

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

From: Diep Nguyen-van Houtte <diepnguyen26@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 07, 2017 12:45 AM
To: Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ); Cevasco, Jenna (EOM)
Subject: Opposition to City's request for variance for homeless shelter

We are Jean and Diep van Houtte at 3830 Reno Rd NW,
Washington, DC 20008

We are opposed to the City's request for a zoning variance/exception to build a massive homeless shelter next to the Second District Police Station. The proposed structure is much too large and dense (40 times) for the site and will have negative consequences for the neighborhood as follows:

- 1) we have experienced over the last 19-20 years of residence in the area continually increasing noise, traffic and light pollution to the point where it is almost unbearable at present. We are afraid for our children's safety in crossing the street or even walking around with the immense traffic. Adding another large structure with denser concentration of residents than current zoning laws permit will only exacerbate this problem.
- 2) coupled with the increased population and traffic is a huge shortage of parking space in the neighborhood. Looking for parking when we go out on errands is an increasingly stressful affair. Increased traffic is also caused by cars circulating multiple times around the neighborhood to look for parking. It's a vicious circle. The teachers at John Eaton are also short of parking and have even asked neighbors to donate our Visitor Parking passes to them. With the neighborhood so severely stressed for parking, granting a variance for this large and dense structure will only add to this problem.
- 3) the proposed structure will interfere with the operations of the Police Station. With increased car thefts, home invasions and robberies in the neighborhood, we need to ensure that police officers at the Second District Station are not hampered in their ability to protect residents.
- 4) John Eaton is a successful school but is also under stress. With significant expected increase in enrollment, the school's fragile success could be compromised.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our protest that the City has not conducted meaningful consultations with residents on the development of the homeless shelter. In fact, the City has deliberately ignored Residents' concerns. Furthermore, the City has not conducted a full assessment of the homeless population's needs and how best to address these needs. We attach a letter from a neighbor below on this topic. We fully endorse the position expressed in this letter. We look forward to reading a strong ANC Resolution against this request for zoning variance/exception.

Sincerely,
Jean and Diep van Houtte

While the Mayor's plan for sheltering the homeless faces its share of legal and community issues, there's a more fundamental problem that should be addressed before any further steps are taken. We need a reliable assessment of the specific needs of the homeless and a detailed plan for meeting those needs. Otherwise, we might be misled by our sentiments and manipulated for the political interests of elected officials who aren't necessarily trustworthy.

The current plan treats the homeless as a burden that must be shared equally by all wards of the city. While I applaud our neighbors who want to assume that burden out of sympathy and a sense of responsibility, I hope everyone joins me in demanding an approach that actually lessens the burden on the homeless themselves, especially homeless children.

From my years working with child welfare and social service agencies, I've come to respect the goal of "permanency planning." With that concept in mind, we should be looking first at the needs of homeless children and how we might lessen the disruption to their lives caused by the loss of their home. For example, we might focus on keeping children near their current schools and making sure any disruptions in their home lives don't affect their ability to stay enrolled

and excel. They might then be better able to maintain relationships with their teachers and friends with little disruption.

Something similar should be considered for adults as well. Can we keep them connected with any family and community members who might provide social support? Can we maintain their presence in those communities they prefer instead of transporting them around the city? Can we maintain or facilitate their presence near where they're likely to find work, where ever that might be? These questions are only the starting point.

Please join me in demanding the following from the Mayor:

- (1) Detailed statistics that describe those areas of the city from whence temporary housing needs most typically arise;
- (2) Comprehensive demographics on those who require temporary housing, including an assessment of their ongoing ties to their communities;
- (3) An informed analysis of the preferences of the homeless, including which neighborhoods they most prefer, for both short-term and long-term residence and employment;
- (4) A well-developed plan for providing services that meet homeless preferences, with a primary emphasis on helping homeless children maintain their community connections. Perhaps there's a homeless advocacy group that knows the needs of the homeless and could help us jump-start this effort. This kind of work isn't that complicated and expensive, but it needs to be done, and done right.

Of course, the needs of the homeless are urgent so we shouldn't waste time. However, building new shelters will take time as well. If time is of the essence in moving people out of DC General, I might prefer that the city rent condos or apartments on a short-term

basis rather than institutionalize a poorly-reasoned plan. The claim that group facilities are needed in order to economically provide support services hasn't been justified, while there is evidence from a range of social services agencies that more individualized settings provide better results, the least of which is a reduction in stigmatization and depression of the homeless.

I urge us to have some empathy for the children who need some stability in their lives. Moving them temporarily to sites around the city does nothing to meet this basic need, but, instead, will cause greater disorientation and interference with their schooling and psychological development.

Perhaps I'm biased since I long-ago concluded the Mayor's primary motivation is to reap profits for the real estate developers who lust after the DC General site (and who, in turn, provide campaign contributions and other "emoluments.") Nonetheless, we should demand that the needs of the homeless are evaluated and met by an open and objective process that can withstand public scrutiny.

John

[3411 30th Street, NW](#)