

Money for new Towson High could be in cards

Kamenetz to propose planning money for two new schools in FY19 budget

By MARGARITA CAMBEST
mcambest@baltsun.com

Baltimore County Executive Kevin Kamenetz announced Tuesday that he would include planning money for two new high schools in his proposed fiscal year 2019 budget, which he will release next year.

The schools would be expected to serve the Towson area and the central-northeast area of the county, where parents have for years asked officials to build new high schools to eliminate overcrowding and failing facilities.

Parents of Dulaney High School in Timonium had previously lobbied for a new school, but Kamenetz had instead proposed a renovation.

In March, after complaints from the school community that it would not be sufficient to address problems, the county school board voted down the contract to renovate Dulaney High. The renovation was part of the county's \$1.3 billion dollar Schools for Our Future program, a multi-year plan to modernize older buildings.

Other renovation projects in that program included Woodlawn and Patapsco high schools, which are underway; and Lansdowne High, which the board said would need to be rebid. Parents in that community were also pressing for a new school.

Towson High School parents also began an effort to get funding for a new high school last year, creating a group called THS New in 22 to promote their efforts when the high school was not included in comprehensive renovation plans.

"After numerous meetings with education experts and community leaders, it is clear that Baltimore County needs to alleviate overcrowding in the Towson area, as well as the central-northeast corridor," Kamenetz said in a statement Tuesday that announced the proposed funding.

The school system projects that Towson High will be 456 students over state-rated capacity by 2026. The same study indicates that two schools in the central-northeast corridor of the county

also face overcrowding — Dulaney High School by 188 students and Perry Hall High School by 234 students.

Baltimore County spokeswoman Ellen Kobler said the central northeast school's placement would be determined by the school system but is expected to alleviate overcrowding at all three schools.

A pending high school enrollment reassessment is being conducted by the school system, according to county officials.

The decision comes on the heels of a decision by the Baltimore County School Board to add a last-minute amendment Tuesday to its FY 2019 capital budget request, calling for two new high schools at specific locations.

The move is the direct result of parents and community leaders pushing for the funding, according to Baltimore County Councilman David Marks, a Perry Hall Republican who also represents Towson.

"Make no mistake, projects like this don't get done without strong support from parents and community leaders," Marks said. "The Towson community has rallied behind a new school that would eliminate overcrowding and fulfill a 21st century mission."

Marks said he has worked on getting a new high school in the northeast Baltimore County for more than 10 years.

While overcrowding in Towson is driven by demographics and development, Perry Hall's overcrowding is driven by increased development in the White Marsh area and is expected to continue, Marks said.

"It's a tremendous step forward," Marks said. "The bulk of the construction money will have to be allocated by the next County Executive, but this at least moves us along the right timeline toward getting a school built by 2022."

State Sen. Jim Brochin, a Democrat who represents District 42, said the change in direction reflects the Towson community's persistence in securing a new school.

"I think its tremendous advocacy work by community activists who were incredibly persistent and knowledgeable in



explaining the facts to the administration,” Brochin said of the announcement.

The members of THS New in 22 have said they would like to see a new Towson High School built by 2022.

Committee member Steve Prumo said that if a new Towson High School is built by 2022, his two youngest children — Rafael Prumo, 8, and Olivia Prumo, 5 —

will attend the new school.

“I’ve been bouncing around in my car,” Prumo said of the announcement. “I can’t wait for everyone to find out. The kids deserve it.”

‘The kids deserve it.’

Parent Rafael Prumo on possibility of new Towson High School



TOWSON TIMES FILE

County Executive Kevin Kamenetz said last week that officials must alleviate school overcrowding “in the Towson area,” including at Towson High School.