

September 29, 2017

Dear Friends:

Over the past several months, we came together to consider the future of Montgomery College's Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus and, specifically, the modernization of its math and science classrooms and laboratories. I am grateful for the opportunity to have engaged with so many stakeholders, to learn and understand their needs, and to share my commitment to the College's mission—empowering students to change their lives.

Montgomery College values community engagement and is committed to being a good neighbor.

A year ago in August, I committed to a process to deepen our community engagement efforts in and about the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus. I did so because I recognize that the College must be a good neighbor with respect to facility construction as well as daily operations.

Last week, I was pleasantly reminded of the value of community engagement with the Montgomery County Planning Department's announcement that the renovation design for the Pavilion Three Building will be awarded a 2017 Design Excellence Award. Our close collaboration with neighbors helped to shape this design that meets the needs of our students and integrates well with the neighborhoods. The Montgomery County Planning Department and the American Institute of Architects' Potomac Valley Chapter will bestow a jury award to the project architects along with the other award winners on October 19.

Our more recent work together resulted in some immediate changes on campus. In response to traffic and circulation concerns at the start of the fall semester the campus implemented a new "cell phone parking" area in our garage, similar to those at airports, for student pickup. A campaign is underway to train students about where to park and the pick-up procedure. Additionally, after last semester's successful pilot program, the College will continue to hire, at our expense, off-duty police officers to enforce parking laws on Chicago Avenue, New York Avenue, and Islington Street.

Community Conversations enabled me to connect directly with the array of stakeholders.

With respect to the future of the campus and to enhance our efforts to balance the needs of neighbors, students, and fiscal discipline, I realized we had to hear more clearly from our stakeholders. As part of this effort, we embarked on a series of Community Conversations in partnership with the City of Takoma Park.

The City embraced this effort by hosting the first two Conversations. I am grateful for Mayor Kate Stewart's leadership and the City staff who contributed countless hours to organize and lead these events.

The dialogue during the Conversations was informative, thoughtful, caring, robust, and frank. Together, we held three events (March 21, May 9, and June 6), which ultimately involved extensive discussions about the need for modern math and science classrooms and laboratories. We discussed the location and building concepts for the needed facilities in the College's current 2013-2023 facilities master plan (FMP), which replaces Science South and Falcon Hall, and its previous 2006-2016 FMP, which replaces Science North and Science South. (Please note in this letter the current 2013-2023 FMP is referred to as "Option 1" and the previous 2006-2016 FMP is referred to as "Option 2.") We recorded each event and documented the comments. The campus' adjacent neighbors, residents of Takoma Park and Silver Spring, government officials, students and alumni, faculty and staff, and many other community leaders gave significant time and energy to these Conversations—more than 100 people attended each event.

Following the Community Conversations, the College also offered an online, open-to-the-public web page to complete these Conversations and ensure all those interested had an opportunity to engage and provide feedback. In sum, over one hundred comments were posted to the City's and the College's web pages in addition to an array of letters, emails, and phone calls that were received.

The consensus for the need for modern math and science facilities was clear and resounding.

During the Conversations, I was gratified to hear the deep commitment to the College and the students we serve. It is clear that we all agree: MC urgently needs to modernize the current math and science classrooms and labs that are woefully inadequate to educate our students. The current buildings, at 38 and 56 years of age, are old, out-of-date, and do not meet today's instructional requirements. And, I think it is fair to say that most participants understand and appreciate the urgency that I feel—that my faculty and staff feel—to bring modern facilities to this campus. Every student must take a math and a science class to graduate. Therefore, the down-county students need easy access to state-of-the-art classrooms and labs to advance their futures. This project has been in our

FMP since 2004, in our capital budget for 10 years, and envisioned for more than 20 years. The students of this campus simply cannot wait any longer.

Additionally, and of great importance to me, our adjacent neighbors came to understand the complexities of constructing this facility on sites away from the east campus.

Neighborhood coalitions wrote us in support of construction on the east campus using the site in Option 2 that replaces the Science South and Science North buildings with two four-story buildings with rooftop air handling systems. We appreciate the recognition of the students' needs and the willingness to move forward from Neighbors United, the Community Coalition for Science and Fitness, Historic Takoma, as well as the City of Takoma Park.

As discussed during the Conversations and in previous discussions, constructing on the parking lot on the campus' west side would require a tall building that would be expensive and impair teaching of math and science. Additionally, acquisition of the properties along Fenton Street today would not be fiscally prudent. Certainly, when it is necessary to expand the campus, the College will look to Silver Spring along Fenton Street—not Takoma Park—as stated in the FMP.

I delayed the July 1 start of the project to fully evaluate the feedback and to seek outside help to craft and analyze options to expedite the adjacent neighbors' preferred location—replacing Science South and Science North, Option 2.

The array of concerns—from the urgent need for modern facilities to compatibility issues—and the neighbors' recognition of the need to construct on the east campus gave me pause. So, to ensure the best decision, I delayed the project's start, though State and County funds were available to begin the design process on July 1. I resolved to take more time to better understand the feedback and to consider more fully how best to balance the needs of the students, neighbors, and fiscal discipline. To help with this effort, I directed staff to seek further analysis from an independent architecture firm.

The College engaged MCA Architecture, an experienced and respected firm, with the assistance of Forella Group, LLC, a well-regarded construction cost estimate firm that has worked with Montgomery County Public Schools and the University System of Maryland. They were tasked to examine alternatives to implement Option 2 more quickly and with an understanding of the impact on our students, the neighbors, and the cost implications.

MCA Architecture and the Forella Group's [independent analysis](#) helped inform my decision.

Together with staff, I reviewed the report carefully and evaluated the options with these complex and interdependent variables in mind:

- Urgency of need for modern facilities
- Disruption to learning and the student experience during construction
- Disruption and construction impact on the neighborhoods
- Impact on enrollment
- Fiscal impact
- Impact on access to classes and timely degree attainment

In addition to these criteria, I feel strongly that the College stands as the guardian of our students' educational experience. As a result, while the architect's report contained six possibilities, four alternatives are ultimately not viable.

Several of these alternatives disrupt the learning and the student experience and would be disruptive to our adjacent neighbors. Enrollment and access would likely be negatively impacted if these options were pursued. All the options add to the costs, and none of the options truly address the urgency of the need for modern facilities, given the time required for new State approvals. Specifically:

- Use of trailer labs (Alternative 2 A)—Portable laboratories are cost prohibitive and would be disruptive for the adjacent neighbors.
- Send students to the Rockville Campus (Alternative 2 B)—The Rockville Campus is 200 percent over capacity; Rockville serves 16,000 students, but was designed for 8,000 students. Additionally, as a consequence, enrollment may be negatively impacted, and may put access at risk for many students who cannot easily get to this campus—an hour-and-a-half bus ride from Long Branch.
- Use of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) labs (Alternative 2 C)—MCPS uses its labs during the day, so College classes could only be offered at night. Currently, two-thirds of TP/SS students attend daytime classes. Of the 178 science and math classes taught, 74 percent are offered during the day and only 23 percent at night in response to student demand. Many students juggle school, work, and family duties. Students may be unable to change their schedules, forcing some students to delay degree-required courses, or stop out—thus, delaying their graduation and putting their completion at risk. Additionally, Montgomery Blair High School currently is over capacity and is utilizing portable classrooms. Other activities and athletic events frequently take place on the Blair campus at night, limiting parking lot and building use. Finally, the faculty and staff would have to transport our own educational tools, equipment, and lab materials, and prepare the classroom for high school use the next morning.

- Use of leased space labs (Alternative 2 D)—Finding and renting suitable, specifically space that could be renovated and outfitted for academic lab use, is complex and time consuming. This alternative is not fiscally prudent especially given its temporary nature.

Of the two principal options, I could consider the expedited Option 2 if the following happens this fall.

- The College's capital budget is not adversely affected.
- The County can provide the additional resources needed.
- The County Council can make the necessary budget adjustments this fall.
- The community understands that the construction time will be almost four years and that there is little capacity to adjust the building's height (four stories plus HVAC) at this location. Thus, the charrette process will focus on other design elements and affordable possibilities to reduce perceived height.

These are matters and decisions that would need to be made outside of the College, but would form a basis to make the option possible. I do have concerns with an expedited Option 2:

- This option still does not fully address the urgency of the need. Students would have to wait five to six years for complete access to modern classrooms and labs. While this is an improvement over the originally envisioned project with eight years to completion, it still requires more time to complete than Option 1.
- State plans would have to be revised, further delaying the project's start by as much as eight months.
- The construction period is longer and lengthens the disruption to the neighborhoods.
- This option costs \$92.4 million—a \$7 million increase to the approved budget.

All things considered, the most prudent course of action is to continue as planned with the replacement of Science South and Falcon Hall, Option 1.

Given the considerations laid out above, in the absence of additional resources, and with the imperative to use current capital funding to advance the project, I plan to continue to pursue Option 1 for the following reasons:

- This option is the least disruptive to the students—as students can stay on campus and be most easily served during construction under this option.
- Access and enrollment are least likely to be negatively impacted.

- It minimizes the disruption to the neighborhoods with the shortest construction time period of two to two-and-a-half years.
- It responds to the urgency of the need—students get in modern classrooms and labs sooner. The time to completion is four years. No further project delays will be incurred to revise State plans.
- It is the most fiscally prudent as it is the least expensive, has an approved \$85 million budget and State aid will stay on schedule.

Option 1 best balances student needs, the needs of the neighbors, and fiscal prudence.

Make no mistake: I heard the concerns of our adjacent neighbors and others about modernizing facilities on the east campus and specifically along Takoma Avenue.

I recognize our neighbors need greater certainty about the project now. The charrette process will enable the community to help the College shape the schematic design for the project. However, prior to the start of the charrette process, I will direct staff to take the following steps to be the basis of the building’s final design and to mitigate the construction process.

Design directives

- Keep the current setback of Falcon Hall—no closer to Takoma Avenue than the existing Falcon Hall.
- Ensure the height is no more than two stories along Takoma Avenue—similar to Falcon Hall.
- Minimize windows along Takoma Avenue to reduce lighting impacts.
- Protect the park-like green space along Takoma Avenue.
- Locate height and rooftop air units away from Takoma Avenue nearer the campus interior.
- Maximize the building’s width to lower height.
- Take advantage of topography to minimize perceived height
- Hire an architect experienced with designing facilities in historic districts and residential neighborhoods to ensure the exterior respects the campus location.

Construction mitigation directives

- Craft and implement specific measures to protect adjacent neighbors’ homes and the Belle Ziegler Park from construction activities. Seek strategies used by MCPS for construction mitigation in neighborhoods.
- Provide an onsite project manager to be available to the community.
- Provide a project “hotline” to respond to immediate community concerns.

- Park construction vehicles away from campus and neighborhoods.
- Craft a construction traffic management plan.
- Mitigate construction noise.

I also recognize that Option 1 does not respond to the desire of many pool users to keep the on-campus pool. But, enhancing student success is the imperative for me and the Board of Trustees. As I have said, the students' need for modern math and science classrooms and labs outweighs access to an on-campus pool. Other fitness activities will still be offered on campus.

In addition, we will seek access for students to the County's new South County Regional Recreation and Aquatic Center in downtown Silver Spring near the Metro station (just over one mile from campus.) The County expects this state-of-the-art facility to open in two years before construction begins on campus. We are committed to enriching the life of the community, as our mission calls us to do. As a result, we invite and welcome community members to use our facilities and participate in programs. However, student success must come first.

I have directed the staff to be ready when the time comes to facilitate the community's use of other nearby swim facilities or the new aquatic center in Silver Spring. We will continue to join the Mayor in calling for swim facilities in Takoma Park.

I remain committed to community engagement including the design charrette process and the mandatory referral process to provide our neighbors a role in shaping the project.

Further community engagement will help us ensure a quality exterior design that is respectful of the campus' location and mitigate the construction impact for neighbors.

The charrette process, led by the project architect, will enable stakeholders to engage in an iterative design and problem-solving process to provide input on the schematic building design.

During the process, the College will share schematic designs as they are drafted and evolve. Specifically, participants will shape design elements to lead to the final schematic design, including:

- mass and scale,
- exterior finishes and façade treatments,

- general aesthetics to complement the existing campus and surrounding neighborhoods,
- tree save and green space, and
- pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle circulation.

Once the schematic design is complete—approximately 18 months—the College will submit it to Montgomery County Planning Board for review through the mandatory referral process, which includes additional opportunities for input. Additional community input will be sought as the College completes the design details and to share the construction timeline and mitigation strategies as they are developed.

We will also submit our storm water management and tree plans to the City of Takoma Park, as required.

While there are more conversations to come, it is now time to move forward.

I am grateful for the engagement by so many stakeholders—I have heard you and I hope you will see our efforts to participate in a community engagement process, especially the Community Conversations and our subsequent deliberations as a genuine effort to collaborate with the community on the future of this campus.

This endeavor built upon previous efforts to consult the community. As we began contemplation for the modern facilities, we reached out to the community for input, as we have done for past master plans and projects. In 2002, we signed a Memo of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Takoma Park, Montgomery County, and Historic Takoma to document our shared values and mutual responsibilities. Specifically, we agreed to, “consult with the community when making any major or substantial changes or alterations to existing structures on the campus.” Since then, we have consulted with the community on the Charlene R. Nunley Student Services Center, the Catherine F. Scott Commons Building, and the now award-winning Pavilion Three Building. More recently, the Campus hosted two community meetings in 2015 and Dr. Brad Stewart, vice president and provost, briefed the Takoma Park City Council in January 2016 regarding the facilities master plan—well in advance of the design or construction of a specific project.

So, I ask you to help me move this project forward and to work with me to get it right—join me to continue to balance the needs of students, neighbors, and fiscal prudence.

With your support, we can bring modern facilities to this campus and enhance access to quality postsecondary education and opportunity for down-county residents.

As I noted earlier, it is clear from the sum of all the feedback that there is agreement that the need for modern math and science facilities is real and urgent for this campus. For this I am grateful.

Our friends, neighbors, family members, and especially the recent graduates of Einstein, Montgomery Blair, Northwood, Springbrook, and Wheaton high schools need access to quality postsecondary education in their community at their community's college. Together, we can ensure that this campus can serve today's students, build the workforce of tomorrow, and help ensure a vibrant Silver Spring and Takoma Park in the years ahead.

It's been gratifying to work with so many impassioned and dedicated people. I count on your continued engagement as we forge ahead to bring modern math and science facilities to this campus and do so in a way that is responsive to the needs of our neighbors.

I hope you will join me to advance our shared mutuality to invest in the future of this campus, our community, and our County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DeRionne P. Pollard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "D".

DeRionne P. Pollard, PhD
President
Montgomery College