



TWO RIVERS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

1830 Constitution Avenue, NE · W DC 20002

Testimony before the Zoning Commission

May 11, 2006

Testimony presented by Sarah Richardson, CFO, Two Rivers PCS

Good evening. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Sarah Richardson and I am the Chief Financial Officer of Two Rivers Public Charter School, a charter public school in its second year of operation in Ward 6. I am also a Ward 6 resident who lives across the street from a public school building. I can offer both perspectives (as a homeowner and as someone in charge of facility issues for a public school). I feel it is an important civic duty to share city space with public schools.

I have personally led the facility location effort for Two Rivers for more than three years, since nearly a year before the school opened. It is extremely difficult to secure any kind of space in this city, in any zoning. It takes months of negotiation with owners and landlords, months of negotiations with bankers and lawyers, and lots of luck to overcome the competitive real estate environment in the city. After (and many times during) securing a facility, another set of challenges happen. In order to make the building safe and appropriate for educating children, architectural and construction work needs to be planned, permits need to be secured, and a certificate of occupancy needs to be granted. I have worked on more than two dozen failed facilities deals all over the city, each of which require that kind of effort. It is costly, time consuming, and fraught with delays that imperil the existence of the school. A few months delay makes a difference – literally the difference of life and death for a school.

The only helpful part of the facilities search has been matter of right zoning. Matter of right zoning has meant that an already stressful process does not become completely impossible. Weakening or doing away with matter of right zoning can completely derail a delicate process and leave hundreds of children without an educational home. Those hundreds of public school students are children of parents who live in D.C. as well and are homeowners or renters here. I am here to speak for these parents and students and ask that matter of right zoning for public schools (which includes charter public schools) continue.

I know that time is limited, but I would be more than happy to share details of the process I describe with the committee to emphasize the importance of matter of right zoning for public schools.

ZONING COMMISSION
CASE No. 06-06
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EXHIBIT No. 35
District of Columbia
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