

Status of Graduation Venue Options for Montgomery County High Schools

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Graduation Venue Options for 2007-2008

- Schools with a graduating class of over 500 may elect to use the Comcast Center at the University of Maryland instead of being scheduled at DAR Constitution Hall. The Comcast Center is a larger facility seating approximately 14,000.
- Schools within five percent of the 500 student threshold (475 and up) may appeal to the Office of School Performance to graduate at the Comcast Center. If there are times available for commencement ceremonies other than those for schools with projected graduating classes larger than 500 students, these schools would be considered. The budget initiative for this year allows for four graduation ceremonies at the Comcast Center.
- Schools under 500 graduating students or schools over 500 graduating students not electing to use the Comcast Center will be assigned to DAR Constitution Hall. As in the past, there are a few exceptions such as Poolesville and Rockville may continue to use Strathmore and Damascus may continue to use their football field.
- A school may choose to use a different venue than DAR, but it must get approval from MCPS leadership and the principal of the school is expected to use their established means of ensuring the support of the school community. Approval is typically granted as long as the choice of venue would not present a legal issue for the system.
- The commencement venues of choice are as follows:
 - Strathmore Music Center – Seats 1,800 – Estimated 2008 cost: \$7,100
 - DAR Constitution Hall – Seats 3,700 – Estimated 2008 cost: \$5,700
 - ShowPlace Arena – Seats 4,500 – Estimated 2008 cost: \$8,000
 - Comcast Center – Seats 14,000 – Estimated 2008 cost: \$34,000
- The cost of using an alternative location other than DAR Constitution Hall would be covered by the budget initiative if the venue is one of the current commencement venues of choice. The exception would be that any school with a graduating class of under 500 wishing to use the Comcast Center will be expected to assume the additional cost over the cost of a standard graduation venue.
- For 2008, the high schools with over 500 graduating students are Montgomery Blair (650), Wootton (577), Sherwood (522) and Magruder (511). Schools within five percent of 500 students are Churchill (488) and Gaithersburg (492). Montgomery Blair, Sherwood and Magruder are scheduled to use the Comcast Center in 2008.

Reduction of Cost for the Comcast Center

As part of the cost for the Comcast Center, there is a \$10,000 rental fee paid to the Athletic Department at the University of Maryland. Efforts were made by Dr. Weast and MCPS earlier this year to have this fee waived for public schools using the Comcast Center. Those efforts included Senator Patrick J. Hogan acting on behalf of MCPS at the request of Dr. Weast to negotiate with the University. However, in mid July, it was announced that Senator Hogan had accepted a position as the chief lobbyist for the Maryland's university system. To date, no agreement or concessions have been made to waive the rental fee and it appears that no further efforts are being pursued. Renewed efforts could possibly include involvement of other county and state officials, contacting the Maryland Higher Education Commission and engaging PG County Public Schools and representatives to increase pressure to waive this rental fee.

Status of a New Arena in Montgomery County

The Economic Feasibility of a Montgomery County, MD Arena Preliminary Study was publicly released in June 2007. The report was done by CABER, Towson University and Sage Policy Group, Inc. on behalf of the Maryland Stadium Authority in conjunction with Montgomery County's Department of Economic Development (DED) and the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development. The purpose of the study was to determine if Montgomery County could support an arena. The arena would accommodate approximately 6,500 to 8,500 fixed seats with total capacity of 8,000-10,000. The study team determined that the size of the facility is not remotely as important as is the facility's adaptability to various users. The study states that "The vast majority of these events will require fewer than 7,000 seats. Moreover, we anticipate that most if not all high school graduations in the county could easily be accommodated by the proposed facility." The conclusion of the report is that the proposed Montgomery County arena would fill a major deficit in our community and "would not only be financially feasible and support significant economic activity, but would quickly establish itself as a treasured community amenity." Currently, the DED and the Stadium Authority have contracted with HOK Sports to complete a second phase of the study. This phase will be more detailed and include a site analysis, economic analysis and preliminary market analysis. The site being study is the Montgomery College Germantown Campus although this does not preclude another site. The study will look at different sizes of mid-range arenas to determine what would be the best fit for Montgomery County. A programming and tenant plan will be developed to determine who will be the main users of the arena and a conceptual design which will enable a rough estimate for construction costs. In addition, the DED on September 10, 2007 released a Request Expression of Interest in order to find a private partner for this project. Although it appears likely that a new venue will be built, it may be a few years to several years before the project would actually be completed.