Testimony By Commissioner Bill Starrels
Board of Zoning Appeals
Edmund Burke School Case #17022
Tuesday October 14, 2003

Good afternoon. I am Commissioner Bill Starrels. I am here today to support the planned addition for the Edmund Burke School.

I have testified before this Board as Commissioner in 2E from Georgetown. Today I come to you as; a proud parent of an 8th grader from Edmund Burke; a former resident of Burke's neighborhood – I resided for many years in Van Ness South and the Consulate apartments, and a concerned resident of the District of Columbia who happens to drive in a car almost everyday.

As a long time resident of the District of Columbia, one of the reasons my wife and I choose Burke as a school for our son is the fact that it is an urban school. You cannot get more urban than Connecticut Avenue, NW. The school is located a block from the Metro. It resides next to one of the city's major north-south roads – Connecticut Avenue, NW.

Our son is dropped off in the morning at the shuttle bus that takes him to the school. In the afternoons our son takes Metro and the Blue Bus home to Georgetown. Living in Georgetown we had to pick a school that was near Metro. The chances of our son driving to school in four years are about the same as the Wizards selling out this season.

I feel strongly that the Burke expansion is good for all concerned. As highlighted in both the Office of Planning (OP) and Department of Transportation (DDOT) reports, the expansion is not only sensible for the school and its students but it helps the surrounding neighborhood by orienting the school towards Connecticut Avenue.

Case No. 17022
Exhibit No. 145

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The OP report, from Director Andrew Altman "recommends approval"... The report states that the special exception will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the zoning regulations... One of the most important points in OP's report is in the paragraph that addresses noise levels. OP states: "noise levels generated by uses within the site's perimeter will be acceptable." The report highlights the fact that the new school will be "oriented towards Connecticut Avenue, away from residential areas".

The report from DC Department of Transportation (DDOT) "Supports the expansion of the Edmund Burke School as outlined in the April 15, 2003 application". The report highlights the importance of the traffic management plan (TMP) and states that "the compliance rate is substantial enough to improve the traffic situation over pre-existing conditions". The report goes on to state that the "queue line was properly designed and will be a safe situation, especially with uniformed police present to help direct traffic".

Both reports highlight the importance of the enforcement plan. The enforcement plan was highlighted by the editorial in the Northwest Current that called the plan a model for other schools.

As an ANC Commissioner in Georgetown, I have been through my share of expansion plans with schools, universities, and others. As a Commissioner I put great value on both OP and DDOT reports.

I was not pleased with the ANC 3F's vote. I was not happy with the procedure or with some of the representations made during the two hearing process. The report which became the motion, was not read into the record before the vote was taken.

There was the unusual process of two hearing – with the voluminous motion pre-written and typed even before the second hearing took place. In fact the report / motion was not even read before votes were taken. To put it bluntly ANC3F appears to have made up its mind before the Burke motion was ever put to a vote.

The Commissioner who wrote the lengthy motion said that it was traffic was all important said in remarks that he has not owned a car in 11 years! In my opinion it helps to be an active driver of the affected neighborhood to understand the merits of the DDOT report.

Another Commissioner made a statement that "things with the students have gotten so bad that Van Ness South had to erect a fence" around its property. This is simply untrue. Finding the statement so bold, I went to Van Ness South a couple of days later to observe the new fence. There is no fence. (Show photograph).

I lived for several years at both Van Ness South and the Consulate. Not once do I recall Burke being disruptive to the neighborhood. I Van Ness South has ample parking. I also had parking in the Consulate. As a Georgetowner I envy the parking these buildings have almost as much as I envy the garage and off street parking the homes on Upton Street enjoy.

Burke deserves to have its plans approved. The plans if implemented would move the entrance point for both pedestrians and cars to Connecticut Avenue. The plan also has a generous amount of new parking spaces planned. The plan is a good one.

The Van Ness / Upton Street corridor is not a gated community. If Burke does not expand into the purposed building – the parcel next to Connecticut Avenue will not stay empty for long. Any other of-right alternatives would add a lot more people and cars that would be used at all hours of day and night – without the constraints of a traffic plan.

I am asking for the support of the Board. The Burke Plan works as is supported by OP and DDOT. It is a good thing for the school, the neighborhood and for the District of Columbia as a whole.