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Sent: Sunday, February 20, 2022 3:06 PM
To: DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)
Cc: Speck, Randy (SMD 3G03); Higgins, John (SMD 3G02)
Subject: BZA Application No. 20643: Maret School Athletic Fields Project

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February 20, 2022

Mr. Frederick L. Hill
Chairman of the BZA

Re: Statement in Support of BZA Application No. 20643: Maret School Athletic Fields Project

Dear Chairman Hill and Members of the BZA,

As a neighbor in very close proximity (29th and Rittenhouse NW) to the Episcopal Center for Children (ECC) and the proposed athletic fields for the Maret School, I respectfully submit this letter to the BZA in whole-hearted support of the proposed development and use of the ECC's athletic fields in partnership with the Maret School. This project will help sustain and support the ECC's important educational and therapeutic mission, as well as preserve and maintain the neighboring facilities for their long-designated educational purposes. I have no personal association or affiliation with either ECC or the Maret School.

The ECC has been an excellent and longstanding neighbor to our community (ANC3/4G) since the 1930s. ECC has as its mission the assistance, education and support of children with emotional disabilities and their families. This is a critical and unique mission in service of a much underserved community within the District of Columbia, and is therefore a mission which our neighborhood and City should support in every way that we can.

The ECC site currently sits unused, and has since 2019, as the ECC has lacked sufficient funds to operate its school for children with emotional disabilities. This situation is neither beneficial nor sustainable long-term. For the children and families served by ECC, the continued closure of the school is a life-changing disservice. Moreover, the community simply cannot expect that ECC will maintain the vacant site clean and safe, as it has been doing, as a quiet park for our pleasure. Additionally, vacated sites can sometimes be used unsafely for purposes for which they are not intended.

Nothing in life is static and the ECC, our good neighbor, needs this partnership to further and fund its educational mission. The site has in the past served as a residential institution and school, and every neighbor who has bought in the neighborhood since the 1930s has been aware of its existence as a school and the uses which such an educational site might entail, including athletics and field use.

The City has an interest in helping ECC continue to use its property as it traditionally has, as a school for children with emotional disabilities. These children and their families have enormous needs that are underserved in our community, city and society. We should want to facilitate the continued operation of a school that serves these need. In this case we can do that by allowing the ECC to enter into a financial partnerships with the Maret School, to lease and develop its fields for the purpose of its extracurricular activities and athletics. The lease payments will support the long-term vitality and viability of ECC.

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.20643
EXHIBIT NO.197

It is clear that ECC must leverage their real estate in order to stay in existence. It has considered numerous development options and chose Maret as a like-minded partner, over other interested parties, because Maret's proposed fields is in keeping with the traditional use of the site for educational purposes.

Our family moved here from Pasadena, CA. In Pasadena, our house was adjacent to the California Institute of Technology (Caltech). Caltech's track, fields, swimming pool, Tournament Park, and athletic complex surrounded our neighborhood. The other neighbor adjacent our house was Polytechnic School (Poly), a private L.A. k-12 school. Poly's high school campus was directly across the street from us.

I thus have personal experience with living right next to two schools and their outdoor athletic facilities and all that entails in terms of use and parking. Having two academic institutions as neighbors was always a benefit. Both schools maintained safe campuses, which in turn contributed to the security of the neighborhood generally. Of more benefit to the neighborhood was the energy and life that the children, young adults, teachers, professors, staff and families contributed to the area daily -- it was quite wonderful. Even with a high school across the street, everything was always done and quiet each evening by 8:30 p.m.

In this case both ECC and Maret plan and agree to reasonable use of the property, in keeping with its educational purpose, and to limit community impact by abiding to certain terms and conditions. This is a reasonable proposed use and I support it as a neighbor. As a last point, though not a particularly important one, personal experience has taught me that being neighbors with educational institutions helps keep home values stable in the area.

As I said before, the ECC site cannot remain empty indefinitely, and communities need life to sustain them. The site has long served as a school for children, and it will be nice to have it serve that purpose again. I will happily put up with some amount of additional traffic and afternoon and weekend parking in exchange for the energy of children and teens, and the sounds of play and sports.

Thank you sincerely and with gratitude for your consideration of this issue.

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