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## **Advocates push for funding for county's community centers**

**Group hopes rally will bolster support for renovations at facilities in Silver Spring, Potomac and Sandy Spring**

by Kristina Gawrgy | Special to The Gazette

Community members, organizers and politicians came out on Sunday to support funding of the renovations at three community centers in predominately African-American neighborhoods in Montgomery County.

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A crowd of about 100 people gathered Sunday afternoon at the Good Hope Union United Methodist Church in Silver Spring to support the cause and hear from four candidates running for the District 4 County Council seat left vacant last month after the death of Councilwoman Marilyn J. Praisner of Calverton.

While the crowd focused Sunday on the Good Hope Community Center in Silver Spring, they were also advocating for the Scotland Community Center in Potomac and the Ross Boddy Community Center in Sandy Spring.

All three centers were initially left out of the Capital Improvements Program budget for fiscal years 2009 to 2014. County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) recommended that renovations be postponed due to a county budget deficit, now estimated at about \$300 million. Only the Plum Gar center in Germantown was kept on the original funding list.

Updates for the other centers were part of a recreation facility modernization fund that was divided among seven facilities, totaling \$1.3 million for improvements for lighting and parking lots.

Since that time, lobbying efforts headed by Action in Montgomery, a faith-based community organization, have intensified. Late last month, a County Council committee recommended a plan that would shift money intended for construction at a pool in Gaithersburg. Planning and design would begin at Scotland in 2009 and at Good Hope and Ross Boddy in 2010.

“We understand that there are shortfalls, but in good and bad economic times, these communities have been asked to wait and wait patiently,” said Alisa Glassman, a community organizer with Action in Montgomery.

Support for the move appears to be solid within the County Council; the approval requires at least five council members’ vote in May. Five council members sent a letter in support for the CIP funding to the council’s three-member Planning, Housing and Economic Development committee. That committee was the one that recommended adding the money to the budget.

The District 4 candidates at Sunday’s meeting enthusiastically supported the proposal: Steve Kanstoroom, a retired computer-systems business owner; Donald Praisner, husband of the late Marilyn Praisner; Patrick Ryan, a former co-chair of AIM; and Nancy Navarro, the current president of the Montgomery County Board of Education.

Residents and advocates of the renovations at Good Hope Community Center emphasized that the center is a safe haven for young people in the neighborhood, within walking distance for many area residents, and could become a community meeting place of which the neighborhood would be proud.

The Rev. Jackie Jones-Smith of the Good Hope Union United Methodist Church told the crowd to remain committed to the centers so that the Good Hope neighborhood and the other predominately African-American neighborhoods would have the same high-quality centers as those in other parts of the county.

“This is a test of our persistence ... the test of our faith to press on,” she said. “... We ask only for justice.”

Residents also said they were disappointed that after years of asking for renovations at the community centers, Leggett did not choose to recommend funding for them.

“We were really surprised, but we’ll keep pushing for it because this is important,” said Laurita Portee, who attends the Good Hope church.

Debra Irby, a Good Hope-area resident, said her sons used the Good Hope Community Center frequently in the mid-1980s. Since then, she said, the center has gotten more crowded and has fewer staff members.

“I want to see that community center thriving,” Irby said. “It’s crucial that [children and seniors] have a place they can go.”

Meeting April 2

Action in Montgomery is organizing another meeting with County Council members and District 4 candidates 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. April 2 at the University of Maryland at Shady Grove, 9630 Gudelsky Drive, Rockville. For more information, call 301-588-0330, ext. 2.