Testimony for BZA, Case # 17149

By Martha Black, June 29, 2004

My name is Martha Black. I reside at 3510 Quebec Street, NW, two blocks from Sidwell Friends School. I have lived in the neighborhood since September, 1969.

I have been a neighbor during four construction projects at Sidwell. The first was the addition of 2 floors at the Middle School in 1970. (BZA Approval #10460). Then, it was the building of the gym, Art Center and maintenance building (BZA Approval; 12945) and addition of classrooms, (BZA Approval #15769). All of these projects have been disruptive to the surrounding neighbors, institutional and private homes. All have been relatively brief in duration.

The current application to BZA is for a master plan for the addition of 3 new facilities – parking garage, gym and meeting house, and additions and serious renovations to 3 current facilities—the Middle School, Arts Center and Kenworthy gym.

When first presented to the community in July, 2003, Sidwell projected that the construction could take 7 to 8 years. They have now added a respite time between the construction of the garage and the Middle School addition and renovation and the rest of the project of up to 5 years, presumably to raise money to complete the concept.

A project of this magnitude will be enormously disruptive to the neighborhood. While we wish the school well in its academic programs, we are very concerned about the health and safety of our residents during this massive undertaking.

My ongoing worry is that we still do not know what you are being asked to approve. A master plan and concept are good ideas, good first steps, but the design of the Middle School addition and renovation is not final. Drawings shared at an ANC 3C meeting June 7 showed for the first time a shed on the roof of the existing Middle School. By Wednesday, June 9, at a lunch a few neighbors were shown a drawing where the Middle School suddenly had bay windows. By the 1st BZA hearing those elements were gone and we now were shown four structures on the Middle School addition that exceeded the elevation of roof line.

We do not know what materials are going to be used on the façade. The 40 foot elevation noted in the Office of Planning report does not take into consideration the grade elevation of the site from the street level of at least 15 feet, nor does it address the 4 air exchange vents and stairwell.

ANC 3C Resolution, 2004-017. states "that any significant changes to the site plan as presented to ANC 3C and the Historical Preservation Review Board will be subject to ANC 3C review prior to consideration by the BZA"

BZA
Case No. 17149
Exhibit No. 69

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17149
EXHIBIT NO. 69

What constitutes "change". Should there be a time when no further changes are allowed?

The Middle School construction approval process, based on today's plans, will in all probability not be the way the extension and renovation will be built.

In a project of this magnitude it would make good common sense to approve each and every phase. Considering and voting on plans for any building still so much on the "drawing boards" just makes not sense. And, it does not assure that the buildings will be compliant to zoning regulations. We will be living with the final product for years.

I would urge the BZA to consider action on individual phases of the project. Approval in concept is great but I feel realities are what should be addressed by this body.