

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

From: Kathleen Baker <bossanovalovely@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, February 10, 2017 11:55 AM
To: Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ); Cevasco, Jenna (EOM); ATD DCOZ
Subject: BZA Application No. 19450

10 February 2017

Dear Members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my thoughts on the proposed temporary family shelter on the grounds of the 2nd District Police Station (BZA Application No. 19450). Allow me to begin by stating that I unequivocally support closing D.C. General and I am not opposed to a homeless family shelter being built in this neighborhood, my **immediate** neighborhood; I am, however, opposed to it being built on the grounds of a police station, as well as the dismissive manner in which the City Council, in particular Councilwoman Mary Cheh, has undertaken to put it there.

The residents of Ward 3 (ANC3C in particular) and the 2D police officers found out about the proposed shelter a mere week and a half before it was scheduled to be voted on by the City Council, a vote taking place the Tuesday following a long Memorial Day weekend. Residents basically found out through an email from a neighbor on our community listserv; the City Council had not sent any information prior to the neighbor's email, though a City Council email was sent out shortly thereafter, likely as they realized their surreptitious attempt to put it to vote without community input and involvement had been thwarted. A hasty community Q&A was agreed to, one that outgrew the meeting room at 2D Police Station and filled to a standing room only assemblage in the great hall of nearby Washington Hebrew Congregation (a filmed recording of which has apparently been "mislocated"). The predominant feeling of the meeting was answer-seeking -- not "for" or "against," as at that point neighborhood residents didn't have enough (any) information with which to form an opinion. It quickly became apparent that Councilwoman Cheh was less interested in the question part of the meeting as she spent the bulk of our allotted time repeating herself and reading directly from Director Zeilinger's one page PowerPoint graphic. When at last she opened the floor to questions, which ranged from what wrap around programs would be available on-site (very few) to school enrollment (John Eaton is already 124% over enrolled, with playground-access stairs literally crumbling, the school requesting neighbors to donate their parking passes for their teachers as there is no parking lot, and yet is not scheduled for renovation until 2020) to why the need for the shelter, to be located within the gates of a police station, would need its own separate 24 hour security, each question was met by Councilwoman Cheh with clear disdain. She did not hesitate to paint neighbors with such questions as callous and compassionless, which to me spoke to her guilt at not having properly involved us, the immediate neighbors of the shelter, from the beginning. Her repeated and continued false claim of complete community support is dismissive and indecorous of an elected official.

In addition to the City Council and Councilwoman Cheh riding roughshod over the residents of ANC3C in much the same manner they resented Mayor Bowser doing to them, costs of Councilwoman Cheh's proposed shelter have ballooned far beyond the initial estimate of the Wisconsin Avenue site chosen by Mayor Bowser which could have been purchased for \$2.5 million and constructed for \$10 million for a total cost of \$12.5 million. The most recent cost estimate for the Idaho Avenue site is \$24 million, an increase from \$20 million in response to valid concerns over already congested parking for both the officers and employees of 2D police station and the surrounding neighborhood; the City Council announced its pricey solution at an ANC meeting on February 6 that now proposes three levels of stacked parking be built directly behind and rising above the 2D police station to accommodate lost police parking and additional shelter parking. It estimates the cost of the ramps alone at \$9.5 million, over the previous \$5.5 million for a two story ramp. It also proposes paving over part of the nearby community gardens (at one time deemed "off-limits" by Councilwoman Cheh) and tennis courts for parking police cars during the estimated 18-24 month construction period, and then restoring the gardens and courts at a still undisclosed cost. The parking alone for this shelter exceeds the original site proposed by Mayor Bowser that the City Council and Councilwoman Cheh deemed too expensive. It is true that Mayor Bowser's proposed site would have been on leased land, but it doesn't take a math major to figure out that implied lease payments on a \$2.5 million piece of land are not going to have a present value of the ~\$12 million difference between the two sites.

This just goes to construction costs alone. Councilwoman Cheh and Director Zeilinger have yet to speak to operational costs, and when asked about what services will be in place for the families and what those costs will be, their answers vary along the lines of "hope for community involvement" to "these families are resilient people." More dismissive non-answers. 60-90 days is barely enough time to settle into a new routine under ideal circumstances, to say nothing of being uprooted to a new neighborhood during a time of duress and expected to be on your feet to move – where? – since D.C. has no affordable housing opportunities for homeless families. Given that a short-term stay is unlikely, families experiencing homelessness deserve better than a rush-job shelter on a site previously determined by former DGS Director Christopher Weaver as being "unsuitable for our purposes" thrown together as more of a political stepping stone than a real solution. If Councilwoman Cheh and the City Council had undertaken this as a partnership with the residents of Ward 3 and conducted an *actual* exhaustive search for an appropriate site rather than the superficial search which she repeatedly used for media sound bites, her fantastical claim of complete community buy-in may have born fruit. Coupled with the complete lack of feasibility and environmental impact studies, save one traffic study that actually addresses parking issues in the surrounding neighborhood (erroneously, at that) and doesn't so much as mention the word "traffic," it is clear to see that the parking lot of 2nd District Police Station is **not** the appropriate site for what started as a 25 family shelter for the Wisconsin Ave site and has now grown to an up to 200 person family shelter in Ward 3. Given the description that the shelter will feature communal bathrooms and no kitchens, buying the seven newly constructed Bozzuto townhomes across the street and making them multi-family units is worth exploring as a wise investment; still in a welcoming neighborhood, in-place construction, available kitchens, and likely not at \$24 million and growing each and every day.

I understand that you have received many letters of support for the shelter from across Ward 3, but I would ask that you take into account that the majority of them are blocks and whole neighborhoods away from the proposed Ward 3 site, and as such are unlikely to be affected by either the construction or operation of the shelter. They are accusing ANC3C residents of nothing more than "not in my backyard," while they themselves are "better your backyard than mine." I say again as I did in my opening paragraph -- I am not opposed to a temporary homeless family shelter in my immediate neighborhood, and regardless of where it is ultimately built, I will involve myself to help it succeed and ensure its residents receive the assistance and welcome they need and deserve, but such an addition to any neighborhood in any part of town needs to be inclusive of the

residents already in place, appropriate to the site selected, and make financial sense for a city renowned for its spending woes. The Idaho Avenue site on the grounds of 2D Police Station fall far short of meeting any of those criteria.

Thank you once again for your time and attention to this matter.

Be well,

Kathleen Baker

38th and Macomb