



FRIENDS of FREDERICK COUNTY



Greetings, parents of FCPS students:

I am sending out this letter representing the Friends of Frederick County—an organization dedicated to sustainable growth and development—to inform you of a major threat to the education of students in Frederick County. *Our new Board of County Commissioners is considering repeal of our county-wide Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) for schools, which safeguards critical elements of public school standards.* We wish to tell you the potential consequences of repeal, and let you know what you, as parents, can do to protect your children.

So what exactly is an APFO?

An Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) affects development around a municipality—such as Brunswick, Thurmont, and Walkersville. It effectively prohibits new development until an adequate infrastructure is in place to support the added traffic and demands for utilities that come with development. Infrastructure covers water, sewers, roads and yes, schools.

How does this relate to schools?

An APFO holds developers responsible for the impact of their development on schools. More homes invariably means more children, who have to enter the public school system. Schools, however, can only support a finite number of students, meaning that without a standard for maintaining student density, schools rapidly become overcrowded. As an example, in 2009 Centerville Elementary School was nearly 200 students over its capacity, and Middletown High School almost 130. These conditions put strain on school budgets and relegate students to portable classrooms. With an APFO, however, developers cannot build without paying for school additions or waiting until the county builds them.

Why is having a county-wide APFO for schools important?

Unfortunately, a number of Frederick County's municipalities—Burkittsville, Emmitsburg, Middletown, New Market, Rosemont and Woodsboro—do not have their own APFOs and, for one reason or another, do not want to draft them. Frederick City *does* have an APFO, but it is effectively worthless to protect schools; any development that fails the APFO school test for three consecutive years is given a free pass, even if schools and facilities are still inadequate. Our county-wide APFO for schools ensures that all FCPS students are entitled to the same protections against overcrowding and inadequate education.

What does the proposed repeal do?

The current Board of County Commissioners is content to replace the section of our county's APFO dealing with schools with a promise from developers that they will “pay for the cost of their impact on schools.” We of FoFC, however, feel this to be woefully inadequate. Not only does this “promise” lack any legal force behind it, but it defeats the purpose of the APFO—to prevent development until schools are adequate. Even if schools *are* made adequate, taxpayers will be left holding the bag for the multimillion-dollar annual operating costs of the schools. Moreover, the only reason for repealing the county-wide school test is a desire to evade its requirements; there is no benefit to county taxpayers or FCPS students to be derived from this repeal, only to private developers' interests.

How does this affect my family?

To some extent, this depends on where you live. Frederick City residents—and County residents not fortunate enough to live in a city or town with its own APFO—will be at the mercy of

developers, who cannot be held to their “promises” if they do not wish to. No matter where you live, however, your students' education will be affected. The operating costs of these schools (averaging \$8.4 million for an elementary school and \$19.2 million for a high school per year) will either have to be passed on to county taxpayers, or be taken out of the already underfunded FCPS budget, which should be used to renovate, upgrade and maintain existing schools. North Frederick Elementary School and Frederick High School, for example, desperately need these renovations, and cannot get them if all of our county's education budget is drained to finance and support new schools.

Alright, I'm convinced. But what can I do to help?

The Board of County Commissioners is holding a public hearing on March 1 to hear comments and concerns from Frederick County residents in advance of their decision on repeal. We need as many concerned parents and teachers as possible to come out and tell the Board that the county's APFO must stay. A mere *promise* from developers is not a substitute for their accountability in our children's futures, and the Board needs to hear it from the people who will be footing the bill if the APFO's school test is repealed.

The BoCC's public hearing is on March 1 at 7 PM, and will be held at Winchester Hall, 12 E Church St, Frederick. Please plan on attending if at all possible and invite your friends as well—anyone with an interest in the future of Frederick County's public schools is welcome. Also, please email me at dsh7@hood.edu whether you'll be attending or not; while there's no need to RSVP, we'd like to know how many people to expect!

Thank you for your concern and your assistance in protecting FCPS students,
Dan Hess, Friends of Frederick County

PS: If you have any further questions [please view our other articles on the APFO](#). I am available 24/7 for specific questions at my email above, and you can also attend the Planning Commission hearing at 1:00 PM on February 23, also at Winchester Hall, for more information. (If you can only attend one, though, make sure it's the March 1 BoCC hearing!) Thanks again!