Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 210
Washington DC 20001

June 18, 2002

To the Board of Zoning Adjustment:

I am writing regarding the proposed expansion of St. Patrick's Episcopal Day School into the house at 4925 MacArthur Boulevard, NW. While I know that I am known for never seeing a school expansion that I don't like, I have in this case seen such a one. My concerns about the proposed expansion have to do with two aspects of the relationship between the size of the school and the size of the property.

The first is the size of the building relative to the proposed size of the St. Patrick's seventh and eighth grades. The St. Patrick's proposal calls for 60 students and 12 faculty to be placed in a building of 5300 usable square feet. (There is another 1700 square feet in the basement which I understand is not high enough to be used for classroom space). That breaks down to approximately 88.3 square feet per student. The recommended guideline for student/square foot ratio for the DC Public Schools is 170 square feet per student, including lunch room and gymnasium. Even without a lunchroom or gymnasium, St. Patrick's proposed expansion falls way below what is recommended as being an adequate space for students. This will lead eventually, I am sure, to a new request by St. Patrick's to the BZA to be permitted to build an addition to the existing house on the site.

My second concern is that St. Patrick's is proposing a total student population of 60 students for the seventh and eighth grades. They currently have 45 students in each of their elementary classes up until sixth grade so they are proposing that a significantly smaller group will continue into their Junior High. This is fine for now – I am sure that they have not got sixty students wanting to be in their Junior High right now. I am also certain, however, that in the future they will have their entire sixth grade wanting to move into the seventh grade and they will be in the uncomfortable position of having to turn away current students. While their "culture" at this moment may be one in which sixth graders automatically apply to other schools, that will change when parents realize that their children can stay in the school until ninth grade when there more options for students looking to change schools. This has certainly been the case at the Norwood School in Potomac. In a similar situation at the Potomac School in McLean where kids traditionally left the school in eighth or ninth grade, when a high school was added fifteen years ago, kids stayed at the school.

Again, with the increased pressure from parents to keep all the kids in the sixth grade class moving on to the seventh grade, the school will be forced to consider an addition to the existing building. And they will have to go to the BZA for another special exception. This puts the neighborhood in the position of constantly having to deal with the school and the BZA. It will become a yearly battle between the neighbors and the school and will leave everyone feeling very angry.

The problem is that the proposed site is not practical. It will not adequately serve the proposed population of students nor will it even begin to adequately serve the inevitably larger number of students that the school will have planning to attend their Junior High. My feeling is that the school needs to look for another site that would better serve its needs both now and in the future and abandon plans for 4925 MacArthur Boulevard.

Sincerely,

Cary Ridder

Cary Ridder
5520 Carolina Place NW
Washington DC 20016

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BZA
Case No. 16852
Exhibit No. 290

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16852
EXHIBIT NO.290