EHT TRACERIES INC

1121 FIFTH STREET, NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20001- TEL (202) 393-1199 FAX (202) 393-1056 E-MAIL EHT@TRACERIES.COM

Testimony of Emily Hotaling Eig
Before
The District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment
In the Matter of
National Child Research Center Proposed Enlargement

October 28, 2003

Members of the Board:

My name is Emily Hotaling Eig. My address is 1121 Fifth Street, N.W. I am an architectural historian and preservation consultant with EHT Traceries, Inc.

My testimony seeks to direct your attention to serious concerns regarding the compatibility and consequences of the proposed enlargement of the National Child Research Center (NCRC) with the character of the Cleveland Park Historic District. In 1987, the Cleveland Park Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. As a result, the proposed project was presented before the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) earlier this year. The HPRB viewed a number of our concerns as more appropriate for your consideration, as it limited its review to the visual appearance of above-ground design elements, as well as choosing not to address any aspect of the project concerned with zoning or planning. Therefore, I direct this testimony to the concept of historic character in relation to the principles of zoning and planning.

Cleveland Park Historic District:

A Delicate Balance Between Residential, Commercial, and Institutional Character

The designation of the entirety of Cleveland Park as an Historic District is based in large part on the delicate balance of its residential, commercial, and institutional character. Beyond the beauty of the area's architecture and the significance of its cultural contribution to Washington's history, is the extraordinary equilibrium that exists among Cleveland Park's residential, commercial, and institutional activities and their related structures. The National Register form specifically includes "Criterion C; Areas of Significance: Community Planning and Development and Architecture," in

BZA
Case No. 16970
Exhibit No. 263

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16970
EXHIBIT NO.263

recognition of this balance between residential quiet zones and commercially and institutionally generated density and traffic.

The designation specifically acknowledges:

1. the harmonious balance that exist between active commercial areas that are contained on the major corridors of Wisconsin and Connecticut Avenues and the "peaceful pedestrian east/west streets";
2. the importance of a rhythm of houses and yards as part of the visual excitement of streetscape; and
3. the value of the visual representation of various periods of Washington's history evidenced in the original land forms with hills, curving roads, and landscaping as well as the in the architectural structures themselves.

These statements establish the grounds for evaluation, and provide the direction for any review of a change of the type proposed by NCRC.

Contributing Status of 3209 Highland Place, N.W.

NCRC is located within the Cleveland Park Historic District. The primary building at the school has been determined by the DC HPRB to be a contributing resource within the Cleveland Park Historic District. The secondary structures associated with the primary resource have not yet been determined to be contributing, but the DC HPRB may confirm that they are contributing depending on an assessment of their date of construction, relationship to the primary resource, and integrity (as defined by the National Historic Preservation Act). Secondary structures such as these in an Historic District frequently are determined to be contributing. Buildings and structures that are determined to contribute to a DC Historic District are protected by the DC Law 2-144. However, even if the secondary structures were determined to be contributing, the regulation of the site under DC Law 2-144 would remain largely unchanged; the site would not be unique or given special consideration. Neither the primary building nor the secondary structures have been designated individually as Historic Landmarks.

The Historical Relationship Between

3209 Highland Place, N.W. and the Cleveland Park Historic District

The history of 3209 Highland Place, N.W., has a long association with the Cleveland Park Historic District, and stands as one of the highlights of its social and cultural heritage. Around 1905, the primary building, a large brick, Colonial Revival style dwelling, was constructed as a large residence on one of three lots that now form its site. As Highland Place developed, a large house was constructed on the adjacent lot to the west. By 1915, however, the three lots were under the same ownership. The house to the west of 3209 was moved to a new location across the street, and an auxiliary building, a private garage, was constructed. The result of this effort was the creation of a large open setting for the house, owned at that time by Bates Warren, a noted Washington developer. This action also established a pattern of dense development on the smaller lots on south side of Highland Place, and large, open lots on the north side. In 1928, the National Child Research Center (NCRC) selected the property for its home. By the early 1930s, the garage was altered to serve as a combined residence and support facility for the school. From its beginnings as a small-scale facility focused on the study of how very young children learn, NCRC managed to maintain a population and activities that were in keeping with the residential character of the immediate neighborhood. Indeed, it has been the ability of the school to exist quietly and comfortably within the confines of the residential property—utilizing the large main house (a contributing resource) and the small secondary buildings—that was critical to its successful occupancy on Highland Place, a narrow, residential street, lined with some of the area's finest houses. This balance between institutional and residential uses resulted in NCRC gaining recognition for its role as a major part of the history of Cleveland Park.

BZA Precedent Acknowledging Historic Significance of NCRC Property

In fact, the historic significance of relationship between Cleveland Park and the NCRC site in terms of Community Planning and Development and Architecture were recognized well before the formal designation of the Cleveland Park Historic District. As early as 1963, the D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) rejected a proposal by NCRC to demolish the existing house and replace it with a modern educational facility that would, NCRC believed, better serve its mission. The BZA

rejected that proposal, agreeing with the community that a new school building would not be compatible with the existing residential development nor "reasonable, necessary or convenient to the neighborhood" given the character of that neighborhood and the existing school. During the 1998 BZA case related to NCRC's traffic concerns, Commissioner Franklin reiterated this concern for the preservation of the character of the property and adjacent area when the Board rejected the placement of a drive in front of the building, believing it "... would interfere with the historic and residential character of the remainder of the property since it would require talking down trees." Why would the BZA have this concern for historic character? In many cases, the retention of historic character is the compelling force behind planning and zoning decisions, for good planning and zoning respects the basic values of our society by establishing and protecting the equilibrium of urban life.

Definition of the Threat to the Historic Balance

The issue before you today is one of balance. NCRC's proposed changes and expansion threaten to tip the scales of the Cleveland Park Historic District, altering the delicate balance that has prevailed in this area for most of the 20th century. The concern that must be addressed here is whether these proposed new structures, which are demonstrably larger than other secondary or auxiliary resources on the site and in the area, and which require institutional building code and zoning compliance, can be introduced into the residential area without adversely affecting the historic equilibrium. The answer is no. There are three specific reasons why the answer is no.

-**The project neglects to account for both its impact on the fragile character of Highland Place and the residual impact on Ordway Street.** The applicant professes that the proposed new construction will not have an adverse affect on the neighborhood. The architect's renderings are certainly attractive. He has presented an imagery that few could argue with, except that it does not accurately depict the surrounding historic context and the relationship between the new buildings and the old. The siting of the new buildings will require changes to the historic topography (a character-defining feature of the district) that

will forever eliminate a tangible expression the 19th century Washington. Moreover, the new buildings' disruptive scale and character will be visible from Ordway Street.

- **The size and appearance of the new buildings will take away from the residential feel that is characteristic of this special area of Cleveland Park.** The presence of a sheer, two-story wall directly abutting the existing building will be drastically out of scale with the neighboring residential buildings. Although this site has been associated with NCRC for more than 80 years, and although the school's presence in this architecturally distinguished house is a well-respected tradition, the changes proposed here will alter the property's appearance so that its residential character will be dramatically diminished. The size and appearance of the new buildings will reinforce the institutional character of NCRC. Now, there is a house that is used as a school; under this scheme, there will be a school campus that has a house on it. This is a significant change in character, a shifting of the balance away from its historic past, an illustrious past that should be protected.

It is my professional opinion that the currently proposed project is so intense that it will damage the historic residential character of the area, diminishing the aspects of feeling and association that are critical to the integrity of the area. It will result in a serious alteration to the historic topography. Its underground component is inconsistent with the residential character of this section of the historic district; and its attendant systems are inappropriate for this area.

Tipping the Scales Against the Historic Character

The proposed expansion of NCRC should not be approved. The historic district cannot absorb this great a change and maintain its defined character. **This is the very crux of the opposition.** The proposed expansion is too dramatic a change, and one that will render the historic house an institution, its property a campus. It is not necessary that NCRC move out of its historic home. In fact, most people would prefer NCRC to continue its historic relationship with Cleveland Park. It is, however, necessary that the school recognize that this level of expansion puts its long-standing

relationship with the historic residential neighborhood at risk. It asks too much of its neighbors and gives nothing in return.

Thank you.

Expansion of School Population Within Historic Districts

The major problem at NCRC is the school's desire to meet the needs of an expanding population without truly understanding or appreciating the impact of this expansion on its own property or the Cleveland Park Historic District. The desire to expand facilities within the limited available space puts great pressure on the historic property and the historic district as a whole; its implementation will result in a dramatic change in the character and feel of the school and the historic district.

This pattern is not new. The decision of how to approach the desire for expansion is key to the protection of the historic district. In Washington, D.C., the locating of a school within a residential area was a relatively familiar practice. Sheridan Kalorama was once the home to the Landon, Holton Armes, and Maret schools. The Lab School of Washington and Kingsbury Day School were also started in the Sheridan Kalorama Historic District. Each of these schools, with the exception of Holton Armes, operated within former residences that were modified for their needs. Holton Armes School was located in a building that was designed as a school but appeared from the exterior to be a townhouse. However, as each of these schools required more space to meet their growing educational programs, each recognized the need to move to facilities that could better serve their students. Landon and Holton Armes moved to large campuses in Maryland. The Maret School purchased the Philip Barton Key estate in Woodley Park. Recognizing the need to expand beyond the capabilities and space available in Sheridan-Kalorama, the Lab School moved to the former Florence Crittenden Home on Reservoir Road. Subsequently, the Kingsbury Day School took over the Lab School facilitates on Phelps Place. It, too, soon needed to expand and chose to move to the former John Dickson Home on 14th Street. These moves reflect a conscientious and responsible understanding of the impact of expansion upon an historic district.