

# **Heather Gustafson**

**Candidate, ANC 3D05**

## **Tell us about yourself.**

My name is Heather Gustafson. I live at 2828 Hurst Terrace, which is a single-family home that I own with my husband, directly across the street from Key School's driveway. We have two boys, William (9) and Winston (6). I am the owner of Palisades Montessori, which is a home-based child development center that was founded in 1984 by the former owner, Barbara Allen. I am also the owner of Palisades Montessori's new infant and toddler daycare center, which will begin serving the community later this fall. I am the founder and Executive Director of Reach the World, an established global education nonprofit that seeks to help all children, in all communities, access positive and personal global experiences. I host a standing neighborhood potluck at our home every weekend. I am passionate about the Palisades, its community members and its unique qualities.

## **What are your thoughts about the need for development in our area?**

The term “development” can be construed as a bad word; however, I believe that development can and should be positive, with positive outcomes for the community and the land. The Palisades is growing and changing, experiencing a surge in popularity like never before, especially among families with small children. My belief is that the Palisades is truly a unique community. Many people describe the Palisades as a “village in the city,” and I feel this is true. The unique combination of residential and green space, with islands of retail that make the neighborhood walkable, is what drew my family here. I hope to be helpful in preserving the character of this wonderful neighborhood, while also seeking to help it become an even better place to live than it already is.

## **For example, what would be an ideal outcome for Palisades Safeway?**

The Palisades Safeway presents a very interesting opportunity for thoughtful development. Having a grocery store in our community prevents our community from becoming a food desert and serves an essential purpose. I believe we should strenuously protect the parcel as being inclusive of a grocery store. At the same time, I believe there is tremendous missed potential in the parcel. The area could offer so much more to the community, as a gathering place not only during the weekly Farmers Market, but also throughout the week. The way it is presently designed, it is a major safety hazard for children during the Farmers Market, due to the exit from the parking lot. There also is minimal seating and shade. It seems to me that the very large parking lots are underutilized. It is also clear that the very large tree growing on the edge of the parking lot exit is about to die. This will remove an important green asset of the space, and when it is removed, all of the shade will be gone, too. I cannot propose a specific outcome, as the Palisades Safeway parcel “belongs” to all Palisadesers – and to Safeway. If any development is to occur there in the future, there would need to be very significant community engagement

that goes deep into multiple community sectors in order to truly gather feedback and develop an inclusive and thoughtful plan. In my opinion, any outcome should include (i) a grocer to anchor the space, (ii) more green space with opportunities for play and seating, (iii) a safer traffic pattern that works with the Farmers Market and (iv) shade. I am certain there are many additional considerations, and I look forward to learning more about those and striving to equitably represent all viewpoints.

**Do you have views about the historic preservation process in Washington? On the ANC, how would you weigh the interests of owners faced with landmark nominations with those of preservationists?**

At this time, my knowledge of the historic preservation process in Washington is not deep; this is an area that, if elected to the ANC, would become a topic of study for me (and any other newly-elected ANC Commissioner). As a member of the public, I appreciate the historic preservation process in our communities. This process plays an important role. As a child, my father served on the Landmarks Conservancy in New York City where I grew up. I was constantly exposed, by his conversation, to issues of historic preservation, and through this exposure I developed a deep appreciation for the ways in which our history informs our communities in the present day. I was a History major in college, and this also feeds my affinity for historical places and for dissemination of history over time. I believe the role of an ANC Commissioner is to represent the interests of the community, both of its individuals and as a whole. As a Commissioner, it would be my responsibility to study the historic preservation process myself, in order to be able to discuss the process with owners as they face landmark nominations, as well as with preservationists.

**The ANC approves many issues unanimously. Should Commissioners be allowed to select items – e.g. driveway cut permits – they feel are not controversial for fast-tracking, or do neighbors deserve to hear presentations on all such projects to be fully informed?**

As a layperson who has never served as an ANC Commissioner yet, I do not feel I am in a good enough position to pass judgment on this question. I have attended many ANC meetings. It does appear to me as an audience member that there truly are some issues that are not controversial. I have seen our ANC fast-track certain issues and this has never presented a problem in the format of the meeting. However, I am keenly interested in an open process; therefore, should a fast-tracking option exist, it must be designed to be free of influence-peddling.

**When is it acceptable to side with businesses or large institutions over the interests of residents?**

My understanding of the role of an ANC Commissioner is that the ANC exists for the purpose of bridging the government and the people. A large institution is not “the people;” therefore, the ANC should not be siding with a large institution because it’s role is to help organize the voice of the people, so that this voice can be efficiently heard by the D.C. government. With regard to businesses, some businesses are very small and some are very large. There are many businesses

in the Palisades that support and sustain our community here. I believe that these small, local businesses are “of the people” since they are such a key part of the fabric of our community – what would we do without Mr. Kim and Mac Market, for example? I would have to learn much more about how our ANC has historically worked with local businesses; however, my instinct is to suggest that the ANC should seek to represent small, local business owners and residents both.

**How should we accommodate cycling as an alternative to driving in our community?**

I am passionate about the environment and good health. I believe that cycling, walking and all forms of non-motorized transportation should be encouraged as much as possible. One day our Earth will run out of fossil fuels. One thing we can each do every day to improve our health and the outlook for our planet is to drive less, and walk / bike / run more – however we are able. That said, there are issues afoot with regard to cycling. For example, I bike with my own children every weekend to the Farmers Market. However, it is not safe for them to bike on the street, so we must bike (slowly) on the sidewalk, which can pose hazards to pedestrians. Or for example, dockless bicycles are in many ways a wonderful invention; however, more education is needed to help users park them in ways that are not obstructive to other traffic. All of these open questions would be exciting ones to study, should they come before the ANC.

**What will you do to help realize pedestrian and cyclist connection from Arizona Avenue to the Capital Crescent Trail and C & O Canal?**

I believe that having a safe, environmentally responsible and accessible connection would be a wonderful asset to our community. It is challenging for many obvious reasons. However, for reasons already stated, this can only be a GOOD thing for our health and the health of our community. There is a lot of ongoing work on this particular idea. I look forward to being involved!

**What are your thoughts on DDOT’s proposal to introduce an 8-10 feet wide crushed stone surface along part of the Palisades Trolley Trail between Galena Place and Nebraska Avenue?**

My only concern with this proposal is that the crushed stone be long-lasting and permeable (porous). This section of trail can become very, very muddy. Sometimes it is impossible to walk on it due to the mud, so people end up walking on the margins, which only increases the problem. It’s a wonderful asset to our community, and could be improved by having a porous surface thoughtfully installed that would help solve the mud problem and therefore get more people out walking. I don’t see the location or length being particularly attractive to cyclists; therefore, I don’t see the proposal as creating a problem of high-speed bikers being a danger to walkers and dogs. However, this should be considered.

**What are your thoughts on the future of the entire Palisades Trolley Trail between Galena Place and Georgetown?**

I will share my thoughts as an individual, first. When I think about how there used to be a trolley providing a good public transportation option along this corridor, and now there is not, it breaks my heart. How wonderful would it be for our community ties and our environment if the trolley still existed? Of course this will not be revived, so that is wishful thinking. However, the corridor is an important greenway that poses so many opportunities for recreation. I do not know enough about this issue to be able to propose a solution for the future; I would have to study it extensively as an ANC Commissioner before I could hope to have an opinion that would be additive in any truly meaningful way. However, my general opinion is that green space such as public byways should be preserved for the people in most cases – not allowed to be built over or lost to public use.

**What are your thoughts on the slated \$20M expansion of Key Elementary School? Considering the constraints of the site should the allocated funds address the needs of the school's population today or it's anticipated growth over the next 50 years?**

I live directly across the street from Key School and am deeply affected by and familiar with this issue. I am also a lifelong educator and entrepreneur in the education space, whose career has been devoted to equity in education for all communities. These are issues that are personally relevant to me, not only because of the location of my home, but more importantly because I care so deeply about high-quality education for all children.

My current open question is about the Hardy School campus. Although I have studied this issue somewhat, I do not yet understand it completely enough to be able to find an answer that satisfies me, personally, as to why the District of Columbia is not reclaiming that former public school site for public school use, given the current and projected growth of the school-age population in this area. I am close friends with many older residents of the Palisades whose children attended Hardy when it was a public school facility. These friends of mine share my open questions about this issue. I want to do more research about this issue, and listen more closely to a broader range of community members, in order to develop a much better sense of the Hardy School component.

On the topic of the Key parcel, my strong opinion is that the site itself is already over-populated. Even if the city spends \$20 million to build new classrooms to replace the six trailers that are now there, this will not solve the problem because there simply is no more recreational space for the children. All children should have ample space to run and play outdoors. I am also an advocate for all schools to have enrichment facilities such as art and music on campus, not in an external location, as I have spent my life as an educator advocating for an enriched model of education. The Key parcel is not going to grow in size; there is no way for this to happen given its physical constraints. There is simply no way – in my opinion as an educator - that the site will be able to provide the recreational space that that so many children truly need and deserve. I therefore think that the Hardy School question should be reopened as a part of the conversation.

However, as already mentioned above, I have more research to do – and would need to put on the “hat” of an ANC Commissioner – in order to truly understand this issue from an expanded set of perspectives, so that I can be the best advocate possible for the whole community.