Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3-D
P.O. Box 40846
Palisades Station
Washington, D.C. 20016

November 11, 2003

Mr. Geoffrey Griffis
Chair
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 210-S
Washington, DC 20001

RE: Application 17081, St. Patrick's Elementary School

Dear Chairman Griffis:

ANC 3D, with a quorum (4) present at all times, and with proper notification of this meeting to the public, heard a presentation at its November 5 meeting from St. Patrick's School on the need to establish a new faculty and staff cap for its elementary school. ANC 3D believes that the school deserves to be commended for coming forward, however belated, with a solution that will end a years-long legerdemain and establish a cap that realistically reflects the current size of faculty and staff.

St. Patrick's Elementary School informed the Commission of its Application (#17081) to the BZA for a hearing and to ask for the Commission's approval of a proposed new cap on faculty and staff. Considerable discussion ensued on the concept and impact of FTEs (Full Time Equivalents), as it was difficult for some members of the Commission to understand the necessity for this new method of counting faculty and staff. Concern was expressed by some members of the Commission that by allowing the FTE method of counting there is less assurance the school would stay within its numerical cap, while also acknowledging the need to find employment for teachers who, for a variety of reasons, might need to move from full-time to part-time teaching or to administrative status.

Peter Barrett, Headmaster of the school, maintained that the cap it is currently seeking is imposed by provision in the zoning code that states the school must provide 2 spaces for every 3 employees. As parking has reached capacity in the school's gymnasium, and in the space it leases from the Army Corps of Engineers, which the Headmaster claimed was a visitor's lot (BZA #16852, May 21, 2002, page 258), and in the diagonal spaces leased from the District, any spillage into the surrounding neighborhood would become objectionable to neighbors. The ANC is hopeful that the new cap proposed by the school will be strictly adhered to. If it is, it will help reduce the distrust that has built up over the years between the school and the ANC. The new cap also will end a charade played out by the school and its lawyers over the past decade that the BZA had imposed a cap only on "staff," not on the size of the school faculty. During that period, St. Patrick's faculty and staff grew from 60 to 103. The school has admitted the errors of its ways in seeking a new cap that reflects the real size of its faculty and staff. ANC 3D also would like to take some credit for calling the school's attention to its misleading cap of the past.

The underlying purpose of a cap on faculty and staff, of course, is to make sure a school lives within its boundaries and does not impose objectionable conditions, such as parking, upon its neighbors. Even with the proposed new cap for St. Patrick's, parking by private schools remains a problem in our Palisades neighborhood. St. Patrick's Elementary School shares Whitehaven Parkway with George Washington's

BZA
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Mt. Vernon Campus, Our Lady of Victory Elementary School and The Lab School of Washington. Some of these schools employ numerous teachers, probably in excess of BZA caps, who find they must park on residential streets because their campuses cannot supply off-street parking. Many neighborhood streets are currently filled to capacity with cars from outside the neighborhood. It is no longer a situation where the parking is "likely to become objectionable" under Section 206 of the zoning code. Private school parking has become objectionable and therefore a specific cap that reflects reality is critical in the case of St. Patrick's and in the future for other private schools in the Palisades neighborhood.

With two distinct locations--the elementary school on Whitehaven and a new junior high on MacArthur and Ashby St., some Commissioners expressed concern about overlap and sharing of faculty and staff on both the elementary school and junior high campuses as this could lead to potential problems in tracking teachers on both campuses in the future.

As a result of its deliberations ANC 3D strongly encourages inclusion of the following conditions when the BZA Order for this application is written:

1. St. Patrick's Elementary School will hold quarterly meetings with ANC 3D and the community;

2. St. Patrick's Elementary School will not return to the ANC or the BZA for any further expansion of faculty, staff or students for a period of five (5) years from the date of issuance of the BZA Order; and

3. St. Patrick's Elementary School will provide the ANC and the BZA with a yearly report on staffing and faculty levels with a break down of full-time and part-time employees.

After weighing the proposal from St. Patrick's Elementary School, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D, voted 7-0-0 to approve, with conditions, the "[S]pecial exception to permit 93 faculty and staff for an existing child development center and private school in the R-1-B Zone District pursuant to Sections 205 and 206 of the Zoning Regulations at premises 4700 Whitehaven Pkwy., NW (Square 1372 and Square 1374, Lot 5)." The Commission hopes the BZA will accord the Commission's views the "great weight" to which it is entitled by law.

Sincerely,

John W. Finney
Chair