

## Residents pushing for more space at Scotland center

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### Gazette.Net

Maryland Community Newspapers Online

December 5, 2007

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The Scotland Community Center may be getting renovations that residents say are much needed.



J. Adam Fenster/The Gazette

**Scotland residents Jesse Locke, 10, Dijon Minor, 11 and Japria Karim-Duvall, 10, play basketball in the gymnasium of the Scotland Community Center on Scotland Drive. Residents say the gym is only big enough for teams of three to play basketball games.**

Near the steps to the small structure from its entrance on Scotland Drive, missing letters mar a small sign that welcomes visitors to the center.

The gym is too small for kids to play a regular game of basketball, residents say — teams have to shrink to two teams of three. And in the afternoons when younger kids are participating in the after school program, there's no extra space for the older kids to hang out — they have to wait their turn.

The center acts as a gathering place for youth in the Scotland community, and a renovated center may attract more participation, said Capt. Russell Hamill, commander of the Montgomery County Police Department 2nd District.

“The gym is horrible,” said Jana Dove, 19, a Scotland resident. Dove said she would like to see a larger gym, along with more programs focused toward young women — like girls basketball — and programs that draw more diverse community members to the center.

“I’d like a better atmosphere on the inside,” said Jazmin Dove, 20, Jana Dove’s sister. “[It should have] brighter colors, and be more welcoming.”

The sisters also agreed that the center needs more sports activities to attract young people.

Scotland residents and community members have banded together with a group called Action in Montgomery to lobby the county for money for extensive renovations or an entirely new structure in the county’s 2009 capital improvements budget.

Action in Montgomery, a grassroots organization comprised of faith-based groups in Montgomery County, has been involved with meetings between the Scotland community and the county about community center issues. The group has helped voice concerns – such as the need for more parking – to the recreation department for consideration as it recommends improvements for the 2009 budget.

The community center received some funds in the county’s 2008 budget, but not enough for an entirely new center. Residents are also hoping that more funds will be earmarked for new youth programs such as sports activities.

Some temporary fixes, however, are in the works. The community center, along with four other centers, received \$320,000 to split among themselves in the county’s 2008 capital improvements budget, according to the county’s recreation department. The money is slated for what the county calls “furniture and fixtures” - in Scotland’s case, this means items such as new gym equipment, a new TV, and new furniture such as tables and chairs.

The recreation department, which has conducted evaluations of the facility, has recently issued its recommendations for the 2009 capital improvements budget to County Executive Isiah Leggett. While the recreation department will not release exact details on its proposed plans before then, Gabriel Albornoz, director of the department of recreation, said that renovations at Scotland will be on the table as the county executive mulls over final budgeting plans.

“We continue to be strongly supportive of a renovation of the Scotland facility,” Albornoz said.

The 2009 CIP budget will be submitted to the County Council in January.

“We’re asking for more meeting room,” said Bette Thompson, a Scotland resident who has been involved with the initiative. “If someone’s holding a meeting and there’s different things going on, you don’t have room.”

Youth input is an important factor, said Chuck Williams, a youth outreach worker with the Scotland AME Zion church, who has worked with Action in Montgomery on the issue.

“We’ve conducted meetings with young people to get an idea of what the young people who use the community center would like to see,” said Williams said.

Williams recently organized a community “field trip” to other area recreation centers, such as the Potomac Community Center, in order to spark some ideas for a wish list.

“That’s a much better center,” said E.J. Morris, 19, a Scotland resident. “It’s bigger – there’s more to do.” Morris, who often plays basketball at the Scotland Community Center, echoed the sentiment that a larger gym was much needed.

The field trip was one way to involve more community members with the project, Williams said.

“There’s been an attitude of “let’s wait and see what happens,” Williams said.

The Montgomery County Police Department, which conducts extensive outreach for youth in the Scotland community, is also hoping for a new and improved Scotland Community Center, according to Hamill.

“It would give the younger people a place to go in order to have and be with each other in a positive atmosphere,” Hamill said.