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To: City Plan Commission

RE: Kensington Playground

I write to urge tabling of the transfer of the park on Kensington Street to the Community Builders for rental housing construction until a neighborhood survey is done. If the timing of the rental housing construction will overlap with the Yale New Haven Health construction of the neurocenter and proposed garages, it would be poorly timed for this neighborhood

I spent much of my professional life advocating for affordable housing, and recognize the continued need to increase the supply. I believe this neighborhood needs a park, ideally one that is made more useful by restoring water to the splash pad. The park at Chapel and Day, being posed as part of the solution to the need for park space, is on a busy corner with a very different feel that is also very close to the area where Yale New Haven Health will engage in 4 years of construction of its neurocenter, and, according to the site plan you approved, its large garage construction projects, with noise and pollution that is an inevitable part of the process. Even more, I believe that the neighborhood should be consulted in a systematic way.

A close up of a flower garden

Description automatically generatedI believe parks are a precious resource in Dwight, where I have lived for 40 years. I live next to the smallest official City park, Rainbow Park, and have worked for decades with my neighbors, the Urban Resources Initiative (URI) and the Parks Department to make it a nice place for people to enjoy. Along with neighbors on the other side, I have watered the Park at my own expense since the City has been unwilling to provide water. The Yale Urban Design Workshop, Fellowship Place and other partners have assisted in a variety of ways. Crime has been a problem for most of that time, but working with the Police and neighbors, we have kept it open, clean and welcoming. People want to use it as a dog park, with dogs off-leash, and plenty of dog waste. It requires active care by at least a few people. Without the support of URI for two decades we could not have kept improving it every year as we have done. Flowers are fine, and bring me joy, but work in the park interests me because it is a place to build community.

Rainbow Park, 72 Edgewood Avenue

I am a social worker, now in training as a public historian, and have read every major planning document in the City’s history having to do with New Haven’s parks, with a particular interest in the parks that are in the 9-square configuration. Our City has periodically talked about how important parks can be to the health and well-being of working people and low-income people. Implementation of great plans has proven to be challenging. When there is not an active neighborhood group that pushes for what they want their park to be, it tends to lose out to parks or other interested parties where people do push for what they want.

I went to Kensington Playground today and there were people sitting on every bench, enjoying the day. I talked with a neighbor with health challenges sitting on her porch opposite the park. She keeps a heavy-duty trash bag hanging from her fence to encourage people to pick up and throw away. She has lived there for more than 50 years and did not know about the proposal to get rid of the park. She says that it has been two years since the water was turned on for the kids to use the splash pad. Why is that? Who decided to stop giving kids in this neighborhood access to a splashpad?

This park is half a block from the Hospital of St. Raphael Campus of Yale New Haven Health, which will soon generate noise and air pollution for 4 years for this neighborhood. A park can help.

I urge you to postpone a decision on the proposal before you. I will commit to doorknock the immediate blocks around the Park to talk with the neighbors to find out what they want to happen with this park and to report back in writing within 6 weeks. Don’t you think that should be a standard, documented part of the process whenever there is a proposal to take parkland from a dense urban neighborhood?

Minutes from the last Board of Parks Commissioners Meeting shows that the motion to approve the land swap failed on a tie motion. The proposal was tabled. Why is this even before City Plan?

Good people are trying to move forward a proposal for affordable housing on this site. I believe a systematic process of talking with the neighbors needs to take place first. I will do that work, and am professionally qualified to do so. I hope you decide to table this proposal and to take me up on my offer.