

February 26, 2016

VAN NESS COALITION

Dedicated to Preserving the Residential Character of the Van Ness Neighborhood

RE: BZA Case #17703A Sidwell Friends School/ Lower School addition to campus

1. The Van Ness Coalition represents residents of the approximately 240 households along Van Ness, Veazey, Upton, 37th, and 38th Streets between Wisconsin Avenue N.W. and Reno Road. These households are respectively one, two, or three streets away from the proposed site of the Sidwell Friends Lower School. The neighborhood includes many households with children who attend Hearst School on 37th Street, across from the Sidwell Friends Middle School.
 - a. Sidwell parents use our streets for automobile access to the drop-off/ pick up points for the Middle School.
 - b. Our neighborhood would be adversely affected by additional traffic generated by the 300 students in Lower School, as well as the 100 new students (if an increase in enrollment is permitted).
 - c. Many Hearst parents walk their elementary school children to/from the school along our streets. Additional traffic presents safety hazards for these pedestrians.
2. Van Ness Coalition representatives and other neighbors have negotiated with Sidwell at length to achieve a 30% reduction in traffic generated by the Lower School and by the Upper and Middle Schools. The parameters for a Traffic Demand Management Plan (TDM) are summarized in the Applicant's submission, in the ANC resolution (2/23/2016), and in the DDOT Report (2/23/2016). Robust enforcement of these parameters is crucial to protecting our neighborhood.
3. In view of Sidwell's commitment to reduce traffic in our neighborhood, and in the expectation that these targets will be satisfied, the Van Ness Coalition strongly supports Sidwell's use of the Washington Home site for its Middle School.
4. A safety issue of importance to our neighborhood is not covered by either the Sidwell submission or the ANC resolution. The February 23 DDOT Report recommends on page 3:

"Subject to the DDOT safety evaluation, implement recommended actions, which could include removal of the vehicular traffic diverter on the east leg of the Upton Street/Wisconsin Avenue intersection restricting turns, and installation of a new raised crosswalk or contribution towards a raised intersection at 37th Street and Upton Street to facilitate safe pedestrian movement and calm traffic on these streets. The traffic calming islands at both Wisconsin/Upton and Reno/Upton would likely remain in place."

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5. DDOT required a safety analysis (pp. 14 – 15, DDOT Report) by Sidwell’s traffic engineers, which found that 5 intersections nearby had an alarmingly high crash rate (1.0 Million Entering Vehicles or higher). Of these, the intersection with the most incidents was the Wisconsin/ Upton Street intersection (see Figure 6, p. 15, DDOT Report). DDOT plans to continue to study the causes of the high crash rate, and “expects the Applicant to work with DDOT to remove the diverter portion of the [traffic] island”.
6. Specifically, DDOT stated:
 - a. “The intersection with the most incidents is the Wisconsin Avenue/Upton Street intersection. Due to this incidence, DDOT will be continuing to assess operations at this intersection. The presence of a vehicular traffic diverter on the east leg of the Upton Street/Wisconsin Avenue intersection may be contributing to this intersection’s safety issues. Following continued assessment, DDOT expects the Applicant to work with DDOT to remove the diverter portion of the existing island. The traffic calming portion would remain. In conjunction with this removal, traffic calming measures at the 37th and Upton intersection (which also exhibits a high crash rate) such as a raised crosswalk or intersection should be implemented. DDOT anticipates that these measures will carry the triple benefit of improving traffic safety, pedestrian safety, and dispersing school traffic across more streets reducing the load on others (emphasis added).
 - b. “The Applicant will be required to coordinate with DDOT during the public space permitting process to ensure that safe design is incorporated into new streets and vehicular access points.”
7. Our Coalition strongly supports DDOT’s ongoing consideration of ways to reduce the crash rate at Wisconsin/ Upton Street. We strongly support the removal of the “diverter” at Wisconsin/ Upton Street, returning Upton Street to its traditional purpose --- serving as the primary entrance to the Washington Home property. If funds become available, we support the installation of raised crosswalks at 37th/ Upton Street.
8. We ask that the BZA mandate that Sidwell “coordinate” with DDOT during the public space permitting process and provide any funds necessary to implement DDOT’s safety recommendation with respect to the diverter and the traffic island on Wisconsin/Upton Street, and other measures recommended by DDOT to improve pedestrian and vehicular traffic safety in the neighborhood affected by the Lower School move to Upton Street.
9. Contact 
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