

## FY 12 Capital Improvements Program (CIP)

### Background and Next Steps

#### What is the CIP?

The Rosemary Hills PTA has been actively involved in providing input into this year's Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Each year, MCPS takes stock of capital projects in the system. These are infrastructure projects – additions, modernizations, upgrades, and new buildings. It is also major systems like HVAC. The planning period is a six-year period. In odd years, the full six years is reviewed. In even years, MCPS simply amends the plan.

#### Why is it important this year?

So, if MCPS does this every year, why has this year generated so much interest? In 2009, the projected numbers for our B-CC Cluster (all schools that send students to B-CC for High School) surpassed the legal limit of 120% as stated in the County's annual growth policy. The projected enrollment at the elementary school level was unexpectedly too high and so a building moratorium on multi-family dwellings in the B-CC area was imposed. This was particularly surprising since new buildings have slowed down during the recession. A moratorium, while good in principle, has serious impacts on the economic planning and activity in a major area of the county and the state, especially during a recession. Therefore, the County Council in the fall of 2009 made changes to the CIP to add capacity in the cluster – a build out of four additional classrooms at Somerset Elementary and new classroom space with a new gym planned for Westbrook Elementary. While these changes dropped the average below the moratorium threshold, they did not address the severe overcrowding at Rosemary Hills and North Chevy Chase in particular.

#### Background to the CIP

A roundtable was convened in the spring of 2010 to discuss options for the schools involved in the paired articulation pattern of Rosemary Hills K-2 and North Chevy Chase and Chevy Chase Elementary Schools 3-6 and Bethesda Elementary (a K-5 school) for 3-5. Rosemary Hills representatives participated as well as representatives from NCC, CCES, BE and Westland. A major topic of these roundtables was the 6<sup>th</sup> grade program at “the Chases.” This 6<sup>th</sup> grade program is a holdover from the original arrangement of the paired school articulation (K-2 and then 3-6). It has served the communities and MCPS well over many years because there has not been space at Westland for these students.

However, in the last few years, there have been two changes that are significant: 1) the introduction countywide of Middle School Reform, which is a change in the curriculum and academic requirements and 2) reduced budgets that have forced all schools to cut back. Middle school is different than elementary school in many significant ways. It is a longer instruction day, students have different requirements, including PE, they move through different classes and teachers. It has become increasingly difficult to replicate the middle school academic experience at the elementary school level. Therefore, one recommendation from the round table was the need to build a second middle school.

### Superintendent Weast's Recommendations

In October, Superintendent Jerry Weast released his recommendations on the Roundtable discussions. Some of these were then included in his FY 12 CIP amendments. They include starting a study to find a site for a second middle school. Once a site is identified, then a second study – a feasibility study – looks at costs. The superintendent did not offer suggestions or recommendations for handling the 6<sup>th</sup> graders in the interim period, either during the study or if a new middle school were to be built.

### To the Board of Education

The Board of Education held a worksession on November 4, 2010 where they listened to a presentation about Dr. Weast's recommendations. Prior to the work session, clusters, schools and individuals sent information to the Board to educate them about specific issues. Rosemary Hills PTA submitted a position paper. At the work session, the Board offered alternatives to the superintendent's recommendations, including 1) a limited transfer policy and 2) moving all 6<sup>th</sup> grade students to Westland beginning next year.

A third alternative on a separate topic, the unusual articulation pattern of some Rosemary Hills students who are assigned to Rosemary Hills K-2 but then to Bethesda Elementary, a K-5 school, for 3-5, was proposed as well.

### The Public Hearings

On November 10 and 11, The Board of Education hosted public hearings for clusters to provide reaction to the recommendations and alternatives. B-CC and approximately 12 other clusters attended on November 10.

There are a number of issues for the B-CC cluster, which our cluster representative Craig Brown discussed. First and foremost, the projects currently in line including a long-over due modernization of Rock Creek Forest, and the additions at Somerset and Westbrook per the

County Council's decisions in 2009. The FY 12 CIP also recommends a study of new space at B-CC high school.

The hearing was well attended by a variety of different groups. Over 100 people from CCES, NCC, Rosemary Hills and the East Bethesda neighborhood were in the audience. After the cluster coordinators spoke, individuals testified. There were representatives of individual schools as well as parents speaking on their own behalf. The Rosemary Hills testimony, delivered by Ilaya Hopkins on behalf of the PTA, focused on two aspects of the recommendations.

First and foremost is the support to add space at the middle school level by building a new middle school. This means conducting the site study and the feasibility study to gain more information as soon as possible as to how this can be accomplished.

Secondly, Rosemary Hills is severely overcrowded. We support the superintendent's recommendation to add permanent space but this will take years given the limited resources and long queue of projects. In the interim and to simplify the complex articulation pattern of the paired school arrangement, Rosemary Hills PTA supports reviewing the RH/BE track with the idea that these students should be reassigned to Bethesda Elementary K-5. This will reduce some overcrowding at Rosemary Hills but more importantly will streamline the paired articulation from 3 receiving schools to 2 receiving school, NCC and CCES.

### Follow Up

After the public hearings, Dr. Weast issued a memo revising his initial recommendations as outlined in his October report. He now suggests a boundary study for Rosemary Hills, North Chevy Chase, Chevy Chase and Bethesda Elementary in the spring of 2011. The PTA will continue to work through our cluster representatives to understand the implications of this recommendations.

### Next Steps

The Board of Education will make its decisions at a session on November 18, 2010. The budget will then be included in County Executive Isiah "Ike" Leggett's recommended FY 12 budget that is sent to the County Council. The County Council approves the budget by May 2011.

### What can we do?

The Rosemary Hills PTA will continue to work with the cluster through our B-CC cluster representative Sandy Barsky and our MCC-PTA cluster representative Laurie Rosen.

There are numerous ways for all of us to advocate for these issues:

- 1) Write to your state senator and delegates. The State of Maryland funds school construction projects. Currently, Montgomery County only receives approximately 17% of the requested state money. The county has to make up the difference. Montgomery County needs our fair share of state resources for our school infrastructure.
- 2) Write to the Governor and members of the Board of Public Works (Treasurer and Comptroller). The governor of Maryland has the greatest authority to determine the state budget of any state chief executive.
- 3) Write to the County Executive to support funding for our school infrastructure to keep projects on schedule and to plan ahead for the growth that is coming
- 4) Write to the County Council that makes the ultimate decision on land use, development and funding for capital and operating budgets.
- 5) Write letters to the editor at The Washington Post and The Gazette. Share information with friends, particularly those with younger children who will be in overcrowded schools is something doesn't change. Talk to neighbors that don't have children but should be concerned because of how this can impact property values and the perception and reality of communities.
- 6) Stay informed yourself. These are really complicated issues but a lot of work has been done this year and in years past. There is good information on how to advocate at various places.

For Background material, please visit the following sites:

[www.rhpspta.org](http://www.rhpspta.org) Position Paper, Testimony

Our RHPS-PTA listserv has many messages about this topic as well

[www.ccespta.org/news](http://www.ccespta.org/news)

[www.nccpta.org](http://www.nccpta.org)

[www.ebca.org/localeducation](http://www.ebca.org/localeducation)

[www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/planning/Index2.shtml](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/planning/Index2.shtml)

[www.montgomerycountydelegation.com](http://www.montgomerycountydelegation.com)

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov)