

Gregory L. Poe
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Washington, D.C. 20015

February 2, 2022

Via Email (bzasubmissions@dc.gov)

Mr. Frederick L. Hill
Chairperson
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, N.W., Suite 200S
Washington, D.C. 20001

Re: Support of Proposed Athletic Fields Partnership
Between Maret School and the Episcopal Center
for Children – BZA Application No. 20643

Dear Mr. Hill:

I write on behalf of my wife, Sunita Duggal, and myself in support of the proposed partnership between Maret School and the Episcopal Center for Children (ECC) regarding athletic fields on the ECC campus. Our house is one block from the ECC campus. We have lived in it since December 2007. For numerous reasons, we believe that the project is plainly in the interests of the neighborhood and the broader community as well as Maret and ECC. I also write to express grave concern regarding the ongoing flow of misinformation from opponents of the project.

We have a keen understanding of Maret's unsurpassed commitment to the well-being of its students and the community at large. We have been Maret parents since 2005. Our older daughter attended Maret beginning in kindergarten. She graduated in 2018. Our younger daughter is currently a senior at Maret and has attended the school since kindergarten.

Our neighborhood should *welcome* Maret's presence. Maret has a proven track record of excellent relationships with neighbors. The project will provide a reliable funding stream that will allow ECC to continue its mission and perform essential services for children with special needs. It will provide much-needed additional field space in the District of Columbia that Maret will open to other groups and neighbors on an appropriate basis. And it will allow Maret to advance the interests of its own student-athletes and further strengthen its institutional excellence.

I have been following the project closely by participating in the ANC meetings, reviewing submissions on the BZA docket, and absorbing the positions of neighbors regarding the project. Sunita and I respect the concerns of persons who live contiguous to and across Nebraska Avenue from the site, and Maret has gone the extra mile to address those concerns collaboratively.

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.20643
EXHIBIT NO.128

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Unfortunately, instead of adhering only to facts, opponents have circulated misinformation and made unfounded accusations in an effort to advance their (perceived) self-interest. As far as the public record of which I am aware reflects, their apparent goal is to delay consideration of the project and ultimately skuttle it, hoping that whatever may follow will be more to their liking. During a January 2022 ANC meeting, one of the contiguous neighbors opposing the project – in a moment of (presumably) unwitting transparency – called the site “parkland.” That is how many neighbors have experienced the site for many years, and they understandably like it that way. The name of the opposition group that has been granted party status – “Friends of the Field” – itself reflects the goal. But the “field” is not parkland and it is not independent of the ECC. It belongs to the ECC and its proposed use will benefit ECC, Maret, and the neighborhood and entire community, while respecting the interests of neighbors.

The exhibits filed on the BZA public docket by opponents of the project have continued the stream of misinformation and *ad hominem* attacks that have been made from the outset. To illustrate:

- The “Friends of the Field” form letter/template, submitted by the individual opponents, itself contains misinformation. For example, it asserts that “[noise] would be a constant concern” and that neighbors would face alleged problems “nearly every day of the year with no relief.” E.g., Exhibit (“Ex.”) 27 at 2, ¶¶ 6-7. The Maret-ECC presentations repeatedly have demonstrated the inaccuracy of those claims.
- Opponents assert without any basis that the Maret-ECC proposals are “disingenuous” and a “pretense.” Ex. 30 at 2, Ex. 100 at 2. Another opponent attacks Maret, without any foundation, as a supposed “bully.” Ex. 86. Two others claim a concern, without pointing to any evidence, regarding the supposed “lack of information, the lack of transparency, and the appearance of bias.” Ex. 87.
- The “Friends of the Field” group has asserted without basis that “Maret seeks to implant a business operation” on the site, Ex. 93 at 4, 9; one opponent calls it a “huge commercial endeavor,” Ex. 71 at 1; others say that it is a “commercial venture” and that “Maret intends to create a commercial enterprise, leasing the field on a 7-days a week and nearly 365 days a year basis,” Ex. 33, Ex. 95 at 3; two others assert that Maret would be engaged in “commercial revenue-generating activity,” Ex. 92 at 3; another asserts that Maret is using it as a “vehicle for budget enhancement,” Ex. 83 at 1; another deems it a “profit-generating venture,” Ex. 46; another says (in two separate submissions) that it is a “for-profit sports complex,” Ex. 48 at 2, and a “for-profit athletic complex,” Ex. 78; another claims that neighbors will face “maybe 48 years of commercial field use;” Ex. 63; and two other opponents say that “the proposal assumes [neighbors] will become a **charity** for Maret and ECC, Ex. 85 (emphasis in original).

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- Apparently oblivious to the fact that the site is private property, two opponents deem the site a “wildlife sanctuary” and ask why it should not “deserve the same consideration as Rock Creek Park,” Ex. 59; another calls it a “piece of nature” and claims that “ECC has never been a good neighbor” because apparently ECC objected to trespassing at some point, Ex. 108 at 1; and another complains that the project would “eliminate walking areas” for the area’s residents. Ex. 81.

We have no doubt, given our 16-year experience at Maret, that the proposed project, if approved and constructed, will be well-administered, and that it will be a great asset to the community as well as ECC (the property owner) and Maret. We understand the anxiety of the opponents as well as their perceived self-interest. At a minimum, however, all persons involved in the process, regardless of their position on the issues, should commit to accuracy. As fellow D.C. residents, that is the least that we can do for each other.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter. We urge you to approve the proposed project. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-595-4466 or gregory.poe@gmail.com if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregory L. Poe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gregory" being the most prominent part.

Gregory L. Poe