

Re: Board of Zoning Adjustment Case #20643: Maret School

Date: Tuesday, January 18th, 2022

Dear ANC 3/4G Chairman, Mr. Randy Speck; Commissioner John Higgins;

Hello, my name is Meredith. I grew up and live at 5829 Nebraska Ave NW directly across from the ECC school and field. I recently graduated from Tufts University in Boston, and I work at Children's National Hospital on Michigan Ave. I studied chemistry and political science and aspire to be a doctor. I volunteered for many years as an EMT serving our neighborhood and community through the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Rescue Squad.

I am 23 years old, which means that I have participated in only two presidential elections in my lifetime. Both have been extraordinary, and frankly, for young people my age, deeply disillusioning. Even as a student in political science, I have felt deeply frustrated with politics and have felt like my voice does not matter on many occasions, despite actively voting in all elections I am eligible to do so.

In my coursework at school, my politics professors frequently cite the problem with democratic political strategies: they do not focus on local politics. Local government and civic engagement in one's community are heralded as crucial avenues for getting people involved and showing them that their voice, their vote, their life, matter. This in turn encourages their participation in more aspects of civic life and helps them from becoming so disillusioned that they abstain from participating rather than allowing their votes to be counted.

Regrettably, despite this optimism, this vision of local politics is far from the truth of my family's and my neighbors' experience. In fact, I have been deeply disturbed by the lack of transparency around the issue of the development of the field across from our house.

The field has been a haven for many people in the neighborhood, especially during the lockdown and the months afterwards as we still struggle to pull ourselves out of the pandemic. It has attracted a genuine local community of outside, socially distanced activity. There have been birthday parties, happy hours, picnics, and pick-up games, all of which have contributed to bolstering the community's connectedness and happiness. The field as it is now is a cherished local resource, a beautiful piece of nature that is home to historic trees and wildlife (including a favorite fox), a rare occurrence in a city such as Washington that should be preserved and recognized as the cherished environmentally-friendly community space it has been.

To be honest, ECC has never been a good neighbor. When I was in elementary and middle school (at Lafayette and Deal), my brothers and I would play whiffle ball or pick-up soccer in the field across the street. It was very scary when a police officer approached us, saying someone in the school had called them to say there were trespassers on the field. Invariably, the officer would grumble about what a waste of time and apologize for interrupting our game but politely insist we leave. What adult, especially one who works at a school would see children playing soccer and call the police? I mention this anecdote because this behavior characterizes ECC for me—they have never reached out to their neighbors despite my family having lived across from them for 25 years. And they certainly did not reach out to discuss their development plans with Maret.

This is where local government should play its starring role. When a relationship between neighbors, or citizens, cannot be resolved, there is need for an unbiased arbitrator. That is government, the arbiter of not just the law, but the spirit of the law, as Montesquieu, the French

Enlightenment philosopher who inspired our country's constitution, wrote so famously.

It is the role of local government to facilitate a fair and transparent process. It is the role of local government to pay attention to all concerned parties equally, without allowing any personal bias to enter their consideration. The genius of elected officials, a novel practice at the time of our country's founding, is exactly the idea that there would be citizens responsible enough to place their personal will second to the general will of their constituents. The founding fathers set up our government with a profound belief in the capacity of American citizens to recognize that allowing personal bias to enter decisions that affect large groups of people would be the end of the democratic process.

Frankly, this is exactly what we see happening on the right, with elected officials abusing their office, corrupted by the pursuit of personal gain. I am fully aware that America has never lived up to its promises. But I do have faith that in a community as enlightened as my own, a process so central to our American culture would be preserved.

So far, it looks like I have been wrong. There has not been a transparent exchange of information. Neighbors around the proposed development are completely in the dark as to how this project will affect their lives every day. The flow of information has been completely controlled by how much the developers want the affected parties to see. They get to control the narrative. This is where normal citizens like myself and my family need the protection and help of our local government. We need you to step in and help us. The organizations we are up against have resources and connections beyond what we as a community of individuals can produce.

Please ask yourself, how would you feel if a beautiful piece of nature directly across from your front door were about to be developed into a many millions of dollars complex turning the entire natural landscape into plastic and asphalt and you didn't even have a 3D model of said development? Not to mention the absence of information on emissions including toxins and pollutants from the construction, traffic of thousands of cars each week, and the plastic field and asphalt parking lot.

We as citizens and neighbors are in the dark. We have no idea how this will look or how it will impact our physical and mental health. We are at the mercy of what Maret and ECC decide to show us. That is like allowing Trump to decide what he wants to show the American public about the January 6th insurrection. There is no way the narrative is not controlled and skewed by the party who will only be positively impacted by the outcome.

Please do not abandon us in our pursuit of the truth. Please do not allow me to lose faith in our democratic system.

Respectfully,

Meredith Sherman