MICHAEL & MELEVA LOVENDUSKY
4927 MacArthur Boulevard NW
Washington DC 20007

8 April 2005

District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustments
441 Fourth Street NW Suite 210
Washington DC 20001

RE: Application # 17300, Special Exception to Increase Student Enrollment
St. Patrick's School, 4925 MacArthur Boulevard NW

Dear Members of the Board,

We urge you to deny St. Patrick's request to increase enrollment from 40 to 60 students at its middle school. The school faces opposite our residence across narrow Ashby Street. We were party opponents to St. Patrick's original application to establish the school in the midst of our neighborhood. The Board decided in Order 16852 to grant the special exception to establish the school with 40 students despite the express opposition of hundreds of adjacent and nearby residents and the unanimous opposition of the advisory neighborhood commission.

It is too soon to judge whether the school will further degrade the quiet of the neighborhood with its current enrollment and complicated traffic plan. The school has been open slightly more than one year and it has not had time to establish a track record. We urge the board to follow its own cautionary approach that a track record be established prior to granting a 50% increase in students. We notice that the shuttle bus is not as successful as anticipated and students are being ferried between campuses by a school car, a practice tantamount to a parent dropping off their child. Extra vehicular traffic is precisely one of the neighborhood's persistent concerns.

The degree of opposition to the school's establishment predictably produced extraordinary short term efforts by school officials to calm neighborhood objections. Unfortunately, grants of special exceptions are forever, and threats to neighborhood tranquility are already on the horizon. Benefactors have purchased 40 acres at 1801 Foxhall Road NW to establish St. Patrick's high school. Inasmuch as school officials testified to the Board merely five years ago that it had a "Master Plan" that it would not expand beyond elementary grades, the Board should inquire what the master plan is for five years hence.[i] A high school will constitute the third St. Patrick's school – more than any other private school in the District of Columbia, all of them within the Palisades. The question is whether the enrollment at the elementary level and the planned enrollment at the high school level relate to the proposed enrollment at the middle school. If the enrollments at either the elementary or high school levels exceed the proposed middle school levels, the instant application is based on faulty planning or worse.

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Beyond faulty planning, the true concern is that St. Patrick's will again change its plans to expand middle school enrollment and neither neighbors nor the advisory neighborhood commission will have sufficient influence to stop expansion in light of historical experience.[ii] Alternatively, by expanding the special exception for higher enrollment now, St. Patrick's enhances the value of the real estate it will sell to another institutional buyer should it decide to re-locate grades 7, 8 and 9. Middle schools are out of fashion and "a growing body of evidence is showing that preteen students do better when they can remain in their familiar elementary schools for longer."[iii]

The apparent eventuality of St. Patrick's busing students among three campuses within a two mile diameter in the heart of the Palisades is objectionable to we who live there. St. Patrick's middle school students do not live in the Palisades. Most live in Maryland and Virginia, and a few live in Spring Valley or other DC neighborhoods. Exceptionally few actually live in the Palisades. It strikes us as strange and unacceptable as a matter of public policy that District authorities permit a non-taxpaying private school to remove properties from the District residential tax base to benefit residents of foreign jurisdictions despite the objections of District taxpayers, especially those who live nearby the school properties.

For all these reasons we recommend the Board deny St. Patrick's application to increase enrollment at 4925 MacArthur Boulevard NW.

Sincerely,

For Michael & Meleva Lovendusky

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[i] "No additional grade levels, no additional students, no additional teachers, no additional cars" promised the school official under oath to the Board. Despite affirmation as late as the autumn of 2000 of its "decision to remain a school ending at grade six", the private school in December 2000 voted to expand to grades 7 and 8 and study the possibility of expanding further to grades 9 through 12. Application 16852, Record at 89 and 751.

[ii] The Board has never denied a St. Patrick's application for expansion:

- Application 14009, expanding elementary school, granted 1983
- Application 15374, expanding elementary school, granted 1990
- Application 16517, expanding elementary school, granted 1999
- Application 16852, expanding to middle school, granted 2003
- Application 16852-A, expanding order for middle school, granted 2004
- Application 17081, expanding middle school, granted 2004
- Application 17300, expanding middle school, pending 2005

[iii] "Middle School Goes Out of Fashion", *Wall Street Journal,* 4/16/05, p. D1, Anne Marie Chaker. The article observes that "many schools systems are starting to do away with middle schools and are increasing the number of elementary schools that continue through the eighth grade...In a review of 20 years of research on middle schools, Rand Corp....concludes that states and school districts should 'consider alternative structures that allow them to reduce multiple transitions across grades K-12' in order to capitalize on 'continuity of schooling and introducing changes gradually.'"