



April 2, 2012

Ms. Françoise M. Carrier  
Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board  
Vice Chair, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission  
Montgomery Regional Office  
8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Dear Ms. Carrier:

This letter is to inform you and members of the Montgomery County Planning Board that my recommendation for the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Middle School #2 site was released on March 30, 2012. After thoroughly considering all of the 38 candidate sites that were reviewed by the Site Selection Advisory Committee (SSAC), I am recommending Rock Creek Hills Local Park as the site for the new middle school. My recommendation is the same as the SSAC's preferred recommended site and is enclosed for your review.

Ms. Carrier, you will see in my recommendation that I did speak specifically about the two minority reports submitted from employees of your agency. I understand that they indicated that the opinions expressed were personal but since they were transmitted on agency letterhead, many believe they represent the views of the Planning Board. I felt it was important to make sure that we responded to what my staff and I believe were inaccurate and misleading statements.

I certainly understand that you and the Planning Board would prefer that we not take back this site for this much needed middle school, but as the facts clearly indicate, we do not have a better option for a school. It is my expectation that our staffs can set aside any disagreements from this process to facilitate the transfer of this property back to the Board of Education so that we may proceed with plans for the school.

Office of the Superintendent of Schools

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850 Hungerford Drive, Room 122 ♦ Rockville, Maryland 20850 ♦ 301-279-3381

The Montgomery County Board of Education is scheduled to act on this matter on Tuesday, April 17, 2012. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your support of our public schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Starr", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joshua P. Starr, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

JPS:jlc

Enclosure

Copy to:

Members of the Board of Education

Mr. Bowers

Dr. Lacey

Mrs. Schiavino-Narvaez

Mr. Edwards

Dr. Garran

Mr. Crispell

Mr. Song

Ms. Turpin

Ms. Wilson

# **Superintendent's Recommendation For Bethesda-Chevy Chase Middle School # 2 Site**

March 30, 2012

## **Recommendation**

I support the recommendation of the Site Selection Advisory Committee (SSAC) for Bethesda-Chevy Chase Middle School #2 regarding the preferred location for the new middle school at the Rock Creek Hills Local Park site. I commend the 47 members of the SSAC for their diligence in reviewing 38 candidate sites—28 more sites than the initial site selection process. Most of the 36 candidate sites that were eliminated by the SSAC were voted down by a wide margin. Of the two candidate sites recommended by the SSAC—Rock Creek Hills Local Park and North Chevy Chase Local Park—Rock Creek Hills Local Park was strongly favored as the location for the new middle school. (Please see Attachment A for a map showing the location of the Rock Creek Hills Local Park site in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster, and Attachment B showing an aerial view of the site.)

Rock Creek Hills Local Park is the one candidate site that best meets the site selection criteria and, importantly, has a reclamation provision that allows Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to have the property transferred back to MCPS for use as a public school. In the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster, the options for land to build a new middle school are extremely limited. The fact that 38 sites were reviewed by the SSAC demonstrates how thoroughly all possible locations were considered, including several sites that were not even in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster.

I appreciate community concerns and those expressed by the Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) about conversion of park land to middle school use. However, at the conclusion of this process, it is abundantly clear to me that this site is the best option to construct the much needed middle school. It is my hope that the community will come to enjoy the positive aspects of having a new school in the neighborhood. MCPS always has been a good neighbor and provided amenities such as playfields, gymnasiums and meeting spaces for communities to use outside of school hours.

As part of this recommendation, I am including background information on the site selection process, a review of the candidate sites considered, and my view of the merits of candidate sites. In addition, I have addressed some of the issues raised in the minority reports to ensure that the community understands important facts about the process and the conclusion I have reached.

## **Background**

Enrollment increases at Westland Middle School and the plan to reassign Grade 6 students from Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase elementary schools to the middle school level will result in a total Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school enrollment of approximately 1,600 students.

This projected enrollment far exceeds the 1,063 student capacity of Westland Middle School. In order to address the middle school enrollment growth, the *Board of Education's Requested FY 2013 Capital Budget and FY 2013–2018 Capital Improvements Program* (CIP) includes funding for a new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school to open in August 2017.

On November 17, 2011, as part of the adoption of the *FY 2013–2018 CIP*, the Board of Education authorized a new site selection process to identify a site for the new middle school. I recommended the new site selection process due to concerns that were raised over the first Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school site selection process. In a memorandum dated November 8, 2011, to the Board of Education, I detailed how the new process would be conducted. The changes from the previous process included the following:

- Use of an external facilitator
- Outreach to all SSAC participants—in advance of the first meeting—to solicit site options
- Inclusion on the SSAC of homeowners' association representatives that have candidate sites in their communities
- Inclusion of minority reports in the SSAC report for representatives who either disagree with the SSAC recommendations or wish to provide additional information
- Release of the SSAC report and recommendations publicly for a comment period prior to the superintendent's recommendation

In addition to these changes from the previous site selection process, it was determined during the process that sites recommended by the SSAC would be submitted to the Montgomery County Planning Board (MCPB) for the mandatory referral process prior to Board of Education action. This process enables the MCPB to provide advice on the conformance of recommended sites to master plans in the areas where the sites are located and to make other comments for the school system to consider.

The formation of the SSAC was coordinated by staff in the Department of Facilities Management (DFM) of MCPS and it included community, county agency, and MCPS membership.

Community input was provided by representatives from the following:

- Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) for all Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster schools
- Homeowners' associations adjacent to candidate sites
- Municipalities in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster and the Town of Kensington

Staff input and expertise was provided by representatives from the following:

- M-NCPPC and the Montgomery County departments of Parks and Planning
- The Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget and the Montgomery County departments of General Services, Recreation, and Transportation
- The MCPS Department of Facilities Management, including the divisions of Construction and Long-range Planning and the Real Estate Management Team, and the MCPS Department of Transportation

- The MCPS community superintendent for the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster schools and the principal of Westland Middle School

As part of the improved process, I thought it was important to look at all possible sites and so we encouraged SSAC members to submit candidate sites prior to the first meeting. In addition to the 10 original sites reviewed by the first SSAC, another 28 new sites were proposed. Thirteen of the 28 proposed sites were private property. The private property candidate sites remain confidential and identifying information on these properties is not included in this paper.

DFM staff compiled relevant information regarding all 38 candidate sites. In addition, the M-NCPPC and the Montgomery County departments of Parks and Planning provided maps from the county environmental *Resource Atlas* for each site. These maps displayed characteristics that could affect the suitability of a site, such as streams, wetlands, stream and wetland buffers, and topography. The information provided for each site corresponded to eight site selection criteria that are used for school site selection by MCPS. The SSAC considered the pros and cons of the sites in the context of these criteria.

The following are the site selection criteria provided to SSAC members:

- Location—Sites should be centrally located within the target area (Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster) with adjacent residential use. If possible, a school site should be located to allow students to walk to school. Due to the location of Westland Middle School in the westernmost portion of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster, a site that is a good distance from Westland Middle School should be considered.
- Size—The preferred site size for middle schools is 20 acres. However, in this urbanized portion of the county, it would be difficult to find sites this large and smaller sites should be considered.
- Topography—Sites as close to flat are preferred and when these sites are not available, a “balanced site” in which soils in higher elevations can be used to fill low elevation areas are preferred to minimize having to bring soil to the site or remove it from the site.
- Access—Access to sites—in terms of road adequacy, length of road frontage, and potential entrance and exit points—is to be considered. The ideal site would have access to a primary subdivision road that consists of a 70-foot right-of-way. Sites that have at least three points of access are preferred. Community sidewalks are preferred to enhance safe student walking access to the school.
- Utilities—Sites must have access to public utilities, including water, sanitary sewer, natural gas, and cable.
- Physical Condition—Existing and planned uses adjacent to sites are considered to ensure compatibility with a good learning environment. Excessive noise, distracting activities, or hazardous industrial-type uses on adjacent land would not be conducive to education.

- Availability and Timing—Site availability is considered in instances where a site must be purchased from a private owner or transferred from public ownership. Private property owners must be willing sellers for a site to be considered available. However, if no other site is suitable and the owner is not a willing seller, then use of the power of eminent domain may be recommended.
- Cost—The cost to acquire a site is considered, compared to sites that may be in public ownership. The cost to develop, given the physical characteristics of the site, including improvements to be demolished, topography, or the need to mitigate any contamination.

## **Review of Candidate Sites**

The SSAC process adhered to the requirements of the *Maryland Open Meetings Act* which enabled private property candidate sites to be discussed in Closed Session. (The *Maryland Open Meetings Act* is codified as Title 10, Subtitle 5 of the State Government Article, Annotated Code of Maryland.)

Through a process of elimination, the SSAC removed unworkable candidate sites from the list of 38 sites and arrived at its recommendation of two sites. There was no requirement that the SSAC eliminate or retain a certain number of sites. The sites that were eliminated were rejected based on the SSAC collective assessment of their characteristics relative to the site selection criteria.

In most cases, the votes to eliminate sites were passed by a wide margin of SSAC members. In reviewing the Report of the SSAC for Bethesda-Chevy Chase Middle School #2, the basis for the elimination of sites is clear. Three of the most common reasons for elimination of sites were site size, environmental issues, and in the case of private property, an unwilling seller, likely high acquisition cost, or both.

The SSAC was provided with an estimate of the minimum acreage needed to construct a middle school. Under optimal conditions, a minimum of 10.1 buildable acres are needed. Site specific issues could result in more acreage being required. Environmental issues that make a site unworkable had to do with land located in a floodplain where construction would not be allowed. In the case of private properties, MCPS staff contacted the property owners or their representatives to determine whether there was a willingness to sell. In addition, assessed values for the private properties were researched and provided to SSAC members.

The following is a summary of the concerns that led to the elimination of 36 candidate sites. I concur with the basis for elimination of all of these sites.

### **Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster Elementary School Sites**

Seven of the candidate sites considered by the SSAC are currently operating elementary schools in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster, including Bethesda, Chevy Chase, North Chevy Chase, Rock Creek Forest, Rosemary Hills, Somerset, and Westbrook elementary schools. All but one of these schools, Westbrook Elementary School, has sites of less than the minimum of 10.1 acres.

Westbrook Elementary School has a site of 12.46 acres, but it is severely constrained by stream valley buffers on both sides of the property and therefore has less than 10.1 buildable acres.

In addition to the site sizes being too small, if one of the elementary school sites was selected, a replacement site for that elementary school would need to be found and construction of both a new elementary school and the middle school would be necessary. This would greatly increase cost and the new middle school could not open by the scheduled opening date of August 2017.

I support the SSAC's elimination of the seven operating Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster elementary school sites for all of the reasons stated above. The small size of these school sites alone merits their elimination. Furthermore, even if one of the sites was adequate, this approach would delay the opening date of the new middle school and increase capital costs by requiring construction of a new elementary school in addition to a new middle school.

### **Westland Middle School**

The SSAC considered the current site of Westland Middle School (25.09 acres), located at 5511 Massachusetts Avenue in Bethesda, as the location for a second middle school or for an addition to the school. After it was determined that the site was too small to construct a second middle school, the SSAC discussed the pros and cons of increasing the capacity of Westland Middle School to approximately 1,650 students. Although the committee's focus was identification of a site for a second middle school, there was sufficient interest in discussing an addition to Westland Middle School to warrant consideration by the SSAC. The issues raised in the discussion of Westland Middle School warrant a more in-depth review here than other sites that were eliminated by the SSAC.

The SSAC members who favored an addition to Westland Middle School believed that having a single middle school for the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster would ensure demographic diversity. These committee members believed that if the cluster is served by two middle schools, comparable diversity levels might be difficult to achieve when school boundaries are drawn. In addition, some SSAC members favored an addition to Westland Middle School because they were concerned that a second middle school would provide sufficient capacity at Westland Middle School for it to be shared by Walt Whitman Cluster students. Sharing could occur if the one middle school in the Walt Whitman Cluster, Thomas W. Pyle Middle School, reached higher levels of enrollment than currently projected. Some SSAC members believed that sharing Westland Middle School with the Walt Whitman Cluster would create program and split articulation issues.

Although there was some support for an addition to Westland Middle School, in the end the SSAC voted to eliminate this option. I strongly agree with the points that weigh against the option of expanding Westland Middle School. These points are reviewed below.

- To accommodate all Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school students in one facility would require a large addition to Westland Middle School. The current capacity is 1,063 students. Such an increase in the number of students would impact the site and the facility in the following ways:

- Given the limited number of playfields, outdoor physical education would be difficult to schedule.
- Parking and school bus access to the school would be difficult to accommodate on the site. The Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster transportation manager said that to accommodate all of the cluster students, it could require school buses to queue onto Massachusetts Avenue. He also stated that increased costs and travel times would result due to all cluster students attending one school.
- The Westland Middle School core facilities would be severely impacted and it would be necessary to expand the media center, construct a new auxiliary gymnasium and locker rooms, and possibly construct a second cafeteria.
- The principal of Westland Middle School said that an increase in the student population to 1,600 students would change the character of the school and that the school would seem more like a high school. Under these conditions, the principal stated that it would be a challenge to uphold the philosophy and ideals of middle school. There would be fewer opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities, such as athletics and theater productions.

The concern over demographic diversity if two middle schools serve the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster was countered by SSAC members who did not agree with this prediction. I agree that this concern is unfounded. MCPS and the Board of Education have a longstanding commitment to diversity in the development of new school boundaries. Board of Education Policy FAA, *Long-Range Educational Facilities Planning*, identifies the following four main factors in the development of school boundaries:

- Demographic characteristics of student population
- Geographic proximity of communities to schools
- Stability of school assignments over time
- Facility utilization

Demographic impact of boundary options is an important consideration of the Board of Education and will certainly continue to be a focus when boundaries are established for the new middle school in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster. The boundary process will begin one and a half years prior to the August 2017 opening of the school. Prior to the superintendent's recommendation and Board of Education action on middle school boundaries, a process of community involvement will occur with all Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster PTAs represented. This process enables the parent community to be directly involved in assessing boundary options and providing advice to the superintendent of schools and to members of the Board of Education. Attention to the demographic outcomes of various boundary options will be a central focus of the committee discussion.

MCPS regularly sets boundaries for new schools. Since 1985, MCPS has established boundaries for the opening of 31 elementary schools, 17 middle schools, and 6 high schools. In all cases, MCPS has successfully drawn school boundaries that addressed community concerns and result



in diverse school service areas. There is no reason to believe that setting boundaries for the new middle school in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster will be any different from these past efforts. Furthermore, the location of the Rock Creek Hills Local Park as the site for the new middle school has no effect on our ability to develop service areas with diverse student populations for Westland Middle School and the new middle school.

The concern raised over possible sharing of Westland Middle School, if a new middle school is built, referred to comments I made in the *Recommended FY 2013 Capital Budget and FY 2013–2018 Capital Improvements Program* where I raised this subject as a long-range possibility. The proximity of Westland Middle School to the Walt Whitman Cluster makes this school a viable candidate for shared use—if needed. But such a shared approach only would be necessary if Thomas W. Pyle Middle School exceeds current enrollment projections and no longer could accommodate all of the Walt Whitman Cluster middle school students.

Given the severe restrictions on land in the lower portion of the county and the uncertainty of long-range enrollment trends, it is imperative that facility plans build in sufficient capacity for the long-term. The rate of enrollment growth over the past four years in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster underscores the extent that enrollment trends can change as a result of economic conditions. In this part of the county, many children are enrolled in nonpublic schools, and if even more of these students enter the public school system, significantly higher enrollments could result.

If Westland Middle School is expanded to a capacity of 1,650 students, this expansion would eliminate any flexibility to accommodate more Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster students in the event enrollments trend higher than now projected. The construction of a second middle school, with a capacity of 944 students, results in a total middle school capacity of 2,007 students in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster. This capacity builds in the ability to address unexpected enrollment increases in the future. Furthermore, the master planning of an addition at the new middle school would enable additional capacity to be opened—if ever needed.

### *Other Board of Education Properties*

The SSAC considered all Board of Education properties in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster with the exception of Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. Several Board of Education properties outside the cluster also were considered. In addition to the operating elementary schools and Westland Middle School, six Board of Education properties were evaluated by the SSAC. The reasons for the SSAC elimination of these sites are described below. I concur with the reasons for the elimination of these sites.

### **Tilden Middle School**

The current Tilden Middle School site is 28.06 acres. The site is located at 11211 Old Georgetown Road in Rockville. The SSAC considered this site because Tilden Middle School will be modernized in a few years at the school's original location on Tilden Lane. The consideration of the site on Old Georgetown Road was based on the fact that it no longer will be an operating middle school after the Tilden Middle School modernization is completed.

However, the Old Georgetown Road facility will become the secondary holding center and will replace the Tilden Holding Center. If this site was used for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school, then another secondary holding facility would need to be identified. This would add to the cost of the project and likely delay the opening of the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school beyond August 2017.

Furthermore, Tilden Middle School is the most distant of the six candidate sites reviewed by the SSAC that are outside the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster. On this basis alone, this site is not suitable for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school.

### **Former Lynnbrook Elementary School/Lynnbrook Local Park**

The former Lynnbrook Elementary School is located at 8001 Lynnbrook Drive in Bethesda and is owned by the Board of Education; the adjacent Lynnbrook Local Park is owned by M-NCPPC. The combined acreage of the properties is 10.04 acres. The former Lynnbrook Elementary School houses a total of 139 MCPS staff who work in the Glenmont and InterACT programs, and itinerant staff based at Lynnbrook who provide physical and occupational therapy for students at area schools. The Lynnbrook Local Park is two blocks from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School and supplements the limited playfields at the high school site. Although total acreage is 10.04 acres, subtracting building set-backs results in a buildable area of 8.5 acres, which is not sufficient for construction of a middle school. The small buildable area of the Lynnbrook site was the primary reason to eliminate this site.

Secondary reasons to eliminate this site, as included in the SSAC report, are the need to relocate MCPS staff and the inability of the site to meet the middle school outdoor program needs and still supplement high school field use. The SSAC members also believed it was important to keep this site available for possible future use as an elementary school site, should that be needed in the long-term.

### **Former Rollingwood Elementary School**

The former Rollingwood Elementary School is located at 3200 Woodbine Street in Chevy Chase. It is leased to a private school. The site is 4.07 acres and it is partially in the stream valley buffer of Rock Creek. The site is too small for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster Middle School.

### **Former Radnor Elementary School**

The former Radnor Elementary School is located at 7000 Radnor Road in Bethesda. It is used by MCPS as an elementary school holding center. The site is 9.03 acres and it is outside the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster. The site is too small for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster Middle School. If the site was used for the middle school, another elementary school holding center would need to be identified.

## *County and State-owned Properties*

The SSAC considered four public properties which are owned by Montgomery County and one property that is owned by the state of Maryland. The reasons for the SSAC elimination of these sites are described below. I concur with the reasons for the elimination of these sites.

### **Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) Facility on Lyttonsville Road**

The WSSC/Lyttonsville site is located at 2501 Lyttonsville Road in Silver Spring. It is a regional operations and maintenance depot and vehicle storage facility. The site is 11.99 acres. WSSC was contacted; they have no plans to leave this location. They are unwilling to sell the property. The SSAC also was concerned about the proximity of this site to a future Purple Line Metro station.

### **Montgomery County Ride-On Bus Lot**

The Montgomery County Ride-On bus lot is located at 8710 Brookville Road in Silver Spring. The site is 17.47 acres. This bus lot is situated in a light industrial area and adjacent to a planned Purple Line Metro rail yard. The Montgomery County Department of Transportation stated that they have no plans to leave this location, and that they are unwilling to sell the property. The county considers this facility to be very important in its service to the lower portion of the county and stated that it would be very difficult to replace.

### **Former Montgomery Hills Junior High School**

The former Montgomery Hills Junior High School is owned by Montgomery County and it is located at 2010 Linden Lane in Silver Spring. The site is 8.67 acres and it is outside the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster. The facility is leased to a private school with a lease that cannot be terminated until 2020. In addition, the terms of the lease with the private school require a termination fee estimated at \$25.96 million to be paid if the lease is terminated before 2020. The site is too small for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school and it is not available in time to open the new school in August 2017.

### **Former Kensington Elementary School**

The former Kensington Elementary School is owned by Montgomery County and it is located at 10400 Detrick Avenue in Kensington. The site is 4.54 acres, and it is outside the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster. The facility is leased to the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC). The site is too small for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school and HOC would need to be relocated if the site was used for the middle school.

### **State Highway Administration Parcel**

The State Highway Administration parcel is located along the Connecticut Avenue exit ramp from the Beltway in Chevy Chase. The site is 7.60 acres. The property currently is used for

construction of the WSSC Bi-County Tunnel project. The site is too small for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school, and the location is unsuitable for a school.

### *Private Properties*

The SSAC reviewed 14 private property candidate sites. One of these properties, Grace Episcopal School, was among the original 10 sites that were reviewed by the first SSAC. Because this site was made public at the conclusion of the first process, it was not discussed in Closed Session. The Grace Episcopal School is located at 9411 Connecticut Avenue in Chevy Chase. The site is 10.94 acres. Due to a conservation easement, the buildable area of the site is 7.5 acres and it is too small for the new middle school. The school has no plans to relocate and it is unwilling to sell the property. I concur with the SSAC elimination of this site.

Thirteen new private property candidate sites were proposed by SSAC members and discussed in Closed Session. All SSAC members signed confidentiality agreements in which they agreed not to disclose the location of these private property candidate sites. Identifying information regarding these properties is not disclosed in this paper. However, general information on the sites that led to their elimination is summarized below. I concur with SSAC's recommendation to eliminate all of the 13 private property candidate sites.

#### **Seven Sites—Less Than 10.1 Acres**

Seven of the private properties were less than the minimum of 10.1 acres needed to construct the new middle school. In addition to this basis for elimination, six of the seven properties had unwilling sellers. One property was located in a light industrial area that is not suitable for a school. Even if one of these sites could be purchased, acquisition of private property in this area of the county could significantly add to the cost of building the new middle school.

#### **Five Sites—More Than 10.1 Acres but Unwilling Sellers**

Five of the private properties were larger than the minimum of 10.1 acres, but the owners of these properties indicated they were unwilling to sell their property. Although MCPS has the ability to exercise eminent domain and condemn private property for public school use, this process has to be justified by the lack of alternative locations for the school. In addition, the condemnation process would, in all likelihood, not allow the new middle school to open on schedule in August 2017.

#### **One Site—More Than 10.1 Acres with Possible Willing Seller**

The last private property was 11.39 acres and an owner who, when contacted, suggested the school system "make an offer" of a purchase price, and the owner would determine if there was a willingness to sell. This commercial property has an assessed value of \$21.8 million with numerous tenants. Real estate expert SSAC members indicated that if this property was put up for sale, it could be sold for much more than the assessed value. This cost would significantly add to the cost of building the middle school. In addition, there was concern that even if the property was purchased, there would be legal issues regarding the termination of tenant leases in

a timely manner. This delay could result in the property not being available in time for the new middle school to open on schedule in August 2017.

### *M-NCPPC-owned Properties*

The SSAC reviewed seven candidate sites that currently are operating local parks. These seven sites are in addition to the Lynnbrook Local Park that was considered with the former Lynnbrook Elementary School site (described previously). During the SSAC process, the representative from the M-NCPPC, Montgomery County Department of Parks, stated that M-NCPPC was opposed to the consideration of park properties for non-park purposes except in the most extraordinary circumstances. In addition, during the first site selection process for the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster Middle School #2, Ms. Françoise Carrier, chair, MCPB, provided a letter to the Board of Education, dated April 27, 2011, stating that the Planning Board “cannot sanction the conversion of parkland we are pledged to protect and preserve.”

SSAC members, aware of the concerns of M-NCPPC, eliminated five of the seven park properties mainly over the concern that the properties would not be available due to the need to preserve park land. I concur with the elimination of these sites on the basis of preserving park land and the concern that M-NCPPC would be unlikely to convey these properties to MCPS. Additional reasons for the elimination of the M-NCPPC-owned parks follow.

#### **Leland Local Park**

Leland Local Park is located at 4300 Elm Street in Chevy Chase. The site is 3.71 acres. The property includes the Jane Lawton Community Recreation Center and the offices of the Town of Chevy Chase. The site is too small for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school.

#### **Rosemary Hills/Lyttonsville Local Park**

Rosemary Hills/Lyttonsville Local Park is located at 2450 Lyttonsville Road in Silver Spring. The site is 17.10 acres and it is adjacent to the Gwendolyn Coffield Community Center. This site was the preferred recommended site of the first SSAC, but it was not selected by the Board of Education due to concerns about its availability. At that time, the Board of Education instead selected the Rock Creek Hills Local Park site, which was the initial recommended alternative site of the first SSAC.

In reviewing the Rosemary Hills/Lyttonsville Local Park site, the new SSAC was advised that 6.65 acres of the 17.10 acre site was purchased with Program Open Space funds that restrict that portion of the property for non-park use. This reduced the available acreage to 10.45 acres. In addition to the concern over the buildable area of the site, the former use of the property as an anti-artillery site in the 1950s raised concern about what may be buried at the site.

#### **Norwood Local Park**

Norwood Local Park is located at 4700 Norwood Drive in Bethesda. The site is 17.50 acres and includes the historically designated Bureau of Animal Industry Building, which comprises 1.6

acres of the site, including the portion considered to be the building's environmental setting. SSAC members' discussion of this site raised concerns about the proximity of the park to Westland Middle School. Concern also was raised about access to the site via Norwood Drive, which requires exiting and entering Wisconsin Avenue in an area of heavy traffic flow. Other access points to the site currently dead end at the park and many of these streets are quite narrow.

### **Rays Meadow Local Park**

Rays Meadow Local Park is located at 2901 East West Highway in Chevy Chase. The site is 11.09 acres. A school could not be built at this site due to its location in the floodplain of Rock Creek.

### **Meadowbrook Local Park**

Meadowbrook Local Park is located at 7901 Meadowbrook Lane in Chevy Chase. The site is 65.23 acres. A school could not be built at this site due to its location in the floodplain of Rock Creek.

### *SSAC Recommended Sites*

The SSAC vote on the two remaining park candidate sites resulted in their recommendation of these sites for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school. In order to establish the preferred candidate site of the two options, SSAC scored each site against the eight site selection criteria that were described earlier in this paper. Based on this scoring, the preferred recommended site was Rock Creek Hills Local Park, which scored significantly higher, with 130 points in favor of its use for the new middle school. The alternate recommended site, North Chevy Chase Local Park, scored 28 points. The reasons the two sites were recommended, and why they scored as they did are described below.

### **North Chevy Chase Local Park**

North Chevy Chase Local Park is owned by M-NCPPC and it is located at 3700 Jones Bridge Road in Chevy Chase. The site is 31.03 acres. The site was recommended due to its large size and the likelihood that a new middle school at this location would not require use of the entire property.

Before voting to recommend North Chevy Chase Local Park the SSAC considered concerns that M-NCPPC may not agree to convey the property. Concerns also were expressed over difficulties in accessing the site due to the expansion of the Walter Reed National Naval Medical Center and resulting traffic congestion on Jones Bridge Road and Connecticut Avenue. Currently, there is one access driveway into the park property. In addition, there were concerns that forest conservation requirements might restrict use of this heavily wooded site. These considerations factored into the score of 28 points for the North Chevy Chase Local Park, and its recommendation as an alternate site.

## **Rock Creek Hills Local Park**

Rock Creek Hills Local Park is owned by M-NCPPC, and is located at 3701 Saul Road in Kensington. The site is 13.38 acres. The site was recommended due to its adequate size, as verified by the feasibility study for the new middle school that was completed in October 2011, and the school system's ability to reclaim the property.

Before voting to recommend Rock Creek Hills Local Park the SSAC considered concerns from SSAC members opposed to use of the Rock Creek Hills Local Park for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school. The Rock Creek Hills Citizens Association expressed their opposition, contending that many characteristics of the park property make it unsuitable for a middle school, including size, topography, access, development costs, and loss of a park for the community. It also was contended that Program Open Space restrictions on use of the park may not be resolved. The SSAC member from M-NCPPC, Montgomery County Department of Parks, expressed concern that use of the site would eliminate one of the two adult-size rectangular soccer fields that are used heavily and in limited supply in this part of the county.

Based on the scoring of 130 points in favor of the Rock Creek Hills Local Park as the preferred location for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school it is evident that most SSAC members were not persuaded by comments raised in opposition to use of the park for the new school. SSAC members pointed out that a letter from the Maryland Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources indicated the Program Open Space restrictions expired after 20 years and this would not be an issue to use of the site. In addition, SSAC members noted that the playfields, tennis courts, and outdoor basketball courts would continue to be available for community use outside of school hours. In addition, the middle school facility would have a gymnasium and meeting spaces that would be available for community use. Regarding the loss of one of the two adult soccer fields, an SSAC member suggested that this field could be replaced at the North Chevy Chase Local Park where there may be sufficient land to add this improvement to the park.

MCPS is fortunate that as part of the closure of Kensington Junior High School at the Rock Creek Hills Local Park location, the parties that drafted the deed transferring the property from the Board of Education to Montgomery County had the foresight to include the reclamation provision. At this time, the need for a new middle school site in the cluster is certainly a valid reason to invoke that provision.

## Minority Reports

My intention in redoing the site selection process was to create a more open and inclusive method to review any and all candidate sites put forth by SSAC members. I believed that such a process would result in a well-reasoned recommendation while allowing for fair dissent through minority reports. I was impressed with the thoroughness of the process and found the SSAC recommendation to be a well-thought out one. I believe most of the seven minority reports were fair in expressing the respective concerns of the authors about the recommendation. However, in the end, I did not find the comments opposing the selection of Rock Creek Hills Local Park to be persuasive, and I do not agree with comments that the process was not sufficiently thorough.

In conjunction with my recommendation, I believe it is important to respond to two minority reports that include inaccurate or misleading comments about the process, the analysis of sites, and the recommendation of the SSAC. These reports are from Mr. Fred Boyd, community planner, Montgomery County Department of Planning and Ms. Brooke Farquhar, supervisor, Park and Trail Planning, Montgomery County Department of Parks. I comment on these minority reports because as representatives of the M-NCPPC—the owner of the recommended Rock Creek Hills Local Park—their viewpoints are of special concern to me. I note that both Mr. Boyd and Ms. Farquhar indicate in their minority reports that the views they were expressing were their own, and did not necessarily reflect the views of the agency they were representing. Nevertheless their viewpoints may be persuasive to some due to their affiliation with the M-NCPPC.

In forming the SSAC, I was hopeful that the inclusion of M-NCPPC representatives would help the committee by identifying additional viable sites as a result of Mr. Boyd's planning expertise, and that Ms. Farquhar would bring her expertise on parks to the discussions. This was especially important due to the strong opposition to use of park land for a middle school that has been expressed by Ms. Carrier. Mr. Boyd provided the SSAC with eight candidate sites, and both Mr. Boyd and Ms. Farquhar strongly opposed the consideration of all park sites that were reviewed (with the exception of the Lynnbrook Local Park that is adjacent to the former Lynnbrook Elementary School.)

I value the advocacy expressed for parks by Mr. Boyd and Ms. Farquhar, but I am disappointed that there seemed to be no balance to their efforts aligned with the purpose of the SSAC, to identify a middle school site that is reasonable. In Mr. Boyd's minority report he expresses disagreement with the conclusions of the SSAC and he bases much of his criticism on the MCPS effort to open the new middle school in August 2017. He contends that this timeframe "tended to steer the discussion away from private and some public sites, and toward parks, because school staff believed them more readily available." No one in the school system believes parks are readily available nor devalues park land.

The timeframe for the new middle school was explained to the SSAC at the beginning of the process and is necessary to head off severe capacity deficits projected at Westland Middle School and allow Grade 6 students at Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase elementary schools to receive the full benefits of the middle school program in a middle school facility. In addition, opening the new middle school in 2017 is necessary to avert a residential development



moratorium in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster according to the county Subdivision Staging Policy. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how a later opening date for the new middle school would have made any of the candidate sites that were rejected any more attractive or, in the case of private properties, any more available or affordable.

Mr. Boyd also raised concerns that the process did not value land as a resource and assess the impact to a community if a park was converted to middle school use. However, a great deal of time was spent in the SSAC meetings discussing exactly this issue. The representatives of homeowner associations that had candidate sites in their communities had ample time to express their viewpoints, and the minority reports from several SSAC members address the impact of loss of park land quite thoroughly. Candidate sites were eliminated by majority votes of the SSAC and these took into account all information that was voiced in terms of pros and cons. The only part of the process that required SSAC members to strictly adhere to the eight site selection criteria was the scoring of the two recommended sites against the criteria, to determine the preferred candidate.

Mr. Boyd notes that the purpose for including Planning and Parks staff on the committee was their stewardship role in terms of all county parks. I understand this to be Ms. Farquhar's role, but I believe Mr. Boyd, as the representative for the Montgomery County Department of Planning, could have provided valuable input as a land use planning expert. In this role, I believe he would have offered a more fair assessment of the various options for locating the middle school. Unfortunately, he appears to have performed his role mainly as an advocate for parks.

I looked forward to possible sites for the middle school that staff from the M-NCPPC might identify. The eight sites Mr. Boyd submitted included seven private properties that cannot be identified. Unfortunately none of these sites was considered viable by the SSAC and I agree. I appreciate Mr. Boyd's search for sites and the candidates he was able to come up with are indicative of the fact that there are very few options for the middle school. The seven private properties Mr. Boyd proposed are all currently occupied and all but one have unwilling sellers: three are in light industrial areas; two more are less than eight acres in size; and the remaining two have assessed values of \$15.7 million and \$32.3 million. The publicly owned property proposed by Mr. Boyd is a State Highway Administration parcel of 7.6 acres currently used to stage construction for the WSSC Bi-County Tunnel. The property is adjacent to the Connecticut Avenue exit ramp of the Capital Beltway. I find it difficult to contemplate a more inappropriate site for a school.

The representative of the Montgomery County Department of Parks, Ms. Farquhar, raised several concerns in her minority report. Ms. Farquhar is fair in her statement that "whatever solution the Board of Education chooses should aim to maintain the highest level of park and recreation, and education service possible." I wholeheartedly agree, and would respond that a middle school at the Rock Creek Hills Local Park location will maintain, outside school hours, most of the currently available outdoor playfields and facilities, plus provide an indoor gymnasium and meeting spaces. In terms of fields, what is being lost by use of this park is one of the two adult size rectangular soccer fields. It is fair to expect that the field that is part of this school would be better maintained than the current fields that are in the park now.

Later in her minority report, Ms. Farquhar suggests “MCPS should be part of the solution by keeping on the table acquisition of a private site or repurposing uses on some of its own land at the Montgomery Hills Junior High School site and the old Lynnbrook Elementary School site.” However, Ms. Farquhar pays no credence to the fact that Montgomery Hills Junior High School is outside the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster, has a highly restrictive lease that cannot be terminated until at least 2020, and would require a payment estimated at \$25.96 million if the lease were terminated. As for the combined former Lynnbrook Elementary School and Lynnbrook Local Park site there is no acknowledgement that the buildable acreage (8.5 acres) is well below the minimum of 10.1 acres needed for a middle school.

In her push for more consideration of the Montgomery Hills Junior High School and Lynnbrook sites, Ms. Farquhar appears to completely dismiss the facts that made the SSAC eliminate them from consideration. However, in her minority report Ms. Farquhar raises a concern that the SSAC did not have adequate data to perform a “robust analysis” of sites. I am concerned that, due to Ms. Farquhar’s strong advocacy of parks, she may have been selective in the data she paid heed to, while complaining that insufficient data and analysis was a shortcoming of the process. I believe the SSAC functioned well and the data provided was sufficient for SSAC members to judge sites.

Ms. Farquhar’s minority report contends that costs were not thoroughly evaluated. However, during the process the assessed values of all private properties and county and state-owned properties were provided to the SSAC. Assessed values for M-NCPPC and Board of Education properties were not provided, as it was determined that these assessments were seldom accurate and much lower than the market value of these lands. In addition, Ms. Farquhar provided the SSAC with approximate costs estimated by the Department of Parks for obtaining either of the recommended sites. The SSAC had the opportunity to consider costs, and in the case of private properties, the high cost of acquisition was one of several reasons for elimination of these sites.

It is important to understand that the role of county agency representatives on the SSAC was to provide expertise from their areas of responsibility. The participation of these representatives provided a base of knowledge that community members of the SSAC drew from in the review of candidate sites. A review of the county agency and MCPS staff who served on the SSAC shows the broad scope of expertise, and first-hand knowledge, these representatives brought to the process.

### *Concerns About Diversity*

Concerns have been raised about the potential for the two middle schools in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster to have differing levels of diversity because of the location of the Rock Creek Hills Local Park in the northern part of the cluster. This concern was expressed in the greatest detail in the minority report submitted by Ms. Teresa Murray on behalf of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) Parents’ Council. Her report states that if Rock Creek Hills Local Park is selected, then a “demographic split will occur in the cluster.” However, there is no basis for this conclusion, and the location of Rock Creek Hills Local Park does not make development of diverse school service areas difficult.

As previously discussed in the recommendation, MCPS regularly sets boundaries for new schools. Since 1985, MCPS has established boundaries for the opening of 31 elementary schools, 17 middle schools, and 6 high schools. In all cases, MCPS has successfully drawn school boundaries that addressed community concerns and the boundaries set resulted in diverse school service areas. There is no reason to believe that setting boundaries for the new middle school in the B-CC Cluster will be any different from these past efforts.

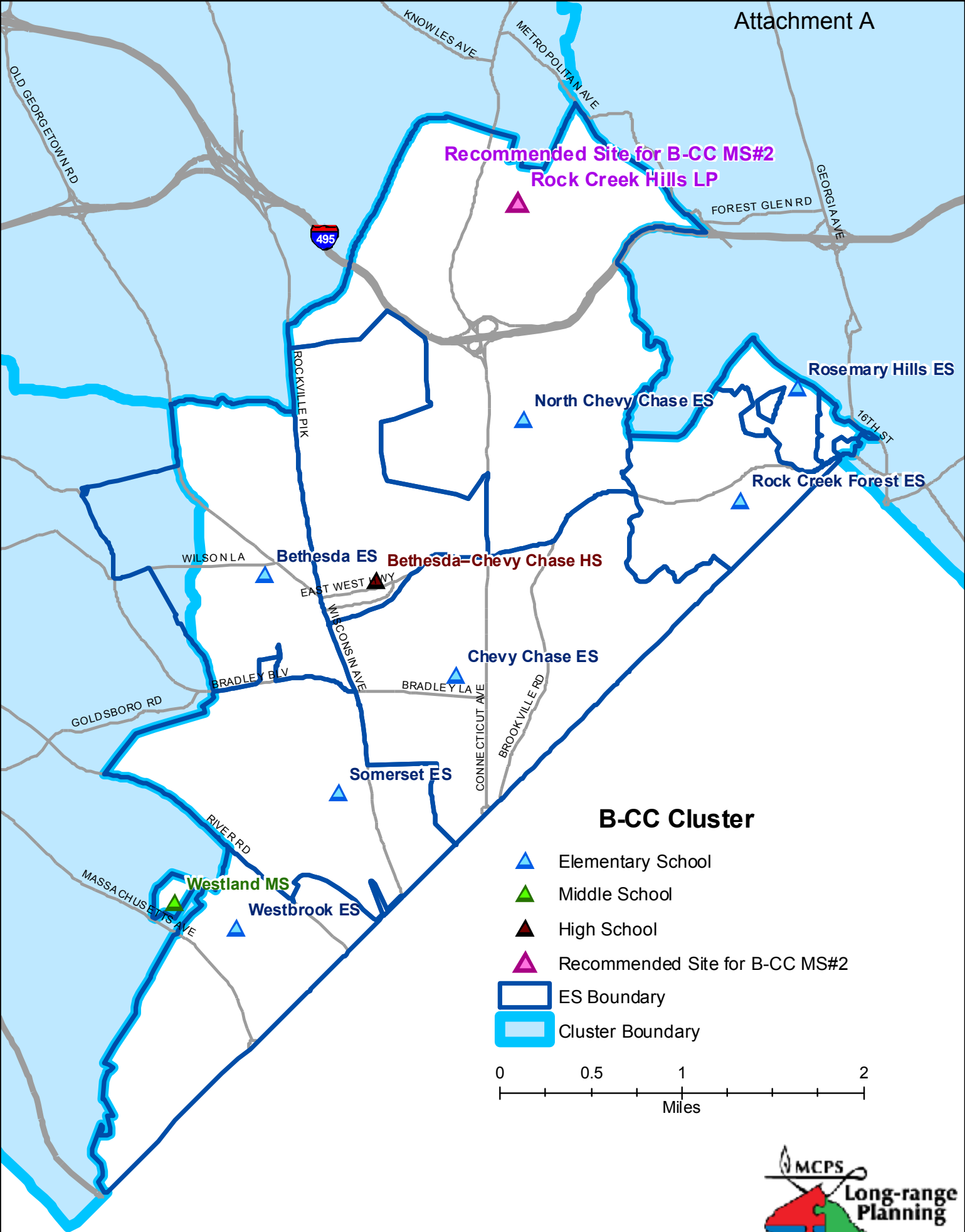
I believe the concern that the Rock Creek Hills Local Park location could create differences in the two middle schools' demographics may be based on the presence of more diverse communities in the eastern portion of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster, compared to communities in the middle to western portion of the cluster. If boundary setting did not consider demographics and only considered distance to schools, then some imbalance in demographics might occur. However, in developing boundaries the proximity of communities to one school or another is considered in the light of the demographic impact of assigning students based on proximity. In order to create diverse school service areas, MCPS boundaries frequently do not assign students to the closest school and in some cases school boundaries are not contiguous areas.

I strongly agree with Ms. Murray's objective to ensure diverse student populations are preserved for Westland Middle School and the new middle school when boundaries are drawn. I want to reassure her, and others who raised this, in the strongest possible terms that this can be achieved with the new middle school located at the Rock Creek Hills Local Park site.

## **Summary**

In most parts of the county, the locating, constructing, and opening of new schools is welcomed. It is difficult to recall a school site selection process that has raised more community concerns than this process for a new middle school in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster. The school system has exercised due diligence by repeating the site selection process for the new Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster middle school. This process has been highly inclusive and exhaustive in its review of 38 candidate sites. I believe that we now can move forward with confidence that the best site for the new middle school has been determined.

Montgomery County, M-NCPPC, and MCPS are operating in an era of diminishing land resources. Opportunities for identifying sites for new schools in built-out areas of the county will continue to be challenging. In some areas, MCPS is fortunate to have former school properties that have been retained in Board of Education ownership or are in county ownership but can be reclaimed. However, most of these properties are former elementary schools. Secondary school sites will be more challenging to find. While I respect community concerns over the selection of Rock Creek Hills Local Park for the new middle school, there can be no doubt that MCPS must reclaim this property at this time for public school use.



Recommended Site for B-CC MS#2  
Rock Creek Hills LP

Rosemary Hills ES

North Chevy Chase ES

Rock Creek Forest ES

Bethesda ES

Bethesda-Chevy Chase HS





Chevy Chase ES



Somerset ES

Westland MS

Westbrook ES

### B-CC Cluster

-  Elementary School
-  Middle School
-  High School
-  Recommended Site for B-CC MS#2

-  ES Boundary
-  Cluster Boundary



**Attachment B**  
**Recommended Site for**  
**B-CC MS #2**

0 100 200 400  
Feet

Montgomery County Public Schools  
Division of Long-range Planning  
March 15, 2012

