Board of Zoning Adjustment Hearing
March 26, 2002
Rock Creek International School
Variance Application 16855

Statement by Judith Dollenmayer
1517 Elliott Place, NW
Washington, DC 20007 dollcom@erols.com

Good morning, Chairman Griffis and Board members. I am Judith Dollenmayer, member of the Friends of Hardy board and former ANC2E District 1 commissioner 1994-98, the period when RCIS obtained its initial lease on Hardy School.

In 1998-99 I strongly backed the lease of Hardy to Rock Creek International. As you recall, the Control Board asked DCPS to put up for sale a number of properties like Hardy. The neighborhood was convinced Hardy should be kept in the public inventory and perhaps returned to use as a public school. I still believe education is among the highest and best uses of DC property. But the Foxhall / Palisades neighborhood is very close to critical mass in its ability to accept more school expansions within less than one square mile. By this fall, our neighborhood's critical mass of operating and/or expanding schools will include one public school, seven private or parochial schools, and GWU's university campus (not counting Georgetown University or the tiny River School).

Next month you will hear St. Patrick's School's application for yet another expansion. Rock Creek and other private schools inadequately anticipated their space needs, and are stuck with "making do" in properties too small. Yet the "baby bulge" that began in 1990 has been perfectly obvious for a decade.

Now, as those children enter middle grades, most private schools want to expand beyond K-5, claiming a "supply crisis" exists for post-fifth-grade students and their parents. Few of these parents, by the way, are considering DC public schools as a solution to that crisis—our public schools are hardly "on their screen." But that's another discussion about what makes a city and a community work.

Now, Rock Creek and other schools maintain they are actively hunting expansion sites in the District. In Rock Creek's case, one must ask why their original lease proposal did not reflect their very foreseeable needs for the 10 years ahead. Now, with 7.5 years to go, Rock Creek asks our neighborhood to bear the burden of its lack of foresight.

It already overtaxes the public playgrounds and fields next door. Those facilities are public, heavily used by neighbors and their kids, who often feel pushed aside by inadequately supervised RCIS kids. How will an influx of older students change this situation? Not for the better.

To be sure, Rock Creek does not propose to break the student cap of 200 laid down in its 1999 lease—at this time—even though faculty numbers have already risen. But I predict we will be back here next year. Critical mass will be close to fission by then, in terms of neighborhood capacity for intensive traffic gridlock at two critical commuting periods. Again, we'll be asked to accept worse traffic, more inequitable use of DC public play areas, more students in a school whose students come mostly from outside the District of Columbia or from non-taxpaying resident families.

BZA
Case No. 16855
Exhibit No. 46
Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16855
EXHIBIT NO.46

Please consider the larger context of this variance request: the school's poor strategic planning, pressure on a residential neighborhood, and traffic gridlock. Please consider, at minimum, laying conditions on this variance if you fail to reject it:

- Require RCIS, at its mandated BZA quarterly meetings, to regularly update neighbors on the progress of its real estate search.
- Require RCIS to submit each semester a schedule of its outdoor activities and P.E. sports to the DC Hardy Recreation Center director, and then to abide by DCDPR decisions regarding appropriate shared use of the facility with neighbors, their children, and other permitted users.
- Establish penalties if RCIS continues to be uncooperative in fulfilling its agreed-upon 1999 commitment to monitor faculty parking and properly lock the security gate installed at the driveway RCIS shares with Hardy Rec Center.

Thank you for your time and attention.