

Good evening, my name is Brigid Howe and I'm speaking tonight as the President of MCCPTA.

First, I want to send my love and healing thoughts to our community members at Wootton High School. You all will hear much more from PTAs about school safety and security when we get to the operating budget and I hope any safety-related capital projects are prioritized.

But tonight our focus is the CIP.

The CIP budget process as it is broken down between the County and the school system is difficult. It's hard to explain to fellow advocates, it's challenging to pin down the actual points where decisions are made, and it feels impossible to change it for the better.

We should all agree...MCPS's CIP needs are real.

Buildings are in bad shape. As MCCPTA president I get messages all the time about HVAC failures at schools like New Hampshire Estates that mean one floor is 28 degrees while another is habitable. Or about flooding at Sherwood. Or ceiling tiles collapsing during the musical at Magruder. Or mold and general bad conditions at Wootton. And we all know about the infamous Stairwell 7 at SSIMS, the terrible conditions at Eastern, and I haven't even mentioned Damascus HS yet. And those are just the schools at the very top of the lists.

For too long, the county has neglected maintenance of this essential infrastructure and fallen short on P-LAR of things like HVAC, roofs, plumbing, and more. It has taken us decades to get to this point, and I suspect that it will take us decades to get out of it.

So how can we do it?

First, decisions need to be made based on data and actual facility conditions, as we heard from our Magruder Cluster Coordinator and others. Squeaky wheels can't be the deciding factor, and MCPS is improving on this.

Second, we need honest and transparent conversations about what is actually possible and realistic given budget constraints. School communities need to be brought into the conversation earlier and we need candor and a sense of the realistic options from ALL of our elected officials and leadership, not only in MCPS but also in the Planning Board and Department, the County Executive's office, and the County Council.

Because I will tell you the way it looks from the cheap seats. I've been following CIPs since the late 1990s and the pattern holds true...not as much when times are good, but absolutely when times are tougher and revenues are down, as they are now.

We see fingerpointing. We see ambitious proposals from one set of folks, followed by another set of folks saying "well, we can't possibly afford that". Then the folks who control the funding go

to the folks asking for the funding and say “we only decide the bottom line, you have to decide what to cut.”

This is not the kind of leadership we deserve.

Montgomery County’s schools are supposed to be a beacon. We need a common agreement and actual alignment to do better so their facilities are what our kids and MCPS staff deserve.

MCPS, the Board of Education, the Planning Board and Department, the County Executive, and the County Council need to be rowing in the same direction, not blaming each other or punting on the tough decisions.

We also need to look at new ways of doing business - exploring P3s for school construction and really diving into making our county as economically competitive and desirable for investment as possible. We need to hear updates and ideas from the Council Infrastructure Funding Work Group much sooner than their June deadline.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention that we need increased capital investment for the Annual Sidewalk Program, especially in school zones. No child in a school walk zone should ever have to walk in the street, and the fact that I have to beg for that every year is a shame.

Thank you.