TESTIMONY OF ANNE-MARIE PIERCE, HEAD,
WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL,
BEFORE THE BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT

BZA APPLICATION NUMBER 16623

November 21, 2000

I am Anne-Marie Pierce, Head, Washington International School. I appear before you today to request your approval for the continued use of a small, 4 classroom modular building called the Annex which has been located on our campus for six (6) years. [See mounted site plan and photographs.] The Annex is only 1500 square feet in size and is sited in a location on campus that is not visible to any adjacent neighbors in winter or summer.

By this application, the Washington International School seeks no increase in the number of students or the number of faculty and staff on campus. We seek no authority to construct any new buildings or other structures. We do not seek, nor anticipate, any increase in the number of visitors to the campus. We expect no increased traffic.

The Annex

- Is completely invisible all year around from the residential communities on either side of campus
- It has no exterior lights
- No noise emanates from the building.
- New evergreen landscaping has been added around the Annex in order to make it virtually disappear

When I last appeared before this Board two (2) years ago, we anticipated that the Annex would not be needed after the 2000-2001 school year, particularly because the new Arts and Athletics Center would provide eight (8) new classrooms and a seminar room. However, a number of unforeseen circumstances have occurred which have caused the School to revise its plans.

First, and most importantly, the facilities of the School have been reviewed by accrediting authorities who have advised WIS that its

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existing buildings and facilities will not satisfy its educational and space needs. Such accrediting authorities recommended that the Annex be retained to mitigate such deficiencies.

Specifically, in our most recent accreditation review, the accreditation officials made two recommendations that directly impact our use of space on campus.

1) that we minimize or eliminate the use of the 4 basement classrooms in the existing Mansion building (one of which has already been taken out of classroom use to provide a computer network center).

2) that we attempt to dedicate some classrooms to specific subjects, particularly languages, in order to be able to create an environment reflecting the cultural aspect of the language taught.

In addition, we have added a new course to our curriculum, Design Technology, which is required by the International Baccalaureate Organization for the Middle Years Program. This course requires special equipment and therefore a dedicated room. The class immediately adjacent to a classroom used for this course can only be used for tutorials because of the noise generated by hands-on projects in Design Technology. This noise, I must add, does not reach any of our neighbors. This new course removed two (2) other available rooms.

A consultant, whose services we engaged to help us solve our space problems, also recommended that we retain the four (4) classrooms of the modular building.

These recommendations from the accreditation authorities and the educational consultant cannot be accommodated by existing facilities because the School lost five (5) classrooms when the buildings that were on the site of the new Arts and Music Building and Gymnasium were demolished. As the result of this demolition, the Finance, Facilities, Admission and Advancement offices were

relocated to the **Gardener Cottage** and the **Greenhouse,** other existing buildings on campus.

The four classrooms of the modular building will allow the School to fulfill these two recommendations and help replace the classrooms lost to offices and the network center.

Furthermore, the new gym on campus has finally allowed us to implement a totally different class schedule, which has proven to help reduce student and faculty stress but does not bring increased space use efficiency. It is also important to note that all our students in grade 6-10 are in class every period of every day. (We have no study halls.) This means that WIS has very heavy use of classrooms.

As a result of all of the factors I have described above, the School is totally dependent on the Annex to function properly until such time as the School can build a permanent classroom building.

Permit me to discuss at this point the only issue regarding our application which seems to have generated different responses by ANC 3C, the Office of Planning and Friends of Tregaron. As you know, the Office of Planning has recommended that our application be approved for ten (10) years, the ANC has recommended a four (4) year extension of authority and Friends of Tregaron has recommended that our application only be approved for approximately seven (7) months (through the end of the 2000-2001 school year).

When we filed the pending application, BZA Application No. 16623, with this Board on August 1, 2000, the School sought a permanent extension of authority to locate the Annex on campus. Promptly upon filing the application in early August we notified Friends of Tregaron, a neighborhood organization with which we have worked very closely in the past (and, I should add, with which we will continue to work closely in the future) of our plans and provided a copy of our BZA application. We attempted to contact Friends on several occasions to discuss our application. However, we did not learn of any objections or concerns

from Friends until the night of the ANC meeting. Had we had an opportunity to do so, we would have worked with Friends on this issue.

In view of the recommendations of the Office of Planning that our authority only be extended for ten (10) years and in recognition of the concerns of the ANC and Friends of Tregaron, the School is willing to withdraw its request for a permanent extension of authority with respect to the continued location of the Annex. However, we are only able to make this good faith concession if the recommendation of the Planning Office, that such authority be extended for ten (10) years, is accepted.

After the issue of a limitation on our authority was first raised at the ANC meeting three weeks ago and after consultation with administrators and trustees, the School prepared a detailed time line for construction of a new classroom building to replace the Annex. As you will see, the four (4) years recommended by the ANC is simply unrealistic.

Allow me to outline the steps and time required for fundraising, planning, development and construction of a new classroom building on the Tregaron campus.

- 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 debt service **per year** 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 to construct a new classroom building. ***(This process would take the School to 2003-2004)***

- Because the current strategic plan for WIS covers 1996-2001 and a new head of school will arrive in July, 2001, the next strategic planning process is not scheduled to commence with

the new head and new members of the board of trustees until ***late 2001 or early 2002.*** In addition, once this strategic planning process is completed, we plan to consult with Friends of Tregaron and other neighborhood organizations before proceeding into detailed architectural plans and drawings. Once such a community process is completed, architectural planning and development drawings and construction drawings would take approximately ***18 to 24 months. (2003-2004).***

- Fundraising at WIS is a difficult and slow process because it is essentially "grassroots" and broad-based (instead of being dependent on a few large donors). As an example, the School's campaign to raise $2.5 million took 8 years!

  WIS has other fundraising priorities, namely:

  1. The completion of the Primary School 3rd floor. This is planned for construction between June and December 2002. We expect that fundraising for this project will extend to its completion.

  2. The School hopes to be in a position to acquire the balance of the Tregaron property, a step which we have been informed is supported by our neighbors. This effort will likely require a fundraising effort.

  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. (This brings the completion of the campaign to ***2007-2008***.)

- A zoning process of ***6 to 12 months,*** involving further community involvement, cannot start until the capital campaign effort is well advanced, since the permit is only valid for 2 years. ***4 to 6 months*** will be necessary to obtain building permits. ***(2008-2009)***

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

TOTAL: TEN (10) YEARS

To conclude, the School does not seek any increase of students or faculty. We do not propose any increase in activity. We will not cause any adverse traffic, parking, noise, glare or other impacts on our neighbors. We will continue to be a good neighbor. We simply seek the flexibility and added effectiveness to keep the small four (4) classroom Annex building in its current location for ten (10) years in order to implement the School's complex and demanding educational program. I ask for your support. And I thank you for this opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

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