Prepared Remarks of Carolyn A. Thornell on Behalf of The Kingsbury Center, Inc.

Before the Board of Zoning Adjustment For The District of Columbia

Historical Background

On behalf of The Kingsbury Center, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before the BZA this afternoon. The Kingsbury Center is the oldest nonprofit educational institution in the Washington area that addresses the special needs of young children, adolescents, and adults who experience learning difficulties. Founded in 1938 by Marion Kingsbury, a pioneer in remedial education, the Center provides educational, diagnostic, psychological, consultative, and tutoring services to hundreds of individuals each year through the Kingsbury Day School (KDS) and two ancillary divisions: (1) Diagnostic and Psychological Services; and (2) Tutoring Services.

Kingsbury Mission and Program Overview

The goal of Kingsbury Day School (KDS) is to provide an appropriate and stimulating academic program for children with learning difficulties that assists them in learning compensatory skills to enable them to function independently and effectively in elementary and secondary school and college. Currently KDS enrolls 100 students ages five to 14 of average or above-average cognitive ability with learning disabilities and helps them to reach their potential in an academic setting. The KDS curriculum integrates a low student-teacher ratio (eight students and two teachers per class); one-on-one and group work; multisensory teaching; a full complement of co-curricular classes, including art, music, drama, and physical education (some of which take place in nearby off-site locations due to space limitations); and related services,

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when needed, such as occupational therapy, speech and language remediation, and psychotherapy.

KDS is supported by the Tutoring Services division of The Kingsbury Center which trains its own special tutors to work with children and adolescents with learning difficulties. They also tutor children who are not currently enrolled at KDS. Kingsbury's Diagnostic and Psychological Services division administers diagnostic tests and provides therapy for KDS children and others referred to the Center because they appear to have learning or attentional difficulties.

Kingsbury Public Service Activities

In the District of Columbia community, Kingsbury has played a leadership role in developing and operating programs for "at-risk" children and adolescents, as well as providing enrichment programs for professionals and parents involved with these children. Kingsbury has developed the "Teachers and Tutors" program to increase the effectiveness of teachers in educating mainstreamed students with learning difficulties in selected DC Public Schools, including Brightwood, Garrison, Martin Luther King, and Cleveland Elementary Schools. With current funding from foundations, the program provides these D.C. public school teachers with specialized training in identifying learning disabled children and teaching them strategies for learning that will help them to be successful students. Kingsbury administrators have already met with the principal of West Elementary School – just across the Street from 5000 14th Street-- about the possibility of implementing the program in that school. He welcomes the opportunity, if we are successful in obtaining a grant for that purpose.

Whenever possible, Kingsbury has also provided tutoring, testing, diagnostic, and therapeutic psychological services at little or no cost to economically disadvantaged children and adults. This service is supported financially, in part, by local and national foundations and organizations. During 1998-99, over $82,000 in grants and internal funding supported the Center's program of testing and tutoring for economically disadvantaged children. This figure includes the Center's waiver of more than $9,000 in admissions testing fees for children applying to independent schools. In addition, many generous volunteer tutors and other Kingsbury professionals give of their time freely or at greatly reduced fees with children from economically disadvantaged families.

Kingsbury also offers community education in child development and learning disabilities through The Kingsbury Lecture Series and The Kingsbury Symposium. Since 1988, The Kingsbury Center has offered daylong annual symposia for teachers, other professionals, and parents on topics related to learning disabilities such as learning strategies, ADD/ADHD, types of intelligence, and self-esteem. The Symposium is open to the public.

KDS Student Population Profile

Kingsbury Day School currently enrolls 100 students of whom 69% are male and 31% female. Further, 47% of KDS's students are Caucasian, 46% are African-American, 5% are Latino/Hispanic, and 2% are Asian-American or other ethnicity. Geographically, 82% of KDS's students are from the District of Columbia, 15% from Maryland, and 3% from Virginia. Eighty-eight of our 100 children are funded under IDEA by their respective public school districts—80 by DCPS.

Kingsbury's Relocation Objectives & Efforts

Kingsbury's ability to grow has been severely limited by the physical constraints of its existing facilities in the Sheridan-Kalorama section of Washington. There is no outdoor play area onsite, and off-street parking is severely limited. Each year for the last five, the increased demand for enrollment at KDS has resulted in more and more creative attempts to carve additional classroom space out of its existing facilities. As a result, the classrooms have become increasingly crowded and the Center's programmatic and administrative offices have been squeezed to the limit. Similarly, families seeking diagnostic and remediation services are experiencing several months' wait because enlargement of our staff would require additional space.

Kingsbury has been looking for an appropriate, affordable new location since 1997 when its 3 buildings were put on the market. The option of expanding at its current location, by acquiring new buildings, was examined. This option was ruled out, however, because the high density residential buildings in the area do not lend themselves to school use without resulting in adverse impacts on neighboring residential uses. Even major renovations of our existing buildings would not yield sufficient additional space to permit significant expansion.

Kingsbury was committed to staying in the District of Columbia and continuing its long history of serving DC's residents. The Board of Trustees and administration of Kingsbury

further assured parents and staff that every effort would be made to find a facility that was 1) centrally located in the District; 2) had ample green space so that the children could play on the premises (instead of walking a block to a local part); and 3) offered adequate parking space on the site. The Dickson Mansion, centrally located at 5000 14th Street, NW, with more than 57,000 square feet of space on nearly four acres of land, ideally suits Kingsbury's criteria for a new facility.

An enlarged KDS will fill a desperate need in the District of Columbia and surrounding jurisdictions. Many more students in the District alone are learning disabled (an estimated 1 in 5 children) than can be properly served in the existing special education schools. An estimated 5,000 children have been identified as being learning disabled in the District and more have not yet been diagnosed. One DC-based public school with 150 children and one independent school with 310 spaces are the only ones dedicated exclusively to this population.

The same shortage of spaces for learning disabled children is also evident at Kingsbury Day School. The rate of applications to Kingsbury Day School has grown steadily since 1994. Since the 1996-97 school year, Kingsbury has been able to replace its average 15 students who "age out" of the program plus increase student enrollment from the existing applicant pool and still have a year-round waiting list. We have 4 to 5 applications for every available space.

Selection of the Dickson Mansion -- Implementation of Kingsbury's Concept for Growth

While KDS's enrollment is 100 today, KDS projects growth to 266 students by fiscal 2007 and to a maximum of 300 students within the subsequent three years. Kingsbury's concept for growth also includes diversification in its program.

In anticipation of a move to larger facilities, Kingsbury is expanding its middle school program. Following relocation to the Dickson Mansion, Kingsbury will also begin a high school program, with its own students who have reached that grade and others who are aging out of other programs or seeking a more suitable placement.

Further, the proposed move to Dickson Mansion will also allow Kingsbury's Diagnostic and Psychological Services and Tutoring Services divisions to expand and accommodate growing requests for their services. Finally, the site will also comfortably house the administrative infrastructure for all of Kingsbury's programs. As a result, Kingsbury will be able to maintain and further develop its team approach to the delivery of services. In addition to its students, other clients can continue to come to one place to receive psycho-educational evaluations and therapy; speech and language as well as occupational therapy evaluations; consultation with a medical doctor for possible treatment of difficulties; and therapists and tutors to provide treatment and remediation of diagnosed difficulties.

Moreover, the purchase and renovation of the Dickson Mansion will enable Kingsbury to remain in the District of Columbia and conveniently serve the D.C. community.

Adequate Parking On-Site

As noted earlier, adequate on-site parking was one of the criteria set by Kingsbury's Board and senior administration for an acceptable new facility. We were delighted with the Dickson Mansion because it clearly could accommodate on-site parking for faculty, staff, parents, and visitors. Had this not been the case, it is likely that the Board would have had serious reservations about proceeding with plans to purchase the building.

We arranged to meet with the Carter Barron East Neighborhood Association (CBENA) to determine the interests and concerns of the immediate neighbors of 5000 14th Street. We also, sought to learn from the ANC single member district representative of 4C02 if there were concerns that others in the ANC might have. All indicated that traffic and parking were the major issues. We met twice with CBENA and once with its traffic subcommittee.

With respect to parking, the expressed concern was that neighbors not be inconvenienced by our staff's parking on the street. We increased on-site parking to 124 spaces, which met our current and future parking needs and addressed the concerns of the neighbors. The parking was configured in a manner that was acceptable to CBENA and to us. We committed to leaving as many trees and as much green space as possible, and to having a Kingsbury liaison to CBENA to discuss such issues as landscaping.

We were therefore surprised at the ANC meeting to hear requests that the parking should be severely reduced in order to preserve trees, and that the staff should park off-site. The suggested parking venue was Carter Barron. We could not agree to that without reviewing the proposal in detail—but we did say that we would consult with Board members and administrators about this matter. Off-site parking or parking at a level well below our needs would not be acceptable to Kingsbury. Our long struggle with parking at our current site clearly points to the reasons we need on-site parking and the importance of such parking to Kingsbury's ability to thrive and grow.

We offer a comprehensive services program with staff and providers who are both full and part-time and are in great demand. We will lose many part-time staff if they must park a distance from the school, and walk both ways, thus adding to their time at Kingsbury. Their schedules are such that they cannot lose this much time and satisfy their other obligations.

Schools in the metropolitan area, especially special education schools, are facing a well-documented teacher shortage. Kingsbury, therefore, is in a very competitive market to attract qualified teachers. Unfortunately, our teachers' salaries are much below those offered by DCPS and other surrounding public school systems. Our teachers who have Masters degrees and 10-15 years experience, earn approximately the same as beginning teachers in DC and other neighborhood jurisdictions with only a bachelor's degree. Parking is an amenity that helps to compensate for the low salary. Offering salaries in the range that we can afford and then having parking at a distant location would cause us to lose both prespective and current faculty.

Parking on the street would disturb the neighbors. Parking at Carter Barron is entirely too far away. Further, it is not always available (e.g., during tennis tournaments or camps). In addition, 90% of our staff is female. There is no metropolitan area neighborhood, including this one, in which women would feel safe walking to a parking site in darkness (4 to 5 months of the year).

Parents and visitors who come to our site to participate in their children's school program, or to have testing and tutoring from members of our staff, need to be assured of parking, or they will not come. And they certainly would not park at the proposed site, leaving them either on neighborhood streets, or, in the case of visitors, choosing to go to another organization for testing or tutoring.

The success of our program at the Dickson Mansion site depends on our ability to grow. For the variety of reasons mentioned, off-site parking threatens our ability to grow and to derive the revenues needed to cover the costs of financing this property.

We are pleased to see that the Office of Planning has recommended 92 parking spaces. This is a number that would be acceptable to Kingsbury.

Thank you for your consideration.