

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

From: judithbailey@verizon.net
Sent: Saturday, February 5, 2022 11:03 AM
To: DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)
Subject: Comments in SUPPORT: BZA Application No. 20643: Maret School Athletic Fields Project

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Frederick L. Hill
Chairperson
District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street NW #200
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Chairperson Hill:

I strongly support the fields project submitted by the Episcopal Center for Children (ECC) and Maret School for approval by the Board of Zoning Adjustment. As a longtime, older resident of the neighborhood surrounding the fields, I would like to see our community do all that it can to nurture the District's children. This project would greatly benefit a diverse group of our children and fill a broad array of their educational and recreational needs.

The fields project would support children with special needs, the focus of ECC's mission. ECC has been in our neighborhood serving children for more than 90 years, even before most of the surrounding homes were built. ECC was first an orphanage, then a residential school. For the past 60 years or so, ECC has provided services to day students with emotionally challenges. But, as you are aware, a lack of revenue forced ECC to shut its program almost three years ago. According to *The Washington Post* (11/28/2021), ECC was \$1.5 million in debt as of June 2019. It has not yet been able to reopen.

ECC wants to leverage the real estate it owns in our neighborhood to gain the revenue needed to reopen and continue serving children with these special needs. The children ECC has served overwhelmingly have been District residents. By leasing its fields to Maret, ECC would get the revenue needed to continue these services, and its land would continue to be dedicated to educational purposes.

My understanding is that ECC has not used these fields in a regular and systematic way for many years. For all that time, the fields have sat more or less idle. Given the shortage of open space in the city of Washington, this seems a waste. It would be good to use the fields once again in the service of children, if not by ECC itself, then by another educational institution. Moreover, keeping the space open for use as athletic fields strikes me as less disruptive to our neighborhood than other ways ECC might leverage the fields for revenue, such as by selling them to build single- or multi-family housing.

The fields project would help provide children at Maret School with a full array of school athletic experiences. As a school located in our city, Maret, like many other urban schools, has had to scramble for open space to conduct a full athletic program for its students, to "educate the whole child," as the school's leadership describes its goal. Leasing the fields from ECC would give Maret the athletic facilities it needs. I want our community to support these "regular" educational needs of DC children as well as their special needs.

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.20643
EXHIBIT NO.143

Maret, as an independent school located in the District, draws its student body widely from the metropolitan area, but mostly from DC itself – 58 percent of Maret students are DC residents, some from this Chevy Chase neighborhood. Moreover, Maret's student population reflects the diverse population found across DC – 53 percent of Maret students identify as people of color, and 25 percent receive financial aid.

The fields project would provide athletic opportunities for other local children. Maret is willing to share the leased ECC fields with other groups in a limited and appropriate way that would not overtax the surrounding neighborhood. Maret understands that, just as it has had to hunt for open space, so must a wide variety of youth athletic programs. I hope sharing arrangements can be worked out -- once again, given the shortage of open space in the District, it would be a shame not to allow other local youth groups some use of the ECC fields. As I understand, the extent of that use is still to be determined.

The fields project would use the space in a way that would minimize the change to, and the impact on, the immediate neighborhood. Some neighbors who live adjacent to the ECC property have opposed the fields project, citing disruptive impacts on their properties. To be sure, the fields project represents change to the neighborhood, most heavily affecting the people who live right next door.

From the outset, however, ECC and Maret have tried to structure the fields project to minimize the impacts on adjacent homes. Maret's use of the fields would be only in the afternoons and on Saturdays and only during the fall and spring seasons. There would be no night games, nor other night use of the fields, so there would be no field lighting. Noise would be limited – yes, the sounds of children playing and cheering, but no loudspeakers or broadcasted loud music. The project would limit the impact of on-street parking by including 48 newly constructed on-site parking spaces. And the project strives to be environmentally-focused. It would preserve heritage trees as much as possible and add greenery and screening. It would also include a stormwater management system, something the site currently lacks, a system that would comply with all applicable regulations.

Since rolling out the initial design for the fields project, Maret has worked with the adjacent neighbors and others to enhance the design and minimize negative impacts even further. It has agreed to a host of modifications, including, to name some, relocating scoreboards, storage structures and trash receptacles; shortening curb cuts; adding bike racks; enhancing landscape buffers; and adjusting heights and locations of retaining walls. It also has engaged a traffic consultant to study the traffic impacts of the project and recommend safety improvements.

As of this week, Maret was continuing to meet with individual affected homeowners to make still further adjustments to minimize the project's impact as much as possible.

In sum, the fields project represents a positive change to the way the fields on ECC's property would be used. The project would support a large and diverse group of children with a broad array of educational and recreational needs. As a resident of the our Chevy Chase neighborhood, I support it.

Respectfully submitted,
Judith Bailey

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