



## HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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December 22, 2017

Michael J. Martirano, Ph.D.  
Howard County Public School System  
10910 Clarksville Pike  
Ellicott City, Maryland 21042

Dear Dr. Martirano:

As you know, funding education and providing support for the anticipated long-term student population growth in Howard County is my top priority. I remain committed to our collaborative relationship, working together to provide a high level of education for all students.

In the past several months, I have demonstrated this commitment by accelerating funding to build a 13<sup>th</sup> high school to relieve overcrowding and provide a long-term solution for high school capacity needs. I also fast-tracked the acquisition and purchase of a 12-acre site in Turf Valley to enable the school system to plan for a future elementary school that will help relieve severe overcrowding at the elementary level.

As you are aware, Council members Ball and Weinstein contacted the school system earlier this year and asked them to consider Rockburn Branch Park as a potential location for the 13<sup>th</sup> high school. Shortly thereafter, three members of the Board of Education met with me and requested that I explore the possibility of using a piece of this parkland for a new high school site.

Out of respect for the Board of Education members' request, I asked the departments of Public Works and Recreation and Parks to work in conjunction with the Howard County Public School System to evaluate the feasibility of this location. Since then, I have heard from many residents about this matter, some who support this option and others who are opposed to it. My responsibility is to always act in the best interest of the entire county, carefully balancing all the needs and fiscal implications of my decisions.

After careful and extensive evaluation of potential school site designs, I have concluded that I am unable to support using land in Rockburn Branch Park for a school site for many reasons. This area of the park includes identified environmentally sensitive areas and archaeological sites. The possible school site is forested and is interjected by wetland and stream buffers and setbacks,

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steep slopes, as well as utility lines, and would require mitigation of the environmental impact. The site contains Native American artifacts, a registered historic site with stone ruins. It also would require access from a scenic road (please see the attached map).

Removing valuable parkland from county residents is a significant concern factoring into my decision. When Rockburn Branch Park was acquired in the 1960s for the residents of Howard County, the vision was for it to be preserved for outdoor recreation and to protect environmentally sensitive land in perpetuity. It is now one of the most popular parks in our system, and its proximity to Patapsco Valley State Park makes it one of the most desirable mountain bike destinations in Maryland. Keeping it intact will ensure this valuable resource will provide future generations with these opportunities.

Further, building a school in this area would increase the cost significantly. The Rockburn Branch Park site will require extensive environmental remediation and grading, including the need for bridges and retaining walls due to the wetlands, historic site, and difficult topography. In a challenging fiscal period, it would not be a responsible use of taxpayer money to fund a new school building at a cost far exceeding the cost to build a high school on a different site.

While land in Rockburn Branch Park is no longer an option for the 13<sup>th</sup> high school, I remain fully committed to continuing our search for land suitable for future schools across the county. I understand the community's desire to build a high school in the Elkridge area and I will continue to search for viable land in Elkridge. We know that growth will continue across the county and more schools will be needed over the next several years, as detailed in the HCPSS Capital Improvement Program. I understand the urgency, and we are exploring every opportunity to acquire more land suitable for building future schools.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Allan H. Kittleman  
County Executive

cc: Board of Education  
Councilmembers  
B. Diane Wilson