

# **Magruder Custer Testimony on the Capital Improvement Plan November 15, 2007**

## **The History of Redland**

If there was ever a community that could claim a case of bad timing, it is the Redland Community. Redland was built in 1971. Unfortunately, that was during a period when open school plans were in fashion. For obvious reasons, it quickly fell out of fashion. In the late 1970s, partitions were put up in Redland that broke up the open space into classrooms and hallways. However, this “solution” had several problems:

- Students in one classroom can hear what is going on in other classrooms, interfering with instruction.
- Students can (and sometimes do) throw things over the partitions.
- The ductwork over the classrooms is exposed so there is more dust and allergens than would be typical causing continual issues with the air quality in the school.
- Some of the hallways are only 5’7” wide, much narrower than is typical in a middle school.
- In some cases, you literally have to walk through one classroom to get to another, causing frequent disruptions in learning.

For 30 years, the students at Redland have had to try and learn under these conditions.

As you know, MCPS’s modernization process involves assessing schools, assigning them Facilities Assessment with Criteria and Testing (FACT) scores, and then modernizing them according to their FACT scores. In 1993, 37 schools were assessed, and they were chosen primarily based on their age. Redland was not one of them. In 1996, 35 additional schools were assessed. This cadre of schools was added to the modernization schedule according to their FACT scores, but only after all of the schools assessed in 1993 had been modernized, as it was felt that scores done three years apart are not comparable.

The schools chosen by MCPS for the 1996 assessment were schools that had been built before 1970 and never modernized, or schools that had been renovated before 1977. Again, since Redland was built in 1971, it was not assessed—another case of lousy timing. It is our belief, that if Redland and the few other schools that had been built in 1971 had been assessed in 1996, Redland would have been rated to be in worse shape than several of the other schools on that list. If that had occurred, the Redland community might have been experiencing a modernization right now rather than having to fight to keep some smaller scale improvements.

Instead, Redland isn’t even on the modernization schedule yet. Even if there are no delays in that schedule and Redland is the first middle school to be added to the list, the earliest that Redland would be modernized is 2023.

These factors are probably what lead to a feasibility study of Redland in 1999 and another study finally completed this year. In both cases, MCPS staff has acknowledged that corrective action is necessary to adequately meet the needs of the Redland students. In both cases, they came to similar conclusions about what improvements the school needed to be functional. New walls would be built. Narrow hallways would be widened. The ventilation system would be completely replaced. Ceilings would be installed. The office would be moved towards the front of the building. Dilapidated science labs would be made functional. You reviewed the plans at a Board of Education meeting this past spring and authorized the hiring of an architect.

If construction had been scheduled to start last year, a year with lower construction prices and more money available for school construction, I would probably be here tonight thanking you for the “Extreme Makeover” going on at Redland. But as we are all too aware, the conditions that existed last year do not exist this year—further evidence of “bad timing” for Redland.

For three decades, the Redland community has willingly played by the rules and the students and teachers have made-do in less than adequate conditions. We are weary of settling for less and are unwilling to wait any longer.

### **The Superintendent’s Recommendation**

In preparing this year’s CIP, Dr. Weast was presented several options for Redland. The original reconfiguration plan could still be done for about \$28 million. Last year’s CIP budgeted \$20 million for it. Three smaller-scale partial renovation projects far short of the entire reconfiguration, were also put on the table.

1. Project #1 would replace only about 10% of the existing partitions, extend the remaining 90% up to the roof deck, rework some of the ductwork, and add ceilings and lights. It would cost about \$6.5 million.
2. Project #2 would fully reconfigure and refurbish the front third of the school. It would provide the school with new science labs, move the front office closer to the entrance, and eliminate at least one of the places where students walk through one classroom to get into another. It would cost about \$6 million.
3. Project #3 would reconfigure parking areas at the front of the school so that the bus loop was entirely separate from the drop-off that parents use. It would cost \$2.5 million.

Each of the three partial renovation projects is independent from the other two and any combination of the three could be done. Thus, for \$15 million, you could do all three partial renovation projects; for \$12 million, you could do partial renovation projects 1 and 2; and so on.

Dr. Weast’s recommendation is to only do Project #1, suggesting only \$6 million be spent on Redland, far short of the \$28 million needed to meet the plans approved just six months ago and short of the \$20 million that had been set aside for the construction in last year’s CIP.

### **Redland’s Response**

It would be the ultimate understatement to say that the community is upset about this. For the last decade, the Redland community has waited graciously for improvements to the school that are to last until the school is finally modernized sometime after 2023. Now, nine months before the project is to start, we are told that it will be nearly another two decades until many of the issues at Redland are truly addressed.

Simply put, Project #1 is not sufficient to meet the needs of the students and staff at Redland. In a time where the county’s focus is on Middle School reform, it is unconscionable to let the students at Redland study for the next 15 to 20 years in a school that is not fit to provide the instructional experiences they need. Three decades ago, the problems at Redland were addressed with the equivalent of a band-aid. The school can not get by for the next two decades with another band-aid.

Doing only Project #1 means that:

- Ninety percent of the existing partitions would not be replaced, but just extended upwards. Many of the “walls” at Redland are mostly glass, which provide poor sound insulation and are a security issue during a code blue or code red. Other “walls” are merely accordion doors between two classrooms, which again are far from effective in providing sound insulation or security.

- The science labs at Redland would remain in their current state, with lab stations that have unsafe sinks and electrical outlets, preventing them from being used effectively.
- Some hallways in Redland are only 5' 7" wide, narrower than recommended, making it especially difficult for the students at the school who use wheelchairs and creating a safety issue in the event of an emergency.
- The front office would not be near the front entrance of the school, which is another security issue.
- Students would in some cases still have to walk through one classroom to get to another.

Doing only Project #1 would not make Redland a functional school. Realistically, it means that Redland will have to deal with these issues for the next 15 to 20 years.

### **Your Decision**

We know that the budget is tight, but even in these difficult times, we think there are choices that the Board of Education can make to address our needs. While Dr. Weast's recommendations include cuts or delays in several projects, there are also some recommendations for new work.

Specifically, there are nine elementary schools additions that while mentioned in last years CIP, had not been given specific dates for planning and construction. Now, Dr. Weast recommends starting these additions immediately by spending \$3.5 million in FY 2009 for the planning of these additions, and \$38 million in FY 2010 to begin construction on them.

The Magruder cluster respectively suggests that these additions be delayed one year.

For the 2009 fiscal year, the \$3.5 million that was to be spent on planning these additions, coupled with the \$3.3 million already designated for construction on Redland in the FY 2009 budget, is more than had been budgeted to spend this year for the full reconfiguration at Redland.

In FY 2010, the \$38 million that Dr. Weast is proposing to spend to start construction on the elementary school additions would be more than enough to do all the work on Redland and still have plenty left over to do the planning for the nine additions.

We realize that overcrowding is an important issue in the county, but we note that waiting one more year will not put any cluster at risk of having a moratorium on construction.

If you follow Dr. Weast's current recommendation for Redland, you are cutting a project that the Redland community was first promised nearly a decade ago. If you wait one year on the elementary school additions, you are delaying a timeline released just a few weeks ago.

We are very sympathetic to those schools that have students in portables, but we can honestly say that we have teachers and students at Redland that would prefer portables over their current classrooms. And we respectfully assert that asking students and teachers currently in portables at these nine schools to wait one more year for relief is more equitable than asking the students and teachers at Redland to wait two decades for relief.

You have visited Redland, you have seen the conditions there, and you have expressed your sympathy. It is now time for you to act.

Thank you.

## **Spoken Testimony**

If there was ever a community that could claim a case of bad timing, it is the Redland Community.

My written testimony outlines the *History of Redland* and how it has encountered repeated cases of bad timing. But since my time is short, I am going to skip discussing the last 36 years of troubles with Redland and jump straight to the Superintendent's Recommendation on page 2 of my written testimony.

## **The Superintendent's Recommendation**

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