Neighbors Allied for the Reasonable Development of Schools

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Geoffrey H. Griffis, Chairman
Board of Zoning Adjustment
Room 210
441 4th St. NW
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Edmund Burke School, BZA Case No. 17022
Response to comment on the Burke School petition in support by Stephen Gell, Esq. on behalf of NULS, dated October 27, 2003

Mr. Chairman and members of the Board:

I am mindful of the Chair's statement that this process is not a popularity contest. NULS, however, has attempted to mislead this Board by stating that there is overwhelming opposition to Burke's expansion bid. This is untrue. Consequently, I feel I must answer the accusations contained in Mr. Gell's document.

NULS' first concern was over the wording "lowered proposed enrollment," suggesting that this was somehow duplicitous and worthy of invalidating the entire petition in support of the school's expansion. In fact, each signer of the petition in support received a document in FAQ form, explaining the entire enrollment cap, previous BZA request, and current BZA request. In addition, I explained this to every person I visited, as it was part of my introduction to the situation. I can affirm that every person with whom I spoke was informed of the history of Burke's BZA cap numbers.

NULS is also concerned that many signers are renters. This is true. Many of the major parties opposing Burke are also renters, e.g., the tenants of Mr. Brown's building, the tenants of the Consulate, and some portion of the tenants of the massive Van Ness complex. Many of the renters who signed the petition are well informed and feel strongly about this neighborhood issue. Many have been here longer than members of NULS. Their opinions and their signatures are valid and relevant to the BZA's decision.

BZA
Case No. 17022
Exhibit No. 196

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17022
EXHIBIT NO. 196

There were two signatures, "from renters of rooms or relatives of owners in houses owned and occupied by Barbara Zuckerman..." Both of these persons signed the petition in support because they support the school's application for expansion. That they were later pressured to recant their support by Ms. Zuckerman is unfortunate, but it does not change the fact that, were it not for such pressure from their landlord and benefactor, they would not have felt they had to recant. I refuse to put further pressure on these individuals and I have assured them that I understand the position into which they were forced.

The NULS group identifies the Wolfs as "...an elderly couple at 2942 Upton...[who were] unaware that they were signing a reversal of the position they took in signing NULS' petition." Now, the Wolfs may be elderly but they are not stupid. They were well aware that they had signed a petition for NULS. They, like several others, signed a petition to delay the original BZA date to the Fall, rather than have it over the summer. They *never meant to sign a petition in opposition to the expansion.* I discussed their signature on the NULS petition with them and they told me that this signature in no way invalidated their overall support for the expansion bid.

I am troubled by this tactic by NULS. As I understand it, *at least* two other alleged NULS members, Peter Weisman and Sharon Worthington, only signed a petition to delay the BZA hearing to the Fall. They never meant to join a group opposing the school's application. Attached is an e-mail from Peter to Walter Ailes, confirming this situation.

Many other residents told me during my canvassing that they received numerous, extremely negative fliers from the neighbors in opposition, some so negative that they were upsetting. Several neighbors who signed this petition to delay the hearing stated that they hoped they weren't identified as being opposed to Burke or its expansion bid.

With respect to the comment by NULS (with exclamation points!) that many signatories were businesses: These establishments were clearly identified as business neighbors. That was the point. Burke students frequent their businesses daily without incidents of bad behavior, contrary to the picture of Burke students painted by the parties in opposition.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to respond to this erroneous document.

Deirdre Karambelas

Deirdre Karambelas
NARDS

Certificate of Service

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Sunday, September 28, 2003 7:53:48 PM

Message
From: "Weissman, Peter" <Weissman@blankrome.com>
Subject: RE: Burke
To: Walter Ailes
"'seworthing@yahoo.com'" <seworthing@yahoo.com>

I don't think we signed anything that opposes the school. I believe what we signed was to request more time and that the neighbors can be heard at a hearing. If there is something different, I would like see it.

Thanks

-----Original Message-----
From: Walter Ailes [mailto:Walter_Ailes@eburke.org]
Sent: Friday, September 26, 2003 5:11 PM
To: seworthington@yahoo.com; weissman@blankrome.com
Subject: Burke

Peter and Sharon,

We now see you are on a list of names that oppose the school and clearly this is a disappointment to us as far as not having the ability to present the school community and the school's vision in such a way as to have you support or at least not oppose the project. Personally, it would be of great help to know where the flaws are in the proposed plans or in the way you view the way the school currently operates that brings you to this point. I don't remember that we were at odds on very many issues as we tried to develop this plan with your help.

Respectfully,

Walter