

0610

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Nancy Grasmick

From: David Lever

Date: April 19, 2005

Subject: Montgomery County Public Schools: Seven Locks Elementary School Project

Current Status of the Project:

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) requested planning approval in the FY 2006 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for a replacement school for the Seven Locks Elementary School. The request is to construct a new elementary school of 67,000 square feet and with a capacity for 522 students. At this writing, the project has a "C" status, signifying that there are outstanding technical issues that must be resolved before the project can become eligible to be recommended for approval. The particular issue with respect to the replacement Seven Locks Elementary concerns the approval of the new site. I have learned from Mr. Jim Noonan of the Maryland Department of Planning that the new site has been approved by State agencies through the State Clearinghouse process, and will be brought to the Interagency Committee on School Construction (the IAC) for approval on Thursday, April 21, 2005. If the IAC approves the site, the project will be eligible for a "B" status.

However, the Public School Construction Program (the PSCP) will not recommend that the IAC approve this project for planning in FY 2006. MCPS submitted the Seven Locks Elementary project as their 41st overall priority, and their 18th priority for planning approval. Given the current large backlog of projects previously approved by the State and the extremely low priority of the project in the Montgomery County Public Schools CIP, Public School Construction Program planning procedures do not permit recommendation of the project. If MCPS wishes to proceed with the project without State approval, it will be submitted as a locally funded project.

Current Status of Surplus of Original Seven Locks Site:

Since the original Seven Locks Elementary School is still in service for educational purposes and will remain so at least until the replacement school is built, MCPS has not submitted a request for transfer of the property to the county government. We have no indication from MCPS when a request for transfer may be submitted.

DL:dgl

cc: Allen Abend
Barbara Bice
Jim Noonan
Joan Schaefer

SEVEN LOCKS

Executive Summary

This memorandum provides a summary of the Seven Locks question as follows:

- **Statement of issue**
- **Reasons for Seven Locks community/PTA opposition**
- **Proposals for achieving winning solution for all concerned**

Issue

The 6000-family Seven Locks Coalition opposes the County School Board's plan to close Seven Locks Elementary School, build a large "replacement" school on Kendale Road, and consider surplusng the Seven Locks site for high-density development.

Reasons for Opposition

- **Concern about losing the heart of the Seven Locks neighborhood.** The Seven Locks E.S. is not only our valued school but also our main community center and the only large recreation space within walking distance for neighborhood children. We think that a sense of community is important for the families in our close-knit community (mostly modest ranch-style homes built in the 1950's in an area bounded by River Road, the Beltway, Cabin John Regional Park and Democracy Boulevard) and helpful for the education of our children.
- **Anger about the sudden change in the School Board plan that will change our entire neighborhood.** The School Board stunned the community in Spring 2004 with no advance notice by shifting from the long-standing School Board plan to expand/modernize Seven Locks Elementary and, instead, to close the school and open the door for surplusng the site for high-density development.
 - In the late 1990's, the County Council had "directed" the School Board to shift from plans to improve Potomac E.S. and, instead, to expand/modernize Seven Locks E.S. so that it could accommodate 550 students.
 - Work proceeded on that plan, 2000-2003, until the change of plans announced by Superintendent Weast in Spring 2004.
- **Lack of due process**
 - There has been little transparency or accountability in the process.
 - Even more troubling, there has been egregious misrepresentation of community/PTA views.
 - Example: The Superintendent and School Board cite Seven Locks and PTA community support for building the Kendale replacement school.

- That is not, and never has been, the case. The Seven Locks PTA has voted overwhelmingly to keep Seven Locks E.S. and the community has grown from a group of 100 families opposed to the change of plan, to a coalition of eight civic organizations representing more than 6000 families.
- The community has registered its views, inter alia, at hearings, communications to County leaders, letters to the local press, large meetings, voting in the 11/2004 election, legal appeals, and, most recently, a petition drive resulting in over 1200 signatures collected on one weekend (Feb. 2005).
- See Seven Locks community legal appeal to the State of Maryland Board of Education (August 2004) for elaboration on due process and the failure of the County Board to comply with its own prescribed procedures. See also community letter to Dr. Weast (February 15, 2005) detailing more recent lapses in due process.

■ **Waste of taxpayer money**

- The School Board plan to build a Seven Locks “replacement” school on Kendale Road costs more than twice as much as a simple addition to Seven Locks E.S., an addition that would take care of overcrowding at Potomac E.S. or Bells Mills E.S. or elsewhere in area. (est. \$15 million versus 7.5 million).
- MCPS cost data are incomplete. They do not reflect the full cost of the Kendale replacement school, such as widening narrow Kendale Road; addressing environmental issues (see below for elaboration on leveling forest and storm water management near flood plain); and the already “sunk” costs for improving the current Seven Locks E.S. (site and architectural drawings, MCPS staff time for 2000-2003, new roof, AC, grounds renovation, etc.).
- MCPS cost data are misleading. They appear to underestimate the cost of the replacement school on Kendale and add unnecessarily high costs for Seven Locks expansion/modernization. Area builders/architects have identified needless proposed expenditures for the Seven Locks modernization that appear to reflect an attempt to push cost estimates for Seven Locks E.S. above those for the Kendale facility. Community requests for an independent assessment, forwarded by then County Council President Silverman, have been ignored.
- MCPS data are difficult to assess because the line items contain few specific break-outs and there is reliance on average “lump sum” figures despite the great difference in the building conditions on the Seven Locks and Kendale sites.
- The School Board and MCPS have refused to explore and assess the full range of options to address student needs in the West Bethesda/Potomac region (looking at nearby school property leased to private entities, available school property on Brickyard Road and elsewhere, etc.)

- For more details, see memo on comparative costs for the Seven Locks project, prepared at the request of then County Council President Silverman, which was presented to the County Council, the County School Board, and the Maryland State Committee for Public School Construction (12/2004). The County Council and community are still awaiting full responses to questions that have been posed since Summer 2004.

■ **Unsuitability of Kendale site for 740-student Seven Locks “replacement” school**

- There are eight (or fewer) buildable acres on the rocky Kendale terrain (versus the 10-acre flat site at Seven Locks complete with all utility connections and provision in MCPS site plan for traffic egress to Bradley Boulevard to relieve Seven Locks Road congestion).
- There are major environmental challenges such as the need to cut down and replant about 1500 trees and the need to address storm water management near a designated “flood area.” None of the soil boring, which most builders do before proceeding to site planning to estimate viability and cost of a project, have been done. If the experience of nearby properties is any indication, the cost of installing the planned underground storm water storage facility on the site may be difficult or prohibitively expensive.
- The lot size is below MCPS guidelines for elementary schools.
- It will be necessary to widen narrow and winding Kendale Road. The current MCPS plan provides insufficient space for two buses to pass safely, for families to walk from Kentsdale Road to the Kendale facility for large events (since no parking is possible or to be allowed along Kendale Road), and for storm water drainage off the road. There has been no provision in cost estimates or planning for a paved shoulder along Kendale or for lighting for those walking 500 feet from Kentsdale for evening events. No provision has been made for assuring egress from the school south on Kendale to Bradley Boulevard, in the event of an emergency for the northern exit to Kentsdale Road. Families living on the southern portion of Kendale Road have negotiated an arrangement with MCPS so that families driving their children from Potomac or Avenel will not be able to take the most direct route to the school from Bradley Boulevard.
- There is less parking available at the Kendale site than at Seven Locks. MCPS has suggested that busing from off-site locations may be needed to accommodate large school functions or events when the school is rented out. There is ample parking on the current Seven Locks site, with parking on site and at adjacent school and church facilities.
- There is less recreation space available per student for a 740-student school than would be available at Seven Locks, even if it were to be expanded. There would be one soccer field superimposed on one softball field versus the two soccer/softball fields at Seven Locks. MSI has identified the Seven Locks facility as the most requested school soccer

field in the County. There have been comparable endorsements from the lacrosse and softball leagues.

■ **Failure to look at the full range of educational needs/options such as those below. (Note: options noted are merely illustrative and do not/not reflect full discussion or approval by any individual or entity in the community.)**

- Why not deal directly with overcrowding at Potomac E.S. (and the area west of Potomac Village where most growth is occurring) if that overcrowding at Potomac E.S. is the main stated reason for expanding Seven Locks or building a replacement school? One of the reasons for overcrowding is the new Chinese immersion program requested by the Potomac E.S. community. Why not expedite expansion and modernization of Potomac E.S. rather than delay work there until 2015?
- Why not rationalize local school capacity by shifting students now in trailers at Bells Mills E.S. to Seven Locks E.S., rather than busing Wayside E.S. students to Seven Locks and rather than proceeding with an addition and modernization at Bells Mills?
- One option, addressing the two points above, might be to expand Potomac and provide an addition to Seven Locks E.S. – thus saving money on an addition for Bells Mills and the construction of a large new school on Kendale Road. The Superintendent himself has stated that it is cheaper to add on to an existing school than to build a new one (statement of 2/23/2004).
- Does it make sense to provide so much school construction in the West Bethesda/Potomac area (Churchill and Whitman clusters) when other parts of the County may have even greater needs? Why not pause to assess which projects are needed most and which are most effective for our children and put scarce taxpayer funds and school construction money to best use?
- Why not look at school property in the Bethesda/Potomac area that has either not been developed (Brickyard Road) or leased (Tuckerman)? The School Board owns a 20-acre site on Brickyard Road that has been set aside for a middle school. However, the Superintendent has indicated (2/23/2004) that there is no foreseeable need for a new middle school on that site, given other School Board plans. Perhaps the Brickyard site could be used both for the large 740-student core elementary school planned for Kendale and for an innovative complex for workforce housing for County teachers.
- There may well be other options that should be assessed before we waste money needlessly.

■ **Opposition to surplus school property with an existing school.**

- Why tear down a perfectly sound school when over 17000 County students are parked in portables?

- If the County does succeed in providing more affordable housing, there is likely to be an even greater need for school property.

■ **Concern about political agenda that seems to be driving plan**

- The letter from County Executive Douglas Duncan to School Superintendent Weast (Oct. 20, 2003), requested identification of County school property that could be declared surplus and used for affordable housing.
- Weast cited that request as part of the School Board's rationale for closing Seven Locks E.S. (2/23/2004).
- Does it make sense to tear down a functioning school when other property near central transportation and commercial hubs is available in the Seven Locks/Bethesda area? The community urges fuller consideration of those kinds of locations since we have a documented record of welcoming affordable housing in our neighborhood, from the historic Scotland community to advocacy of MPDUs in new developments. See proposal below.

Winning Solution

It would be helpful to address both educational and other needs in the community, while avoiding turmoil in two close-knit neighborhoods (Seven Locks and Kendale) to address overcrowding elsewhere (Potomac Village). See below for some possible options.

Note: the proposals and options below do not/reflect formally considered conclusions of any individuals or entities in the Seven Locks Coalition. They do reflect some illustrative ideas on what can be done and how it might be done which we believe might help overall in achieving a win-win solution for the County and community – and, most of all, for our children!

- **Defer further action on the Seven Locks project**, pending the provision of complete answers on the full costs of the full range of options, a definitive indication of the availability of State funds for school construction in Montgomery County, and the outcome of the informal task force noted below.
- **Or, proceed with the originally planned addition to Seven Locks E.S. (10 classrooms, gym, provision for increased 550-student core capacity).**
 - Advantages: Costs less than half the replacement school, no need for holding school, available in 2006 (one year before Kendale replacement and thus faster relief for Potomac or Bells Mills), frees up money for higher County school priorities, and eases choices in the event of a shortfall in State school construction money.
 - See also housing/school option below.
- **Capitalize on community support for affordable/workforce housing.**

- Stop County practice of enabling developers to buy out of MPDUs.
 - Assess potential for large developments at local malls which provide transportation/commercial hubs (such as Westfield Montgomery Mall) and area adjacent to Walter Johnson High School, where major new development is planned. Why not opt for housing for teachers and police/firemen, rather than a large new hotel, at the building site adjacent to Walter Johnson High School?
 - Why not explore the option of building workforce housing for teachers on the School Board's Brickyard Road site along with the construction of a new 740-student core elementary school there?
 - The combination of that housing/school option and an addition to Seven Locks E.S. would have the following advantages: provide relief for Potomac area, provide capacity for Seven Locks and Bells Mills contiguous districts while saving money on planned Bells Mills addition/modernization and bringing Seven Locks E.S. up to 550-student capacity, with the latter addition available in 9/2006 (far sooner than now planned relief for Potomac and Bells Mills).
- **Form informal County-community task force** to assess needs/options and present recommendations by late Spring to School Board and County Council in time for the County's final approval of the budget.
- The School Board has indicated that State funding is one of two prerequisites for this project. See the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2006 Capital Budget and Amended FY 2005-2010 CIP (page 4-14). Specifically, the CIP states that, for the Kendale plan to proceed on schedule, "two critical funding sources must remain as programmed. First, the County Council must provide local funding at the levels approved in the FY 2005-2010 CIP, and, second, the State of Maryland must provide state funding at levels projected by the County Council for the FY 2005-2010 CIP."
 - Given current projections, the County Council may face some difficult choices in the late Spring 2005 budget cycle.
 - Recommendations from the task force might provide valuable input for consideration by the County Board and County Council.

(Seven Locks – Summary)
(3/7/2005)

References:

- Legal appeal to the State of Maryland Board of Education (8/2004)
- Memorandum on comparative costs for Seven Locks (provided at request of then Council President Silverman, 12/2004)
- Letter to Superintendent Weast (2/2005)

SEVEN LOCKS E.S. -- COMPARATIVE COSTS OF OPTIONS

| Costs | 7 Locks One-step Addition/Modernization, One Community Plan | 7 Locks Addition Only (10 Classrooms/gym), Alternative Community Plan | 7 Locks, Phased Addition/Modernization, MCPS Plan | Kendale Replacement, MCPS Plan |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| Construction (modernization of existing structure, including expanded multi-purpose space vs. gym) \$3,473,610 Second-story addition over all, except multi-purpose space (25,000 sf-2,000,000*) | 6,473,610 * | 5,899,487 | 12,653,480 | 11,559,770 |
| Related Construction Contingency | 1,250,000 325,000 | 632,000 273,115 | 1,680,000 605,525 | 1,595,000 530,866 |
| Project Planning | 700,000 0 | 648,454 | 1,258,912 | 1,026,753 |
| Project Capital Investment FY 2005 | 8,748,610 * | \$7,453,056 | 16,197,917 | 14,712,390 |
| Road widening | 0 | 0 | 0 | 500,000? |
| Off-site drainage to flood area | 0 | 0 | 0 | 500,000? |
| Rock contingency | 0 | 0 | 0 | ? |
| ESTIMATED TOTAL COST | 8,748,610 * | 7,453,056 | 16,197,917 | 15,712,390 Plus rock contingency, architectural detail/landscaping to win Kendale community approval. etc. |
| Square Footage | 54,190 sf | 53,040 sf | 71,140 sf | 64,490 sf |
| Completion Date | Dec. 2006 | Sept. 2006 | Sept. 2010 | Sept. 2007 |

* Data estimated by community architects/builders; all other data provided by MCPS or indicated as question to be addressed to assess full project cost.

Note: 3/17/2005: MCPS memo indicated latest cost projection for Kendale facility is \$15,224,000 - not including costs for road widening, etc. that come out of different County budgets.

Note: Addition for Seven Locks could be configured to provide core capacity for 550 students

accused of being influenced by large campaign contributors."

"One or two dollars a year is not too much to restore faith and confidence in our government. The system is entirely voluntary so it does not violate the first amendment free speech provision of the constitution. If a candidate does not participate, he/she is subject to current election law."

Status Report on Issue of Seven Locks Elementary School: On Perception and Trust

by Mark R. Adelman, Education Committee Chair

Any attempt to summarize an issue as complex as the fate of the Seven Locks Elementary School is almost certain to fail, at least in part because so many people have so many strong feelings and differing perspectives. What follows is my personal attempt at a snapshot.

The Board of Education has voted that, instead of remodeling/expanding the existing Seven Locks Elementary School (ES), it will build a new school on the nearby Kendale Road site. The new school will be quite large (more than 700 student capacity) and reflects the need to modernize the existing Seven Locks ES, as well as deal with overcrowding at Potomac ES. Many citizens of the Seven Locks area are waging a vigorous effort to reverse this decision (<http://www.save7locksschool.org/>), but plans to build the new school are already well underway (<http://www.potomacalmanac.com/article.asp?article=46418&paper=70&cat=104>). Until late 2003, it was assumed that the existing Seven Locks ES would be upgraded and extensive plans had been developed toward that end. But the County Council and County Executive were working on a plan to begin to deal with the lack of 'affordable housing' in Montgomery County and had asked various county agencies to identify properties that might be 'unneeded' and thus could be turned over to the county to enable construction of

affordable housing. I outlined this program, and my concerns about it, in the May 2004 issue of the MCCF Newsletter (<http://www.montgomerycivic.org/newsletter.asp>) and also wrote articles for the Sentinel Newspaper's Civic Fed Corner on this matter (also available on our website). The Kendale Road site was on the County Executive's initial list, and there is reason to believe that the decision to build a new ES on it is the first step to deciding that the Seven Locks site is 'unneeded' and should be turned over to the County - possibly for high density affordable housing that is not part of the Master Plan and would eliminate a local community center and heavily used playing fields.

Unfortunately, whatever happens in this case, the outcome will leave a bitter taste in the mouths of many and will be questioned. Numerous public officials have been neither consistent nor transparent in their actions (or words), nor have they been convincing in their arguments. Many people have played on - or raised questions about the sincerity of - the 'motives' of others. Citizens have questioned the motives of public officials who have failed to advance affordable housing, but now urge the use of potential school sites for housing at a time when so many of our children attend classes in portables and under circumstances where no plan can guarantee that even the mandated percentage of newly constructed housing units will in fact be of the affordable variety. While most of the outspoken citizens appear genuinely concerned about educational programs, some are clearly objecting to high-density, 'affordable' housing in their neighborhoods. And while most school supporters recognize the need to argue for consistent policies that balance the needs of all, the temptation to accept a solution that addresses short term needs can be overwhelming. It is exceedingly difficult to decide if the Superintendent and the Board of Education have made their decision based on "hard numbers", "best practices" and realistic scenarios, as opposed to political pressures to provide land for developers or concerns about ways to guarantee an uninterrupted flow of tax dollars to support the ever-growing needs of our school system. The MCCF Education Committee is continuing to research this

issue, in the context of the policies and practices of the Board of Education, the Montgomery County Public Schools, the County Council, and the County Executive: we will have more to say about these matters, but the 'rush to decision' in this instance has been much too fast to allow adequate, thoughtful, public debate.

It has been my contention that politics and public education policy should not be - but all too often are - allowed to mix. The path we have all trodden, the one that leads us to the current apparent destination of a new school on the Kendale Road site, also has the consequence of allowing perceptions of insincerity to grow to the point where few trust the validity of the conclusions reached. Whether or not a new school is constructed on the Kendale site, whether or not the Seven Locks site is surplussed, whether or not public dollars are wisely spent, whether or not the children of our community are well served: all these "facts" will be forever clouded by doubts in the minds of many. And that is NOT the way we should run our County, nor educate our kids.

Recommendations on New Zoning Text Amendment

by Jim Humphrey, District 1 Vice President

In the resolution approved at the February 14 meeting, delegates agreed to recommend to the Council that the following four changes be made to the proposed ZTA 05-02 creating a new Transit-Oriented Mixed Use Zone, the "TOMX" zone:

- Specify a maximum building height in feet for the Optional Method.
- Establish a minimum required setback from any adjacent single-family residential zone for Optional Method development (or specify that it is not allowed).
- While supporting the 20% public use space requirement for Optional Method, we think 10% for Standard Method is too low (unless there is also minimum required "active and passive recreational space" for projects with a residential component)

and strongly oppose a reduction to 5% in projects with MPDUs. We think there is no less need for light, space and air around buildings with MPDUs in them than for other residential buildings.

- MCCF recommends establishing a maximum dwelling-unit-per-acre density for Standard and Optional Method. If you are creating a new zone to allow mixed use at medium density levels, then a density cap should be placed not just on FAR but on the number of dwelling units per acre.

Proposed Bylaws Amendments

by Peggy Dennis, Bylaws Committee Chair

The following amendments were proposed, discussed and amended in the February regular meeting of the Civic Federation. They will be voted on at the March meeting. [new/added text in bold. Deleted text.

ARTICLE IV. OFFICIALS AND ORGANIZATION

1. *Board of Directors.* There shall be a Board of Directors comprised of the President, First Vice President, ~~four~~ Second Vice Presidents, the Recording Secretary, the Corresponding Secretary, and the Treasurer. It shall have the duties and powers set forth in these bylaws and as may be imposed by state law. The Board of Directors shall meet at least annually. An Affirmative Vote shall be at least five votes, and shall be required for a Board action.

3. *Elected Officers.* Elected officers shall be a President, First Vice President, ~~four~~ Second Vice Presidents, one District Vice President from each of the ~~Councilmanic~~ **eight State Legislative** Districts, a Recording Secretary, a Corresponding Secretary, and a Treasurer.

ARTICLE VII. DUTIES OF ELECTED OFFICERS

2. *First Vice President.* ~~It shall be the duty of The~~ **First Vice President shall be responsible for all programs presented at regular meetings and will**

8003 Greentree Road
Bethesda, MD 20817
February 17, 2005

Mr. Douglas Duncan
County Executive
Executive Office Building
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

SUBJECT: SAVE SEVEN LOCKS, SAVE TAXES, AND SAVE SCHOOL LAND

Dear Mr. Duncan:

We write to you as the highest ranking official in Montgomery County because the issue in question reflects the School Board's response to a request from you.

Specifically, **we need your support to help overturn the School Board's decision to drop longstanding plans to expand and modernize Seven Locks Elementary School** (intersection of Seven Locks and Bradley Boulevard in Bethesda) -- and, instead, to close Seven Locks School, build a 740-student "replacement" school on nearby Kendale Road, and consider surplusing the Seven Locks site for high-density development. School Superintendent Weast has stated that he made this decision pursuant to a request from you in late 2003 to identify school property that could be used for affordable or workforce housing.

Unfortunately, the School Board has responded to your request with a plan that fails to meet the needs for either schools or housing in a constructive way. The Seven Locks community and PTA have thus strongly opposed the plan to close and surplus Seven Locks Elementary. We have instead proposed more cost-effective options. Nonetheless, the School Board has placed the Seven Locks "replacement" school on a fast track -- even though the new school in Potomac may "bump" other County schools waiting longer for more critically-needed expansion/modernization and even though this project may require County "forward funding" to compensate for scarce State school construction funds.

What's wrong with the School Board plan?

- **Tear down good school.** The Board plans to tear down a school deemed fine by Maryland state authorities and surplus a flat, ten-acre site with an elementary school that the School Board and County Council had planned, 2000-2003, to expand and modernize. Money has already been spent on site

and architectural drawings, as well as building upgrades (new roof, AC, etc.) for this existing school.

- **Put big school on small site.** The Board plans to build a super-sized school for 740 students on a smaller, unsuitable site along narrow Kendale Road, a winding country road with a designated “flood area.” The site itself – in contrast to Seven Locks – is rocky and hilly, with only eight buildable acres. MCPS must address major environmental issues (from cutting down and replanting over 1000 trees, to dealing with a major storm water management challenge). There is no adequate parking space on site or along Kendale Road for large school events. Guests may have to be bused from off-site. Projected recreation space for the 740-student school may be half what is available per student at Seven Lock Elementary. The list goes on!
- **Fuzzy math.** The School Board justifies its change of plans for Seven Locks by asserting that it is cheaper to build the new school than to expand or fix up the existing school. However, MCPS has refused to provide the County Council or community with data on the full cost of the project. MCPS says that costs such as those for widening Kendale Road or already “sunk” costs at the existing Seven Locks School do not count as part of their construction budget for Council review. We taxpayers figure all the money will come out of the same pocket – ours!
- **More fuzzy math.** Community evaluation of the cost data provided by the State of Maryland Public School Construction Program (MCPS has refused to provide us cost data) indicates major omissions in likely costs for the Kendale school and substantial inflation of projected costs for expanding and/or modernizing Seven Locks Elementary.
- **New school twice the cost of what is really needed.** Community assessment of MCPS data indicates that the cost of the replacement school is likely to be more than twice as expensive (\$15⁺ million versus \$7.5 million) as the simple addition at Seven Locks that would address the most urgent classroom capacity needs. Expensive modernization is not essential.
- **Board misrepresentation of community.** The School Board has consistently misrepresented the views of the local community and PTA. Contrary to what Superintendent Weast and the School Board say, the Seven Locks community and PTA were stunned by the Board decision to close and propose surplus of Seven Locks. We have strongly opposed that decision from day one!

We know that you are dedicated to achieving significant progress for Montgomery County – including good schooling for our children and affordable housing for more citizens, including teachers. In that regard, you are being ill-served by the proposal to surplus Seven Locks Elementary.

- Why use a school site with a functioning school for a housing development when the County has identified more than 4000 potential sites for affordable housing and when so many County students are packed into trailers?
- Of all County property, why identify only one property with an existing school – namely, Seven Locks Elementary? That site has no reliable public transportation or easy access to shopping.
- Why not capitalize on other options in our neighborhood for housing such as Cabin John Mall or Montgomery Mall – both of which are scheduled for major re-development and are key transportation/commercial hubs?
- Why not use existing or improved County regulations to encourage affordable or workforce housing? Our community has fought for MPDU's in this area, only to have the County agree to builder buyouts.

Given such questions and the need to act fast – before the School Board and County Council approve more money for the Kendale school this spring -- we would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you as soon as possible. It is time to move past the current impasse, with a 6000-family community coalition increasingly frustrated by the lack of accountability in much of the County government. The Seven Locks question is important, both in its own right and as a reflection of growing citizen concern about rising taxes, fiscal responsibility, due process and the balance between development and quality of life. We look forward to working with you, and will call to arrange a meeting in the near future.

Sincerely,



Cyril Draffin
President, Deerfield-Weathered Oak Citizens' Association



Sandy Vogelgesang
Board Member, West Bradley Citizens' Association

Plans for Kendale School Move Forward

Parents repeat that their concerns and input are being ignored.

By Ken Millstone/The Almanac

February 15, 2005

In what has become a familiar scene in the last few months, community members and Montgomery County Schools officials clashed Feb. 8 at a meeting to discuss plans for the Seven Locks replacement school on Kendale Road. But with the preliminary design process at its end, the next time planners and opponents of the school are likely to meet is in front of the Montgomery County School Board.

The board will vote March 8 on whether to approve preliminary design plans for the school, which is scheduled to open in September, 2007. If the board approves the design as expected, it will move on to a review by the Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission and then to a design development stage in which the structural, mechanical, and architectural elements of the design, as well as the cost, are worked out in much greater detail. Planners hope to take bids on construction in November of this year.

"We're still at the beginning of this process and there's still a long way to go," said facilities designer Jim Tokar of Montgomery County Public Schools.

That may be of some comfort to opponents who see the construction of the Kendale school as being linked to the eventual demise of Seven Locks Elementary. The County Council last year identified Seven Locks as a potential site for the construction of affordable housing.

"Time is an ally, from the perspective of the community because other things change," said School Board member Steve Abrams (District 2), who attended the meeting.

"It's still not clear how much money's going to be available to start this project next year," he said, because the MCPS does not know how much funding it will receive from the state. And even after the new school is built and occupied, it could take time for the Board of Education to decide whether or not the Seven Locks site should be declared surplus and turned over to the county for other uses.

"Even if you assume that the new school goes through, it's still not clear that surplus issue is one that we would be taking up so quickly. And I would certainly raise concerns about surplus." "

THE SEVENTH MEETING of the Facilities Advisory Committee — convened in October to gather community input on design plans for the new school — was scheduled Jan. 6 during what had been planned as the final advisory committee meeting, because community members said they had not an adequate opportunities to provide input.

Following a presentation by architect Mike Pones, who explained changes to his design since the last meeting, Montgomery County Public Schools officials took questions from the community. In addition to facilities designer Jim Tokar and planner Adrienne Karamihas, who have been present for all of the meetings, MCPS leaders like Abrams, Department of Facilities Management director Richard Hawes, and Department of Planning & Capital Programs director Joe Lavorgna were present.

Some of the community objections focused on elements of the Kendale design — particularly that the plan does not provide enough parking or field space, that it will not allow students to walk to school, and that 740-person capacity of the proposed school is too great for the site to accommodate. MCPS facilities guidelines call for 12 acres of land for new elementary schools. The Kendale site offers 10.4 usable acres.



Photo by Ken Millstone/The Almanac Residents at the seventh and final Facilities Advisory Committee meeting to provide input on design plans watch a presentation by architect Mike Pones.

[Printable Version](#)



But the majority of concerns were aimed not at specific aspects of the design but on a larger process that community members say has left them out and will eliminate a cherished community resource — Seven Locks — while replacing it with what some parents are calling a “mega-school” on Kendale.

JUST A FORMALITY? One proponent of that view was Janet Battista, a neighbor and former Seven Locks parent.

“Having had this meeting here tonight, can you then check off on your list of procedures that you need to take in order to continue down the road, that you have now gotten the final bit of community input that you require in order to seal this plan as your plan?” Battista asked Hawes. “Are we now participating in your plan as a community input by showing up here and asking questions about your architectural plan, when — although that is a concern to some people here — the real concern is the process by which we got here?”

“I’m not sure that anything that’s been said here tonight will change anything that we’ve got up there on the board. I mean I don’t consider that input,” she said.

Poness asserted that for those who have attended all of the meetings, the advisory committee process has in fact been interactive.

“A lot of you are thinking, this is the first time you’ve seen this plan. But this plan started off as six boards. We had the building over here, we had the building here, we had the building here,” he said indicating different areas of the site on a design board. “As a matter of fact I believe three of the plans were ruled out, without further consideration, by the group.”

“It’s been a process and in that process, you can call it a vote, you can call it a census taking, you can call it a straw poll, but the committee has been really generating” substantive changes, he said.

Hawes said repeatedly that the MCPS’s task was to design a school that meets the programmatic specifications set forth by MCPS planning documents.

A heated debate about whether the committee should vote on the design proposal resurfaced following extensive discussion of that question at the Jan. 6 meeting.

“If you feel strongly about taking a vote you should take a vote, because what you tell us is what we’re going to present to the Board of Education” Hawes said. “Now if you feel we haven’t met some standard that you’ve established for this school, then that’s what the vote will tell us. ... But ... the standards that you think should be met for this school may not be something we feel is par to the programmatic standards, the programmatic specifications.”

Winston Churchill High School cluster coordinator Janis Sartucci did eventually orchestrate several votes at the January meeting, but by the time they took place many people had left. With no agreement even on who was a member of the Facilities Advisory Committee, the votes had the tenor of a symbolic gesture rather than a firm statement.

Sartucci wanted the group to vote on a list of objectives that had been set forth at the first advisory committee meeting in October, but no one could decide whether they should be voted on together or separately.

“What about meeting the program standards for the school?” Hawes asked.

Sartucci replied, “That wasn’t our goal.”

“Well it was very clearly our goal to meet the program standards,” said Hawes, adding, “We’re here to get your input. We’re not here to gain your approval.”

NO DECISION ON SEVEN LOCKS

MCPS representatives maintained a long-time position that the decision to build the Kendale school is not linked to the possibility of surplussing Seven Locks

“We can deal with facts or we can deal with conjecture. Until the superintendent recommends, and the board decides, this school site stays in the MCPS system,” Hawes said. “It has no relationship whatsoever to this site.”

But some, including members of the Save Seven Locks coalition, objected.

“We all know it’s a bunch of bull,” said David Tiktinsky, who has been a vocal opponent of the Kendale

plans. "You can say whatever you want, we know the board of education has to do their own thing. You can try to talk around what I'm saying but the reality is it's on the county council's list, it's been targeted."

"My suspicion is that there are some forces at work that would like to see a major public initiative towards affordable housing. And you have a lot of politicians running for office in 2006," Abrams said in an interview. But he said he was not aware of any official or unofficial plans for Seven Locks, and that the school board is unlikely to even address the issue until summer or later. Abrams did acknowledge some of the concerns raised by the community about the Kendale school itself.

"I am concerned on the road capacity issue," he said, and about the size. "It may well be a legitimate 500 person site or 400 person site, but the question that [the community] is raising is, 'Is it a legitimate 740-person site?'"

**STATEMENT BEFORE BOARD OF EDUCATION
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
Hearings for FY 2006 Operating Budget
January 13, 2005
Written Statement for the Record
(Accompanied by Short Summary for Oral Presentation)**

**Ambassador Sandy Vogelgesang
West Bradley Citizens' Association (WBCA), Board Member
Member organization in 5000-family "Save Seven Locks Coalition"
9009 Charred Oak Drive
Bethesda, MD 20817
301-365-2347**

Subject: FY 2006 Operating Budget

My name is Ambassador Sandy Vogelgesang. I represent the West Bradley Citizens' Association. As the mother of two children in Montgomery County schools, I belong to the Seven Locks Elementary and Winston Churchill High School PTAs. This statement highlights two issues:

- 1. Priorities for the Operating Budget**
- 2. Importance of fiscal responsibility for overall school spending**

First, regarding priorities for the Operating Budget, we commend the Superintendent for his commitment to higher educational performance, including some points identified in the proposed \$26 million for "initiatives to improve student achievement." We also commend the priorities identified by the MCCPTA budget compact – especially those addressing "educational program staffing," "educational resources," and "a safe and healthful environment."

On staffing, although County schools generally do well by those students who are most or least gifted, the vast majority in the middle often get short shrift. One of the main reasons is the lack of teachers. The Board should thus expand the number of teachers you plan to hire to reduce class size. The County needs more than the 175 additional teachers proposed in the Superintendent's "Budget Initiatives." In particular, the Board should include far more than the 40 positions proposed for reducing oversize secondary school classes County-wide. Why must my children get lost in the shuffle of large classes, with teachers too busy to help them, to alert me to their problems, and, sometimes, even to know their names?

On resources, the proposed budget indicates that many MCPS textbooks do not reflect the County curriculum and therefore includes plans to purchase and distribute about \$3.7 million in new textbooks. However, the budget also indicates that "these textbooks will be purchased without adding to the budget by realigning funds from other

textbook and materials accounts....” The Board should, instead, allocate increased funding for textbooks. Why must my children, who will start semester exams tomorrow, struggle with no textbooks in one third of their classes? Why must my son, in introductory Latin, depend on my old textbook?

On health and safety, the MCCPTA compact rightly identifies many issues from air quality in trailers, to lead in drinking water and discipline problems. One of our main concerns is drug abuse in our schools. Yet, the proposed budget item for “Safe and Drug Free Schools” requests no net change from the current FY 2005 budget of \$396,748 and indicates no initiative to bolster supervisory or security capacity to crack down on open drug trafficking? Why do students at our high school report that drugs can be bought anytime, even inside the school?

Second, to deal with such priority issues, the School Board must exercise maximal fiscal responsibility -- not just in the Operating Budget, but for overall school spending. As taxpayers, who are shocked by the latest huge increase in tax assessments, we see funds for operating and capital budgets ultimately as part of one pot of money – ours! Further, there is some overlap between operating and capital budgets. Reportedly, some operating needs are in the capital budget, and vice versa, partly to ensure adequate funding if one budget is cut. We thus pose the following **questions**:

- Why does Montgomery County pay a premium for State funding to cover educational expenses?
- Why persist in forward funding when there is a shortfall in State funding?
- Why surplus school property that is needed for this County’s growing student population or lose revenue that might be earned through leasing or rental of facilities?
- Why not concentrate on priority operational issues, such as hiring more teachers, rather than wasting money on projects that communities and PTAs do not want? For example, why build a large replacement school for Seven Locks Elementary on Kendale Road that may cost twice as much (estimated \$15+ million versus \$7.5 million) as just adding on to the existing school?

In sum, our community asks that the School Board review the proposed Operating Budget in the context of overall school spending and that you exercise greater fiscal responsibility in order to address highest educational priorities. Resist proposals that may provide more benefit for some developers and politicians rather than our children. You will have our enthusiastic support if, instead, you concentrate on our shared objective, educating our children.

(Seven Locks – Final Statement - Jan. 2005 Hearing)

Cyril W. Draffin
Public Comments to Montgomery County Board of Education
January 11, 2005

In the quest to obtain more funding for school construction in Montgomery County from the state or county taxpayers, it undermines your case to push building an expensive school at Kendale Road that is not wanted by the Seven Locks PTA or the community.

The Seven Locks PTA by over a 2 to 1 majority voted against the replacement school, now they understand the MCPS plans (and most in favor of the replacement school came from Wayside area, not the surrounding community). Over 100 very concerned parents stood to show their disagreement at the November Board of Education public hearing (on the capital budget) and again last week (January 6) at the Seven Locks replacement school facilities discussion (and were so against the MCPS plans that the MCPS officials cancelled the scheduled vote on whether to proceed with Kendale design).

The County guidelines do not support mega elementary schools, but Kendale is being designed for a 740-student core. We understand the County guidelines are 12 acres when building a school at a new site, but Kendale has only has 8 usable acres (due to steep grade and rocky terrain), thus substantially reducing playing fields (which is exactly the opposite of what Mr. Leventhal said last night to Montgomery County PTA when he said exercise was important to student health).

Because no one at the Board of Education is on record as a member of the Board as being against declaring surplus the current Seven Locks site, the community assumes your goal is to get rid of the current Seven Locks School even though our schools are plagued with overcrowding and trailers. The thought of closing Seven Locks Elementary, and ripping apart the community that surrounds the school and taking away the only large recreation area within walking distance for our neighborhood children, has united the Seven Locks community.

From the public's vantage point, your process of supporting plans to expand Seven Locks (which was the official public MCPS position until early 2004) and then suddenly reversing course within less than a month, without any substantive dialog with the community, has created a firestorm of public distrust that is spreading countywide and to state officials.

MCPS's position that they did not want to have a dialog with the PTA or the community, written response from MCPS to the community that they would not provide written answers to our questions in 2004, and avoiding giving the community any detailed financial information, has acerbated the concern. A lack of willingness by the Board to consider alternative paths has created ill will and raises questions of transparency and fiscal responsibility. We stand ready to discuss win-win situations. What do you need from us or your own staff to help you make a fiscally sound decision that is in the best interests of the Seven Locks community and our children?

"We're continually open to the input process..."

– Superintendent Jerry Weast, May 13, 2004

The Seven Locks replacement school slated for construction on Kendale Road is planned to be huge – big enough to deal with the Potomac and Wayside Elementary overcrowding (according to the Superintendent on May 13, 2004). Superintendent Weast was mistaken in his impression that Kendale and Seven Locks are equal 10-acre sites: Kendale's usable acreage is considerably smaller, due to its topography and location adjacent to a flood plain. Our road is hilly, curvy, narrow with no shoulders for parking, and very dangerous due to excessive speeding. Fitting a school nearly triple the size originally intended for our site poses enormous challenges and will dramatically change the very nature of our neighborhood. We are also very concerned that MCPS has estimated the project to be so inexpensive. Our concerns are to be addressed in a series of Facilities Advisory Committee (FAC) meetings held between community members, MCPS teachers and staff, and expert consultants.

Ken Millstone's 1/12/05 article, "It's a Nice School, But Don't Build It" outlined community members' anger about the planned closing of Seven Locks Elementary School as it was expressed at the 1/6/05 FAC meeting. Robin Gordon, the principal at Seven Locks, did a heroic job of trying to refocus the meeting in the face of such anger on the part of so many. Staff representatives from MCPS emphatically explained that the FAC meeting was not the proper forum to address whether or not the replacement school would be built. They also assured the frustrated audience that there would be a future opportunity to address that issue.

However, on May 13, 2004, Superintendent Weast and then Board of Education President Cox stated on the record to the County Council that the Seven Locks community not only had already provided input, but that the replacement school had actually been the Seven Locks community's idea. The Superintendent stated: "We did get plenty of input because this issue with Seven Locks actually was brought to us in our input from the general public because we were forging ahead with doing classrooms at Seven Locks... But with the input we got from the public, who pointed out that Kendale had 10 acres and Seven Locks had 10 acres, we actually re-examined our position." And Mrs. Cox elaborated further: "We have already had one public hearing on the concept of building the school on the Kendale site and it was in March along with our boundaries discussion and the Superintendent's recommendation to build the replacement school on the Kendale site was a subject of this public hearing. We did get testimony from the schools involved so there really already has been a public hearing on the concept of the replacement building."

Yet at that time, hardly anyone in the community, outside a handful of people in the Seven Locks PTA, had any idea that there was a possibility that Seven Locks Elementary School would be closed and a huge new school built on Kendale. No member of the community was notified by mail of any such plan or possibility.

The County Council also made very clear on May 13, 2004 what the replacement school would mean for Seven Locks. In opening discussion of the issue, Councilmember Subin stated: "Seven Locks is a horrible, horrible site for a school... The Board of Education and the Superintendent came to an overdue conclusion that they would prefer to build a new school of the site of the Kendale property and surplus to the County the Seven Locks site." As the discussion came to a conclusion, Councilmember Praisner reminded the Superintendent and Board of Education President of the implications of their actions: "The regulations would require if this [Seven Locks] parcel, if the site, if the building is no longer needed by the school system that it is conveyed then to the County Council. And folks need to understand the process. It isn't a sale of the parcel; it is a conveyance... Once there is a school on the parcel [that is abandoned], it must be conveyed to the County."

Yet, despite these statements about the surplus of Seven Locks, made by members of the County Council and affirmed by the Superintendent and the Board of Education on May 13, 2004;

MCPS staff members at the recent FAC meetings have insisted that no decision has been made to surplus Seven Locks.

Closing 40-year-old Seven Locks Elementary at its current location at Bradley Boulevard and Seven Locks Road will abruptly change the fabric of that neighborhood, alter people's home values, and, indeed, their day-to-day lives. Is it any surprise that they come to express themselves in any forum –appropriate or not (like operational budget hearings, boundary hearings, and now the FAC meetings) – with the MCPS or County Council audience? We accomplished almost nothing constructive at the last FAC meeting.

We, in the Kendale neighborhood, badly need the FAC meetings to discuss our concerns with MCPS, the architect, and other experts, in order to protect our neighborhood as much as we can. We can all empathize with the MCPS staff members, who have little latitude to make adjustments, given the relative sizes of the school planned and of the Kendale lot. The larger community wants to be heard. If they are not given a proper public forum, we may need to schedule FAC meetings into the distant future until our concerns are addressed and the details finalized. More importantly, it may be many years before the anger of these citizens dissipates.

Why not grant the communities in the Seven Locks area a realistic and viable public forum, so that they can ask their very legitimate questions and, hopefully, be given honest and responsible answers?

Superintendent Weast also stated on May 13, 2004, "We are continually open to the input process..."

Sandra W. Bradley
9400 Kendale Road
Potomac, MD 20854-4517
Telephone 301-365-5900