

Watkins Mill Cluster

Watkins Mill High School.
Montgomery Village Middle School; Neelsville Middle School
South Lake Elementary School; Stedwick Elementary School; Watkins Mill Elementary School;
Whetstone Elementary School

Recommended FY2009 Capital Budget and FY2009-2014 Capital Improvements Program

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Testimony presented by:

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Good evening President Knapp and members of the County Council. My name is Susan Young and I am one of three Coordinators for the Watkins Mill Cluster. I am also the PTSA President at Montgomery Village Middle School. We know we are in difficult financial times and we appreciate this opportunity to speak.

The Montgomery Village, Gaithersburg and Germantown communities whose kids attend Watkins Mill Cluster schools represent a very diverse and inclusive community. You can see this fact confirmed in the demographics of our Cluster's schools. The wide range of housing styles and prices in Montgomery Village was intentionally planned to achieve just such a community. We need your help and support to ensure this vision is not lost.

In part, this vision is sustained by people's perceptions of public safety, amenities that meet their needs, and the quality of the local schools. Our Cluster is not seeking to change our demographics. We are here to advocate for those programs we believe can sustain the competitiveness of our community, and best meet the needs of our population today.

Accordingly, the Watkins Mill Cluster supports the following CIP focus areas to help sustain the energy and vitality of our community, and to meet the needs of a changing population:

- In the area of Children Prepared to Live and Learn..
 - o We support the increase in school construction funding. Providing quality school facilities and tools ensures all kids have a fair chance to learn and compete in the global economy. We are very thankful for construction of the Stedwick Elementary School addition, and excited about its opening next school year. Funding to support a needed addition at Whetstone Elementary School is an equally important construction project for our Cluster.
 - o We support the funding needed for a feasibility study for a classroom addition at Montgomery Village Middle School. The loss of the new middle school to another cluster was a huge blow to our community, and a wake-up call to Cluster PTAs. Location of this new school within Montgomery Village would have especially benefitted the children who attend South Lake ES. Currently these children are bused to Neelsville MS (quite some distance away). For

many of their families, reliance on public transportation makes getting to Neelsville MS a real challenge. This new school would have greatly improved parent access and involvement, always crucial factors to children's success, and doubly so for a school with a 62% FARM rate, 33% ESOL students, and a 42% mobility rate. The MVMS feasibility study will allow us to closely examine other options to meet those needs.

- We support planning and design of a wellness center at Watkins Mill High School. A quick look at the demographic data for our Cluster reveals why the services of a wellness center are greatly needed, and now. Many of our residents rely heavily on mass transit and cannot easily make it to the Upcounty Government Services Center in Germantown.

In the area of Vital Living for All of Our Residents, we support the renovation of the Gaithersburg Library in Montgomery Village. This is one of the most heavily used libraries in the County, and is sorely in need of renovation to meet the needs of a growing community.

Our cluster and community face many challenges, yet, also have much positive going for them today. We have welcomed several new principals to our cluster and are working closely with them to help our kids succeed. Our priority Capital projects can help ensure this work takes place in a positive and supportive environment, one conducive to vital living and good learning. We ask that as you balance across the many competing needs, you continue to support the educational and community resource needs such as we have identified in our testimony. On behalf of the Watkins Mill Cluster, thank you.