

## **Help Mt. Hebron Committee (HMHC) Summer Update**

There is **a lot** of news to share so the update is long. This one deals with activities that took place over the summer. Look for another update soon to tell you about next steps. Thanks for taking the time to remain informed, concerned and active in our efforts. Your continued support is greatly appreciated and is necessary to our success. Feel free to forward.

### ***Discoveries from a Freedom of Information Act Request***

Through a Freedom of Information Act Request, we discovered an April 2006 Existing Condition Report & Concept Study by Smolen Emr + Associates Architects (a long time HCPSS consultant) prepared for the 2006 Board of Education and Superintendent. This broad scope report identified numerous deficiencies in Mt. Hebron's compliance with HCPSS' programmatic educational specifications, its physical plant and building environment. In total, space at Mt. Hebron is 61,580 square foot deficient when compared to HCPSS educational specifications. Mt. Hebron was undersized in every category including in the new areas of the Art Suite and Science Wing. Numerous mechanical and electrical problems were highlighted. Many systems were indicated as in need of replacement due to age. Problems with student circulation were also noted.

Proposed solutions for retaining the existing building include a 18 classroom addition in the rear of the building, a front lobby renovation, a performing arts addition and renovation, circulation renovations, and a transformation of a courtyard into classrooms.

When the Renovation Planning Committee comprised of HCPSS central office staff, school staff and parents was formed in May 2006, this report's findings were not shared. When recently asked, no committee member knew the report existed. Help Mt. Hebron confirmed with the Superintendent that neither he nor the HCPSS Chief Operating Officer had seen the report either. The Superintendent said the Board had not been informed either.

Excerpts from the report include the consultant's professional opinion that states:

“If minor changes are made to building then the building should be kept.”

However, the consultant's “proposed scope of work for this project is quite extensive i.e. the final building will be significantly different than the existing...”

Meaning “there will be extensive modifications to the existing building and yet the building in the final configuration will still be compromised”. Also there are other compromises architectural, mechanical and electrical... inherent in modifying an existing structure.”

“By the time this renovation of Mt. Hebron is complete the majority of the structural portion of the building will be approaching 40 years and a significant portion of the building will be more than 45 years old. In our opinion, rebuilding portions of the building or even rebuilding the entire building should be seriously considered.”

What this report did was validate concerns and problems raised over the last several years by teachers and other staff, parents and students. Its findings were also reaffirmed by the most recent HCPSS study of Mt. Hebron, in combination with 3 other High Schools, performed by Gilbert Architects Inc.(June 2007) The question that we have asked which remains unanswered to date is

**Why was the April 2006 report not shared with the 2006 Renovation Planning Committee nor included in original design recommendations?**

Revised reports were issued by the consultant in October and November of 2006 in which Mt. Hebron's problems were narrowed and the solutions were retuned.

The April 2006 report was the subject of two newspaper articles, the August 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> editions of the *Baltimore Examiner*. [http://www.examiner.com/a-899832~Officials\\_keep\\_school\\_reports\\_from\\_parents.html](http://www.examiner.com/a-899832~Officials_keep_school_reports_from_parents.html)

HMHC is trying to make our hard copy of the April 2006 report available on line for you to view. We hope to have that done soon. Anyone want to help? Contact [helpmthebron@yahoo.com](mailto:helpmthebron@yahoo.com)

***Help Mt. Hebron Committee's Facility Assessment Report***

HMHC in May prepared for the Board of Education and the Superintendent an assessment using the same methodology as Gilbert Architects, Inc. A panel comprised of educators, PTSA members, community leaders and industry professionals conducted several on-site inspections while students were in the building. The appraisal was conducted in accordance with the 1998 Education of the *Guide for School Facility Appraisal* published by the Council of Educational Facility Planners, International, the same methodology used by Gilbert Architects in its June 2007 report prepared for the Board.

The HMHC report, which can be viewed on the PTSA website ([www.mhhsptsa.com](http://www.mhhsptsa.com)), gave the school an overall rating of Borderline (53.7%). The school received Borderline ratings in the sections of *Structural & Mechanical 61%*, *Plant Maintainability 60%*, and *School Building Safety & Security 56.5%*. Poor ratings were given in the sections of *Educational Adequacy* and *Environment for Education*. Scores received there were 41.5% and 41% respectively.

The findings of the HMHC closely mirrored those we eventually uncovered in the April 2006 report and from the June 2007 Gilbert report.

***Reports shared with Public Officials***

HMHC realizes that that all those involved in the public decision making process need to have access to the same information. Throughout the summer, HMHC presented copies of the April 2006 report and its own Facility Assessment (see above) and expressed concerns and questions to Superintendent Cousin, 4 Board of Education Members (all were invited to meet with us 3 declined), County Executive Ken Ulman's staff, and one

County Council member. We are hoping to meet with the other Council members in the coming weeks.

### ***HMHC Meeting with Superintendent Cousin Yields Promise for Compilation Report***

In July, HMHC met with the Superintendent to present our findings, discuss the June 2007 Gilbert Report and next steps. Because of the number of reports issued on Mt. Hebron's condition that highlight many core problems but also include newly discovered ones, HMHC requested and the Superintendent promised to have HCPSS staff produce a *Compilation Report* listing every deficiency/problem identified in all reports including those in HMHC's facility assessment. We informed the Superintendent that HMHC would also be preparing a similar document to share with the Board, himself, the County Executive and the County Council.

It had been our understanding that the HCPSS compilation report would have been given to the Board as they kicked off their Capital Budget process for Fiscal Year 2009 at their August 16<sup>th</sup> work session. This did not occur.

The HMHC Compilation Report will be released in within the week. When we do, it will be available to view on the PTSA website.

### ***June 2007 Gilbert Report Findings***

June 28<sup>th</sup> marked the public release of the 4 High School Assessments by Gilbert Architects, Inc. Below are excerpts from the report.

- Mt. Hebron received the lowest or worst overall rating between the 4 schools. A Borderline rating of 62.8% (HMHC rating of 53.7%).
- Mt Hebron received the lowest or worst overall rating in the sections Fire/Life Safety, Exterior, Interiors, and second to last in Mechanical/Electrical.
- Mt. Hebron was identified as having a total program educational specification space deficiency of 35,514 square feet (April 2006 identified 61, 580 square feet).
  - *Educational Adequacy* 53% Borderline (HMHC rating 41%)
  - *Environment for Education* 56.5% Borderline (HMHC rating 41.5%)
  - *Structural and Mechanical* 69% (HMHC rating 61%)
  - *Plant Maintainability* 54% (HMHC rating 60%)
  - *School Building Safety & Security* 74.5% (HMHC rating 56.5%)
  - *School Site* 68% (HMHC rating 77%)
- Mt. Hebron is the most expensive school for maintenance and utilities.
- Mt. Hebron required the largest amount of total capital expenditures (immediate repairs, deferred maintenance, and 20 year capital renewal) over the study period.
- Mt. Hebron is the worst in terms of physical appearance.

The Gilbert Architects, Inc June 28, 2007 report, we are told, can be viewed at [www.hcpss.org](http://www.hcpss.org). by clicking on the Board of Education BoardDocs (documents) section.

## ***HCPSS Begins Capital Budget Process August 16<sup>th</sup>***

The Board of Education began its Fiscal Year 2009 Capital Budget process on August 16<sup>th</sup>. Family vacations, work conflicts necessitated that HMHC send email testimony. The testimony can be viewed at the PTSA Website [www.mhhsptsa.com](http://www.mhhsptsa.com)

Excerpts from our testimony—

...Any solution, must address all of Mt. Hebron's problems. It is clear from the comprehensive list that the Department's proposed option 2B is woefully inadequate and unacceptable to the community. Option 2B leaves too many problems to fester and is an ineffective expenditure of our tax dollars.

Instead, what are required are comprehensive solutions, not the previous piecemeal approach that remains the preference of the Department of Education. What must be done? Simply,

- Safety issues and code violations must be eliminated.
- Educational/Academic shortcomings and deficiencies must be resolved.
- The building's environment must be improved to a Howard County standard.

... All costs, even the costs of inaction need to be publicly and fully disclosed...

Option 2B is the wrong answer. Option 2B does not fully address basic health and safety standards or minimum academic standards and would not raise Mt. Hebron's overall rating vis-à-vis the CEFPI assessment tool to an upper Satisfactory category and certainly would not place us in the Excellent category. The community will continue to object to 2B.

...We must provide the County Executive and County Council with a full disclosure of Mt. Hebron's needs. No solution should censor or sweep deficiencies and problems under the rug for future government leaders to discover and deal with.

The questions to answer are straightforward. What are all Mt. Hebron's deficiencies and problems? How will they all be resolved in the existing building? How does the total cost (including temporary costs incurred) of this massive renovation compare with that for a replacement school?

### ***Help Mt. Hebron Committee—just a reminder***

The Help Mt. Hebron Committee is a sub-committee of the Mt. Hebron PTSA. It represents students, staff, parents and the community. To date, Help Mt. Hebron has successfully advocated for a thorough assessment of Mt. Hebron's deficiencies with respect to HCPSS educational specifications, safety issues and building environment/physical plant concerns. We are now at the juncture with the Board of Education considering solutions.

The Committee is chaired by Cindy Ardinger. Linda Dombrowski is vice chair. Tony Culler, PTSA President is also actively involved. A steering committee comprised of staff, a SGA representative, feeder school parents and members from the community at

large. The committee will be meeting the first week of school to develop a plan for actively engaging the community over the coming weeks.

***Forward it on***

Feel free to forward this email to others. Our email list is nearly 450. However, only with many, many voices speaking together will we be able to obtain a comprehensive, long-term solution for Mt. Hebron. Over the next few weeks, we will need emails to the Board, other public officials and the press to convey our needs and concerns. To get on the mailing list, send an email to [helpmthebron@yahoo.com](mailto:helpmthebron@yahoo.com).