



FRAMEWORK FOR A MULTI- USE FACILITY WITH A NEW HIGH SCHOOL IN WESTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

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FAIR ACCESS
FOR WESTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY



TOWN OF
Poolesville
MARYLAND

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This white paper is produced by the *Fair Access Committee*, a committee formed by the Town of Poolesville under its Charter. The paper's purpose is to provide background and the rationale supporting the construction of a much-needed Multi-Use Facility (MUF) in Poolesville to serve Western Montgomery County. It also provides a conceptual framework of how the MUF would operate and what services it would be able to provide.

The residents of the Agricultural (Ag) Reserve have a great need for the MUF proposed due to the inadequacy of the nearly 70-year-old Poolesville High School (PHS) building, and the lack of public health and safety services in Western Montgomery County, leading to significant health disparities for those living in this area.

The current PHS is not ADA compliant, and has an abundance of structural deficiencies (poor insulation, leaking roof and windows, antiquated infrastructure systems, and significant security shortfalls) given its age. The proposed MUF would replace the existing decades old high school and include a collocated community/senior center, wellness center/clinic and satellite police office. The new high school would be capable of meeting all current needs and meet all safety and infrastructure standards. It would also be modern and have a greatly lessened impact on the environment.

Montgomery County's Health and Human Services Department has documented that health outcomes in the Poolesville area are the worst in the county. Access to regular, local health and wellness professionals and community services programs would allow for "one-stop-shop" access to the many individuals facing health disparities in this part of the county.

Taking a cue from other County community centers, the new facility would allow for people to gather, seek medical assistance and get regular access to wellness, fitness and recreational programs. It would include programmable space that could be used for a wide array of activities, including senior recreation and youth development programs, as well as art lessons and creative projects. The proposed space would include:

- Health clinic
- Staff offices
- Conference room for meetings and lectures
- Arts and crafts room
- Community lounge for informal gatherings, coffees and discussions
- Exercise room with a wide array of exercise equipment
- Kitchen
- Extensive storage for ongoing projects
- Restrooms
- Satellite police office
- Gymnasium

Considering the White Oak Community Recreation Center in Silver Spring, Eastern Montgomery County, serving 30,000 residents with 33,000 square feet, we find it appropriate for the proposed Western Montgomery County MUF to be 15,000 square feet to serve a population of 12,000 to 15,000 people.

The Ag Reserve was founded to preserve agricultural land and open space and limit development. Recognizing that premise, the committee's proposed MUF approach is not only right sized for the population it would serve, but also would be very much in line with the vision that created the Reserve.

BACKGROUND AND NEEDS

The Town of Poolesville is in the heart of the Agricultural Reserve of Western Montgomery County, which includes the nearby communities of Dickerson, Barnesville, Boyds, and Beallsville. Western Montgomery County makes up nearly one-third of Montgomery County's land area with slightly more than one percent of the population.

The citizens of Western Montgomery County lack convenient access to a wide array of County services that are commonly available to other residents, including:

- Health and wellness services
 - Mental health assistance
 - Clinical services for the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses
- Senior living services
 - Assistance with medical and social services
 - Nutritional advice
 - Regular fitness programs
- After school youth programs to promote self-esteem and healthy lifestyles
- Reliable, convenient public transportation services
- Continuous police coverage



Montgomery County has failed to invest in the facilities, staffing and program resources needed to make these services available to the Western Montgomery County community. This part of the County pales in comparison to the many services offered to County residents who live in the Southern, more populated portion of the County.

The County has also failed to invest in a modern high school. Poolesville High School (PHS) is the largest County facility in Western Montgomery County; however, major parts of the school building were constructed in the early 1950's. Although there have been additions and renovations to portions of the school, it has never been completely modernized. Smaller projects – updates to the HVAC system and additions like a new gymnasium – have been completed, but have not been revisited in decades. Numerous building problems remain in the school and include ADA violations and encapsulated asbestos.

The *Fair Access Committee* for Western Montgomery County proposes that a new MUF include a new 21st century high school, collocated with a community center and health clinic, and a Montgomery County Police (MCP) satellite station. The MUF could be constructed on the current PHS site, and serve to boost opportunities and access for students and Western County residents to vital educational, social, health and public safety services.

The MUF would be “right-sized” and built to fit within the unique rural, small-town community that is Western Montgomery County's Town of Poolesville. It is a treasured town located within the County's Agricultural Reserve, with highly committed residents who will work with Montgomery County leadership, and all stakeholders, to meet the shared goal of bringing **Fair Access** of County services to this part of the County.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY GOVERNMENT'S PRESENCE IN WESTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Montgomery County provides few services in Western Montgomery County and possesses no offices or facilities that could house the necessary staff and resources to provide such services.

Montgomery County has land assets in Western Montgomery County, but their size and configuration are unable to support new facilities needed to provide services to area citizens. The County operates a 300-acre plus golf course, two miles south of Poolesville, which is not a convenient location to those living in Barnesville, Dickerson and Beallsville.

Additionally, there are plans to convert a portion of the golf course into a grape crushing, tasting, and banquet facility. The County's Sarah Auer Western Montgomery County Outdoor Pool in Poolesville is located on 14 acres of land, but swimming facilities and a parking area cover the usable area. The pool is only operational for four months out of the year. The Woodstock Equestrian Park, Owens Park, and Upper Montgomery County Volunteer Fire Department (UMCVFD) are in Beallsville. The Woodstock Equestrian Park only has a cross country course and trail system. Owens Park is a small County park comprised of a small building, tot lot, a tennis court, and a baseball diamond. The building has been unused for many years and has a very small meeting room and limited storage. Again, the UMCVFD property has limited acreage which is not suitable for any other purposes.

PHS sits on approximately 37 acres in the center of town. Parts of the school are more than 66 years old, and although repeatedly scheduled for modernization, it has never been included in the school system's final Capital Improvements Program (CIP) budget. A complete rebuild of the school building is required. This would provide the opportunity to plan and construct a new PHS collocated with a Western Montgomery County Community Center with clinic and MCP Satellite Station.

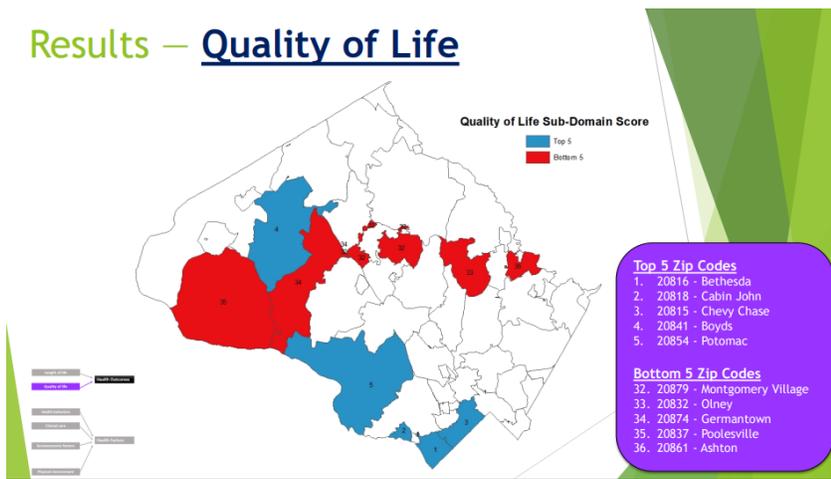
The impact of the lack of services is compounded by the lack of access to County-provided public transportation. A Ride On bus comes to Poolesville, but does not serve the surrounding communities of Barnesville, Beallsville, or Dickerson. That bus only operates during the week for approximately four hours in the mornings and afternoons/evenings, with no service on weekends. The route from Poolesville to Shady Grove Metro Station makes very few stops. In addition, there is no Ride On bus route connecting Poolesville with the many doctors and medical offices in Germantown that service the residents in Western Montgomery County.

NEEDS IN WESTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Poolesville is at the center of a “services desert.” On a listening tour stop in Poolesville, County Executive Marc Elrich stated, “you have made your case” when it comes to the lack of services and programs provided elsewhere, but not in Western Montgomery County. Each year, many local volunteer organizations, including WUMCO (Western Upper Montgomery County HELP), provide food to hundreds of families in need and transportation to doctors, medical exams or procedures. Despite these efforts, our residents often miss medical visits or try to delay visits because they are reluctant to ask for much needed help.

At a meeting of the Poolesville Town Commissioners, County Health Officer Dr. Travis Gayles stated consistent and regular visits with medical professionals is an important determinant of improving health outcomes.

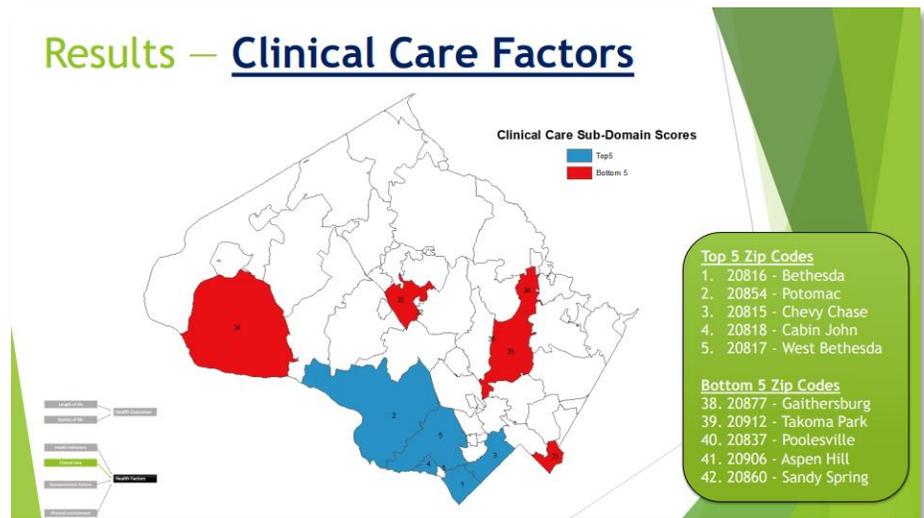
Results – Quality of Life



Dr. Gayles presented the results of a recent Montgomery County HHS study which examined health outcomes using zip code and census tract data. Compared to other jurisdictions, Montgomery County ranks very high on health outcomes, but as Dr. Gayles went on to point out, the County’s overall wealth, measured by such things as median income levels, can mask significant problems, including poor health outcomes in various parts of the County.

The zip code study used several health measures – including total number of people dying before the age of 75 annually, ER hospitalization rates, mental health hospitalization rates, and deaths due to injuries – to assess health outcomes in zip codes throughout the County. It showed that on many key metrics - including ER and mental health hospitalization rates - Poolesville ranks very low (i.e., comparatively high numbers of hospital visits compared to the rest of the County).

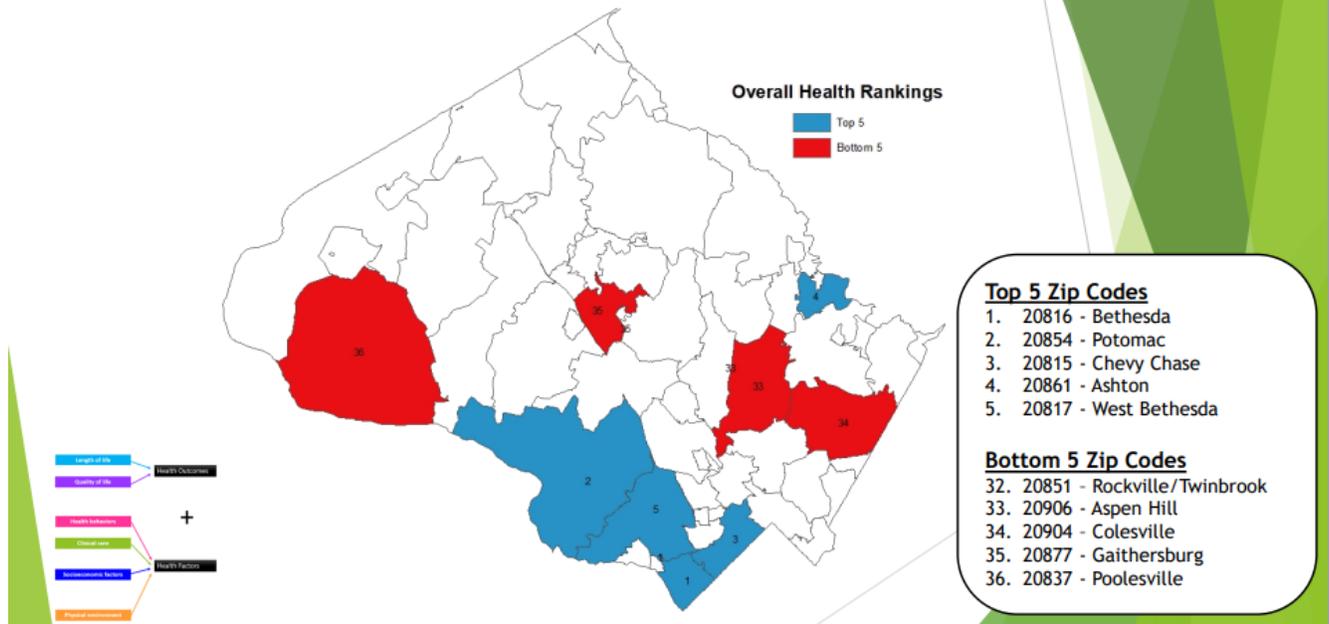
Results – Clinical Care Factors



Overall, Poolesville is one of the lowest ranking zip codes in the study and other parts of the Western Montgomery County – such as Dickerson – rank low as well. WUMCO has found a great number of people living alone, often without close relatives or friends.

Of the residents requiring frequent medical visits – many do not own a car, cannot afford a car or are unable to drive because of their health issues. These factors combined with age contribute greatly to the poor health outcomes in much of the Western Montgomery County. This is a serious problem.

Results – Overall Rank



Data and graphs courtesy of: Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

It's not just the older residents and those who need regular access to health care facilities that face challenges living in Western Montgomery County. Families and youth are far from many County services and facilities. Sports facilities are widely available in Poolesville, but there is a lack of after school youth programs like health, wellness, and mental health programs.

PHS does not have a Wellness Center like Gaithersburg and Watkins Mill High Schools. The Wellness Centers are housed in rooms that are a part of the high school. We propose it be part of the proposed community center collocated with the new, modernized PHS to help address many unmet needs.

COLLOCATED FACILITY – A FIT FOR WESTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

For some time, Montgomery County has recognized it does not have unlimited or ideal locations for constructing facilities which would help meet one of its major goals - reasonable and fair access to government services for all citizens to improve their quality of life. It has also focused attention on how to maximize the impact of program and staff resources and how to reduce the costs of construction. It has long been a County that prizes reducing the negative impacts of its actions on the environment.

A strategy that the County has studied to help achieve these goals is the use of collocation. By building facilities that can provide space for a variety of needed services and programs, collocation can provide several benefits.

A 2018 county study entitled, “A Collocation of Public Facilities Study” found that collocating facilities can:

- Promote agency collaboration vs. competition for funds
- Achieve cost savings through better utilization of limited (and high cost) land and other resources
- Ensure a stronger focus on long-term asset management best practices
- Offer flexibility in providing for neighborhood demographic changes
- Reduce and consolidate duplicated services
- Reduced capital and operational expenses
- Provide enhanced opportunities for staff advancement and the development of expertise
- Accelerate the updating of facilities
- Facilitate multi-generational and multi-purpose community destinations
- Support economic development efforts and revitalization
- Enhance service delivery by allowing “one-stop shop” access and the clustering of services for agencies

Given the lack of needed County services and facilities in Poolesville, and the age and condition of Poolesville High School, a collocated MUF in the town to serve the Western Montgomery County community makes a great deal of sense. As noted, the County has very little available land on which to build new facilities. The core of the Ag Reserve is in Western Montgomery County and was founded to protect green space and farmland to support agriculture. To accomplish this goal, major developments and large building complexes are prohibited, while allowing other parts of the County to become more densely populated. A collocated facility where the high school now sits would provide a “right sized” MUF and high school to meet the needs of the community and the County in a way that enhances the core values of the Ag Reserve. It would preserve land and reduce the environmental impact by decreasing the new facility’s land and carbon footprint.

Building new facilities on the PHS site is the best option. Parts of the school are more than 66 years old. An aerial perspective clearly reveals how the building is “piece parted” together. It is the equivalent of a broken Rubik’s Cube, with partial fixes and new structures – like the gymnasium (constructed in 1978) – added over the years. Despite these efforts, there are a myriad of problems with the existing structure, not the least of which is non-ADA compliant bathrooms and entrances, with some interior classrooms having no direct access to hallways. Without a security foyer in the main entrance and adjacent science building, visitors are not channeled into an office to check-in.



Additionally, there is no connected covered/enclosed walkway between the old school building and new science wing to protect students during inclement weather. The HVAC system caused air quality problems a few years ago and is part of a series of systems – from the water system buried in the floors to the electrical system – that have been pieced together and connected to newer parts of the school. Asbestos is “fixed in place” but remains in major parts of the building.

A complete, new facility also would improve system efficiencies through a new modern centralized HVAC system, new electrical and plumbing networks, and the employment of “green technologies.” This would help avoid future costly repairs to maintain old inefficient deteriorating systems and save operating dollars.

Starting in 2001, the school has repeatedly been added to, delayed, and then removed from the modernization schedule. The justification time and again has been “limited funding”; however, for almost 20 years, school system officials have known that the school needed to be modernized. Why else would it have been placed repeatedly in the queue for modernization?

Given all this evidence, it is impossible to see how the existing building can really be recast as a modern school simply by using a “pick and fix” approach. It needs to be totally rebuilt.

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED MULTI-USE FACILITY

The Montgomery County Executive and County Council created a “Directors Oversight Committee” to evaluate possible opportunities/challenges along with possible collocation opportunities for multi-use facilities. The group produced the “A Collocation of Public Facilities Study” in June 2018.

Additionally, Montgomery County has experience in constructing facilities with collocation features for several years, such as the Wheaton Library and Recreation Center library as well as including Wellness Centers in four high schools (i.e., Gaithersburg, Watkins Mill, Northwood, and Wheaton). These centers are clinics that also include a youth opportunity program component and offer physical health services, mental health services and after school youth opportunity and development programs.



Rendering of proposed multi-use facility provided by [Two Tyres Design](#)

The proposed MUF in Poolesville would be unique in its incorporation of more types of programming and services than other collocation projects undertaken in the County. A new high school would be the major component of the proposed project, but it would incorporate a Western Montgomery County Community Center with a wellness facility.

Taking a cue from other projects, the community center would include programmable space that could be utilized for a wide variety of activities (e.g., senior recreation programs, youth development programs, art lessons and projects, etc.). Using the White Oak project as a template, the proposed space would include:

- Staff offices
- Health Clinic and Wellness Center
- Conference room where meetings and lectures could be held
- Arts and crafts room; a community lounge where informal gatherings, coffees and discussions could occur
- Exercise room with a wide array of exercise equipment
- Kitchen
- Extensive storage so projects could be put away and worked on again at a future time
- Restrooms
- Satellite Police Station
- Gymnasium

As Western Montgomery County’s population is approximately half of the White Oak area, we propose a community center of approximately 15,000 square feet.

The Health Wellness Centers that exist in some County high schools offer healthcare, mental health services, after school youth programming, counseling and basic dental care to students and their families. The Centers frequently perform physical immunizations, examine sick patients, and prescribes medications. They are staffed with a part-time pediatrician, a nurse, a social worker and a clinical youth counselor. They are not a substitute for the students’ private physicians, to which they are usually referred for follow up, especially in the case of an illness.

The proposed Western Montgomery County Community Center with wellness center and clinic would help enhance health outcomes of Western Montgomery County residents and would serve PHS students as well.

The Zip Code health study suggests that convenient and reliable access to health care services can improve health outcomes. The Wellness Center and clinic could provide our older residents with the following services:

- Access to doctors who could advise them about their medications
- Reassurance about health concerns
- Provide guidance on use of medicines
- Help deciding next steps to cope with a disease or injury

In many cases, these residents are not seriously ill, they just need a little guidance, reassurance and consistent, real time advice. The community center could also help improve health outcomes and enhance the quality of life for both older residents and students. Programs that allow for interaction between senior residents and students – such as the Tech Connect program pioneered by Montgomery County Parks and Recreation – is an example of the kinds of intergenerational programs that would be enhanced by a community center that is a part of a MUF that includes a new high school.

The community center could provide programming for seniors and youth including:

- Teen-after-school programs
- Craft programs
- Exercise programs
- Programs to provide nutritional guidance
- Help for seniors in apply for and using social services assistance

Such programs already exist in much of the rest of the County and could be major enhancements to health outcomes and the quality of life in Western Montgomery County.

A new, modern high school would be at the core of the proposed MUF and plans for a new school building have been sketched out at various times in the past. Based on these concepts, the new building would be situated around the area where the new science wing exists. The addition of an Agricultural Sciences Curriculum would be an especially good fit for the only high school located in the Ag Reserve. It would enhance and complement the school’s existing magnet science programs, and the Reserve could serve as a training ground, providing real life “laboratory applications” for students.

Modern Agricultural Science programs are not be just about “tractors and farm animals”; they are be configured to satisfy the “modern real world” agricultural requirements. The curriculum would be geared toward the

complex, scientifically sophisticated “high tech” industry that agriculture has become and would complement Poolesville High School’s existing programming and capitalize on the school’s location.

A completely new facility with the necessary lab facilities would also provide the opportunity to incorporate “green technologies” which would reduce:

- Future facility operating costs;
- The existing facilities “carbon footprint” by eliminating the environmental impacts of the older systems and structures that exist today.

An integral part of the proposed MUF’s design would be the incorporation of the necessary mechanical and electronic surveillance security systems to ensure that all the facilities are secure while permitting interaction between various groups as dictated by programming requirements. Protocols would need to be developed to ensure that both the school and the community facilities work well together and are safe and secure. This proposal would result in a new 21st Century Poolesville High School collocated with a Western Montgomery County Community Center with clinic/wellness center, and MCP Satellite Station, and help maintain Montgomery County’s reputation for equity, academic excellence, and as “the place where people and businesses prefer to locate”.

In conclusion, the *Fair Access Committee* for Western Montgomery County believes that the construction of a MUF – including a new PHS, a community center with a clinic, and a MCP satellite station – is not only feasible, but necessary for improving the lives of those living, working, and studying in Montgomery County’s Ag Reserve.

With the support of the County, *Fair Access* will be realized in Western Montgomery County.

SOURCES

[Churchill Observer Article on Health and Wellness Centers in High Schools](#)

[Collocation Staff Report 2018](#)

[Elrich Capital Budget Proposal for FY 20](#)

[Fact Sheet – Gaithersburg Health and Wellness Center](#)

[Identity 2.0 Running Health and Wellness Centers](#)

[Master Plan – Montgomery County Recreation](#)

[Montgomery County Planning Historic Places Plan](#)

[Poolesville High School Data Sheet 2017](#)

[Poverty in Montgomery County](#)

[Ride On Bus Schedule Poolesville to Shady Grove](#)

[White Oak POR](#)

[Wikipedia Ag Reserve Background](#)

[Zip Code Health Analysis Report](#)