

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

From: Elisabeth Leamy <eli@elisabethleamy.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 23, 2021 3:14 PM
To: DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)
Cc: Alexandra Gianinno; Elyssa Larranaga; Chrun Anne
Subject: I OPPOSE the River School project

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Dear Board of Zoning Adjustment:

I am writing to express my opposition to the River School's plan to move into the historic Under Oak property in AU Park at Nebraska Avenue, 42nd and Van Ness streets. I live at 4360 Van Ness Street NW, 2 blocks west of the proposed project. For context, please know that I am not a "NIMBY," opposed to all new development. (Indeed, I support denser development when the site is big enough and when there is a substantial community benefit, such as retail offerings at the former Superfresh site in AU Park.) Nor am I opposed to Independent Schools. My own daughter attended a private school for elementary school and attends another now for high school.

My reasons for opposing the River School project are simple and clear:

SIZE: The River School wants to cram too much programming and too many cars and people onto too small a site. The historic Under Oak property is only about 2 acres in size, yet they propose to build a school for 350 students plus a daycare center AND a public health clinic? There is only room for 17 cars in the school's proposed drop-off/pickup line, but at least 10 times that many cars will actually be dropping off and picking up! In addition, the River School plan calls for clear-cutting most of the beautiful trees around the perimeter of the property to make room for their looming facility. That is an aesthetic and environmental travesty. At a time when the District is desperately trying to restore its tree canopy, this should not be allowed.

TRAFFIC: Are you aware that a pedestrian was struck and gravely injured at the intersection of Van Ness and 42nd Streets a few years ago? That already dangerous intersection borders the proposed River School project. I was part of a community group that worked hard to get DDOT to take steps to minimize and slow traffic on Van Ness Street, with limited success. At the time, we did our own traffic study and found that only about 10 percent of the vehicles that travel on Van Ness Street during morning/evening rush hour are DC vehicles! Yes, our street is such a popular "cut-through" that 90% of our traffic is caused by Maryland and Virginia drivers. I often have to wait several minutes to be able to turn into my own driveway, thanks to out-of-state drivers zooming down Van Ness Street. If you allow the River School project to go forward, you will be making a bad situation worse for the benefit of people who do not live here.

PARKING: From what I have read, the River School plan allocates less space for parking than its faculty and families require. And the school has set aside NO space for parking for its daycare center and public health facility. And yet, it's my understanding that new developments are required to demonstrate they are providing adequate parking for their purpose. If this is the rule, why are we even entertaining the River School's proposed Special Exception? There is simply not enough space on a 2 acre site for a school, playground, daycare, public health clinic—and parking. The truth is blindingly clear.

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.20472
EXHIBIT NO.47

ZONING: The Under Oak property is zoned R-1-B for single family homes only. Not condos or apartments. Not stores or offices. And not schools. Why do we even have zoning in the District of Columbia if we are not going to honor it? Sometimes the Board of Zoning Adjustment grants exceptions because a project will be an asset to a community. The River School plan provides NO benefit to the surrounding neighbors. (The school cites its playground as a community amenity, but we have plenty of playgrounds in AU Park...) Furthermore, most of the children who attend the River School do not live in the AU Park neighborhood —or even in the District of Columbia. The school has deployed well known people such as CNN's Dana Bash to speak in its favor, but she does not live anywhere near the Under Oak site! We should not allow people from other areas —or other states— to determine the fate of our neighborhood.

I have nothing against the River School and I admire its educational mission. The Under Oak location is simply not the right site for it. Please use your authority to oppose the special zoning exception and prevent the River School from building on the Under Oak site.

Respectfully,
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