

August, 2008

Dr. Royce Hanson, Chairman
Montgomery County Planning Board
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20901

Dear Dr. Hanson,

We, the Walter Johnson Cluster Coordinators of the MCCPTA (Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations), are writing on behalf of the PTAs of all the schools within the Walter Johnson cluster. We would like to thank Nkosi Yearwood for participating in the meeting arranged by the MCPS on July 28, 2008 with the WJ Cluster Coordinators and other PTA/PTSA representatives to discuss the potential location of a new elementary school in the WJ cluster as a result of proposed construction in the White Flint sector plan.

We greatly appreciated the opportunity to provide input to the discussion of choosing a new site for the school and what the impact will be on the other schools in the cluster. We look forward to a continued presence in these discussions. However, we also feel that we are being brought on board very late in the process without much time to consider the options or formulate a response and that, indeed, finding a suitable site for a new school in the White Flint sector has been made more challenging because of the many parcels within the sector that have already been approved for development without consideration for a school site. We believe that the County's planning process has been insufficient to accommodate the anticipated population growth and that it is imperative to consider potential demands on schools before approving housing that will ultimately necessitate school construction.

Furthermore, the student population projections that we have been given based on 10,000 housing units will ultimately exceed the capacity of both Tilden and Walter Johnson. We urge you to limit the development within the White Flint sector to an appropriate number of housing units that will not exceed the capacity of these schools. One reason families look for housing within the Walter Johnson cluster is because of the schools; don't endanger the quality of those same schools with development that calls for over-crowded buildings or student population sizes that threaten the boundaries of the cluster.

There was much discussion within the cluster of using Montrose ES, which is currently closed, or either Grosvenor ES or Tilden Center, which are being used as holding schools. However, there were equally strong proponents of keeping the new school within the boundaries of the new construction, which is where the school population will live. Ideally, the new elementary school would be centrally located within the White Flint sector so that children would be able to walk to school easily, and families would have convenient access to the fields and school playgrounds after school and during weekends and the summer. As far as we can tell, none of the proposed sites can meet this rather straight-forward ideal.

We feel strongly that the sites proposed do not take into account key needs for students and their families: the ability to walk to school; the ability to drive to school without causing additional traffic in local neighborhoods; adequate parking for staff as well as parents attending school functions both during school and after school; adequate space for playgrounds and fields. We

are also concerned that the small sites may not even provide room for the programmatic requirements of an elementary school in Montgomery County.

The two sites identified as the ones most likely to be chosen for the new elementary school face severe shortcomings. Both the Wall Park site and the White Flint park site are at the limits of the development sector, not centrally located. The Wall park site puts the fields on the opposite side of the MAC building from the school, creating logistical and supervision nightmares for recess and PE. The school would also be located across from a convention center which has a lot of traffic from a transient population. Both of these situations are totally unacceptable for an elementary school. The White Flint park site threatens to bring high levels of new traffic through the Garrett Park Estates and White Flint park neighborhoods, a situation the neighborhoods find unacceptable and to which they have already objected. There are also concerns that the park will lose its tennis courts. In addition, we share the County's concerns about the other two identified sites. We look forward to hearing how you plan to address all of these concerns.

We expect to be kept informed in a more timely fashion as the plans for a new elementary school continue to develop and change. In addition to seeing more concrete information about the school site as it becomes available, we would like to be shown how the school will be situated in relation to the proposed new housing developments, what is being planned to make the school site walker-friendly, and what the expected impact of traffic will be on the Pike, on new streets, and through existing neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

Deedee Jacobsohn
WJ Cluster Coordinator

Liz Sadove
WJ Cluster Coordinator

Amiee House
WJ Cluster Coordinator

cc: Margaret K. Rifkin, RLA AICP, Lead Planner/Urban Designer
Nkosi Yearwood, Community-Based Planner
Bruce Crispell, Long-Range Planning, MCPS
Janice Turpin, Real Estate Management, MCPS
Denise Green, Office of School Performance, MCPS
Frank Stetson, Community Superintendent, MCPS