GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

Memorandum

TO: Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Ellen McCarthy, Interim Director
Office of Planning

DATE: June 7, 2005

SUBJECT: BZA Application #17320 (St. Albans School, Protestant Episcopal Church Foundation)
3101 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. (Square 1944, Lot 25)

APPLICATION

St. Albans School (applicant) requests, pursuant to 11 DCMR 3104.1, a special exception under Section 206 to allow the addition to the academic facilities; reconstruction of the athletic fields and related structures; and construction of a performing Arts Center.

RECOMMENDATION IN BRIEF

The Office of Planning (OP) supports the proposed application with the following conditions:

- The use of sound systems or other amplifications on the fields except for the announcer calling games is prohibited.
- There will be no lighting on the fields, as St. Albans does not participate in night games.

The application will be further reviewed by HPRB to address the following:

- Proposed fencing around the fields
- Softening of retaining wall surfaces
- Introduction of additional vegetation between the fields
- Extending plantings along the practice field south of the Olmsted Woods

Since these may alter the site plan provided to the BZA, OP recommends that the record be kept open for submission of an updated Site Plan reflecting Historic Preservation Review Board's comments.

The community and the applicant are in the process of negotiating a Use Agreement. If this agreement is not ratified by the time of the public hearing OP supports a postponement to allow time for the negotiations to conclude.

BZA
Case No. 17320
Exhibit No. 28

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17320
EXHIBIT NO. 28

SITE AND AREA DESCRIPTION

The National Cathedral grounds ("the Close") consists of approximately 57 acres of land at 3101 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., (Square 1944, Lot 25) on which are located the National Cathedral, National Cathedral School for Girls, St. Alban's Church, St. Alban's School, the Beauvoir Elementary School, the College of Preachers, residences and accessory buildings. The Close is bounded by Massachusetts Avenue and Garfield Street to the south, Wisconsin Avenue to the west, Woodley Road to the north, and 34th Street to the east (Attachment 1). The topography of the Close is highest at the Cathedral and slopes down towards Garfield Street with a difference of eighty-five feet. The St. Albans portion is on the southeast and southwestern portions of the Close.

Generally, the area surrounding the Close is residential use. Across Wisconsin Avenue are apartment buildings while along Garfield and 34th Streets are single-family detached residences. St. Sophia's Greek Orthodox Church is across the street from St. Albans along 34th Street.

PROPOSAL

The proposed development has three components; the New Wing Extension, the renovation of the athletic fields, and the performing arts center. The development will be phased over ten years with the construction of the New Wing addition and the athletic fields renovations scheduled to begin in 2006. The Performing Arts Center will be built sometime within the ten-year timeframe.

New Wing Addition

The New Wing Building will have an addition of approximately 31,000 gross square feet (gfa) of new space that will include seven classrooms, faculty offices, student social space, administrative offices, and a student bookstore. Additionally, the extension will provide connections between several unconnected buildings through a series of stairs and an elevator on all floors that will enable handicap access that is not currently provided. Further, the new space will suppress the current service road underground to conceal the loading, trash, and mechanical functions below grade and remove their view from Garfield Street.

Athletic Fields

The current athletic fields will be reconfigured into three separate levels. The upper level will have a multipurpose field for football, lacrosse, and soccer, and is surrounded by a track. A 600-person viewing stand would be built on the slope adjacent to the Beauvoir School. The middle level will contain a baseball field and practice field separated from the upper level by an arcade (covered walkway). The lower level at the intersection of Garfield and 35th Streets would have seven tennis courts on the lower level. Support space for the tennis court will be built into the hillside between the upper and lower levels.

Performing Arts Center

The proposed Performing Arts Center will be located underground with only a small portion above ground to provide natural light into the building. The center will contain a 650-seats auditorium and 39,000 square feet of space dedicated to support space, practice rooms, offices, classrooms, arts studio, library and connections to other buildings. The center will accommodate programs for St. Albans, National Cathedral School for Girls and the Cathedral.

ZONING

The subject site is in the R-1-B district and private schools are permitted as a special exception use if they meet the requirements outlined in Section 206.2 and 206.3 of the Zoning Regulations.

St. Albans School was established prior to the enactment of the Zoning Regulations. Since then there has been three BZA approvals for new buildings and additions (BZA Order No. 8867 (October 1, 1971), BZA Order 12174 (November 5, 1976) and BZA Order 15987 (October 28, 1994).

ANALYSIS

To fulfill its ongoing mission, the proposed increase in academics and administrative space is important as the current facilities fall below needs. Similarly, the athletic field and facilities are inadequate for the level of competition and interscholastic games in which the students are involved. The Performance Arts Center is necessary because the current venues are inadequate for performances. In addition to the construction of the new facilities, landscaping around the facilities and view-sheds towards Cathedral would be have been improved.

Historic Preservation

The entire National Cathedral Close is a designated historic site. The original master plan for the Close created by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. was originally developed in 1910 and was further expanded and refined in 1924. St. Albans proposal has incorporated a number of design elements including wooded hillsides, view corridors, processional sequence, outdoor spaces, and a consistency with the material language of the close. The 1998 Master Plan for the Close encourages new development to minimize further erosion of the Olmsted Plan and its pastoral character.

The applicant has been working with the Historic Preservation staff in the OP and share their concerns regarding the chain link fence around the fields, softening of walls through the use of more berms, a reduction in size and design of Senior Circle, and creating a unified edge along Garfield Street. The proposal will be reviewed by the HPRB at its June 23, 2005 meeting.

Special Exception

The subject site is in the R-1-B zone and Section 206 of the Zoning Regulations allows a private school in the R-1-B district if approved by the Board of Zoning Adjustment. The proposed use meets the requirements of Section 206 as follows:

206.2 The private school shall be located so that it is not likely to become objectionable to adjoining and nearby property because of noise, traffic, number of students, or otherwise objectionable conditions.

Noise

The introduction of the Performance Arts Center and addition to the New Wing Building containing offices and classrooms will not create any additional noise that will affect the adjacent community. The center will be mostly underground and enclosed. No increase in noise is expected from the performing arts center or the new offices and classrooms, as these new buildings are internal to the property and not adjacent to any residential structures.

There may be some increase in noise from the athletic fields. The multipurpose field will be used the most and is located further into the site and away from Garfield Street and the applicant has stated that their studies show the noise levels along Garfield Street will be less than current levels. However, there is a slight increase in the noise level along 34th Street but this is not a noticeable increase. The applicant has stated that there will be no use of sound systems or other amplifications on the fields except for the announcer calling games.

Traffic

The New Wing addition that will result in an increase in teachers will have an insignificant effect on traffic arriving and leaving the site. The modification to the athletic fields will also have an insignificant impact on traffic. The increase in traffic results from the additional track and field meets that will have more buses coming to the site. Visiting teams will be required to park on-site and new parking spaces for buses are included in the athletic field modifications.

The applicant's traffic study states that the Performing Arts Center will generate a significant increase in traffic to the site but events will be limited to only a few times per year and on Friday evenings. A new traffic signal is proposed for the intersection of North Road and Wisconsin Avenue that will bring traffic operations at this intersection into a desirable range and alleviate existing safety hazard at this intersection. DDOT will provide a separate traffic analysis.

Number of Students

The school currently has 568 students. The proposal does not include an increase in the number of students. The number of faculty and staff currently number 133 and will be increased by 8 to 141. This increase in faculty and staff will not have an objectionable effect on the neighborhood.

Lighting

There will be no lighting on the fields, as St. Albans does not participate in night games.

Landscaping

OP has had discussions with the applicant regarding the chain link fence around the fields which should be replaced with a more appropriate fencing, the softening of some of the retaining wall surfaces, such as the arcade, the introduction of additional vegetation between the fields, and extending plantings along the practice field south of the Olmsted Woods to have a unified edge along Garfield Street. The applicant submits that these issues will be addressed prior to the public hearing. Additionally, these issues will be further reviewed by HPRB.

206.3 Ample parking space, but not less than that required in chapter 21 of this title, shall be provided to accommodate the students, teachers, and visitors likely to come to the site by automobile.

The Zoning Regulations require two parking spaces per three teachers and other employees and therefore ninety-four spaces are required. Currently, 154 parking spaces are required and provided to serve the faculty and staff and assembly space. The increase in faculty and staff by nine persons will increase the required parking to 160 spaces and St. Alban has been designated 163 spaces on the Close.

Currently, the Close has 532 spaces but there is a demand for 826 spaces that results in spillover parking onto nearby streets. The proposed new garage will satisfy the needed additional parking and not necessitate the need to park on neighborhood streets. Required parking for the performing arts center will be provided in the new garage with a dedicated pathway between the two facilities.

St. Albans will institute a Parking Policy to make it attractive to students, faculty and staff, and visitors to park in designated and less attractive to park on neighborhood streets. The applicant is currently in negotiations with ANC-3C on a Use Agreement and a parking policy is included (Attachment 2 – Draft Agreement Between St. Albans School and ANC 3C-08). OP believes that if these policies are instituted, parking on neighborhood streets will be reduced.

Pilgrim Way is one-way to allow on-street parking that would be reduced if converted to two-way traffic. The 1998 Master Plan for the Close emphasizes the opening of Pilgrim Way to two-way traffic. OP encourages the applicant to continue exploring the possibility of a parking garage.

The application is also required to meet the requirements of Section 3104.1 for Special Exceptions as follows:

> **"…. special exception will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map and will not tend to affect adversely the use of neighboring property in accordance with the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps, …."**

A private school is a permitted use in the R-1 district, subject to approval of the BZA. The school fulfills the intent of the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map that allow uses that are compatible to one-family residential areas. The applicant has undertaken measures to mitigate any negative impacts and is in compliance with Section 206 of the Zoning Regulations.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS

St. Albans has had many meetings with the community in addition to creating a web site to communicate information to the community regarding the proposed development. On May 16, 2005 ANC-3C voted to support the proposed design and landscaping with conditions as it relates to historic preservation. The conditions addressed limitations on the amount of chain link fence, hard edges of the athletic fields, and the amount of landscaping along Pilgrim Road, the Beauvoir School, and the north edge of the fields. OP supports the recommendations to address these items and believes they will strengthen the pastoral image of the Close.

The ANC and other community organizations are working with the applicant on a Use Agreement and Construction Management Plan. The ANC will meet on June 6, 2005 to review and vote on the special exception request.

RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning (OP) supports the proposed application with the following conditions:

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ATT:

Attachment 1 – Site Location Aerial

EM/mbr

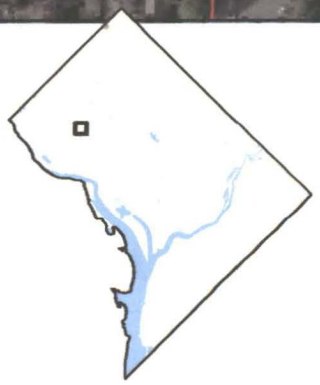


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Feet

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Site Location
BZ A # 17320
St. Albans School



★ ★ ★ **Government of the District of Columbia**
Anthony A. Williams, Mayor

Office of Planning ~ June 6, 2005

This map was created for planning purposes from a variety of sources. It is neither a survey nor a legal document. Information provided by other agencies should be verified with them where appropriate.

Attachement 1