



*of the Anacostia River*

July 24, 2019

Dear Mayor Hollingsworth:

I am writing on behalf of the Neighbors of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit volunteer watershed organization with members in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. We have been working since 2003 to restore the health of the 19-mile long Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River. We want to see this urban treasure safely enjoyed by wildlife, our families, and generations to come, and its waters feed a restored Anacostia River. Restoration of the Anacostia is important both economically and from a civic perspective. You probably agree that the Anacostia Watershed Society has done outstanding work in engaging the community and together changing this river from an open sewer to one that supports wildlife and where people play, even if the water is still not clean enough for swimming.

It has come to our attention that Magruder Park, abutting the Northwest Branch, has been proposed as the site for a new Hyattsville Middle School. This would be either in the developed portion of Magruder Park, or in the currently densely wooded area. We fear that both locations, and especially the elimination of the forest, would seriously delay restoration of the Anacostia River. We urge that you consider a few relevant points:

1. While improving, the Anacostia River still rates an F from the Anacostia Watershed Society. One of the rating criteria is stormwater runoff, on which it received a grade of 46 of 100, and the red arrow indicates a negative trend.<sup>1</sup> Forested land is excellent at containing stormwater. It is, in fact, the gold standard. According to the U.S. Forest Service, on average, 100 mature

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<sup>1</sup> From the report card: "**Stormwater Runoff** flushes trash and toxics from paved areas and erodes stream banks, filling the river with sediment. A score of 100% means that the peak stream flows are the same as averaged values from recorded historical levels (1938-1942)." The report card can be found at <https://www.anacostiaws.org/what-we-do/public-policy-advocacy/state-of-the-river-report-card.html>

trees capture about 140,000 gallons of water a year, which is water that does not gauge out the Northwest Branch banks or flood anyone's basement.<sup>2</sup> Replacing this water-absorbing forest with rooftops and parking lots would change the area from a plus on stormwater management to a serious negative.

2. Further, this approximately 15-acre patch of forest is a valuable refuge for wildlife, including a wide variety of birds such as Baltimore Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, Bluebirds, various kinds of woodpeckers, Tree Swallows, and water birds such as the Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, and Osprey. All these contribute to the natural value of the area and joy of living in Hyattsville.

3. Both the developed park and the wooded Parcel 43 are in the 100-year floodplain. In the last four years, Maryland has had three *500-year* floods. As our climate warms, we can expect more excessive rains, and a farsighted community would turn its floodplains into parks that can absorb water, removing structures rather than building new ones there.<sup>3</sup> Assuming PGCPS is willing to spend the necessary money to elevate the school above the 100-year or 500-year flood level, there is no avoiding the fact that an important natural stormwater control system will have been turned into impervious rooftops and parking lots, that is, a huge stormwater management problem requiring extensive expensive mitigation, if effective mitigation is even possible.

4. From what was reported at the June 3 meeting and hearing before the City Council, Hyattsville Middle School has mold and other air problems making children and teachers sick, and the number of students exceeds planned capacity. This is clearly not a viable learning environment. It was further revealed, when a small fire broke out, that the fire alarm and sprinklers are inoperable. It would appear then that this school needs to be closed *now*, and the students moved in September into swing space until a new school can be built. So swing space is needed no matter where the school is built. Leaving students and teachers in such a building for the couple of years it would take to build a new school would likely be worse for their educational development than moving them elsewhere. With a move to other space, the student body would still be together, which is what counts.

The current site, at 9.41 acres, is admittedly smaller than the standard suburban site of 20 acres. This is, however, an *urban* school, and a 2-story facility could be built on the current site with lots of space left for fields and parking. Middle schools and even elementary schools in

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/real-estate/ct-xpm-2013-04-23-ct-sun-0421-garden-morton-20130423-story.html>. See also the water transfer and oxygen producing benefits of trees described by North Carolina State University Agriculture & Life Sciences Cooperative Extension at: <https://projects.ncsu.edu/project/treesofstrength/treefact.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Many cities have replaced structures with parks and walks along their rivers, fostering recreation and greater appreciation of the river. Some, such as Nashville, also wanted to address a flooding problem. See <https://www.outsideonline.com/1929066/best-river-towns-america>.

many jurisdictions, including DC and Montgomery County, are multiple stories high. The students manage, and less roof area means less stormwater runoff to mitigate.

We are convinced that Magruder Park, both its recreation areas and wooded Parcel 43, are too valuable to the residents of Hyattsville and to the health of the Northwest Branch and Anacostia River to be considered as sites for a new middle school. We respectfully urge you to use your influence to ensure these floodplain properties remain protected parkland.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laura Turbe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a light blue shadow effect behind the text.

Laura Turbe, President