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Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street NW
Room 210
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Board Members:

I am writing in support of Edmund Burke School's recent application for a variance (BZA case # 16611). As a recent graduate of Burke, and a voting resident of Ward 3, I feel strongly that allowing the proposed expansion would not only improve the school, but would also have a positive net effect on the neighborhood.

I would like to direct your attention to the expansion that Sheridan School (4400 36th street) underwent several years ago. I attended that school for 8 years, and at the time Sheridan decided to expand, the school was roughly in the same situation Burke is in now. The demand for private schools was increasing, and the building, built in the 70's, could not handle the demands of an increasing student body, nor could it compete with its peer institutions. To make a long story short, the neighbors vigorously opposed the project, but the BZA realized that the long-term benefits of expansion outweighed the concerns. And, I'm pleased to report that the end result was positive, both for the school and the neighborhood.

I would respectfully submit that the same is true for Burke. To my knowledge, the neighbors have expressed two main concerns: Traffic and parking. In terms of traffic, I can definitely understand their concern, as I drove to school in my junior and senior years. The traffic in the morning and afternoon is quite heavy. In response, Burke hired off-duty MPD officers to regulate the traffic and enforce a more efficient traffic pattern at great annual expense. The school has bent over backwards to address the concerns the neighbors have brought, but it has been met with nasty yard signs instead of a willingness to work together in good faith.

I can also sympathize with the neighbors concerns regarding parking, as I live two blocks from Lafayette Elementary School, and parking is often difficult. However, I think the neighbors are unfairly blaming Burke. There are less than 300 students and 30 or so faculty. Of those 300 students, only 100 or so have driver's licenses, and the number of those students who drive on a regular basis is considerably lower. Those who do must park in a designated area of Upton Street, or on Connecticut Avenue. As of last year, I knew of three students, myself included, who had valid zone three parking permits. My point is simple; the solution to this is vigorous enforcement of the residential parking regulations, not denying Burke a variance to build. Denying the variance would not help things at all, and speculating that an expansion would make things worse, considering the parking measures the school has incorporated into the plan is biased and unfair. I would like to point out that there are three educational institutions in the neighborhood, Burke included. But, it seems that Burke is getting a disproportionate amount of the blame. Also, a lot of the parking problems come from people who use residential streets as overflow parking for Connecticut Avenue. This is nothing new, and happens all along major arteries.

BZA
Case No. 16611
Exhibit No. 132



Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16611
EXHIBIT NO.132

I am not sure if you have had the chance to view the site of the proposed expansion yourselves, but let me assure you, the buildings currently standing next door to Burke (the site of the proposed expansion) are eyesores. They poorly maintained, and have for years appeared, at least to me, to be about to fall down. The proposed expansion would improve the esthetics of the neighborhood considerably. And, as someone who has just lived through a renovation, I can relate to concerns regarding construction. However, I would like to note that a multi-story apartment building was built across the street last year. As far as I could tell, it caused little disruption.

I think I can also offer a unique perspective (at least from those of parents) as to why we need this extra space. As Burke's reputation has grown, so has its enrollment. There are now more students than the current space can handle. I would invite you to observe one of our all school assemblies. During my freshman and sophomore years, everyone fit comfortably in our atrium. As my high school career progressed, the space got tighter and tighter.

Additionally, facilities for our academic and athletic programs are at a premium. The enrollment in our photography classes is capped because of the size of our darkroom; our sports teams are limited in their activities because of the size of our gym, etc. Also, due to a shortage of rooms, the school was forced to give sophomores free periods, instead of study halls. Formerly, free periods were a privilege for freshman and sophomores, earned only by making the honor roll. This privilege was a major motivator for me.

While it is not my place to criticize the actions of our neighbors, I would like to note that the school pre-dated all but a handful of them. When you **choose** to move near a school, it seems to me that one must be prepared to deal with the parking problems and occasional noise. I do not see how Burke's application is any different from those of Maret, NCS or Sheridan. It is a basic, and generally accepted fact that schools have to expand to fit the times. The only difference here is that our neighbors have regrettably decided to oppose this project. That is their right, just as it is mine to support it, but I hope the BZA will once again show the same vision that you did in the cases of other similarly situated private schools and recognize that the long-term educational benefits of this project outweigh the concerns presented.

Finally, I hope you will realize that while Edmund Burke has made every conceivable effort to minimize any disruption to the neighborhood, our neighbors have been unwilling to work in good faith to achieve a solution acceptable to both parties. I assure you that Edmund Burke will continue to work to minimize any disturbance to our neighbors, but in order for this to be maximally effective, the neighbors need to work with us, not against us.

If I can be of any assistance to you, I would be delighted and honored to do so.

Sincerely,

Jonathan H. Franks
Edmund Burke Class of 2000
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