



May 5, 2015

Mr. Michael Quadrino  
Project Manager, Lafayette Elementary School Modernization Project  
DGS - DCPEP  
1250 U Street, NW, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Mr. Quadrino:

We are writing to express our concerns about the proposed bio-retention pond on the south hillside of Lafayette Park included in the Lafayette School Renovation plans. While we support the goal of reducing runoff from the park, we question whether the proposed plans are the best way to achieve that goal, and we fear that the current plans will degrade the park that we have worked so hard to improve for the community's benefit.

The Friends of Lafayette Park, as well as the larger community, have both expertise about park drainage and a strong interest in preserving the quality of the park. Yet, neither the Friends of Lafayette Park, nor the larger community, have been adequately informed or consulted about proposed changes to the park and school landscape, including the bio-retention pond. The planning process for the school renovation has generally done a good job of soliciting community feedback and keeping the community informed about changes to the school proper. But, the process of informing the community about plans for the bio-retention pond – as well as other proposed changes to the landscape at the park and school-- has not been sufficient.

As a result, we have several requests that we feel must be addressed before additional planning continues on the bio-retention pond and certainly before any alterations are made to the landscape.

Specifically, we are requesting: (1) disclosure of all plans affecting the landscape of Lafayette Park and school. We would like to have a detailed understanding of what the park and school landscape would look like when completed under existing plans; (2) a thorough review of alternative water retention strategies. We would like to know if there are alternative ways of achieving water retention goals, or if not, why alternatives have been rejected; (3) a discussion with FOLP and the community of current plans and alternatives; (4) ample time to review and respond to a presentation of plans and alternatives so that community input (including affected neighbors) can be incorporated into the planning.

More details on our questions and concerns are below.

- **Have alternative water retention measures received adequate consideration?** It may make more sense to capture water in the areas where the runoff occurs, such as on the north hillside,

the ball fields, the track, and the eastern edge of the park, rather than building a single large retention pond to collect water after it has run through numerous areas of the park, degrading the park along the way. Further, other areas of the park appear to have more significant runoff problems than the south hillside. Has there been a study of the existing water flow? What alternatives have been considered and at what level of detail? Why was the current plan selected? Will additional water be diverted to the bio-retention pond, or simply what currently is on the hillside?

- **Are there ways to preserve the trees that help give the park its character?** In the plans, quite a number of trees would need to be removed or compromised for this project, including many very attractive trees that make the south entrance to the park so pleasant. In addition to our question about preserving the trees that are specifically marked for removal – which include many trees that our organization helped plant – we are also concerned that additional trees – including very large and old oak trees – may be compromised by the current plans. The current plans call for significant digging in the root zone of these trees, and the tree protection plans appear inadequate.
- **Would the bio-retention pond be as attractive as what we currently have?** We fear that the pond could become an unattractive nuisance, especially over time, given DC's history of inadequate maintenance of the park. The current entrance to the south side of the park is quite attractive, with a number of redbuds lining the path and large mature trees providing shade. Furthermore, the hillside is a popular sledding hill for children in the neighborhood. Though the plans for what the proposed bio-retention pond would look like when completed have not been shared with us – which is a problem that should be remedied immediately – we fear they may not be in keeping with the nature of the park. In addition to answering questions about what the proposed pond would look like, we would like to know how would the proposed bio-retention area be maintained and monitored for proper functioning? Does DC require yearly site visits and inspections, as does Montgomery County, for example? Which agency/branch has oversight of bio-retention areas?
- **Has the likelihood that neighbors will be adversely affected by the proposed bio-retention pond been adequately considered?** Given the location and purpose of the bio-retention pond, it seems highly likely that the proposed plans would cause significant flooding problems for the neighbors closest to it. Has there been any study of how the bio-retention ponds would impact neighbors? What amount of water is the bio-retention area expected to retain? What is the percolation timeframe? Will the bio-retention area drain into the current sewer grate and drain, or will that drain be closed off? Are you considering an overflow valve into the sewer system? Are there plans to bank the bio-retention area on the south side nearest the home there, and if so, what amount and type of banking? What impact will the bio-retention area have on the water table and hydrostatic pressure in the adjoining neighbor's basement? What plans are there to make neighbors whole for any damage to their house or property? What evidence will the city accept as proof of damage?

Again, we support the goal of reducing runoff from the park. However, we also expect that any plans will only enhance, and not jeopardize, the aesthetics and function of grounds traditionally known as Lafayette Park. We ask that before proceeding further with any planning or construction in this proposed bio-retention area that you provide the community with full, public discussion of the plan, alternatives, impacts, and answers to our questions, so that we have confidence that the grounds will

continue to be the precious neighborhood resource that we have worked so diligently to create and maintain.

Sincerely,

The Board of the Friends of Lafayette Park