

## Money for centers may come

### Council tentatively approves renovation dollars for Ross Boddy, Good Hope, Plum Gar and Scotland

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## Gazette.Net

Maryland Community Newspapers Online

Wednesday, April 9, 2008

[http://www.gazette.net/stories/040908/olnew62214\\_32357.shtml](http://www.gazette.net/stories/040908/olnew62214_32357.shtml)

The County Council tentatively decided on Tuesday to fully fund planning and design money for renovations to the Scotland, Good Hope, Ross Boddy and Plum Gar community centers that residents say have been neglected for years.

The tentative decision was part of an initial reconciliation workshop, in which County Council President Michael J. Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown outlined recommendations for projects that should remain in the recommended Capital Improvements Program. The final decision on the roughly \$3 million in design costs will come after the council votes on the capital budget in May.

On the recommendation of County Councilman Roger Berliner (D-Dist.1) of Potomac, the council also tentatively decided to set aside an additional \$17 million for construction of the centers. The \$17 million reserve — about two-thirds of the \$26 million estimated cost of renovating the four centers — would be designated specifically for construction costs at the four centers after planning and design is completed.

“I think this was a creative and appropriate way to convey to the community that we mean business,” Berliner told The Gazette. “These recreation centers will be funded as soon as they are ready to go.”

The recommendation, which took place at a council work session, comes after more than 1,000 residents and members of Action in Montgomery — a faith-based advocacy coalition that has been taking the lead on raising community support for the community center funding — met April 2 at the Universities of Shady Grove to garner support for renovation funding for the four centers.

At the meeting, the group said they were dissatisfied that County Executive Isiah Leggett’s recommended capital budget included funding for new centers to be built in North Potomac and North Bethesda, but delayed major renovations at three of the four centers located in traditionally African-American neighborhoods.

“Why should we continue to build new things when we haven’t taken care of what we already have?” the Rev. Pearl Selby, a pastor at the Oak Grove AME Zion Church and an AIM member, told The Gazette.

According to Leggett’s recommended budget for fiscal 2009-14, Scotland in Potomac, Good Hope in Silver Spring and Ross Boddy in Sandy Spring, along with several other centers, would share \$1.3 million for minor upgrades.

Meanwhile, \$22 million would be slated for a new North Potomac recreation center and \$3.5 million for a North Bethesda recreation center.

According to Leggett’s recommendation, \$1.5 million in planning and design would be allocated for the Plum Gar Community Center in Germantown.

“I think what we’re doing here is correcting what is deemed by some as an inequitable distribution of capital funds in certain neighborhoods,” Councilwoman Valerie Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring told The Gazette.

County Councilman Marc Elrich (D-At Large) of Takoma Park, who supports the renovations to the four neighborhood centers, said that comparing the North Bethesda and North Potomac centers side by side with the renovation funding for the four community centers may not be fair because they serve communities of different sizes.

“These are neighborhood centers, and they don’t serve the same function as the other ones [in North Bethesda and North Potomac],” he said.

Patrick Lacefield, a spokesman for Leggett, cited fiscal constraints for the lack of funding for the centers in Leggett’s recommended budget. “It’s not a matter of not wanting to do it, it’s a matter of not being able to fit it all in,” Lacefield said. “[Leggett] is committed to it — as soon as we can work it in, we’ll work it in.”

At Tuesday’s worksession, the council also tentatively approved funds for the North Potomac and North Bethesda community centers.

At the April 2 action meeting, residents came out to hear County Councilman George Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park, Ervin, Berliner and Knapp discuss their support for funding renovations at the four community centers.

“There may be times when we disappoint you – this, I believe, will not be one of them,” Berliner said at the meeting.