

Prof. Georg Zellmer
Professor in Earth & Planetary Sciences
Massey University
Palmerston North, New Zealand

10 January 2022

Re: Proposed Sports Fields on Utah and Nebraska Avenues

Board of Zoning Adjustment Case #20643: Maret School

Dear Mr. Speck and Mr. Higgins,

It has come to my attention that Maret School is planning to construct a large sports complex besides the Episcopal Center for Children, corner Utah and Nebraska Avenue NW. The plan appears to remove several trees and to excavate and regrade a circa five-acre area to make space for a baseball diamond and a multipurpose field covered by artificial turf, plus a parking lot for about 50 vehicles.

As a former visiting scientist at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, who lived in the area, and as Professor in Earth and Planetary Sciences, I am writing to voice my serious concerns regarding the environmental and health impacts of this proposal.

The removal of 40+ trees and replanting several healthy heritage trees would be bad enough, as green spaces and wooded landscapes are particularly important in cities to reduce summer heat and provide oxygen, but also for the physical and mental wellbeing the people in the neighborhood.

Yet this is just the beginning. The current elevation difference of the area is about 10 meters, and regrading this to provide a flat surface for the facilities would result in tall retaining walls at both cut and fill sides. The planned covering of the area by artificial turf and concrete would not allow for adequate rainwater seepage and would likely lead to flooding of adjacent areas during heavy rain, which will become more frequent with progressing climate change over the next 20-30 years. This will cause immense problems.

Extensive stormwater management would be required, and it is unclear how this will be done and how effective this would be given that the increase in flash flooding is not accurately predicable. Either way, rapid stormwater runoff into Rock Creek will have detrimental environmental effects on a much larger area, which are typically not apparent prior to starting this work.

Apparently, tall perimeter fencing and netting are proposed for the entire site, i.e., at or near several property lines. The visual impact of this complex on the quality of life in the neighborhood will have detrimental effects on the value of these properties, as will the noise from increased traffic to and from the area.

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.20643
EXHIBIT NO.29

Besides, 50 parking spaces are not likely going to be sufficient for such a large complex, causing additional problems to the neighborhood through cars parked on the roadside. If deemed sufficient, the question will be why this sports complex is at all required to be at this location?

In summary, my assessment of this project is that it will be detrimental to the environment as well as to the health and livelihood of the community living in this area. Further, there are several externalities (costs not accounted for and to be borne by others). As such, I would strongly advise against granting permission for this project to go forward.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georg Zellmer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Georg Zellmer
Professor in Earth and Planetary Sciences

cc: Mr. Randy Speck, Mr. John Higgins and BZA.