

Borough of Rosslyn Farms  
200 Rosslyn Road  
Carnegie, PA 15106



February 22, 2011

Dear Residents:

Please find attached a letter dated February 14, 2011 from Rosslyn Farms Borough Council to the Carlynton School Board. Initially, Borough Council had been reluctant to interject its opinion in the Carlynton elementary schools feasibility study process as concerns were being addressed directly by residents of the district.

However, after attending a February 3<sup>rd</sup> school board meeting and becoming concerned about the process as well as learning of the Board's intent to make a final decision on February 17<sup>th</sup>, Council felt it should raise its concerns directly to the Carlynton Board. As a council, we endeavored to represent the viewpoints of residents we have gleaned over many years. Also, in consideration of the short time remaining, we felt we needed to be direct in our opinion that additional options needed to be considered.

Despite our request, the Carlynton Board chose to move ahead with a project at their February 17<sup>th</sup> meeting. By a split vote, the school board chose to proceed with closing Crafton Elementary and building one new elementary school somewhere on the Carnegie Elementary site.

It is important to note that Carlynton School District taxes represent 63% of the total real estate taxes paid by Rosslyn Farms residents and 50% of our local income taxes. As a result, this decision not only has an impact on the education of our students but also on the long term tax burden for our community. It is for these reasons that we want to keep you apprised of the direction chosen by the school board.

If you have any questions or comments about Council's position on this matter, please feel comfortable sharing them with us at our next meeting on February 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:30pm at the Community Center. We must acknowledge, however, that Borough Council has no authority in Carlynton School District decisions. Influence at this stage may be best addressed at the individual citizen level. For reference, below is a list of the Carlynton School Board members and their position on this matter.

**Board members voting in favor**

- Thomas Brown (Carnegie)
- Thomas DiPietro (Carnegie)
- Sandra Hughan (Carnegie)
- Ronald McCartney (Carnegie)
- Patricia Schirripa (Rosslyn Farms)

**Board members voting against**

- Nyra Schell (Rosslyn Farms)
- Betsy Tassaró (Rosslyn Farms)
- Sharon Wilson (Crafton)
- Ray Walkowiak (Carnegie)

Respectfully,

Rosslyn Farms Borough Council

Borough of Rosslyn Farms  
200 Rosslyn Road  
Carnegie, PA 15106



Carlynton Board of Education  
435 Kings Highway  
Carnegie, PA 15106

February 14, 2011

Dear Board:

As requested in your letter dated January 24, 2011 several members of the Rosslyn Farms Council as well as our mayor attended the school board meeting on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. We listened to the review of the feasibility study options investigated thus far as well as the considerable public comment on the subject. Following were our observations:

1. The superintendent's presentation strongly favored closing Carnegie and Crafton Elementary Schools and building a new combined elementary school.
2. Certain school board members had expected but have not yet been allowed to pare down the master wish list for each option that involved renovation and /or additions to the existing elementary schools.
3. As a result the master wish list for renovation and additions to each elementary school appears inflated which only serves to financially justify building a new school rather than keep our community based schools. These renovation estimates need to be realistically reviewed and revised to reflect the true needs of the district before any attempt is made to compare renovation costs with new construction costs.
4. The stated reasons for this sizable undertaking are primarily to achieve administrative improvements and perceived economy of scale with virtually no justification based upon improved student performance. Meanwhile our existing community elementary schools have performed well on PSSA tests.
5. Most importantly there is considerable public opinion in opposition to closing the existing elementary schools.

At this point, it is clear that two obvious options need to be considered before proceeding with any program.

1. What improvements can be made to our existing schools with the \$12 million already available, or some portion thereof?
2. If the primary school board objective is economy of scale, then what are the options to merge Carlynton into other school districts?

It may be helpful to understand the following general characteristics of our community. Approximately half Rosslyn Farms school age children attend Carlynton School District and half attend various other schools in the region. A representative portion of our community believes the Carlynton School District is too small to thrive or offer their desired diversity of programs and as a result advocates that Rosslyn Farms or the entire school district should merge with a larger district. Another representative portion of our community appreciates the benefits of our smaller school system, community based schools and the resulting interconnectedness between teachers, students, and parents. Although some residents may favor a new school, we have not heard from them while the position of other residents has been made clear for many years. Further, there has also been understandable caution over potentially breaking our bonds to Carnegie and Crafton which have been fostered by the Carlynton School District. Many view this bond as a symbol of our broader community with a shared appreciation for the long term vitality of all three boroughs.

Roslyn Farms Council also has these additional concerns:

- Closure of the existing elementary schools in favor of a new building will leave Crafton and Carnegie each with an abandoned building not easily adapted to reuse and likely to fall into disrepair, signaling a community in decline. This will do harm to our neighboring boroughs.
- Carlynton already has a high millage rate and despite the projections shown at the school board meeting, we believe the apparent favored option will ultimately require additional taxes and the millage rate will have to be raised further. In combination with other burdens facing our communities, this will do further harm to all three boroughs.
- On both the national and state level, budgets are strained and not sustainable. It is expected that these strains will present themselves to local governments through reduced local funding, further burdening Carlynton's budget and ultimately that of each of our residents. This is in addition to the looming pension shortfall which will affect all districts. As local leaders we need to prepare for this. As a result, extreme caution and full examination of the options should be taken before the school district moves ahead with any of its current options and additional indebtedness.

As your stated objective is to make a decision at your February 17<sup>th</sup> meeting, we believe we must be clear in the opinion of Roslyn Farms Borough Council. If the Carlynton School Board chooses to proceed with a program that will close the existing community based elementary schools without careful consideration of the two obvious options delineated above, we believe this action will bring unnecessary harm to not only Roslyn Farms but also our neighboring communities.

We request that the School Board delay its decision until these options can be properly examined. Should you proceed despite this request, we will need to consider supporting actions to protect the interests of our citizens. This may include the support of residents in the circulation and submission of a petition to the State Board of Education requesting our merger with another school district. The petition will assist in documenting public opinion and will be in addition to vigorous investigation of charter schools and proposed voucher programs as a means of ensuring best value to our citizens. Since the apparent favored option of the superintendent and certain school board members includes the closure of neighborhood schools, it is likely that a majority of our residents will find a common purpose in this regard. In this event, we will welcome discussions with our neighboring borough councils on how we may be able to maintain our common bonds, if possible, outside of the Carlynton School District.

Roslyn Farms Borough Council  
[By unanimous vote of Borough Council on February 14, 2011]

Respectfully,



Kathleen Green

Council President