Board of Zoning Adjustment

Case No. 16791: Appeal of Southeast Citizen's for Smart Development, Inc.
Testimony of Lawrence P. Goodwin
February 19, 2002

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Good afternoon Board of Zoning Adjustment Commissioners. My name is Lawrence P. Goodwin and live at 1420 G Street. I have been very involved in children and youth related causes for more than 20 years.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today because it gives me a chance to present another side of the story regarding Girls and Boys Town's community participation on Capitol Hill. I join my neighbors who represent a majority of the views of long term residents of Capitol Hill both homeowners and non-homeowners alike in supporting the Boys Town project.

I know first had that Boys Town made extensive efforts to reach out to engage our community in dialogue about its plans because I personally attended two community meetings in which a team of architects, public relatios practitioners and Boys Town's Site Director presented their proposed plans__one called by PSA112 and one sponsored by commissioners form ANC 6B at which Boys Town makde presentations and entertained questions. Both of these meetings were disruptive and an affront to civil order and discord.

These meetings left a bad taste in my mouth; so, I called Boys Town to invite them to make a presentation to my neighbors in my home. They agreed and Boys Town's national manager of construction flew in from Omaha to attend. The single member representative whose district Boys Town is located, ANC Commissioner Kalimah Abdul-Sabur attended the meeting at my home.

In April, one of my neighbors, Doug Shadd, invited me to attend a meeting that included people in support and those in opposition to the project. This meeting was run well by Mr. Shadd and very civil. I agreed to host the next meeting in my office for the purpose of forming a Boys Town Capitol Hill Community Advisory Liaison Committee, a group that would work with Boys Town and the community during the development through project completion. Boys Town had been asked not to attend the first formative meetings of this new CALC and Doug agreed to serve as Interim President. As the meeting got underway, opposition members of Citizens for Smart Development challenged Doug's leadership, called for an election and replaced him with Calvin Gilbert who then appointed opponents as committee chairs. They voted to request that Boys Town's executive director Father Peter be asked to write a letter of apology. A volatile argument followed in which, people began speaking demeaning to one another and calling each other racists. Some people began standing up to leave and the meeting broke up with wild accusations thrown about.

I feel confident that members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment understand that DC land use code is quite clear in guiding the relevant zoning issues around Boys Town's permit to build its four residential homes. Two zoning administrators investigated this matter and both have concluded that Boys Town is in fact building four residential facilities by right. I join Commissioner Kalimah Abdul-Sabur and the larger Capitol Hill community in asking the BZA to uphold the decision of the Zoning Administrator.

BZA
Case No. 16791
Exhibit No. 59

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16791
EXHIBIT NO.59

Board of Zoning Adjustment

Public Hearing Case No. 16791
Re: Appeal of Southeast Citizen's for Smart Development, Inc.

Testimony of E. Douglas Shadd

February 12, 2002

Good day Board of Zoning Adjustment Commissioners. My name is Douglas Shadd and I have resided at 1382 K Street, SE for 22 years and I want share with you my experiences in dealing with the Boys Town in its efforts to develop a site at the corner of Potomac and Pennsylvania Avenue, SE. I have been actively involved in the Ward 6 community and have participated in a Church-based mentor program for almost 10 years.

When I learned of the proposed Boys Town site application, I thought that this is not one of your better areas for constructive youth environments. I attended several community meetings in which Boys Town gave presentations and I noticed that the atmosphere was charged with emotions, fear, mistrust, anger, etc. Shortly thereafter, I learned of a community effort to resist the Boys Town project. Over time, I learned that there were several key issues that separated me from members of the community that oppose Girls and Boys Town. They are:

1.) My position was and still is that if the Boys Town project moves forward, then there needs to be a cooperative relationship between them and the community.

2) I do not believe that Citizens for Smart Development is representative of the entire community. They are a small group of individuals who happen to be more organized and vocal.

3) During community meetings attended by Boys Town officials, the behavior displayed by neighbors, made it absolutely impossible for conducting a civil meeting. The language was charged and menacing and neighbors resorted to personal attacks on the presenters. There was apparent class-ism, NIMBY- ism, and not to subtle racism. One man actually said, "We don't want those kind of kids in our neighborhood"; "the only kids I care about are mine".

Uncomfortable with the misinformation opponents were distributing, I approached Boys Town officials and gave them an opportunity to refute the claims being alleged. In addition, I made inquiries to the police and Boys Town's NE community residents. All of this confirmed for me that some Capitol Hill residents were conducting a deliberate and negative campaign against the organization in an attempt to frighten neighbors simply because they did not want this residence for troubled children in their neighborhood.

Two other milestones served to alienate me from the opposition. I attended a meeting at the Mayors office with opposition leaders and Deputy Mayor Eric Price who listened to their protests, and then admonished the group for sounding like NIMBY's. He advised them that Boys Town was on the site as a Matter-of-Right. For me, that was enough - it was time to seek a cooperative relationship with Boys Town.

I also attended a meeting called by ANC Commissioner Kalimah Abdul- Sabur, the Single Member Representative for the area where Boys Town is located. This meeting was disrupted and dispersed. However, this time, I witnessed an incident that was extremely appalling ____two angry white men yelling menacingly in the faces of the two African American female presenters --- truly an intimidating tactic. Once outside of the building, it was obvious that they were shaken to tears.

Realizing that that this situation was intolerable, I decided that I had to go to the Boys Town NE facility and offer my assistance. The very next day I visited the facility and after several meeting, we agreed on a strategy for working with the community.

During this time period, I was exposed to Boys Town's Ward 5 service offerings and to its management. They had an existing structure for community involvement called Boys Town's Community Advisory Liaison Committee (CALC). I insisted that they allow me to convene a series of meeting to try to organize a CALC on Capitol Hill and that the meetings exclude them and City officials because their presence would only inflame the situation. They agreed.

The first meeting was scheduled for April 4, 2001; mailings went out about two weeks before. The list included community contacts provided by Boys Town, recommendations from my neighbors and associates, several members of the opposition group, and ANC members and over 21 people attended or signed in. The meeting was conducted with relative ease and after diligently working for four hours; we adopted a mission statement and scheduled the next meeting.

The second meeting was scheduled for April 28, 2001 and it was sabotaged and overtaken by a large contingent of the opposition, who were not invited but who, we allowed to attend. They engage in disruption and forced a vote for control of the nascent organization. I was voted out as president and Calvin Gilbert voted in. He then appointed his committee chairs and their first order of business was to vote to request that Father Peter be asked to write a letter of apology. A major argument ensued in which allegations of racism were lodged, people began to walk out and the meeting disbanded amid confusion. Was it the intention of the opposition to frustrate the development of a CALC? One needs simply to observe their actions. All of these questions serve to magnify the derisive position this community finds itself in.

The BZA cannot regulate a cooperative community environment with individuals who are adamant about preventing Boys Town's entrance into the neighborhood, nor can you re-write the land use code simply to deny Boys Town its rights. Two Zoning Administrators have issued a decision that Boys Town can build the four residences, they are almost completed the construction and 3000 District children are waiting in foster care for placement. I appeal to the commissioner of the Board of Zoning Adjustment to uphold the decision of the Zoning Administrator and to allow Boys Town to move forward

Case # 16791

Kalimah Abdul Sabur
1121 K Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

February 12, 2002

Commissioner Geoffrey Griffis
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 Fourth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Commissioner Griffis:

As the Single Member Commissioner for ANC 6B09 where Girls and Boys Town's site is located, I join my constituents in welcoming this needed facility to our neighborhood. I have lived in Ward 6 for more than 23 years and I have been active in civic leadership for quite sometime. The majority of neighbors with whom I have spoken support Boys Town and feel their services will benefit District children and families.

I can attest to the quality of service they offer and to their commitment to community engagement. While I was president of the Hopkins Residents Council, Boys Town offering free parenting classes to help parents develop better skills for communicating with their children. Fellow residents benefited so much from the training that they told other residents, which prompted Boys Town to add additional classes. In addition, our building was in disrepair and in dire need of painting. Boys Town staffers came and worked side-by-side with residents in painting the halls of two four-story buildings and a five-story building. Residents were struck by the staff's devotion to children and their willingness to work to improve our living conditions.

During the planning for the Capitol Hill site, Boys Town contacted community leaders and presented at numerous community meetings, one of which I hosted. They even presented at small group meetings in neighbor's homes. In addition, they distributed a *Capitol Hill Update* newsletter to keep residents apprised of community meetings, their progress and ran a free bus to carry residents to an open house at their Ward 5 site.

I am unwavering in my support of Boys Town. With more than 3,300 District children in foster care, we need a place where children who are victims of neglect and abuse can find a safe harbor. Girls and Boys Town is an asset to our community and to the District.

Sincerely,

Kalimah Abdul Sabur

Kalimah Abdul Sabur
Commissioner ANC 6B-09