

Remarks of Kim Fondren (first of two comments made this evening) 12-4-2014

Thank you, members of the School Board for the opportunity to speak. My name is Kim Fondren and my children attend MVCS. I speak as co-chairman of the MVCS PTA Playground Improvement Committee. We would like to support the Capital Improvement requests for playgrounds.

The PTA has embarked on a Fundraising effort to improve our K-2 playground. It needs a great deal of work. I will note only infrastructure issues. My co-chair Liz Johnson will go into great detail. The school's playground is situated along a highly trafficked street, Mount Vernon Avenue. There is a busy stop on the corner of the playground, for Metrobus and DASHbus. It is much used. Yet the playground is surrounded by a short, aging, chain-link fence. The fencing profile does not make it easy to secure the school in the event of a lockdown drill. Latches don't work, gates don't shut. A retaining wall on one side of the playground (along Uhler) is failing. Pieces of cement block jut out of the ground in areas where the children play. Much of the playground is a mud pit if a little rain falls. The PTA wants to partner with the City to improve the safety and security of the playground.

The other issue that I am concerned about after spending the last year involved with this issue is poor routine maintenance, contractor supervision, contract selection and bidding. We have had trouble getting repairs done when requested. They are not done timely. The work is often shoddy. For example, loose field stones had to be repaired three times because they were not repaired properly. A fence rail has been repaired by being loosely wired into the top of the fence, only to be removed by the children twice. We tried for months to get latches repaired and gates fixed on the fences. To date those repairs have not occurred. Nobody expects that every job will be inspected but certainly some would be audited when the same job keeps having to be redone.

Facilities paid \$30,000 for a topographical survey to assist us in our landscape design for the playground. This number seemed high to us, and when we finally were allowed to see the contract, it included design requirement that we had not asked for and weren't being done anyway. The topographical survey we asked for was initially a very inferior work product. As we investigated, my co-chair and I discovered that for many of these functions, only a few contractors are approved bidders. This results in inflated bids. One wonders how many more and better playgrounds could be built with better contract management. One wonders how many playgrounds would last longer if routine maintenance audits were performed and routine maintenance completed and inspected. As a taxpayer in this city, I want my tax dollars to provide maximum benefits and services not line pockets of contractors who provide shoddy service or over inflate their prices. As a parent of a child, I want my children to have a safe happy playground experience. Please do what you can to investigate these issues and see that proper controls are in place.