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April 12, 2002

Board of Zoning Adjustment
Attention: Chairman Geoffrey Griffis
441 4th Street, N.W., 2nd Floor
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Chairman Griffis:

As a father of 5th and 6th grade students at St. Patrick's, and as a long time resident of the Palisades (Chain Bridge Road), I am obviously an interested party to the eventual decision whether to allow St. Patrick's to locate its middle school at McArthur Boulevard and Ashby Street.

My concern is that the process has pitted the Ashby Street neighbors against the community-at-large, without an attempt to reach a reasoned result. In the first instance, the Palisades Citizens Association Board voted against the proposal before knowing the will of the Association membership. This seems to be a curious and backward process, culminating in a vote whether to support the Board rather than whether to support the St. Patrick's proposal. Only because of the overwhelming support shown for St. Patrick's proposal at the Association Membership meeting was a second vote taken, in which the Association voted to support the proposal. Nonetheless, at the ANC meeting, at which the vote was taken, the Chairman made reference to the Association's Board's vote in a fashion belittling the vote of the Association's membership. It seems clear to me that the Association's leadership is a small and entrenched group, whose interests are unclear. Why they voted unanimously before understanding that their membership did not support the position is, simply, bizarre.

My real complaint is with the ANC action. I have no problem with giving deference or even great deference to objections of close neighbors to the proposed site. That seems fair to me. However, a rule of reason approach must also apply in the sense that these neighbors do not have veto power simply by stating objections. When it came down to it, the reasons for opposition were noise and traffic related. The ANC heard hours of testimony and grilled the St. Patrick's representatives and parents appearing at their meetings at much length about St. Patrick's proposals to mitigate any noise or traffic concerns. The ANC members voted with the Ashby Street neighbors, and simply rejected, out-of-hand, the St. Patrick's proposal. In doing so, there was no attempt to determine whether the objections of the neighbors were reasonable and/or had been mitigated by the St. Patrick's proposal. Neighborhood concerns were simply ignored. Personally, I feel that St. Patrick's did make reasonable proposals that took into account the neighbor's concerns. In fact, my view is that St. Patrick's more than bent over

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backwards in its attempt to resolve those concerns, and was rebuffed at every turn. Under those circumstances, the ANC should have made a reasoned decision whether the objections were reasonable, and outweighed St. Patrick's showing and the will of the neighborhood in general.

One got the impression that this was, like the Association's Board's vote, an inside matter handled by insiders. I was particularly concerned about the refusal of Commissioner Lewis to even allow conditions be placed on a waiver if the BZA were to grant one. Another Board member stated (this is a quote from your April 10th article) that "I don't think I can substitute my judgment for the judgment of the neighbors", even though his constituents probably support St. Patrick's. It's not the judgment of the neighbors which is relevant, but whether they have stated reasonable objections that have not been overcome by St. Patrick's attempts to do so. What was really lacking was reasoned judgment by the ANC members. Let's hope that the BZA does exercise sound judgment, no matter which way the vote goes.

Sincerely,

William M. Barnard

cc: Mr. Peter Barrett
Ms. Katherine Bradley