

# **Government of the District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B**



## **RESOLUTION #4B-25-0602**

**In Support of 3rd St NW (Square 3269, Lot 0065) Application for Area  
Variance Relief as it Relates to Whittier Elementary Modernization Swing  
Spaces**

**Adopted June 23, 2025**

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B (The Commission) takes note of the following:

- The Property is located in the R-1B Zone District and is an upside-down L-shaped lot of approximately 283,200 sq. ft. The Property abuts a Square 3269 Lot 66 which is improved with the Ida B. Wells Middle School building, a D.C. public school, constructed in 2019. The School Building is located to the west of the Property. Abutting the Property to the north is the Takoma Community center. The Property is bounded by public rights-of-way along 3rd St. NW to the east and Sheridan St. NW to the south. The Property is located in the Takoma neighborhood.
- The surrounding area is primarily single-family residential homes. There is also a small swath of commercial uses to the southeast of the Property on 3rd St NW. The Property is not in an historic district, and the School Building is not a designated landmark.
- Traffic Conditions and Mass Transit the Property is well-served by Metrobus, with stops for Lines 62 and 63 two blocks away in front of the School Building on 5th St. NW. Additionally, the Takoma Metrorail Station is approximately 0.45 miles to the north of the Property. There is a Capital Bikeshare station within a block of the Property as well.
- The Applicant is conducting a renovation and modernization of the Whittier Elementary school located at 424 Sheridan St. NW (Square 3268 Lot 0811) across Sheridan Street from the School Building and one block away from the Property. Whittier Elementary School was constructed in 1926.
- In order to provide space for students during the renovation, the Applicant proposes to construct a modular trailer “swing space” campus (the “Swing Space”) on the Property. The Swing Space consists of five modular trailers, one tensile structure (bubble) (multipurpose space) and a concrete masonry structure for the electrical switchgear building that will have approximately

44,577 sq. ft. of gross floor area. Four of the five trailers will be dedicated to classrooms and support space and one trailer will be a kitchen. There will also be a canopy and walkway that is constructed to provide a path between each modular trailer. There is a baseball field on the north end of the Property that will remain untouched.

- The Swing Space will comply with all zoning standards in the R-1B zone. The buildings will have a total floor-area-ratio of 0.16 with up to 1.8 permitted for a school building. The Swing Space will have a maximum building height of 16 feet, with up to 60 ft. permitted for a school building. The total lot occupancy at the Property will be 16%, with up to 60% permitted. The Swing Space has a parking requirement of six spaces, which will be satisfied by the installation of a temporary parking lot at the Property. There is one loading berth in the parking lot, which will serve the Swing Space. The Swing Space will also provide 30 bicycle parking spaces, which meets the total requirement.
- The Applicant is seeking area variance relief for multiple primary structures on a single record lot. Each new primary building or structure must be erected on a separate record lot when located in an R, RF or RA zone. As a result of the Swing Space, there will be several primary buildings on the Property; therefore, area variance relief is needed. Under D.C. Code § 6-641.07(g)(3) and 11 DCMR Subtitle X § 1000.1, the Board is authorized to grant variance relief where it finds that three conditions exist:
  - The Property is affected by exceptional size, shape or topography or other extraordinary or exceptional situation or condition
  - The owner would encounter practical difficulties or undue hardship if the zoning regulations were strictly applied
  - The variance would not cause substantial detriment to the public good and would not substantially impair the intent, purpose and integrity of the zone plan as embodied in the Zoning Regulations and Map. 11 DCMR Subtitle X § 1001.
- In assessing the variance test, the Board may apply a more flexible standard of review for a public service organization, “especially where the organization is seeking the zoning relief in order to meet a public need or serve the public interest.” The flexible standard of review can be applied regardless of whether the applicant seeks to expand an existing use or add a new use to the property in question.
- As part of this reduced standard of review, the Board may more fully weigh the equities of an individual case, including the organization’s needs, in finding an exceptional situation or condition.
- The phrase “exceptional situation or condition” applies not only to the land, but also to the existence and configuration of a building on the land. Here, the Property faces the following exception situation and conditions:
  - The Swing Space will consist of prefabricated modular trailers that function as interim swing space for students. Creating the Swing Space with multiple, separate trailers - as opposed to one larger structure - is necessary for several reasons:
    - Allowing sufficient light and air into each classroom space

- Meeting DOEE stormwater requirements by providing green space between trailers
- Wood-frame construction type that limits maximum size of each trailer
- Separating each trailer by a minimum of 20 feet to avoid increased cost for fire and life safety compliance
- Transporting the prefabricated units on narrow public roads. ‘
- The Property is one of few large lots in the neighborhood where most lots are small residential lots. The Property’s large size makes it appropriate for multiple primary structures
- An applicant experiences practical difficulties when compliance with the Zoning Regulations would be “unnecessarily burdensome.” These practical difficulties are present whether the Property remains a single lot or if the Property were to be subdivided to provide a separate lot for the Swing Space.
- It is inefficient and unreasonable to construct the Swing Space as a single structure. One large structure would create more internal space with no access to natural light, which is not conducive to the learning environment. Likewise, one large structure would create challenges with meeting stormwater requirements and fire/life safety requirements. The smaller modular trailers are also significantly easier to transport to the Property on the surrounding neighborhood roads. Therefore, even if the Applicant were to subdivide the Property and construct the Swing Space on its own record lot, multiple structures on the lot would still be needed.
- The proposed swing campus is a temporary solution. The modular buildings proposed for the swing campus are specifically designed for quick installation and removal. Requiring these temporary structures to be consolidated into a single primary building would impose unnecessary design and construction challenges, particularly for a short-term use. Creating a meaningful connection between the trailers would pose practical challenges, particularly from a cost and budget perspective, given the expenses associated with enclosing, heating, and lighting the connection. Compliance with the zoning requirements would undermine the efficiency and flexibility that modular campuses are intended to provide, making it significantly more difficult to meet the District’s educational and logistical needs during the renovation period.
- The Variance Relief Will Not Cause Substantial Detriment to the Public Good or the Zoning Regulations and Maps The variance relief will not cause substantial detriment to the public good or Zoning Regulations. The Property will remain compliant with the zoning standards in the R-1B zone. In particular, the School Building and Swing Space are well below the maximum permitted lot occupancy, building height and FAR. There will be approximately 10,000 sq. ft. of open field space and multiple play spaces at the Property.
- The Swing Space is for a public-school use that is permitted by-right in the R-1B zone. Further, the Swing Space meets a public need in that it will minimize disruption for public school students during renovations. Ultimately, the Swing Space will help the Applicant and DCPS to achieve its goals of providing modernized facilities to improve educational outcomes for students and families.

**RESOLVED:**

1. The Commission approves the Application for Area Variance Relief as it Relates to Whittier Elementary Modernization Swing Spaces.
2. The Commission requests DGS in coordination with DCPS to distribute fliers to any affected neighbors and for a phone number to be available to call for any complaints.
3. The Commission designates Commissioner Keenan Courtland, ANC 4B03, to represent the Commission in all matters relating to this Resolution.
4. That in the event the designated representative Commissioners cannot carry out their representative duties for any reason, the Commission authorizes the Chair to designate another Commissioner to represent the Commission in all matter relating to this Resolution; 5 6. That consistent with DC Code § 1-309, only actions of the full Commission voting in a properly noticed public meeting have standing and carry great weight; and 7. That the actions, positions, and opinions of individual commissioners, insofar as they may be contradictory to or otherwise inconsistent with the expressed position of the full Commission in a properly adopted resolution or letter, have no standing and cannot be considered as in any way associated with the Commission.

**ADOPTED** by voice vote at a regular public meeting (notice of which was properly given, and at which a quorum of 8 members was present) on June 23, 2025, by a vote of 8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstentions.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KE' followed by a long horizontal stroke and a loop.

Keenan Courtland, ANC 4B03  
Secretary ANC 4B  
7/10/2025