

## **Subject: Oppose Excessive MCPS Spending & Require Renovation-First Approach for DHS CIP**

### **To the Montgomery County Council:**

I am writing to express strong concerns regarding the scale and approach of the Damascus High School (DHS) Capital Improvement Project and the overall MCPS budget strategy. I urge the Council to prioritize fiscal responsibility, avoid unnecessary tax increases, and require MCPS to submit a more disciplined and realistic capital plan.

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### **Key Points**

#### **MCPS's Rebuild-First Mindset Is Unsustainable**

- MCPS increasingly defaults to **complete rebuilds**, even when existing school structures can be effectively modernized through renovation.
- This pattern reflects a preference for “new building” optics rather than responsible asset management.
- Rebuilds cost *multiples* of renovation and place enormous pressure on both the operating and capital budgets.
- Much of the narrative expressed to date suggests DHS is 75 years old. While the original DHS building was constructed in 1950, there have been additions made since then and a major infrastructure project was just completed <10 years ago (HVAC, fire suppression, lighting, safety). These are the types of investments that a more prudent spend plan would not target for complete over haul.

#### **DHS Project Is an Example of Misaligned Priorities**

- The DHS Capital Improvement Project proposes a **full replacement**, despite the fact that targeted renovation could address:
  - Infrastructure deficiencies
  - Any remaining HVAC and mechanical issues
  - Safety upgrades
  - ADA compliance
  - Classroom modernization

- A renovation-based plan would deliver **equivalent educational benefit** at significantly lower cost.
- The current approach suggests a “shiny new building” mentality instead of a practical, needs-based strategy.
- A renovation-based plan would maintain athletic field functionality on site and preserve the community desires to keep our student-athletes local and support local businesses.

### **Taxpayers Cannot Support This Level of CIP Growth**

- Residents are already facing rising costs and cannot absorb additional tax increases driven by overly ambitious MCPS capital projects.
- Approving such projects without rigorous scrutiny reinforces structural inefficiencies and sets unsustainable expectations for future schools.
- County Council must force accountability. The County literally has the responsibility to force more disciplined spending. You are our last defense on poor policy and decisions.

### **MCPS Must Operate Within Its Means**

- The Council should require MCPS to:
  - Present **renovation-first scenarios** alongside rebuild proposals.
  - Provide lifecycle cost comparisons demonstrating that full replacement is truly necessary.
  - Prioritize *needs*—not aesthetics, public relations value, or symbolic gestures.
  - Present fact based reasonings, not attention grabbing headlines.

### **Fiscal Responsibility Requires Leadership**

- A renovation-focused DHS project would:
  - Preserve taxpayer dollars
  - Reduce the burden on the capital budget
  - Accelerate improvements by avoiding multi-year teardown/rebuild cycles
  - Set a precedent for prudent infrastructure management across the county

- Allow student-athletes to practice and compete on-site.
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### **Request to the Council**

I respectfully urge the Council to:

- **Reject** any tax increases tied to unchecked CIP growth
  - **Deny** the DHS full-rebuild proposal in its current form
  - **Require MCPS** to redesign the plan using a **renovation-first, cost-effective approach**
  - Insist on capital planning driven by **need, efficiency, and stewardship**, not optics
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Thank you for your attention to these concerns and for your commitment to responsible governance on behalf of Montgomery County residents.

Travis Hartman | [REDACTED]  
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Gaithersburg, MD 20882

03.19.2026

Montgomery County Council

100 Maryland Avenue

Rockville, MD 20850

**Subject: Fiscal Responsibility, MCPS Oversight, and Concerns Regarding the DHS Capital Improvement Project**

Dear Councilmembers,

I am writing as both a Montgomery County resident and a local business leader to urge the County Council to exercise strong fiscal discipline in the upcoming budget cycle, reject unnecessary tax increases, and insist on meaningful oversight of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) operating and capital budgets. The Council holds the clear authority—and the responsibility—to ensure that taxpayer dollars are managed wisely. Now is the time to use that authority.

MCPS's current budget requests, including the Damascus High School (DHS) Capital Improvement Project, reflect a troubling pattern: a consistent preference for costly full rebuilds over more prudent renovation-first solutions. Renovating existing buildings can address infrastructure deficiencies, safety concerns, HVAC issues, ADA compliance, and classroom modernization at a fraction of the cost of a complete replacement. Yet time and again, MCPS appears to pursue the most expensive path, prioritizing new construction that looks impressive on paper rather than choosing practical, cost-effective approaches.

Approving these oversized requests without rigorous scrutiny reinforces inefficiency rather than correcting it. At some point, the county must acknowledge that this rebuild-first mentality is simply not sustainable.

**The Council Must Exercise Oversight**

As our elected officials, *you* are the ultimate safeguard protecting residents from wasteful practices. The Council has the power—and the obligation—to demand accountability from MCPS. Without strong oversight, spending will continue to escalate unchecked, and the structural problems within the system will persist.

I urge the Council to:

- Abandon rebuild proposals and recognize various “forecasting” scenarios are ripe with false assumptions, error-prone, and not adequate when billions of dollars are on the line.
- Demand renovation-first alternatives be developed and fully evaluated
- Hold MCPS accountable for operational efficiency before approving new funding
- Ensure capital projects reflect actual need rather than administrative preference or political optics – taxpayers do not care about ribbon cutting ceremonies and we deserve a Superintendent who can responsibly propose and operate a budget, not a YouTube channel and moonlight as a social media influencer.

This is not merely a budgetary issue—it is a governance issue.

### **Fiscal Irresponsibility Has Real Economic Consequences**

Montgomery County already struggles with high taxes and rising costs. If fiscal decisions continue on their current trajectory, we risk the long-term erosion of our tax base. Families and businesses have choices about where to live and invest, and sustained poor planning will inevitably push many to leave in search of more stable, disciplined jurisdictions.

I recently opened a business office in Montgomery County because I believed in this community and its potential. However, continued irresponsible spending, growing tax burdens, and lack of accountability in key agencies like MCPS will force me—and many others—to reconsider our presence here. No business can thrive in an environment where fiscal instability becomes the norm.

Montgomery County cannot afford to lose the very taxpayers and employers that sustain it.

### **A Sustainable Path Forward**

A responsible budget—one that prioritizes renovation over unnecessary rebuilds, controls spending growth, and avoids punitive tax increases—would help restore confidence in county leadership. It would demonstrate that the Council is committed not only to supporting public education, but also to protecting the economic health of our community.

I respectfully ask the Council to:

- Reject tax increases connected to unchecked MCPS spending
- Demand a more realistic, accountable MCPS operating and capital budget
- Require renovation-first scenarios for the DHS project and others like it

- Uphold your responsibility to act as the fiscal stewards the residents elected you to be

Thank you for your time and for your service to our county. I trust you will make decisions that reflect long-term financial sustainability and responsible governance.

Sincerely,

Travis Hartman

Montgomery County resident and parent of two children within the Damascus cluster