



# FRIENDS OF THE FIELD

February 18, 2022  
Re: BZA case #20643 Maret School proposal

Dear Chairman Hill,

We write regarding zoning relief sought by Maret School to establish a parking lot in the front yard in BZA case #20643. We offer a positive alternative that would better align with the city's needs and codes than the proposal as presented.

If the proposed parking lot were to be shifted north, as it could be without loss to Maret, it would be beneficial to the established trees. This move would save two heritage pine trees (designated #340 and #341 on Attachment C - Annotated Heritage Tree Transplant Plan) which are true gems at the site. At a Special ANC 3/4G meeting on February 16 to hear from Mr. Earl Eutsler of Urban Forestry, Commissioner Michael Zeldin commented on these remarkable trees, though they were outside the heritage tree discussion. Preserving these established trees would provide excellent screening, which would be sorely needed to block the proposed tall backstop and netting of the proposed Maret field. Preserving them would lessen visual intrusion both from the street and relative to nearby residences. Shifting the parking lot north would also serve to better protect heritage trees #348 and #323. Heritage trees #348 and #323 were both seriously distressed when the grade of Nebraska Avenue was lowered more than ten years ago. (Highlighted in Attachment A - Annotated Site Utility Plan)

The Critical Root Zones (CRZ) of both heritage trees #323 and #348 extend far under the limits of the proposed parking lot and (in the case of #348) the proposed rain garden. Construction activities of excavation, compaction, and paving would unavoidably further distress these trees.

Maret is seeking a special exception to establish parking in the front yard, under DCMR 11-C710.3. It should not be granted. By not granting it:

- A. Two more exceptional heritage trees would be saved, and two heritage trees slated for preservation would be better protected.
- B. The unsightly proposed parking lot, equivalent in length to seven residential lot frontages, and out of place in this residential district of Nebraska Avenue, would be better concealed by the added setback and retained vegetation.

This would align much better with DOEE's goal to achieve forty percent healthy tree canopy in the District by 2033. As DOEE writes in *Trees in the District*, trees help:

- Absorb and reduce stormwater runoff
- Improve air quality
- Save on energy bills
- Create shade
- Cool the city/reduce heat
- Efforts to clean up the Anacostia River
- Create a more diverse ecosystem so wildlife can thrive

Under DCMR, Section 11-C710, the zoning code requires: Within all R and RF zones, any surface parking lot for more than ten (10) parking spaces shall be located a minimum of six feet (6 ft.) from any property line, with the space between the surface parking lot and the property line providing landscaping and screening consistent with Subtitle C §§ 714 and 715.

It should also be noted that in this residential neighborhood, the parking lot would ideally meet front yard setbacks for R-1-B zoning. Front yards are specified by the zoning code, which states (DC Zoning Handbook): "A front setback shall be provided within the range of existing front setbacks of all structures within an R-1-B zone on the same side of the street in the block where the building is proposed." This is critical to keep parked cars at least no further forward than the face of the line of housing, to make the parking less intrusive. It should also be noted that due to the slope of Nebraska Avenue, at the east end the parking lot would be both much higher than the prevailing level grade on the site, and much higher than the elevation of adjacent houses.

Drawing the parking further into the interior of the lot would be a win/win for Urban Forestry and the neighborhood, visually and functionally. There is plenty of room to do this within the bounds of Maret's plan. Please see the three annotated attachments to better explain this.

Sincerely,

Friends of the Field

Attachments:

- A - Annotated Site Utility Plan
- B - Annotated Public Space Exhibit
- C - Annotated Heritage Tree Transplant Plan

CC: Urban Forestry, Office of Planning