

Ingleside Retirement Community

BZA Case #18898

January 13, 2015

Testimony of
Anne Mohnkern Renshaw
Ingleside Abutter

My name is Anne Mohnkern Renshaw, a 40-year resident and owner of 2910 Military Road, NW which abuts the Ingleside Retirement Community

I was chair of ANC 3G in 1996 when Ingleside (then called the Presbyterian Home) petitioned the BZA for a special exception to build 102 active senior apartment units. I did not champion the expansion back then fearing that the Home's appetite for growth would eventually overwhelm the surrounding Military Road neighborhoods. I have not been proven wrong.

As a veteran Ingleside abutter, I come before the BZA (on which I served some years ago) to express reasonable opposition to its current application for yet another, but far greater, expansion. Grounds for this opposition are six-fold and relate to the buildings and land only, not its residents.

First: What's the rush? On 12/1/2014, I appealed to the ANC to request a postponement (citing project reports not yet submitted to the ANC or BZA). That request was denied. Four reports, we note, were only filed with the BZA in the last two weeks [*Applicant's Pre-Hearing Statement, 12/30/14, Applicant's Traffic Analysis, 12/30/14, Office of Planning Report, 1/6/15, and District Department of Transportation Report, 1/6/15*] and contain conclusions that either could be rebutted or definitely clarified. Moreover, the Carnegie Institution requested, on 1/9/2015, a modest delay which would allow time for the community to catch up with the case filings.

Second, the BIG business of aging: Ingleside's application is more about an expanding, albeit non-profit, business and its bottom line. Private continuing care communities, including Ingleside, compete for residents via advertising and aggressive marketing. To stay competitive, more and better amenities must be part of a sales package (e.g., *pools and spas, care services, diet and snack bars, on-site bakeries, memory care, state-of-the-art medical treatment, pet care, performing arts center, as well as transportation and parking*). Next, new buildings must house the additional senior population which, according to OP, "desire support and amenities." More occupants require extra staff that may (or may not) use public transportation to and from work. However, OP maintains (some 9 times in its report) that the impact on the surrounding neighborhoods "should be" minimal. If Ingleside's huge expansion goes forward, complete with a Life Care Center building extending down Military Road from 31st Street to 30th Place, the immediate residential area will become even more identified as an Institutional Zone than a series of appealing neighborhoods nestled in Ingleside's shadow.

Third, building height and the Tunisian Ambassador's residence. In 1996, the community killed the "Holiday Inn" high-rise design floated by the Home as its new Ingleside apartment building. We note, for the record, that nearby Forest-Side and St. John's College High School at Military Road and 27th Street, NW are both low-rise buildings in keeping with the nearby residential area.

This time, Ingleside is proposing not one, but two 8-story buildings, far out of character with neighboring private homes. I requested a "balloon test" to prove or disprove the actual sight lines of these high-rise buildings but that was summarily rejected. Not to worry, said Ingleside to the community, we'll plant trees. The trees Ingleside planted along the 29th Street alley to hide view of the senior apartments some 18 years ago, however, have either died or are drawing their last breath.

Most important, one 8-story high-rise will loom over the front door of the official residence of the Tunisian Ambassador, jeopardizing his and his family's privacy. Moreover, during this time of great international tension, the Ambassador's security could be compromised, given that an entrance to a new underground garage may be located directly adjacent to the Ambassador's residence.

Fourth, the environmentally-sensitive ravine. A former Tunisian Ambassador wrote to the BZA (letter dated 8/21/1996) stating his Embassy's objections to Ingleside's expansion along the west ravine which read, in part: "The implications of any large-scale development of the Presbyterian Home (now Ingleside), whether it take the form of multi-rise apartment buildings or low-rise terraced buildings, will be very severe, indeed, not only for community residents, including our Embassy's residence, but also for the flora and fauna that characterize the neighborhood."

The protection of the east ravine which backs up to homes along the 2900 block of Military Road and 5300 block of 29th Street, as well as the stream bed which connects to Rock Creek, remains a major concern to abutters. Ingleside has been asked multiple times for a perpetual conservation easement of the east ravine but has steadfastly refused, instead offering a limited-year "building moratorium" per each expansion application. What abutters want is permanent (not incremental) protection against Ingleside acquiring more property (such as the 3000-block of Military Road-south side, all properties of which are now owned by Ingleside save one home which it would also like to purchase.)

5) Construction: 30+ months of 6-day a week blasting, demolition, pile driving, and earth-moving in order to reposition Ingleside's campus will result in adverse impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods, abutters and Ingleside's present residents. It will be 30+ months during which the quiet enjoyment of our homes will be lost and never recouped. Ingleside residents will eventually be rewarded with added amenities (e.g., individual heat/AC controls in every unit). Outlier senior citizens, however, may only get a bed in which to recuperate after breaking a hip.

The ANC has assembled multiple pages of "Conditions" to protect the Military Road neighborhoods and abutters during this prolonged construction period. But remembering the 1996-era expansion, some protections, like the Task Force and the 29th Street buffer previously mentioned, fizzled. Moreover, construction worker parking on neighborhood streets will happen, regardless of fines and satellite parking provisions, as workers will not be separated from their vehicles. Ultimately, the Broad Branch Road grassy area across from the shared Ingleside/Tunisian Ambassador's driveway will again become a prime area for construction parking, but this time only with the approval of both Public Space and Rock Creek Park.

6) Lastly, Military Road and Traffic: Military Road conditions are bad and traffic worse. It suffers from the absence of permanent traffic enforcement, faulty traffic signals and uneven sidewalks which impact pedestrian safety and the prospect of additional high-frequency buses traversing the roadway. The noise, vibrations and emissions from construction and commercial vehicles permeate the area. But D-DOT approved Ingleside's application in any case with only the caveat that "at least 2 secure long-term bicycle parking spaces in (Ingleside's) garage facilities (be provided) to support staff arriving by bicycle."

D-DOT also fails to mention that five current and pending large-scale construction and roadway projects greatly exacerbate Military Road traffic and roadway conditions (*e.g., ongoing Cafritz development at Military and Connecticut Avenue, 27th Street/Broad Branch Road bridge redo; Oregon Avenue upgrade from Military to Western Avenue; 16th Street/Military Road bridge replacement; and the Broad Branch Road "improvement" project*).

In conclusion, Ingleside may meet its burden of proof but at what expense? Regardless of having 17 or 14 or 15 acres (various reports contain different figures), Ingleside should limit future high-and mid-rise construction so that the charm of surrounding neighborhoods will not be devalued due to Ingleside's institutional ambitions.
