

9009 Charred Oak Drive, Bethesda MD 20817
November 12, 2005

Chairman and Members, County Council Education Committee
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

**SUBJECT: Superintendent's FY 2007 Capital Budget and FY 2007-2012 CIP:
Recommendations for Additional Funding for Seven Locks "Replacement" School
on Kendale Road and Boundary Study**

Dear Chairman Subin and Council Members Denis and Knapp:

The **purpose of this letter** is:

- (1) To underscore the continuing strong opposition of the Seven Locks community and PTA to the School Board/MCPS plan to close Seven Locks Elementary School and build a 740-student core "replacement" school on Kendale Road.
- (2) To reflect concern about the incomplete, misleading cost data provided by MCPS and insufficient County Council budgetary oversight regarding the Seven Locks "replacement" school on Kendale Road.
- (3) To commend the recent statements by the School Superintendent and School Board President against surplusing Seven Locks Elementary. [These statements reflect a significant change from March 22, 2004 when Dr. Weast said that Seven Locks is "no longer needed for school purposes" and the Board approved a resolution authorizing possible sale of the school. Our community looks forward to working with the Board to ensure educational use of Seven Locks Elementary and preservation of the surrounding recreation area.]
- (4) To request specific changes in the Superintendent's proposed FY 2007 Capital Budget and CIP.

We have **attached representative testimony** for your reference as you prepare to send recommendations to the State of Maryland in early December and to the County Executive for signoff in January 2006. Our **key points**:

- **Waste of taxpayer money and lack of transparency.** MCPS has yet to provide the County Council or the public with detailed cost comparisons for the Kendale project and the most efficient addition/modernization of the existing Seven Locks School (or of building an alternative new elementary school on the large flat MCPS Brickyard Road). There is still no indication in the new MCPS FY 2007 Capital Budget of the full cost of the proposed Kendale project (school and gym). According to community estimates, the complete cost of the Kendale school (construction, road widening, environmental remediation) is likely to exceed \$20

million-- versus the \$12,051,000 figure presented by MCPS in March 2005. Simply keeping the current Seven Locks ES as is or adding on to that school would save money because an addition would cost less than \$10 million. Either option would free up funds for adding classrooms elsewhere in the County.

- **Insufficient County government oversight on the school budget in general and the Kendale project in particular.** As with the Clarksburg situation, elected officials have failed to address fully the key issues raised by the community and PTA including costs, the inadequacy of the flood-prone Kendale site (requiring \$1.5 million storm water management system and cutting down over seven acres of trees), traffic safety on Kendale Road (may be riskier than on Seven Locks Road), and other real estate development issues.
- **Bad County policy and flawed planning.** Why advocate closing current Seven Locks Elementary, an award-winning school deemed fine by the State of Maryland and MCPS, when over 17,000 County students are in portables? Why waste money on a new school that the community and PTA overwhelmingly oppose when the Superintendent seeks a 26 percent spending increase? Most of this money will be used to build new schools, including Kendale, which may require the added cost of borrowing money.
- **Lack of due process.** The Superintendent's flip-flop on Seven Locks in March 2004 shocked the community with a fait accompli. Since then, there has been no genuine discussion of options and no full response to our questions. The School Board has violated its own FAA procedures by, for example, awarding a sole source contract to the architect for the Kendale project.

Based on such concerns, **we request the following action:**

- (1) Put hold on awarding construction contracts for Kendale project (scheduled for mid-December) and on accepting the Superintendent's FY 2007 recommendations for the Kendale capital projects -- until MCPS provides you and the Seven Locks community with full, updated cost data on the Kendale project and the most efficient addition and addition/modernization options for the existing Seven Locks School.
- (2) Amend reference to the proposed Seven Locks boundary study so as to include, not just Seven Locks and Potomac school districts noted in the CIP, but the full Seven Locks Road corridor and Potomac and Wayside areas within the Churchill Cluster. Why not, for example, include the school adjacent to Seven Locks ES (Bells Mill)? Bells Mill has students in eight portables and will continue to need portables even after its scheduled modernization. The proposed CIP language seems to presume a boundary study outcome that would preclude continuing use of the current Seven Locks facility as an elementary school.

- (3) Formally endorse the latest statements by the Superintendent and School Board President opposing the surplus of the current Seven Locks Elementary School and encourage the School Board and MCPS to work with the community to identify a specific educational use of Seven Locks Elementary School before final approval of the FY 2007 Capital Budget in late Spring 2006.

We seek your action on the above, before you proceed to full Council approval of the FY 2007 Capital Budget and new CIP and before you dispatch these documents to the State of Maryland Interagency Committee for Public School Construction and the County Executive. In the interim, we would be pleased to discuss options with you and would, as always, welcome your advice.

Sincerely,

Sandy Vogelgesang
West Bradley Citizens'
Association

Cyril W. Draffin Jr.
Deerfield/Weathered Oak Citizens'
Association

Attachments: Testimony from Seven Locks Coalition and PTA
(Seven Locks – Letter to Ed.Com. Rev. Nov. 12, 2005)