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From: Bardin, Sara (DCOZ)
Sent: Friday, October 22, 2021 9:45 AM
To: DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)
Subject: FW: CASE #20472- Opposition to River School Application for Special Exemption

Sara

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Director



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From: David Burton <datburton@gmail.com>
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Subject: CASE #20472- Opposition to River School Application for Special Exemption

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Dear Chairman Hill: I am writing to respectfully request that you deny the application of the River School for special exception relief under the Zoning regulations to develop the Buchanan estate (BZA case number 20472). I live at 4340 Verplanck Place, two blocks from the proposed new location of TRS. I offer the following points in support of my request.

1. The proposed project would bring a total of 450 students, faculty, and staff each day to a site of just 2.27 acres. This would give it a population density far higher than almost any other comparable private school in the DC. This has serious implications for the character of the neighborhood, including through higher noise levels, and especially for traffic in the vicinity of the site (as discussed in more detail below).
2. TRS proposes putting at least 60,000 square feet of institutional buildings on that part of the site not already occupied by the existing house. This will dramatically change the residential nature of what is now a leafy corner of AU park, radically altering the outlook of many homes.

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3. The project would add significantly to traffic in the neighborhood at peak times, even if the number or trips is limited to the extent that TRS claims, as seems unlikely (see below). Traffic is already heavy at peak times because of the presence of numerous educational establishments in the vicinity as well as commuters.
4. The proposed site is right at two very dangerous intersections--42nd and Van Ness, and Van Ness and Nebraska. I have personally seen more than one accident at the latter intersection and many near misses at the former. By adding to the traffic at these intersections, the project raises significant safety concerns.
5. The River School's own transportation experts have evaluated 18 intersections close to the proposed location and have found nine showing adverse impacts from the proposal, and TRS has proposed just two measures to mitigate the impact of the additional traffic.
6. The measures proposed by TRS to sharply reduce the number of additional automobile trips (e.g., cutting the number of morning trips almost in half) are vague and unconvincing (TRS Comprehensive Transportation Report, pp 40-48). This large reduction is to be achieved primarily by establishing yet to be fully articulated carpooling programs, providing a shuttle(s) from a yet to be determined offsite location(s), and providing incentives for use of public transport. It is far from clear how effective these measures will be, and indeed hard to imagine that parents paying high tuition for an elite private school will readily submit to all the restrictions on transportation involved. TRS says it will monitor plan implementation, but its proposal envisages that the process of resolving failure to meet the targets could go on for years. In the meantime, it is the neighborhood that would suffer--there are no penalties for TRS in that eventuality, only a commitment to try harder.
7. The addition to traffic in the vicinity of the proposed River School site would drive both River School and other traffic onto side roads, creating a safety hazard for pedestrians, many of whom are elderly, and for children playing in the neighborhood or walking to their own schools. And some River School parents would undoubtedly try to park in the neighborhood and walk their children the rest of the way, even if this is not permitted under River School rules--this happens at most schools. The inadequate parking at the site would only exacerbate this problem.
8. Many will no doubt speak or write on behalf of the River School's Project, some of whom may even be well known, but I doubt there will be anyone in support who lives in the vicinity of the proposed site and is not affiliated with the school in some way. The views of the residents who will be affected should carry the most weight.

To close, the River School is a fine educational institution, no one disputes this. There are, however, major problems with its proposed relocation, namely that the Buchanan estate is too small for the number of students, faculty and staff involved, the envisaged development would fundamentally change the residential character of the site, and the project would add significant traffic to what are already overloaded roads and dangerous intersections, raising safety concerns. The latter problem would be even more serious if the TRS's Transport Demand Management plan does not work as well as advertised, as seems likely. There can be no doubt that the relocation of TRS to the proposed site would therefore create conditions that are objectionable to nearby property, and TRS's request should be denied.

Yours sincerely,

David Burton