Susan Dienelt July 26, 2005

For the Application Number 17320 of St. Albans School on behalf of the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation of DC pursuant to 11 DCMR 3104.1 for a special exception to permit additional facilities including renovation of athletic fields and related structures and construction of a performing arts center serving a private school.

I have lived at 3422 Garfield Street, NW for 25 years. Our house is at the corner of 35th and Garfield, directly across from the entrance to Pilgram Road and the STA tennis courts and playing fields. My children went to Beauvoir Camp and learned to swim in the St. Albans and Beauvoir pools. My daughter went to National Cathedral School. I have been walking my dogs around the Olmstead Woods for the last 18 years. I care about what goes on in my neighborhood. I have raised my family there and I, for the most part, have loved living there. But I have not loved all the times I have driven around looking for parking when I had groceries or other packages in my car. I hate competing for parking in front of my house on a regular basis, especially with people from Maryland and Virginia.

I have been harassed by the increasing congestion and constant parking problems on our street for years now. I have complained and pleaded with St. Albans to take responsibility for the cars that they bring into the neighborhood. I have watched as they not only increased the activities of the school itself but as they extended the use of their facilities to others all year long. The intensity of traffic and parking associated with academic uses goes well beyond the school day. We are not asking them to curtail these things. It is hard enough to balance quality of life with the intensity of the academic uses but the outside use really tips the balance. We used to get a break in the summer with the fields only being used during the camp session and a few St. Albans teams getting ready for the fall. Now their fields and their gyms are in constant use. When they are not using them for their own school, they are almost continually used by other schools, teams or leagues. We are only addressing the use of the fields today but they also rent or lend out their gyms and pool on a regular basis. Since school let out this June there have been a series of tournaments or something going on in the gyms which have taken all the parking up and down our street more evenings that not. It never seems to let up. I love to look out on the fields and see the teams lining up to play--but not all the time.

If St. Albans were to institute a parking policy for its students and staff, they could enforce that. With education and consequences, they might even be able to convince most of the parents of their students and the members of their tennis club to follow the policies. But as difficult as that may be, it is going to be much harder to educate and convince the parents and families of the athletes that play on teams that are renting or borrowing the facilities. The more they are lent out, the greater the imposition and hardship on the neighbors. The school has a full

BZA
Case No. 17820
Exhibit No. 39
Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17320
EXHIBIT NO. 39

schedule and heavy use of its facilities without any outside use. St. Albans has said that they have a responsibility to the greater Washington community but don't they have a responsibility to the community immediately surrounding their school?

St. Albans says that they have been meeting with the neighbors for several years. I have attended most of those meetings. They were not meetings where there was real dialogue between the school and the neighbors. St. Albans made presentations and allowed the neighbors to comment, but I never a feeling that there was a real discussion going on or, indeed, that they were really even listening to us. Representing the neighbors immediately adjacent to the school and, therefore, those most impacted by the congestion, noise and parking, I was a part of a group negotiating with St. Albans in June to try to come to a Use Agreement for the fields and new building, including a parking policy. I was heartened right before the last BZA meeting because, for the first time, I felt there was real communication. I thought we might really come to an agreement. I was very happy because I intensely dislike the conflict and discord. I was delighted because I thought I would not have to come here and contest their new plans. I do not want to interfere with the programs of the school, but I am saddened that they cannot acknowledge the hardships they impose on their neighbors. I was beginning to think that we could work something out and all get on with our lives together in our beautiful community. Now St. Albans seems to have backed off from wanting to negotiate with us. I have lived with these frustrations for years. I ask you to please deny their application for a zoning variance until they work out an acceptable agreement on usage and parking, including enforcement, with the neighbors. In fact, I urge you to give us a limited amount of time to come to an agreement so that St. Albans is not delayed in getting their improved facilities and so that we can all move along with our lives.