

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster
Bethesda-Chevy Chase HS * Westland MS * Bethesda ES
Chevy Chase ES * North Chevy Chase ES * Rock Creek Forest ES
Rosemary Hills PS * Somerset ES * Westbrook ES

Testimony Before the Montgomery County Council
FY2008 Capital Budget and Amendments to the
FY2007-2012 Capital Improvements Program

May 1, 2007

Good evening, President Praisner, Vice-President Knapp, and members of the Montgomery County Council. I am Terri Salus, co-coordinator, with Deborah Missal and Jack Hayes, of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase (B-CC) cluster. We thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) capital improvements program (CIP).

We appreciate that you must balance many worthy interests competing for limited county funds and, as in past years, we will continue to marshal resources and work with you and state officials to get full funding of our MCPS budgets. The B-CC cluster is extremely grateful for the recently-completed modernization of Somerset Elementary School. We also look forward to the upcoming construction of much-needed classrooms in our overcrowded Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School (four or five classrooms "roughed in" in the lower level of "D" building; planning funds have been approved to complete the architectural design for the build out with completion of the additional classrooms targeted for August 2009) and Westland Middle School (construction funds have been approved to complete the six-classroom addition in August 2008).

Since these projects are in the works, I would like to focus on our other outstanding priorities that need to be addressed sooner than later: the modernization of Rock Creek Forest Elementary School and the construction of gymnasiums at two of our elementary schools, North Chevy Chase and Westbrook.

Rock Creek Forest Elementary School: requests facility planning funds to maintain the previously scheduled 2010 modernization and/or additional PLAR funds to maintain the facility given the delay in the modernization schedule

Built in 1950, Rock Creek Forest Elementary School was renovated in 1971 and a gymnasium was constructed in the early 1980s. While there have been some improvements to the core facility, the thirty to fifty-seven year-old systems are now in desperate need of maintenance or replacement. The school has made the "top 20" list and is in immediate need of restroom renovation. This is currently scheduled for summer 2007 and we urge you to maintain that schedule. However, with more than three decades since it was last modernized, Rock Creek Forest must undergo another major renovation, planned life-cycle asset replacement (PLAR), as recommended in previous and current CIP reports. The school struggles with a leaking roof that has destroyed health records and left classrooms damp and vulnerable to mold and mildew.

The trash facility is connected to the front of the school, allowing for rodents to enter and live in the building. Recently, parents and neighbors contributed over \$35,000 to purchase and install additional playground equipment, the use of which is severely limited due to glass imbedded in the fill dirt surrounding the school. Moreover, Rock Creek Forest now far exceeds its enrollment capacity, so students attend classes in five portable classrooms and special education students are currently taught in what was once a utility closet (with an exposed circuit box). Due in part to the popular Spanish Immersion Program, the deficit capacity is projected to hit triple digits by the end of the decade, years before the school will be modernized, now scheduled for January 2015, five years later than in previous CIP plans. We urge the council to rectify this situation as quickly as possible for the welfare of our students.

Westbrook and North Chevy Chase Elementary Schools: requests construction of gyms

We still have two elementary schools, North Chevy Chase and Westbrook, without gymnasiums (programmed for completion August 2010). Both of these schools are over-enrolled and are in great need of gyms. The need is particularly compelling at North Chevy Chase Elementary School, which houses sixth-graders, a factor that was not considered when the implementation schedule was developed. North Chevy Chase is the only school in the county with sixth-graders that lacks a gym—and therefore, we believe the school should be moved to the top of the list. Sixth-graders at North Chevy Chase lack facilities that would enable them to participate in the physical education program engaged in by other sixth-graders countywide. This inequity disadvantages the North Chevy Chase students when they join other middle schoolers at Westland in seventh grade and compete for team sports. With regard to Westbrook, the continuous trend of increased student enrollment has rendered that school, including the cafeteria/"gym", overcrowded.

We agree with the Superintendent and the Board of Education that gymnasiums are essential for the physical education program and well-being of students and that these facilities should be included in all elementary schools, including North Chevy Chase and Westbrook. Gyms permit a variety of learning experiences that cannot be accommodated in classrooms and the already overused cafeterias, which are smaller than gyms. In schools without gyms, the all-purpose room is the only place for everything and on inclement weather days, indoor recess wrecks havoc on the building, the children, the teachers and staff, food services, and the teaching day. As our PTAs noted, the students work up a sweat during physical education and indoor recess, attend schoolwide assemblies, and eat in the same room—seems very unappetizing to me.

Thank you for affording us this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase cluster. We appreciate your attention to the concerns we have raised this evening and we look forward to working with you to implement these projects to meet the educational needs of our children.

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