

Testimony of Stuart Moore, President, Old Blair Auditorium Project
Before the Montgomery County Council
Public Hearing on the FY11 Capital Budget and FY11-16 Capital Improvements
Program
February 17, 2010

[Note: In my testimony, I thanked the County Council for funding the community meetings and architect's feasibility study, but I neglected to thank Councilmember Valerie Ervin by name. The study was Valerie's idea, and she pushed to get the necessary votes to ensure it was funded. This was an important milestone in our 11 year effort to return the auditorium to our community. -- Stuart]

More than eleven years ago, when the old location of the Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring was renovated into a combined elementary school and middle school, the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system took the 1,200-seat Elizabeth Stickley auditorium out of service, despite community objections and despite no multi-purpose room in the middle school.

The auditorium was constructed in 1968, and was state-of-the-art for that era. However, it was more than just a school auditorium. It was a community asset, a resource heavily used through the Community Use of Public Facilities. If you walk the neighborhoods and talk to the people, you will find many who can recall attending events at the auditorium. So it is no wonder that the community wants it back. And that is why we turned to our government.

In 2005, the community asked for and the state provided a \$600,000 bond bill requiring matching funds. Senator Jamie Raskin and Delegates Sheila Hixson, Tom Hucker, and Heather Mizeur are enthusiastic supporters, and graciously worked to extend the deadline in 2007 and again in 2009, with the proof of matching funds now required by early Spring 2011, and expenditures required within 5 years of that date.

Last year, the County Council funded an architect's feasibility study to look at re-using the space, for which we are grateful. MCPS conducted the study, holding a series of community meetings, with participation from County agencies, some members of the County Council, the school system, the schools' PTAs, local civic associations, and community members. Four alternatives were developed, all of which would renovate the back of the auditorium into separate multipurpose space for after-school programming and community use.

We thought the county was on the right path. Sadly, in announcing his new capital budget, County Executive Ike Leggett was not with us. Despite the large growth in this year's capital budget, especially for schools, the renovation was excluded. And now, I fear, the \$600,000 state funding will likely lapse.

The auditorium portion of the building is deteriorating, just as you would expect of any unmaintained and neglected building. Mold growth, sewer gases escaping from empty drain traps and toilets, and the occasional four legged visitor are par for the course.

The building will not repair itself. Eventually, the deterioration will affect the adjacent Sligo Creek Elementary School and Silver Spring International Middle School, which could clearly benefit from the auditorium but instead face risks associated with its disuse. How long must this facility lie fallow?

The goal was a simple one - take something that already existed, get it back into operation at the best cost possible, and make it a valuable resource for our diverse community.

The easy choice for all of us is to choose to do nothing. We respectfully ask that you choose to include funding for this project in the capital budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Stuart Moore

Elizabeth Stickley Auditorium
(Old Blair Auditorium)

