



ATTACHMENT 4

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

OFFICE OF THE CHAIR

April 16, 2012

Ms. Shirley Brandman
President, Board of Education
Montgomery County Public Schools
Carver Educational Services Center
850 Hungerford Drive, Room 123
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Re: Mandatory Referral #2012019
Bethesda Chevy-Chase Cluster Middle School #2 Site Selection

Dear Ms. Brandman:

On April 9, 2012, the Montgomery County Planning Board (Board) conducted a mandatory referral review on the site selection for the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Middle School #2. The Board received a presentation from staff of the Department of Parks and the Planning Department, and then took public testimony from speakers, including several who participated on the Site Selection Advisory Committee (SSAC). The Board also received considerable written testimony on this issue.

At the conclusion of nearly four hours of testimony and discussion, the Board voted four to one, with Commissioner Dreyfuss dissenting, in favor of the following:

MCPS should enter into serious discussions with Parks Staff and the Planning Board to assess the feasibility of locating the middle school on the combined site of the former Lynnbrook Elementary School and Lynnbrook Local Park. While the Board does not support the taking of Rock Creek Hills Local Park for the middle school, it recognizes that MCPS has the right to reclaim the property if the Lynnbrook option proves infeasible upon further study.

Commissioner Dreyfuss, who did not support the motion, was in agreement with the Superintendent's recommendation to choose Rock Creek Hills Local Park. He stated that the SSAC process was fair and that the chosen site would still offer some shared recreational facilities for the community. He suggested, however, that it is still possible for the Board of Education and the Planning Board to negotiate about other possible sites.

The majority of the Planning Board favored the Lynnbrook site for the following reasons:

- Our staff conducted test fits that demonstrate the MCPS program can fit on the combined site;
- The site is centrally located within the cluster;
- 4 acres of MCPS property would be utilized to meet MCPS facility expansion needs, thereby reducing the need to take parkland;
- 6 acres of parkland would be used as opposed to 13 acres of parkland at Rock Creek Hills Local Park;
- There would be no loss of an adult size rectangular athletic field, as there would be at Rock Creek Hills Local Park. The 2005 Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan estimates the need for an additional 25 such fields in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase area by the year 2020.

Bruce Crispell, who participated in the mandatory referral meeting on behalf of MCPS, stated that one reason the SSAC rejected the Lynbrook site was a desire to keep it in reserve in case an elementary school site is needed in the cluster at a future time. The Planning Board was dismayed to hear that MCPS considers it appropriate to take a much-used park in order to reserve its own land for potential use in the future. If a new elementary school site is needed in the future, perhaps MCPS will have reclaimed land in the cluster or close to the cluster boundaries that is currently under lease, and another opportunity will have arisen to build a new school without taking another park. In our view, saving its own land for a potential future use is not a justifiable reason to take parkland now.

The Planning Board rejected staff recommendations to give additional consideration to purchase of a private site or reclamation of the former Montgomery Hills Junior High School site, primarily based on the high cost of acquisition. It also did not support further review of the North Chevy Chase Local Park alternative, as it concluded that the Lynnbrook option is feasible and has less adverse parkland impact. The Board found it difficult to fully assess the cost to the park system of MCPS taking North Chevy Chase Local Park rather than Rock Creek Hills Local Park because no information was available about which parts of the North Chevy Chase site school facilities would occupy, and which existing park facilities might be preserved. While two MCPS personnel attended our mandatory referral meeting and participated when asked, neither had any information about what the MCPS program would look like on that site. Our own staff was able to tell us about the challenging topography of the North Chevy Chase site, but without even the most basic information about which parts of the site the MCPS program would occupy, we could not assess the impact on park facilities.

The majority of the Planning Board expressed concerns about the SSAC process, most notably that the sites reviewed by the SSAC did not receive a thorough analysis in a manner that would allow the SSAC and the Planning Board to adequately compare and contrast impacts and cost. In addition, the majority of the Board continues to be concerned about the inability to discuss privately owned sites reviewed by site selection committees. It is

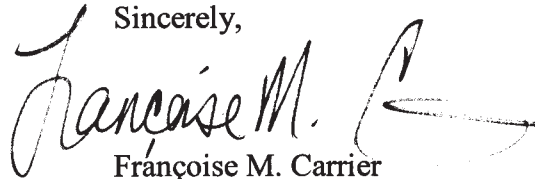
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conceivable that acquisition of a private site could be the most appropriate solution for the new middle school, but Board members had little information to determine the merit or cost/benefit of private sites.

The Board believes that schools and parks should not be pitted against each other and that the Board of Education, M-NCPPC, and Montgomery County must continue to work together to better plan for future growth and expansion of the school system and the concurrent delivery of park and recreation services.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the site selection and look forward to a continuing collaboration between our agencies to plan for the important aspects of Montgomery County that residents value the most, our parks and our schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Françoise M. Carrier". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name.

Françoise M. Carrier
Chair

FC:BF