

If the District is really going to attract 100,000 new residents in the next decade, renewing our school buildings is a first priority.

#### Revenue Shortfall

The capital budget request for the schools next year is \$313 million; the mayor's proposal as of yesterday remained at \$168 million. Even if the Council decides to increase that number substantially, there will obviously have to be changes in the schedule for school replacements and renovations.

#### Open Discussion

School capital projects affect every one of us at the basic neighborhood level, so it is especially important that the problems of budget shortfalls be freely and openly debated. As we are faced with touchy questions of how to reallocate dwindling resources it is all the more important that the discussion be public and transparent.

#### Educational Costs of Project Delays

With the revenue shortfall the question is not re-ordering the projects but deciding how each of the projects already scheduled will be delayed. We have to be careful to proceed fairly and prudently. It may be better not to expend planning funds for new projects, but rather reallocate those funds to ensure that projects already underway are completed on schedule. No need to pay for planning when construction is years away and, consequently, DCPS is ever more desperate for maintenance and repair money.

Delay in school construction should be minimized because delay means more than mere inconvenience. Good, nearby swing space is in short supply and costs money not only in getting the space ready and in transportation but also to the education of children and the revitalization of neighborhoods. Education is disrupted by the mere fact of moving, the time expended in bussing, decreased parental involvement simply because of distance from home, and energy drained from teachers as they pack, unpack and get students settled in. When a school opening is delayed a year, these educational costs are also extended for a year.

Moving a neighborhood school off site means the loss of the schoolyard for recreation, the lack of after school activities close to home, the loss of a convenient neighborhood meeting place, or evening classrooms for adults. Putting a school into construction even for a few years means a loss to the general vitality of the neighborhood. Delays extend

the accompanying traffic congestion, noise, dirt and general unsightliness of construction making the situation even worse.

#### Coordination, Not Competition

Because of the revenue shortfall, our neighborhood projects are competing: libraries, parks and recreation, playgrounds as well as schools - - all are on budgets that are not going to cover the amount of construction necessary to renew our neglected buildings. Rather than pit our civic interests one against the other, we should be perfecting the coordination of services, locating libraries with new schools where possible, better aligning school activities with recreation centers, adding health clinics to school sites and using creative partnerships to leverage funding wherever possible. Our planning is just getting started in these areas, and we need to do more.

#### Federal Payment

Finally, as the Brookings Institution has pointed out in several studies, DC simply does not have the fiscal structure in place to cover a normal urban budget. Inevitably DC will have to go to the Federal government to make up what would in any other jurisdiction be the state share of construction dollars, whether it is a payment in lieu of taxes, a revived annual federal payment, or some version of a tax on nonresident DC workers. This requires a coordinated approach including our congressional delegate, the mayor, the city council the board of education, DCPS administration, non-profit organizations and most of all, private citizens. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund is willing to help in that effort in any way possible.

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