

South Lake Update

On Monday, October 26, the Education and Culture Committee of the Montgomery County Council unanimously endorsed the proposal to fully fund the \$5.853 for South Lake Elementary School construction as requested by the Board of Education. This endorsement moves South Lake back to its original timeline, with completion of a new facility by 2023.

While there are some budgetary details to be worked out, before the committee's endorsement has a final hearing, the full council should vote on the proposed amendment to the FY 2021-26 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) in early November. In addition to the unanimous endorsement by Committee members Craig Rice (chair), Will Jawando and Nancy Navarro, Council members Sydney Katz and Gabe Albornoz, both also attending the committee meeting, gave their endorsement, meaning there should be a majority of votes when the amendment reaches the full council.

While Temple Beth Ami was not mentioned directly, several of the councilmembers alluded to the letters and phone calls to support the amendment that were received from individuals living outside the school's district. Among those were certainly TBA congregants and a large thank you goes to all who wrote or called members of both the Board of Education and the County Council.

This vote culminates efforts that Community of Action and Critical Issues members focused on throughout the summer and fall following the Council's vote in May to remove South Lake from the Board of Education's recommended CIP list of elementary schools awaiting construction. In addition to organizing a letter writing campaign to both the Board of Education and County Council, members also helped to organize and provide video support to an on-site tour of the building conducted by South Lake administrators for Councilmember Andrew Friedson (District 1) on July 23. Working with other faith-based organization within AIM (Action in Montgomery), they also participated in a series of online meetings with other County Council members throughout August and with Board of Education members – President Shebra Evans, Vice-President Brenda Wolfe and Member Karla Silvestra.

The summer letter writing campaign and other advocacy efforts had a strong impact on the Board of Education's recommendation to the Council in September that South Lake be returned to its original priority place on the CIP list and to find supplemental funding. The same campaign forced the Education and Culture Committee on September 21 to take up the question of South Lake's delayed construction as it had earlier promised in May.

With the question of funding still an obstacle, the Committee delayed a final decision on the matter until October 19. In the meantime and to continue pressing South Lake's cause, AIM held a press conference, Friday, October 2. The press conference included the presentation of a petition signed by local clergy, including both Rabbi Weiss and Rabbi Pokras, asking the County Council to reprioritize South Lake on the CIP list. Concluding the press conference, which used as its focus the holiday of Sukkot, Rabbi Weiss gave the closing benediction.

As noted in the lead above, all these efforts culminated in the endorsement by the Education and Culture Committee to return South Lake to its original timeline for construction and to provide the funding.

