BROAD BRANCH MARKET
BZA Application 17147

Anne Mohnkern Renshaw
Commissioner, ANC 3/4G-03
April 20, 2004

At the time of the ANC meeting on March 22, 2004, there was no final traffic report on the Broad Branch Market/day care operation, only a verbal summary given by a traffic consultant.

One copy of the traffic report was made available to the ANC a week later, after the vote.

At the time of the ANC meeting, the LaFayette Elementary School principal, Lynn Main, had neither been approached by the applicant, his attorney, nor the traffic consultant. As late as April 16th, the LaFayette principal had "not talked to anyone" about the Broad Branch Market/day care center. LaFayette Elementary School is located on Broad Branch Road, close to the Market.

LaFayette School has 530 preschool and elementary school children. They arrive anywhere from 7 AM to 8:45 AM when school begins and leave at 3:15 PM. There is an after-school program that runs until 6 PM.

145 babies, ages 3 to 6, are enrolled in LaFayette's pre-kindergarten or kindergarten in the newer part of the school diagonally across from the Broad Branch Market. Parents park anywhere they can find a place," according to Ms. Main. It takes approximately 10 minutes to get a child out of the car and into the school. Some teachers stand by to help. The majority of the 145 little ones are walked to the door. There are 2 adults (teacher and aide) for each 20 pre-K and kindergarten children. All the younger children are on the first floor for ease in getting the children in and out of the building. (The pre-K children are chosen by a lottery held in March. This year, 67 enrolled; the school takes the first 60, with the rest on a wait list. So far, two pre-K children have dropped off, leaving 5 children on a wait list.)

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Ms. Main, in an e-mail to me today said that she has a superintendent's meeting this afternoon and could not attend the BZA meeting. She looked over the traffic report and other materials that I provided her and feels that LaFayette will be able to work out the traffic issues for both locations.

We know from previous daycare/private school cases, how parking, drop-off and pick-up can quickly become neighborhood irritants. In some BZA cases, neighbors of day care centers and/or private schools have told the Board of school-bound cars parked in their driveways, blocking the end of their driveways, double-parked in the street, parked in METRO bus zones and/or driving around and around the blocks looking for a space to park or keeping a place in the drop-off or pick-up queue.

The Broad Branch/Northampton Street neighbors deal with a lot of morning and afternoon traffic generated by LaFayette School. Their strong PTA organization and responsive principal work together to minimize problems in the neighborhood.

Yet, in the matter of the proposed Broad Branch Market/day care, the community and the ANC, in my opinion, do not have a full grasp of the day care operation because, at the time of the ANC meeting, it was discovered that the day-care provider was tentative. One individual from the day care organization was present at the ANC meeting; few questions were directed his way as there was no concrete deal between the developer and the proposed day care board at that time.

Therefore, all the normal questions that a community should inquire of a day care provider (actual number and ages of enrollees, hours and days of operation, emergency contact, staff arrangements, whether the school will advertise, number of special event days/evenings, location of handicapped parking and term limit) remain vague. The promise of children being walked to school, which we have been told will happen with this day care operation, is really determined by the weather, distance, parents' schedules and numerous emergencies that pop up on a daily basis.

There is a sense that the community wants the market to reopen. The building, after all, is an eye-soar. LaFayette teachers would like a nearby place to buy sandwiches and soup at noontime. The children, of course, want their popsicles. But this is a business. And there will be delivery trucks (just how many and when, is unknown) and vehicles competing for market and/or day care parking spaces. The Broad Branch and Northhampton corner (and side streets) will be even busier. There will be more traffic off of Nevada and McKinley onto Northhampton and Broad Branch Road which, by the way, the neighbors have told the ANC they do not want. Traffic diversion and cut-through traffic are huge issues in the Chevy Chase area. With the Broad Branch Market/day care center, we have a new destination for traffic which, in the long run, may be significant.

The Board will analyze these points, among others, to assure that if there is to be a restored and expanded market (perhaps even with outdoor seating), together with a day care center for 60 children "at any one time" (complete with an outdoor play area), that the proposed new use ultimately fit into and enhance, not overwhelm, the neighborhood.