

Regional News

MS

Council weighs giving Carver Center to college

by Sean R. Sedam

Staff Writer

A \$100,000 supplemental appropriation would lay the groundwork for Montgomery College to take over the Carver Educational Services Center, the public school system's administrative headquarters in Rockville.

The Carver Center, on Hungerford Drive across Mannakee Street from the college's Rockville campus, is also where the school board meets.

On Monday, the County Council's Education Committee voted 2-1 to recommend the appropriation. Councilman Howard A. Denis (R-Dist. 1) of Chevy Chase voted against the proposal, saying he wanted to speak with board members about the proposed takeover and about how much it would cost to relocate the offices.

School system officials have not taken part in the discussions, which began in June.

"I don't think the college has established the need yet for their expansion," Superintendent Jerry D. Weast said at Tuesday's school board meeting.

The college's needs outweigh those of the school system. Education Committee Chairman Michael L. Subin (D-At large) of Gaithersburg said Monday.

"There would be less difficulty taking that 500,000 — roughly — square feet that they would need

and getting that somewhere else," Subin said. "My sense is the school system's needs are secondary ... It's not even a close second. Replacing administrative office space as opposed to classroom space, it is a far easier task to do."

The college should come to the council in March before the county's six-year construction plan is approved to ask for an amendment to the \$474 million construction plan already approved by the college's Board of Trustees, Subin said. That request could include \$2 million for the project's design in fiscal 2007, \$12 million for construction in fiscal 2008 and \$14 million in fiscal 2009.

"The Education Committee is trying to flush out what's the cost for the college, and I think that's first what has got to be done," Weast said.

The Rockville campus "is the engine of Montgomery College," serving nearly 15,000 students on a campus designed for 8,000, college President Charlene R. Nunley told the committee.

Lack of classroom space left 1,200 students unable to enroll in the courses last year, she said. Enrollment of full-time students, which has increased by 10 percent since 2000, is expected to continue to grow.

"We've looked at a few options, and after doing that I'd have to say that I'm more convinced than ever that MC really needs the Carver site," Nunley said.

The college would renovate the historic structure, which during segregation served the county's African-American students from 1951 to 1961 as the George Washington Carver High School and Junior College. The project would add new construction, for a total of 50,200 square feet of space at a cost of nearly \$29 million, say consultants hired by the college.

"We believe it to be more in the \$60 million or more neighborhood," Weast said. "And that doesn't even count what our cost would be."

At a time when the school system has more than 17,000 students in portable classrooms and an \$1.8 billion operating budget that Weast will recommend formally tonight, "It would come in direct competition with your budget," he told board on Tuesday. "I'm not in any hurry at all to leave Carver when we have these horrible kinds of needs that you have established and you have promised you would put in the queue to fund."

The supplemental appropriation will not go before the full council until it returns from its winter recess on Jan. 17.

Voting changes weighed

Also Tuesday, the board voted 7-1 to examine ways to allow mem-

bers to participate in meetings without being physically present at the board table.

The board will develop guidelines defining under what circumstances members could participate in meetings via telephone conferencing.

The board eliminated a portion of the resolution that would have allowed members to designate a board colleague to cast their vote.

Stephen N. Abrams (Dist. 2) of Rockville said he introduced the resolution because the board can hold meetings with a quorum of five members and state law requires a constitutional majority of five votes for a successful vote.

"We have people who work at this board ...," Abrams said. "There are times when we will have to miss a meeting."

When that happens, he said, an issue that an absent board member support may fail for lack of his or her presence at the vote. Under a constitutional majority, an issue could fail even with four board members voting in its favor.

"A 4-1 vote fails," Abrams said. It has happened before, said Abrams, who added that the ability to participate via conference call could help with closed-door meeting issues, such as appeals on discipli-

nary actions or student placement.

"You could have a circumstance where somebody goes through the process, and it fails because there aren't enough people present at the vote," he said.

Teleconferencing could be conducted in open meetings, as long as the votes and discussions are conducted in public.

Most organizations and corporate boards use such procedures, Abrams said, citing the Charles County school board's example.

The Charles County board allows members to vote via telephone conference or through proxy, but such votes are rare, said Charles County schools spokeswoman Katie O'Malley-Simpson.

New officers

Charles Haughey (At large) of Rockville is the school board's new president. Haughey was elected on the fourth ballot at Tuesday's board meeting in Rockville.

Sharon W. Cox (At large) of Germantown was elected vice president on the 14th ballot. Nancy Navarro (Dist. 5) of Silver Spring received votes for president and vice president. Abrams received votes for president.

Officers serve one-year terms.