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Prince George's seeks input on \$2 billion school priority plan [by Jamie Anfenson-Comeau](#) *Staff writer*

A new process for evaluating and rating school system facilities is under development to help Prince George's Public Schools prioritize over \$2 billion worth of deferred maintenance.

"It does seem overwhelming, but if you can break it down into manageable pieces, it can be done, if there is a will, and if the public has a will," said Sarah Woodhead, PGCPSS director of capital programs, during the first of three public hearings, held Tuesday at Charles H. Flowers High School in Springdale.

A final public meeting is scheduled March 19 at Northwestern High School in Hyattsville.

Jay Brinson, project executive for Washington, D.C.-based project management firm Brailsford and Dunlavey, said a final master plan prioritization report is expected to be completed by the end of May, with drafts released to the school system in late April.

Woodhead said the school system typically has a capital improvements budget of \$130 million per year.

"If you look at the number, \$130 million sounds like a lot, but if you're trying to take care of \$2 billion in deferred maintenance, overcrowding issues, plus modernizing to meet current standards, we do have a shortfall," Whitehead said.

Whitehead said the \$2 billion backlog is due to maintenance needs over the past 40 years that were put off, and have now added up.

"That's roofs, boilers, windows, mechanical systems, things that should have been replaced every 20 years, or 30 years or 15 years, that didn't happen, all adds up to over \$2 billion," Whitehead said.

Woodhead said more than 50 percent of the school system's inventory of schools is over 40 years old.

"Those old schools, from the '60s and '70s, that didn't get made over, we've been working an awful lot on fixing maintenance issues, but we haven't been able to do it in a holistic manner," Whitehead said.

The new plan will not only take into consideration facility condition, but will also how well facilities meet the current needs they're being used for, Brinson said.

"It's a different way of looking at how the facilities are interacting with the students," Brinson said.

Erika Lehman, senior associate of District-based Perkins Eastman said her architectural firm has visited 193 schools over a six-week period to evaluate the original designed use of rooms as well as how those rooms are being used now.

"Sometimes a room is designed as a music room, but because there are so many students, that music room may be used as a classroom," Lehman said.

Brinson said the new report will prioritize facility needs into five tiers, with the top two tiers being those with the greatest need.

Whitehead said the school system is encouraging community members to be involved in the plan's development.

Robert Adams of Capitol Heights, parent of two children attending Capitol Heights Elementary, said he hopes the new process remains open to the public. He said every day, his daughters go past Doswell E. Brooks Elementary, which underwent major renovations a few years ago, on their way to Capitol Heights Elementary, and ask why they can't go to Brooks.

"If you have these schools in close proximity, and you see things going on at one school, and you're school isn't getting any work done to it, it really affects the kids," Adams said.

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