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March 16, 2018

RE: BZA Case 19377: The Boundary Companies and The Missionary Society; Letter in Opposition

Dear Chair of the Board of Zoning Adjustment,

We write to oppose the proposed Boundary Companies townhome development. We are particularly concerned about the destruction of green space to be replaced with more densely packed townhomes, and the resulting increase in traffic in an already-congested area.

1. Edgewood and Brookland are unique neighborhoods. Few other areas in the District—and certainly none with relatively affordable housing—feature so much green space. That green space, in combination with the historic architecture of academic and religious buildings like the Paulist campus at the center of this site, attracted many of the area’s residents, and give these neighborhoods a distinct character that should be preserved. Indeed, the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capitol notes that green properties like the current Paulist land “are important to the health of the community and should be considered as opportunities for new neighborhood and community parks They are the ‘lungs’ of the neighborhood.”¹

These attributes were a key draw for us when we moved to the area from downtown D.C. to escape street noise and congestion in 2016. Every morning in the spring and summer, we relish hearing birds chirping as we drink our coffee. But the proposed project—even as revised—will destroy a large area of green space between 4th Street NE and the current Paulist building.

Green space shouldn’t be a luxury commodity. As other parts of the District become more developed, there is a risk that parks, trees, and open areas like those currently around the Paulist building will be increasingly found only in Upper Northwest, where they are inaccessible to many District residents. That would be unjust. Families in Edgewood and Brookland should have the same opportunities

¹ D.C. Mun. Regs. § 2407.2(f) (Planning And Development Priorities), *available at* <http://dcrules.elaws.us/dcmr/10-a2407>.

for sledding, frisbee, walking the dog, or outdoor play as those in Colonial Village or Cleveland Park. As the Comprehensive Plan cautions, while “seminaries, cemeteries, and institutions provide much greenery” in Upper Northeast, “[t]here are also concerns that the large institutional open spaces—*particularly the great lawns and wooded glades of the area’s religious orders*—may someday be lost to development.”² If you do not reject this proposal, “someday” will be today. The proposed development simply takes away too much of the area’s already-dwindling green space, including existing mature trees.

Green space is not just aesthetically pleasing, but provides habitat for birds and other wildlife, cleans the air, reduces storm water runoff, and mitigates urban heat islands. That is, concrete, asphalt, stone, and metal result in a high absorption of solar radiation during the day, thereby increasing the temperature of the surrounding areas. Trees, by contrast, lower surface and air temperatures through evapotranspiration and shade.³ Studies have also shown a link between higher levels of greenness in a neighborhood (*i.e.*, trees, park space, and other vegetation) and lower chronic illnesses, diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol.⁴

All of this is presumably why, when the BZA approved the existing Chancellor’s Row development, it did so on the explicit understanding the remaining green space on 4th Street NE—the space Boundary Companies now seeks to develop—would remain untouched.⁵ Regardless of whether that understanding resulted from a specific promise by the developer, it was important to the BZA’s decision then and it should be even more important now.

2. We are also very concerned about the increase in traffic and congestion that will result from an additional sixty homes on a plot of land that runs only a few hundred feet in each direction. In particular, the intersection of 4th Street NE and Franklin Street NE, just to the south of the proposed development, is already ill-suited to the current volume of traffic and causes significant congestion,

² D.C. Mun. Regs. § 2407.2(f) (emphasis added).

³ Elizabeth Borneman, *Vegetation Helps to Lessen the Effects of Urban Heat Islands*, Geo Lounge (Sept. 25, 2015), <https://www.geolounge.com/vegetation-helps-to-lesson-the-effects-of-urban-heat-islands/>; Project Evergreen, Environmental Benefits of Green Space, <http://projectevergreen.org/resources/environmental-benefits-of-green-space/>.

⁴ University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, *Study links neighborhood greenness to reduction in chronic diseases*, ScienceDaily, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/04/160421171345.htm (last visited March 13, 2018).

⁵ See, e.g., DC Dept. of Housing & Community Dev. Mem. (July 8, 2008) (“DHCD offers the following reasons for support of the application based upon the specific information presented in the application: ... The park-like St. Paul’s Campus will be retained for the portion of the site fronting on and facing 4th Street NE”); Z.C. Case No. 07-27, July 17, 2008, Hr’g Tr. (testimony on behalf of applicant) (asserting that the development would “maintain these viewsheds that the Paulists currently have,” including the “spectacular openness of green space [on 4th Street] that will be maintained”).

bottlenecks, and even accidents. In addition, the private streets of the Chancellor's Row development—which are not intended for, and are too narrow for, significant traffic—already see numerous vehicles cut through in an effort to avoid congestion on main thoroughfares, sometimes at high speed. The addition of potentially dozens more cars in the immediate vicinity will only add to this problem. That result would also present added safety risks, especially for neighborhood residents and for the many students of the Washington Leadership Academy who walk to the Paulist building from the Metro every day.

Finally, street parking in the area is already at a high premium. It is far from clear where the new residents and their visitors would park, as there is no street parking on the adjacent stretch of 4th Street NE. Presumably they will choose the Chancellor's Row streets, even though they lack the right to park on those private ways.

We urge you to reject the proposed project and preserve the distinctive character of this neighborhood, including the green space around the beautiful Paulist building.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Morgan Kennedy & Tobias Loss-Eaton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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