

**Testimony to Montgomery County Board of Education
Regarding Current CIP and Facilities Planning**

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In evaluating the CIP (FY 2006 Capital Budget and amended FY 2005-2010 Capital Improvement Program, October 2004), there are two key points to be made:

1) The MCPS planning that resulted in this CIP is flawed. There has been lack of transparency in how the Board of Education makes decisions and does demographic analysis, and statements by public officials have been wrong.

Let us use the plans to close and surplus Seven Locks Elementary School as an example. In 2001 and 2002 the MCPS and the Board of Education recommended the expansion and modernization of Seven Locks. **In 2003 the MCPS and Board again recommended the expansion and modernization of Seven Locks** and explicitly recommended it in the November 2003 CIP. Then in early 2004 **the Board of Education repudiated the planning done by the MCPS and the previous Boards of Education**, and recommended Seven Locks not be expanded but instead be discarded (*a complete turnabout*).

Since there has been no substantive change in the MCPS land, schools, or students in Churchill cluster in the last year, that suggests two alternatives:

- 1) **The plans of the MCPS and the CIP are not to be trusted.** If this is the case no taxpayer funds should be further spent on the CIP until community representatives review all of the CIP (and background data not shared with the community) in detail and see where else errors may have been made.
- 2) **Rapid change in CIP is due to political pressure from the County Executive (Doug Duncan) and others to use school property for real estate developers and not for students.** If this is the case, and this “deal” resulted in a rapid change in the CIP, we think each of you as the members of Board of Education are abrogating your responsibilities to students and parents of future students.

We (leaders in civic associations and PTAs representing well over 5,000 homes) have asked questions about the planning process, but have been given information that has been wrong or misleading. When we finally had a meeting with the MCPS representatives on July 6, 2004 to answer our questions, they followed up by having the MCPS Director of Planning, Mr. Joe Lavorgna, write to us that they would **not** answer the questions of the community representatives or the PTA. After waiting a few months for answers, we have concluded the MCPS has been **consciously hiding relevant information** from the public (including parents and taxpayers), and possibly the Board of Education as well.

As recently as Monday night (at the Joint Montgomery County House/Senate Delegation Annual Public Hearing on November 8, 2004), the Chairman of the Montgomery County Board of Education said the impetus to close Seven Locks Elementary School was the recommendation to build on the Kendale site that came from the community. As President of Deerfield Weathered Oak Citizens Association I had checked the facts on this. I talked with Presidents of all the local citizens associations near Seven Locks and Kendale, the PTA Presidents of Seven Locks and Kendale, PTA leaders in Churchill Cluster, the Montgomery County Civic Federation, and hundreds of other citizens, and no one has said they or anyone they know in the community recommended building a replacement school on Kendale, especially in the time frame in late 2003/early 2004 to which Ms. Cox is referring. When I met with Ms. Cox this summer she indicated a PTA person who had recommended the site, but when I checked with this PTA person she said she had not recommended building on the Kendale site, just that it could be considered. Therefore the facts suggest that Ms. Cox's statement on Monday night was wrong.

There have only been two independent non-County Government groups (the community and the state) that have reviewed this change in the CIP, and **both are against** the MCPS recommendations. So far the community groups representing over 5,000 home have been against this complete reversal at Seven Locks Elementary. At least one Board of Education Member was surprised that a community was against a new school because usually when planning is done properly communities wholeheartedly support schools. That was an insightful comment and reflects the errors caused by the political deals struck in early 2004 that have resulted in this controversial project. It may be the **MCPS staff has not provided comprehensive or accurate information to the members of the Board of Education, and decisions they have made in 2004 have been based on specious or incomplete cost and other data.**

The other independent group is the **State of Maryland**. When the MCPS presented their feasibility study for getting rid of Seven Locks Elementary and building a replacement school (which we assume they had been working on for over six months), the state did an on-site review of the Seven Locks Elementary School and **concluded the MCPS staff was wrong**. Based on my conversations with the Executive Director, Public School Construction, State of Maryland, the state concluded that Seven Locks is a suitable school and should not be replaced. Seven Locks Elementary was in good condition with large classrooms and adequate hallways. The state usually routinely approves reasonable requests so this action is unusual. Thus state funds would be decreased and Montgomery County taxpayers will have to pay for the poor planning by the Board of Education (and the MCPS that you control). When MCPS was told of the state conclusion, they said they would go back and **change the numbers**. Therefore I can only assume the numbers the MCPS staff gave the Board of Education earlier in 2004 were wrong or the numbers and assumptions are being changed (manipulated?) to justify a political deal.

In the CIP it states the Kendale project would **only** go forward if the state provides funding at levels projected by the County Council for the FY2005-2010. (p. 4-14; "*State of Maryland must provide state funding at levels projected by the County Council for the FY2005-2010.*") Again two scenarios: 1) The County Council knew their plans were flawed and bad for students and expected the state not to give them funding for Kendale—a disregard for good planning and Montgomery County taxpayers that we hope is not true, or 2) if the

state does not provide funding in 2005, MCPS will **not** go ahead with their 2004 plan for Kendale and instead work with community to reconsider their 2001-2003 plans. I understand from the State that Kendale is a C Project and there are 18 Montgomery County B Projects in line ahead of the Kendale project for funding.

The Mission (<http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/boe/about/mission.shtm>) of the Montgomery County Board of Education is “to provide leadership and oversight for a high quality educational system with community-supported goals, policies, and resources committed to benefit our growing and diverse student population.” We in the community (which includes civic associations, PTAs and taxpayers) want to jointly work with the Board of Education to support the County’s growing student population.

If the Board of Education were willing to be open to community input, there may be a better solution. For instance why not take the money allocated for Kendale, and go ahead with the expansion & gymnasium at Seven Locks that the Board of Education had recommended in 2000-2003, and use the extra money to expand Potomac Elementary where there is overcrowding? If budgets were tight then the modernization of Seven Locks at this time could be considered.

2) We are against Board of Education plans to surplus any school property.

We do not support recent efforts of the MCPS and the Board of Education to get rid of current schools and fields (e.g. Tilden Middle School land at Edson Lane), and other school property being held for future school use throughout the county. If the Board of Education succumbs to political pressure to give up school land, regardless of educational merit, then every Montgomery County parent will have to worry that their fields and schools will be at risk. There are approximately 17,000 students in trailers, the majority of which are in trailers due to poor MCPS planning when they got rid of prior schools when they thought they would not be needed in the future. We understand from the County Council that the Board of Education would not get any money or Memorandum of Understanding incentives from giving away school land to the County Council, and we are surprised the Superintendent of **Schools** (Jerry Weast) seems so **eager to get rid of schools**, school playing fields, and school property to support a political deal with the County Executive.

I am sorry to be a bit harsh, but our multiple letters and meetings have not yet gotten you to have meaningful public involvement. Therefore with the community (local community groups representing over 5,000 homes, as well as a growing number of civic federations, PTAs, and the Montgomery County Civic Federation against surplusings) saying your recent plans are wrong, and the State of Maryland saying you are wrong, we need to boldly speak out. We do not agree with this CIP and the recent planning that takes current quality schools, school fields, and public land held for future students and uses them for political purposes. **We do not think this Board of Education wants to be known as a group who put students and school property last, and political deals and real estate developers first.**