COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

WASHINGTON, D.C 20001

Phil Mendelson
Councilmember-At-Large

Office: (202) 724-8064
Fax: (202) 724-8099

May 20, 2002

RECEIVED
D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING
2002 MAY 22 PM 4:47

Mr. Geoffrey H. Griffis, Chairperson
D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW Suite 210
Washington DC 20001

RE: Appeal No. 16852 (St. Patrick's)

Dear Mr. Griffis:

I am writing to support the property owners near and adjacent to 4925 MacArthur Boulevard, N.W. who oppose a proposed junior high school sought to be established by St. Patrick's Episcopal Day School. I have visited the site and believe the application, if granted, would violate the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations regarding private schools located in an R-1 district.

St. Patrick's is a long-standing, well-regarded institution in the Palisades neighborhood. Many District children have received their education at St. Patrick's, and it is the policy of the District to encourage the presence of quality schools. However, their location should be appropriate. The issue is not whether a junior high school run by St. Patrick's would be an asset to the overall neighborhood, or to the District, but whether this site is suitable for such a school.

I am struck by the following facts.

1. The nature of schools in the District has changed considerably since adoption of the current zoning regulations in 1958. Their student bodies are much less neighborhood-based, and arrival/departure is much more automobile dependent.

2. In 1962 the BZA denied an application to permit up to 75 elementary school students at the proposed site.

3. The Office of Planning recommends approval, but subject to 17 conditions. This is somewhat unusual and essentially acknowledges that a typical school for adolescents at this site would be objectionable. Thus, OP recommends that the building shall close at 6pm, there shall be no summer school, organized outdoor activity is prohibited, large commercial trash dumpsters are prohibited, etc.

4. The Division of Transportation recommends a number of traffic mitigation measures, but then states: "*One reservation is that some of the most crucial conditions are behavioral ones that will be difficult to monitor and enforce.*" (4/22/02 memo, p. 3)

BZA
Case No. 16852
Exhibit No. 281

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16852
EXHIBIT NO.281

5. The proposed use of this property is quite different than previous uses in that it would be the establishment of a new junior high school.

6. OP recommends an enrollment cap and maximum number of faculty and staff. But the history of private schools throughout Ward 3 (and elsewhere) is that almost all, almost always, seek to expand. Burke School, Maret School, National Cathedral School, National Child Research Center, Sidwell Friends -- these come to mind immediately -- have each gone back to the BZA at least once to increase their limits.

7. Indeed, in 1999 St. Patrick's told the BZA it had decided to refrain from expanding the school beyond Grade 6. But "Within one year of that decision, the climate for independent middle schools in the District of Columbia changed significantly." (Statement of the Applicant, p. 3) Now the school is before you seeking a middle school. In my view there is nothing untoward about this. Rather, it highlights the likelihood that the establishment of a new school at the proposed site would be a critical next step in an incremental expansion.

8. The subject site is a corner lot with its driveway on Ashby Street. Ashby Street is relatively narrow and entirely residential. On the other side, the neighboring MacArthur Blvd. house is only four feet from the property line. It is the primary function of the Zoning Regulations to protect these property owners from adverse impacts.

For these reasons I agree with the recommendation of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3-D that the application be denied.

Sincerely,

Phil Mendelson
Councilmember At-Large