

Montgomery County Council Public Hearing – March 7, 2006

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**AGAINST School Board request for special appropriation for Seven Locks Replacement School on Kendale Road, and
FOR CIP amendment proposed by Councilmember Denis to build new school on current Seven Locks site, and
FOR strong County Council follow-up on the findings and recommendations in the Inspector General’s “Seven Locks School Projects” report.**

Having been involved in the Seven Locks issue for two years and having talked to hundreds of key people, I present five conclusions:

- 1) **Mistakes have been made by MCPS and Board of Education in planning for and defending the Kendale site, and citizens have raised serious legitimate concerns that are being addressed by the Council.**
 - a. OIG presented four findings showing problems. (*February 2006*).
 - b. Majority of County Planning Board have expressed serious reservations about suitability of the Kendale site. (*January 2006*)
 - c. Board of Education stated they had not followed documented procedures for awarding Kendale architecture design contract. (*Sharon Cox March 2, 2006 response to County Council question*)
 - d. MCPS staff stated, “We don’t withhold information, we just don’t necessarily provide it.” (*Washington Post, March 7, 2006*)

- 2) **Newly available cost numbers favor construction of new building at Seven Locks rather than at Kendale.**
 - a. Building on the Seven Locks site appears to be about \$100,000 less expensive than building on Kendale. It is not, as MCPS claimed, \$2-3 million more expensive.
 - b. With comparable costs, state and county precedent favors staying at current Seven Locks site.
 - c. Also, now Superintendent Weast has written he would never surplus the Seven Locks Road property, so previously proposed plans for that property are no longer relevant.

- 3) **Some people have concerns about safety at Seven Locks, which can be addressed. However, Kendale has more serious safety problems, which MCPS has mostly ignored.**

- 4) **Based on Councilmember Denis's proposal, a new Seven Locks elementary school can be completed in fall of 2008 to address Potomac capacity issues.**
 - a. Plan would use available holding school and honor the commitment to the modernization schedule. *(Spring 2006 to spring 2007 would be for architecture award, design, additional site work, and permitting; students would be moved to near-by Radnor or another holding school for 2007-2008 school year while demolition/construction occurs; new Seven Locks school would open in August 2008.)*
 - b. The County Council now has an opportunity to address citizens concerns and to support the option of building on current Seven Locks site favored by the Seven Locks and Potomac PTAs and the vast majority of the community.

- 5) **Accountability and transparency are important throughout the County.**
 - a. A direct open-to-the-public comparison of costs, safety and other issues has never been made *(until this County Council hearing)* for Kendale vs. Seven Locks — the March 2004 MCPS decision was unilateral, based on limited information, and never open to real discussion.
 - b. We wonder about accountability in the Board of Education, because responses to OIG by appointed staff and individual Board members seem to have been made without having a formal Board meeting on the IG audit, so it is unclear who is setting policy.
 - c. Experience with Seven Locks has shown the need for broad improvement in transparency and procedures by MCPS and the Board of Education. As recommended by the Inspector General, stronger measures are needed.
 - d. Especially in this post-Clarksburg era, a strong active County OIG is a vital institution for restoring public confidence in local government.
 - e. Given the size of the school budget, we look forward to the Council's leadership in assuring improved accountability and transparency throughout the County Board of Education and MCPS.

Thank you to those on the Council who believe in and act to assure accountability and transparency in County decision-making.