Further Private School Expansion

There was a time in this city when residents felt secure about their street when purchasing a home. It was zoned residential and that was what it meant. This belief was especially true in the Palisades area of Washington, DC. But, in recent years all this has changed as private institutions have needed to expand. Mt. Vernon College was bought by George Washington University and decided to capitalize on underutilized property. The death of Gwendolyn Cafritz prompted the family to sell the estate that had graced Foxhall Road for over half a century to the Field School. Today, the view from the hill is a treeless expanse with buildings springing up from everywhere. But, Field School should not be confused with the construction of the residence of the Spanish Ambassador across the street that resembles a yellow brick air plane hanger or bowling alley. The Lab School of Washington, which led the way in school expansion, finished overbuilding its property at the intersection of MacArthur and Reservoir three years ago and continues to flood neighborhood streets with cars for administrative staff, teachers clinicians, tutors, student teachers and students. Around the corner on Whitehaven, behind The Lab School, sits St. Patrick's School. A large addition, stretched to the property line, and a gymnasium across the street, have recently been added to the site. However, expansion at St. Patrick's is not finished. The school has placed a bid on a stately old well landscaped Victorian at the corner of MacArthur Boulevard and Ashby Street to house its seventh and eighth grades as the seventh grade is currently renting space from the River School on MacArthur Boulevard.

Peter Barrett, St. Patrick's Headmaster, has stated that there will be no development at the Ashby Street site but the community has heard those words spill from his lips before. There was going to be no further expansion when the school appeared before the ANC to inform it of plans for its current expansion on Whitehaven. The words, "pressing needs compel us to consider ...," have become all too familiar where St. Patrick's is concerned. The addition of a seventh and eighth grade constitutes another expansion. And, as the competition for private high school entrance becomes more and more competitive, expansion at the Ashby Street site, currently zoned for three houses, might well serve the future needs of St. Patrick's for expansion to grades nine through twelve.

Something must be done to stop private schools from destroying the character of residential neighborhoods. To date, "substantial weight" has not been given to ANC votes by the Board of Zoning Adjustment and institutions have continued to expand while District taxpayers carry the tax burden on properties snatched from the tax rolls. Palisades residents should not be asked to sacrifice their property values to subsidize further private school expansion for students from Maryland and Virginia.

Harry Gates

BZA
Case No. 16852
Exhibit No. 44

Harry Gates
Palisades
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