



District of Columbia Government
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A
Box 75115
Washington, DC 20013



March 13, 2015

Ms. Jennifer Niles
Deputy Mayor for Education
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 303
Washington, DC 20004

Acting Director Jonathan Kayne
Department General Services
2000 14th Street, NW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Deputy Mayor Niles and Acting Director Kayne:

The process last fall to designate the Gibbs School surplus government property and the ensuing fast-tracked process to place a charter school there raises serious concerns for us as to transparency and public engagement in these processes. The Commission voted [7-0], with five required for a quorum, to share the following concerns and express our recommendation that the process for deeming government property surplus be revised to provide greater transparency and earlier community involvement in the decision. The vote took place at our regularly scheduled publicly announced monthly meeting.¹

Specifically, we urge you to:

- Consult with affected Advisory Neighborhood Commissions *before* deeming government building surplus.
- Give great weight to the recommendations of the ANCs before obtaining applications from charter schools for buildings deemed surplus.
- Conduct community impact studies before leasing vacant buildings to new entities.
- Submit all signed leases to D.C. Council for public review as required for leases of the standard 25 year term.

Our concerns are as follows:

1. The criteria by which DCPS and DGS uses to determine that a DCPS school is excess public property were not clear or transparent during the Gibbs process last fall. It was not clear to Ward 6 ANCs or education stakeholders what these criteria were.

Going forward, the process and criteria used to designate a DCPS property "surplus" needs to be clear and transparent, and take into consideration additional public uses than just a DCPS school building. The decision to deem a property "surplus" cannot be made without consulting the relevant community. DGS should have sought ANC6A's guidance regarding potential uses for the Gibbs site prior to asserting that there were no potential government uses for the property.

¹ ANC 6A meetings are advertised on the listserves anc6a-announce@yahoogroups.com, anc6a@yahoogroups.com and newhilleast@yahoogroups.com, at www.anc6a.org, and in the *Hill Rag*.

2. The ANC(s) governing the area surrounding the property were not given opportunity to weigh in until *after* charter applicants were selected for the a DCPS building no longer in use for DCPS purposes.

Going forward, community members – via their ANCs – should be given the opportunity to participate in the decision regarding a nearby building's use and reuse. Neighbors know their communities the best, and the District should involve surrounding neighborhoods on these questions before making a determination.

3. No careful analysis was conducted – that we could see during the Gibbs process – of the impact of a new charter opening in the excessed school building. This looks to be in direct opposition direct conflict with to residents' deliberate efforts – through ANCs, education stakeholder groups, neighborhood groups, and our Councilmembers – to create a safe, livable neighborhood for ourselves and a neighborhood feeder patterns for our families with school-age children.

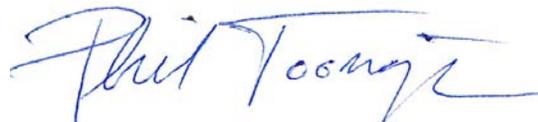
Going forward, the District should – in concert with the relevant ANC – objectively determine the impact the charter school applicant(s) has/have on our neighborhood safety, transportation, parking, and other livability factors. The District should also work with ANCs and school stakeholders to determine the impact on enrollment and viability at surrounding DCPS public schools and feeder patterns.

4. Government representatives repeatedly assured community members and our representative on the D.C. Council, that there would be a public process provided which would include D.C. Council review of the proposed lease of this property, but those assurances have now been withdrawn and the lease for this site was reduced from the “standard” 25 years, which would have required Council review, to 20 years, which does not require the lease be submitted to the Council.

Going forward, all such leases should be submitted to Council for review. If leases are going to vary from what DME has deemed the “standard” 25 year term, that should be communicated up front and the need to do so should be provided in writing. Where that does not happen, an inference of an intention to evade the public hearing process that is identified as the standard is made, which does not aid the responsible government entities, the applicant, or the community as they work toward building a new relationship. Either way, Council review should occur.

Thank you for giving great weight to the recommendations of ANC 6A.

On behalf of the Commission,



Phil Toomajian,
Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A

cc: Chancellor Kaya Henderson, D.C. Public Schools
Chairman David Grosso, D.C. Council Committee on Education
Councilmember Charles Allen, Ward 6 Councilmember