

April 26, 2018

To: Board of Zoning Adjustment
From: Steve Charnovitz and Sally O'Brien

We are writing to recommend a rejection of the April 19, 2018 request of the "West End Citizens Association" for Party Status in the BZA Proceeding 19748 regarding the Acton Academy Foundation's effort to establish a small Montessori school at St. Paul's Church.

The request for Party Status should be rejected for three reasons:

First, the West End Citizens Association (WECA) has long masqueraded as a real organization. The stationery and Form 140 employed in this request do not show a street address or phone number. The request provides no information as to the membership of WECA, its decisionmaking process or its accountability to its members. Although WECA claims to be "one of the oldest citizen associations in DC," WECA fails to host a website and exhibits no transparency as to how to join or when its meetings are. The DC corporate filing for WECA shows a registered address in the Monroe House Condo located at 522 21st Street, Unit 401, a condo unit that the DC real estate tax website suggests is owned by Ms. Sara Maddux who signed the letter to the Office of Zoning as the "President" of the WECA. The use of a residential condo to house an organizational headquarters is irregular especially when that Unit 401 is receiving a senior citizen homestead exemption. In addition, the stationery asserts that WECA covers a broad geographical region comprising portions of at least ANC2A, ANC2B, and ANC2C, and yet, if true, that undermines the argument in the attachment to Form 140 that the WECA members' "interests" will be "significantly, distinctively, and uniquely affected" by the proposed new small elementary school on K at 25th Street.

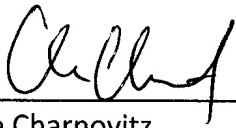
Second, the concerns expressed in the WECA letter are clearly frivolous. Those concerns include "objectionable noise" from an outdoor playground, additional traffic from dropping off and picking up kids, and "property values affected." The speciousness of those claims can be seen by what happened when the two proposed witnesses listed in the request for Party Status agitated against the school at the ANC2A meeting held on April 18, 2018. The protests had so little credibility that the ANC2A voted unanimously to endorse the Acton Academy Foundation's request. I would also note that St. Paul's is in Foggy Bottom, not West End, and that the leader of the Foggy Bottom Association (a real membership organization!) attending the ANC2A meeting also endorsed the proposal. In addition, while the two individuals claiming to be officers of WECA and seeking to testify before the BZA do live in Foggy Bottom condos, they live many blocks (and far more than 200 feet) away from the Church. Their condo property values would not be lowered by the small school.

By contrast, several neighbors who live in street level-houses less than 20 feet away from St. Paul's and the church playground, including the authors of this letter, all spoke at ANC2A in favor of granting a zoning exception for the new school. Indeed, no one living within earshot of

the church voiced any complaint at the ANC2A meeting about "objectionable noise" or additional traffic.

Third, the context of the WECA objections also weigh against granting organizational standing. The two intended witnesses have long been a neighborhood embarrassment in taking up valuable ANC2A time to oppose any improvements to the Foggy Bottom neighborhood. Whether the proposed new amenity or development is an outdoor cafe, a grocery store, a college building renovation, a hospital helipad, a bike lane, and now even a playground, those two individuals can be expected to be unconscionable objectors.

In summary, we urge the BZA to reject this request for Party Status from a bogus organization, a request whose sole apparent purpose is to prevent youngsters and their parents from gaining a new school located in and serving the neighborhood.



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