

Dear Parishioners,

On October 30th the D.C. Government requested bids to construct a building at the southwest corner of Albemarle Street and Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., on the grounds of the Bernard T. Janney Elementary School and the Tenley-Friendship Neighborhood Library. To be constructed through a public private partnership (PPP) between the D.C. Government and a real estate development firm, the development would include the library, an underground parking garage, and a residential building perhaps 65 feet high with 100 or more apartments. This large project could have a serious impact upon the Saint Ann's Parish community.

Whether intentionally or not, the proposal's advocates excluded Saint Ann's from the early stages of planning. Once aware of the plan, we acted quickly to try to insure that it would do no harm to the children of Saint Ann's Academy, the people of Saint Ann's Parish and our Church buildings and grounds. Parishioners voiced our concerns at many meetings. Parishioners, Academy parents, the Chancellor and the staff counsel of the Archdiocese, and I wrote the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development thoughtful comments on the draft request for bids. Unfortunately, our efforts have had little influence on the final version of the request the Deputy Mayor sent to potential bidders. I must therefore report this matter to you publicly. I will begin with two general observations and then list our specific concerns.

First, Janney's School Improvement Team sought this development as a means of generating funds to repair, modernize and expand the School's facilities. The District Government plans to improve Janney in 2013 or so, but the SIT hopes to complete the job sooner through a PPP. As Janney's neighbor and as members of Washington's Roman Catholic Archdiocese which is deeply committed to children's education and which educates and serves people throughout the District of Columbia regardless of religion, we in the Saint Ann's Parish community support the goal of improving Janney School's facilities as quickly as possible in accordance with District of Columbia Public Schools policies and regulations. We remain unconvinced, however, that this development is the best means to achieve the goal.

Secondly, generations of Janney and Saint Ann's children have used Janney School grounds. A green space with a soccer field and playgrounds, surrounded by three schools and a library, this land is a publicly owned educational resource that will become increasingly valuable as our neighborhoods grow and Janney School grows to meet the needs. Yet a few D.C. Government officials have decided that this land has greater value for tax revenue than for elementary school education; they would (a) declare it is no longer needed for public purposes, (b) zone it for an apartment building, and (c) sell or lease it to a private real estate developer. Once this land is transferred, it will be lost to future generations of children. The Council of the District of Columbia Government must decide if this development uses the land wisely.

The residential building would be located on Janney School's soccer field. Its west side would be about 80 feet from Janney; its south side, about 20 feet from Saint Ann's Academy's front entrance. Its loading docks, garbage collection facilities and service areas would be on the south side. Comments: (1) The building should be located closer to Albemarle Street. (2) Any loading docks, garbage collection facilities and service areas should face Janney School or the Library.

The residential building and related structures pose environmental risks for parishioners and Academy students. Comment: The D.C. Government must make and publish an environmental impact study before approving any building on this site.

Construction might be extremely disruptive to Saint Ann's Academy. Excavating and removing thousands of cubic yards of dirt, driving heavy structural steel, and the daily work of skilled trades and crafts people will generate dust and noise that will prevent teachers from teaching and school children from learning. Janney children could be placed in public schools where there is underutilized classroom space. Saint Ann's does not have that option. Comment: The D.C. Government must assume responsibility for the collateral consequences of this project.

Construction would generate heavy traffic. Comments: (1) The bidder must route the flow of personnel, equipment, supplies and materials so as to avoid endangering parishioners and Academy children. (2) The bidder may not use the narrow paved alley which abuts Saint Ann's Church property on the west and is just feet from entrances to the Academy and some classrooms. This alley is intended to serve Janney School and Saint Ann's Church; it is not safe for heavy traffic.

The development raises serious law enforcement and security issues. Who will vouch for the residents of a building where the windows look out over the children of two elementary schools and where there may be easy access to elementary school campuses? The underground parking garage and the sheltered open space ("small plaza") at the southwest corner of Albemarle and Wisconsin could become venues for nuisance behavior, misdemeanors, and even criminal activities. An underground parking garage close to two and perhaps three schools, a public library and a Metrorail station might pose long-term security risks. Comments: (1) The development must separate the residential building and its underground garage from the schools. Residents and their visitors must not have uncontrolled access to school grounds and must not use the alley. (2) The Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department must certify that no element of this development threatens the health, safety or security of Saint Ann's parishioners or Academy children. (3) The U.S. Department of Homeland Security must certify that the underground parking garage is not a security hazard.

The development would generate traffic which must be routed so as not to endanger parishioners and Academy children. Comments (1) Saint Ann's will not grant an easement for this traffic. The Deputy Mayor must so inform all bidders. (2) The bidder must not route traffic into Wisconsin Avenue via the driveway on the Library's south side because it would endanger parishioners, Academy children, and other pedestrians who walk to the Library, the Tenleytown/American University Metrorail Station, and the stores on the west side of Wisconsin Avenue.

The development would generate a considerable demand for parking. Comments: (1) The development must have parking space entirely adequate for Janney teachers, Library patrons, residents, guests, service and delivery vehicles, and all other reasonably foreseeable purposes. (2) Residents' parking spaces must convey with the apartment or condominium, and must not be sold or rented separately because this maneuver simply encourages residents to park their vehicles on neighborhood streets. (3) The development must be designed to prevent the parking of residents' and associated vehicles on Saint Ann's property.

Construction risks damaging Saint Ann's buildings. Comment: The D.C. Government must require the bidder to exercise due care in the construction process and to be adequately and sufficiently bonded and insured against any damage occurring to Saint Ann's buildings and property.

The flow of underground water is a severe problem which affects a corner of the Church basement. The development could divert underground water into other buildings on Saint Ann's property. Comments: (1) The D.C. Government or the bidder must engage an urban hydrologist to determine the flow of underground water and its potential impact. (2) The findings must be published. (3) The permit process must approve plans for controlling underground water.

Saint Ann's property lies downhill from Janney School grounds. The development's buildings would present impermeable surfaces that could divert surface water onto Saint Ann's property. Comments: (1) The D.C. Government must require the bidder to prevent surface water from running onto Saint Ann's property. (2) The permit process must approve plans for diverting surface runoff.

The proposed residential building would be disproportionately high in comparison to the other buildings on or adjacent to the site. Comments: (1) To visualize the relative heights, the bidder must prepare two site sections (cross sections). One would run approximately parallel to Wisconsin Avenue and would include Saint Ann's Academy. The second would run approximately parallel to Albemarle Street and would include both Janney School and the Library. (2) These models must be prepared and included with bidders' proposals, and must be available for public viewing prior to bid approvals.

The concerns I have raised are not frivolous; indeed they are very serious. It is my hope that the D.C. Government will give them due consideration and incorporate them into the final plan for this development. Without such action, we will have no choice but to explore other options under the law to protect our interests and rights in this matter. This is not our preference, as such action would undoubtedly be time consuming and costly for all parties. However, there can be no compromising the health, safety and security of the Saint Ann's community, and especially the children, whose safety and protection are paramount. I certainly look forward to an amicable resolution of this matter.

Rev. Msgr. Godfrey T. Mosley
Pastor