

## **Bring the Public to the Table, NOW!**

*by Mark R. Adelman, Chair, MCCF Education Committee*

Some of our elected officials are setting the table for a dinner that we do NOT like. We need to be involved in planning the menu before they cook us up a turkey.

The issue concerns the possibility that the Carver Educational Services Center might be turned over to Montgomery College, without adequate planning and public input. Carver is the former high school that has served for many years as the MCPS administrative office headquarters and for the Board of Education.

On December 10, a colleague from the PTA provided us information that discussions were underway to transfer Carver from MCPS to Montgomery College. We sent an Email to both the County Council and the Board of Education asking whether such discussions were in fact in process and, if so, what is their status. In particular, we sought to learn when and how citizen input will be obtained. We reminded them that it is imperative that the public be informed of the ongoing dialogue, and that the entire decision-making process be open to public input. We also indicated that the MCCF Education Committee has had preliminary discussions, and is prepared to offer comments, as soon as public comment is sought.

A check of the County Council agenda revealed that its Education Committee was scheduled on, Monday afternoon, December 13<sup>th</sup>, to have a discussion with MCPS and the College concerning the Carver Center. Two members of the MCCF Education Committee were able to adjust their schedules and attend that meeting.

What took place at the Council Committee was extremely disturbing. We expressed the following concerns in a second email to the Board of Education (with a copy to the County Council):

- The discussion was one sided in that no representative of MCPS or BoE at the meeting - only one BoE staff member. This staff member was neither invited to the table, nor asked to speak. Dr. Nunley, the College President, gave extensive testimony as to why the College needs Carver and how it will use the site and facility. In addition, there were multiple staff from the college present and many of them were called upon to clarify points in Dr Nunley's presentation.
- By his tone and words, the Committee Chair made it clear that he held the Board and MCPS administration in contempt for failing to participate in the dialogue about the best use of Carver. I can only surmise that this one-sided "dialogue" has been going on for some 5-6 months since we have not seen all records of previous meetings on this matter and since the public is, of course, not allowed to participate in such sessions.
- Members of the (Council) Education Committee asked thoughtful questions. By a 2-1 vote the Committee proposed to move forward with the process. Given this, I also surmise that the Council Committee and College now presume that Carver is only being used by the BoE/MCPS for offices and that they can be easily moved to another site at a cost that is acceptable. It did not appear to me that there was any consideration given to the fact that Carver is one of the very few sites remaining in the County that can house a high school should we need one, or be used as a holding high school while others are being renovated.
- The Council Committee will recommend that supplemental funds (in the current fiscal year) be allocated for a more detailed study of how the conversion of the Carver site to an addition to the College might proceed. It did not appear to me that a thorough discussion has taken place of other ways to satisfy the needs of the College without "evicting" MCPS from Carver.

- I expressed my extreme disappointment with the failure of MCPS/BOE to participate.

As of this date, we have not received any response to our emails from either the BoE or the Council. The Superintendent of MCPS has informed me in person that our intrusion into this process is ill-advised and undermines his efforts to serve all the children in our County. His perception is inaccurate and most unfortunate. The Civic Federation operates on the principle of supporting our elected and employed public servants by providing wise feedback, based on careful observation and probing. We presume that they understand that a democratic society depends on such actions by an informed and thoughtful citizenry. Absent any response to our questions, we can only conclude that what is going on here is a petty turf war amongst people who do not see the bigger picture.

There is no question that Montgomery College serves many students and that it needs more space. But the dialogue we have heard thus far suggests that the people who ARE talking, and those who are not, see this as a battle for space that can be used (primarily) either for parking or for offices. They seem to be ignoring the larger value of the Carver site. They appear to lack the vision of one of my contacts who commented that that Carver could be something for everyone since there's enough land between the College and the Carver site to house a small county high school, MCPS and college offices, underground parking for thousands, housing for the poor and public workers, and a few baseball diamonds.

Given the failure of the Council, MCPS, and the Board of Education to respond to our questions, why should we presume they have thought of any of these possibilities? Why should we assume that they have ANY such vision? I believe that we need to demand the immediate establishment of a CITIZEN-BASED task force to come up with a better plan for the Carver site. We demand that before the "powers that be" plan a menu of the same old tired dishes, they involve the public in a REAL discussion of what should be done with Carver.

I ask each of you to write to the Council and the Board of Education and demand to be involved. If we do not make such demands, then "they" will plan the menu, set the table, and serve the meal. And we will be left with our "just desserts". And that would be truly UNACCEPTABLE.

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