Susan B. Taylor
3301 Highland Place, NW
Washington, DC 20008

May 4, 2003

Mr. Andrew Altman
Director, Office of Planning
801 North Capital Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002
By Facsimile

D.C. OFFICE OF PLANNING
2003 MAY -5 AM 11:22

Dear Mr. Altman:

My family and I have lived in our home on Highland place for ten years. I have been involved with child advocacy for all my adult life. I was on the Steering Committee for, and have been very active in, a partnership program between my church and the 1994 kindergarten class at an elementary school in Petworth. The partnership program began ten years ago and continues with the '94 kindergarten group of children as they advance through high school, college, and/or vocational training. The partnership is now known as "STEP/I Have a Dream". I have been extraordinarily involved in the schools, both public and private, that my children have attended. I am a Board member of a nursery school that has a nationally recognized special needs inclusion program. Before I retired in 1993 to become a full time mom, I worked in commercial real estate development at the Kaempfer Companies. Notwithstanding my background and my commitment to institutions that advance the needs of children and their families, I oppose the current expansion plans at the National Child Research Center (NCRC).

It is important to review the history of NCRC's relationship with its neighbors because it will explain why we are where we are. NCRC and neighboring residents had lived in relative harmony for 73 years. Recently, that relationship has deteriorated. In the last two years it has been severely compromised by distrust.

In 1994, NCRC rebuilt its playground and playhouse. In the process, it removed numerous mature trees, added concrete sidewalks and decks, and altered the doors and windows of the playhouse. It did not seek any of the necessary permits for this work. Neighbors were upset and contacted the center. The appropriate District permitting agencies were contacted. Affected neighbors and the center worked out an agreement by which NCRC committed to replant trees and add additional landscape features to restore some of the visual green space it had destroyed. The current plans will obliterate all of the restorative work NCRC committed to at that time.

In 1997, NCRC placed notices on its property announcing its plan to appear in front of the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) to increase its Certificate of Occupancy from 90 to 120 students. Neighbors were alarmed and many of us contacted the center. When I called NCRC, I was told that the request was merely a formality to align District licensing and permitting requirements. The center assured the neighborhood that no changes in the maximum number of students would occur. The Acting Director sent a letter to the neighbors describing NCRC's current conditions and future plans (Attachment A).

BZA
Case No. 16970
Exhibit No. 154

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16970
EXHIBIT NO.154

Only because the neighbors were assured by NCRC that its enrollment would not increase, did the neighbors support the Center's 1997 application. We took the student enrollment figures provided to us by NCRC (108), as fact. Instead, the neighbors shifted their focus from concern about a possible expansion, to seize an opportunity to remedy NCRC's intolerable traffic. We had experienced a gradual but persistent increase in traffic generated by the center. District Agencies and Civic Associations affirmed our concerns. A number of traffic mitigating responsibilities were incorporated into the 1998 BZA Final Order. There are two critical elements to this process. First, the BZA Order was set for a period of 8 years; a length of time decided on specifically to evaluate the efficacy of the traffic mitigating conditions. Second, every entity that reviewed NCRC's 1997 application did so using a figure of 108 for enrollment. NCRC has subsequently stated that its enrollment at the time was 168. All of the evaluations were based on figures that were approximately thirty percent lower than NCRC's actual numbers.

Despite NCRC's commitment to its neighbors in 1998, four years later it announced its plan to expand. The current expansion plan includes the addition of ten students above its 2002/2003 enrollment of 171. It wants the right to an annual 2% enrollment "fudge factor", raising its potential enrollment to 185. It includes 6 additional staff members above its current staff of 38. And it includes the construction of approximately 9,000 square feet, doubling the size of its existing facility. The additional space would enable NCRC to ultimately add 50 more students. If you understand the history, it is easy to understand why neighbors are united in their opposition to NCRC's expansion as proposed (Attachment B). Our support in 1998 is now being used as the basis for NCRC's case for its right to expand.

As I read through the Office of Planning's (OP's) supplemental report dated May 4, 2003, the two critical issues cited were 1) the uniqueness of the NCRC property and 2) a District Agency created adverse impact by requiring NCRC to separate its proposed new building from an existing structure. NCRC's proposed new building will destroy the very unique qualities in the property's topography that OP describes as unique. Have you looked at the plans? The first story of the new building will be covered by dirt and grass. There will no longer be a hillside sloping down from Highland Place to Ordway Street. And the visual line from Highland to Ordway will be obliterated. A passer by on Ordway Street will see only a two-story wall.

As to OP's second concern, it is my understanding that Mr. Callcott recommended that NCRC separate the buildings to conceal the massive quality of the structure, he did not require it. And, even if the two buildings were connected, I believe there would still be a compelling argument that a second principal use structure would exist on the lot. The existing playhouse has never been permitted a use other than as a caretakers cottage. In fact, NCRC renovated the building in 1994 and converted into a second principal use building.

Further, OP has a mandate to monitor the relationship between institutions that operate as special exceptions in residential neighborhoods and the residents. Part of this monitoring responsibility is to ensure that Ward Three's "most outstanding characteristic...low density, stable residential neighborhoods" be preserved and protected. (Comprehensive Plan 14 D.C.M.R. § 1400.2(a)(1)). My neighborhood is not being protected. In fact, the conditions created by NCRC make our

streets "unsafe" (Attachment C). And the "solution" proposed by DDOT will imperil a quality of life that the residents have enjoyed for 100 years. NCRC has created the adverse impact and unsafe conditions. There are simply more vehicles traveling to and from its facility than the adjacent streets can absorb. NCRC does not have to expand to continue its excellent programs, it wants to.

Lastly, OP's report does not consider the scope of NCRC's services. In addition to operating a childcare facility, NCRC hosts several weekend events throughout the year, and operates a summer camp. The impact on the neighborhood is 11 months out of the year and numerous weekends.

This is not a situation in which neighbors have been unwilling to accept inconvenience, or even adverse impact, from an institution's presence. This neighborhood has accepted adverse conditions created by NCRC for a number of years. And it has done so because the neighbors cherish the center and what it provides to young children and their families. But now we are in a nightmare. NCRC claims there are no legal limits to its enrollment. NCRC claims it can place 120 students on its campus at any given time. The 8-year traffic evaluation period placed by the 1998 BZA Order to protect residents from institutional adverse impact, has been superseded by NCRC's current application to expand. Existing traffic conditions are not merely adverse; they are "unsafe". The "solution" to the current unsafe conditions proposed by The Department of transportation (DDOT) is to make Highland Place and 33rd Place one way. That solution will place additional adverse impact on the neighborhood and the residents will bare the sole burden of this impact (Attachment D). DDOT's efforts to remedy an unsafe situation should not reward an institution that has exceeded its operating permit and, in the course of it, effect a change on those of us living here that causes additional burden.

It appears that District Agencies are not seeing the complete picture of NCRC and its neighbors. The Cleveland Park community spent so long convincing the District Government that the traffic on a residential Street, 34th Street, should not adversely impact the residents so that commuters from Maryland could get to their work places more easily. Now, residents on tiny streets adjacent to an early childhood development center are being told that the quality of their lives must be severely diminished so that families commuting to the center can get there more easily. This doesn't make any sense. It appears that OP is willing to sacrifice a stable residential community so that a preschool can expand. NCRC has created the overcrowding that exists on our streets. NCRC wants to expand beyond what its location can tolerate. The "solution" is for NCRC to bear responsibility and reduce the number of vehicles associated with its operation. It certainly should not be allowed to expand. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

Susan B. Taylor

Susan B. Taylor

Cc: Mr. Dan Tangherlini
Mr. Geoffry Griffis
Ms. Kathy Patterson

Attachment "A"



NATIONAL CHILD RESEARCH CENTER
3209 Highland Place, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20008
Telephone (202) 363-8777
Fax (202) 244-3459

Kay Stafford
Acting Director

Dear Neighbor:

The National Child Research Center (NCRC) has operated a school at 3209 Highland Place, NW, for nearly 70 years. Originally founded as a research facility under a three-year grant from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller will, the school has continued as an independent school for young children. The mission of NCRC is to provide the very best in early childhood education. This has been the goal of the school and will continue to be so in the years ahead. Over the years NCRC has witnessed periodic changes in the regulations governing the District's preschools. It is for this reason that I am writing to you.

NCRC has a Certificate of Occupancy for its buildings, as well as a Permit for Child Care Facilities, issued by different administrations of the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs. The Certificate of Occupancy was issued in 1951 in the then current nomenclature for a 90 student "Nursery School & Kindergarten & Elementary School." Currently we do not operate a kindergarten or elementary school, nor do we have any plans to do so. Nursery schools are now named as "Child Development Centers," and the most recent facility permit for NCRC was issued for 120 children of "Ages two and one-half thru five." Although these differences have existed in the permits for a number of years, we are now advised by the Service Facility Regulation Administration that the Certificate of Occupancy issued by the Building and Land Regulation Administration must be conformed to the Child Care Permit. Because we are located in a residential area, any change in the Certificate of Occupancy must be approved by the Board of Zoning Adjustment with a full application and hearing.

In the coming days, notices will be mailed and posted of the filing of the application and the date of the hearing. We want you to know that this is a completely paper matter. The school is not contemplating any construction or change in the maximum number of students, which currently stands at 108. I wish to assure you that there will be no changes in our daily operation or original mandate of providing a safe, stimulating educational experience for young children.

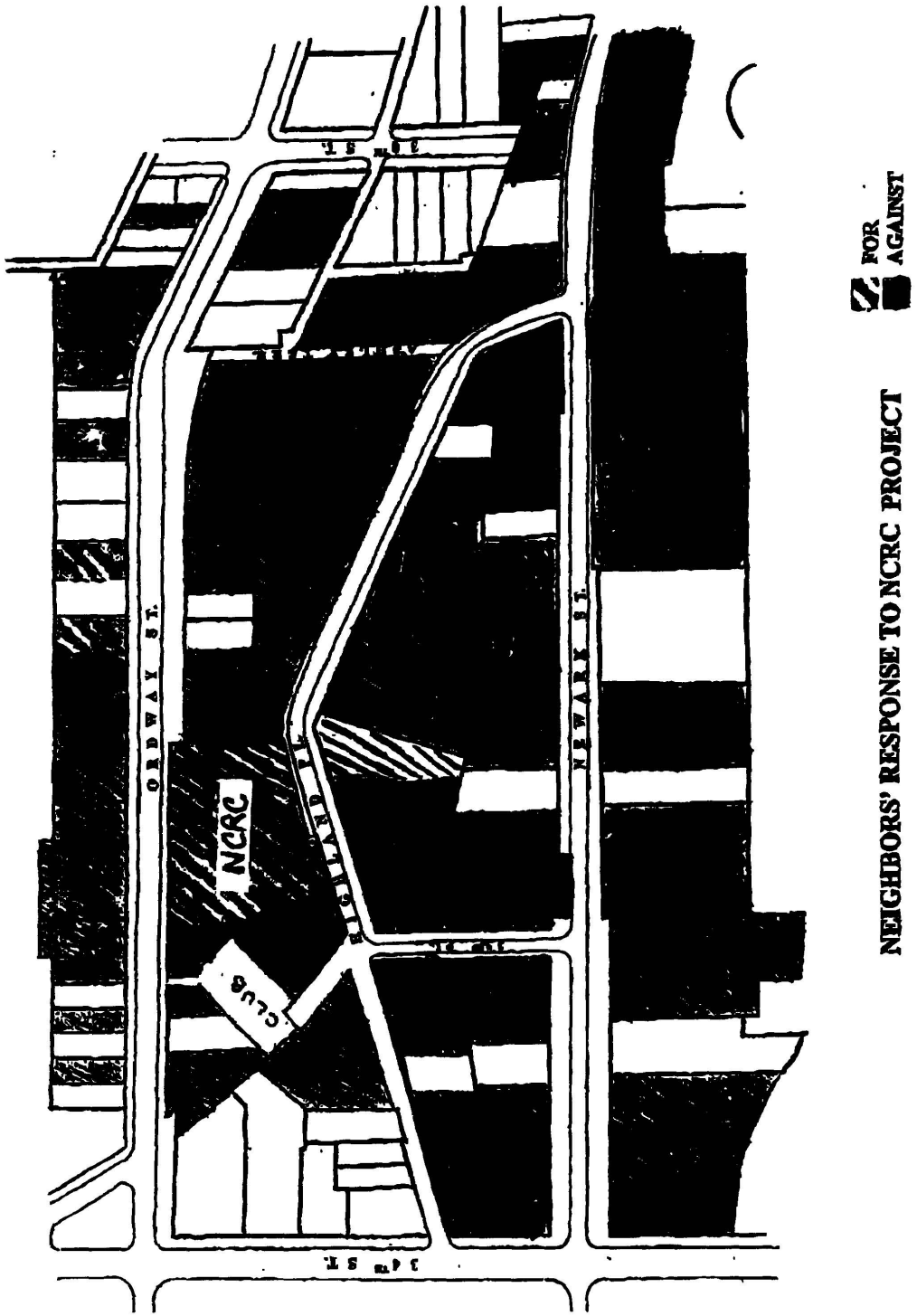
In order to answer any questions you may have, we are holding an informal, informational meeting on October 28th at 7:30 pm in the Annex Building on the playground. Please come and invite any interested neighbors to attend. Please also feel free to call me at 202-363-8777.

Sincerely yours,

Kay Stafford.

Kay Stafford
Acting Director

Attachment 15



FOR
AGAINST

NEIGHBORS' RESPONSE TO NCRC PROJECT

also like to indicate that none of these options have the full support of the applicant and opponents. However, DDOT does believe that these options can have a positive influence on the existing transportation safety conditions. The four options DDOT examined include:

- **Option I: Do Nothing**
  Under this option, the existing situation would remain as is. DDOT finds that residents and NCRC generated traffic are aware of the traffic issues involving Highland Place and that this understanding of the situation naturally encourages people to drive more safely and with caution. Additionally, there has been no history of any accidents taking place on this street. It would then be up to the residents of Highland Place, NCRC parents and NCRC staff to work together to make the situation as safe as possible.

  The benefit of this option is that neither the neighborhood residents nor the school will be asked to make any sacrifices above and beyond what sacrifices are being made now in terms of dealing with a frustrating and unsafe traffic situation. The obvious shortcoming of this option is that we believe existing conditions on Highland Place, NW are unsafe and anticipating no future accidents is perhaps wishful thinking.

- **Option II: Adjust NCRC's Traffic Generation**
  Under this option, the school would be required to reduce the traffic on Highland Place by either decreasing its overall enrollment, reducing overall vehicle trips, or accepting a larger percentage neighborhood students who would presumably then be able to walk to school, while decreasing the percentage of out-of-neighborhood students.

  DDOT's main interest here is to reduce the number of vehicle trips and thereby reduce exposure to unsafe driving conditions. The fact that the NCRC is essentially a pre-school limits some transportation options such as carpooling, transit, or shuttle bus solutions to reduce traffic volumes. DDOT has no authority over the enrollment of students at a school, and therefore leaves it to the BZA to determine if this is a proper solution.

- **Option III; Regulatory Solution**
  A regulatory solution has been proposed by the NCRC in their revised Transportation Management Plan, and would include:

  - Staggered drop-off and pick-up operations that will utilize the north curb as a drop off lane from 8 am – 5 pm during the weekday or during peak AM and PM time periods;
  - Monitoring drop-off and pick-up operations on Highland place by two uniformed persons or off-duty police officers from 8:15- 9:15 each morning classes are held;
  - Community liaison process;

Attachment "D"

- Addressing faculty and staff parking by NCRC by providing staff a financial incentive to use public transportation through participation in the Metrocheck program; and
- Limit of 3 special events in any 12-month period held only on Monday-Saturday when school is not in session.

DDOT could provide the school additional curb space in front of the school for loading and unloading operations by eliminating a residential permit parking zone adjacent to the school and utilizing an existing no parking restriction in front of the school during school operating hours for student drop-off and pick-up.

The benefit of a regulatory solution is that it could be implemented quickly and, if run properly, positive results would presumably be felt in a short period of time. The downside of such a regulatory solution is that it would depend on constant monitoring to ensure people were abiding by the new regulations.

- **Option IV: Engineering Solution**
  A possible engineering solution would be to redesignate Highland Place, NW from Newark Street to 33rd Place as a one-way westbound road. Creating a one-way westbound road would allow for the north side curb to retain its existing residential permit parking, provide a queuing lane in what is now the westbound travel lane, and the existing eastbound lane would become the through lane.

  The benefit of such an engineering solution is that it would create a safe traffic condition because it would eliminate the competing interests for use of the existing eastbound lane.

  The disadvantage of the engineering solution is that it places the burden solely on the residents of Highland Place, NW and would require some traffic safety modifications to 33rd Place NW, which would now be receiving all of the traffic exiting from Highland Place. As previously stated, none of these options provide an ideal transportation solution.

The Department, at this time, is strongly considering implementing Option #4 as the most direct means of addressing the existing transportation safety concerns on Highland Place, making Highland Place a one-way street, westbound from Newark Street to 33rd Place, NW. This solution would eliminate our concern about westbound traffic having to cross over into the eastbound travel lanes to bypass the NCRC line of queued vehicles. Cars would no longer be making illegal U-turns on Highland Place, and traffic congestion would be reduced along Highland Place. This recommendation does not address our concerns regarding the narrow sidewalks on Highland Place, however, one-way traffic on this road would reduce the potential vehicular/pedestrian conflicts on the roadway. This option does not address problems with parents blocking driveways, running stop signs and parking illegally. However, these are traffic enforcement issues that cannot be easily addressed with additional regulatory or traffic engineering solutions. The Department

Susan B. Taylor, c/o
William W. Taylor, III

Direct Telephone: 202-778-1810
Direct FAX: 202-659-0014

FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION COVER SHEET

TO: **Andrew Altman**
Director, Office of Planning
202-442-7638

Dan Tangherlini, Director, DOT
Geoffrey Griffis, Chair, Board of Zoning Adjustment
Jerrily Kress, Director, Office of Zoning
202-727-6072
(Same number for all three;
upon receipt, please copy
and deliver to each party)

Kathy Patterson
Councilwoman
202-728-2806

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FROM: **Susan B. Taylor**

CLIENT NO. **009**

DATE: **May 5, 2003**

NO. OF PAGES (not including cover sheet) 7

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