Statement by Phil Kogan, ANC 3F01
Before the Board of Zoning Adjustment
Application 16611, Edmund Burke School
May 15, 2001

My name is Phil Kogan and I am the ANC Commissioner for SMD 3F01, the district in which the Edmund Burke School is located.

Over the past 14 months ANC 3F has spent a good deal of time considering the Burke School's planned expansion. Reviewing the history of the project over this period of time can provide a useful context for understanding ANC 3F's position on this proposal.

ANC 3F considered the Burke School application at five separate meetings between March 2000 and April 2001. Three of these were regular business meetings and two were special meetings devoted primarily to the Burke School application. Representatives of the Edmund Burke School appeared at meetings of ANC 3F on March 13 and October 11, 2000, and on January 16 and April 23, 2001. The Burke School expansion was also on the agenda of a regularly scheduled ANC 3F meeting on October 16, 2000.

During this period, the Burke School presented several different versions of its plan for an addition. The Burke School recognized early in its planning process that traffic management would be a key part of any plan. The school's residential neighbors are very concerned about existing traffic conditions at the school and that many neighbors find the conditions to be objectionable. From these neighbors perspective, a nearly 20 percent increase in school generated traffic that would accompany expansion could only make matters worse.

Each version of the project reviewed by ANC 3F proposed to increase the number of students at the school to 360 and to also increase the faculty and staff size. But each version took a different approach toward addressing the school's traffic problems.

The Burke School provided ANC 3F a pre-hearing statement on September 26, 2000, in anticipation of an October BZA hearing. The traffic impact analysis accompanying this plan showed that the total number of daily trips generated by the school would increase from 500 to 595, an increase of nearly 20 percent. The traffic management analysis described in the pre-hearing statement proposed a "loop" plan that would direct the school's drop off and pick up traffic to a loop or carousel that would move traffic around the school. One leg of the loop would have been formed by converting an existing side yard on the east side of the school to a drive through lane. This side yard provides a green space buffer between the school and the residential neighborhood to its east on Upton Street. This leg of the loop on the east side of the school would connect with the existing rear alley to the north of the school which would form the

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second leg. The public alley between Upton and Van Ness Streets would form a third leg and Upton Street itself would be the fourth leg. School officials assured the neighborhood that the loop plan would solve the traffic problems at the Burke School. Neighborhood support was solicited on the basis that traffic conditions would improve if the school were allowed to expand and create its traffic loop.

Our neighbors vigorously opposed elimination of the green space buffer between the school and its residential neighbors and also objected to the use of a public alley and a public street for managing school drop off and pick up activities. There was a great deal of concern that the proposed loop could quickly become grid locked simply because of the large volume of traffic being directed into a very limited and confined space. A total of nearly 200 vehicles would be entering the loop during the morning drop off period. Any delay in vehicle movement at any one point in the loop would cause the entire system to fail. This failure in turn would block our neighbors' access to Upton Street and the public alley at the very time of day they would need such access. This plan was also seen as an unwelcome extension of the Burke School's already intrusive traffic operations further into the community.

On October 16, 2000, ANC 3F voted five to one to oppose the school's application. A principal point of objection was the proposed loop plan. Our ANC simply did not believe that such a plan could work given the high volumes of traffic being directed into the loop for drop off and pick up. Also high on the ANC's list of objections was the inadequacy of the amount of parking the plan would provide. From our neighbors perspective it seemed that the Burke School wanted to reap the benefits of expansion while asking the neighborhood to bear the burden of expansion in the form of more school generated traffic on public streets and alleys and more school generated demand for limited on-street parking.

On January 11, 2001, ANC 3F received a revised pre-hearing statement from the Burke School in anticipation of a January hearing. This version of the project modified the approach toward solving the school's traffic problems. This latest plan would use a traffic loop but one that had a different orientation from the previous plan. A traffic lane was proposed to be created between the school's new building on Connecticut Avenue and the apartment building at 4107 Connecticut Avenue. The school proposed that drop off and pick up traffic would use the new lane to enter the school's property by turning right from Connecticut Avenue. Traffic would then turn right into a traffic lane alongside the new building that would run parallel to the Van Ness/Upton public alley and feed school traffic onto Upton Street. The school's daily trip generation through the neighborhood would increase from 500 trips a day to 593 trips – again, a nearly 20 percent increase. Once again, the school assured its neighbors that this plan would solve the school's traffic problems and address neighborhood concerns. Neighborhood support was solicited on this basis.

From the neighborhood perspective, however, this plan also put too much of the school's traffic and parking burden on the school's residential neighbors since the public alley as well as Upton Street would continue to be heavily used for school drop off and pick up activity. There was concern that the high volumes of traffic directed to the new drive through lane would lead to

backups on Connecticut Avenue. Such backups would be an incentive for drivers to revert to using the public alley as well as onto Upton Street to access the school. There was also a great deal of concern about automobile exhaust. Because the proposed drive-through would abut the apartment building at 4107 Connecticut Avenue, residents of this building would be exposed to a high level of carbon monoxide fumes generated by the high volumes of school generated traffic passing alongside it. No ventilation would be provided to disperse, filter or in any way minimize the noxious automobile exhaust. This plan would also have provided inadequate parking and would have increased the school's demand for limited on street parking. On January 16, 2001, ANC 3F voted three to two with one abstention to oppose the school's application.

On April 10, 2001, ANC 3F received the pre-hearing statement that the Board is considering today. This version of the plan also proposes that drop off and pick up traffic be directed to the Connecticut Avenue side of the proposed building. This traffic would enter the interior of the proposed building where it would be channeled in one of three ways. One route would take vehicles to an the underground garage. A second route would take vehicles through a turnaround that would bring them back out to Connecticut Avenue. And a third path would take vehicles to a drive through lane that would run alongside the proposed building and parallel to the public alley. This drive through lane would bring vehicles back onto Upton Street. This plan proposes to increase school generated traffic from the current 500 trips a day to 593 trips a day, a nearly 20 percent increase. This plan was presented with assurances that it would solve the school's traffic problems. Neighborhood support was solicited by the school on this basis.

DPW's report rejects this current Burke School plan and validates our neighbors' concerns about this project. This report rejects the plan on the basis that the neighborhood around the Burke School does not have a complete grid system of streets and that local alleys. The incomplete network of streets and alleys is not designed to handle existing levels of traffic that weave through it daily to drop off and pick up students. This situation produces traffic congestion and traffic safety problems in the neighborhood. Our neighbors object to this current plan on the same basis that DPW rejected it. Adding additional traffic to an area that is already saturated and overwhelmed with traffic will simply make things worse.

Another problem with this plan is that the applicant's traffic impact analysis proposes that parents coming to the school from the north along Connecticut Avenue would be required to approach the school from the south. In order to change their direction of travel along Connecticut Avenue, parents traveling south bound on Connecticut Avenue would be required to turn right onto Van Ness Street, travel to Reno Road and turn left, go to Tilden Street and turn left, and continue back to Connecticut Avenue where they would turn left in order to approach the school in the northbound lane of Connecticut Avenue. This is a circuitous route. It is likely that parents would continue to use the most direct route available to them. This direct route means that vehicles traveling south on Connecticut Avenue turn left at the left turn arrow at Veazey Terrace. From there vehicles turn right into the Veazey/Van Ness alley and continue to the Van Ness/Upton alley which leads to Upton Street. This is how much of the school's Connecticut Avenue southbound traffic arrives at school today. This is an inappropriate use of public alleys and our neighbors are very concerned that such use would only intensify should this

plan be approved.

The proposed traffic plan has another objectionable feature from the neighborhood perspective. DPW's report states that a "traffic signal would need to be placed at Upton and Connecticut Avenue" as a condition of approval of the application. This recommendation attests to the fact that traffic conditions would worsen at the Connecticut and Upton intersection and would need to be mitigated should the application be approved. This intersection is already rated at a Level of Service of "F", the worst possible rating. The recommendation for a traffic signal also suggests that the applicant's plan for directing traffic to the Connecticut Avenue entrance of the proposed building will not have the intended mitigating effects and that additional measures such as this new traffic light would be needed to manage increased traffic volume.

Further, installation of a traffic signal at the Connecticut/Upton could have the unintended consequence of creating traffic back ups on Connecticut Avenue. With a new signal at Upton Street added to the existing signals at Tilden Street, Van Ness Street, and Veazey Terrace there would be four traffic signals within a very short three and one half block stretch of Connecticut Avenue. Rather than expediting the flow of traffic, this additional signal could have the effect of "boxing" traffic in and impeding the movement of cars in this short three block stretch. The proposed signal could also have the unintended negative consequence of encouraging more traffic onto Upton Street. A signal at the Upton/Connecticut intersection could act as magnet for drivers seeking an outlet to Connecticut Avenue or a cut through to Rock Creek park.

Our neighbors also object to the construction of three new layby areas that would be created by narrowing parts of the Upton Street and Connecticut Avenue sidewalks. A proposed layby in front of the existing school would destroy three mature trees and create a safety hazard for pedestrians and students by narrowing a sidewalk that provides direct access to Connecticut Avenue. This sidewalk would also provide access for students as well as faculty and staff walking between the existing building and the proposed building. We understand that the applicant has decided to drop this layby from the plan. A proposed layby in front of the new school building on Upton Street would create a safety hazard for pedestrians and students by narrowing a sidewalk that provides access to Connecticut Avenue. This sidewalk would also provide access for students as well as faculty and staff walking between the existing building and the proposed building. Mr. Laden of DPW has stated that his agency opposes this layby. A proposed layby as well as construction of a driveway in front of the proposed building on Connecticut Avenue would eliminate much needed neighborhood parking spaces and create a safety hazard for pedestrians by narrowing a heavily used sidewalk that provides direct access to and from the Connecticut Avenue commercial district and to and from the Van Ness Metro stop. This layby would also remove mature trees.

On April 23 ANC 3F voted three in favor, two opposed, and one abstention to support a resolution recommending that the BZA reject Application 16611. Our ANC continues to be very concerned that an increase in Burke School generated traffic in our neighborhood will make a bad situation worse.

ANC 3F is also concerned that the applicant has failed to comply with the conditions of its existing BZA Order and has exceeded its authorized level of student enrollment as well as faculty and staff. Because traffic management measures in this application depend on voluntary compliance to be effective, this failure to comply with the existing BZA Order is distressing. We believe that the school's failure to voluntarily comply with its existing BZA Order should weigh heavily in the Board's consideration of this application.

As the Board members can see, several variations of this project including the version presented by the school today have been considered and rejected by ANC 3F. In each case our ANC came to similar conclusions and each decision by ANC 3F had some common themes. Let me review these for you:

1. Existing traffic conditions at the school are not acceptable.

2. Increasing the volume of traffic by nearly 20 percent can only make things worse.

3. The Burke School's principal difficulty in developing a solution for its traffic is the limited amount of space available for traffic management. The proposed facility would house 360 students on less than three quarters of an acre of land situated in a densely populated residential neighborhood. This is far below the one acre per one hundred students that is closer to the norm for private schools in the District. In each version of its traffic plan the school has been handicapped by the lack of adequate space for managing its traffic operations.

4. The Burke School's efforts to come up with a workable plan are also severely handicapped by the fact that the School is located in a densely populated residential neighborhood with an incomplete grid system of streets. On streets that are already overwhelmed with school generated traffic, increasing the volume of traffic by 20 percent can only produce more congestion and more traffic safety problems.

I believe that when the Board considers the serious flaws in the traffic plan presented today, it will conclude, as ANC 3F did, that this plan will produce highly objectionable conditions for our neighborhood. I would also encourage the Board to consider that existing traffic conditions at the Burke School have not improved even while this application has been under consideration.

From ANC 3F's perspective, the best solution for the Burke School's traffic problems is to have the school operate at the level of 270 students that is authorized in its existing BZA Order. The school's application has identified a number of steps that could be taken to relieve traffic congestion and improve traffic safety including the increased use of mass transit subsidies and other alternatives to automobile commuting. The school should be encouraged to develop a traffic management plan that will enable it to minimize traffic impacts on the neighborhood by remaining at the 270 student level.

I would also ask the Board to bear in mind that there is nothing in the zoning code or in District law that compels the expansion of the Edmund Burke School. Expansion of the Burke School is

not inevitable and should not be viewed as being inevitable. In fact, the traffic impacts of an expanded school would produce objectionable conditions and provide a sound basis for rejecting this application.

I want to thank the members of the board for the opportunity to present the views of ANC 3F today.