

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

From: Richard Gervase <rgervase@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 3, 2022 2:17 PM
To: DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)
Cc: Speck, Randy (SMD 3G03); Higgins, John (SMD 3G02); Chang, Connie (SMD 3G05)
Subject: BZA Application No. 20643: Maret School Athletic Fields Project: Comments in Support

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ATTN: Frederick L. Hill, Chairman of the DC Board of Zoning Adjustment

Dear Chairman Hill:

As a 20-year resident of the Chevy Chase DC neighborhood, I am writing to submit **Comments in Support** of BZA Application No. 20643 for the Maret School Fields Project at the Episcopal Center for Children. My contact information is included at the end of this email.

I have been a Maret parent nearly as long as I have been a Chevy Chase DC resident. Maret has consistently impressed me as an honorable, transparent, and engaged community partner. Through Maret's service learning programs, my sons volunteered with a variety of community-serving non-profits through longterm partnerships with a variety of organizations from Martha's Table to Mazique Early Childhood Center to Bread for the City. I have served for several years as the co-chair of the council supporting Maret's Horizons Greater Washington program, an impactful academic and enrichment "summer school" that Maret brought to the DC area and that serves hundreds of DCPS students each year from grades 1 to 9, yielding impressive academic gains and teaching every child to swim and ride a bike (www.horizonsgreaterwashington.org). I also chaired Maret's scholarship fundraiser during the pandemic last year, through which this generous community raised \$843,000 to help provide a Maret education to students whose families are unable to afford the tuition; Maret provides financial assistance to 25% of its families, as high a percentage as any school in this area. I could go on, but in short, Maret is an institution that serves students — and shares its resources to improve conditions — *throughout* the District.

In keeping with this community-oriented track record, I support Maret's School Fields Project because it will yield benefits for the broader DC community in two main ways:

1. The Episcopal Center for Children (ECC) has been shuttered due to financial difficulties, leaving it unable to fulfill its mission as a therapeutic school serving children with emotional disabilities. Institutions like the ECC are few and far between, leaving families in severe need. The ECC has wisely determined that it must leverage its real estate in order to resume operations to avoid closure. The ECC chose Maret as its partner in order to obtain the financial resources it needs via a longterm lease while only allowing a use that is consistent with its educational mission. Of course, the ECC has a variety of other options to achieve its financial goals that would have been less palatable to the surrounding community. As a neighborhood resident, I support this application because it enables the ECC to restart its program and fulfill its core mission of providing educational opportunities for families in need.

2. There is a dearth of sports fields throughout the District and particularly in my neighborhood. My sports-playing son is in college now, but for years we drove great distances to fields far outside our neighborhood — and often well outside

the District, which is of course bad for the environment, and where on many a weekend day we also spent our dollars on food and drink that could have been spent at District establishments. Since Maret will only use the proposed sports field during set hours, DC's youth sports organizations will have access to the fields (at reasonable hours and without noise amplification). This is a clear win for DC's young athletes and families who will benefit from having another local field to use, including my neighbors who will have the opportunity to walk their children to a practice or game.

Maret and the ECC have been transparent in their planning process, inviting and responding to extensive community input with respect to transportation, site design, and hours of use. I have confidence that Maret will continue to be responsive to neighborhood concerns once the field is up and running — just as it has been where the school is located in Woodley Park (where neighbor concerns about traffic and parking are taken very seriously, parents are admonished to follow the rules, and adjustments have been made over time as needed). For the record, my younger son will graduate before the field is completed (and he does not play team sports at Maret), so although I am a Maret parent currently, my support is based on my belief as a neighborhood resident that the community will benefit, rather than any personal benefit my family would receive.

In conclusion, approval of BZA Application No. 20643 will provide clear community benefits without any significant detriments to its neighbors. Any characterization of this proposal as one that benefits only a small number of well-off students is a misunderstanding of who comprises Maret students, how the field will benefit young athletes from throughout the District, and, perhaps most importantly, the property owner's mission-based decision to find a complementary use of its field space that will enable it to once again serve students with emotional disabilities. As a neighborhood resident, I would look with pride on the ECC location filling two needs (educating children with special needs and providing field space) that are often NIMBY-ed out of other neighborhoods. As you may know, Chevy Chase DC is engaged in a "Small Area Planning Process," and our ANC recently issued a report on racial equity — in both efforts, we are searching for ways to chart a future for our neighborhood that is more inclusive than its past. Our neighborhood, which is predominantly single-family homes, should open its arms to — and not exclude — community-serving uses such as those proposed in this application before the BZA.

Thank you very much for considering my input.

Best regards,

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