TESTIMNONY BEFORE BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT #16852 on St. Patrick's School
Oct. 8, 2002

Greetings, I am William G. Smith. 50 years ago I chose the Palisades and built my home. Immediately I got involved in Palisades Citizens Association [PCA]. My PCA activities included being President and supporting Walter Washington during the 1968 riots. While not a member of this church, I supported its move into the Palisades and subsequent expansions. Time is my most valuable asset having retired from the Govt 28 years ago after serving 34 years. I don't know how much time I have left. I don't like it wasted and you shouldn't either!

For more than six months I have been trying to tell you that we [PCA] got this MacArthur property zoned as a schoolhouse 40 years back. Why do you permit discussion about its use as a school? Whether student AGES and HOURS are your business is debatable. St. Patrick's School [St. Pats] owns it and wants to improve its schoolhouse use by installing an elevator for handicapped and to modernize air conditioning and other utilities. Isn't it reaching to make such improvements your business?

My comments apply to the Neighbors, St. Pats school, and the BZA.

Neighbors: Our community, PCA, voted overwhelmingly to support St. Pats expansion. We have always encouraged education as the best nonresidential use of our area. In the 50's I urged my friends Phileo Nash [aide to President Truman] and his wife Aggie English to bring Georgetown Day School to the Palisades. Recently after it relocated on lower MacArthur Blvd., more than 25 houses were built next door and sell in excess of $500,000. So schools may improve our housing values. For months abutting neighbors have used your hearing to learn about bus size and operation, street parking, and similar issues of questionable relationship to this case. Can you believe three busses in an hour on MacArthur Blvd would be disruptive? Unlike others in our community bordering on schools, these few seem to object to student ages and their hours of attendance. Would the neighbors prefer night time and weekends for classes for these kids, and if so would you get involved?

St. Pats: What business of this hearing is the layout and operation of their church property on another street? If Ashby neighbors object to St. Pats compliance with District rules elsewhere, is that properly before this hearing? Is the public good furthered by permitting opponents such lengthy questioning about irrelevant issues? ***This fall's class was denied use of their schoolhouse!*** As public policy should we waste private educational funds, while questioning over months experts who are unchallenged? St. Pats reports hearing costs exceed $300,000. While not your mission, can you ignore this waste of charitable funds?

Board of Zoning Adjustment: Justice delayed is justice denied! Permitting these hearings to extend over more than a half year wastes precious taxpayer monies - your time, staff, facilities, and delays of other urgent cases. Have you served the public good by denying these 7-8th graders use of their schoolhouse? Permitting irrelevancies, amateurism, and repetition to extend these hearings may damage more than the students and the donors, because your conduct reflects on our city. Have you no regard for the huge costs your hearing imposes on those of us interested in improving our city's educational opportunities? The schoolhouse was so zoned long before most of these neighbors moved next door. Can you permit NIMBY to dictate DC policies when the majority of residents support St Pats? By law your responsibility extends far beyond immediate neighbors to further the common good.

Opponents should be limited to arguing AGES and HOURS, which scarcely justify the time and expense already expended by you and the rest of us. I prepared earlier testimony which develops my interest in our community and this issue more fully, but I will file it for the record unless you want me to read it. When I worked in the Executive Office of the President including Eisenhower's 8 years, his order was "Get it on one page or get out." Any more and I would have to get out. THANK YOU.

William G. Smith, 2315 Chain Bridge Rd. NW, Washington DC, 20016 [202] 362-6949 10/8/02

BZA Board of Zoning Adjustment
Case No. 16852 District of Columbia
Exhibit No. 321 CASE NO.16852
EXHIBIT NO.321

STATEMENT BEFORE BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
16852 St. Patrick's School

Greetings, I am Bill Smith. For the past half century, I have owned my property and been a past President of the Palisades Citizens Association [PCA]. Back then Harold Gray created our Zoning system which you are upholding.

This schoolhouse was so zoned in 1961 and has been a school since. The new owner wants to change students and make minor building upgrades for safety reasons. I helped in the original rezoning and continue to support this schoolhouse.

The only issues are AGES and HOURS! Current zoning permits more than 60 students, so St Patrick's School [St. Pat's] is within authorized numbers.

Recognize two facts: 1. The only vote on this schoolhouse endorsed St Pat's 124 to 41 [PCA meeting April 2]. Other residents couldn't vote their support of St Pat's .
2. MacArthur Blvd. [MAC] is our main street where we concentrate business and education in the Palisades.
For generations PCA has guided such activities to our MAC. Thousands of students attend Our Lady of Victory, Lab School, River School, Little Red School, and Georgetown Day school, which I as a PCA officer helped bring to our area. Opposing neighbors, most of whom knew of the schoolhouse when they purchased, are the first to try to turn back our support for education in PCA area.
Arguments about home values and overcrowding our MAC likewise have little substance. After Georgetown Day School relocated on MAC to obtain a ballfield, over 25 new homes have been built next to it and sell for over $500,000. St. Pat's already schools 20 of the projected 60 students on MAC so opponents claim the other 40 on outbound side will overcrowd MAC which carries in-bound many thousands of commuters each morning BIG DEAL!
While I know, admire, and respect our ANC members, they failed to hear and present community views in their opposition to St. Pat's. Limiting their consideration to the few vocal neighbors, they failed to consider the great majority of their residents in favor. When we created the ANC's over a generation ago, we sought to improve local participation in government, not establish a lobby for residents of abutting property.
Their proper question should have been "Would ST. Pat's on MAC improve or detract from our community?" Then all residents could have spoken, but we were denied. The commissioners refused even to allow opinions on the broad community support for education in our area, or to hear the views of residents outside the PCA area.

Your mission is even broader. Weigh local interests against the common good of our Nation's Capital. If you limit your consideration to the immediate neighbors, NIMBY will stifle progress and deny students a better education.
Can you deny ST.Pat's because they change the schoolhouse's AGE and HOURS?

7/2/02 *William G. Smith 2315 Chain Bridge Rd., NW [202]362-6949*