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Balto. Co. didn't notify public about Mays Chapel school hearing

State reverses decision to build school and says school board must hold a new public hearing

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By Alison Knezevich, The Baltimore Sun
5:53 p.m. EST, December 19, 2012

The state has reversed the Baltimore County school board's decision to build a 700-student elementary school at Mays Chapel Park because it did not give proper notice of a public hearing.

In a legal opinion released this week, the state school board said local officials must schedule a new hearing and properly publicize it to correct the mistake.

"We find that the local board violated the notice requirements of [state law] because it failed to publish notice of the March 19, 2012 site selection hearing at least once in a newspaper of general circulation in Baltimore County," the state board wrote.

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The county board has now scheduled a new hearing for Jan. 14 at 6 p.m. at Loch Raven High School, and officials pledged to publicize it widely.

School officials say they need the new building to alleviate overcrowding in schools along the York Road corridor. Neighboring property owners, many of them senior citizens, have fought the decision, saying the location would not benefit students because the community has few children. They fear heavy traffic, losing the park and damage to their homes' values. The school would be built on up to half of the 20-acre park.

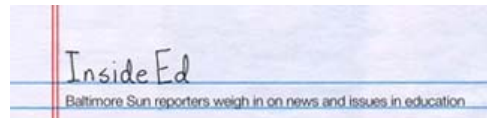
Whistler Burch of the Save Mays Chapel Park Committee called the state ruling "a little win" for residents. He said they are reaching out to County Council members and hope the school board will reconsider.

"We're going to have a meeting and just see .. what we can do to change the attitude and the arrogance of the Baltimore County school board and the politicians," he said. "They could just come around and put out a public notice and have another meeting and do the same thing. But we're hoping that this is a wake-up call, to not just them but to everyone else."

The school is set to open in August 2014. School system spokesman Mychael Dickerson said Wednesday that officials believe the state's ruling will have no effect on the timeline.

Neighborhoods of condominiums, town homes and assisted living facilities surround the site of the planned school. Residents say they love the park's tranquility and use it for exercise and socializing.

They said this week that benches on the walking paths were recently removed.



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"They're just ramming it through," said Art O'Neil, president of the homeowners association for Towns of Doolan. "Next thing you know, bulldozers will be here. ... There's been no transparency."

Dunloy Townhome Condominium Inc. had filed an appeal with the state board this spring, saying local officials didn't give the required notice of the hearing.

In a statement Wednesday, school board President Lawrence E. Schmidt said the board would "look forward to giving the community another opportunity to provide input on the proposed Mays Chapel Elementary School."

"We will be sure to provide sufficient and transparent notification to make sure all interested stakeholders are aware of the hearing date," he said. We will notify the public through the required notification tools such as public notices in local newspapers, but we will also go above and beyond that by making sure we use our own communication tools including the website, BCPS-TV, and press releases to the media."

According to the state board's opinion, officials announced that there would be a March 19 hearing — but not its location — at a prior meeting, and the school system distributed a news release announcing the hearing to the media on March 7. Still, the schools did not publish legal notice in a newspaper.

The board voted unanimously March 20 to approve the site.

"There is no dispute that over 200 individuals were present at the public hearing on March 19 and 42 individuals addressed the local board in-person that night," the opinion states. "But at what point does the number of people who attend at a hearing, by whatever means they learned about it, mean that the publicity was sufficient to assure notice to all interested persons? We have no way to gauge how many more people may have attended the hearing to present their views had the requisite notice been given."

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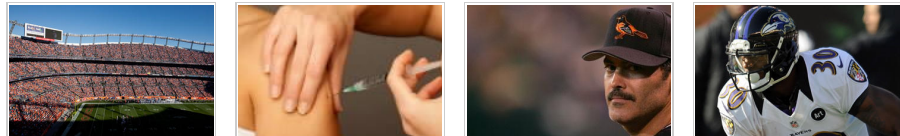
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Michelle1296 at 9:36 PM December 20, 2012

It's BCPS property so let them build the school! Mays Chapel needs to get there head out of there rear end and get off the high horse they think they should be standing on. You act like your better than everyone else and your not. Schools are too over crowed so let them build,if your worried about the park there are plenty of parks in the area just get in your car and drive to it. Oh I forgot your to good for that you think you should only walk out your door. I'm sure they have a lot people's approval. BCPS needs to fight! It their property, no one else's.

MC_Timonium at 7:31 PM December 19, 2012

This whole episode is evily reminiscent of how the liberal Dems shoved Obamacare down our throats. In this case, the liberal infested Balto. County school board tried repeating the Obamacare nightmare.....however, there must have been a few Dems in the area that caved for 'their' better good. Right Dutch?

_____ at 1:09 PM December 19, 2012

If a school is not built in Mays Chapel, we'll know the wallets of Seminary Overlook and Mays Chapel spoke up to someone and ultimately kept the riff-raff (people that can't afford private school) out.

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