4913 MacArthur Blvd NW
Washington DC 20007

February 7, 2004

Mr. Geoffrey Griffis, Chairman
District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 Fourth Street NW
Suite 210-S
Washington DC 20001

Subject: Opposition to Request for Clarification or Modification of
BZA Order No. 16852
St. Patrick's Episcopal Day School, 4925 MacArthur Blvd NW

Dear Mr. Griffis and Members of the Board:

As abutting neighbors of the middle school operated by St. Patrick's Episcopal Day School at 4925 MacArthur Blvd NW, and as parties opposing the original application for special exception that resulted in the BZA Order referenced above, we wish to voice our opposition to the request for clarification or modification thereof.

The middle school has been in operation at 4925 MacArthur Blvd for just two weeks now. From our perspective as neighbors to the immediate south, separated from the property by the grade separation referred to at length in the earlier hearings and by the fencing installed by the school as mandated by the BZA, we have not been exposed to many of the disruptions described in various forums by our neighbors on Ashby Street, whose greater proximity to the irritants of the construction process is evident to all. We have recently had cordial discussions with a school representative with respect to adding vegetation to the buffering provided by that fence. Overall, our relations with the school have been reasonable and we trust that they will remain so.

This said, we are deeply concerned and angered by the manner in which the current controversy has come to pass. The school's decision to relocate the music room below ground level is certainly logical from its perspective, but the procedural shortcomings associated with the unilateral implementation of its decision are troublesome at the very least.

Did the school inform neighbors of the change from the BZA-approved drawings? Yes, it did, but passively rather than proactively. The change was noted on drawings displayed at neighborhood meetings, but it was not highlighted in the electronic/paper newsletter that the school distributed weekly to a wider audience. And the fact that amended building permits were entailed was never spelled out in the meetings that either of us attended. Did the school bother to indicate to neighbors, systematically or otherwise, that

BZA
Case No. 16852
Exhibit No. 389

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16852
EXHIBIT NO.389

it was simultaneously increasing the square footage of space that could be used by students? No, it did not. And certainly it did not intimate that its unilateral decision to add 120 square feet of usable educational space has the potential to enhance the resale value of the property to a successor institution. This is an altogether legitimate concern given the unenforceable nature of many of the present conditions, and the school's public expression of interest in the Brady estate property for future relocation/expansion.

This episode illustrates, as amply documented in many venues of late, the propensity of St. Patrick's to work around the edges, to persist in a pattern of just slipping through, to push the envelope until the envelope is so full that the only logical recourse is for the relevant authorities to make the envelope bigger.

They should not.

We are firmly convinced that it is incumbent on the BZA, having approved this massive change in the structure of the neighborhood in the first place, to do everything within its power to ensure that the wounds inflicted by the change are given time to heal. This almost certainly cannot occur if an expansion in the school's usable physical plant, and hence its potential headcount of students and staff, is allowed to occur by BZA sanctioning of the "oops, I forgot" approach to change.

The envelope is already too big, and should not be made larger. We do not think that the school has anywhere near enough experience with operating in the neighborhood to justify formal or inadvertent endorsement of its expansionary potential. It is our considered opinion that St. Patrick's can best establish its *bona fides* as a good neighbor by doing what it said it was going to do in the first place. It would be extraordinarily counterproductive to exacerbate the already heightened community sensitivities in this regard.

There should be no approval of the request for clarification and approval in the absence of significant modifications in the conditions applicable to school operations, particularly as regards the governance and reporting of compliance enforcement and community liaison activities.

Very truly yours,

Cathy M. Wright

Lawrence T. Skrivseth