

Share with All Members of the Montgomery County Council:

I am extremely dismayed to again read of another lack of open and transparent process as well as another lack of community involvement in this process involving the Blair Ewing Center and its relocation to the former English Manor elementary School at 4511 Bestor Drive in Aspen Hill. My community of Manor Lake just east of Rock Creek Park was never notified and dumping roughly 1000 cars/buses onto Avery and Norbeck is forcing us to be gridlocked trying to leave for work or return home. The Aspen Hill community was only notified a few days before the Board of Education was scheduled to hold its public hearings on the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP). This is totally unacceptable as taxpayers in this county.

This a track record I have seen starting with the first year I moved to Maryland in 1992. As a Board Member in my community I saw it frequently. A slip of tongue or leaked document led to community organizations learning of Council action with no involvement of the community nearest the situation.

I can go on with my continuing disappointments with not only the actions of the Public School System but the Montgomery County Council.

This County has and continues to spend and not always wisely.

There is a no serious document showing a reliable feasibility study for this decision to move the Ewing Center to within private residences and tear down a school, of which the County lacks sufficient numbers, to build a commercial school bus depot right next to one of only contiguous parks with a stream in the metropolitan area.

To build a bus depot, one must install a lot of underground gas tanks. There will be toxic run-off and maybe an oil spill that will run downhill into the park and stream. The potential is there for an environment disaster. Another potential I have noted in this county is once a zoning goes commercial, offices and large apartment buildings follow suite NOT individual homes. What my community of Manor Lakes has prided itself is its proximity to Rock Creek Park, Rock Creek and Lake Frank in a wooded setting. And, this very same MCPS Board and Co. Council that made a presentation in 2013 stating you needed 35 acres to support the school buses. Ewing Center is 22.4 acres. The difference is: 12.6 acres. Either you lied in 2013 or you are lying now because the figures do not equate.

The current Ewing Center is zoned for R200 which specifically prohibits things like bus depots. This means the area would have to be re-zoned and this site is only 500 feet or so from Rock Creek which is much more a sensitive area then say Vitro/BAE Systems which could take years. I for one would fight it with its proximity to the Rock Creek Park. And as I will mentioned, once an area is rezoned then it is a slippery slope down to commercial and degradation of the area.

Traffic Nightmare:

As one who is daily stuck in rush hour traffic – the lengths of which on Norbeck Road are now 4 hours in AM and 4 hours in PM. I travel between Bauer and Gude going west and in the evening from Gude east to Rocking Springs. Others have backups from Bel Pre going west in AM and in the evening from Maple Avenue up to and past Georgia Avenue. In the mornings, the backups start about 6:30 or 7AM and evenings about 3:30 PM. The worst of the backups occur through the lights of Bauer, Old Baltimore, Avery and Gude and now you want to put 700 and possibly 1100 vehicles into this already gridlocked road? Have you people lost your minds? And, you are now dumping, into these private residences on small streets, somewhere in area of 20 buses plus cars for faculty and staff. Numbers of 20 buses means up to 40 trips to the Center. We no doubt have people living in this quiet community many parking on streets now having to contend this traffic as these buses wind through these quiet neighborhood streets.

My understanding is the City of Rockville paid \$790,000 to build athletic fields that are on the Ewing Center site and the City has an agreement to maintain the facilities. They also approved a bid of \$331,261.000 in early 2014 for a new sidewalk on the East side of Avery. So what happens with these monies for which the residents of Rockville City no doubt are responsible for?

I have also learned that the school, into which you want to move students from Ewing Center, is over 10

years older. This does not make sense added on what I written above and what I will write below. AND, Ewing had renovations done as late as 2007 whereas no major renovations have been done since English Manor was constructed. I read English Manor needs HVAC and new roof along with replacing the electrical systems. AND, the School Board suggests rehabbing English Manor could be done with \$16.6 million and we know that figure is NOT sufficient since the cost of the project will be increased in the Fiscal Years 2017-2022 Capital Improvement Program. This is done under the “Maintenance of Effort” rule where the cost can never be less than the previous year’s. And, I believe I read this correctly – the original \$16.6 million promised to these students currently at Ewing is now down to \$16,463,800. Why does the school board continue to waste the money already promised to these students? And, had you all done a good job of studies before deciding you want to do this, maybe you could have figured another way to accomplish this or done it in a manner that does not COST US TAXPAYERS more money to be thrown down the rat hole.

I believe most of you on the Council along with the school board ran on promises to build new schools for the

Children in Montgomery Co. I was told over and over the County did not have enough schools to house the students presently residing within the County let alone those moving in. OK, so under the Shady Grove Sector Plan, the Shady Grove Transportation Depot on Crabbs Branch Way (the school bus depot & maintenance facility) will be closed this month, January 2015 to make way for “residential development”. And in addition, we are now learning this proposal also included the razing of an existing school building for this bus depot. And, I will ask this: If this Depot, located on Crabbs Branch, was part of an approval for a massive housing development, why did the BOE wait until the last minute to fine a new location for the bus depot, thus manufacturing this crisis?

It is also my understanding that the students enrolled in the Alternative Education Programs (AEPs) have behavioral problems. I understand several questions related to the reasons, that put the students in this particular school, have not been responded to in a timely manner. “Out of school suspensions” were 41.9% of the students in a program that was to address behavioral problems. That percentage is much higher than seen in normal schools. Words such as attack, dangerous substances, threats were used. When a student gets suspended, how do they physically leave the property? This is a problem you are now pushing on a community surrounded by private homes. Many young families with infants and toddlers could be negatively impacted by the presence of this school and its troubled students. Most schools located within communities are assets to the community so the children can be close to their homes. The fact Ewing Center is isolated and not within a community may have been the reason why it was chosen in the first place. From what I have read, the MCPS High School Safety Reports for 2012-13 state the police were called to the Ewing Center (Mark Twain School) for serious incidents - 47 times. This level of responses would be disturbing to the residents living in a quiet community. I for one would be extremely upset to learn of this intrusion into my quiet community. I was not pleased when I learned about the type of school that was so close to my home however, we have the park, wooded area and creek as a buffer. Again, this is not the type of school that should be placed within a quiet community. And, I really wonder where your minds are on this issue.

I see so many things wrong with the process with which both the School board and the MOCO Council made these decisions that it should be stopped immediately and re-accessed with “much more” dialogue with the communities affected by this. These plans you are coming up with need options that benefit the students and the taxpaying residents in our communities.

Currently, I am overwhelmed with the issues presently before the Council that I would have to ask for leave of absence just to attend all the hearings, I cannot do that so I am exercising my civil duty by writing and your will be hearing more from me.

Lee Prouty