

Ross Boddy rally highlights its needs

Council committee recommends restoring renovation money for facilities in black communities

by Contessa Crisostomo | Staff Writer

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Arlene Clipper reminisced at a rally Thursday night about her childhood spent shooting pool, playing basketball and roller-skating at the more than 50-year-old Ross Boddy Community Center in Sandy Spring.

“And here are the roller skates,” said Clipper, 41, holding them up in front of the crowd of more than 100. “They’re still here! There’s a whole closet full.”

Residents of Sandy Spring and nearby communities rallied at Ross Boddy to raise awareness about the need to fund planned renovations at the center, which has not been extensively updated since it was built in the 1950s as an African-American elementary school.

Clipper, a 40-year resident of Sandy Spring, said the community has grown “by leaps and bounds” and has outgrown the center.

The funding for major renovations at three of the county’s four community centers in historically African-American communities is being delayed by County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) in his Capital Improvements Programs budget, which runs from fiscal 2009 to 2014.

Leggett has recommend \$1.55 million for planning and design of renovations at the fourth center, Plum Gar Recreation Center in Germantown, be approved, while he’s proposed that Ross Boddy, Good Hope in Silver Spring and Scotland in Potomac share



Chris Rossi

Slug: RossBoddy0031908 Photo by Chris Rossi/The Gazette
Cynthia Marshall, Associate Organizer with AIM, speaks during a rally for funding for the Ross Boddy Community Center Thursday March 13, 2008 in Sandy Spring.

\$1.3 million for only minor improvements. The County Council will make the final decision.

The purpose of March 13 rally, organized by the faith-based community group Action in Montgomery, was to convince the council to support a different funding plan. County Councilman Roger Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac has proposed planning and design money for Plum Gar and Scotland recreation centers in 2009-2010, and for Ross Boddy and Good Hope community centers in 2010-2011. The proposal was unanimously recommended by the council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee.

In total the renovations are expected to cost \$14.7 million at Ross Boddy, \$8.9 million each at Plum Gar and Good Hope and \$8.7 million at Scotland.

County Council members Marc Elrich (D-At large) of Takoma Park and Valerie Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring on Thursday joined tour groups through the center's kitchen and game room, where center supporters say equipment is old and ventilation is insufficient.

With a county budget deficit of more than \$300 million, Elrich said the council is going to have to make some tough choices.

"We cannot support projects for future growth if we can't take care of people today," Elrich said after the rally. "If I had to make a choice, I'd choose this." Ervin said it is a "tragedy" that the issue of neglect in black communities in the county is not a new one.

"You've languished in this for too long," Ervin told the crowd.

While Ross Boddy, Scotland and Good Hope renovations were delayed, funding for other recreation centers in wealthier communities was put in the budget, Ervin said.

According to Leggett's recommended construction budget, \$22 million is slated for a new North Potomac recreation center and \$2.5 million for a North Bethesda recreation center.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see there are equity issues that stare you right in the face," Ervin said.