



September 5, 2007 (via US Mail and Email)

Mary Bradford  
Director of Parks  
9500 Brunett Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20901

Re: Staff Report's Proposed Transfer or Demolishing of the Garrett Park Estates  
Recreation Center

Dear Director Bradford:

As you know, the Executive Board of the Garrett Park Nursery School in a letter dated September 3, 2007 submitted its preliminary comments and objections to the Planning Board concerning the recommended transfer of the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center to the Montgomery County Public School system, as outlined in the "Functional Plan for Recreation and Ancillary Buildings: Preliminary Staff Recommendations" [hereinafter "Staff Report"]. In response to this alarming development, the Executive Board of the Garrett Park Nursery School established a "Save our School" Task Force. As co-chairs of this Committee, we share the Executive Board's outrage regarding the nursery school's exclusion from the process that resulted in the Staff Report. We urge you to reject the Staff Report's recommendation that the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center should be transferred or demolished. Rather, because the Staff Report's recommendation is based on flawed information and an even more flawed process, the building should be preserved so that it can continue, as it has for over 50 years, to house the Garrett Park Nursery School.

The Executive Board's letter of September 3rd sets forth in great detail the many ways Department of Parks' staff excluded the Garrett Park Nursery School from the process prior to the issuance of the Staff Report. What matters now is that the voices of the nursery school's parents, staff, and alumni, as well as the Garrett Park community at large, not be excluded from the process going forward. As we understand it, the Staff Report was presented to the Planning Commission at the end of June and the Department of Parks is now seeking comments from the public. We are rallying our friends and supporters to contact you. We urge you to consider these comments before making any final recommendation regarding the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center. To some, perhaps even members of your own staff, the transfer of the property to the MCPS is a "done deal." We are confident, however, that you will not merely go through the motions

of seeking public comment but instead, will engage in a thorough and thoughtful analysis of the issues raised.

The purported rationale in the Staff Report for including the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center in the category of “transfer or demolish” is that Staff determined that the level of “public need” was low and the physical condition was “poor.” The Staff Reports’ analysis of the public need for the building is faulty. The Staff Report equates public need with the “percentage of yearly available rent-able time that is sold.” This equation may make sense when looking at the usage levels for a property that primarily is rented for birthday parties or other meetings, but it does not make sense when evaluating the “public need” for a building that houses a community-based cooperative nursery school which has provided a high-quality education to generations of students. Put simply, the calculation used does not reflect the community’s need for or the value of the Garrett Park Nursery School and the building that houses it.

Secondly, although there is no doubt that the building requires repairs, the Report itself acknowledges that “the buildings are of a simple enough construction that all could be fixed if enough money is appropriated.” (Staff Report, p. 4). The building is thus structurally sound, just in need of basic repairs. We suggest that it makes more sense, in light of the significant community need for the building and the school it houses, to simply appropriate the money necessary for the identified needed repairs.

To better understand the basis for the Staff Report’s conclusions and recommendations regarding the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center, we request that you provide the following information:

1. The assessment criteria used for evaluating the physical condition of all of the recreation centers;
2. The basis for the Staff Report’s assessment of the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center’s condition as poor, i.e., details concerning the repairs identified as necessary and the estimated cost of such repairs;
3. The usage figures and fees for the Center, including an explanation of how staff assessed the usage of the playground attached to the Center;
4. An explanation for how using the amount of revenue generated by the Center equates to “public need” when the primary tenant is a nursery school.
5. A summary of the information gathered, prior to the issuance of the Staff Report, concerning the historical and cultural significance of the Garrett Park Nursery School and the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center.

6. An explanation of what, if any, efforts were made to contact the Garrett Park Nursery School prior to the issuance of the Staff Report.

We note that page 11 of the Staff Report suggests “the recommended management strategy” should be to “[e]xplore transfer of property to Montgomery County Public Schools. Relocate current tenants to more suitable building.” In various conversations (since the Washington Post article made the proposal public) with the Director of the Garrett Park Nursery School, Brenda Artim, Mr. Wallis of your staff indicated that a possible “suitable location” for the Nursery School would be at 4806 Oxford Street, the building that currently houses a program run by the Montgomery Child Care Association (MCCA). We believe that the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center is the best and most suitable location for the Garrett Park Nursery School. In order to more fully understand the recommendation in the Staff Report, however, we request that you provide the following information:

1. The status of any discussions with the Montgomery County Public Schools regarding the proposed transfer of the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center to Montgomery County Public Schools, including any timetable discussed and the impact of the impending reconstruction of the Garrett Park Elementary School.
2. The status of any efforts to locate a so-called “more suitable” location.
  - a. Have any properties been identified?
  - b. What criteria are you using to identify such properties?
3. In connection with the property at 4806 Oxford Street, what leads your staff to believe it is a more suitable location for the Garrett Park Nursery School?
  - a. What leads your staff to believe that it would be possible for the Garrett Park Nursery School to relocate to a site that is owned by Montgomery County Public Schools and that currently houses a preschool program, as well as a before and after school care program also important to the community?
  - b. We are aware that the building is listed on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties. How will the reconstruction of the Garrett Park Elementary School impact the building?

In light of the objections set forth above, we urge the Department of Parks to reject the Staff Report’s recommendation regarding the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center. The Garrett Park Nursery School addresses an important community need – the need for a high-quality nursery school. Closing the Garrett Park Estates Recreation Center puts the continued operation of the Garrett Park Nursery School in serious jeopardy. We are confident that when you consider our objections to the current

recommendation, you will recommend to the Planning Board that the Garrett Park Recreation Center be preserved in order to allow the Garrett Park Nursery School to continue operation, uninterrupted.

We look forward to your responses to our requests for information and to having a continued dialogue. Please send your responses to the address listed below to the attention of Brenda Artim, Director of the Garrett Park Cooperative Nursery School and the Nursery School's designated contact for this matter. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Ms. Artim. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Angela Melton, Esq. and Tara M. Flynn, Esq.  
Co-Chairs of the GPNS "Save our School" Task Force

Cc: The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission  
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