

1 community asked what is that the community needs to
2 see coming out of this building as a functioning unit,
3 we did indeed gave them a laundry list. And they did
4 indeed try to satisfy as much of that as they could.
5 That put a strain on the architecture, that put a
6 strain on the finances. And I think they've done a
7 remarkable job in trying to satisfy both the demands
8 of the community and the demands of the zoning.

9 VICE CHAIRPERSON MILLER: I think the
10 applicant did address this in part, but I'm just
11 curious from your perspective.

12 COMMISSIONER SPALDING: Yes.

13 VICE CHAIRPERSON MILLER: So for instance
14 specifically could there have been a gym without a
15 variance, do you know?

16 COMMISSIONER SPALDING: There could have
17 been a gym without a variance, perhaps. But then you
18 strip out almost all of the rest of the use of this
19 building. And just building a gym, although it's a
20 multipurpose kind of facility, really wouldn't have
21 satisfied the community I think.

22 When the Department came out and asked, we
23 really did give them a list. And they've tried to
24 incorporate as much of that as they can. And, yes, we
25 could have a stripped down facility, but I don't think

1 that that's really what's required in this case. I
2 think it's a community that needs multiplicity of
3 services.

4 I think the requests of zoning are
5 reasonable to accommodate a lot more service from a
6 multifunctional community center than, you know, a
7 basketball court would be.

8 VICE CHAIRPERSON MILLER: And in your view
9 are there any adverse impact as a result of the
10 variances?

11 COMMISSIONER SPALDING: There have been
12 none voiced to the ANC and the Commission has not
13 really heard any. The community is really pleased
14 that they have developed as many uses as they have out
15 of this building.

16 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: Anything else?

17 VICE CHAIRPERSON MILLER: No. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: Any other questions?

19 The applicant have any cross?

20 MR. BLANCHARD: No cross.

21 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: Thank you.

22 Thank you very much. We appreciate you
23 taking the time to come down and present that, and
24 excellent follow up to the questions asked.

25 Let's move ahead then. I don't have any

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 other -- or there any other government agencies
2 present tat would like to present tot he Board? I
3 don't have any other indicated as submitting into the
4 record.

5 Therefore, we can move ahead and ask for
6 those persons present that would like to provide
7 testimony in regards to this application 17386. If
8 you want to come forward at this time, persons in
9 support of the application, and make yourselves
10 comfortable. Is there anyone else that's going to
11 provide testimony in support, opposition?

12 MS. OLIVER: Good afternoon, Chairman
13 Griffis and Board members.

14 I'm Gail Oliver, Executive Director of the
15 Columbia Heights Youth Club.

16 To give you a small history of the Youth
17 Club, on December 1, 1954 the Columbia Heights Boys
18 Club was established. The Youth Club was located in
19 the basement of All Souls Church, Unitarian. The
20 Youth Club was established due to the call from
21 members of the church to provide an ongoing service to
22 then a growing "Negro" population, which was rejected
23 by the existing Boys and Girls Club, who refused to
24 serve "Negroes." The Girls and Boys Club decided to
25 move an the church established its own avenues to

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 serve the growing population.

2 In 1970 the Club opened its doors to
3 ladies and changed its name to the Columbia Heights
4 Youth Club. Since its inception, the Columbia Heights
5 Youth Club has remained committed to enhancing the
6 quality of life for children and youth in the
7 Washington metropolitan communities. We have provided
8 educational, recreational and personal growth
9 activities for approximately 250 plus youth annually.
10 Columbia Heights Youth Club serves as an alternative
11 place for entertainment, activities and moral and
12 social growth development.

13 Over the years, we have made several very
14 valuable partnerships in the community. The
15 Department of Recreation has been a major resource for
16 the Columbia Heights Youth Club through its summer
17 meals program, providing breakfast and lunch daily.
18 The Department of Recreation supported the design and
19 development of the Girard Street Playground and
20 remains an active member of FROGSPLAY, Friends of the
21 Girard Street Playground.

22 We use the playground daily during the
23 summer and almost daily during the school year. This
24 park is located directly adjacent to the new building.
25 Further, the Department of Recreation provides

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 security to the park. Ironically the staff person
2 hired to maintain the integrity of the facility and
3 the safety of our young people is none other than a
4 parent volunteer from the Columbia Heights Youth Club.
5 He has a long history with the Columbia Heights Youth
6 Club and five children that are active participants.

7 The gymnasium is a requirement for
8 organized and drop in sports and other related
9 activities. There is only one regulation style
10 gymnasium located in our community outside of our
11 community high school at Carodzo. The Columbia
12 Heights Youth Club has a gym. It was constructed in
13 1954 and is merely not adequate for the use today.
14 However, it is the only one available to an older
15 population in the community. While our gym is
16 obviously inadequate, it is widely used by many
17 community members, young people and a host of learner
18 communities. We currently provide space for other
19 community based organizations, grassroots groups, and
20 charter schools and of course the children and youth
21 that we serve.

22 With the construction of this new gym we
23 will be better equipped to serve the children and
24 youth in this community. We will increase the numbers
25 and variety of sports events and increase the

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 participation in community around team spirit, a
2 number of athletes coming from our community -- and
3 provide a number of athletes coming from our community
4 and provide another resource for children , youth and
5 adults to promote community and a healthy lifestyle.

6 We're anxious to have this building come
7 to fruition. It is heartbreaking to continue to serve
8 children in a youth facility that has been constructed
9 in the early '50s. We need a better place to provide
10 services to our population. Windows are the first
11 item requested by those that frequent our facilities.
12 Adequate bathrooms, classrooms and all that will
13 support a positive environment for the participants.

14 We are grateful to All Souls Church, and
15 they are aware of the needs of the basement that we
16 occupy. However, the building will provide a gleam of
17 hope that we have been so desperately looking for.

18 There is still a large number of African
19 Americans residing in Columbia Heights. There is also
20 a need to address issue that plague our community.
21 The Columbia Heights Youth Club remains involved in
22 the prevention and intervention of violence through
23 our partnership with the D.C. Department of
24 Recreation, the D.C. Children Youth Investment Trust
25 Corporation and other investors. It will allow us to

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 continue to provide after school and out of school
2 time programs, and our summer enrichment programs that
3 are limited because of space. With the construction
4 of the new building we will increase the number of
5 children and youth, increase the number of programs,
6 increase the visibility of the city's efforts to
7 better serve its children and youth, and restore the
8 equality of empowerment.

9 In closing, I have an old African proverb
10 that will sum up the need for this facility and new
11 home for the Columbia Heights Youth Club. And that
12 is, "It's easier to build a child than to repair an
13 adult."

14 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: Thank you very much.

15 Questions? Any cross? Indeed.

16 Thank you very much. It was very
17 informative.

18 Let me just ask quickly, the Columbia
19 Heights Youth Club have a contract or a relationship
20 with the Department of Recreation to utilize the new
21 facility?

22 MS. OLIVER: We're going to work on an
23 MOU. Also the church is getting ready to go under
24 construction. We've been there for 50 years. It's
25 really decayed. We've done well and we have nicknamed

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 ourselves "For Better Intent The Little Rascals." We
2 operate properly. We can maintain competitively, but
3 we're not in a very savvy facility. So we would like
4 to be able to come out, go into a facility such as the
5 one that's being built for the Department of
6 Recreation. And, hopefully, we will be able to call
7 that home.

8 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: Excellent. Thank
9 you very much. Very well.

10 Are there others that would like to
11 provide testimony today in support or in opposition?
12 No one else? Then let's move ahead to any closing
13 remarks, summations that you might have.

14 MR. BLANCHARD: Thank you, Mr. Griffis and
15 members of the Board. Again, I believe we have
16 provided testimony and you've also heard from District
17 agencies, the Office of Planning and the ANC and the
18 very experienced member of our community about the
19 needs for this center. And, again, I think it's the
20 programmatic needs that really drive the need to the
21 variances and the special exceptions. We are burdened
22 with this unusually shaped and the history of this lot
23 which provides the unique circumstances. And as
24 you've heard, the benefits that will accrue from this
25 new facility are numerous.

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 And so with that, if the Board is willing,
2 we would ask their indulgence to provide us with a
3 bench decision if possible and summary order if there
4 are no extraneous conditions that might be imposed.

5 That concludes our presentation.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: Excellent. Thank you
7 very much.

8 Any requirements for clarifications, final
9 questions?

10 We ready to roll? Indeed.

11 BOARD MEMBER ETHERLY: Mr. Chair, if there
12 isn't any further discussion, I would feel comfortable
13 and that the record is full, then I would approval of
14 application 17386 of the D.C. Department of Parks and
15 Recreation pursuant to 11 DCMR § 3104.1 for the
16 special exceptions as advertised herein and for the
17 area variance relief in three forms, as also
18 advertised herein, and I would invite a second.

19 COMMISSIONER PARSONS: Second.

20 BOARD MEMBER MANN: Second.

21 COMMISSIONER PARSONS: No, go ahead.

22 BOARD MEMBER ETHERLY: Thank you very
23 much. I'll defer to Ms. Bailey to break that tie.

24 I think the record is very amply full and
25 complete as it relates to both the special exceptions

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 and the variances. I'll speak to the special
2 exception first, and I think clearly there's a harmony
3 here with the zone and area plan. And clearly there
4 do not appear to be any adverse impacts that would
5 arise from the project as proposed. As was indicated
6 by some of my questions, I wanted to probe the issue
7 of parking because I felt that that might be the only
8 area where there might be some issues. But I think
9 the Department has taken significant steps to ensure
10 that there would not be any adverse impacts that arise
11 out of use of the parking spaces as they have been
12 delineated at the subject property.

13 With respect to the variances, I'll speak
14 very quickly just to the issue of some of the
15 challenges that are presented by the shape and
16 topography of the subjected location and then in
17 particular, as was indicated by Mr. Blanchard in his
18 presentation, the Monaco case is very instructive in
19 bringing to mind or calling to mind, of course, the
20 overall objectives and missions of the D.C. Department
21 of Parks and Recreation. And clearly that objective,
22 those missions were brought into play here as the
23 Department worked with the community as we've heard
24 from the ANC to pull together a building that is
25 really more than just an multipurpose building. It

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 really it attempting to satisfy a wide range of needs
2 in the community. And I think the Department has
3 taken excellent steps to do that. And as we've heard,
4 to do that in a way that will make it a very leading
5 and cutting edge facility, to pun indicated on the
6 word "lead" in terms of its effort to get the highest
7 certification possible.

8 I just think in short, Mr. Chair, that the
9 application is very full and has really captured all
10 of the key elements of the test here. And I'm very
11 happy to offer the motion.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: Excellent. Thank you
13 very much.

14 Mr. Parsons, any further comments,
15 deliberation? Good.

16 Mr. Etherly, you've done an excellent job
17 in terms of summation. The tests it's made.

18 I wanted to hit upon the unique site.
19 It's been said a couple of times in the testimony
20 today and also in the written submission about how
21 this is a uniquely site and one might look at this and
22 see we have a rectangular building. But in context of
23 what this building actually is and what it feeds, I
24 think I finally caught upon it in the hearing today is
25 the unique shape of the site is that it is not a

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 massive piece of grass of which one small structure
2 goes in the middle and it's surrounded by play fields
3 as one might picture this Parks and Rec. building, but
4 rather this is a difficult site to accommodate all
5 those outside requirements and then the programs on
6 the inside, which leads again to the issue of a
7 required relief from the lot occupancy and also the
8 gross floor area allowed in the building and putting
9 in the programs. Of course, those are the special
10 exceptions And looking at the variances you've laid
11 out, I would also agree in terms of your analysis and
12 also the applicant's, as well as the Office of
13 Planning's analysis.

14 The one that gave me some pause was that
15 of the height. And I think it was well discussed
16 today in terms of what is pushing the building up in
17 terms of the height. And I think it's very
18 persuasive.

19 I think the citing of Monaco case is an
20 excellent one in this predicament in terms of the
21 confluence of elements and how one balances that of
22 compliance with the regulations with the reasoning for
23 the existence of the building or programs. And really
24 that to me, not being an attorney, is the elements of
25 intent or persuasiveness that I have gleaned from

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 Monaco.

2 We have had past cases that have dealt
3 with that that perhaps other members or commissions
4 didn't agree with our interpretation. But here,
5 again, I think it is correctly put that Monaco is an
6 excellent insight into how we look at the threshold of
7 making the variance test or not.

8 In terms of the parking, I think it's
9 also a very delicate issue. And obviously in this
10 community, and in every community quite frankly, that
11 we hear parking is a problem. And certainly when we
12 start looking at the utilization of a more public
13 entity, I think of all of those that I've seen, though
14 specifically with this case, it's fairly clear that
15 there should be nothing and certainly the evidence
16 shows that there is nothing that is encouraging an
17 increased demand. And it may be, in fact, over parked
18 if we started putting in 22 spaces, and that's just
19 taking from the utilization of the area for other
20 programs and needs. And, again, it is subsequently
21 a balance. I think that balance has been well struck
22 and planned in terms of the parking by also granting
23 variance in the size of the parking spaces that are
24 required.

25 Going back to the design, I am incredibly

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 pleased. It goes somewhat beyond our review
2 jurisdiction, but I tell you it's very encouraging to
3 see something as creative a design that's happening on
4 a building such as this. We might think in this city
5 that we just give the lowest kind of easiest, most
6 cost efficient thing to a neighborhood that isn't, you
7 know, it's the height of the city and it isn't on the
8 main avenue through the neighborhood and so where we
9 can kind of get away with doing as little as possible.
10 And this just seems to be a great beacon, and who
11 knows what the correct analogy is. But it really
12 struck me as like a bright light on a corner, as the
13 record shows, has been one that has not been of great
14 utilization of mixed uses, let's say, or quality of
15 life elements.

16 So, I think again really shows the support
17 of this is not something that's just hey we're kind of
18 pulling it together and, boy, we really can't make the
19 regulations fit for us. But rather this is trying to
20 fit everything as correctly as possible and maximize
21 the utilization of the site itself to the benefit of
22 those in the surrounding area. And I think it will be
23 a benefit to the city itself.

24 That's enough for me. I'll let it open
25 for others if there's any other comments.

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 VICE CHAIRPERSON MILLER: I mean you all
2 said a lot already, so I don't want to be redundant.
3 But I do want to commend the Parks Departments for
4 working with the community so beautifully, it sounds
5 like. And I think that this is the type of case,
6 variance case that has these confluence of factors
7 where there is uniqueness and restrictions with
8 respect to the property itself. But there's also this
9 issue of the design being driven to a certain extent
10 to meet programmatic needs. And also by the fact that
11 it's not the situation where Department of Parks will
12 say okay, well I'll go somewhere else and put this
13 facility. It really has to be here because it's
14 rooted in the community. It's serving this community.

15 So I think that's a clear practical
16 difficulty that had to be met. And I heard no adverse
17 impacts. It's all positive. So I think it's a very
18 strong case here. And it's beautiful to see the
19 community and the District working so well together.

20 BOARD MEMBER ETHERLY: I think finally,
21 Mr. Chair, it's very good to note that the Office of
22 Planning and my colleagues and I we're all on the same
23 page with regard to the question surrounding the issue
24 of use variance. I'll characterize this as dicta
25 here, not instrumental for the actual decision, but I

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 think it is important to give the Department as much
2 flexibility and as much breadth, if you will, in terms
3 of the creativity around what types of uses, what
4 types of programs are made available in our
5 recreational facilities, and to give them by space.
6 By way of a supportive reading of our zoning
7 regulations I think will be a very helpful tool as the
8 Department continues to move forward with other
9 opportunities like this in other parts of the city.

10 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: Excellent. Thank
12 you all very much.

13 Is there any further deliberation?
14 Comments?

15 Now we do have a motion before us, it has
16 been seconded. I would then ask for all those in
17 favor signify by saying aye.

18 BOARD MEMBERS: Aye.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: And opposed?
20 Abstaining?

21 Very well, why don't we record the vote.

22 MS. BAILEY: Mr. Chairman, the vote is
23 recorded as five zero zero. Mr. Etherly made the
24 motion. Mr. Parsons was closest to me, and that's the
25 second that I heard. Other members voting, Mr.

NEAL R. GROSS

COURT REPORTERS AND TRANSCRIBERS
1323 RHODE ISLAND AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005-3701

1 Griffis, Mr. Mann, Ms. Miller all in support.

2 Summary order, Mr. Chairman?

3 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: Yes. I see no reason
4 why we wouldn't waive our rules and regulations and
5 issue a summary order in this case.

6 That being said, thank you all very much.
7 Well done, and have a pleasant afternoon.

8 Ms. Bailey, is there any further business
9 for the Board this afternoon?

10 MS. BAILEY: No, Mr. Chairman. That's it.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRIFFIS: Let's adjourn.

12 (Whereupon, the public hearing was
13 adjourned at 4:05 p.m.)

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25