

February 7, 2022

Frederick L. Hill, Chairperson
Board of Zoning Adjustment
Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 200S
Washington, DC 20001

Re: **Letter in Support of BZA Application No. 20643: Maret School Athletic Fields Project**

Dear Mr. Hill,

I write to you and your colleagues as ANC Commissioner for single member district 3F03, as a resident of the District for nearly 25 years, and as a parent in our city. It is my understanding that the Episcopal Center for Children (ECC) and the Maret School have entered into a long-term agreement which will enable Maret to develop the grounds behind ECC's buildings into a multi-sport facility that will include fields, a parking lot, and storage and restroom facilities.

I do not have children at ECC or Maret, but I am taking the time to write this letter because I believe that projects of this kind should not only be supported, but strongly encouraged, by the District government. From what I have read in publicly-available materials, the development of the proposed athletic fields will result in a win-win for many stakeholders and should serve as a model for other such projects in a city where space and resources are often scarce. Specifically, I support the ECC-Maret land lease project because:

- The lease payments that ECC, a school that serves children with emotional disabilities and their families, will receive are critical to its continued ability to fulfill its important mission. Just a few minutes on the website of ECC confirms that this school is a special place "Which for 125 years . . . has helped children in difficult circumstances."¹ As a policy matter, the District should support measures that fortify the fiscal health of an institution that serves a vulnerable youth population.
- The lease arrangement will leverage an underutilized resource by providing much-needed field space both for Maret students and for DC youth sports organizations. In a city where field space is gold, the BZA should support the proper development of land that would enable our city's youth to get fresh air, exercise their bodies, pursue healthy

¹ <http://eccofc.org/>

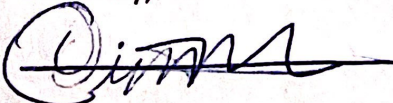
competition, and get off of their electronic devices. By offering time and space for DC sports leagues to use the developed fields, Maret's project helps to address the severe shortage of field space for District athletes.

- As an ANC Commissioner, I believe it sets a dangerous precedent to yield to the collective will of adjacent property owners whose objections are clearly based on their entitlement to underutilized private property. Moreover, rejecting the field development project would send the message that children don't belong in neighborhoods, which is clearly not the District's policy. In fact, it's nearly impossible to find a private or public field in this city that is NOT in a residential neighborhood.

Many District residents would love to live near a large, undeveloped green space (for which they do not pay taxes and which they otherwise do not support or maintain), but that simply cannot be the standard for review by the BZA. It is my hope that the BZA will apply the proper standards of review in considering the development of private property pursuant to an agreement between private parties, especially when the proposed project results in considerable benefits for children and families in the District. The residents who oppose the field development project are banking on their short-sighted conviction that blocking this project will prevent all future development of ECC's property – a highly unlikely outcome in the long term and one that is antithetical to the District's goals for density.

For these reasons, I urge approval for BZA application 20643 which will enable ECC and Maret to proceed with their land lease arrangement. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Dipa Mehta, ANC Commissioner for 3F03
2831 Chesterfield Place, NW
Washington, DC 20008
(202) 744-3885
dipamehta@comcast.net

cc: Commissioner Randy Speck, ANC 3/4G at randy.speck@anc.dc.gov
Commissioner John Higgins, ANC 3/4G at 3G02@anc.dc.gov