

Fenty agrees to talk with nominee's critics

By CHRIS KAIN
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Mayor Adrian Fenty agreed Saturday to meet with opponents of his nomination of Geoffrey Griffis for a seat on the D.C. Zoning Commission.

The issue arose several times during a question-and-answer session at the monthly meeting of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association. Several attendees challenged Griffis' service as the long-time chair of the Board of Zoning Adjustment, including his conduct during hearings on the National Child Research Center's hotly contested expansion proposals.

Fenty said his aides are reviewing allegations raised during the recent D.C. Council hearing on Griffis' nomination, including complaints about a conflict of interest in the Cleveland Park preschool case. He said he did not have enough information at this point "to say I can either dispute it or affirm it."

The mayor added that he believes Griffis has "the talent and the aptitude" to serve on the Zoning Commission. Like all his nominees, Fenty said, Griffis recognizes the mayor's priority of "working with the community, listening to the community."

"That's true of all my people," Fenty said. "I would not appoint somebody who I did not feel was going to listen to the community."

After the mayor's initial remarks about the nomination, another attendee returned to the issue, draw-

ing applause when she asked Fenty to withdraw the Griffis nomination.

In response, Fenty offered to meet with a small group to further discuss the Griffis nomination in an attempt to find a "meeting of the minds," and several in the room volunteered to participate.

"I guess we can't ask for more than that," Cleveland Park Citizens Association president George Idelson said of the offer.

In discussing his nomination of Griffis to the Zoning Commission, Fenty said he believed change was necessary on the Board of Zoning Adjustment, the subject of citizen questions during the mayoral campaign. Griffis has chaired the board since 2001.

"We thought there was a need for a change there," Fenty said, expressing confidence in his choice of Shepherd Park resident Mark Loud, executive director of Gateway Georgia Avenue, for Griffis' seat.

The Board of Zoning Adjustment handles applications for variances and special exceptions, while the Zoning Commission writes the zoning regulations and considers requested zoning changes, campus-plan proposals and planned-unit developments.

Like the Griffis nomination, the schools came up repeatedly among the dozen or so questions posed by audience members. Fenty also responded to several other issues.

In response to complaints about the lack of promised renovations at Hearst Recreation Center, Fenty said his administration last week

challenged the new director of the Department of Parks and Recreation to fix longstanding problems.

Fenty said he raised the issue during his regular CapStat accountability session, where neighborhood service coordinators presented photos of poor conditions at the Guy Mason Recreation Center and the Chevy Chase Community Center, among other department facilities. Fenty said he gave the agency 30 to 45 days to correct the deficiencies.

"We have to have a sense of urgency," he said.

He also touted his plan for mayoral control of the D.C. Public Schools, saying he believes putting the mayor in charge would result in streamlined accountability and greater continuity in the system's top administrative post. He noted that one of the "most accomplished" and longest-serving superintendents in charge of a major school system in recent years — Boston's Thomas Payzant — served at the pleasure of Mayor Thomas Menino.

Fenty rejected a questioner's thesis that he has decided to remove Superintendent Clifford Janey, saying that it is premature to decide personnel matters before the council votes on the legislation.

After Wilson High School parent and school board candidate Mai Abdul Rahman asked whether he was worried that the debate thus far had soured his relationship with the current superintendent, Fenty dismissed the idea.

"I think he'd be thrilled if I reappointed him," Fenty said.