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From: Kosec, Katrina (IFPRI) <K.Kosec@cgjar.org>
Sent: Monday, October 11, 2021 4:35 PM
To: DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)
Cc: Fabian Valencia
Subject: Comments in Support, BZA Application No. 20472: The River School

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Dear Chairperson and Secretary of the BZA,

We are writing to offer our most strident and forceful support for the planned River School campus at 4220 Nebraska Avenue. We hope you can share this email with the various BZA decision-makers. Thank you in advance for your time in reading and considering its contents.

We purchased our home at 4418 Fessenden Street, NW five years ago and absolutely adore this neighborhood and its neighbors. We love how residential blends so seamlessly with zoning for schools, and with zoning for commercial properties—this is truly a neighborhood in which we have it all; calm streets for our kids to learn to bike on, coffee shops and grocery stores we can walk to, and lovely schools, libraries, and universities reflecting our investment in learning and education. These features are what make this an envy-worthy neighborhood. We've lived in North Bethesda and in Mount Pleasant in the past; we've now found perfection in ANC3E.

We would like to lay out precisely why we support this project, and also why we find those backing its opposition so off-putting—and feel that they do not reflect who we are as a community:

1. **THIS PROJECT MAKES ECONOMIC SENSE.** We are both PhD Economists (from Stanford University's Graduate School of Business and Johns Hopkins University). We thus place substantial value on research showing that increasing school choice and attracting a diverse set of residents to the neighborhood through that choice will ultimately raise all of our property values, avoid overcrowding in our public schools, and contribute to better outcomes for children all around. Well-reasoned neighborhood planning has to be driven by evidence, and as such, increasing schooling choices will benefit thousands of residents.
2. **THE SCHOOL'S EFFORTS TO AVOID CREATING NEW TRAFFIC ARE ADMIRABLE AND SUFFICIENT.** We had our own questions about how traffic would be handled, and whether it would overly spill onto quiet neighborhood streets. We now have no concerns; we see that River is serious about carpooling, encouraging public transit, making room for a lot of cars on the property (so fewer are on Nebraska Avenue at any given time), staggering pick-ups and drop-offs, and keeping things flowing. And we can attest, as parents of a River School student, that the carpool line always moves incredibly quickly; an army of teachers, traffic directors, in-car signs, walkie talkies, and kids who know the drill results in almost no line for us each day (on Macarthur Blvd.) At present, we drive our car on Nebraska Avenue every day to get to River School. We cannot wait to simply bike through the neighborhood to get to school, and to get our car off of Nebraska Avenue due to the school being close to us.
3. **SUPPORTING DIVERSITY AND UPLIFTING THOSE WITH DISABILITIES IS ESSENTIAL IN THIS DAY AND AGE.** The River School will serve those born deaf and with hearing loss in the way no other school in our community can. It

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EXHIBIT NO.56

will attract parents of differently abled children to our neighborhood. And it will frankly shift the winds just a bit in favor of children born with severe challenges which many of us cannot comprehend. The school cannot grow in its currently location; children now in 3rd grade will have to leave a school that can support them so well (precisely when writing skills are developing) unless this new campus makes grades 4-6 possible for the school. Our wonderful, accepting, diverse, multi-cultural, supportive community is just the right one to meet this challenge. I am sick of hearing in ANC meetings that it should be “someone else”/ “somewhere else.” Injustice in this country has persisted too long as we listen to people explaining that they agree something is necessary, but now or here is not the right time or place. Enough. There's no school like the River School in the entire country (there's one school in Texas right now hoping to emulate the River Schools' model, but River is currently the only one), where deaf children learn alongside hearing children, everyone appreciates and is educated on cultural and developmental differences, and kindness is the center of the curriculum. We want them as our neighbors!

4. **WE HAVE ONLY HEARD FACTUALLY-INCORRECT AND SPECULATIVE ARGUMENTS FROM A HANDFUL OF NEIGHBORS WHO OPPOSE THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW CAMPUS.** This seems to be about four women engaging in fear-mongering and the spread of false information. I have listened to them orally berate those speaking in support of River. I have personally been victimized by one of them through antagonistic, harassing direct messages sent to me by them during ANC meetings. We have all listened at ANC meetings while they tell those who rent housing and are students that they are lesser citizens, and that their opinions do not matter as much as do their own. They post false and misleading signs about 500 cars coming to a school of 222 students (that hopes to grow to 350 over a period of 10 years). Fear-mongering, disrespect, harassment and attempts to silence neighbors, and dissemination of lies have no place in our neighborhood.
5. **THIS CAMPUS IS GORGEOUS.** We can imagine so many less-pretty uses of the property. The River School will preserve this historic property and its buildings and trees, and will be shorter than many homes in our neighborhood. It looks like it'll be a lovely network of green walls and roofs amid the bricks already present on the property. What I love most is that the neighborhood has asked and the River School has responded (shorter, greener, more trees – check, check, check). They have dealt with our neighborhood concerns with such respect and thoroughness, and at great personal cost. The outdoor space will be amazing to view. This fits well and appropriately in our neighborhood, right next to similar properties.

River school is full of incredibly passionate parents, many of them in ANC 3E, who want to give back to their community and will. I certainly know we will. We can make ANC3E the site of an amazing school! Please feel free to contact us for any further information, clarifications, or anything at all. We are on hand and happy to chat. Thank you again for your time and attention!

Sincerely,

Katrina Kosec and Fabian Valencia (your nearby neighbors 😊)

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ANC3E-03

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