

## Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

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**From:** Bardin, Sara (DCOZ)  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 20, 2022 12:33 PM  
**To:** DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)  
**Subject:** FW: BZA Case #20643 Maret School

Sara

**Sara Bardin**  
Director



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**Subject:** BZA Case #20643 Maret School

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1-20-22

Dear BZA, ANC 3/4G Chairman, Mr. Randy Speck; Commissioner John Higgins; Commissioner Michael Zeldin and DC Councilmember Lewis George:

I am writing this letter because I have serious concern about the multi-sports complex the Maret School is proposing to build on the grounds of the Episcopal Center for Children in my neighborhood. I live on Nebraska Ave NW, about 300 feet south of the ECC property. I consider myself an immediate neighbor and as such I believe my concerns carry great weight with my ANC — indeed greater than those who live further from the site or even outside the neighborhood.

Board of Zoning Adjustment  
District of Columbia  
CASE NO.20643  
EXHIBIT NO.94

Here are my concerns

### **Stormwater runoff:**

- My first and greatest concern is removing 40 trees, ripping up topsoil, and replacing it with hardscaping plus a 3.7 acre carpet of plastic turf for the playing field. This means that nearly 5 acres of land that is now grassy, wooded, and most importantly permeable would be made impermeable. The topsoil microbiome would be killed. Water that was once absorbed on site by the trees and grass would be flushed into the city's storm sewer system through pipes and surface runoff. Environmentalists consider stormwater runoff to be the #1 pollution problem in the country. We need to take it seriously.
- A planned rain garden would mitigate a small percentage of the total runoff, caused by a parking lot for about 50 cars. But overall, the site's reduced capability for absorbing stormwater will increase the load on the city's storm sewer system, which is incapable of handling the current storm water load. It absolutely cannot handle the predicted increase in intense weather events.
- Don't be fooled by claims that the plastic turf system is pervious. It does not allow water to seep into, and be absorbed by, the earth below. It is engineered to channel rain and stormwater from the surface into plastic pipes below the surface that collect the water and dump it directly into the city's storm sewers. There is no local absorption of this water. Local absorption is how we keep the city's storm sewer system from becoming overwhelmed during weather events.
- Local homeowners will experience the effects of stormwater runoff from the field most acutely. Will Maret indemnify local homeowners from water damage due to runoff from the field?
- Note that the city's requirements for managing stormwater runoff on athletic fields are minimal. During this time of increased awareness of climate change, merely following city regulations that are out of synch with the current and near-future climate conditions is not enough. Maret must commit to doing more.

### **Other health and eco issues:**

- The field will require 3.7 acres of plastic turf — roughly 40,000 lbs — which needs to be replaced every 8-10 years. Plastic turf can't be recycled and goes to landfills. Why are we encouraging more plastic in our city's landfill?
- We should not allow ourselves to naively accept industry claims that plastic turf and infill are harmless to people and the environment and an improvement over natural grass. The manufacture of plastic turf requires PFAS and other toxic, cancer-causing forever chemicals. Human exposures to PFAS are associated with cancer, birth defects, and other impairments. In addition, roughly 400,000 lbs of infill material is used on the typical field. Even so-called eco-friendly infills have not been declared safe by any US government agency, and may give rise to lung irritating dust. Likewise, silica, which is used to keep the infill from clumping, is a known carcinogen. That's why workers who install it are required to wear respirators. Those who live nearby will have 24/7 exposure to these toxins. The parents of the children who use these fields may have signed a liability waiver, but those who would have the most exposure are without option.
- The infill and silica will wash off the field during rain events, and will also end up in our storm sewers, streets, and will ultimately wash into Rock Creek Park, the Potomac, and the Chesapeake Bay along with the excess stormwater. This stuff does not go away. It spreads throughout the watershed, bringing pollution with it.
- Then there is the heat island effect of having 3.7 acres of plastic grass, which absorbs heat during the day and releases it at night into the surrounding environment. Once again, the houses and families that border the field will bear the burden of the this additional heat.

### **Traffic and safety**

- Traffic and pedestrian/biker safety is another area of concern. The pickup and drop-off of children using the field for practice and games, the subleasing of the fields when Maret is not using it, ECC's after school program, and summer camp, would overwhelm the local streets with cars and buses, particularly when drop off and pickup times overlap with morning and afternoon rush-hours. These would occur alongside Nebraska Ave commuter traffic, adding to stress on the streets that were never designed for that volume. The nearby residents will be most impacted from the increased traffic as they walk to and from their homes and the Lafayette public school.

- Importantly, the immediate neighborhood streets - on my block too - will be overwhelmed with parked cars of the field users, particularly on game days. Maret has already told us that we can expect 200-300 spectators when the school has major games at the field. Where will all these cars park? Onsite parking is for about 50 cars. Again, the nearby residents will bear the brunt of the increase traffic and parking.

### Sound

- The constant noise associated with the intensive use of the field is another concern for those who live nearby. The maximum allowable sound in an R-1-B zone is 60 dB. Sports activities regularly exceed that limit. The hard surface of high walls planned at the field perimeter will only intensify the sound, creating an echo effect. What relief from constant noise will be available to the 58 houses that border the field, and other nearby residences? Again, the people who live near the field would bear the greatest burden.

### Summary

- The proposed multi-sport field at ECC is in a location that is wholly inappropriate for this use. The field is surrounded by 58 houses. Nowhere in the city is a sports field of this size usage wedged into a residential area that is immediately adjacent to so many houses.
- The people who live nearby would bear the brunt of the negative effects of the field — stormwater runoff during major weather events, health effects from exposure to air and water pollution from plastic toxins and infill materials, heat from 3.7 acres of plastic carpet baking in the summer sun, pedestrian safety concerns from heavy traffic and parking on streets never designed to handle that level of usage, disruptive noise during field use and games.
- Those who live near the field, including myself, will have exposure to all the negative aspects of this proposed development without any of the supposed benefits.
- To date we've identified 140 public and private playing fields in the city, a significant percentage of them in Northwest DC. The problem is not a lack of playing fields, it's a lack of good management of existing fields. Creating a new field for Maret will NOT solve this problem; it will kick the problem down the road.
- **We live in a time of climate change. We have the opportunity now to make decisions that can make DC a more livable city and contribute to a more sustainable future for us all. Indeed, Montgomery county has taken a leadership role in encouraging natural grass on sports fields. And the Sustainable DC plan resolves to make the city healthy, green and livable by preserving trees, green spaces, and managing stormwater runoff. The city recently installed permeable pavers in the alleys and a rain garden on the street directly adjacent to the ECC field. Why are we rushing to allow a plastic-packed sports field that will make things worse? Maret's plan for the ECC field moves us backward, not forward. Surely we can do better.**

I object to Maret's proposal to disrupt our neighborhood. Furthermore, I do not want this to set a precedent for future development in our city.

Respectfully,  
Jill MacNeice

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