

MINUTES
Public Hearing of the College Park City Council
Tuesday, January 31, 2006
7:30 P.M.

PRESENT: Mayor Brayman; Councilmembers Milligan, Krouse, Catlin, Perry, Olson, Fellows, Hampton and Peña-Melnyk; Student Liaison Emily Guskin.

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Joe Nagro, City Manager; Janeen Miller, City Clerk; Sara Imhulse, Assistant to the City Manager; Bob Levan, City Attorney; Terry Schum, Director of Planning; Steve Groh, Director of Finance.

Mayor Brayman announced that this Public Hearing was being held to discuss the Downtown Redevelopment Project and Site Selection for the relocation of City Hall. Mayor Brayman has received numerous e-mails and forwarded them to the City Clerk's office. In those cases where the writer does not testify, the e-mail will be read into the record.

Mayor Brayman introduced Mr. Levan, who began with an opening statement (a copy is attached). Mr. Levan mentioned the Fact Sheet that was made available to the public (also attached). Mr. Levan reviewed the history of the project. The City's Development Team determined that it would be feasible and desirable to offer the current City Hall site for a mixed use development, thereby generating sufficient revenues to allow the City to construct a replacement City Hall at some other location, and absorb a substantial portion of the cost of a new public parking garage on the Special Lot property. The City can not negotiate with a potential development partner until the City actually indicates the preferred site for City Hall. Three sites had originally been considered. The City initially chose the Branchville Fire Department site as the preferred location, but after months of negotiation, was unable to reach an agreement with the Fire Department. This left the Friends School and Special Lot site as the two remaining options for a new City Hall. The City's Development Team considered the Special Lot site for a new City Hall, even though it was considered the least desirable and most expensive of the three original choices, and was designated as the best site for a new parking garage in the downtown area. The Development Team then considered if a new City Hall could be combined with a parking garage on the Special Lot site. The Development Team estimated that a combined City Hall and parking garage, though technically feasible, would be too expensive, and would create design, accessibility and maneuverability problems, and would be aesthetically unappealing. Further outside analysis confirmed this determination. The cost differences of combining a new City Hall with a parking

structure, over building separate facilities, were estimated by the Development Team and Project Consultant, UniDev. The increased cost of the parking garage portion of the structure and the City Hall portion of the structure, if combined, amounts to \$1.2M. Because of the difference in the time required for the construction of the two facilities together, there would be an additional project carrying cost estimated at \$200,000. The consultants also believed the increase in Non-bondable costs of a combined larger facility would be \$460,000. The total estimated cost increase of a combined structure is \$1.9M. Even if you back out the Non-bondable cost estimate of \$460,000, the estimated increased amount would be \$1.4M to combine the two facilities at the Special Lot. The Development Team's unanimous conclusion is that a combined City Hall/parking garage on the Special Lot site is inefficient and too expensive, and may jeopardize the overall financial return to the City from the aggregate project.

Mayor Brayman asked about the costs of providing parking necessary for City Hall employees and fees in lieu of parking spaces. Councilmember Fellows asked about the Fact Sheet that was provided and what the next step would be after the new site is selected. Mr. Levan explained the next step would be the negotiation process, resulting in a deal that would be satisfactory to the developer and the Development Team, and then that deal would be brought to the Council in a public setting that would invite questions and scrutiny.

Mayor Brayman opened the public comment portion of the meeting.

John Brown, 7323 Baltimore Avenue, Treasurer DCPMA, and a member of the Development Team: Believes a parking garage is needed, believes a combined project will not work. Supports mixed use at 4500 Knox Road, a parking garage at the Special Lot, and relocation of City Hall to the Friends School site.

Mr. Perry thanked Mr. Brown for his involvement in this project over the last two years.

Ted Ankeny, President DCPMA, owner of Maryland Book Exchange: Although he has ample parking, he is aware of the impact the lack of parking has on College Park merchants. Wants to see more diverse development in College Park. Does not think a combined project will work on the Special Lot, and urges a different location for City Hall.

Lisa Holt, Vice President of DCPMA, owner of Paperworks: Lives in University Park and likes to come downtown with her children, but it is hard to do without ample parking. Sometimes drives to a different location to shop to be ensured of parking. Believes Special Lot should only house parking garage, and not a combined project.

Morgan Gale, President Calvert Hills Citizens Association, 7010 Wake Forest: He first spoke on behalf of Dora Kennedy who could not be here tonight. She is opposed to City Hall moving to Friends School, and believes it should remain a school. His personal belief is that the City is using eminent domain to take space near City Hall and has not used that option to take space elsewhere in the City. City should work with nearby

property owners to solve parking issue and create presence for City Hall. The Calvert Hills Citizens Association was not unanimous on the subject, but majority wanted to see a school remain at the Friends School site.

Amelia Murdoch, 4600 Hartwick Road: She believes cramming City Hall into a parking garage on the Special Lot is by far the least desirable option, and that the goal should be to have the most useful parking garage and the best possible City Hall that would be truly worthy of the City. She believes a bad City Hall and a bad parking garage would damage the City more than the loss of Friends School site as a school. Believes it is in the best interest of the City to develop the best public schools possible.

Micki Freeny, 7201 Rhode Island Avenue: Believes City Hall should be relocated to Friends School site to remain near downtown, and that it would be the best of neighbors.

Mark Shroder 4909 Muskogee Street: Speaking for North College Park Citizens Association: NCPCA went on record saying unless there was an overwhelmingly attractive offer for current City Hall site, they didn't see a need to relocate, but they also believed the Branchville site to be best of three options. Speaking personally: Between the remaining two options, Friends School site is the better site, but he's not enthused about it because it is not central to City. Has the Council considered Starlight Motel site, Hillcrest Hotel site, Katz property, property behind bowling alley? All are central sites.

Mayor Brayman pointed out those properties would include an acquisition cost.

Sam Bronstein, 9026 Autoville Drive: Had questions about the potential costs of new projects and wanted details about the Branchville site. Expressed concern about additional Route 1 traffic. Would this project go to referendum to get wider public feedback? Hasn't heard the option discussed of building an addition to the current City Hall. Discussed new technology to get more parking – robotic parking – and provided some information to Council on this.

Mayor Brayman responded that the Council can not reveal too many details about the Branchville negotiations without breaching good faith. With respect to the debt, the current models would package expenses into a revenue bond, to relieve tax payers' burden, and not a general obligation debt.

Lawrence Bleau, 4901 Niagara Road: Between the two sites, believes the Friends School site is best for City Hall. Does not see a good reason to use the Special Lot site for a combined project.

Mayor Joseph Page, 4608 Drexel Road: He would agree to the Friends school site with the following conditions: 1) after adequate explanation, the community should agree with going to the School site, 2) that the new City Hall is positively essential, 3) risks involved in financing are clearly negligible, 4) revenue derived from this economic development would pay for everything and not result in higher taxes.

Councilmember Perry requested details about his conditions #1 and #4.

Leo Shapiro, 6907 Rhode Island Avenue: Urged consideration of the intangible cost of losing the Friends School site as a school and asked if we really need a new City Hall. Perhaps additional options should be considered. Acknowledges it's a hard choice.

Dave Dorsch, 4607 Calvert Road: It now seems this project is more about wanting a new City Hall than funding a parking garage. The different studies and data have been confusing. Wants Friends School to be used for any other public purpose but not City Hall, does not want City Hall to be torn down just to provide a downtown parking garage. Just build the needed parking garage and move on.

Deborah Levenson, 4614 Fordham Road: Friends School site should remain a school. Does not make sense to tear down Friends School facility when City Hall renovations are less than 10 years old. This Historic building should not be demolished.

Councilmember Olson clarified that should the Friends School site be chosen, discussion has been to try to preserve as much of the building façade as possible, and that the playing field and playground would also remain.

Jack Robson, 4710 Harvard Road: Mr. Robson urges a decision tonight in favor of the Friends School as the location of the new City Hall. Keep the façade of the Friends School; preserve the playing area behind school. There was no unanimity from Calvert Hills Citizens Association on this topic.

Councilmember Olson clarified that the previous vote of the CHCA was to oppose the Friends School site, but that recent debate had not ended in a new vote.

Sarah Cutler, 7207 Rhode Island Avenue: Calvert Hills is a wonderful but fragile community with increasing traffic and crime issues. Having a school there helps mitigate these problems as an office building would not.

Councilmember Perry asked how many of her neighbors have children that attend the Friends Community School. She did not know.

Veronica Larvie, 4612 Drexel Road: Sorry the Branchville site did not work out, but believes relocating City Hall to the Friends School site is the poorest choice, and that it is important to retain school sites in the City. As a lawyer who does property development, she will take a sabbatical from her job to help the Council find a better location.

Kathy Bryant, 7406 Columbia Avenue: Spoke in support of the Friends School location remaining a school. Thinks the architecture is beautiful and is opposed to moving City Hall there.

Councilmember Perry asked when Prince George's County closed the College Park Elementary School. She did not know; Mr. Schnabel informed her the date was 1974.

Statement by **Doug Meade and Birgit Meade** read by Veronica Larvie: Opposed to moving City Hall to Friends Community School, believes it would be a violation of the preferences of the people who elected the Council. Take the time you need to find an acceptable site.

Mary Lou Miller, 4603 Knox Road: Believes the current City Hall is a fine building and could be expanded if more space is needed. Had questions about the loss of the Branchville site option, and about historical designations in Old Town and Calvert Hills.

Mayor Brayman clarified that historic designation is addressed through a separate legal process before a Zoning Hearing Examiner. With respect to Branchville, it would be bad faith to divulge details of those negotiations at this time.

Stephanie Stulich, 7400 Dartmouth Avenue: President of Old Town Civic Association. Spoke in support of retaining the Friends School location as a school site. Believes retaining a school is important to sustaining the neighborhood as a good place for families. Special Lot site should not be dismissed – it is in the heart of downtown. Also open to more centrally located options.

Ellen O’Neill, 4610 Drexel Road: Spoke in support of keeping the existing City Hall where it is and keeping the Friends School as a school. Has learned of an interest in the Friends School location by a new school.

Richard Biffi, 4805 College Avenue: Spoke in support of keeping a school at the Friends School location. Believes it helps attract families to the neighborhood.

Corey Harbison, 9109 49th Avenue: Urges Council not to rush the decision but to take time to find a more appropriate site.

Liz Maring, 4609 Guilford Road: Supports having a school remain at the Friends School location.

Lea Callahan, 4511 Guilford Road: Owns ZIPS Dry Cleaners. City Hall relocating to Friends site would not be bad, but is concerned about parking and traffic flow. Asked about postponing the decision.

Mayor Brayman read into the record comments by Jim Coppess and Ann Rowe who are opposed to moving City Hall to the Friends School site, and from Linda Dunn (4604 Fordham Road), who supports keeping a school at the Friends School site.

Councilmember Olson read into the record an e-mail from Mrs. Moira Abernathy who opposed having City Hall relocate to the Friends School site.

There being no further comment, the Public Hearing was closed at 9:14 p.m.