to save Seven Locks Elementary School and keep school land for school children. My statement for the record addresses two points:

1. Our **longstanding opposition** to the County Board's decision in early 2004 to close Seven Locks Elementary School and propose surplusizing that site for affordable or workforce housing and to build a replacement school with 740-student capacity on Kendale Road.
2. Our **alternate proposal** for the funds allocated for the Seven Locks replacement school in the Superintendent's recommended FY 2006 Capital Budget and Amended FY 2005-2010 CIP.

On the first point of opposition to the Board decision, the community has been clear since the Superintendent announced the change in plans for Seven Locks in late February 2004: we are against that change! Although the Superintendent and County Board say that they are acting in response to a request from the community, they have not been able to identify any individual authorized to speak for the community who supports that position. The fact is that the community has early on and consistently expressed its opposition in testimony at County Board and County Council hearings, community meetings, petitions, letters to the press, and meetings with County Board and County Council members, as well as other County and State officials, and by other means. We filed a legal appeal with the State Board of Education over the substance and process of the decision. When rejected, we followed up with a motion for reconsideration of the

appeal (also rejected) and discussion of this matter with the Maryland Interagency Committee on Public School Construction.

We have requested, so far in vain, a voice for our community in a decision that will change, fundamentally, the character of our neighborhood. The Board's plan will mean that we lose a facility that is not only an outstanding school. It is also our community center. Its green space constitutes the only recreation area within walking distance for most of our children. Instead, we will get increased development on the Seven Locks site – with the potential for a high-density affordable housing complex that will add to already growing traffic gridlock.

We have asked for basic information so that, as taxpayers, we can understand the rationale for this change in plans – again, so far in vain. For example, we have asked for data on student demographics and full construction costs. We wonder how it makes sense to surplus any school property in our area, given the likelihood of increasing student enrollment due to new development and generational turnover in the community. We want transparent data on the full cost of the proposed school on Kendale (not just the construction cost but the cost of widening and straightening narrow Kendale Road and the cost of environmental remediation for building near a flood area). Were the School Board and County Council provided these full costs when they were told that the Kendale replacement school would be \$2-3 million cheaper than expanding and modernizing Seven Locks? Do the projected costs take into account the money already spent to update Seven Locks, with such expenditures as installing a new roof and other improvements or completing architectural plans and feasibility studies with the community?

Why can't we as taxpayers get answers to those questions? We continue to believe that, until there are public hearings to address these kinds of questions, no more money should be allocated for the so-called Seven Locks replacement school. In any event, as reflected in a vote of the Seven Locks PTA this month, we firmly and overwhelmingly oppose surplusing of school property, including Seven Locks.

Having underscored why we oppose the County Board's reversal of plans for Seven Locks this year, let me outline one solution that would redound to the benefit of all concerned. (There might well be variants that could be explored.) We propose that you reallocate the amount earmarked for Kendale in this year's budget document as follows:

- Use part of that amount to build the planned 10-classroom addition, gymnasium, and bathrooms for the existing Seven Locks E.S. That long-planned expansion would bring Seven Locks up to the prescribed 500-550 student capacity recommended by the Board for elementary schools and address the needs of overcrowded Potomac Elementary School. In the interest of saving time and money, we might forego, for now, the planned modernization of the existing Seven Locks facility and thus not need to move children to a holding school during construction of the addition.

- Use the rest of the earmarked money for adding 3-4 classrooms and an expanded cafeteria for Potomac Elementary, thus assuring a 500-550 student school for that community. There, too, we would suggest, for now, holding on modernization of the existing facility.
- Retain the Kendale site for possible future school construction.

According to information available to the community, the money allocated for construction of the Kendale facility should more than cover building additions to Seven Locks and Potomac Elementary Schools. There might well be funds remaining to modernize the existing facilities at both schools – particularly if the County were to allocate the full amount of money that we believe will be needed to build the Kendale school, widen and straighten Kendale Road, and address site and environmental challenges.

This proposal has the following advantages:

- It uses the funding already allocated by the County Board for our community and does not take funding from other County projects.
- It could facilitate faster relief for overcrowding at Potomac since architectural plans and feasibility studies have long since been done for the Seven Locks expansion.
- It appears to be cheaper and less complicated with no need to move students during construction of the additions.
- It has the strong support of the most affected nearby community because it preserves school property for schools (not developers), saves taxpayer money, and provides the best education for our children.

In sum, we ask that you meet with community representatives to discuss this proposal or amend the CIP by reallocating the funds from the Kendale site and proceeding with highest-priority additions for Seven Locks and Potomac Elementary Schools. This could be a win-win for both the County Board and Council – and our community!

(Seven Locks – Statement for Record)