Nyarku, John (DCOZ)

From: Alan Z. Aiches [aiches@aichesdesign.com]
Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2002 6:46 AM
To: BZA@DC.Gov
Subject: testimony attached

Please note the attached testimony for distribution and the record in the St. Patrick's case No. 16852.

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5/21/02

BZA
Case No. 16852
Exhibit No. 274

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16852
EXHIBIT NO.274

AICHES DESIGN

Interiors · Fine Art ·

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Testimony – Board of Zoning Adjustment

May 21, 2002

Members of the Commission,

My name is Alan Aiches and I live at 5839 Sherier Place NW.

- Testifying as private citizen
- Support St. Patrick's request for a special exception

BACKGROUND

- Chair zoning committee of Palisades Citizens Association
- Design Studio practice
- Much of my life spent around construction, development and planning
- Trained art historian w/ extensive background in architectural history
- Directed 2 regional NC art museums, oversaw respective building programs

- Chief curator @ Bass Museum, Miami Beach, authored building program for $18 million expansion/preservation for Arata Isozaki's office
- Years dealing w/ historic preservation in Wilm, Raleigh, Miami Beach & DC
- Former senior curator at National Building Museum

REASONABLENESS STANDARD

- You have a letter in your file dated March 27 detailing my findings related to this case
- Granting special exceptions related to a standard of reasonableness, whether or not proposed use ***might*** place unbearable burdens on immediate/nearby property owners
- School forthcoming in its proposed use
- Satisfies code requirements for parking, noise, environment and objectionable standard, proposes extensive traffic solutions

I may skip the portion in red because of time constraints, since they have this in my letter.

- **Neighborhood Concerns**
  - School has addressed every neighborhood concern to limit impact

- Been good listener and creative problem-solver

- **Traffic and Traffic Management**
  - St. Patrick's pro-actively addressed traffic concerns thru submitted plan
  - Addresses concerns of the immediate neighbors
  - Proposes use of shuttle buses
  - Proposes collaboration on traffic management with Lab School, GW @ Mt. Vernon & Field School in Foxhall/Whitehaven Parkway corridor.

- **Student cap –** Use restricted to 60 students.
- **Historic and Environmental Preservation** – Use would preserve the Victorian house [dated 1903-05] and site [green space w/ tree canopy of 9 mature trees]
- **Existing Scale and Context** – Use would retain property as is and remain in keeping with the surrounding area
- **Structure** – Building suits the seminar style based program school offers: classes of 12 students or less
- **Recreational Facilities** – No athletics or such facilities allowed or built on site.
- **Parking** – No on-street parking required for school staff or visitors. 15 spaces exist, 7 more than required by the code

- **Noise** – Reports confirm combined ambient noise from aircraft and MacArthur Blvd. louder than noise created by students
- **Environment** - Suggested steps to mitigate drainage problems having plagued site and immediate Mac A Blvd. neighbor [unresolved by the previous owner]
- **Trash** - Removed daily late afternoons by maintenance; eliminates odors, pests, dumpsters, early morning pick-ups by trash trucks and attendant noise
- **Objectionable Standard** – Based on the above, there can be no reasonable objection to this modest use by any standard

VILLAGES

- Residents identify Palisades neighborhood as a village
- Attachment as a sense of place
- Visual scale embraces us as human beings without overwhelming us
- Allows us to encounter our friends and shopkeepers
- Provides sense of comfort and belonging
- Urban villages began as small enclaves on the outskirts of larger cities
- Land-use traditionally was mixed: residential, business, commercial, educational and as well as institutional.
- Size allowed people to walk most places in a short period of time:

- Schools, train station, courthouse, grocery
- Pharmacy, banks, professional offices, movie theatre

- Aftermath of growth since WWII, planners found cities devoid of housing
  - Suburban development too dependent on the automobile
  - Down towns dying, services fleeing to suburbs
  - Mistake of over-building office space at the expense of housing led to new urbanism

IMPACT VS. OBJECTIONABLE STANDARD

Neighbors have right to voice legitimate concerns about a potential use. In spite of their recognizable concerns about traffic, the school has responded to every concern in an extensive traffic report; yet neighbors have been intransigent since the beginning, unbending and unwilling to compromise.

- There's been an over-attention to details, which are road map to beginning the decision-making process
- Since special exceptions rely on the principle of reasonableness, we should not deny them solely on the basis that modest changes might upset the balance in residential areas

- If we don't allow them under reasonable circumstances, then we make the reverse mistake cities made with office space, which is to reserve residential areas only for housing
- Over 200 children from Palisades and surrounding area attend St. Patrick's
- Their parents are committed to quality education and are future of Palisades
- School's presence adds vitality to neighborhood
- At some point, we need to set aside details, which are no substitute for human experience nor an end result
- Many watching this case feel there's room for compromise
- Regrettably, it should be noted that the opposition has resisted every offer of compromise made in good faith by the school
- I respectfully urge the Board to consider this use as modest and grant the special exception

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

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Option: BZA grant St. Patrick's conditional exception renewable if it can be shown school has created no detrimental impact on the adjacent residential properties and adheres to initial BZA filing provisions with the following.

- Maintains 60 students cap (including any 9th graders that would attend classes in the building for a one-year period if St. Patrick's decides to locate a high school elsewhere)
- Maintains building's exterior
- Maintains original footprint besides that necessary to provide for life, fire, safety, and handicapped access required by law
- Maintains landscaping and the health of the mature tree canopy
- Undertakes no new construction or physical expansion of the premises beyond existing plans for occupancy
- Successfully implements and enforces recommendations of the traffic consultant
- Undertakes collaborative with other area schools to control traffic [predicated on cooperation coming from other schools]
- No athletics or such facilities on the site
- Erects landscaped buffer between the school's parking lot and the two adjacent neighbors, created from appropriate plant material [selected by a landscape architect] to dampen noise and screen parking lot.