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From: Bardin, Sara (DCOZ)
Sent: Thursday, January 20, 2022 3:39 PM
To: DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)
Subject: FW: Board of Zoning Adjustment Case #20643: Maret School

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Subject: Board of Zoning Adjustment Case #20643: Maret School

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January 20, 2022

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

I am writing to indicate my serious concerns regarding the imposition of the Maret School sports complex proposed for my neighborhood.

My name is Thierry Rosenheck – My home on Nebraska Avenue looks out on the Episcopal Center for Children (ECC). I have lived here since 1991 and am planning to age here as well. I am still trying to find out more about the sports

complex the Maret School is planning to build on the property they will be leasing from the ECC. What I've learned so far concerns me.

TRAFFIC

Currently, we anticipate Beach Drive to be closed to future commuter traffic. Oregon Avenue is still closed for construction. While we no longer have a Covid lockdown, traffic to offices has been radically altered and we cannot reliably predict when it will return to pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, I believe the pandemic has altered commuter traffic behaviors – I have observed more people are walking and riding their bikes on Nebraska Ave during rush hours. All these factors are bound to skew a traffic study that would capture the existing and future conditions of a traffic study Maret would submit to the BZA. The BZA application speaks of Maret leasing their fields to sports organizations, summer camp, Maret Games and Maret Rivalry Games. The application is vague about the number of players, coaches, parents, and spectators that will be coming to the sports fields by private vehicles. The number of Rivalry Games is either 5/year and/or 5% of Maret's total hours of use. We are uncertain whether the 5% could allow as much as 7 games a year instead of 5, as Maret presented. Based on what I see taking place at St. John's College High School, half a mile away, I believe the Maret Sports Complex will greatly impact traffic on Nebraska and Utah Avenues. St John's has huge parking lots to absorb and keep off public streets, the private vehicles from parents and spectators and buses transitioning between games. Furthermore, at the curb cut to the proposed market parking lot, the topography creates a blind spot to east-bound traffic from Connecticut Avenue. I believe this presents a safety concern that I am not sure will be considered in the traffic study. I also understand ECC will re-open and add its traffic with a potential along with a future day-care center it is planning. These would create additional drop-offs to the traffic. I'm concerned whether a valid traffic flow analysis will be conducted to simultaneously model various traffic, frequencies, and in the adequate time frames; including inbound and outbound peak hours with car and bus drop-off, and parking by residents, contractors.

ENVIRONMENT

I am concerned that the best information on this will only come at the Permit stage, after possible approval of the project. In the meantime, we will not know about the environmental impact of the development - as it contrasts to the natural field that is there now. The Maret Sports Complex is set on converting nearly 5 acres of natural grass land into an impervious surface of synthetic turf plus hardscaping. I understand Montgomery County has opted out of this. Much research shows that synthetic turf is associated with safety concerns for players, polluted run-off and heat islands in the surrounding neighborhoods. DC's Climate Ready study is clear on the need to be concerned with a radical INCREASE in the frequency of future floods occurring from 25 and 50-year floods. Maret design is simple - move surface run-off into DC's storm system that's been designed to past climate. This will likely impact an already overburdened and polluted Rock Creek. Stormwater management on the current grass field could be improved, but the proposed installation of artificial turf and hardscaping seems to be going counter to DC's goals as expressed in their Climate Ready DC study.

BUFFERS

What we have learned by looking at the vast sports complex at St John's is that buffers make a difference. St. John's, less than a mile away, is buffered by Rock Creek Park across two streets on two sides. As well Utah Ave and a substantial school building and parking lot provides a buffer to residents on Utah Ave. In the North, only two residents about St John's – one is owned by the school and the other has a first right of refusal agreement to be bought by the school. In addition, that side of the school includes a wide buffer of trees and landscaping. Yet, even with all the buffers surrounding St John's, our neighborhood is privy to the sound from their games. By contrast, the proposed Maret sports field is wedged into an R-1-B neighborhood with incompatible and inadequate buffers. The development being proposed will be jarring visually and acoustically.

NEBRASKA AVENUE FACADE

- a. The site has a drop of 35ft. The design creates a level field by introducing a series of retaining walls. Instead of looking at a pastoral view; residents on the West will look at retaining walls, topped with a fence plus tall netting. These will dwarf the scale of surrounding homes.
- b. From Nebraska Avenue, passersby now look at a rolling field with many trees. As proposed, the 'facade' of the complex will be a parking lot with a dumpster, a concrete bio-retaining pool with a huge flat synthetic turf field

surrounded by retaining walls, fences and netting. The lot is so tight for the multiple sports field being envisioned, that it simply does not allow a proper front/back consideration.

SOUND AMPLIFICATION

The retaining walls, shaped to contour the West side of the field will amplify and direct the sound of the games to neighbors East and South of the field. That said, sounds from games can be fun and refreshing and a positive feature of those attending games. However, there is a difference between listening to sounds when choosing to, and hearing these sounds 7 days a week and nearly 365 days a year.

COMMERCIAL OVERRIDING EDUCATIONAL USE

This sports field is only partially intended for Maret players. Maret intends to create a commercial enterprise, leasing the field on a 7-days a week and nearly 365 days a year basis. This development is a commercial venture being inserted into a residential community - its design should be more respectful of its context.

CRITICAL PATH AND NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

As with many other residents, I did not become aware of this proposed sports field until we were personally invited by other neighbors to join backyard meetings where Maret presented its design in November. It is then that we learned Maret submitted its BZA application; and later, that we learned Maret has been working on this project for one or more years. This is a complex project with complicated issues. What it ISN'T is a request for neighbors to consider allowing a back porch to protrude into a setback. The impact of this project goes well beyond the 200 ft surrounding the property. This should not be treated as a typical R-1-B zoning issue. Maret has moved forward on a timeline to get approval on THEIR critical path. This time-line is out of character with allowing residents to become aware of, and properly evaluate issues they will have to live with. Maret can modify their design until their final BZA application is submitted. The timeline of this process is tilted to advantage Maret and does not provide adequate time for the community to do proper due diligence, and understand the consequences of their proposal.

SUMMARY

I object to Maret's proposal that I believe will negatively disrupt the community. The process of developing this property was presented to the neighborhood as a completed design without the ability of immediate neighbors – those most directly affected – to participate in how to develop this field with a more compatible design. I believe approving this plan is a mistake and will set a wrong precedence for our city.

Respectfully,
Thierry Rosenheck

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