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RE: BZA Application No. 20643: Maret School Athletic Fields Project: Comments in Support

ATTN: Chairman of the BZA, Mr. Frederick L. Hill.

I am writing to offer my strong support for a positive decision by the D.C. Board of Zoning Appeals to approve the application of the Maret School for construction and operation of its athletic field under a 50-year contract with the Episcopal Children's Center of Washington DC. I have been involved from the outset in the outreach of our Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) and Maret and have been impressed by what can only be described as a model process of community engagement. I strongly support the very careful analysis of the ANC of all of the issues raised and of Maret's responsiveness to community concerns. In regard to the BZA's role in this process I believe BZA should grant its approval.

I have several reasons for my support of this project:

1- MARET's proposal is consistent with the current zoning and use of the property for educational purposes. It is not only consistent with the mission of the existing Episcopal Children's Center but also essential for the ECC to have the funds to reopen and serve the unique needs of children with emotional challenges which was closed at least temporarily for lack of resources. This will ensure the site's primary use continues.

2- MARET's proposal meets the needs of both the ECC's unique population and the broader needs in DC for children's athletic fields. ECC has also sought out Maret as a partner since their use of the site will meet the needs of children in the community for whom there is a paucity of athletic fields. This is clearly not about the money. If this transaction was about the money the ECC could just sell the site to a developer for denser mixed use residential and commercial development as has been promoted throughout the city. As for Maret, they will not be making money off of sublease to DC youth sports groups. Maret subleases provide a means for Maret to carry through on commitments to community. Maret can hold any sub-leasees accountable for responsible use of the field(s) while meeting Maret values of sharing its assets so that it can serve the interests of a broader DC community when available. Furthermore, Maret plans to charge minimal costs to sub-lessees in order to maintain the fields after proposed uses. Maret's commitment to the community would not leave this important asset dormant while its students are not using it, which is much of the time!

3- MARET's proposal addresses longstanding water management issues.

MARET's sizeable investment in the property will address from its proposed use of permeable astroturf, its grading and plantings, its assumption of existing yet unmet requirements for water management by the ECC and its employment of experts in this process. The permeable surface of the artificial turf and development of a plan for water runoff and management is something that does not exist now and will enhance rather than worsen existing water management issues.

4- MARET's proposal minimizes adverse traffic and noise impacts and the proposed curb cut is along a wide street already used by bus transit. MARET's proposal to minimize traffic, provides for biking, parking spaces, provisions for use of its buses and those of opposing teams. The days and times of use are limited especially given the fact that the field will not have lights, nor a large scoreboard. Maret students will only use the field after school hours during the week and only on occasional weekends. There will only be one game at a time. There will be no lights on the field so activity must stop at sundown. Other users of the site, for soccer and baseball, will be one game at a time. There will not be multiple users or multiple games.

5- MARET's proposal preserves those Heritage Trees that can be preserved and design features that make this an amenity for the neighboring property owners. Many of the existing trees are severely compromised, and left as they are will not survive. The Maret plan preserves several in place and with the aid of professional arborists plans to safely relocate others.

6- MARET's proposal is better than alternatives: more compatible with intended existing uses, far less disruptive than alternatives. The proposal for a single sport field is neither wise nor feasible. I live within the Small Area Plan zone for Chevy Chase DC's Connecticut Avenue Corridor slated for higher density development so I understand angst of the site's neighbors about proposed change from its relatively undisturbed state but also potential for other types of development that will greatly exceed the projected impacts of the sports field by several orders of magnitude. There might be some who prefer the site become available for affordable housing, but it is not convenient to shopping and support services even though there is a bus line along Nebraska Avenue. Far more desireable locations are afforded in Friendship Heights or more limited options along Connecticut Avenue. There are still others who argue for a single field instead of two adjacent fields for two different sports. This would not only fail to meet Maret's needs and scuttle the deal, but also makes little sense since the fields will not be in use at the same time, so it is really a single field at a time.

7- MARET's proposal responsive to community input and garners the full support of our ANC. If you read the report and recommended conditions of the ANC it provides ample evidence of a process which reached out and responded to community concerns with solid responses and conditions to satisfy them.

8- In regard to the BZA special exception, I understand that the application before the BZA is for a special exception pursuant to 11-U DCMR § 203.1(m) and 11-X DCMR § 104 to permit a private school use in a residential zone district, and pursuant to 11-C DCMR § 710.3 to allow parking spaces to be located in the front yard of the property. Both requests are reasonable given the size of the property, the intended use, and planned controls/designs to minimize and limit impacts of site views, sound, runoff, and time of use.

NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST: My children are now grown and will not be directly benefited by this field, however, my grandchildren, if we are blessed to have them and they live in the community, would benefit greatly. Also in full disclosure I am the parent of a Maret graduate over a decade ago so in that regard I also will not benefit from this project, other than to know from this vantage point the character and values of the Administration and parent body, committed to not only its own community but to the broader DC community. They walk the talk and can be relied upon to do right by the city. Certainly concerns about relinquishing their use of the Jelleff fields once this is up and running will serve the broader DC community as have their actions to improve that field and maximize use by others. The only constraint on their making this asset more broadly available is the agreement with its neighbors to minimize any adverse impact on them.

Thank you for listening. I am sincerely yours,

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