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July 11, 2003

Chairman Geoffrey Griffis
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 210-S
Washington, DC 20001

Re.: CASE #: 17022

Dear BZA Commissioners:

I am writing to support the Edmund Burke School's application to expand its facilities, which will be heard by the BZA on July 15, 2003.

The BZA's reluctance to approve Burke's application last year was based understandably on the concern that the proposed but untested plan to reduce congestion might not work. The Board suggested that a pilot program be installed, even though it could not take advantage of traffic reduction operations that the new building would enable Burke to implement. Burke immediately followed up by limiting drop offs at the school to cars with three or more students, and encouraging parents to leave students at the Van Ness Metro "Kiss and Ride" depot. It also instituted a shuttle bus service from the parking area near the Art Barn, at Tilden Street and Beach Drive, it closely monitored adherence to the plan and issued stern warnings to families that violated the new rules, and it hired off-duty police officers to enforce compliance and direct traffic.

The results over the last fifteen months have been dramatic. Morning drop offs on Upton Street, at the school's entrance, have been cut nearly in half; afternoon pick-ups have declined even more; drop-offs at the adjacent alley virtually have disappeared. With a new building, congestion on Upton Street would be further eased. The design creates two new school entrances, one on Connecticut Avenue and one accessed from a driveway on the school's property, which cars would enter from Connecticut Avenue. I often drop off my carpool of three children in front of the school – which is permitted under the traffic plan – and there is rarely more than two other cars dropping off children at the same time. All fit easily into the space in front of the school so that Upton Street traffic can move smoothly. I have never experienced a back-up in the morning since the carpool restriction was instituted. Back-ups along Upton Street had been the norm before.

What makes the new traffic management plan especially laudable are the features which could lead it to be a model for resolving disputes between schools and residents in other neighborhoods. The plan establishes feasible mechanisms for dialogue between the school and

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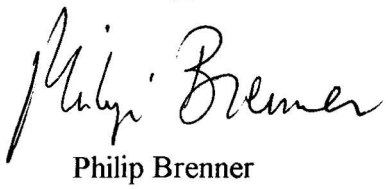
residents, for monitoring compliance, for mediation of disputes, and for enforcement of the plan. For example, contracts for all students beginning this September include a proviso that the school can expel a student for failure to comply with traffic management regulations. A committee made up of three community and three Burke representatives would be empowered to issue a $40,000 "fine" against the school if there were consistently as few as two infractions per day, on average, of the traffic plan. For a small school which operates at the margins, this would be a severe penalty.

The school would incur an even more significant penalty for non-compliance. Its current BZA application includes a request to expand enrollment ultimately to 320 students. But it could not do so without a record of compliance on the traffic plan. Unless there were community concurrence, the student body would be capped at 300, straining Burke's ability to re-pay the costs of the new building. Burke has built into its plan, then, very strong incentives that pressure it to live up to its promises.

I have lived in Washington, DC for 35 years, and in Cleveland Park for 17 years. A few years ago, my neighbors and I were concerned about the Washington International School's proposal to build a new gymnasium. But we were willing to interact with the school to find a win-win solution that has worked quite well – the school built its gym and traffic has been well managed (though, naturally and expectedly, Macomb Street becomes fairly congested for a few minutes each morning). I wish the opponents of Burke's application would be as open to such a win-win possibility as we were on Macomb Street. More typical is the letter in a recent issue of the *Northwest Current* from an opponent, which concluded that "we hope Burke finds a place elsewhere."

Mixed-use neighborhoods offer the city a special vitality. People who work and participate in institutions cannot merely use a neighborhood, they must be part of it. Without meaningful interaction, the whole can become less than the sum of its parts. Edmund Burke's plan for modest expansion offers a hopeful new approach that could strengthen the city. The first step in that direction would be for the BZA to endorse Burke's efforts.

Sincerely,



Philip Brenner