

“Comprehensive Zoning Regulations Rewrite: Campus/Institutional”

**Zoning Commission Case No. 08-06-7, Zoning Commission Public Hearing:
December 11, 2008 at 6:30 pm**

**By: Elizabeth Downes, Executive Director,
Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington**

Good evening, I am Elizabeth Downes, Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington. AISGW is a non-profit, voluntary membership organization made up of eighty-four schools in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. Twenty-five of these schools are located in the District; 16 are in Ward 3. AISGW provides professional development and information-sharing services, encourages high educational standards and monitors the collective interests of the area's independent schools. The Association is not a lobbying organization, nor does it represent the interests of any individual member school.

The association, as well as its member schools, participated in the working group process and is pleased to be here this evening to generally support OP's recommendation and to also recommend some additional ideas.

Given the difficult and unpredictable experiences our member schools have had with the BZA special exception process, we applaud OP's efforts to provide consistency and predictability in the regulations and hopefully achieve a more streamlined and less expensive process for our schools. We also support having all institutional use cases being heard by the Zoning Commission, whether it's the Campus Plan or special exception process.

AISGW values variety and diversity in its membership. Our schools range in size from 51 to 1,400 students. They include boarding and day schools; single-sex and coeducational schools; elementary schools, middle schools, upper schools and various combinations in between; traditional and alternative schools; non-sectarian schools, church schools, and church-related schools. Each member school is governed by a Board of Trustees, is independent in its governance and finance, has a stated policy of nondiscrimination in admission and employment, and is incorporated on a non-profit basis. All schools are accredited, except for those newly established, which are undergoing the accreditation process. Let me provide a few quick statistics. Almost 24% of the children enrolled in DC schools attend nonpublic schools, a total of over 21,000 students (11,019 of them are in AISGW schools). AISGW schools actively recruit students from diverse backgrounds and provide significant financial aid: 19.6% of students attending AISGW DC member schools receive need-based aid, funded by the schools themselves, at a cost of almost \$28 million annually. 34.5% of the students enrolled in AISGW's DC schools are students of color. For most of these schools,

salaries are well below public school salaries, endowments are very modest, staffing is tight and budgets are stretched.

Given the costs associated with the Campus Plan process, we support OP's Recommendation #2, which gives institutional use the option of either doing a campus plan or a special exception application (the current procedure). Additionally, we want to:

- Clarify that the size threshold only applies to GFA, not below-grade space.
- Clarify that if more than one school/institutional use is located on a campus, each is treated as a separate use in terms of determining the size.
- Support the recommendation that once a campus plan is approved, all construction and uses approved in the plan may proceed without further Commission review.

We also support OP's Recommendation #4 (which allows unanticipated projects to proceed as a matter of right provided they contain less than 3,500 square feet of GFA.) Additionally, we

- Recommend that the threshold be higher - 5,000 square feet.
- Recommend that the same threshold apply to the special exception process.

We also support OP's Recommendation #5 (which outlines the information required as part of the special exception application.) Our additional comments are:

- Student/faculty count: To the extent OP is going to come up with a standard definition applicable to all schools, the schools would like to be engaged in that process with OP. Also, to the extent any new definition results in a school being over its cap, an adjustment would be made to raise the cap to ensure compliance with the new definition.
- Discussion of items listed under "conservation" (historic, sustainability, environmental) should be in a general context and should not be interpreted to mean the designation of landmarks or the preparation of an EISF. The Commission should continue to defer to the agencies that have authority over historic preservation (HPRB) and environmental issues (DDOE.)

Finally, we support OP's Recommendation #6 to permit ancillary non-residential uses within campuses; however, we would like this also extended to the special exception process. Specifically, we recommend that schools be permitted the same flexibility to serve the needs of their students with some non-residential uses.

For your convenience, I have attached to my testimony a summary of our Associations' recommendations. You will also hear from several of our member schools, each of which has a unique story to tell.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening. I am available to answer any questions you may have.

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By: Kathleen Minardi, Aidan Montessori School

Good evening. I am Kathleen Minardi with the Aidan Montessori School, a small, nonprofit, board governed school located in the Woodley Park community. I am pleased to be here this evening representing the small schools that are part of the Association of Independent Schools and to present testimony in support of OP's recommendations. Let me start by telling you a little about our school and our history with the zoning process as it currently exists.

Aidan accommodates toddler, primary and elementary grades for children between the ages of 18 months and twelve years. Since its founding in 1961, our school has accepted children without regard to race, color or creed. Of the 155 families currently served by the school, 70 percent live in the District from which 32 percent are from the Woodley Park neighborhood. We provide the community with much needed educational programs for children under the age of five. This is especially important since the DC Public School system does not provide pre-kindergarten programs for all families in need of such services and provides no nursery and toddler school programs.

In 1991, we were displaced from our location at the Temple Sinai building at 3100 Military Road because of the success of the Temple Sinai's religious school and its desire to develop its own child development center. We sought special exception approval to relocate to 5501 Utah Avenue, immediately adjacent to St. John's College High School. Our application was filed in 1990, public hearings were held in 1991, and in the fall of 1993 we were turned down despite our many efforts to revise our plans to accommodate the community's and OP's concerns. Subsequently, we were able to locate at 2700 27th Street, N.W., our current location. In 2004, we filed an application to make modest changes to our school and again met with community opposition. Not willing to undergo another costly and time-consuming legal battle we withdrew that application.

Based on our experience and that of other schools, we support OP's recommendations to provide consistency and clarity to the special exception process. Right now the regulations provide only vague guidance as to identifying impacts from institutional uses. The phrase "so that it is not likely to become objectionable" leaves it up to the community and OP to anticipate the impacts. And the phrase has even been used to suggest that the sound of children's voices is an objectionable impact. We support OP's Recommendation #5 to create special exception criteria for institutional uses. We also want to recommend, however, that for small schools, such as Aidan, which has only 18, 000 square feet of GFA and a small student population, that the level of detail required in its submission should be less than what would be required for the larger schools. Specifically, we offer the following recommendations:

- A school that is simply coming before the Commission to change its student or faculty caps, or for some other minor issue, should not be required to address all of the criteria. A simple statement that these are not applicable should suffice. Further, the level of detail required should also reflect the unique characteristics of the school, particularly pre-schools and schools that have lower GFA and, hence, lower impacts.
- In terms of proposed conditions/future needs, we recommend that this information is only required if the school is proposing new buildings. Otherwise, a simple statement that it is not applicable should suffice.
- Finally, community benefits should not mean negotiation of an amenities package similar to a PUD application and community benefits should also include recognition of the role the school plays in the larger community.

Like other schools, Aidan has a strong commitment to the community and we instill in our students that message. Every day, Aidan students are actively involved in community activities and the celebration of fundamental human values. We respect individual differences, value partnership, seek cooperative approaches in our planning and problem-solving, believe in hard work and aiming for one's personal best effort, and take joy in one another's achievements and successes.

At Aidan, children learn and grow with a strong sense of relationship to all other members of the community. Whether it is an ongoing partnership with a senior center, collections for refugees, or making valentines for a children's hospital, Aidan's elementary students initiate numerous community service projects. Aidan's younger students also participate in many of the service projects organized by Aidan's active parent body.

In reaching beyond the classroom and the school, Aidan calls its students to involvement in service to the greater community and to compassion for others. Throughout the year, students contribute talent, time, and energy to projects that benefit those in need, instilling a civic conscience.

Aidan is fortunate to have developed close partnerships with a variety of organizations in its community. The Marriott Wardman Park, the National Zoo and the Omni have all allowed Aidan the use of their facilities for all-school performances, play rehearsals, or graduations. Many embassies and restaurants have contributed to Aidan's program by providing speakers, food, or other materials. The annual auction for financial aid receives countless donations from area merchants, and our families, in turn, support those merchants.

Aidan recognizes its responsibility to its neighborhood and holds an annual Earth Day Neighborhood Clean-up. It has also participated in Woodley Park Day. As a member of the Washington Community, Aidan devotes the majority of its community service activities to local service agencies, including its monthly ongoing relationship with Iona

Senior Services, and Bright Beginnings Center for the infants and preschoolers of homeless families.

For all of those reasons, community benefit must include recognition of the important role schools play in the larger community.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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**By: Kate Curtin Lindsey, Chief Financial Officer,
Georgetown Day School**

Good evening. I am Kate Lindsey, CFO for the Georgetown Day School. Georgetown Day School is a private, independent school established in 1945 as the first racially integrated school in the District of Columbia. I am here this evening to support OP's recommendations and to thank them for listening to our concerns as we all went through the Working Group process. Let me start by telling you a little about Georgetown Day School.

The School was founded by seven families who wanted to create a school committed not only to academic excellence and educational innovation but also to a value system emphasizing appreciation and respect for others. Because they wanted children of all races to learn together, the founders established GDS as a school where all would be welcome. The School strives to maintain a diverse community of students, teachers, and parents. Committed to fostering the intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of its students' lives, GDS encourages respect for the variety of beliefs represented in the student body.

Georgetown Day School is housed on two separate five-acre campuses in northwest Washington, DC, the Lower/Middle School at 4530 MacArthur Boulevard, NW, and the High School at 4200 Davenport Street, NW. A recent expansion and renovation of the High School more than doubled the size of its original footprint. The facility now features a spacious student forum; a humanities and science wing; an extensive performing arts complex; athletic facilities that include a double gymnasium, an indoor track, an all-weather athletic field, home team and visitor locker rooms, fitness and wrestling rooms, and an athletic training room; and new administrative offices and an underground parking lot. The Lower/Middle School, renovated and expanded in 1998, accommodates the varying needs of a pre-kindergarten to eighth grade student body with a new playground installed in 2006, an all-weather athletic field, full-size gymnasium, a black box theater, fully equipped science labs, library, art studios, technology/multimedia labs, and a student lounge for seventh and eighth graders. The Lower School's large multipurpose room serves as the center for the after school program. Both campuses are fully handicapped-accessible.

Georgetown Day School High School was established at its present location in 1985. The School is permitted to enroll up to 465 students and employs 95 full time equivalent faculty and staff. In furtherance of the School's mission, students are required to complete a rigorous, multidisciplinary academic program, and all students must complete a minimum of 60 hours of community service prior to graduation.

In 2002, the School applied for a special exception to increase the student enrollment and faculty/staff cap. The application was approved in BZA Order No. 16944. The Order approved a student enrollment of 465 and a faculty and staff of 95. In 2004, BZA Application No. 17170, the Board approved a major facility expansion for the High School while maintaining the enrollment and faculty/staff populations. We have recently filed an application with the BZA to increase our student enrollment from 465 to 500 and the size of our staff from 95 to 100.

I am here to specifically support OP's recommendation that each campus be treated as a separate institutional use and to also recommend that the community benefits concept include city-wide benefits.

As to the first point, each of our campuses is unique and is located within separate ANC's and community associations. Accordingly, it makes ultimate sense to treat each as a separate institutional use. OP has proposed that and we support that recommendation. We also believe that to the extent there is more than one institutional use on a campus – for example, the National Cathedral and St. Albans School – each should be considered a separate use in terms of calculating whether the use crosses the 300,000 square foot threshold. Otherwise, each use would be in competition with the others for available GFA.

With regard to community benefits, we strongly recommend that this concept include consideration of the city-wide benefits that all schools provide. Community service is an integral part of every GDS student's education. Through involvement in the program, students are encouraged to become active community members working to improve the lives of others. By participating in service projects throughout their school careers, students can enhance their capacities for compassion and empathy, establish a lifelong commitment to personal altruism, and form a civic awareness that leads them to search for social justice and to work for social change.

Community service provides a link between the classroom and the outside world that brings greater relevance and meaning to both. In addition to reinforcing academic skills, participation in the program enables students to become socially adept in ways that will prove vitally important throughout their academic careers and beyond. The real-life situations that students encounter instill decision-making skills, improve self-reliance and develop the ability to act responsibly. Involvement in community service provides GDS students with an invaluable education in navigating an increasingly multicultural, interdependent world.

Recent and Upcoming Community Service Projects include our:

December Gift-Giving Project - Again this year our holiday gift giving project will focus on Kid Power DC, a wonderful community youth organization that works with over 100 kids from six different local elementary and middle schools. Kid Power offers after school enrichment programs that promote literacy, the arts, and an appreciation of Washington DC and its history. Through this organization, GDS high school students and faculty provide weekly tutoring, an arts program, and a program on social justice for more than 80 kids. GDS families can brighten the holidays for these kids and their families by "adopting" a Kid Power family and providing a gift for each member of the family.

Mitten Tree - A tree for new mittens, gloves, scarves and hats will be in the lower school entrance starting in early December. These items will also be given to Kid Power.

Thanksgiving Pie Bake - GDS families made a total of 265 pies for the Thanksgiving meal to be served on the Mall by DC Central Kitchen and CCNV shelter. In this time when the economy is straining so many people's incomes, we are particularly grateful for the generosity of the GDS community.

Coat Drive - More than 200 coats, vests, fleeces and jackets were collected in November for donation to Navajo partner schools in Arizona and Raymond Elementary, a DC public school.

Halloween Costume Drive - Used Halloween costumes collected in October outfitted about 50 Kid Power kids for trick-or-treating. GDS high school students and faculty provide weekly tutoring, an arts program, and a program on social justice for kids enrolled in this wonderful local youth organization.

Gleaning - Approximately 30 members of the GDS community (students, parents, teachers and younger siblings) spent two hours in the field on a beautiful sunny morning on Saturday, Oct. 4, and picked about 800 pounds of collard greens. This translates into 800 to 1000 servings of wholesome, nutritious vegetables! The greens were taken to the National Capital Food Bank and local food kitchens where they were made available to hungry residents of the DC area.

Additionally, in order to satisfy their required 60 hours of community service, our students form Community Service Clubs. These include:

Galveston Tutoring - Using a curriculum developed by For Love of Children, students provide one-on-one tutoring to 20 children who are reading two levels below grade.

Hardy Tutors - Hardy DC Public Middle School
35th Street & Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Tutor 6th–8th grade students in math in a structured setting, after school.

Meridian Tutors - Meridian Public Charter School
1328 Florida Avenue, NW.
Tutor an elementary school child in basic reading comprehension and math skills at this new, innovative public charter school.

DC Central Kitchen - Working in this enormous, impressive food kitchen, students prepare food for thousands of the District's neediest citizens.

Luther Place Night Shelter - Prepare and serve dinner for 30 homeless women on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month.

Sports for Our Community - GDS students, many of whom are athletes, invite kids from SE, DC to visit the Lower/Middle School one Saturday a month to play sports, providing one-on-one attention and mentoring, arts & crafts and a hearty meal.

GDS Carpenters Club - Learn how to demolish, renovate, and build low-income housing, under the auspices of Richard Feldman of the DCJCC and Rebuilding Together.

Environmental Club - Participate in a variety of green activities over the course of the year.

As you can see, our community is the city as a whole, and we believe the regulations should recognize these important city-wide benefits.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.

SUMMARY OF AISGW POSITION ON Z.C. CASE NO. 08-06-07

- Recommendation #1 (which proposes to treat all institutional uses under one category.) No issue.
- Recommendation #2 (which gives institutional uses below 300,000 square feet the *option* of either doing a campus plan or a special exception application (the current procedure.) No issue, provided:
 - Clarify that the size threshold only applies to GFA, not below-grade space.
 - Clarify that if more than one school/institutional use is located on a campus, each is treated as a separate use in terms of determining the size.
 - Support the recommendation that once a campus plan is approved, all construction and uses approved in the plan may proceed without further Commission review.
- Recommendation #3 (which outlines the Campus Plan criteria for large institutional uses.) See our comments under the special exception criteria, many of which are applicable to the campus plan criteria.
- Recommendation #4 (which allows unanticipated projects to proceed as a matter of right provided they contain less than 3,500 square feet of GFA.)
 - Recommend that the threshold be higher - 5,000 square feet.
 - Recommend that the same threshold apply to the special exception process.
- Recommendation #5 (which outlines the information required as part of the special exception application.) Comments:
 - A school that is simply coming before the Commission to change its student or faculty caps, or for some other minor issue, should not be required to address all of the criteria. A simple statement that these are not applicable should suffice. Further, the level of detail required should also reflect the unique characteristics of the school, particularly pre-schools and schools that have lower GFA and, hence, lower impacts.
 - Proposed conditions/Future Needs - Recommend that this information is only required if the school is proposing new buildings. Otherwise, simple statement that not applicable.

- Student/faculty count: To the extent OP is going to come up with a standard definition applicable to all schools, the schools would like to be engaged in that process with OP. Also, to the extent any new definition results in a school being over its cap, an adjustment would be made to raise the cap to ensure compliance with the new definition.
- Community benefits should not mean negotiation of an amenities package similar to a PUD application.
- Community benefits should also include recognition of the role the school plays in the larger community, i.e., the city. (Particularly true for schools like the Lab School that serve special needs children from all over the city.)
- Discussion of items listed under “conservation” (historic, sustainability, environmental) should be in a general context and should not be interpreted to mean the designation of landmarks or the preparation of an EISF. The Commission should continue to defer to the agencies that have authority over historic preservation (HPRB) and environmental issues (DDOE.)
- Recommendation #6 (ancillary non-residential campus uses permitted, but not as part of special exception.)
- Recommend that schools be permitted the same flexibility to serve the needs of their students with some non-residential uses.