

## MCPS clings to new school plan

### Seven Locks Elementary parents still favor renovation of current site with cost estimates nearly the same

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by Peggy Vaughn  
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School officials crunched the numbers again last week comparing the costs of building a new Seven Locks Elementary School versus renovating the existing school.

School officials have always said building a new 68,000-square-foot school would cost less than a two-phased renovation and expansion of the old school on Seven Locks Road.

The updated bottom line confirms that, with the replacement school, to be located on Kendale Road, coming in at a little more than \$18 million, or about \$1.3 million less than what it would cost to renovate the existing school, said Richard Hawes, facilities manager for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS).

“We compared apples to apples,” Hawes said, estimating what it would cost to have same-sized facilities with a core capacity of 740 students at each site.

But even as MCPS deems the Kendale Road site most cost-effective, the number crunching is far from over.

Montgomery County Inspector General Tom Dagley is also doing an analysis of the figures and plans to release a report by the middle of the month.

“We’re looking at all construction-related information for the Seven Locks project,” he said.

Also by the end of this week, MCPS will release yet another cost comparison it completed at the behest of County Councilman Howard A. Denis (R-Dist. 1) of Chevy Chase.

Only this time, the figures will cover two new options not yet considered: building a brand-new school on Seven Locks Road or renovating and expanding the existing school all at once rather than in two phases.

One of the smallest elementary schools in the county, Seven Locks has a student capacity of 294.

“[Denis] believes there are cost savings possible that deserve to be looked at,” said Jennifer Hughes, an aide in his office.

Community groups long opposed to the plan to close the smaller, older school in favor of building a new one on Kendale Road say the comparison is long overdue.

“This is what we’ve been saying all along, let’s look at all the options available to us at the [existing] site,” said Sandy Vogelgesang of the Seven Locks Coalition, comprising six neighborhood associations. “We have no doubt at all that tearing down the [existing] school and rebuilding it is the most cost-effective way to go. But we’ve never been able to get that [openly] discussed by school officials.”

The Montgomery County Board of Education awarded a construction contract for the Kendale Road site on Jan. 10, but it is contingent on the County Council

approving a \$3.3 million special appropriation request, Hawes said.

That request will be discussed at a council public hearing on March 7 before being voted on by the council at a yet to be determined date.

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