

## Montgomery County Council Public Hearing: March 7, 2006

### Subject: Seven Locks Elementary School Budget Requests and Inspector General's Report

#### Statement for the Record:

#### **AGAINST School Board Request for Special Appropriation for Seven Locks Replacement School on Kendale Road"**

#### **FOR CIP amendment proposed by Council Member Denis to build new school on current Seven Locks site**

#### **FOR strong County Council follow-up on the findings and recommendations in the Inspector General's "Seven Locks School Projects" Report**

Good Evening, Mr. President and Members of the County Council. I am Sandy Vogelgesang, speaking for the West Bradley Citizens' Association that represents the neighborhood south of Seven Locks Elementary School. Thank you so much for the time you have spent on the Seven Locks issue, over the last two years and the hearings this month.

Since you know the history of the Seven Locks issue and there's plenty of material in your briefing books, I will focus on where we are now and how we can move forward together.

The good news is that you all have a new situation, with new facts on the table. You have the opportunity to revisit past decisions. The main new reasons for reconsidering the Seven Locks project are:

- **Cost:** New information shows that building a new school on the current Seven Locks site could be less expensive than building a school on the Kendale site. *(For data, see item #3 in Seven Locks briefing book.)*
- **Timing:** Enough time has passed to make nearby holding schools available and to allow one-step construction at Seven Locks without violating the MCPS building schedule. Regarding the latter, it is not clear how building a "replacement" school on one site versus another has a different impact on the modernization queue especially if holding schools are available. *(Note : Two holding schools close to Seven Locks appear to be available for the period during which demolition/construction would occur on the Seven Locks site so that the new school could open, August 2008.)*
- **Challenges to MCPS plan:** The County Inspector General has documented erroneous and unreliable data, especially on cost, provided to the Council. A majority of the Planning Board has registered "serious reservations" about the Kendale site.

- **Traffic safety:** There are even greater safety issues on narrow Kendale Road than on Seven Locks. (*See Items #1, #2, and #6 in Seven Locks briefing book and note later presentations.*).
- **Change in justification for Kendale project.** MCPS and the School Board had planned to sell the Seven Locks site, but they now oppose surplusng that site. They cited overcrowding at Potomac Elementary as one reason for a new school but Potomac enrollment has dropped from 648 students in 2000 to 527 now.

For these and other reasons, we ask you to capitalize on the new situation and approve the budget amendment to build on the current Seven Locks site – as the Council itself originally directed in 2001. Mr. Denis’ amendment reflects a thoughtful compromise that addresses the highest priorities for the most concerned communities:

- It provides overdue relief for Potomac Elementary by August 2008.
- It pleases the Kendale neighborhood that opposes a huge school on an unsuitable site.
- It reassures the Seven Locks community that considers Seven Locks school the heart of their neighborhood -- their main meeting place and only recreation space within walking distance.

Finally, I have spent my life as an American diplomat promoting good governance abroad. I thus commend your determination to defend the independence of the Inspector General and to take action on his report. Doing so -- whether for Seven Locks or Clarksburg -- will help restore citizens’ confidence in the accountability of Montgomery County government. Thank you!

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