

November 13, 2018

Honorable Frederick L. Hill, Chairperson,
Honorable Anthony J. Hood, Chairperson, Zoning Commission
Honorable Lesyllee M. White
Honorable Lorna John
Honorable Carlton Hart, National Capital Planning Commission Designee
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 200S
Washington, DC 20001

RE: BZA Case No. 19823
Wisconsin Avenue Baptist Church - Sunrise Senior living, 3920 Alton Place, NW

Dear Chairperson Hill and Members of the Board:

I own and reside at 4404 39th St., one of 5 houses sharing the block and directly abutting WABC. My back fence sits on the property line dividing my backyard from the WABC property.

I have lived in this house with my wife and son for 18 years. We very much enjoy the location of our house, on a peaceful block. The WABC proposal, because it is oversized, will adversely affect my property with noise and traffic, as well as restricted sunlight.

Right now the relatively quiet parking lot of WABC is directly across our back fence. The current proposal would have a ramp requiring a 13 foot retaining wall to the parking garage and delivery truck loading dock, 8 feet away from my back fence. Residential zoning only allows for a 4 foot retaining wall.

According to statements by Sunrise, 30 foot trucks would be backing up to the loading dock, BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, right behind my house, then revving their engines to make it up a steep ramp. Ambulances, shuttle vans and other vehicles would also be navigating to the entrance directly around the corner on Alton St.

The Sunrise staff and visitors comings and goings will also increase traffic to the site. I am semi-retired and spend time many afternoons in my now quiet backyard. Besides the added car traffic and bothersome truck noise, the proposed development would restrict afternoon sunlight in my backyard because it would occupy more of the lot than zoning allows and would be 4 stories instead of the 3 that the zoning allows.

I do not object to the church expanding. I understand a religious institution can build matter of right up to 60% lot occupancy, 3 stories. Some neighbors have supported the current proposal in fear of the alternative specter put forth by WABC/Sunrise of a mega-church (even though a huge church on this lot is highly speculative in today's climate of declining churches). Be that as it may, I would not object to church expansion (of itself) or a larger church within the zoning.

Nor would I object to a CCRC at this location, so long as it would remain within the required 3 stories at 40% lot occupancy. But I do object to a church squeezing a CCRC onto their property at or near lot occupancy for a CHURCH (60%) and adding a fourth story all around, including 2

stories above the church, for the sake of profits for the church and/or Sunrise corporation. We neighbors will pay the price: This proposal would significantly alter the character of our neighborhood by including what is essentially a commercial property in an R1B zone, with the ensuing reduction of our quality of life and reduction in the value of our properties.

It seems to me that one of the functions of zoning is that those who move into a certain zone should be able to count on that zoning being honored (with minor exceptions allowed). Otherwise one's property value can be adversely affected; indeed the neighbors on either side of me have already seen this. The neighbor to my right recently sold his house at a reduction of \$150,000 after two contracts fell through when the prospective buyers found out about the WABC proposal. The neighbor to my left also had a contract fall through and then sold at a reduced price.

If zoning exceptions are allowed, e.g. a CCRC, they should fall within the zoning. Any variances should be minor.

This proposal vs. nearby existing comparable institutions:

Some neighbors who have expressed support for this proposal, offer as comparison the widespread acceptability of nearby institutions (e.g. Friendship Terrace, Georgetown Day School, Janney Elementary). But unlike these other institutions, WABC is surrounded on 3 sides by 2 story residential homes.

Another comparison (which has been offered at more than one meeting by our ANC) is between the proposed Sunrise facility and the extant Lisner Home in nearby Frienship Heights. The Lisner Home has been cited as an example of a CCRC which neighbors are happy to live near *because* it is quiet and unobtrusive. Indeed, neighbors of WABC, myself included, have explicitly agreed with that assessment. Even some of the most vociferous opponents of the WABC/Sunrise proposal have expressed welcome acceptance for the likes of a Lisner Home instead. Why? What exactly are the differences?

- 1) The lot occupancy of Lisner is very low, certainly way under 40%, with considerable setbacks. (vs. WABC/Sunrise proposal of 57% lot occupancy).
- 2) Lisner complies with R1B zoning. It is largely 1 and 2 stories. Its central building is 3 stories. whereas WABC/Sunrise proposes 4 stories all around.
- 3) The nearest single family home to the Lisner building is across a 50' buffer of lawn, trees and shrubs, whereas WABC/Sunrise proposes only an 8 ft. buffer to their truck ramp.
- 4) The closest house to Lisner's loading dock is across the street and across a 100+ ft. side-yard buffer of lawn and trees, a total of about 130 feet from the front yard of the nearest house. For WABC/Sunrise, the closest home property, my next door neighbor, will be about 20 feet from the loading area.
- 5) Lisner's main entrance is on Western Avenue, a 4-lane, yellow double-line thoroughfare. The proposed main entrance for Sunrise is on Alton St., a small side street of single family homes, a street so narrow (30 ft.) that two cars can barely fit to pass if there are parked cars, which there most always are.

6) Deliveries to Lisner require no truck traffic through streets of neighborhood homes. Lisner's delivery entrance is immediately off Western Ave. across from Chevy Chase playground. The delivery entrance and exit for Sunrise are on Alton and Yuma, side streets with single family homes.

7) Lisner, of course, does not include a 250-seat church.

8) Finally, Lisner is a true CCRC, a non-profit whose fees are based on ability to pay, and which does not ask residents to leave if they eventually need additional medical services. If WABC was partnering with such a non-profit, **within the zoning**, I would not oppose.

Comparisons have also been offered between WABC on one hand and other nearby churches on the other, specifically St. Ann's Catholic church, St. Columba's Episcopal, St. Paul Lutheran, and Citizen Heights church. Again, there are important differences:

1) None of these other churches are surrounded on 3 sides by single family homes as is WABC. None have entrances that directly face single family homes, as would the new WABC.

2) Two of these churches (St. Ann's and Citizen Heights) are entirely surrounded by commercial development and/or non-profit institutions.

3) St. Columba's has a side-yard buffer of over 100 feet between the church (school) building and the nearest single family home properties. The entrance faces no houses, only the side yard of the house across the street.

4) St. Paul's, the closest of these churches to neighboring houses, has an addition which was built such that it is across the alley from only one house and still has a 45' side yard buffer to the house next door. (Again, WABC/Sunrise proposes only an 8 ft. buffer for 4 of the 5 abutting single family homes. WABC/Sunrise would be directly across the street from another 7 homes on the two surrounding side streets).

5) Perhaps most significantly, these other churches subsist within the zoning regs without a commercial partner requiring the major zoning variances being requested by WABC. These churches do not therefore have commercial truck deliveries noisily backing up to a loading dock within feet of abutting homes.

It is not fair to ask the neighbors to accept trucks backing up so close to our houses, revving their engines to make it up the exit ramp, exhaust, traffic, on top of a church's outdoor congregating, with all the extra noise, not to mention decrease in property value, (already evident), that will ensue if these major zoning variances are granted. The zoning regs are precisely what protect and preserve proper buffers and sizing for the neighborhood.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jeffrey Koczela
4404 39th St. NW
Washington, DC 20016

