

BIPARTISAN COMMISSION ON SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION
December 8, 2009 – 5:45 p.m. – Council Conference Room

Members Present:	John Scotten	Absent:	Donald Osman
	John Smilko		
	Richard Slutzky		
	J.B. Jennings		
	Mary Ann Lisanti		
	Susan B. McComas		

Miss Lisanti welcomed the members and asked each of them to introduce themselves. She stated that this Commission was established by Resolution 19-09, which was a result of the changing climate of funding for school construction due to the declining commitment of the State for funding. It is the intent of this Commission to bring all parties that are involved in school construction and financing together to work on a strategy for the future.

Mr. Slutzky stated that the funding process has dramatically changed in just the last seven years and noted that Harford County had never forward-funded a school project prior to building the Patterson Mill Middle/High School. He stated that at one time the State provided as much as 60% of the funding for school construction costs. Once the County began to forward-fund the school construction projects, the Council became engaged in the process by approving the required bond funding.

Miss Lisanti stated that the Resolution grants this Commission a year to develop a long-term action plan for funding public schools, to study the capital facilities requirements for the future, to determine the effectiveness of existing sources of funding, and to explore potential new partnership opportunities.

The first order of business was the selection of a Chair and Vice Chair for the Commission. A motion to nominate Miss Lisanti as the Chair was made by Mr. Slutzky, seconded by Mr. Jennings, and carried by general consent. A motion to nominate Mr. Smilko as Vice Chair was made by Ms. McComas, seconded by Mr. Scotten, and carried by general consent.

Miss Lisanti asked the members to suggest what data the Commission would need to carry out its task. Ms. McComas stated that there had been a previous Commission that should have had a report. She also suggested data be gathered from any other task forces, such as through the Department of Legislative Services, that have dealt with school funding, as well as gathering information from other states. She suggested that David Lever, with the Maryland Department of Education, be invited to one of the Commission meetings.

Mr. Slutzky stated that there was a recent meeting with David Lever, and he will get the minutes of that meeting.

Mr. Scotten stated that the Board of Education will need to lay out the capital facility needs, and Mr. Smilko said that that is already a very formalized process and the information is readily available.

Mr. Smilko stated that the scope of the Commission also needs to address the constraints of the adequate public facilities legislation and the development envelope on the location of new school construction.

Mr. Slutzky noted that there are only three other states that have county funded education and have funding authority with the Board of Education, so data from other states will not be compatible for the needs of Harford County.

Mr. Jennings stated that when the Annapolis legislature is considering school funding issues, they look at whether the county has been responsible with development. He also stated that it is frustrating that state law only allows construction for the actual number of enrolled students and does not consider any planned development that may impact the capacity of a school. Miss Lisanti noted that it is those types of policies that the Commission needs to study and may necessitate a change.

Miss Lisanti stated that the Commission needs to know how the Board of Education prioritizes capital projects, and Mr. Smilko stated that the information would be contained in the capital improvement program, which he will provide.

Ms. McComas stated that when locating a school it is important to be sure that basic infrastructure is in place and that there is adequate population to fill the school.

Mr. Slutzky suggested that the Commission address the mandates that have fiduciary responsibility such as all-day kindergarten. He also noted how the Board of Education had changed the target capacity for classrooms from 25 to 23, which changed the capacity needs of the schools. Kathy Carmello, staff member of the Board of Education who was present in the room, stated that she will be able to keep the Commission updated on the responsibilities associated with any newly proposed mandates in her capacity as the legislative liaison for the Board of Education.

Mr. Scotten stated that the Commission should review the Land Use Plan and the demographic information. Mr. Slutzky suggested that Pete Gutwald, Director, Planning and Zoning, address the Commission with regard to projected housing projects and the annual growth report. Mr. Slutzky also requested that the Board of Education provide the actual costs of the most recent 7 or 8 school construction projects. Miss Lisanti also suggested that a map of the development envelope imposed with the existing school locations might be helpful.

Ms. McComas stated that the Commission might explore the use of school facilities being utilized to meet community needs.

Miss Lisanti suggested that the Commission also consider the potential for public and private funding partnerships.

The next meeting was scheduled on Monday, January 25, 2010, at 3:00 p.m. in the Council conference room. Before that meeting, a summary of the data to be gathered will be sent out to the membership. The meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara J. O'Connor
Council Administrator

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Summary of Suggested Data

Report/Minutes from previous Commission

Report/Minutes from Task Forces, i.e. Department of Legislative Services

Minutes of recent meeting with David Lever, Board of Ed representative, Council member, and County Executive

State laws regulating school funding issues

List of state mandates that carry fiduciary responsibility

Board of Education Capital Improvement Program

Board of Education actual costs of most recent 7 or 8 projects

Land Use Plan and demographic information

Map of Development envelope with existing school locations

Future Invitees: David Lever, MD Dept. of Education
 Pete Gutwald, Director, Planning and Zoning