

November 15, 2017

Testimony of John Strand regarding Opposition to Application #19581: Latin American Montessori Bilingual (LAMB) Public Charter School Application to Increase the Number of Students from 300 to 600 at 5000 14th St NW

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Board.

I'm John Strand. My wife, Lisa Weiss, and I have lived at 1501 Emerson St. NW for 21 years and are adjoining neighbors of the southwest corner of the Kingsbury Center property at 5000 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW, and we have standing in this case. We oppose the special exception application (BZA #19581) of Building Hope Parkside Foundation and the Latin American Montessori Bilingual Public Charter School (LAMB) to establish a public charter school (LAMB) and co-location of LAMB with another permitted private school (Kingsbury Center) at the 5000 14<sup>th</sup> St NW location. This special exception application requests permission to increase the allowable student population at this location from 300 to 600 and to build a new gymnasium adjacent to neighboring single family residences, including ours.

As you have heard from the Testimony provided and no doubt observed from the various Letters in Support and in Opposition, this is a very emotional issue for all involved. For Supporters (***none of whom have standing in this case***), this involves the health and future of their children's school, to which they have deep attachment and investment. For Opponents (***many of whom do have standing, ourselves included***), this involves preserving the residential quality and character of our neighborhood. The LAMB parents who have posted Letters of Support make impassioned cases for the quality of their school, the great opportunity this Application present to consolidate the various campuses, and its potential positive contribution to our neighborhood. We don't dispute any of those important points; if we were LAMB parents, we would probably feel the same.

But instead our daughters walked to West, the local DCPs elementary school across the street from Kingsbury on 14<sup>th</sup> St. And, actually, this Application is primarily about LAMB's special exception request to significantly expand nonresidential use of the

Kingsbury facility within the R-16 Sixteenth Street Heights Overlay District. The R-16 District was put in place in recognition that this stable single-family residential neighborhood already is unduly burdened by nonresidential use of more than 35 assorted institutions, comprising more than 33% of the available land. The R-16 District offers special protections and requirements for “improved public review to ameliorate adverse impacts on immediate and nearby neighbors and preserve a predominantly single-family residential character.”

One cannot argue that the LAMB Application significantly expands the non-residential use of the Kingsbury property. LAMB wants to expand the student population from the current Kingsbury level of 108 to 600, a 556% increase! Moreover, LAMB’s own traffic study points out that morning student drop-offs by car (vehicle trips) would increase from the current Kingsbury level of 73 to 548; that’s 475 more a.m. rush hours car trips, a 750% increase! On top of this, LAMB also wants to build a new gymnasium in the corner of the property behind our house, with the accompanying noise, lighting and potential off-hours activity.

We neighbors who have standing in this case feel strongly that LAMB and Building Hope have not sufficiently demonstrated that their Application will not have adverse impacts – in terms of traffic/parking, noise, lighting/design and other objectionable environmental effects – on us and our neighborhood. Basically, the Applicant has brushed off the high likelihood of a variety of negative effects arising from this dramatic expansion of school-associated activity in this R-16 neighborhood. And we’re justifiably wary of Applicant assurances that “we’re good people and neighbors, we’ll work to make everything right.” We heard those same assurances from Kingsbury Center in 2000 and subsequently have seen them repeatedly violate at least 4 of the 13 BZA conditions placed on their approved application.

As you’ve heard, we feel that right now there are too many unknowns related to how the joint occupancy period of LAMB and Kingsbury will work out in terms of these important impact issues. So we told Building Hope and LAMB we would support a more modest expansion, using their own estimated figures of interim period (2018-2024) maximums of 310 LAMB students and 36 LAMB staff and 175 Kingsbury students and 80 Kingsbury staff. We want to be good neighbors, and we also want to have some

assurance that we can work with the Applicant to establish and monitor meaningful metrics related to the potential areas of impact noted above. Approval at the lower maximum student thresholds would allow all parties to experience the effects of LAMB's co-location with Kingsbury and address any negative issues that arise.

AND, it turns out the Office of Planning agrees with approval of the Application with scaled-back terms. In its 11/03/17 memo outlined (see Exhibit 46), the Office of Planning recommended interim conditions on the Applicant to mitigate potential adverse impacts of the Application on the surrounding R-16 community, as follows:

- 1. The maximum number of students in the interim stage shall be 310 and a maximum number of faculty/staff shall be 36;*
- 2. The hours of operation shall be 7:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday to Friday; and*
- 3. LAMB shall maintain the current allotment of 107 parking spaces.*
- 4. When Kingsbury departs the property and the student population for LAMB is to be increased to 600, the proposal be submitted to the BZA for further review.*
- 5. LAMB shall submit details of the gymnasium to the BZA for review prior to construction either as part of that review, or as a modification to the approved LAMB [application].*

We endorse these recommended conditions on the Applicant set forth by the Office of Planning. We further note that in its 11/08/17 meeting the ANC 4C voted 5-2 in favor of a letter of support for applying these same OP conditions on the Applicant. The ANC 4C letter is posted as Exhibit 71.

Finally, we respectfully request that the BZA reject the LAMB Application as submitted and impose the Office of Planning's recommended conditions, with regular community monitoring and reporting – which would constitute the “improved public review to ameliorate adverse impacts on immediate and nearby neighbors” intended by the R-16 Overlay – as requirements for Approval.

Thank you.

John Strand and Lisa Weiss  
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