

Not Taking No

Scotland community and supporters turn out en masse to urge approval of community center renovation.

[By Aaron Stern/The Almanac](#)

February 27, 2008

More than 100 people crowded in to Scotland Community Center Monday night, Feb. 25. They filled seats in the main room of the center, lined the room's walls and crammed into the entrance area of the center that overlooks the main room. With so many people at the Scotland Community Center at one time it would have been impossible to hold any other activity, and that was the point. Politicians, community activists and prominent members of Scotland community were among those who showed up to demonstrate their frustration with County Executive Ike Leggett's (D) decision to leave the Scotland Community Center off of the Capital Improvements Project list for renovation. In doing so, Leggett cited budgetary constraints as Montgomery County faces a \$400 million budgetary shortfall in the 2009 fiscal year. But in doing so he also reneged on a promise that he made to Scotland residents last year that their center would get a long-awaited expansion, they said.

"The County Executive, in all practical purposes, went back on his word to us," said Chuck Williams, a member of the Scotland A.M.E. Zion Church.

The center, a focal point of youth programs and social activity in the community, was built in 1977 and has had no substantial improvements aside from general upkeep and maintenance since then.

Leggett's decision did not completely quash the chances of getting Scotland onto the CIP, but it made it much more difficult. The County Council has the power to add and remove items from the CIP and the hope now is that a majority of the council can be convinced to insert the community center's, said Cynthia Marshall of Action in Montgomery, a faith-based, non-partisan community activism group that is working with other historically black communities in the county to obtain funding for renovations to their community centers. Leggett approved renovation plans for Plum Gar Recreation center but left off the Scotland, Good Hope, and Ross Boddy Recreation Centers, centers that Action in Montgomery has lobbied to have renovated.

"You have my absolute commitment that this is going to be my top priority," said County Councilman Roger Berliner (D-1). Berliner sent a letter to the County Council on Feb. 15 urging inclusion of funding for the planning and design phases for the renovation of all four centers.

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS at the Scotland Community Center feature karate lessons. Those sessions draw far fewer people than Monday's meeting but produce the same result — no other activity can take place, said Catherine Hood, a Scotland resident.

"That's the only thing you can do in here because there's not room for anything else," Hood said.



Photo by Aaron Stern/The Almanac

The Scotland Step Team performs to a packed house at the Scotland Community Center on Monday, Feb. 25. As they marched out they sang, "All of my love, My peace and happiness, I'm going to give it to Scotland."



Photo by Aaron Stern/The Almanac

A tour of the Scotland Community Center's weight room showed a facility too small to comfortably accommodate 10 people. Much of the equipment is outdated, some is broken, the clock doesn't work and one of two lights is burned out.

[Printable Version](#)



Tutoring programs run throughout the week as other children and visitors to the center pass through, she said.

"You need an area for your child to focus and concentrate," Hood said.



The effort to renovate the center began in the late 1990s and has died out from lack of political support at least twice, residents said.

"We've been working on this for many, many years," said former state Sen. Jeane Roeser. The momentum and the cohesiveness of the current effort gives Roeser hope that this time will be different, and she attributes a lot of that momentum to the backing of Action in Montgomery.

In addition to Roeser and Berliner, representatives from Councilmember Duchy Trachtenber's office attended Monday's meeting, as did the principals of Bells Mill Elementary School, Cabin John Middle School, and Winston Churchill High School. Members of the Scotland community from long-time resident Bette Thompson to the Rev. James Phifer and Washington Redskins running back Marcus Mason were in the crowd, as were many residents who have seen promises about the center's renovation go unfulfilled in the past.

"Where's Ike Leggett?" shouted Clarence Curtis as the meeting dispersed. "This is 20 years behind time. When he wanted the vote he was around."

Jay Dove served on the Potomac Master Plan Advisory Group and expressed skepticism that this time will be any different. He's prepared if it's not.

"You just got to keep going," Dove said. "It's nothing new to me."

"It's just a matter of fairness ... that these four communities would get the same as what the other communities in Montgomery County would get — it's not that complicated," said the Rev. Roy Howard of Saint Mark Presbyterian Church in Rockville.

JOYCE SIEGEL has seen the highs and the lows of Scotland. She worked side by side with Geneva Mason to create the Save Our Scotland campaign in the mid-1960s that eventually converted Scotland from a forgotten enclave with no electricity or running water to the townhouse community that it is today.

"I think the participation of the people in what they want for the community is very, very important," Siegel said. "That they've gotten together over this project is very important."

"It was 44 years ago [since] Save Our Scotland," Berliner said. "This is, if you will, the next iteration." The council is tentatively scheduled to vote on the final CIP for 2009-2014 in May of this year, and Berliner assured the community that the renovation of the Scotland Community Center will be approved.

"I am absolutely confident we will find those five votes ... we are going to find five votes," said Berliner.