

**BEFORE THE BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Application of
Acton Academy of Washington, DC

STATEMENT OF THE APPLICANT

I. NATURE OF RELIEF SOUGHT

Acton Academy of Washington, DC (the "Applicant") submits this application, pursuant to 11 DCMR sections 3104.1 and 206 for a special exception to establish a private school at premises of Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Washington, DC ("Saint Sophia") at the address of 2815 36th Street, N.W. (Square 1942, Lot 33) (the "Property" or "Site").

II. JURISDICTION OF THE BOARD

The Board of Zoning Adjustment has jurisdiction to grant the requested special exception relief pursuant to section 3104.1 of the Zoning Regulations.

III. EXHIBITS IN SUPPORT OF THE APPLICATION

This application includes the following additional materials:

Exhibit A: Site Plan showing the Property and Parking.

Exhibit B: DC Zoning Map showing the Property outlined in brown.

Exhibit C Architectural drawings showing existing Site layout.

IV. BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

A. Site and Vicinity Characteristics

1. The Property

The Property which is the subject of this application is located on the east side of 36th Street, near the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Garfield Street, N.W. It is located in the Observatory Circle neighborhood in Ward 3 near the National Cathedral. The Property is located along the Wisconsin Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. Metrobus corridors. The

Property is zoned R-1-B (See attached zoning map, Exhibit B) and is located within the boundaries of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3C.

The Property is currently improved with a church and a three story Educational Center. There are 137 parking spots on the Property. Saint Sophia currently uses the Property for regular Sunday church services, teen and adult ministries, children's Sunday school, and occasional special events such as festivals, weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Saint Sophia currently has a Certificate of Occupancy (Permit Number CO 83702) for "Religious Education (Ages 3 to 99)."

The Property is surrounded by other private schools such as St. Albans School, Beauvoir National Cathedral Elementary School, and National Cathedral School. To the immediate east of the Property are two and three-story residential buildings, some of which Saint Sophia owns and leases to the community. Immediately to the south and west are small triangular parks.

B. Nature of Special Exception Request

The Applicant, Acton Academy of Washington, DC ("Acton DC"), is an independent affiliate of Acton Academy, a private elementary, middle, and high school founded in 2009 in Austin, Texas. Acton is growing rapidly around the world with affiliates opening or located in cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, New Orleans, Houston, Toronto, and London.

The Applicant will bring a unique and innovative educational model to DC. Acton DC's mission is to inspire each student who enters our doors to find a calling to change the world. Acton DC is a student-driven, self-paced elementary school that blends real-world projects, state-of-the-art educational gaming, and Socratic discussions in a multi-age classroom. Acton DC asks each child to dream big, work hard, and humbly pursue a passion that serves a great need or rights a great injustice. Acton Academy is recognized as one of the top blended-learning schools in America by the Clayton Christensen Institute.¹

The Applicant aims to deliver a world-class private school education that is affordable.

¹ Michael Horn, Heather Staker, and Clayton Christensen (forward), *Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools*, San Francisco: Wiley, 2015.

For many parents, private schools are a financial challenge, particularly when there are multiple children. For instance, just across the street, Beauvoir, The National Cathedral Elementary School has an annual tuition of \$33,315; the Maret School starts at \$30,225; and Washington International School is \$31,520. In contrast, Acton DC's goal is to create a sustainable economic model at \$19,500 tuition for an 11-month program.

The Applicant proposes to occupy approximately 900 square feet of classroom space in the Cathedral building (as shown in Exhibit C, "Applicant Classroom Space") in the first year, and potentially grow into additional classroom spaces over time. In its first year, the Applicant plans no more than 16 students in first through third grade. As students age up, the Applicant plans to offer additional grade levels, growing to approximately 36 students within five years.

According to Section 206 of the Zoning Regulations private schools are permitted in the R-1-B District as a special exception based on the following criteria:

206.1 The private school will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulation and not tend to adversely affect the use of neighboring property.

206.2 The use shall not be objectionable to adjoining and nearby property because of noise, traffic, number of students or otherwise objectionable conditions.

206.3 Indicate the number of parking spaces being provided and whether the required number of parking spaces will be provided.

V. THE APPLICATION MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIAL EXCEPTION RELIEF FROM THE ZONING REGULATIONS

A. The Proposed Use Is in Harmony With and Will Not Tend to Adversely Affect the Use of Neighboring Property

As indicated above, the immediately surrounding area includes three private schools: St. Albans (approx. 545 students), Beaviour National Cathedral Elementary School (approx. 393 students), and National Cathedral School (approx. 580 students). Additionally, within a few blocks, other private schools include Sidwell Friends School (approx. 1,097 students), Maret

School (approx. 645 students), and Washington International School (approx. 920 students).

These private schools combine to total enrollment of approximately 4,180 students.

The Applicant, Acton Academy of Washington, DC, plans to enroll no more than 16 Elementary School students its first year, adding only 0.4% more students to neighboring private schools enrollment capacity. The Applicant plans to grow to approximately 36 students within five years. Even at 36 students within five years, the Applicant would add less than 1% more students to the neighboring private school enrollment capacity. Such a small increase in the number of private school students already in the area would not tend to adversely affect neighboring properties.

B. The Use Shall Not be Objectionable to Adjoining and Nearby Property because of Noise, Traffic, Number of Students, or Otherwise Objectionable Conditions

As indicated above, the Property is currently used for regular Sunday church services, educational ministries, and community events such as festivals, weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Most of these activities occur on Sundays, weekends and evenings while the proposed use typically will be a weekday school schedule with limited evening events. Given the complementary schedules and the small percentage of additional students, the Applicant's use shall not substantially add to the noise, traffic, or otherwise objectionable conditions for adjoining or nearby properties.

As with neighboring private schools, morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up will draw traffic during the day. To abate the potential for noise to neighbors, the Property has a circular drop-off area along Garfield Street, shielding neighboring properties from traffic noise (see Exhibit A Space Plan, area labeled "New Drop-Off"). Additionally, student play-time will be along the Property area fronting Massachusetts Avenue, shielding potential noise from adjoining properties.

C. Indicate the Number of Parking Spaces and Whether the Required Number of Parking Spaces Will be Provided

As indicated above, the Property has 137 parking spaces. In the first year, the Applicant will have three staff: a head of school, a lead teacher/guide, and an assistant teacher/guide generating a parking requirement of 3 spaces (2 spaces are required for every 3 teachers and staff). However, given the fact that the Church's parking facilities exceed the zoning requirements, the Educational Building is underutilized and the Church sees little activity during the hours that the school will be operating, the existing parking lot can be utilized and there is no need to provide additional parking.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, the requested relief meets the applicable standards of the Zoning Regulations and can be granted without substantially impairing the intent, purpose and integrity of the Zoning Regulations. The Applicant therefore requests that the Board grant this application.

Respectfully submitted,

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