



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

November 18, 2009

Dr. Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent
Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)
850 Hungerford Drive
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Dr. Weast:

Numerous residents have contacted our office about your recommendation to close Monocacy Elementary School. As you know, during our master planning process, we strive to ensure that there is a school in each community; they are critical to character and cohesion of our communities. I appreciate the extreme budget constraints the County currently faces, and that you, on behalf of all of MCPS specifically face. So I ask that as you consider this school for closure, that you take a look at the broader community. The closure of this school will impact more than the students and their families; it will create a void in the center of this community.

The Functional Master Plan for the Preservation of Agricultural and Rural Open Space (AROS) has limited development in the upcounty area in order to preserve farmland and to encourage agricultural use of the land. In 1980, when the Plan was approved, the Agricultural Reserve was created and the allowed residential density levels were reduced by almost four-fifths. Because of this reduction in allowed density, Monocacy Elementary School will never see the kind of increased enrollment that we see in neighborhoods that are planned for future growth. And because of these growth restrictions, the Barnesville area is also not served by the Recreation and County Services Centers that are located in other parts of Montgomery County; as a result, the local schools and libraries must provide the gathering places and meeting rooms that are otherwise unavailable. Currently, men's basketball, youth recreational teams, and scouts use the school after hours.

In the future, Monocacy Elementary School may be called upon to provide relief to the adjacent communities. As you know from experience, the speed of growth in Clarksburg has far exceeded the County's expectations, and further growth is planned on the west side of I-270. The Clarksburg Master Plan and Hyattstown Special Study Area (June 1994) proposes a new elementary school in the vicinity of Old West Baltimore Road and Clarksburg Road for this new community. We know there will be future development in Clarksburg and understand that their current school systems will continue to grow as Clarksburg grows. It seems logical that until a new elementary school is built to handle the continuing growth in Clarksburg that the Monocacy Elementary School could handle the overflow of students in their school.

While we were reading your recommendations, the following questions came to mind in your review process:

- What will happen to the school after it is closed? Will it be leased to an entity or would it be demolished?
- Do you have another location in mind for the community to use as a meeting place?
- Why do you expect the student population will continue to decrease in Poolesville when development is proposed? Will Poolesville Elementary School be able to handle an influx of the student population over time?

Given the budget constraints that the entire County is facing, we are all looking for ways to reduce costs; as a small school, Monocacy Elementary School may appear to be less efficient than your other schools. But schools form the hearts of our communities, and this school serves vital functions beyond its core educational mission. I recognize that your first responsibility is to continue providing an excellent education to the students of this County, and I applaud the outstanding work that you are doing. As this review proceeds, I ask that you give consideration to the importance of this small school to its community.

Sincerely,

Royce Hanson
Chairman