

Statement of Susan Punnett
Zoning Commission Case #06-17
October 30, 2006

Good evening. My name is Susan Punnett; I live at 224 Kentucky Ave., SE; Washington, DC. I speak this evening as one of a number of parents who have devoted hundreds of hours toward ensuring the modernization of the School Without Walls, which is a component of the PUD that you are considering this evening. When I first became involved in this project I had one child at School Without Walls; I thought that my younger child would have the opportunity to attend the modernized building. That did not happen. Both of my children have already graduated and are in college but I remain committed to helping endure that School Without Walls has a building that is equal to the academics that occur within.

The School Without Walls local school community (teachers, parents and administrators) has been working toward the school modernization since 1996, when the local school began work with the 21st Century School Fund on Educational Specifications for a modernized school. Despite an already decaying physical plant, no planning for the SWW building was then occurring within DC Public Schools.

In fact, it often seemed that no one needed to work on the SWW building because it was going to be renovated by a public private partnership, as if such a partnership were an entity that would create itself and do all the work without any work or assistance on the part of anyone else.

For example, in October 2001 as part of the facilities planning process, DCPS evaluated all senior high schools based on their educational adequacy, physical characteristics and physical conditions. SWW scored the lowest of any high school, only 17.5 out of a possible 98 points and yet DCPS placed it low on the priority list. The only way to get the renovation done was to make the PPDP happen.

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That this public private partnership is now a possibility is a testament to the parents, teachers and principals who have remained committed and tenacious. Since the beginning, we have been through three principals, four superintendents at least four project managers (not to mention those times when there was no project manager assigned). Through our persistence, we were instrumental in getting the Board of Education to pass a policy that would govern public private development partnerships; in pressuring superintendents and facilities management staff to remind them that this project could not happen on its own and needed staff assigned who had the time and would devote time to making it happen; and in staying in regular contact with school board members and city council members to ensure that they were informed about progress (or the lack thereof) and would ask the questions that would keep a focus on making this project happen.

I have been involved in this project since the spring of 2001. I have personally devoted hundreds of hours to phone calls, meetings, writing, and editing the Educational Specifications. I am proud to be one in a line of parents who have collectively devoted thousands of hours to this project. Many of us no longer have school-aged children, yet all of us remain devoted to ensuring that future generations have a safe, modern, appropriate building that will both help the school further its mission and will say with bricks, mortar and electronics that we value the education that goes on within and outside the walls of School Without Walls.

Thank you.