GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

Office of the Director

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Memorandum

TO: Board of Zoning Adjustments

FROM: Andrew Altman, Director
Office of Planning

BZA
Case No. 16623
Exhibit No. 27

DATE: November 14, 2000

SUBJECT: BZA Application #16623 (Washington International School)
3100 Macomb Street, N.W.

APPLICATION

The application by Washington International School requests, pursuant to 11 DCMR 3104.1, a special exception under Section 206 to change the status of a modular classroom building from a temporary to a permanent status at a private school.

SITE AND AREA DESCRIPTION

The Washington International School, Tregaron Campus, is located at 3100 Macomb Street, N.W. (Square 2084, Lot 837). The school site occupies approximately six acres of the 20.68-acre historic Tregaron estate. The remainder of the estate is undeveloped. The school buildings are located at the top of a hill approximately 190 feet from the entrance on Macomb Street and approximately 520 feet from the exit on Klingle Road (See attached Site Plan). The school property is bounded on the north by Macomb Street; on the east by the remainder of the Tregaron Estate, Klingle Road and Woodley Park residential community; to the south by Klingle and Woodley Roads; and to the west by property owned by the Republic of Taiwan.

HISTORY OF PROPERTY

Over the years, the BZA has approved a number of special exceptions for operations concerning the Washington International School. On July 21, 1978, the BZA approved the special exception for the School by Order of the Board in Application 12576. In 1995, the Board granted special exception approval of a modular building for a period of four years (Order of the Board in Application 16054) to accommodate the selling and purchasing of a new campus for the Lower School, the planning and development of new music/arts and gymnasium facilities on the

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Tregaron Campus, and to accommodate and centralize classroom facilities on the campus. Two years later, Order of the Board in Application 16189, authorized a special exception to increase the student enrollment from 350 to 425 students. In 1999, the Board approved an extension of the special exception of two years (Order of the Board in Application 16468) for the continued temporary use of the modular building in order to finalize construction of the music/arts and gymnasium facilities and its relocation to the current site on the campus. Due to construction delays, completion is not anticipated until December 2000. The special exception for the temporary use expires in August 2001.

PROPOSAL

The application proposes converting the temporary use of the existing approximately 1,500 square feet modular building as an "Annex" for four classrooms to a permanent use.

ZONING REQUIREMENTS

The subject site is located within the R-1-A district. The Zoning Regulations permit private schools in this district subject to BZA approval and conditions outlined in Section 206. The Washington International School currently operates under a special exception granted by BZA Order 12576 and dated July 21, 1978. All changes subsequent to the original approval also require a special exception.

ANALYSIS

The applicant proposal is to convert a temporary modular classroom building to a permanent use on the campus. The applicant has submitted that the need to change the status of the building from a temporary use to a permanent use is due to a number of unforeseen circumstances. Since the request for a special exception for the temporary use of the modular building was approved in 1995 and 1999, the facilities of the school have been reviewed by accrediting authorities and educational consultants who have advised the School that the existing buildings and facilities will not satisfy its educational and space needs and recommended that the modular classrooms be retained to help mitigate the deficiencies.

Retaining the modular building would be help to alleviate the existing need for additional classroom space and would not result in an increase in the student, faculty or staff populations. The impact on the surrounding community will not change from the present situation, as the building cannot be viewed from any adjacent property. Since the student population will remain the same, making this a permanent building on the campus will generate no additional traffic.

The Office of Planning is concerned with the compatibility of the modular building with the architecture of the other buildings on the campus that compliment the historic nature of the campus. The issue of its impact on the historic nature of the property was not a critical issue when the structure was envisioned to be a temporary building. However, the proposal of

retaining the modular building on a permanent basis could erode the historic integrity of the land and the historic site.

The applicant met with ANC-3C on October 30, 2000 at which time the ANC recommended an alternative to the request for making the modular building a permanent part of the campus. The ANC recommended that the special exception for the temporary building be extended for four years. This recommendation for a four-year extension was not based on any analysis of the timetable for replacing the temporary building with a permanent building that would be more compatible to the historic nature of the site. Since that meeting, the applicant has submitted a timeline that outlines the steps to be taken towards the construction of a new building. This timeline suggest that it would be at least eight years before a permanent building would be ready for occupancy. To account for unforeseen circumstances, the applicant is requesting an extension for 10 years.

The Office of Planning supports the request for extending the special exception for an additional ten years to give the School an adequate period of time to plan and build a permanent building. Having a review of the building in four years when nothing has changed could be burdensome and costly to the applicant at a time when they are in the process of fund-raising to build a permanent building. The community has voiced some concerns that the School could make changes if the building is made permanent or given a long extension of the special exception. It should be noted that if the building is made permanent or a ten-year extension of the special exception is approved, the School will not be able to make changes, expand the facility or increase the student population without approval by the BZA.

The Zoning Regulations outlines provisions under which a private school shall be permitted in the R-1 district if approved by the BZA. The following demonstrates how these provisions are met:

206.2 The private school shall be located so that it is not likely to become objectionable to adjoining and nearby property because of noise, traffic, number of students, or otherwise objectionable conditions.

The Washington International School currently has BZA approval for 425 students. For the 2000-2001 academic year, 422 students are enrolled. The student population will not increase as a result of the modular building becoming a permanent structure at its existing location. Noise, traffic, and service pick-ups and deliveries will not increase with the proposal. The building is well buffered from surrounding uses by distance, sloping terrain, landscaping, and wooded areas. At the present time, the temporary building is not objectionable to nearby properties and this is not envisioned to change with making the building permanent.

206.3 Ample parking space, but not less than that required in Chapter 21 of this title, shall be provided to accommodate the students, teachers, and visitors likely to come to the site by automobile.

Making the building permanent will not generate an increase in the number of students, faculty, or staff, and therefore there will not be an increase in the demand for parking accommodations. The school currently provides 70 parking spaces on this campus as required by the Zoning Regulations.

The standard by which the BZA should approve a special exception is set forth in Section 3104.1 of the Zoning Regulations. The following demonstrates how the school has met these standards:

> **"…. special exception will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map and will not tend to affect adversely the use of neighboring property in accordance with the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps."**

The request to make permanent the existing temporary building will have no effect on the surrounding neighborhood. The proposal will not increase the number of students, faculty or staff. In addition, the permanence of the building will not generate any additional traffic to and from the property. The building is located in an area where it is not visible from adjacent properties and therefore will not impact the neighborhood. As outlined above, the request will be in compliance with Section 206 of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS

ANC-3C, the Cleveland Park Citizen Association, the Cleveland Park Historic Society, and the Friends of Tregaron Foundation are all community organizations that have reviewed the application and recommended alternatives to the applicant's request. The ANC and the Cleveland Park Citizens Association have recommended extending the existing special exception for a temporary building for an additional four years. It is the ANC's view that this extension would give the school additional time to make plans for a permanent building to address the school's classroom needs.

The Friends of Tregaron Foundation states that the permanence of the modular building will "deteriorate the value of the historic landmark and threaten the historic designation on the land" and recommended that the special exception for the temporary be extended to summer of 2001.

The Cleveland Park Historic Society is scheduled to formally review the application on Wednesday, November 15, and submit it recommendation to the Board.

SUMMARY

The application for making the modular building on the school campus permanent will not adversely affect the residents of the surrounding community, as there will not be an expansion in the facility or the school population. However, due to the historic nature of the school campus, a modular building that is out of character with the other buildings is not an appropriate permanent fixture on the school campus and the Office of Planning and the community would like to see the

structure replaced with a permanent building in the near future. Therefore, in order to have some vision that this temporary building will be replaced in the future it is appropriate for the building to retain it temporary status.

RECOMMENDATION

The application complies with the provisions set forth in Section 206 of the Zoning Regulations and therefore is in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and will not adversely affect the surrounding neighborhood. However, the Office of Planning recommends that the request to make the modular building a permanent structure on the school campus be disapproved. In the alternative, the Office of Planning recommends that the Board of Zoning Adjustment **APPROVE** extending the special exception for the temporary building for a period of ten years, with a condition that in the fourth year, the applicant presents documentation to the BZA as to its efforts and achievements in working towards a permanent building in the year 2010.

ATT: a/s

AA/mbr

Estimated Timeline for a Potential New Classroom Building at Tregaron

At the ANC 3C meeting, there was concern about a permanent extension of the authority to locate the modular building on the campus. After discussion, the ANC voted to approve a four-year extension. However, for the reasons set forth below, four years is inadequate and, the School believes inappropriate. After consultation with administrators and trustees, the School is willing to withdraw its request for a permanent extension of authority to locate the Annex on campus but requires that such authority be granted for ten (10) years.

I was asked to evaluate the time required to build a permanent classroom building on campus in its stead. I will outline the steps and time required for such a project.

- The school recently entered in a 30-year, 11 million tax-exempt municipal bond loan to build the new primary school campus and the Arts and Athletics Center. The annual debt service is $695,000. The school is required to maintain a minimum 1.25 debt service ratio at all times. It is therefore essential for the school to begin repaying this long-term debt and arrive at a debt service ratio, which is comfortably above the minimum. It will take 3 or 4 years at the very least before the school is in a position to borrow any more funds. ***(2003-2004)***

- The current strategic plan covers 1996-2001, a new head of school will arrive next July the next strategic planning is scheduled to be held with the new head in ***late 2001 or early 2002.*** In addition, architectural planning and development drawings and construction drawings would take approximately ***18 to 24 months. (2002-2004).*** It should be noted that the School always includes many constituencies into the planning and development phase to insure consensus. And, as typical in most schools, the summer months as well as the first and last month of the school year are impossible for such meetings. People are either away or too busy.

- Fundraising at WIS is a difficult and slow process because it is essentially grassroots instead of dependent on a few large donors. Our campaign for 2.5 million took 8 years!

  Because of other fundraising priorities, namely:
  1. The completion of the Primary School 3rd floor planned for construction June to December 2002. Fundraising for this project will extend to its completion.
  2. and the School hopes to secure the rest of the Tregaron property. This too may require some fundraising.

Therefore the School could not envision another capital fundraising effort for a permanent classroom building at Tregaron until 2004 or 2005. The campaign would take at least 3 years. Bringing the completion of the campaign to ***2007-2008***.

- Another ***4 to 6 months*** will be necessary to obtain building permits. ***(2008-2009)***

- Zoning process of ***8 to 12 months*** cannot start until the capital campaign effort is well advanced, since the permit is only valid for 2 years. ***(2008-2009)***

- Construction ***9 to 15 months. (late 2010- early 2011)***

TOTAL: TEN (10) YEARS