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January 3, 2004

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

2004 JAN -7 PM 3:31

Re: Application No. 17055 filed by the Army Distaff Foundation

Dear Mr. Griffis:

I am writing regarding the proposal by the Army Distaff Foundation to expand the Knollwood Army Retirement Residence at 6200 Oregon Avenue in Chevy Chase. The proposed increase to Knollwood – which already is very large and out of place – would negatively affect both the character and safety of the surrounding neighborhood. While that alone is reason enough to reject the proposal, it also must be rejected as contrary to the plain terms of the BZA's 1990 approval of Knollwood's previous expansion and as a troubling precedent to this and other neighborhoods.

My family moved into our present address – which is on one of the streets bordering Knollwood – nearly five years ago. We have two small children (ages 3 and 5), and one of the principal reasons we moved to this neighborhood – and to our specific street – was because it is quiet, rustic, and largely free from through traffic. We were of course aware of Knollwood when we made the decision to move here, but were ultimately persuaded that, even though it is out of character for the neighborhood, the property was well maintained, not excessively developed, and likely to remain that way. Indeed, I am aware that when Knollwood last received permission from the BZA to expand – a mere 13 years ago – it was on the express condition that Knollwood not engage in any additional expansion *until 20015*.

Knollwood is now seeking to go back on its word, and to violate the terms of its prior BZA approval. The proposal seeks to build an *82,000* square foot addition, which is the equivalent of more than 30 average-sized single-family homes. This massive addition will require the removal of old-growth trees that give this neighborhood its rustic charm, replacing this natural landscape with concrete and asphalt, added noise, added light, and years of construction. It will bring more traffic into the neighborhood, both over the short and long term, making it more dangerous for children to play outside.

The proposal is a radical departure from the BZA's 1990 approval of Knowlood's prior expansion, which confined development to "the center of the extremely large lot" so

BZA
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there would be "large trees and thick vegetation" to provide "a buffer between the retirement center and neighboring properties." The current proposal, by contrast, would place a structure that is nearly 60 feet high *at the edge* of the Knollwood property, within less than 40 feet of existing homes. It would eliminate the natural park-like buffer and instead force neighboring residents to overlook sterile concrete buildings and asphalt parking lots. By its own terms, the proposal seeks merely to comply with the "minimum" landscaping requirements of the District of Columbia, which are well below the standards expected in this very rustic part of the city.

According to their proposal, Knollwood seeks to expand in order to provide special care for residents with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. This is a noble cause to be sure, but it is not the only one at stake here. Preserving the character of Washington's historic neighborhoods also is critical. And while balancing competing interests always is difficult, in this case the balance was already struck more than a decade ago. The Board must now must force Knollwood to live up to the deal it struck with its neighbors on the last go around. To hold otherwise would not only render the Board's 1990 decision meaningless, but also would set a dangerous precedent that could allow all sorts of commercial interests to encroach on the ever-shrinking communities that have long made this city great.

Very truly yours,

