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April 19, 2002

Geoffrey Griffis, Chairman
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Support for St. Patrick's School -- Application No. 16852 -- at 4925 MacArthur Blvd.

Dear Chairman Griffis and Members of the Board:

I have lived in the Palisades community for over 12 years -- first in the Kent Neighborhood, and now off of Edmunds Street.

I know the building on MacArthur that St. Patrick's proposes to use for it's 7th and 8th grade classes. And I believe it is ideal for such a purpose -- particularly given the history of St. Patrick's as a hard-working and accommodating member of the community. I strongly support St. Patrick's proposed use of the site and adding 60 additional slots to help address the supply and demand gap that has developed in the community for education.

I must also say I am greatly disturbed that the "advisory groups" you also hear from -- ANC and the Board of the Palisades Citizens Association -- present a distorted view of the total community support for education, and as a sub-set, the St. Patrick's plan.

When given the chance to be heard, the Palisades community votes to support education, as was seen in the overwhelming vote of support by the membership of the PCA. Regrettably -- the Board of the PCA and the ANC-3D are detached from the community -- or have other agendas.

I attended the PCA Board Meeting, the PCA General meeting and vote to support St. Patricks, and the I attended the various ANC meetings where St. Patrick's proposal was discussed, and here are my observations.

The "Misleading" Resolution by the PCA Board

You should know that the three PCA Committee Chairman who issued reports are all residents of Ashby Street. There was no Committee Report on the educational needs of the community.

As you undoubtedly will, carefully read the PCA Board resolution -- which was crafted with the classic cynicism of Washington politicians -- who want "air cover." The double-minded resolution was crafted for the board members to duck a hard vote and go on record "for" education -- while satisfying the NIMBY voice on the Board. The resolution is intellectually dishonest and vote is misleading. The resolution was seen as such by the PCA membership at large and was thoroughly repudiated.

BZA
Case No. 16852
Exhibit No. 173

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16852
EXHIBIT NO.173

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In my analysis of the PCA Board views, had there been a straight up-down vote for the St. Patrick's plan -- accommodating the addition of resources for the community or not -- the Board would have been evenly split.

The ANC-3D View of The Palisades: One Big Assisted-Living Community?

Perhaps of greater concern is the distorted view of the ANC-3D in opposing St. Patrick's and the addition of education resources to the community.

The sad part is this: Families in the community are stressed and stretched to make ends meet and get their kids schooled -- and don't have time for the "hobbyist" activities of sitting on the ANC. Hence -- the preferences, management and views of the ANC are largely those of "seniors." I will leave it to you to assess the demographics of the panel, but the Chairman of the ANC, who aggressively presided over ANC-3D discussion, is 79 years old, and out of touch with the needs of families with children in our community. Forty years ago, he provided his children with a private school education. Today, and at the hearings, declared discussion of community educational needs at his hearing -- impermissible. To this day, there remains no accurate shared assessment of community need for education.

This is sad, entirely unfair to the families in our community, and stands as a threat to the future vibrancy of the Palisades.

If our community is to remain vibrant, we must, as a community be accommodating -- if not welcoming -- to the educational needs of families with children.

The St. Patrick's proposal is a good strong proposal. Is it perfect? No. There is not enough real estate left in the Palisades -- our community -- for a perfect plan.

But for the sake of families seeking to educate their children in our community, we should not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Sincerely,

Thos F. Gibson

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