

BEFORE THE ZONING COMMISSION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Statement of Elizabeth Nelson

Chair, North Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association

Case No. 06-06

May 11, 2006

Good evening. My name is Elizabeth Nelson. I am the Chair of the North Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association, which operates on Capitol Hill in the area just North and East of Lincoln Park. Thank you for allowing me to make this statement in support of the proposed text amendments which clarify the status of public charter schools under the zoning regulations and which set minimum site requirements for public and public-charter schools in the Residential zones

One of the primary reasons for selecting a home in an R4 zone is for the quiet residential character of the neighborhood. The neighbors I represent want to choose their homes with a clear expectation of the types of uses permitted for nearby properties. The lack of clarity in the current regulations leaves us subject to the inappropriate incursion of large, noise, litter, and traffic generating institutions. The proposed text amendments would rectify that situation.

The siting of a DCPS facility is determined by central administration, and vetted by the City Council and the Board of Education who are elected officials, answerable to their constituents. Opportunities for public comment are built into the system. The siting of a private school or a child development center is addressed explicitly in the current regulations which are designed to ensure that they do not present a hardship to the surrounding community.

But the siting of charter schools is not clearly addressed in the current zoning laws, no doubt because they did not exist at the time the regulation were written. Also, parking was a less important consideration at that time (for all schools, public or private) because far fewer children were driven to school – very young children did not attend and most children enrolled in a school within a few blocks of their homes.

If a DCPS school becomes a poor neighbor, residents can seek relief through their Councilmember or their School Board representative, who are elected and answerable to their constituents. Also, we know where the DCPS-operated schools are likely to be and can act accordingly. But charter schools are popping up in unpredictable locations and, like private schools, are answerable to no one. Once they are in place, their neighbors must rely entirely on their good will. It makes no sense at all that these institutions that exist largely outside the control of the citizenry are regulated less stringently than those that are within our purview.

I don't see how anyone can reasonably object to having uniform regulations for all schools, private, public or public-charter. I urge you to adopt the proposed text amendments.

Thank you.

ZONING COMMISSION
CASE No. 06-06
District of Columbia
EXHIBIT No. 29
CASE NO. 06-06
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