



Community centers being neglected in Montgomery County, advocates say

(GregWhitesell/Examiner)

Churchill High School senior and volunteer E.J. Morris tutors Asmaa Hassan, 11, while working on her fifth-grade reading assignment at the Scotland Community Center on Thursday.

Dena Levitz, The Examiner
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Montgomery County -

Leaders of three different historically black Montgomery County neighborhoods have fought for years to secure funding for repairs at Scotland, Good Hope and Ross Boddy community centers.

This week they told members of the County Council the gyms are too small, the programs inadequate, and in one case, the Ross Body Center, there have been no significant renovations since the 1950s.

They gathered with 200-plus residents to present their case to members of the County Council and ask for \$320,000 worth of funds for maintenance work until permanent changes can be made.

Bette Thompson, a member of the Scotland center's board, said the youth who use the aging facilities have outgrown them and decrepit conditions in some parts of the space have led to flooding problems.

"Our gym is basically elementary size," she said as an example. "We're trying to get the boys off the streets. It gives them something to do. But it's hard with the current site."

Thompson's children are now grown, but she said as children they enjoyed the center as a central meeting place in Potomac.

She began pushing for more taxpayer dollars to keep up the center. When she struggled to get the attention of leaders, she enlisted the help of Action in Montgomery, the 30,000-plus interfaith group that put on Wednesday night's forum.

The other two centers discussed, Good Hope and Ross Boddy, have struggled with additional issues including insufficient money for programming.

At Good Hope, in Silver Spring, the center only stays open from 3 to 7 p.m. on weeknights.

"We are thankful for our centers, but it's time for our wealthy county to do the right thing and bring parity to its community centers," he said.

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