

TESTIMONY ON THE WHITE FLINT SECTOR PLAN

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I am Carolyn Shawaker from Garrett Park. I taught at Walt Whitman High School for forty years and was the mayor of the Town of Garrett Park for two terms. My graduate work was in sociology with an emphasis on community structure and organization.

We do not have children or grand children who would be affected by the Council' decision regarding the White Flint Sector Plan's effects on the schools in the area. While it appears that I don't have a dog in this fight, I have a very real concern for those effects on my community. I have had experience with both the effect of high density student crowding and the importance of a high school on a whole community.

A high school is a central feature of a community within a vast metropolitan region. Real estate listings include an indication of the school area in which a property for sale is located. Community groups use the school building for meetings. People who have no children in the schools even identify their area by the local high school. Breaking up a community by re-districting is a violation of both wholeness of the community and its sense of identity.

I am appalled that the White Flint Sector Plan almost casually suggests that MCPS consider re-districting as a solution rather than considering limiting housing density to match the capacity of the local schools. Local is the operative word here. Not only is it the identity of the community, it also means that all of the children of families can have the common experience of sharing the same schools. It also means that teachers have an opportunity to get to know whole families and, thus, are better able to meet the needs of the children of those families.

In the mid to late 1960's the student population of Walt Whitman High School was over 2400 students. The brilliant ones did brilliantly, but the more average and low ability students suffered from the large numbers. Almost exactly a year ago I met with some members of the White Flint Advisory group. One member was a graduate from Walt Whitman who said to me, "You won't remember me. I was one

of the average kids who were lost in the great mob of kids there." I remember still, all of these years later, the look on one of the "non-college prep" student's face when he said, "I feel like I am just a bug squashed under everyone's thumb here."

There was a great amount of what we sociologists call alienation. While it is true that larger schools are able to provide a much broader variety of courses, it also means that a considerable number of students become "lost souls". I well remember, and still have nightmares about, the class of 43 I had one semester. No matter how hard one works to meet the needs of each student, it can't be done when the class that large is in a room meant for 25 or 30 students and lot of them can't even sit down during the class. Students who are just numbers become alienated, are harder to challenge and do not fulfill their potential.

Phases 1-3 of the White Flint Sector Plan are projected to produce 2529 students. If Randolph Hills is added to the school cluster, 163 students are projected to be added for a total of 2692 students. Phase 4 of the Plan would add even more.

I urge the Council to consider both the effects of student crowding and the impact of re-districting of schools would have on our community as its makes it decisions on the White Flint sector Plan. I strongly urge that residential growth be limited to phases 1-3 which runs risks of producing negative student outcomes. Adding phase 4 will produce very negative community and student outcomes. PLEASE work to balance residential growth with school capacity to help create optimal circumstances for student achievement.

As a final point, I note that there is no budget for planning the public and private investment in infrastructure and public facilities is included by the Park and Planning Commission even though it mandates that all the planning be done within 12 months of the adoption of the Sector Plan. This is crazy. As a former mayor I know that planning for infrastructure and facilities as well as their financing is essential. The infrastructure and public facilities will serve all the residents of the region. Therefore, planning for their financing is essential if Montgomery citizens are to be well served. Please provide budgeting for the planning.