

City of Takoma Park, Maryland

Office of the City Council

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February 4, 2016

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive
Executive Office Building (EOB)
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear County Executive Leggett,

We write to you to convey the importance we place on the public school system provided by the County and for which investments in programs and infrastructure are so critical.

In Takoma Park, approximately 20 percent of the population are children and youth who attend county schools, in particular, Piney Branch Elementary, Rolling Terrace Elementary, Takoma Park Elementary, East Silver Spring Elementary, Takoma Middle School, Silver Spring International Middle School and Blair High School. Each of these schools serves a diverse population and in some of our schools more than 80 percent of students are Hispanic, African American or Asian. Many of our schools are currently over capacity and in some cases like Rolling Terrace Elementary, have been over capacity for more than five years with an expectation that a high level of overcrowding would continue. The 2016 projection shows that our schools are more than 600 students, in total, overcapacity at present. Blair High School is currently hundreds of students over capacity and is projected to grow far more crowded with a population expected to exceed 3,000 students.

Moreover, many of these crowded schools are aging and require increasingly frequent maintenance. In Piney Branch Elementary School, Principal Rachel DuBois reports that "All of our staircases have the rubber treading on them. They are constantly breaking and people have fallen as a result. We place work orders, however only that one broken piece of rubber is replaced instead of the tread on the whole stair. In addition they are worn down and slippery." And our PTA writes that "several windows are so warped or damaged that they no longer close, so cold air leaks in, forcing heating and cooling systems to work harder to keep temperatures comfortable."

We request the following:

- 1) Evaluation of the current formula used by MCPS to predict enrollment.
- 2) Fully fund the MCPS CIP budget and improvements to area schools that will allow adjustments in school boundaries to ease overcrowding.
- 3) Inclusion of the residents of Takoma Park in discussions and feasibility studies regarding expansion options at Piney Branch Elementary School and with regards to the future of the Piney Branch Pool.
- 4) Work with the Council and City staff to identify potential options within the City for new school locations.

We thank the County Council for asking OLA to evaluate the current methods used to calculate future school populations and welcome updates on this issue. We are concerned about the formula the MCPS uses to predict enrollment which seems to consistently underestimate the level of future overcapacity and thus potentially lower the priority of our schools for expansion or modernization projects. For example, looking at just the 2012 and 2016 CIP documents, MCPS underestimated enrollment in five of six Takoma Park schools whereas MCPS consistently overestimated enrollment at other school clusters (with a history of expansions and modernizations). Indeed, during a recent presentation to the Takoma Park City Council, Bruce Crispell of the Office of Long-Term Planning indicated that a number of our schools have never been modernized. Whereas we can read in MCPS documents about schools in other parts of the county being expanded when they have less overcrowding or modernized at a time when they are still a newer school than ours. In year after year of past CIP budgets, we are disappointed that our schools consistently seem to receive little investment.

We thank MCPS and School Board staff for proposed expansions in or studies of future expansion at East Silver Spring and Piney Branch Elementary. We encourage the County Executive and County Council to fully fund these projects and the CIP budget, as well as improvements to area schools that will allow adjustments in school boundaries that ease overcrowding. In particular, we appreciate the consideration being given to different expansion options at Piney Branch Elementary School including options that would allow expansion into vacant and unused areas between the school and playgrounds, and exploration of options that would keep the pool in operation. The Council would welcome engagement on this issue if there is a need for further dialogue about transferring a marginal area of land from the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission to MCPS to make the connection of an expanded school with the county-owned playground

area possible. In particular, we support every effort to maintain and improve the Piney Branch Pool, which is a critical resource to our children, to a large population of lower income residents, and to people throughout our community. As MCPS moves forward with evaluating options for Piney Branch Elementary School and the pool, we request the City and its residents are included in those discussions.

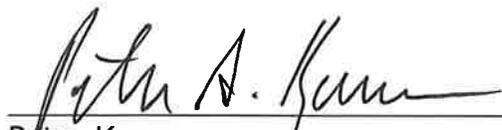
We also want to raise two possibilities that are rarities in our City and county. First, is the campus of Washington Adventist Hospital. As you are aware, the Hospital is in the process of moving its acute care facilities, leaving open the opportunity to work with the Hospital regarding future development of the campus. Second, is the presence of a 2+ acre property currently used for a private school in an R-60 zoned area that could be available in the near future for MCPS acquisition. Mr. Crispell indicated the county was aware of the possibility of the private school site becoming available, but we wanted you to be aware of the site's potential to ease crowding in schools by serving students from New Hampshire Avenue and many other parts of Takoma Park.

Our Council hopes to spend more time engaging with you than has occurred in the past. We will focus those efforts on both infrastructure and programming and use our voice to help ensure that you know the stories and situations of the diversity of children in our community served by MCPS schools. We will look for opportunities to work together with you to help them. For the greater good of the whole County, we look forward to working with you as advocates for all Montgomery County schools at the state level.

Sincerely,



Kate Stewart
Mayor



Peter Kovar
City Councilmember, Ward 1



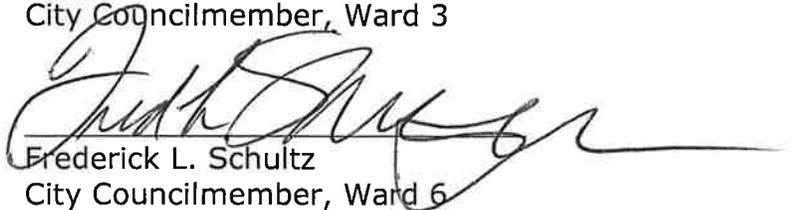
Tim Male
City Councilmember, Ward 2



Rizwan Qureshi
City Councilmember, Ward 3



Terry J. Seamens
City Councilmember, Ward 4



Frederick L. Schultz
City Councilmember, Ward 6

February 3, 2016

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CC:

The Honorable Roger Berliner

The Honorable Marc Elrich

The Honorable Nancy Floreen

The Honorable Tom Hucker

The Honorable Sidney Katz

The Honorable George Leventhal

The Honorable Nancy Navarro

The Honorable Craig Rice

The Honorable Hans Riemer

The Honorable Michael A. Durso

The Honorable Judith Docca

The Honorable Christopher S. Barclay

The Honorable Philip Kauffman

The Honorable Patricia O'Neill

The Honorable Jill Ortman-Fouse

The Honorable Rebecca Smondrowski

The Honorable Eric Guerci

PTA President Emmet Acquoi, Sr., Piney Brach Elementary School

PTA President Lisa Seigel, Rolling Terrace Elementary School

PTA President Shana Fulcher, Takoma Park Elementary School

PTA President John Lopez, East Silver Spring Elementary School

PTA President Shruti Bhatnagar, Takoma Park Middle School

PTA President Maryse Mills-Apenteng, Silver Spring International Middle School

PTA President Ray Moreno Montgomery Blair High School