

Davis proposes partnership to speed needed school project

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WASHINGTON -

With scant local dollars to build a much needed middle school in southern Fairfax County, Northern Virginia U.S. Rep. Tom Davis said he wants the federal or county government to sell some of the county's surplus land to a developer to pay for the construction of the new facility.

In a letter to constituents this weekend, Davis suggested the exchange could speed up the construction of South County Middle School. Fairfax County school officials have not put the construction project on their immediate list of priorities. Proponents, however, argue building the facility is the only way to fix a growing problem of overcrowding at South County Secondary School, which is over capacity by hundreds of students.

"Our hope is to expedite the construction of the middle school by selling land currently owned by the county or federal government in the Lorton area and earmarking the proceeds for the middle school," Davis wrote.

Officials are increasingly turning to partnerships with the private sector to replace shortfalls in state and local funds for new infrastructure, most recently on a project to build high-occupancy toll lanes on the Capital Beltway. South County Secondary was built through such a partnership.

Parents and others in the area who want the middle school built by 2012 plan to rally on Oct. 24.

Davis' spokesman said Tuesday that three options are on the table: turning over a section of Fort Belvoir's Engineer Proving Ground, rezoning and selling surplus county-owned property, or exchanging part of the shuttered Lorton Prison site. In all three options, the company would be allowed to build a profitable development on the land and would in turn fund the middle school construction near South County Secondary, Davis spokesman Brian McNicoll said.

"To be clear, this is a local issue he's trying to help with," McNicoll said. "He can't rezone property."

The land in question is the Mount Vernon District. Gerry Hyland and Dan Storck, the district's county supervisor and school board member, could not be reached for comment.

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