BEFORE THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT

Application for Special Exception from R-1 Zoning, Concerning Properties:) 1670 31st.St. NW, Lot 827; and) 1644 31st Street, NW, Lot 830)		Application No. 16974

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STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION OF
RICHARD THEIS

1. Statement of Interest

I am a neighbor directly affected by activities at Tudor Place. My home at 3102 Q Street, NW, sits immediately across the street from the property. The front of our house overlooks the expansive lawn and affords us a view of the mansion's southern exposure.

My wife and I moved into our house in February, 1991. Then, Tudor Place opened primarily for tours of the mansion and gardens, and for educational programs, which the Foundation hosted on weekdays and Saturdays only. Evenings and Sundays, Tudor Place seemed like any other home among the residences of this neighborhood.

2. The Pending Application.

The pending Application, as written, would permit The Foundation to conduct itself in much the same manner as a convention facility. The Application asks for permission to host numerous events and functions, activities which are inherently inconsistent with the general purpose of R-1 residential zoning. Should the BZA grant this Application, the BZA will give the Foundation license to transform the property into a bustling destination for tourists, event planners, and civic groups. For all practical purpose, the BZA would give Tudor Place license to become a conference center. Experience has shown that such activities will adversely affect those who reside in the immediate vicinity of Tudor Place.

BZA
Case No. 16974
Exhibit No. 45

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 16974
EXHIBIT NO. 45

Permission For Almost Unlimited Events at Tudor Place

The Application, if approved, would allow the Foundation to host, yearly, 10 evening functions for between 200 and 500 people. Because even 200 guests would exceed the mansion's capacity limits, we can expect all of these events to take place out-doors. Consequently, the Foundation would probably bunch these events over a five month period from mid-May through Mid-October. The words of the Application, those saying that no more than three such events would be scheduled in any one month, confirm this. Assuming that the 10 events were spread evenly over the five warm months, granting this request would bring 1,000 visitors into our neighborhood each month. This, however, is the tip of the iceberg.

The Application is void of any limitation on the number of events, day or evening functions, that the Foundation could host as long as fewer than 200 attended. Said another way, if granted, the Application permits the Foundation to book as many of these smaller events as possible. If Tudor Place sought to maximize its activities, and the Foundation acknowledges that it wants to increase its visibility, it could hold one or two such events every day of week, all year long. Indeed, the only limitations the Foundation will accept are that it (2) notify residents 60 days before such events, and that (2) valets park the cars at events for more than 100 guests, 75 in the case of rental functions. The latter distinction is meaningless. Using figures the Tudor Place Executive Director provided, one vehicle driving into the neighborhood should be expected for every two guests whether the event is a rental or a function hosted by the Foundation.

Furthermore, the BZA, if it grants this Application, would allow Tudor Place to open its doors for evening tours, 52 times a year. The tours would be held between 5:30 and 8:30 p.m., the hours over which most of the residents return home from work and look for street parking. Although Tudor Place is willing to limit pre-approved group tours to 20, the Application places no limits on the number or walk-in tourists that would be admitted. Under the terms of this Application, hundreds could drive into the neighborhood, park, and tour the mansion every night that tours are held.

The foregoing concerns only uses wanted for the Tudor mansion and its grounds. The Foundation asks for even more.

Permission For Almost Unlimited Events at Dower House

The Application seeks permission to have thousands use Dower House, the large single family home to immediate north of the Tudor Place grounds. The Application asks that the Foundation be permitted to host an unlimited number of meetings, functions, and parties, so long as the guest list never numbers more than 50. Tudor Place could hold such functions every day, and every night. The Application contains two limitations only. It limits the Foundation to just four rental functions per calendar month. While this limitation has a ring of fairness, it would not reduce any adverse impact. Fifty people coming to Downer House for a Tudor sponsored function will congest the streets the same as would 50 people attending a private party. Likewise, little protection is afforded by the agreement to aggregate the head count of guests at Downer House with those attending a Tudor Place function. The same congestion will be realized whether all the guest visit Tudor Place, or if half the crowd convenes at Dower House while another groups parties in the mansion. Consequently, the benefit of these limitations is illusory.

3. Efforts to Shield the Neighbors Proven Ineffectual.

The BZA must realize that granting this Application would have an adverse affect on the neighborhood. That current application is little different from that the BZA approved in the mid-1990s and that approved in 1999. Both times, the Foundation obtained permission to host an unlimited number of functions of up to 200 people and 10 functions of between 200 and 500 people. In 1999, the BZA also authorized the Foundation to use 1670 31st Street (Dower House) for smaller events, lectures, and offices. Under the terms of those BZA permits, Tudor Place undertook activities that clearly were not typical of those seen or heard in most residential neighborhoods.

During the mid-1990s, and after the BZA gave Tudor Place permission to open for more than just tours, we witnessed an obtrusive increase in the Foundation's activities. Many days, especially during warm months, hustle and bustle transformed the tranquil grounds. Trucks came and went. Deliverymen thumped supplies and materials to the ground, teams of workers erected tents and assembled large platforms/stages on the lawn, and caterers arrived and prepared to serve

food. Before some outdoor events, we were treated to the noise of workers firing-up generators, hammers pounding tent stakes. Similar clatter and racket accompanied the breakdown of the tents, the dismantling of the stages, and the closing and stacking of metal folding chairs. On occasion, bagpipers droned while they marched across the lawn or strolled the sidewalks. When music enlivened the festivities, we were compelled to listen to big bands playing swing standards even when we retreated, in search of quiet, to the patio at the rear of our house.

Traffic congestion and a virtual lack of street parking made our neighborhood insufferable on the days and evenings with events. Although Tudor Place tried to ameliorate parking problems, its efforts failed to keep spaces open for residents. For the largest events, the Foundation insisted that valets offer parking services and that the cars be parked on private lots. Many guests used the services. However, many parked in street spaces. Of course, for most of Tudor Place's events street parking was the attendees only option. Whenever the Foundation hosted events, street parking along the 31st, 32nd, Q and R Streets vanished. This should not come a surprise. Using the figures the Tudor Place Executive Director supplied (one car for every two guests), about 30 extra cars roamed our streets even when the Foundation hosted modest sized events of just 60 people. Bigger events ushered in bigger problems; the metropolitan police, on at least one occasion, were called to control traffic. By the end of the event, the police had closed 31st between R and Q Streets.

All the above happened while Tudor Place operated under a BZA ruling. Moreover, all the above happened although Tudor Place instituted protections that were supposed to shield the neighbors from any detrimental impact from those activities. The safeguards failed to work

4. A Voluntary Return To Tours and Educational Events Protected the Neighborhood

Many of the neighbors of Tudor Place sought assistance from the Georgetown Residents Alliance (GRA) when, in 1999, Tudor Place again applied to the BZA for permission to conduct events, corporate parties, meetings, and other similar group functions. The problems were many, as stated above. And, it had become clear that the Foundation was exploiting Tudor place for financial gain. Although the GRA and neighbors opposed the application the Foundation filed that

year, the application was granted because, in large part, the BZA found that the Foundation had taken steps to address the concerns that neighbors expressed.

Even though time proved that the BZA conclusion mistaken, other events caused quite and sanity to return to our neighborhood. While the 1999 BZA application was pending and for a few months after, the Foundation continued to host events and functions at Tudor Place and Dower house. And, the noise and commotion problems continued unabated. However, soon after the GRA filed an action in the Court of Appeals, Tudor Place dramatically cut back its events, parties, and other group functions. The change was wonderful. Ours was once again a residential neighborhood.

5. Not This Application

The Foundation has failed to explain why it again wants permission to invite hundreds of people to 10 large events each year at Tudor Place, and permission to hold an unlimited number of events for up to 200 people. Nor has it explained why the BZA should allow Dower House to be used for meetings and the like every day and night just so long each event is limited to 50 people. No where in the Application or in the supporting statement of the Executive Director is an explanation offered that would justify opening the mansion and ground for tours during the hours when residents are returning home from work and searching for parking. In fact, the terms of the Application are in direct contradiction to the written statements submitted by the Executive Director. Ms. Buhler states that her objective intends to further Tudor Place's role as an educational institution. These representations cannot be reconciled with the Application the Foundation filed. The Application asks for far too much and should be denied.

Respectfully,



Richard Theis