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May 4, 2001

District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 Fourth Street, NW
Room 210
Washington, DC 20001

Re: BZA Application Case No. 16611: Proposed Edmund Burke School Expansion

To the Board:

I live across the street from Edmund Burke School and I also have a child in the school. I am writing to support their application for expansion, not as a parent of a Burke student but as a neighbor who will have to live with Burke long after my child has left the school.

In seeking a variance to expand at the corner of Upton Street and Connecticut Avenue, NW, the Edmund Burke School has created a plan that answers every concern voiced by the neighbors over a year ago when this process first started.

Specifically, Burke has:

- created access to the school from Connecticut Avenue
- eliminated drop-off and pick-up of students on Upton Street,
- created a total of 75 on-site parking spaces to be used by faculty and students for school time and evening events
- pledged to require all students who drive to school to park on-site
- agreed to construct a driveway parallel to the public alley between Van Ness and Upton streets to be used for Burke School traffic only and to eliminate Burke School traffic from that public alley
- agreed to continue traffic control positions to ensure enforcement of traffic regulations
- limited evening events to school related activities only (i.e., no renting of Burke School space to for non-Burke School groups)
- expanded a Metro benefit program for Virginia and Maryland families in which Burke will pay for ½ of the cost of riding Metro to school instead of driving
- agreed to provide school vans to pick up in the morning near Pierce Mill and North of the school on Connecticut Avenue, thereby eliminating those cars from the area around the school

With these conditions, the Burke School expansion will result in a clear and significant improvement to the current traffic conditions in the neighborhood.

BZA
Case No. 16611
Exhibit No. 151

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16611
EXHIBIT NO.151

Still, the neighbors oppose the expansion. At this point, one must wonder whether it is the good of the neighborhood or an inherent dislike of the school, its children, and/or any development at all.

At the most recent ANC meeting, Ms. Karen Perry, one of the two ANC commissioners most closely involved in this project, voiced her objections. With her disgust clearly expressed in her voice and facial expression, Ms. Perry's most virulent objection was to the students walking in groups to purchase lunch from the local retail establishments and jogging for exercise "...in their gym shorts!" It is true that the children patronize the neighborhood businesses and run in the neighborhood for exercise, but I fail to see how this is objectionable. She also claimed that the children eat their lunches on the neighbor's front yards, but as one who works at home all day on Upton Street, I can attest that this is incorrect.

Mr. Phil Kogan, in whose district this expansion is proposed, was also openly hostile to the Burke School representatives at the ANC meeting. Mr. Kogan is well known to oppose all development and has testified that the District's governing bodies are inappropriately pro-development.

The Edmund Burke School has presented evidence that their current plan will decrease side-street traffic, eliminate lining up of cars on Upton Street, improve access for its immediate neighbors to their public alley, and provide for more on-site student lounge areas. Clearly, these conditions will improve the neighborhood.

I'm looking at this as a neighbor. What is the logical result of the expansion not going forward? The current traffic situation will continue with long lines in the morning and afternoon and no traffic enforcement personnel to keep drivers civil and traffic moving. Burke students and faculty will continue to park on our street. There will be no on-site spaces for Burke's students to lounge. The building that Burke recently purchased in anticipation of the expansion might be sold and could be developed as a 90 unit apartment building. In addition, if Burke leaves, we might have a less desirable owner for the current Burke School building. In short, we win nothing but the satisfaction of having stopped what some see as 'yet another developer' and we could be worse off than we are now.

The opposition by the Upton Street neighbors is short-sighted and is by no means unanimous. The Edmund Burke School is not just another developer. It is a progressive middle and high school with a strong social service record in the District. It provides financial aid to more than 20 percent of its families at a cost in 2000-2001 of more than $600,000.

Burke has responded to numerous neighborhood needs within its current financial and space constraints. It has pledged improve its performance in the future by reporting enrollment to the BZA and the ANC and/or to abide by any BZA plan for monitoring compliance.

I am attaching a list of neighbors on Upton Street who support the Burke expansion. For the most part they have not been active in the opposition to Burke and have not attended most of the meetings held on this matter during the last year; those who don't oppose something rarely come out to evening meetings. I hope that you will consider the best interests of the neighborhood and the opinions of these neighbors in your evaluation of the Edmund Burke expansion plan.

Very Truly Yours,

Deirdre K. Karambelas

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