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Fairfax County School Board Public Hearing, Thursday, January 12, 2023

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- Official meeting video (YouTube): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gS6HWb7kqs
- Official School Board page (FCPS): https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps/leadership/school-board

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[00:00:04] - Good evening, I'll call this meeting to order. Before we begin, I need to certify our members who are participating virtually. Mr. Frisch has submitted a written request to virtually attend this evening's meeting due to a personal conflict. Ms. Cohen and Ms. Keyes-Gamara have submitted a written request to virtually attend this evening's meetings due to a medical conflict.

[00:00:24] All those in favor of approving these requests, raise your hand. That is Ms. Bukarski, Ms. Dr. Anderson, Ms. McLaughlin, Ms. Jarenak-Koufax, Ms. Corbett Sanders, Ms. Tolan, Ms. Omish, Ms. Marin and myself, all those opposed, abstaining that motion passes, welcome our colleagues virtually.

[00:00:43] Before we begin our public hearing, let us pause for a moment of silence in remembrance of the students from South County High School.

[00:00:59] Thank you and we keep them and their families in our thoughts and prayers. Good evening and welcome to the public hearing on the Capital Improvement Program.

[00:01:14] On behalf of the school board, I would like to thank you for sharing your comments with us this evening. This hearing is being broadcast on channel 99 and live streamed at fcps.edu/tv/channel99. Tonight we have 24 registered speakers.

[00:01:30] Each speaker is allowed at two minutes and we ask you stay within that time limit. The timer will start when you begin to speak and the timer will sound after two minutes. Speaker remarks must address the capital improvement program. When your name is called, in-person speakers should approach the podium and begin speaking.

[00:01:46] Virtual speakers should unmute your microphone, turn on your camera and begin speaking. Substitutions are not permitted. If you would like to address the board but do not register in advance, please see the clerk for up to one of five available slots. And before we start, I would like to recognize Boy Scout 2BA 702 from Annandale, with members from Marshall, Falls Church, Lewis, Lake Braddock, Woodson Frost, amongst others.

[00:02:09] So welcome tonight. Thank you for joining us and attending our meeting. Please stand and we recognize. Woo-hoo! Thank you for seeing how your government works. Thank you so much.

[00:02:25] Madam Clerk, please call our first speaker. Our first speaker is student number one. Hi, I'm a student at Thomas Jefferson High School and a member of the Environmental Impact Club. I'd like to talk about the Environmental Stewardship Section of the Capital Improvement Plan and how it can better reduce FCPS carbon emissions.

[00:02:47] Over the past decade, you've made strides towards carbon neutrality, both by reducing emissions and passing resolutions to recognize the climate crisis and set goals with the Joint Environmental Task Force. However, after reading the Stewardship Section of the Capital Improvement Plan, I noticed some shortcomings. You barely set any concrete goals for the next four years to assist you in your objective of reducing emissions by 50% by 2030.

[00:03:10] The Capital Improvement Plan covers the fiscal years 2024 to 2028, bringing us within two years of the deadline to reduce our emissions by 50%, as recommended by both the Joint Environmental Task Force and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC.

[00:03:27] The Environmental Stewardship section mostly focuses on actions FCPS has already taken in the past, rather than guidelines for the future. I challenge you to include specific requirements for carbon reduction in the capital improvement plan to make sure we can reduce our emissions fast enough.

[00:03:42] One such requirement I think is particularly important is the construction of net zero ready facilities. Many FCPS schools are up for construction and renovation in the next four years, and these facilities will be in operation for decades. If they are not built-- - I'm sorry, I have to pause you for a second. I apologize.

[00:03:58] There is a technical, our online speakers do not have any volume. Can you please reset his time for 50 seconds? My apologies. We just need to make sure our online can hear us. All right. We will pause while we get our technical difficulties straightened out and I I'm so sorry.

[00:04:14] Sorry would you like me to start from the beginning or from where I left off. Yes from the beginning if we're really set your time. All right. Thank you. Thank you for your patience. Madam Cluck would you let me know if it's more good.

[00:04:32] All right. If you could reset us time for two minutes you may start from the beginning. Thank you. All right. So I'm a student at Thomas Jefferson High School and a member of the Environmental Impact Club and I'd like to talk to you about the environmental stewardship section of the capital

improvement plan and how it can better reduce FCPS carbon emissions. Over the past decade you made strides towards carbon neutrality both by actually reducing emissions and passing resolutions that recognize the climate crisis and set goals with the joint environmental task force. However after reading the stewardship section of the capital improvement plan I've noticed some shortcomings. You've barely set any concrete goals for the next four years to assist in your objective of reducing emissions by 50% by 2030. This capital

[00:05:11] improvement plan covers the fiscal years 2024 to 2028 bringing us within two years of the deadline to reduce our emissions by 50%, as recommended by both the Joint Environmental Task Force and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC. The Environmental Stewardship section of this plan mostly focuses on actions FCPS has taken in the past, rather than guidelines for the future.

[00:05:32] I challenge you to include specific guidelines for carbon reduction in the Capital Improvement Plan to make sure we can reduce our emissions fast enough. One such requirement I think is particularly important is the construction of net zero-ready facilities. SCPS schools are up for construction and renovation during this capital improvement plan.

[00:05:50] If they are not built at least net zero ready they will not be compatible with long term carbon reduction goals. Please specify that all new and renovated FCPS facilities must be net zero ready. Finally I'd like to thank you for all the work you've done and continue to do to protect the future of our planet.

[00:06:07] At a time when national and state climate policy is sketchy at best it would be really refreshing to see a model that works. Please continue to be a leader in effective environmental policy. Thank you. Our next speaker is student number two. My name is Aria Lee, and I'm an eighth grader at Carson Middle School and part of Fridays for Future DC, a youth-led climate organization.

[00:06:34] The Capital Improvement Program will help determine FCPS's priorities for the next few years. The climate is changing, and so should we. Improvements I would like to see happen to address climate change are create a bigger budget for making all school roofs solar-ready and make solar panel installations through PPAs a high priority.

[00:06:54] Solar power saves taxpayer money and emits no CO2. As stated by FCPS in the CIP PDF, prioritize the practices to be developed and implemented by staff members in order to address global warming and to meet other important environmental initiatives.

[00:07:10] The JET goals are unanimously approved to directive of the school board. Make them a priority. These objectives include a 50% emissions reduction by 2030 and being carbon neutral by 2040. The science is clear. Solutions are available.

[00:07:25] We must keep the global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius to avoid the worst of climate change. The IPCC says global warming could reach 1.5 degrees as early as 2030. We'll only have 420 gigatons of CO2 in our carbon budget to have a two-thirds chance of staying below 1.5 degrees.

[00:07:45] We can't make passive ideas of goals. FCPS is one of the largest school districts in America, emitting around 147,000 metric tons of CO2 in 2021. there is still time to change but time is running out my generation will live in a world shaped by climate change and what the people in power do or don't do it's your choice fcps can be a leader in this fight for climate action so i ask you to listen to the young people make a plan for carbon neutrality make climate action the priority for the capital improvement program so youth everywhere

[00:08:20] can have a planet and a future to look forward to thank you thank you our next speaker is student number three. My name is Netra Purishothaman and I am a middle school activist from Fridays for Future DC, a youth-led climate organization. The Capital Improvement Program will determine how our school district runs for the next four years. With the problems our communities are facing, priorities need to change. SCPS has started to make progress with climate change by asking facilities and transportation services to implement the following measures. Regulation 8534

[00:08:59] to minimize operation expenses by conserving energy, policy 8542 to prioritize practices in order to address climate change. Also, for the past few years, FCPS has received the Energy Star Partner of the Year Award for energy efficiency in buildings. But what does this mean if our emissions have gone up since 2020, and that we will not meet the Joint Environmental Task Force's goal of being carbon neutral by 2040? And what about the aspiration to be at zero waste by 2030?

[00:09:30] The definition of aspiration is a hope. We no longer have time to hope. We only have time to act. And the pursuit of green career paths for students will not mean anything because if we are not limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius by the time I graduate high school, then it will be too late.

[00:09:48] The Resolution on Climate Change Action passed by the School Board in October 2018 calls on the state and federal governments to take action and for local governments to follow. But more often than not, change happens the other way around. politicians won't change unless the people demand it. FCPS has goals to promote environmental stewardship, but they're surrounded by the words aspirational or if feasible. If we are to take real climate action, then we need real goals and real substantive action. We have seven years to combat climate change, and it starts with you listening to civilians and making climate change

[00:10:24] and equity the priority for CIP 2024 to 2028. Thank you. Thank you. Our next speaker is Deborah Tisler. Good evening. Everybody loves a good magic trick until it turns out to be nothing

[00:10:58] more than a bait-and-switch performance act. This school board sells you the best plan, but it's really among the worst at this juncture. Do you remember Clifton Elementary School, the elementary school that had some of the highest performing students? Well, rather than fix the elementary school building. Those students were shuffled and moved over to lower performing schools in order to make our scores look better. I remember, because I was teaching back then,

[00:11:34] and I saw the data points and I heard the discussions. Well, that school remains closed and empty in an area that is grossly overcrowded. Almost 15 years later, the same bait and switch act continues. Years ago, the federal government made headlines for $10,000 toilet seats And elected officials said it wouldn't happen again, but here we are in DC's backyard with high-cost estimates to rebuild or build a new school on the Clifton site.

[00:12:08] Whereas in 2010, keeping Clifton Elementary School open and deferring renovation would have been beneficial to the school system, community, and most of all the children. At the time, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources provided historic rehabilitation tax credits to rehabilitate school buildings for continued educational use.

[00:12:29] But just like today, common sense was thrown out the window. At this point, Clifton Elementary School must be renovated with expansion to meet the current needs of the community.

Unfortunately, it is estimated to come at a high price tag, but we must move forward to ensure the needs of our students are met.

[00:12:45] I know you can dig up those funds, and some of those ways are trimming the procurement card costs and eliminating excess fees. Thank you. Our next speaker is Sandra Davis. In late 2020, Waples Mill Mosaic and Providence Elementary Schools in the central part of the county were overcrowded.

[00:13:23] In particular, Fairfax County had been excessively zoning county students into a city of Fairfax School Providence Elementary for years. providence is a title one minority majority school that winter when this board should have been tackling the big issue of returning to school carl frisch instead persuaded this board to act to his political benefit the voters of this county one of those disadvantaged children moved out of the decade-old moldy trailers at providence and into a brand new school on blake lane which had been set aside by the fcps board for 20 years but carl frisch's neighbors wanted a dog park to further

[00:14:01] pamper their pooches. He simply gave away these kids school. When the chair of the city of Fairfax school board objected to the unilateral change Mr. Frisch shushed her saying she was ruining the party atmosphere of the joint working session. The board decided to go with a supposedly cheaper option of renovating the site at Dunloring despite the traffic jam it would cause on one of the most congested roads in the county. The neighbors convinced the rich McLean residents paid off this board to move the school and to avoid the chaotic redistricting that comes with it.

[00:14:34] Instead, costs have ballooned because the Dunloring building must be torn down, not renovated. This board doesn't have to continue treating canines better than disadvantaged students. Stop the Dunloring project and build a new school on the original site as intended and clear out the trailers at Mosaic and Louise Archer.

[00:14:51] Let's do the right thing and redraw elementary school boundaries in the northeast part of the county. Thank you. Our next speaker is Anthony Sabio, followed by Joanne Sears.

[00:15:08] Anthony Sabio. Joanne Sears.

[00:15:29] Tonight I'm not going to address how the school board failed our children academically, as shown via plummeting test scores, or how FCPS, according to the Office of Civil Rights at the Federal Department of Ed, violated the civil rights of special ed students when they shuttered schools, or how they've been systematically focused on killing merit, as shown by the recent scandal at TJ or the fact that some of the school board actually believe they are deserving of higher office.

[00:16:00] Nope, tonight I'm going to address the fact that this school board continues to put our children and staff at risk. There are over 800 trailers being used on campuses across FCPS. It has been the easy button for overcrowding in the McLean Pyramid and other schools by this school board.

[00:16:19] The modular classrooms are built to withstand the elements and not bullets from an active shooter. Some of these trailers are far from the protection of the brick and mortar of a real school building, and our children and staff have been turned into sitting ducks by you while you focus on pet projects like changing the names of schools.

[00:16:39] Every time this board adds a trailer, they put more children and staff at risk. God forbid there is an active shooter in our community. The bloodshed of children and staff will be on your hands because

you have failed to invest our budget, a $3.4 billion budget, in real construction to mitigate overcrowding.

[00:17:03] Moms demand action. Thank you. Our next speaker is Robert Jordan, followed by Vanessa Athena. Good evening. I'm speaking on behalf of the Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, which is a local nonpartisan nonprofit that works to identify and advocate for local solutions to the climate crisis.

[00:17:31] I'm happy that our students who spoke earlier have talked about the jet recommendations, which I was going to mention, but I'll go on the energy recommendations are not being met. AND WE REALLY FEEL THAT THE FCPS STAFF HAS NOT TAKEN THEM SERIOUSLY.

[00:17:57] WE HAVE SEVERAL RECOMMENDATIONS THAT WE FEEL SHOULD BE MADE TO IMPROVE OUR PERFORMANCE, THE FCPS PERFORMANCE.

[00:18:16] First, it's important that there's a firm date for the FPAC task force to identify the ways to incorporate jet goals in FCPS facilities planning. There is no date, as far as I can tell, and that one must be established.

[00:18:35] Secondly, energy conservation projects that will lead toward achievement of the jet goals should be implemented in addition to the renovation and construction queue projects. THEY SHOULD EXPLICITLY BE INCORPORATED INTO THE PROPOSED CAPITAL ASSET PRESERVATION AND RENEWAL PROGRAM THAT ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT FAN SHAW MENTIONED AT YOUR WORKING SESSION.

[00:19:01] WHEN FCPS DEVELOPS A NEW RENOVATION AND CONSTRUCTION QUEUE, ENERGY USE INDEX OF SCHOOLS SHOULD BE INCORPORATED AS A HEAVILY-WEIGHTED CRITERIAN WHEN ESTABLISHING THE QUEUE PRIORITIES. FINALLY, FCPS MUST ESTABLISH A CLEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN TO MEET JET.

[00:19:23] THANK YOU. OUR NEXT SPEAKER IS VENESSA ATHENA, FOLLOWED BY HARRY JACKSON. HARRY JACKSON. SCHOOL BOARD.

[00:19:40] I WAS VERY DISTURBED BY WHAT I SAW IN THE LAST FCPS WORK SESSION, WHERE MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL BOARD UNFAIRLY BLAMED MEMBERS OF THEIR STAFF, SAYING, CLAIMING THAT THEY, BECAUSE THEY, THEY SELVES WERE NOT EXPERTS WITHIN FACILITIES PLANNING, THEY RELY ON THE EXPERTISE to the staff to provide them viable options that that they to follow i'm sure that they did but you didn't follow them in fact we're in a dire situation now where we have schools that are being overcrowded and the resources define this the resources to find money to to expand school capacity and how do we end up here well let's first let's do a lessons learned it's been a

[00:20:17] comedy of errors i'm sure the staff did not advise a school board to violate those students with disabilities and have where you found an ocr complaint where you now have to find money to provide compensatory services i'm sure the staff did not tell you to discriminate against agents at tj which is why you went to a lawsuit which you're likely going to lose or to violate the human rights of students at langley westfield and thomas jefferson again by failing to notify them and probably will end up in a class attitude which will cost more money but um i saw another thing here another comedy of errors we talked about that if you live in the providence area or zone for marshall to be aware that dunloree elementary school that mr fris champion for wasn't needed

[00:20:57] And that, if ever open, required massive and unnecessary boundary changes involving multiple schools in the Marshall Pyramid, including at a minimum Freedom Hill, Senwood, and

Shrevewood. It's also done nothing to plan for future enrollment and growth in Marshall, even though the FCPS longer-term projections indicate that Marshall could pick up more kids in the coming years than any other high school due to the construction in Tyson's.

[00:21:18] Again, another comedy of error. That if you live in Providence in your zone for Oakton, to be aware that Mr. Frisch took money earmarked for a new school in Fairfax, Oakton, and rerouted it to Dunlorn to save Blake Lane Park, a dog park, prioritizing dogs over the future of our children.

[00:21:35] Again, another comedy of error that need not happen. We should be a better steward of our resources and prioritize the futures of our children. Thank you. Our next speaker is Jack Shelton, followed by Joe Dumbia. Jack Shelton?

[00:21:55] Jo Dumbia, followed by Shelley Arnoldi. Good evening. I'm Jo Dumbia. I'm representing the FACE Alliance of Climate Solutions as well. Well, the CIP is an incredibly ambitious program.

[00:22:16] The planet is in a planetary crisis, existential planetary crisis. The county has committed to very aggressive targets to 2030 to 2050, reduction of 50% gas emissions, neutrality on carbon.

[00:22:33] The CIP needs to incorporate all the net zero elements. There have to be follow-ups, check-in, interaction of the different agencies that are involved into making this a reality. How all of this is going to happen? They ask it is for you to consider having a net zero champion that can oversee, can look for these initiatives going forward.

[00:22:58] So let's go now a little bit about the CIP. Five years, 10 years plan, a list of schools for renovation, construction, expansion. No indication of how these programs are going to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions.

[00:23:17] We don't know exactly how these numbers are going to come out and whether there is going to be a way to really satisfy the deadline. They ask, please to include the means for us to identify and for you to identify how this is going to really, in fact, be taking place.

[00:23:40] The asset management program talk about backlog of equipment that is not considered anywhere. The invitation to please look and integrate this into the CIP. Financing. I rise here. Two incredibly effective means to get money to improve the program.

[00:24:02] There is the S-Cost to be considered. Thank you. Our next speaker is Shelley Arnoldi, followed by Susan Stillman. Susan Stillman, followed by Susan Taylor.

[00:24:26] Hi, my name is Susan Stillman. I'm a volunteer with the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club. And I thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening on the SIP for 2024 through 2028. my area of interest are sustainability with a focus on solar energy and net-zero construction.

[00:24:43] My understanding is that the board has directed the FCPS staff to deploy on-site solar and that any new buildings designed started in 2021 must be designed for net-zero energy. This is a directive with unanimous support from the board. For those in the audience that don't know about net-zero design, it's a building designed to be so energy efficient that with the addition of solar and possibly ground source heat pumps that the building can stand on its own and provide all its own energy.

[00:25:13] I'm in the process of building a net zero home, and I'm really excited about the prospect of being able to control my energy cost, have cleaner air in my home, and other attributes that come with net zero building. The architecture firm Perkins Eastman did a study for you all that said that building a new

school building, an elementary school, to net zero would cost you an extra 5%, and renovating an elementary school would cost 11% extra, and that the life cycle cost over -- savings over 30 years would be $6 to $7 million.

[00:25:48] That's for every school. That's real taxpayer money. So I spoke with an architect that works with FCPS, and he said that they had been told to go back to designing the schools to the old way, not to net zero. If that's the case, then we've got a problem because he said it's too expensive now with the escalation in the cost of building and the cost of materials and the cost of labor and so on.

[00:26:15] If that's the case, then in the next budget cycle, I hope that the school board will adhere to its commitments and have the county provide the additional funds needed to get to net zero. We know the board of supervisors supports net zero.

[00:26:32] you. Our next speaker is Susan Taylor followed by Doug Taylor. Good evening. Remarkably, I'm here to speak to you for the third time about the conditions at Kent Gardens Elementary School. Quite frankly, I'm not even sure what I can say. Kent Gardens does not have adequate instructional space for its students.

[00:27:01] Full stop. The board has known this for at least 10 years, yet this version of The CIP once again puts forwarded potential solutions for capacity deficits, all of which, save boundary adjustments and construction, have been deployed at Kent Gardens to no avail.

[00:27:24] As for boundaries, a process quite frankly that could have been initiated and completed years ago even now sits as an idle promise. As to construction, we're told it's difficult because zoning variances are required. And when questioned what has been done to investigate obtaining those variances, we're met with silence and blank stares.

[00:27:45] So essentially the answer to the hard questions is, well, it's difficult. So instead, we do nothing. Finally, the CIP document states, and I quote, that it is updated annually to reflect changing conditions within our schools and communities.

[00:28:01] Capital project needs are informed and updated by the facility capacity evaluations completed each year. This can't possibly be true, because when asked, there doesn't seem to be a single board member or person in a facilities department or committee that can answer the questions about what modifications have been made to the renovation queue since 2009, nor can they answer why there are at least 15 elementary schools listed in the current CIP with no capacity issues, yet there are others within our district with demonstrable problems.

[00:28:34] we're supposed to vote on a bond next year for more money for these projects when no one can seem to answer why they are in the CIP. So I'm thank you. Our next speaker is Doug Taylor followed by Robert Rigby. First off, thank you to the district staff and the committees and the board members for the many hours of earnest effort that have formed the CIP. You probably don't hear that

[00:29:12] enough. In fact, I don't think you've heard it once tonight. Thank you. My comments will focus on the CIP renovation queue that is finally going to be updated. I want to address two of the potential criteria that are under consideration for prioritizing the queue. The first I often hear or see listed in materials is how long it has been since the most recent renovation. A straight time calculation bulldozes over many of the most salient considerations about our infrastructure and is not nearly sufficient. My

understanding there's a comprehensive building review being conducted that will consider many of those more diverse questions about the past renovations the current state of the infrastructure its future life

[00:29:52] expectancy and it is my hope this is great news that these more robust criteria will be used to inform the renovation queue rather than a straight calendar time calculation we can do better the second criteria is projected enrollment and capacity given the vital importance of this metric I would like to see more transparency around the data and the methodology that we are using for in our enrollment projections and to have the opportunity for greater public review and input into that process I also ask that we make available the capacity of all of the school facilities not just the program capacity of the classrooms themselves how many students to the library the gym the cafeteria the

[00:30:32] labs how do what do they support at a given school we can't just look at the classroom or trailer capacity alone and as far as I know those other capacity data points are not available to the public. Have our projections fully and appropriately accounted for the shifts in matriculation patterns that TJ is now encountering as a result of the change in its admissions process? Most schools should be projected for higher or lower enrollments most likely going forward as they are sending more or less kids to TJ than they did in the past. Only transparency about our projections will sufficiently answer these types of questions. Thank you. Our next speaker is Robert Rigby, followed by Vanessa Hall.

[00:31:14] I am Vice President for Advocacy for the Fairfax County Council PTA, and I'm also a member of the Fairfax County Special Education PTA and a local unit. I want to speak about how the design of renovations and new construction can have input from established family and parents organizations new and old student organizations and certified employees organizations in the design process why such organizations as ptas will be able to bring to you needs of students staff and

[00:31:54] family high level decision makers or the design and construction folks may not even be aware of these needs. One specific example is making our actual physical plants welcoming particulars for people, students with disabilities that non-disabled people may not even know about.

[00:32:20] This includes accommodations during drills and lock-ups. Another example are needs for space for minority phase. A third are how to make non-binary and trans students and staff walk. reach out to stakeholder groups.

[00:32:37] We are ready and can help elevate traditionally muted. Note, I'm not talking about asking the community to solve thorny public relations issues. I'm talking about seeking information on specific needs and proven solutions that may be out here in the community.

[00:33:01] An open access survey by FCPS clearly doesn't produce useful information. We're all just concerned that each child and staff person has the facilities available. Thank you. Our next speaker is Vanessa Hall, followed by Jennifer Myers. I can't believe it's been a year since I spoke about my daughter's horrific experience during renovation at Frost. Fortunately, a lot has changed in the year and the renovation is

[00:33:38] going really well the halls are clearer my daughter's harder to bully and the school's looking great i doubt that the renovation will be complete before she starts high school next fall but i want to commend you on the spacious halls 21st century classrooms and beautiful library and thank you ms omesh for your lovely response uh sharing changes you and ms cohen had initiated to ensure that fcps gets a larger portion of the annual bond sale woohoo that being said the current cip shows you're dealing

with nearly four decade building life cycle decades of budget cuts and a growing community with diverse needs our schools are overcrowded from decades of failure of richmond

[00:34:17] and the board of supervisors to fully financially support the cip i doubt they'll ever support the schools like you all do which means that you're always trying to do so much with so little with that in mind please consider some key needs in each new and current building particularly with our recent pandemic experience. For example our hallways are overcrowded. We need adequate space for students to safely pass in the hall and maybe even have a quiet space when things get really chaotic. I know I need that space. Try to make buildings as green as possible to reduce costs

[00:34:51] and rely on some fossil fuels. Keep kids safe in their schools without over hardening buildings. In Miami this over Christmas I saw schools that looked like prisons which is no way to learn and no way to teach. Also, students need access to bathrooms without traveling across campus, including gender-neutral bathrooms, as appropriate. Please, regarding accessibility, make schools accessible every day, but especially in the case of emergencies. Thank you for trying to stretch the dollars to cover as many schools as possible. I hope that Richmond releases the purse strings for our family and students. Also, since it's been discussed, equity and merit can

[00:35:29] coexist. Thank you. Our next speaker is Jennifer Myers, followed by Alyssa Densham. Thank you for allowing me to speak. I'm going to say that overcrowding does seem to be a popular topic this evening. I am yet another speaker to address the severe overcrowding at Kent Gardens Elementary School. Kent Gardens is currently operating at 121% capacity with no further options for expansion.

[00:35:57] This is the most overcrowded elementary school in the region and one of the most overcrowded in Fairfax County, yet no actions are being taken. Fairfax is not accurately considering the population growth in the area given the methods that you utilize. There are significant teardowns in our area that are drawing more families with young children, and these are not being captured in your numbers. This will only add to the overcrowding. Currently, the entire sixth grade class attends school and trailers, many of which are dilapidated to the point where a child's foot fell through. The electives are in trailers. Each possible expansion technique has already been

[00:36:36] taken. Trailers, optimizing interior spaces, converting closets into classroom. Furthermore, there's no more exterior land. There are now quads on the blacktop on the playground. It's so overcrowded this lunch has spanned from 10.30 to 2.30. The gym has to hold two classes at one time and the trailers are unsafe.

[00:36:57] What makes all of this worse is that Kent Gardens is one of the tightest schools in terms of the square footage per child. This means that children are more physically squeezed at Kent Gardens than any other school in the region. Part of the problem is that the school has a very popular French immersion program which brings children in from other districts, some coming as far away as from Herndon.

[00:37:21] The school board has proposed changing boundaries or modifying the French program. The parent body has expressed a strong preference to address the French program, possibly adding a second program in Fairfax County. This could address the overcrowding while meeting the overwhelming demand for the French program, which currently doesn't...

[00:37:41] Thank you. Our next speaker is Alyssa Densham, followed by Amanda Campbell. Amanda Campbell, followed by Jennifer Litton-Tidd. Good evening.

[00:38:03] My name is Amanda Campbell, and I'm speaking tonight as president of Fairfax County Special Education PTA. I was disappointed to see that there are only three mentions of accessibility in the entire CIP document, all pointing to the ADA, but with no real explanation of what that means in practice in FCPS.

[00:38:18] As I'm sure everyone at this dais can agree, technically meeting the requirements of the law is not always the same thing as meeting the spirit of the law. Unfortunately, there are cases of this regarding accessibility in FCPS. For example, the playgrounds are all considered to be ADA compliant, but I ask you, are we truly providing accessibility if there's only one piece of playground equipment that a person with mobility impairments can access?

[00:38:40] Are we providing accessibility when that one piece of playground equipment can only be gotten to by crossing yards of thickly mulch-covered ground that wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids cannot actually traverse? My written comments submitted to you contain more detail with photographic documentation as well.

[00:38:56] We ask that FCPS include a plan within the CIP to identify a queue of playground renovations to address playground accessibility, prioritizing school sites that have consistently had higher numbers of students with accessibility needs another similar issue relates to accessible parking spaces each school does have accessible parking spaces which meets the requirements of the law yet for elementary schools at least many of those spaces are located in the bus loop and then in the section of the parking lot that's impacted by kiss and ride what this means in practice is that these spaces are not accessible when they are most needed during the day arrival and dismissal times we ask that fcps audit the current accessible parking spot locations

[00:39:33] and whether or not they are accessible during arrival and dismissal and then develop a district wide plan to address the changes needed to ensure that these spaces are available during the highest traffic times at all schools in future iterations of the cip to increase ada accountability we would love to see the cip explicitly include accessibility needs in the individual school renovation plans as well as a section of the overall cip dedicated specifically to accessibility in the same way that there is a section dedicated to environmental sustainability. Thank you. Thank you. Our next

[00:40:05] speaker is Jennifer Litton-Tidd, followed by Cheryl Binkley. Cheryl Binkley, followed by Michael

[00:40:16] Berry. Michael Berry? Michael Berry? Yes, I'm here. Sorry. I thank you for the time to speak before the board this evening and the work on the capital improvement plan. I'm here representing Kent Gardens Elementary School as a parent of both a current and a future student. We only recently

[00:40:55] joined Kent Gardens Elementary and now cherish being part of such a caring and vibrant community. We're also very appreciative of the energy and the engagement from the school's academic and administrative leadership. What we've also become very concerned is we've learned more about the severe overcrowding challenges at the school and have experienced them firsthand through our daughter.

[00:41:13] We commend the school staff for handling the situation as they have up until now. It is now time that they can be provided with the capital improvement resources they desperately need to create the learning environment we all expect for every child throughout FCPS. My daughter's first experience at

Kent Gardens was her new school year orientation, where she learned that her classroom would be a windowless former storage closet that had been recently converted into a classroom.

[00:41:38] I'm still uncertain how this was even allowed under fire safety protocol. In her new classroom this year, she at least has a window, but there is a makeshift classroom in the hallway for a special needs class. Special needs in the hallway. When she goes to the music class in the trailers outside, she's had to have, quote, silent music class where she and her classmates need to keep their noise levels down in music class because the sixth grade class next door is teaching advanced math and science.

[00:42:04] We can do better, and we must do better, and the fact that Kent Gardens is not even on the list of projects with a plan for future funding at any point is unacceptable. Please take action. Thank you. Our next speaker is Stephanie Lundquist-Aurora, followed by Norma Margias.

[00:42:29] Good evening. It's time to clear the FCPS trailer parks. I think you guys have heard that several times.

[00:42:44] That seems to be a common theme. You've just allocated $400,000 for your own office space, so I think it's only fair that you should also do that for the children. That would be really considerate. So come on now, get it done. There's plenty of wasteful spending that you should shift towards projects like putting children in these real classrooms.

[00:43:06] I'll give you a few examples. So I think it does seem to pay to be friends with Dr. Reed. I know that you just issued a $455,000 sole source contract, which is non-competitive.

[00:43:22] I'm sure you guys know that when you agreed to it, to performance fact for more equity planning in your strategic plans. So that seems pretty excessive, I would say, personally. And then that $20,000 one-hour Zoom call with a critical race theory advocate.

[00:43:44] And then let's talk about the legal fees for a second, because you've spent, that legal audit just came out, and you've spent $9 million in lawyers in 18 months from June 2020 to December 2021, and nearly $17 million from 2020 to 2022 in legal fees.

[00:44:05] So I think, like, it's just a good idea to stop breaking the law and getting sued would save a lot of money. With all this waste and 8% property tax increases this year in Fairfax County, coupled with increased valuations of houses and cars, we, the taxpayers, further demand an audit of FCPS and your wasteful spending. Thanks.

[00:44:31] Norma Margulies. Thank you. I'm really moved by the testimony of many of teachers, parents of elementary schools that are facing overcrowding, that are being submitted to you, they're pleased to address.

[00:44:54] And at the same time, the other side of the coin is that you keep spending $455,000 for equity consultants or equity commentators and talks.

[00:45:10] And also, you have hired the chief equity officer, right, Ms. Nardos King. I just wonder if with her salary we can meet many of the demands of these many schools.

[00:45:26] It seems to me that Fairfax County Public Schools is an urgent need for an audit. And I will support that. And we need an independent body and organization to conduct that audit and to determine what are the type of priorities that you have instead of addressing the real issues.

[00:45:46] For instance, maintenance of bathrooms, basic maintenance of bathrooms on many schools. What happened at Woodson High School? There was a fire there. And I haven't seen any interest whatsoever, any construction plan to address the situation or the overcrowding.

[00:46:02] but you keep putting your money on equity and towards. Thank you. - That was our final speaker.

[00:46:18] - Thank you, Madam Clerk. We will adjourn this public hearing, take a brief break and begin our meeting at 7:25.