

Scotland pushes for rec center funding

Faith-based group lobbies county to renovate community hubs in traditionally African-American neighborhoods

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Gazette.Net

Maryland Community Newspapers Online

February 27, 2008

http://www.gazette.net/stories/022708/potonew204255_32360.shtml

Residents gathered Monday at the Scotland Community Center in Potomac to drum up community support for the renovation of the recreation facility along with several others.

The meeting was in reaction to the county executive's proposed Capital Improvements Program budget, which recommended delaying major renovations of the Scotland Community Center, the Good Hope Community Center in Silver Spring and the Ross Boddy Community Center in Sandy Spring.



Brian Lewis/The Gazette

Scotland resident Olivia Lee and Dorothy Durek, a congregant at Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church in Potomac, attend a community action at the Scotland Community Center Monday to garner support for recreation center renovations. The Scotland Community Center, along with the Ross Boddy Community Center and the Good Hope Community Center, was not recommended for renovations in the County Executive's proposed capital improvements budget.

The residents, joined by members of Action in Montgomery, a faith-based community organization, said they have long been promised renovations to four community centers, which they say are in need of renovations, located in traditionally African-American

communities. In the county executive's proposed CIP budget for fiscal years 2009 to 2014, only the Plum Gar Community Center in Germantown received funds for renovations.

"The county executive went back on his word to us," said community organizer Chuck Williams at the meeting. "As the kids here would say, he dissed us."

At the meeting, Councilman Roger Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac pledged his support to the renovation of the community centers and said he felt confident that dollars and votes could be found.

"You have my absolute commitment that this will be my top priority," Berliner said at the meeting.

The council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee recommended the renovation of all four centers this month. Under the plan discussed in the committee, Scotland and Plum Gar would receive funds for planning and design in fiscal years 2009 and 2010, while the Good Hope and Ross Boddy community centers would receive money for planning and design in fiscal 2010 and 2011.

But community organizers say a path still remains toward achieving their full goal. Four County Council members — Berliner, Valerie Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring, George L. Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park, and Duchy Trachtenberg (D-At large) of North Bethesda — currently support funding for all four centers, but a total of five votes are needed to pass the plan when the council adopts the new budget in May.

"Much can slip between the cup and the lip, but there's no question we need to stay on top of this," Berliner said.

Action in Montgomery organizer Cynthia Marshall described the community center gathering as "an action not only on the County Council, but on ourselves." Marshall said organization continues to be necessary to influence the County Council's decision, and her group collected more than 100 "commitment cards" from meeting attendees, pledging attendance for another action meeting about the community center issue in April. The group has also planned action meetings at the Ross Boddy and Good Hope centers.

Residents of the Scotland Community have pushed for more space at their center, including a larger gym.

"There's no space, there's no equipment — there's basically nothing here," said Aida Sow, 18, a resident of the Scotland community who uses the center. Sow said she became involved in the campaign to renovate the center because she wanted a better facility for her younger siblings.

Lanol Dove, who works at the center, said that Scotland could use more space as well as more funding for staffing. More often than not, there's only one staff member available at the center, Dove said. "If you're doing an activity downstairs, you can't answer the phone upstairs."

Dove said that if she needs to take children to an activity like bowling, she often has to close the center early since there isn't another employee available to staff the center.

Berliner's support for the project brought a mixed reaction from residents. "I told him to make me happy, but seeing is believing," said Odelia Cooper, a Scotland resident. "You have to believe someone until they've proven themselves wrong," Sow said. "We're hoping he'll keep his promise."