

September 17, 2009

President Brandman and the Members of the Board of Education:

This year's MCPS strategic plan mentions 2 topics of concern: (1) Addressing oversized classes in elementary, middle, and high schools. (2) Organizing and optimizing resources.

I. Addressing Oversized Classes in Overcrowded Schools

Oversized classes and overcrowded schools are on the horizon, and this is the year to take action to avoid them.

The County Council is considering 4 sector plans this year that would cause major and rapid residential growth near transit. Unless you act, this growth will swamp nearby schools by hundreds of students. The results will include increased class sizes and many students in trailers in "smart growth" clusters. This calls for action – under the strategic plan and otherwise – to prevent oversized classes and overcrowded schools. Please, prevail on the County Council this fall to insist on complete sector plans. Complete plans would contain provisions for dedicated land and committed resources for the school clusters affected.

Consider the Walter Johnson cluster. The White Flint development (and others) will add over 450 students to the ESs, 410 to the MSs, and 350 to the HS in the cluster. MCPS projections indicate that the ESs could be 300 students over capacity in 10-15 years, under the Growth Policy. WJHS would outgrow its maximum capacity, eventually leaving hundreds of students in overlarge classes and in trailers. The related White Flint sector plan recommends solving this problem not by reserving land – but by redrawing the line between the WJ cluster and the Wheaton HS area, or other redistricting.

I, and many other parents in the GPES and nearby PTA's, strongly oppose this oversizing, overcrowding, and redistricting. Cluster and community coalition statements make this clear. Consistent with the strategic plan, I urge the School Board to work with the County Council – this year - to prevent these results by obtaining land and other resources for school facilities in smart growth clusters.

II. Organizing and Optimizing Land and Other Resources

This leads to my second concern with the strategic plan – the need to organize and optimize land and other resources. Specifically, smart growth clusters will need: (A) Land on which to build additional schools. (B) Resources, preferably from developers, dedicated to build, reopen, transfer, or increase capacity for schools. (C) Additional priority points (beyond the points in the proposed Growth Policy) for use of capital improvement funds for schools in smart growth clusters.

This year, while the development plans are before the County Council, I urge the School Board to work to obtain these resources. Request that the Council refuse to adopt sector plans

until they are complete plans – with land for additional schools, and dedicated resources for school facilities. Ask the Council to ensure that this Growth Policy, and subsequent Growth Policies, contain extra priority points for CIP projects in smart growth clusters.

In all likelihood, land will never again be as available for school facilities as it is this year. There will probably never be a year with more opportunities to obtain school resources from land owners, and manage smart growth through revisions to the Growth Policy. Taking these actions is fully consistent with the strategic plan goal of organizing and optimizing resources.

I urge the Board to seize the opportunity. The schoolchildren and parents of the Walter Johnson cluster need your help. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Liz King
4714 Argyle Ave., No. 407
Garrett Park, MD 20896