

April 24, 2018

Chairperson Appointee Frederick L. Hill  
Board of Zoning Adjustments  
441 4<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Suite 200S  
Washington, DC 20001  
bzsubmissions@dc.gov

**Re: Comments in Opposition, Case No. 19377, Application of The Boundary Companies and The Missionary Society**

Dear Chairperson Hill:

We are members of a local DC organization called Huddle for the Future, and we write to oppose the current application of the Boundary Companies and the Missionary Society for a special exception for proposed development at 3015 4<sup>th</sup> St NE, which we understand is scheduled for a public hearing before the Board of Zoning Adjustment on April 25, 2018. Our opposition is based on specific portions of the application that seek to create a gated community within Ward 5, with private roads that are closed to even pedestrian traffic.

**Who We Are and What We Represent**

Huddle for the Future is comprised of approximately 40 families—

- voters;
- neighbors;
- concerned citizens;
- parents;
- activists; and
- hard-working residents of the District of Columbia (and a few from Maryland), a large number of whom are residents of Ward 5.

Huddle for the Future aims to—

- cultivate forms of activism to ensure that everyone is treated justly, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status; and
- transform individual voices into a collective movement to protect future generations from the social and political injustices that currently exist.

We share the core values that are embodied by the mission of the Office of Human Rights, “to eradicate discrimination, increase equal opportunity and protect human rights for persons who live, work, or visit in the District of Columbia.” More specifically, we believe that nobody should be permitted to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, among other protected traits that are enumerated in the DC Human Rights Act. We further share the belief that all citizens should have equal opportunities available to them, and that development must protect against discrimination, most commonly on the basis of race, and displacement of long-time residents, particularly those of lower socioeconomic status.

## **Our Concerns**

Development, and inevitably gentrification, in the District has not been in step with the above stated core values and beliefs. The District has done a lot to provide equal opportunities to its residents, including adopting a focus on quality public education, creating public charter schools, and implementing a school lottery to increase accessibility of the public schools to residents of all Wards. Ward 5 has the fortune of housing a number of highly sought-after public charter schools who enroll students from across the District. Development in Ward 5, on the other hand, has created enclaves of expensive housing that shut out a segment of current DC residents and puts in stark relief the income inequality that exists in the District, more specifically between the homeowners within the new developments and the students from lower income neighborhoods who attend the public charter schools. This inequality has been an incubator for discrimination against the very same low-income students that DC has made strides to welcome to its high quality schools.

Furthermore, Ward 5 is a wonderfully diverse area (e.g., racially, religiously, socioeconomically) with a neighborly feel that is unusual for a big city. It also boasts some of the most open green spaces in the District. We understand that when choosing to live in a city that development is inevitable, and our members have certainly benefited in many ways from the newer housing and retail spaces that have developed in Ward 5. The current application of the Boundary Companies and the Missionary Society, however, seeks to introduce gated communities that close their streets to the neighboring community. If implemented, such a plan would fundamentally change the nature of our wonderful community and therefore raises several concerns.

1. Gated communities by their very nature create socioeconomic and often racial division and segregation and promote discrimination. Gated communities, therefore, violate the core values espoused by the District, and do not belong in the District.
  - a. The DC Zoning Commission approved the Chancellor's Row development on November 10, 2008, in part because the developers promised that it would not be a gated community and would instead be integrated into the neighboring community and would provide amenities to the Brookland/Edgewood community as a whole. That promise has not been upheld--while indeed there are no gates on the streets of the Chancellor's Row development, Chancellor's Row has privately maintained streets that require permits for parking. The private maintenance of the streets has spurred the development to limit even pedestrian traffic to its homeowners and residents. Chancellor's Row secured promises from the neighboring schools that students, staff, families, and visitors will only walk through the neighborhood on the Hamlin St. side of the development. Residents further monitor pedestrians to ensure that only those who "belong" in the neighborhood are using the streets. It is our understanding that discrimination, approved and encouraged by the Board of that development, has already occurred on a regular basis against black students, staff, and Ward 5 community members. For example, it is our understanding that persons of color, specifically who are black, have been stopped by residents of Chancellor's Row, photographed, or videotaped when walking through their neighborhood to the schools housed at the St. Paul College site. Despite the zoning application that stated that the streets would not be closed, residents have used the private maintenance of the streets as justification for blatant exercise of bias and prejudice.

b. A truly gated community creates an environment ripe for increased discrimination, scrutiny of pedestrians and others who enter the neighborhood, and questions of whether people “belong,” all with the imprimatur of the District should the application be granted as currently drafted.

2. On a related note, the District approved the application of two charter schools to lease the existing building at the St. Paul College site: Lee Montessori, an elementary school, and Washington Leadership Academy (WLA), a high school. It is our understanding that the majority of the students at WLA are black, with a large percentage qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals. The current application eliminates one of two “permitted” pedestrian access points to the schools (the plans show townhomes over the current path from 4th St. without a replacement, leaving only the Hamlin St. route through Chancellor’s Row for pedestrian access) while simultaneously creating an environment where, should students try to walk through the private streets to get to the school at any point, they will be open to scrutiny, discrimination, and to legal repercussions, such as arrests for trespassing. The District must ensure that the decisions of its separate administrative entities work in harmony together and do not create an environment ripe for conflict, particularly to the detriment of its most vulnerable residents.

3. We share concerns relating to the development of the religious sites present throughout Ward 5. These sites appear to be uniformly sold to developers to build dense, expensive housing communities, which eliminate green spaces to the detriment of the environment and the character of the community. The pattern of development appears to violate the District’s own strategic plan as expressed in The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capitol.

4. Finally, we share the concerns expressed in the DDOT evaluation regarding congestion, access, and connectivity to the existing neighborhood, and do not repeat those here.

We believe, as DDOT has suggested, the grant of public access easements on the private streets and sidewalks within the proposed development can go a long way to addressing the issues presented in numbers 1, 2, and 4 above. Given the issues that have arisen with the Chancellor’s Row community, however, we believe that the Board should consult with the DC Office of Human Rights and require further changes to the current application that mitigate and eliminate any discriminatory effects that the development may import. Approved developments should uphold the core values of the District, not work counter to the District’s stated goals, one of which is to eradicate discrimination for persons who live in the District of Columbia.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,



Helen LaCroix (2927 10<sup>th</sup> St. NE Washington DC, 20017, 202-635-6364, [helen@limits.com](mailto:helen@limits.com)), on behalf of Huddle for the Future