March 29, 2000

COMMENTS ON THE TRAFFIC CONDITIONS REVIEW BY THE D.C. DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND TRAFFIC CONSULTANTS RELATIVE TO THE PROPOSED OPERATION OF A SCHOOL FACILITY AT TWO SYNAGOGUES BETWEEN JUNIPER AND JONQUIL STREETS ON 16th STREET, NW WASHINGTON, D.C.

These comments are offered as my personal professional opinion to the neighbors of the Shepherd Park/Colonial Village neighborhood in their endeavor to assess the impact of the proposed zoning change (BZA application 16556) on the neighborhood. My association with the neighborhood and awareness of the project is through membership at the Washington Ethical Society (an institutional neighbor at 7750 16th Street) one block north of the proposed school site.

My relevant professional background includes five(5) years as a design engineer for the D.C. Dept. of Highways and Transportation, Highway Design Division (1961-1966), and over thirty years in traffic engineering and highway planning and design, including transportation planning for major urban projects and environmental impact studies. I am a registered Professional Engineer in Maryland, Virginia and Delaware and was registered in D.C. when I had professional employment there.

The following comments are grouped by type of impact:

The condition of approval for an exception in BZA Application 16556 as specified in DC codes is that it will not bring with it "substantial detriment to the public good". In the case of evaluating traffic impacts this would require examination of impacts on 16th Street NW and on local streets and alleys. This would also require evaluation of off-street parking facilities adjacent to alleys, as they might affect alley operations, evaluation of on-street parking availability as it would be affected by requirements for additional parking to supplement off-street parking and an evaluation of the proposed Traffic Management Plan.

TRAFFIC IMPACT

The consultant report has stated that the impact on 16th Street is "minimal", which is accurate based on normal traffic flows along the arterial. They also state that the "minor" streets "will continue to experience longer delays due to high commuting volumes along 16th Street." The introduction of additional traffic volumes on Jonquil and Juniper Streets both east and west of 16th will increase the "side" street volumes significantly for local traffic even if it does not seem significant as a part of the 16th Street traffic. This increased local traffic is a "substantial detriment" to local residents who already have significant difficulty in entering or crossing 16th Street during the morning peak hour. The statement that the new traffic would be of minimal impact on 16th Street obscures its substantially greater impact on local street traffic. It should also be noted that while the added volume is insignificant, 80 vehicles turning right from 16th will have a significant impact on 16th Street traffic because they must slow down to a speed much lower than the through traffic normally operates (e.g., 15 or less mph instead of 30+ mph).

The D.C. DPW indicates, in their report, that they do not believe that the traffic management plan proposed as a way to alleviate traffic impact are enforceable (I fully agree). Drivers are more likely to utilize left turn lanes at Juniper and Jonquil to access the schools than to follow the prescribed circuitous routes. If these movements do occur (and I agree that this is a probable reality) then there will be more disruption to traffic flow on 16th and also on the local streets than accounted for in the consultant's report. The DPW also raises the reality of an increase in traffic congestion even before adding new traffic because of an 18 month period of construction on 16th.

ALLEY OPERATIONS

There are numerous garages that access the main streets via the alleys that are to be used for loading and unloading operations at the proposed school. Refuse collection trucks also require access periodically and must use the alleys. The DPW indicates, in their report, that they consider the potential disruption to alley operations as probably the most serious impact of the proposed school traffic.

In addition to the vehicular traffic impact on the alley's operations is the impact on pedestrian safety for the school children attending Shepherd Park School. These children utilize the alley to walk to school. The alley is less than 16 feet wide and is even more restricted in width where trash containers encroach on the alley pavement. The alley is an important pedestrian walkway because there is no sidewalk along most of the east side of 16th between Juniper and Kalmia.

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PARKING

The consultant's report shows 33 spaces on two lots adjacent to the alleys. These spaces are extremely packed (or stacked) which will require extremely careful parking and coordinated leaving times. This packed parking will perhaps work with optimum conditions but the potential exists for parking to overflow onto the alley or side streets if parking is not done strictly according to plan or in inclement weather (i.e., snow piled up). The consultant report reflected the marginal ability to provide the indicated number of spaces by stating that a "formal survey of the two sites will be necessary to insure that the existing space would be adequate to provide the planned number of spaces".

A review of the parking layouts, in the report, shows that at Tifereth the handicapped ramp from the alley would be blocked and the dumpster would have to be moved. At Ohev the dumpster is also blocked and perhaps the telephone poles have not been accounted for. At both sites the entrances, wherever they may be located, would be difficult to reach through tightly packed vehicles. If it is presumed that queued vehicle number one at Ohev is the unloading point then the rear door near parked vehicle #18 is a very remote entrance and would be hazardous for a child to navigate. If the side door on Jonquil is the entrance then the entrance is more accessible but would not be desirable in inclement weather.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT PLAN (TPM)

The proposed Traffic Management Plan relies on a number of assumptions that are extremely unlikely to be realized. Adherence to the provisions of the TPM would be necessary to achieve even minimal reduction of traffic impact. Teachers, for example, will be asked to act as traffic officers in instances such as directing drivers in a hurry (and maybe even late) who are waiting to drop off children to drive around the block and go to the rear of the queue because a neighbor needs to get out of their garage. Drivers will be asked to drive north for 6 or 8 blocks to turn east and follow an extraordinarily circuitous route to head south. Greater than 75% of the drivers will want to head south after the drop-off according to the consultant - reference page 3 of DPW report. This exit route is after taking an equally circuitous route to arrive at the school. The DPW report stated that the traffic routings recommended "appear to be unenforceable" . Anyone who has driven during a Washington Metropolitan Area rush hour would readily agree with this conclusion.

Reluctance of the neighborhood to have any faith in the enforcement promises made relative to the TPM is based on their experience with Tifereth's compliance with previously promised compliance with BZA orders. The Tifereth school, according to testimony at the February 1, 2000 ANC public meeting, has consistently violated provisions in the 1994 BZA order which specified special traffic operating rules and requirements for working with the neighborhood to resolve complaints.

CONCLUSION

Based on personal inspection of the sites and analysis of the reports by others, my personal opinion as a registered professional engineer with extensive experience in traffic engineering and highway design is that there is a significant "substantial detriment to the public good" in the impact on the use of local alleys. The operating plan developed for school access in support of BZA Application 16556 relies on many assumptions that are unlikely to be fully realized.

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