VP Advocacy Report - May 2020

Montgomery County Budgets

1. Operating Budget

The County Council voted to pass a budget that satisfies the Maintenance of Effort requirement, which is about 50 Million less that the BOE request. We are receiving about 25 Million from the CARES act, which must be used on Covid related expenses. We might get 10 Million more from the state portion of the CARES act. Dr. Smith said that we will need to find about 100 Million in this MOE budget to focus on learning recovery. This puts some of the pre- Covid priorities in jeopardy. The County Executive has suggested a property tax hike focused solely on education. This is not supported by the County Council.

1. Capital Budget

In January, the County Executive sent a budget that is 100 Million less than the BOE Request. This is due to a reduction in impact taxes from the forecast. We still recieved about 40% of the county’s CIP budget, which is near the top end of the normal percentage. The County Council asked that the BOE send over a “non-recommended budget.” This budget included a one year delay in the following projects: Clarksburg ES #9, Dufief,Crown HS, Northwood HS, Woodward HS, William Tyler Page ES and Magruder HS. It included a 2 year delay of Bethesda ES. It removed the projects at Maryvale/Sandburg, Westbrook and Watkins MIll.

The County Council asked for prioritization of the High School projects, especially Northwood/ Woodward. They also asked to keep Bethesda ES, Clarksburg ES, and Magruder on time. They asked Watkins MIll Early Childhood center to be added back into the budget

Council staff came back with a plan, one that needed to save 94 million in the first year. There were several savings in delayed work throughout the county, including a 6 month delay in a 54 Million dollar biking tunnel in Bethesda. The final compromise was voted on unanimously by the council. The new budget now includes the delays/removals below.

3 projects were kept on time from the original delay list. Northwood, Woodward, and Magruder High Schools. Crown HS, Clarksburg ES, Dufief ES, Tyler Page ES, are delayed by one year. Bethesda ES is delayed for 2 years. They removed the projects at Maryvale/Sandburg, Westbrook and Watkins MIll.

Because they needed to find more savings to keep Northwood and Woodward projects on time, there are now delays in the Major Capital Projects. 3 ES projects in the Major Capital Project list are also now delayed. Woodlin ES, Southlake ES and Stonegate ES have been delayed by one year. Burnt Mills ES will stay on schedule. Two High School projects are delayed by a year, Damascus and Wootton.

Note that the budget might be adjusted later in the year, depending on finances.

Sign on Letter Requests

We received 2 requests to sign onto letters regarding the Capital Budget. We declined to sign either due to the nature of the requests. One was to sign onto the letter supporting the 54 Million dollar biking tunnel in Bethesda in the name of safe routes to schools. This is a worthy goal, but because of the limited funds available in the budget, this project could not be prioritized by MCCPTA or we would have risked losing more funds to support our school CIP. This action would have needed a vote from our membership.

The other sign on request was from a group that was formed under Empower Montgomery. This organization is led by businesses, mainly developers. It was a letter to the council to demand full funding of the CIP, and also mentions the goal of avoiding moratoriums. Again, this is a worthy cause, but MCCPTA has not taken a position on moratoriums at this time, and we have already had our testimony delivered to the council which clearly communicates the need to fund our CIP appropriately. Again, this is an action that we would want to have input from our membership before signing onto a letter from an organization with which we had not had a previous relationship. Side note: They also shared a petition that collected emails for Empower. I did not share because the privacy note said that businesses could use that information at a later date. It is a positive sign that other groups ARE advocating to fund our CIP.

Veto of Blueprint for Maryland’s Future, and Built to Learn Act

Both of these bills are now not in effect. Blueprint will need an override by the legislature. The Built to Learn Act is tied to the Blueprint passage. If the Blueprint is not overridden, then the Built to Learn Act will need to be changed and sent back to the Governor next year. Look out for more advocacy concerning these bills.

The MoCo IG Bill passed. Complete list of bills that passed or failed will be provided next week.