

Public Testimony

Zoning Hearing: CASE NO. 02-38J (WFS2, LLC – Second-Stage Planned Unit Development for 1000 4th Street, S.W. (Lot 822, Square 542)).

January 31, 2019

Allison Harvey, Co-PTA President, Amidon-Bowen Elementary School

Commissioners thank you for your time this evening and for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Amidon-Bowen PTA.

My name is Allison Harvey, and I'm the Co-President of the PTA at Amidon-Bowen Elementary. Amidon-Bowen is the only remaining elementary school in Southwest. The PTA is working hard to make Amidon-Bowen the school of choice for all families, of all backgrounds, in Southwest.

The PTA is not opposed to development or the ANC's support of development, but the PTA is opposed to choices by developers that hurt our community and public institutions.

In 2016, PN Hoffman and partners won the RFP for Waterfront Station II, based on a proposal to bring affordable housing, shops, and entertainment to round out the city-center feel to 4th Street Southwest, which is a main thoroughfare for residents. Neither the RFP nor the original proposal put forth by PN Hoffman called for the inclusion of a charter school in Waterfront Station II. However, this is now part of the plan.

In early January 2019, members of the PTA, including myself, were invited by representatives from PN Hoffman to discuss the impact of construction on student walking routes, as Waterfront Station II is on a direct diagonal from the school. In this meeting, they indicated they had signed a 7 plus year lease with AppleTree, a charter school that serves Pre-Kindergarten students, but could not provide additional details as there was a non-disclosure agreement.

Prior to this meeting, PN Hoffman never reached out to the PTA to discuss the significant implications of a long-term lease with AppleTree in the heart of Southwest.

Currently, Amidon-Bowen loses 16 Southwest families to AppleTree each year. AppleTree is set to expand to a new 9,000 square foot space.

According to a Washington Business Journal article, AppleTree will offer up to 176 seats— an almost 40% increase in seats.

For DC Public Schools, like Amidon-Bowen, the number of students in a school help determine how many staff and other resources are allotted.

For the past few years, Amidon-Bowen's enrollment has been stable at around 350 students. But, a charter school in a brand new facility, in the heart of Southwest, has the potential to draw additional families away from Amidon-Bowen. Leading to fewer resources for the school— which ultimately hurts our students and community.

Even though Amidon-Bowen has an excellent Pre-K program, the school's ability to attract neighborhood families is still tenuous. For example, when my child was eligible for PreK, I was advised to list Amidon-Bowen as a lower choice in the lottery. But, after talking to more people in the community, I put Amidon-Bowen as #1. Yet, there is a perception among parents of all backgrounds that our neighborhood school is not good enough when compared to others.

By negatively impacting the number of Southwest families that attend Amidon-Bowen, AppleTree prevents critical early exposure to our school. Furthermore, AppleTree has a long history of actively discouraging families to enroll their children at Amidon-Bowen after finishing their PreK program.

PN Hoffman has been less than transparent about its agreement with AppleTree. Citing a non-disclosure agreement, they insisted they could not disclose the length of the lease. However, when pressed by the ANC in the January public meeting, PN Hoffman indicated it was for 12 years and had a differing account of the number of seats that would be available. Finally, at this meeting, PN Hoffman stated that the lease had not been officially signed with AppleTree, but then told us after the meeting it was essentially a done deal. It still remains unclear what the exact deal with and expansion of AppleTree is. But, what is clear is that PN Hoffman and partners have lacked engagement and transparency with families and the Southwest community.

Amidon-Bowen serves a predominantly African-American, economically disadvantaged student population. The school and the PTA are working hard to create a strong community and culture of equity inside and outside the school. PN Hoffman is engaging in direct competition with the only public elementary school. It is also placing AppleTree very close to the school. The impact will be a siphoning of resources away from our children for at least the next decade. The redevelopment of Southwest should not come at that expense.

Our strong preference is that PN Hoffman forgo the AppleTree lease and find another use for its space. However, if PN Hoffman's agreement with AppleTree cannot be undone, then we urge the Zoning Commission to withhold approval until PN Hoffman and the Amidon-Bowen PTA have reached agreement regarding community benefits.

A Community Benefits Agreement will help the PTA and school offset the negative impact of AppleTree opening almost directly across from the school and creating unnecessary division and further inequity within our community.

Thank you again for your time and consideration to this matter.

Submitted on 1/30/2019 by:

Allison Harvey on behalf of Amidon-Bowen PTA