

February 6, 2024

RE: Testimony from Clarksburg Resident, Dr. Arti Patel Varanasi

Greetings County Council Members Albornoz, Balcombe, González, Friedson, Glass, Jawando, Katz, Luedtke, Mink, Sayles, and Stewart.

I am Dr. Arti Patel Varanasi and appreciate and welcome this opportunity to share my strong opposition to the budget cuts that will result in further delays to the Damascus High School renovations and subsequently overcrowding at Clarksburg High School.

I come before you as a parent of a 5th grade student at Wilson Wims Elementary School, an Upcounty Resident for more than 20 years, a local and county PTA leader, scientist, and public health professional.

Having lived in Germantown and now Clarksburg, I have watched over the years as projects in other parts of the county are prioritized. Our Clarksburg Community has experienced significant growth in population with new homes built in the past two decades. However, this housing boom has not been accompanied by supporting infrastructure, including promised establishments like a community center, aquatic center, library and other services. After attending the Second Community Meeting on the Damascus High School Renovation at the end of last year, I was hopeful. It seemed that Upcounty voices were finally being heard and our concerns taken seriously. Everything seemed to be back on track with the renovation project and the community members and staff present were excited about the project and progress. However, I was unable to attend the Third Community Meeting and subsequently learned that serious consideration is being given to delaying the Damascus High School Renovation project yet again. This is simply not acceptable. I understand that the conditions and learning environment at Damascus High School continues to deteriorate. We are asking our students and staff to flourish in an environment that is subpar. The conditions that students and staff are forced to learn and work in is a public health and educational equity issue.

Additionally, each day the renovations are delayed impacts students and overcrowding at Clarksburg High School. Let's work together in setting up our students for success. It is time for our county leadership to show that they hear the voices of all county residents equitably and to focus efforts on moving the Damascus High School renovation project forward and reducing overcrowding at Clarksburg High School. The existing and continued housing development of Clarksburg will result in continued overcrowding and the use of portables at Clarksburg High School. The lack of expansion at Damascus High School means more students at Clarksburg High School with the potential to add more portables to accommodate the population.

In the past week, we have received almost 100 signatures to our sign on letter. Please expect to receive letters from individual residents and hear testimony from fellow parents and community leaders on this issue. I implore you to think of our students and support their education and future in creating an environment where all will flourish. Please join us in creating a healthy and safe environment for our students, staff, and community to learn and prosper. I thank you for your time and attention on the matter of moving forward with the Damascus High School renovations to continue as scheduled to ensure a bright future for all our students.