

Sidwell

FRIENDS SCHOOL

Office of Finance and Operations

District of Columbia Zoning Commission

November 11, 2008

Dear Members of the Zoning Commission,

Sidwell Friends School respectfully requests that the zoning commission exempt K-12 schools from the master planning requirement, either by a significant increase in the square footage threshold for the master plan requirement above the currently proposed 300,000 square feet, or by eliminating the master planning requirement entirely for K-12 schools, which are by nature very different from the colleges and universities for which this requirement was intended. We feel strongly that all independent schools should continue to have access to the zoning process through the "special exception" procedures.

Sidwell Friends School was founded in 1883 and embraces the Quaker belief in the unique worth of each individual. The School seeks students of diverse cultural, racial, religious and economic backgrounds – students of ability and promise whose qualities of mind and heart indicate that they will thrive in an atmosphere of intellectual, creative and physical vitality intended to foster strength of character and concern for others. Diversity, Quaker values and academic excellence are the three pillars supporting a Sidwell Friends School education. The School offers its students a challenging curriculum and a vigorous learning environment built on long-held standards of Quaker education. In keeping with the ideals of justice and peace, the School emphasizes personal integrity, respect for consensus and commitment to service. The School undertakes to develop in its students a combination of independent thinking and high personal expectation, complemented by openness to the ideas of others and a spirit of compassionate generosity. Above all else, the School seeks to nourish in all its students that genuine love of learning which will enrich them and animate their efforts to engage thoughtfully and responsibly with others throughout their lives. The School is committed to remaining where it is – an urban school in the District of Columbia.

In the last 35 years, Sidwell Friends School has filed five special exception applications with the Board of Zoning Adjustment as needs have been determined, plans formed and funds raised. This system has been formative, efficient, manageable, and cost-effective for the School. Increases in employment, enrollment and physical additions have been very limited in number. Each BZA application came about due to a necessity to adapt to needs that could not have been anticipated more than a year or two in advance. The current BZA process works well for SFS. Specific issues that arise from an individual building's uses and needs can be remedied in detail rather than through a vague general campus plan approach. SFS collaborates with the community on issues of concern and neighbors have ample opportunity to make their views known.

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ZONING COMMISSION
CASE No. 08-06-7
EXHIBIT No. 14
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 08-06-7
EXHIBIT NO. 14

While SFS supports the intention to have rational, clear and up-to-date requirements, we disagree with the proposed mandatory template on institutions that do not have common economic, cultural and mission requirements. K-12 schools are unlike higher institutions of education, as students do not reside on campus and our educational facilities are smaller. The time and money spent on developing a Campus Master Plan would be extraordinary as we would have to hire planners, building and landscape architects, and traffic consultants. Consequently, this financial burden would use up funds that could be directed towards activities essential to our core missions. The proposed "campus master plan" would not provide any additional benefits to the city and the neighboring communities than those offered by the special exception process as SFS has always presented information beyond that required by the special exception requirements. Additionally, the community has equal opportunities to provide input with a BZA special exception process as with a campus plan of an academic institution of higher learning. In fact, the requisite time and money spent on preparing such a master plan would decrease the School's flexibility for responsiveness to evolving neighborhood concerns or desires. The planning horizon of independent schools is short and more immediately and specifically focused than those of universities which have longer range visions.

Sidwell Friend School's ability to effectively provide educational services is dependent on the flexibility accorded to our school by the special exception process. We urge you to reconsider the proposal to require a master planning process for K-12 schools or increase the threshold square footage well above 300,000 square feet, thus permitting independent schools to continue following the special exception process that has been so effective and efficient.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Saxenian", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Saxenian
Assistant Head of School and Chief Financial Officer