Case #17022

Board of Zoning Authority (BZA) Hearing
In re: The Edmund Burke School Proposal
Testimony by:

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The Edmond Burke School (EBS) has been a "neighbor" of my family's for over 11 years. As "good neighbors" we have a compatible relationship with our residential and usually with our non-residential neighbors. The EBS has not been a good neighbor because of its poor history of adversely affecting the neighborhood and its poor relationship with the residents. The EBS proposal now before the BZA comes after a period of time that should have been sufficient to:

1.) demonstrate an ability to act within compliance limits set by the existing BZA order
2.) demonstrate its willingness and ability to engage and work with the neighborhood it lives within.

The EBS has begun to address parking and traffic issues that have negatively impacted an already heavily impacted residential street in northwest Washington. There have been improvements to Upton Street. However, there is ongoing evidence that traffic related to dropping off and picking up EBS students has spread to surrounding streets and alleys. These impacts are outside of the "eyes" of the cameras used by Burke to document its efforts and in spite of monitoring by EBS staff.

We are very sensitive to EBS's ability to behave (and sustain that behavior) according to its traffic plans and proposals and BZA orders because they have had a history of negatively impacting the neighborhood and non-compliance. We share a dead-end alley with EBS that was often blocked by buses and EBS associated cars for unreasonable periods of time. Those of us

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who share this alley with Burke are at their mercy if they use the alley as their private driveway and not the public thoroughfare it was constructed to be. The six families who share this alley with EBS use it. As a result, we do not add to the parking congestion on Upton Street. Complaints about the alley were not addressed until EBS made plans to expand. We are concerned that the same behavior will return after it is allowed to expand and enforcement becomes difficult. In addition, EBS has been operating beyond its enrollment limits for years. There has been no apology to the neighborhood, nor any explanation for this disregard of the BZA rules. There has been no acknowledgement of the impacts of this breach on the neighborhood. The fact that it is still out of compliance indicates that they have not been able to respect and act within the lawfully limits set by the BZA.

As good neighbors we communicated with the leadership of EBS about these issues. This was prior to the formation of the Burke Neighborhood Advisory Committee (BNAC). I was appalled to learn that EBS invited certain neighbors to advise them on their traffic and compliance planning. No one from the north side of Upton Street had been invited (those of us who share with EBS this dead-end alley) to participate in the BNAC. Our knowledge about the workings of BNAC came when participating neighbors volunteered to update other interested neighbors. The EBS had not arranged any formal update for the neighborhood until the eve of their application to the BZA and their presentation to the ANC. I volunteered along with my next door neighbor to serve on the BNAC after making it clear that as neighbors of the school, we were certainly capable of making meaningful contributions to an expansion plan by EBS despite our skepticism about the viability of such a plan. Meaningful contributions were made. In fact, the "neighborly" thing to do would have been for EBS to engage the neighborhood in any and all

expansion plans. This neighborhood contains a wealth of expertise and experience with independent schools in the District (parents, board members, an architect) as well as concerned neighbors. The BNAC, however, was not representative of the neighborhood. EBS conducted not regular updates to the neighborhood. It is telling that EBS has had no neighborhood meetings nor of BNAC since the first week of June. In the end, I was more convinced that the expansion, given the restrictions of the land on Connecticut Ave, the terrible traffic on Connecticut Avenue, the tight alley system, and even more student and faculty using an already heavily impacted residential neighborhood was more than the neighborhood could bear.

I have asked (and have received no answer yet) the question, "What does the EBS contribute to the neighborhood?" EBS contributes a quality education to a student body, the majority of whom do not live in the neighborhood (or are from D.C. for that matter). The other impacts besides parking and traffic are relatively minor but add up. There is occasional graffiti (not removed for 3 ½ years), occasionally students smoking cigarettes and other materials on private properties...and the list goes on. It's difficult to tolerate these impacts AND tolerate an expanded EBS (as well as the 1-2 year construction period which will limit access to the dead-end alley...and EBS has yet to volunteer any possible relief nor even any acknowledgement of this impact on its immediate neighbors) when the school has difficulty engaging its neighbors in serious and meaningful dialogue...even neighbors who have willingly and consistently been neighborly to them. For many of us, it is difficult to advance "credit" to an institution that has practically no credit history.