

**Montgomery County Council CIP Hearing
FY2023 Capital Budget and the FY23-28 CIP
February 9, 2022
Testimony of Melissa McKenna**

Good afternoon. My name is Melissa McKenna. It's been awhile, two years actually. Thank you for allowing live virtual testimony. I look forward to seeing you again in person in Council chambers very soon.

Today I'd like to talk about..... transit. Bet you didn't see that one coming. Having lived behind what is now Downtown Crown, the Great Seneca Transit Network is the bus system that I've always felt was lacking: the ability to get around within the County—not just transit for commuting purposes only.

It seems increasingly likely that the CCT will not come to pass. However, this bus network will be more useful and flexible than light rail. We need to connect our education, residential, and business locations and this plan does that. I mention flexibility because I see one small improvement.

By 2026, the new Crown High School will sit proudly at the corner of Fields Road and Omega Drive. Right now, that corner is not on any planned route, and it needs to be. The ability of students to access The Universities at Shady Grove and Montgomery College, along with so many nearby employers for internships and apprenticeships, would be phenomenal. And all it would take to connect our students and their education with their future is a small rerouting of the Pink line down Research Blvd, rather than Key West Avenue, to add a stop at the corner of Omega Drive. I urge you to make this change.

While we're in Gaithersburg, let's talk about roads. Cars will always exist in Montgomery County. We are not all commuters, and the suburbs still require personal transportation. Road infrastructure in the Upcounty has been neglected for too long. While I'm glad to see the Observation Drive extension included, a three-year delay on a long overdue promise is not acceptable. Please accelerate (wink) this schedule.

While you're at it, I want to echo Mr. Robert Nelson's testimony, and borrow Ms. Rosemary Arkoian's favorite refrain, "Build the M83."

In the zero sum game that is the CIP budget, with constrained Spending Affordability Guidelines, something will have to give to finance these projects. We can't just "make the pie bigger" with fiscal rebasing that appears to improve revenue projections in school impact taxes and recordation taxes. That's risky business.

Speaking of risky business, the FY23 MCPS State Aid request is an astonishing \$229.5M! That is **three times higher** than last year's request and **twice** the average annual request. More money is available from the *Built to Learn Act* by bidding at prevailing wage, although we know we won't get the entire request. However, the County Executive's budget assumes that we will get roughly double the historical annual MCPS state aid allocation for the next two years and even more in FY25-27. If those assumptions are wrong, think of the effect on communities expecting new schools.

My greatest concern after the cost of MCPS projects is **HOW** facilities are being built. MCPS should now **ONLY** be planning and building Net Zero Energy schools.

Something incredible happened in March 2021—a record opening of SEVEN new schools!! The last of the rev/ex series: Three ES, one MS, one HS, and two co-located special education schools. Sadly, COVID-19 delayed their opening and erased the significance of the occasion. How many of them had solar on the roof? **ZERO**. Having attended the virtual design meetings for both the new Woodward HS and Crown HS, I can report that **NEITHER** has solar included in the preliminary design. Why not?

It is past time to actually build better schools.

There are many choices to make in constructing schools. New building techniques reduce embodied carbon, yield incredible energy savings, use solar and geothermal energy, and most importantly can be built at a cost similar to traditional construction. Yes, it's true! Graceland Park MS in Baltimore City is being built for \$335/sq ft. Their sister school Holabird ES for ~\$350/sq ft. Discovery ES in Arlington was built for \$333/sq ft. MCPS averages ~\$345/sq ft. (pre-pandemic pricing of course, and also pre-prevailing wage pricing).

The Council and County Executive have been very clear about our County's commitment to using renewable energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, even planning new County buildings to be net zero energy:

- Adopting the 2018 International Green Construction Code
- Passing Bill 16-21: Building Energy Performance Standards
- Releasing the draft Climate Action Plan

At the State level, our own Delegate Marc Korman has introduced HB365 the Green School Construction Act of 2022. There are many other such pieces of legislation.

You have many tools in your toolbox to insist that Net Zero Energy schools aren't just a nice idea, BEPS reporting for MCPS should be mandatory, and renewable energy must be incorporated in new school designs.

The time is now to use these tools to build the schools of the future today. There is no Planet B. Our children still only have one shot. I urge you to spend wisely.

Thank you.

Melissa McKenna