



**Oakland Mills Community Association**  
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September 21, 2023

“When originally deferred, this was a major HVAC renovation project; however it has been nine years since the project was deferred. Current conditions at the school now require a full renovation. It’s not practical and cost effective to maintain the system any longer. Due to the fact that the system is old, obsolete and continues to be problematic we are unable to provide a conducive-learning environment to both the students and staff.”

This was the assessment of Oakland Mills High School’s heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system in 2017-2018. It had been deferred since 2009 and could wait no longer. Yet OMHS was removed from past capital improvement plans until this board acted two years ago, then it was proposed to be deferred again until the board acted last year, and now here we are this year with OMHS proposed to be pushed to the bottom of the plan, with renovations maybe starting in 2034 when that system that needed replacement in 2009 will be 61 years old.

Good evening and thank you for this opportunity to testify on the Superintendent’s proposed capital improvement program. My name is Jonathan Edelson, and I am speaking on behalf of the Oakland Mills Community Association. Sadly, I don’t have much new to say to you tonight given the story hasn’t changed much since today’s seniors were starting kindergarten, other than the building and its systems are another year older. This plan would ensure this year’s kindergarten students also start their high school careers in an unrenovated Oakland Mills High School. Think about that for a second.

For the last few years, you and past members of the board have heard from faculty, students, and concerned community members about the condition of the school. Last year, you heard from them for nearly two hours and saw some of them in tears. You are hearing from them again this year. Your own assessments should tell you all you need to know about the facility.

You have a plan before you that would defer a building, declared unable to provide a conducive learning environment five years ago, for another eleven years. That last sentence was copied almost verbatim from last year’s testimony; all I did was change the reference to the assessment from four years ago to five. Do you see a pattern? It will never get done if you allow this trend to continue. To put that in perspective, if OMHS were taken care of on time in 2009, the original building would have been 36 years old. If it is taken care of under the plan you adopted last year, the building will be 53 years old when the project starts. If you wait until 2034, it will be 61 years old before the project starts. The “new” addition on the back of the school will be over 30 years old by then. Some of the first students to attend OMHS will be in their early 80s while current students breathe air passing through the same system those original students had.

Is it a coincidence that the start date keeps getting moved on the high school with the highest proportions of lower income and traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic populations? Let's look at things that have been said in this room

Several years ago during the redistricting conversation, and I mean the one before the latest to fill what would become Guilford Park High School, a member of the board cautioned on some of the moves being suggested because of their future impact on the redistricting that would fill GPHS. The caution was we can't open a new building with 45 percent or more of the students receiving free and reduced meals. Guess what? Under that old FARMS measure, it has been perfectly acceptable to have an old building with that rate. So are we saying only certain students from certain backgrounds are deserving?

Recently, there has been more talk about whether Oakland Mills can provide relief to neighboring schools. Unfortunately, the talk has been about how that's not necessary. The schools in Oakland Mills could be kept the size they are. I'm not hearing similar things said about other renovation and addition projects. For all of our challenges with finding capacity and land to build capacity, it seems the only time the discussion turns to **not** investing in capacity is when Oakland Mills gets discussed in this room. Why is that? Again, reflecting on past conversations in this room, it has even been stated that we need to be careful about how much we fill OMHS due to its challenging condition.

So what is it? Is it challenging and in need of help? Is it fine just the way it is and we'll build capacity elsewhere? Do you think the OMHS students and teachers, along with their families, aren't clever enough to see a pattern that dates back a quarter century now?

Just for the record, here are a few facts about OMHS:

- mold
- leaky ceilings
- lack of fresh air
- lack of natural light
- largest gap between state calculated capacity and county calculated capacity among the 13 high schools
- A hundred students over capacity by county calculations, and 250 students over capacity by state calculations
- no student gathering spaces
- substandard auditorium
- noncompliance with current standards including COMAR
- Major HVAC renovation project deferred since 2009.

And finally, I don't even know how to address how an inflation rate, not amount, but rate, is mysteriously higher in Oakland Mills than elsewhere in the same county, necessitating the need to reconsider a rebuild of Oakland Mills Middle and a reprioritization of the entire plan to push OMHS to the bottom. As Ms. Moseley pointed out, that's not how inflation works. At least that's not how it works until we're talking about half century old buildings in Oakland Mills that have not had full, systemic renovations. Speaking of which, those fact sheets on each school are very misleading. The school system reports "renovations" the same way whether they were complete overhauls of a building or retiling restrooms. There's a lot of suspect data out there.

I could go on. Unfortunately, past Boards of Education have left a legacy of neglect of OMHS. Enough is enough. I am here to ask you once again to stick to the plan you adopted last year. It is illogical, inequitable, and immoral to delay OMHS any longer. What will your legacy be?