

Building money suggested for centers

Ross Boddy is among four community hubs finally in line for renovations

by Erin Donaghue | Staff Writer

Wednesday, May 21, 2008

Improvements to four recreation centers located in traditionally African-American communities are likely imminent, with a final decision on the county's capital budget slated for Thursday. After what residents say has been years of waiting and wanting, the centers are poised to receive needed upgrades and now, an additional \$3 million may be put toward renovations at the centers.

Residents who use the centers reacted with enthusiasm when they learned about the possibilities for their centers. "I was so disappointed when they turned us down, but now, I'm as happy as a lark — my spirits are lifted," said **Bette Thompson**, a Scotland resident who has advocated for years for the renovation of the Scotland Community Center in Potomac.

On the recommendation of County Councilman Roger Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac, the \$17 million that the council tentatively agreed in April to allocate toward renovations at the centers, will be increased to \$20 million. The final decision on the money is pending the adoption on Thursday of the Capital Improvements Program for fiscal 2009-14.

Thursday's decision is far from where things were just a few months ago when the CIP budget that County Executive Isiah Leggett recommended did not include major funding for three of the four centers — Scotland in Potomac, Good Hope in Silver Spring and Ross Boddy in Sandy Spring. Plum Gar in Germantown was the only one in the budget proposal, with \$1.5 million allocated in planning and design.

Action In Montgomery, a community coalition comprising area faith groups, took the lead on lobbying the council and garnering community support to renovate the centers, which residents say have been neglected for years. A community action meeting at The Universities of Shady Grove April 2 drew a crowd of more than 1,000 supporters seeking funding for the centers.

In April, Berliner recommended including planning and design money for all four centers, as well as a separate fund of \$17 million to be available when the centers are ready to move into the construction phase. The fund, he said, would not compete with

other capital improvements projects. Berliner told The Gazette he thought that **bumping up the reserve to \$20 million would afford the centers more non-competing dollars.**

“The \$17 [million,] I thought, was an unrealistic number with respect to the ultimate cost of construction,” Berliner said. The cost of renovating all four centers has been estimated at \$26 million.

Thompson said she hopes the construction money will be put toward a larger gym at the Scotland center so that neighborhood children can play basketball in teams of five.

Right now, the gym is only large enough for games of three on three.

“We’re just ecstatic,” said the **Rev. Pearl Selby, a pastor at the Oak Grove AME Zion Church and AIM member.** “We are so grateful that County Council showed these historically African-American community centers the respect they deserve.”