

# Lorton rallies for a middle school

James Cullum

A crowd of 400 parents, students and politicians gathered in the South County Secondary School auditorium the evening of Oct. 24 to rally support for a new middle school.

The meeting was intended to educate and motivate those present to do something about an overcrowding situation that has left most of the high schools and secondary schools in southern Fairfax County bursting at the seams.

Land is available for the middle school, but no funds will be in the school system's capital improvements program to pay for it until 2017, and there are currently no building plans for the school. According to terms in the deed of transfer from land formerly belonging to the Lorton prison site, if construction is not begun for the middle school by 2012, the land will no longer be available.

Every penny raised by the South County Middle School Solutions Group has been spent on outreach efforts to gain the attention of the public through a Web site, T-shirts and banners.

South County, which will lose hundreds of students next year in a boundary change, now uses five four-classroom "quads," two double-wide trailers, a smaller trailer, an auxiliary gym and a bursting capacity of 117.2 percent.

"We have another boundary study looming in another year that will ... draw more kids from the area if money [for the middle school] is not secured by next year," said School Board Chairman Dan Storck.

Storck encouraged the crowd to find an answer to securing land and funds in some kind of public-private partnership with a yet-to-be determined partner.

Storck is also concerned about the unknown immediate and aftershock effects that are expected to come with base realignment in 2011. An unknown number of students may come to the area as a result of the greater number of government and contractor jobs expected in Springfield and Fort Belvoir.

U.S. Rep. Tom Davis (R-11th) said he is working to find land that the county could zone as open space, sell and then use the profits to finance the middle school. That work, however, has not begun.

“There are a lot of hoops on the county and congressional end that have to be jumped through to make this work,” Davis said.

South County Middle School Solutions Group member Rob Robertory said, “Every school in the area has a higher utilization percentage than the average we have in the rest of the county. We can no longer solve this problem by shifting students.”

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