

MINUTES
CLEVELAND PARK CITIZENS ASSOCIATION
Thursday, March 13, 2008
“Are Our Schools Ready for Our Students?”

CPCA President George Idelson convened and SRO meeting at 6:30 pm and advised that DC Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee would be the major speaker. Pending Rhee’s arrival, Idelson introduced Jeff Smith and Erika Landberg of DC VOICE, an independent non-profit organization for school reform

Smith and Landberg reported on the 2007 Ready Schools Project Community Audit, a volunteer initiative that collected data from 137 schools about a range of school readiness conditions: teacher recruitment and hiring (66% by the first day of school), training and professional development (86%); teaching and learning conditions – textbooks (78%), instructional supplies (86%), computers, (67%), internet access (76%), and safety and security equipment (82%) and personnel (93%); and basic maintenance of facilities (71%). Smith and Landberg noted that trends were up for hiring music and art teachers and librarians. Audience members expressed interest in having access to data on student and teacher populations for each school.

Rhee quoted Mayor Fenty as saying, “No one says no to Rhee except me.” She commended his leadership on school reform and the way funding, staff, and other resources have been deployed for cabinet-level agencies. She acknowledged support for change by the general public. Public education, she said, should be a social equalizer with children having first priority in all decision-making regarding the schools.

She said procurement remains a complex problem that will take time to resolve. In response to questions about the interaction between Federal “No Child” requirements and the proposed restructuring of high schools to begin with 9th grade, she said she is considering interventions, including summer transitional programs for students moving from 8th to 9th grades. While elementary school libraries are generally good, this is not the case in middle and high school and she wants to develop a long-term alignment between school and public libraries. To a Murch parent’s question about the future of that school’s interim principal, Rhee said she is now recruiting principals, requiring first level screening before she gets enters the process. Initial decisions are slated for the end of April. In response to a charge that she was

making too many decisions herself, she said schools would gain autonomy as they earned it. To a challenge from the floor that she had accused objectors to school closing decisions as “contentious,” Rhee denied the charge and said the process had been open with community feedback, and that the hard decisions she had to make couldn’t please everyone. Rhee said that short term answers to the continuing failures of the special education program would not solve the problem, and that she was focused on new strategies to solve it once and for all.. She hopes to develop partnerships with the DC arts community to strengthen arts education. Concern was expressed about Wilson High School (recent violence and the addition of 350 9th graders) and Rhee advised that her office is developing a plan to deal with the underlying as well as the on-site problems at Wilson. One Alice Deale parent asked about reductions in classrooms and students from feeder schools; Rhee advised that she will look into this and encouraged the audience to contact her (michelle.rhee@dc.gov) if they have questions. Idelson asked the Chancellor what she had to say to parents ambivalent about public versus private schools and wanted to know if the system would be there for them at the lower and upper grades? Rhee said parents should never forsake their children’s interests, but noted that her job is to make sure that DC public schools are a compelling option in the future.

Under new business, Lindsey Williams, introduced a proposed CPCA resolution (see attachment 1) regarding the Cleveland Park fire station on Connecticut Avenue, NW. CPCA members voted to approve the resolution without objection.

Idelson adjourned the meeting at 8:15pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Joan Buchanan, CPCA Recording Secretary

ATTACHMENT 1

WHEREAS the Cleveland Park Citizens Association (“CPCA”) exists in part to bring attention to community needs and opportunities to address these (and has been doing so since 1911); and

WHEREAS the fire station located along Connecticut Avenue NW in the midst of CPCA’s community has many failings owing to deferred maintenance; and

WHEREAS the fire station also lacks adequate parking for First Responders stationed there as it lots has very little open area and is unable to expand; and

WHEREAS the station is located within the Cleveland Park historic district; and

WHEREAS there is an area located to the rear of the station that is about one story above the grade of the station’s ground floor that abuts a public alley of a depth corresponding to the length of most passenger cars; and

WHEREAS the station is slated for long overdue and essential refurbishment; and

WHEREAS the First Responders cannot park their vehicles on area streets weekdays and weekday evenings as that conflicts with zones where Residential Permit Parking restrictions apply; and

WHEREAS a structural deck that could support automobiles of these First Responders, if found feasible by the Chief and those reporting to him on such matters and if approved by the Historic Preservation Board in concept, could greatly reduce or resolve the lack of parking for these First Responders; and

WHEREAS such a structure would be well behind any façade visible from Connecticut Avenue and would also cover an unattractive “pit” and would not appear to adversely impact the contributing elements of this building station to the historic district of which it is a part—

THEREFORE, the Cleveland Park Citizens Association requests the Fire Chief, those in his facilities management program, and others to evaluate the

prospect of including such a feature in the renovation and rehabilitation that is to be undertaken in the near future; and

FURTHER, that the CPCA convey copies of this RESOLUTION to the Fire Chief, Councilmembers At Large and Those Representing Wards 1 and 3 (both of which wards are in CPCA's overall area), Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3-C and the Cleveland Park Historical Society requesting that they work to achieve the ends herein identified.