



FRIENDS OF THE FIELD

February 23, 2022

Re: Maret BZA case #20643
Re: Maret Public Space application #383995

Response to the February 16 and 14 ANC 3/4G Meetings

Dear Commissioners,

At the February 16 ANC 3/4G meeting, the Commission considered oral and written testimony, respectively, by the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), including the Urban Forestry division, and the District Office of Energy and Environment (DOEE) regarding the proposal by Maret School to develop athletic fields at the Episcopal Center for Children.

Friends had understood the respective DC agencies would be delivering final reports with findings and recommendations key to informing the public and the Commission's assessment of Maret's proposal prior to the Commission's final deliberations and possible vote at its scheduled meeting on February 24. This was not the case. DDOT representatives indicated their report was still being written, and largely limited their prepared remarks to process and procedural matters. Urban Forestry offered more substantive views but also no final report. DOEE provided only written responses to Commissioners' questions.

Friends has consistently asked that all due diligence be completed in time for review by all parties prior to any vote or final action by the ANC on the Maret proposal. How can the ANC conclude its review and vote on February 24 without final DC agency reports? Why won't the residents enjoy the benefit of having these same reports prior to the ANC's final decisions? How does this demonstrate responsiveness to citizen needs and concerns?

Friends had further understood the February 16 meeting would allow residents to voice questions and comments directly to the DC agency representatives. Yet, there was no such opportunity. Our input was selectively filtered by the ANC for response by those officials. Worse, we had previously been directed to limit questions at the February 14 ANC meeting on Maret's proposed Nebraska Avenue curb cut to that issue alone, and not to address any related traffic matters, expressly because there would be the opportunity to do so at the subsequent February 16 meeting. Why hamstringing citizen participation? What was the need for such restrictions?

ANC-managed discussion precluded clarity from DDOT on a host of issues. Why the artificially narrow scope of study (only immediately adjacent streets) to understand relevant traffic flows? Why no assessment of the impacts of modifications to Beach Drive, Bingham Drive, and Oregon Avenue? Why no demonstrated understanding that Nebraska Avenue is a major commuter route that further

congestion posed by Maret's use at ECC will only exacerbate? We don't know. The ANC's facilitated discussion failed to press DDOT for answers. Adding insult to injury, when asked how the citizens might comment, DDOT representatives said it was too late; their report was in final draft.

In the Urban Forestry presentation, the representative pointed out any disturbance to a tree, especially a heritage tree, was deemed undesirable. But there was no discussion of design changes that could save more trees or keep others from further distress. Nor was there discussion of the importance of the trees now on ECC grounds to preserving DC's tree canopy. These are issues, again, that we residents would have raised had there been open dialogue.

DOEE's written responses of course offered no opportunity for citizen input. With adequate notice, the citizens could have presented our questions. Commissioner questions are not an adequate proxy on storm water management or any other issue. Maret has now said they will design for a 25-year storms. But serious questions remain about the stormwater management system and the climate change issues we are facing.

DOEE said the project would be exempted from some stormwater management requirements if the field were made available to the general public; otherwise, it would be considered private, and the rain garden would need to grow. The consequence would be loss of parking spaces, putting more cars on neighborhood streets. No commissioner picked up on this to ask if Maret's proposal qualified as open to the general public. The result, again, was incomplete understanding of a critical issue.

Harking back to the prior February 14 meeting at which the ANC considered the Maret-proposed curb cut for Nebraska Avenue, here too there was narrow scope of participation afforded Friends. We had merely five minutes to present our views, which focused on safety and visibility, given the cut in the middle of the block, on a hill, in a pedestrian- and bike-friendly neighborhood. In contrast, preceding the curb cut discussion was an hour-plus review of a small alley in Barnaby Woods with testimony by more than a half-dozen neighbors. The ANC voted 7-0 in favor of the curb cut, a decision that will now carry "great weight" at the Public Space hearing on February 24.

In sum, the February 16 and 14 ANC meetings further illustrate ongoing flaws in the ANC's review of Maret's proposal. Yet nothing indicates the ANC will not press ahead to express its approval. We thus register our further, strenuous opposition.

Sincerely,

Friends of the Field