



Re: Traffic Safety at Watkins Elementary School

Dear Interim Director Kershbaum:

At a properly noticed general meeting on November 14, 2023, with a quorum present, Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 6B voted 9-0-0, based on the unanimous recommendation of its Transportation Committee, to submit the following request to the DC Department of Transportation (DDOT).

Numerous residents in recent months have reported to ANC 6B that the roads around Watkins Elementary School feel unsafe for pedestrians of all ages. We request that the DDOT Safe Routes to School Safe Routes to School (SRTS) team investigate the built environment on the blocks that surround the Watkins Elementary School, playground, and field: the 400 blocks of 12th and 13th Sts. SE, and the 1200 blocks of D and E Sts. SE. Some of the safety problems stem from unsafe behavior, which we are addressing in a separate letter to DCPS and DPW Traffic Enforcement. However, the safety problems could be greatly reduced if DDOT were to conduct an SRTS Action Plan for Watkins.

Watkins has several unusual features that we ask the DDOT SRTS team to consider. Watkins has a DPR-managed sports field with nighttime lighting, so it is often used for highly-trafficked nighttime events, most famously the Congressional Women's Softball Game. Watkins has an unusually large elementary school boundary for an urban school; some in-bounds students live 1.5 miles away. Watkins also has an unusually high proportion of out-of-bounds students compared to other Ward 6 elementary schools. Unfortunately, this means lots of kids use cars to get to school. Until 2020, Watkins featured a DCPS-run shuttle bus which took 100 cars off of the streets every day; that bus was cancelled due to budget cuts. Post-pandemic, Watkins has seen more car traffic than it can handle.

ANC 6B believes that an SRTS Action Plan would find that some combination of restored bus service, road diets, sidewalk bulbouts, improved signage, and other safety features could make the streets around Watkins safer for pedestrians without reducing access to the school. We look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Thank you for giving great weight to this Commission's recommendations. Should you wish to discuss this letter with the Commission, please contact ANC Commissioner Matt LaFortune, Chair of the ANC 6B Transportation Committee, at 6B09@anc.dc.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward Ryder".

Edward Ryder, Chair of ANC 6B