I am writing to advocate that Bryant Woods Elementary School be added to the HCPSS capital improvement plan for replacement/renovation. Bryant Woods is the oldest elementary school in Columbia, built in 1969 and the only school from Downtown Columbia that has not been substantially renovated or replaced.

* There are numerous **safety concerns** at the school including the need for a safe front entrance, eliminating the open library design, eliminating the classrooms in open space pods, having separate car and bus loops that support the current usage of the school, and eliminating the need for portables
* There are numerous **health concerns** including copious amounts of animal excrement and lead in the drinking water
* There are **dilapidated facilities**, including the cafetorium (cafeteria/auditorium) ceiling which was recommended by outside consultants for replacement in 2009. The 2009 the recommendation was also made to replace all HVAC by 2024. There were further recommendations to replace the generator, vinyl floor tiles, the gym floor, and carpets all prior to 2022, none of which has happened.
* Bryant Woods provides positive **community impact** by serving historically underserved black/brown and low-income students.

Safety Concerns:

Bryant Woods Elementary School is a very old building that currently does not meet the needs of the students. The school has a small layout meaning that once someone enters the building, they are able to reach several rooms, including the cafetorium, two pre-k classrooms and a music classroom before they get to the front office. This is a safety concern because someone could enter the school and enter into a space with students before checking in at the front office.

Security on the back side of the school is even worse. There are six portables that lack bathrooms. This means students as young as 5 years old enter the main school building from the portables to use the bathrooms which leaves the students entering and exiting the building vulnerable and leaves the security of the building in jeopardy. Children going in and out of the back doors all day long means there could be a security breach in the rear of the building. There are numerous neighborhood foot paths as well where non-school-going pedestrians walk right by the portables leading to further concerns about security and safety around the portables.

Insufficient facilities:

Even though Bryant Woods is currently just a bit over capacity and has its maximum of six portables, there are still teachers teaching in the lobby or wherever they can find space for pull out instruction because there is no more classroom space for additional instruction. Depending on the number of students in any given year, grade-level classes sometimes do not have classrooms and are allocated to the open area of a pod. Those classes have no walls and all the other classes for the grade enter and exit through their learning space.

Open library:

The library is not conducive for learning or safety. The library has no walls and is located next to the open pods where classes are held. Hosting class in an open library next to an open classroom in a pod is distracting and negatively impacts learning. Most of the schools with open media centers have had them enclosed, but BWES has not. Not only is an open library not conducive to learning, it is also a safety concern as those children need to be relocated during a lockdown.

Dilapidated facilities:

As you head into the cafetorium, you can look up to see ceiling tiles that are bowing significantly. In 2009, they were identified as needing to be replaced. They were scheduled to be replaced in 2022, but at this time, the ceiling no longer appears on the capital improvement plan nor do any of the other required capital improvements. On the stage in the cafetorium, you will find copious amounts of mouse excrement which is a major health concern in an area where children eat lunch. You will find mouse excrement many places including around school instruments. Also, the once blue curtain on the stage in the cafetorium is faded and falling apart.

Health concerns: – Lead in the water. Like our kids, when you visit Bryant Woods Elementary you should bring your own water. In 2018, 28 of the 59 faucets tested had reportable levels of lead with 3 having actionable levels. The EPA has said no lead in drink water is acceptable. Most sinks have red signs to not drink the water, despite many of them also having drinking faucet attachments that the kids still use.

Getting to school:

The school was originally built to be a walking school and as such it can be accessed from many different directions by students who walk to school. This means that there are many points around the property that should be monitored for safety reasons but there are a minimal number of cameras. It also means far more crosswalks than there are crossing guards, which raises chronic safety concerns. Trying to access the school by car or bus is challenging. The road into the school is a small side street not meant to serve the currents needs of the school. Since it was designed as a walking school, the bus loop can only hold one bus, despite the school now having 6 or 7 buses after redistricting. Car loop was not anticipated in 1969, so it overlaps with the bus loop and snakes through the parking lot over many crosswalks causing congested traffic and safety concerns for walkers. Kids come from all directions and have no choice but to walk through the car loop dodging buses and cars. Please stop by at morning drop off or afternoon pick up to see these concerns for student safety.

Capacity:

BWES currently has a school capacity of 361 therefore, it is one of Columbia’s smallest elementary schools. The addition of just 36 students increases school capacity by 10%. Yet it will get all of the elementary school students in the Merriweather District and if the library plan is approved there will be “at least 240 units of mixed-income housing, twice the number as originally called for in the Downtown Columbia Plan” which will add to the number of students as well. This is in addition to all the children expected to live in Rosslyn Rise starting in 2024, less than a year away. Rosslyn Rise includes “new mixed-income development that will provide over 100 affordable units across the income spectrum”. All of these new developments are districted to an old school that does not meet today’s needs and only has capacity for a little over 300 students.

History of Repairs:

Bryant Woods had an addition in 1984 that included a gymnasium and three classrooms to enable all day Kindergarten, which are now used for band/strings and two pre-K classrooms. A renovation in 2004 replaced the packaged rooftop air conditioner along with the addition of a gymnasium gas-fired make-up air unit . On July 13, 2006, the board approved that the roof be replaced by Cole Roofing Co. for a little over $602 thousand. According to the strategic plan, Bryant Woods was last renovated in 2004, and all other elementary schools except 1 have been renovated or had an addition since then.

Community Impact:

Historically underserved black/brown and low-income students. Bryant Woods Elementary School serves pre-K through 5th grade and is a community eligible and Title 1 school with 40% of children receiving free and reduced meals . It a majority minority elementary school with 46% of the students being Black/African American and 14% being Hispanic/Latino. Therefore, it is a school with historically underserved populations.

Other school renovations:

Wilde Lake High School was originally built in 1971, was completely replaced in 1995 and had a new roof in 2019. Wilde Lake Middle School was built in 1969 and completely replaced in 2016. However, Bryant Woods Elementary School (BWES) was built in 1968, before either of those schools, and has not seen substantial recent renovations and has major issues. Running Brook is the only other elementary school that serves Downtown Columbia. Running Brook was built in 1970 and renovated with a new addition including a security vestibule in 2014.

Bryant Woods Elementary School needs to be replaced. It is infrastructure that supports the growing Downtown Columbia area. Funding is needed to address the capital needs of the school. At the very least, Bryant Woods should be added to the HCPSS capital improvement plan and ultimately should be completely replaced with a larger school that supports the growing elementary school needs in the area.