



April 24, 2017

District of Columbia Zoning Commission
Chairperson Anthony Hood
441 4th Street NW
Suite 200 – S
Washington, DC 20001

Reference: Zoning Case No. 16-17

To the Zoning Commission:

The Brookland Neighborhood Civic Association (BNCA) has been following the case of the proposed development by EYA of the parcel behind the St. Joseph Seminary over the past year. We have heard presentations from Evan Goldman of EYA. We have also heard from others, including members of Neighbors of St. Joseph Seminar (NSJS), such as Dr. Anita Greene, who have raised concerns about this proposed development. At our regularly scheduled general membership meeting on April 19, 2017, at Brooks Mansion, a quorum of members in good standing reached a consensus view to submit this letter acknowledging and supporting the many positive attributes of this proposed development, while pointing out several specific concerns.

In general, BNCA is strongly supportive of preserving existing green space, affordable housing, our economically and culturally diverse community, and our historical resources, from inappropriate development. We have seen, and continue to advocate against, development projects that are contrary to those aims. The Brookland community faces an incredible degree of development pressure on every parcel, public and private, that could be profitably developed. While many residents are environmentally conscious and many are supportive of “smart growth” policies that focus denser residential and commercial development around transit nodes like the Brookland Metro Station, too often it seems the City and developers pay little heed to the suggestions of the community that make all the difference between a culturally, aesthetically, and historically appropriate in-fill development and one that is purely aimed at profit-maximization for the developer. The City and the real estate sector must better incorporate, and indeed mandate, these sensitivities into their decision making process.

We would like to commend Mr. Goldman for the effort he has put into community engagement with respect to this project. There is much here that deserves, and has, our support. We support the affordable housing element that goes beyond the minimum inclusionary zoning requirements; we support the design accommodations to protect existing trees along 12th Street; we support the many changes in the design and scale of the housing since first proposed in order to better integrate the development into the existing neighborhood; and we certainly support placing the remainder of the property under historical protections. EYA's commitment to provide a fund to offset increases in property values for surrounding residents is laudable and precedent-setting in terms of community amenities that should be expected of any infill development of this nature in the future. Further, BNCA supports all efforts of EYA to subcontract with local Brookland businesses through the Greater Brookland Business Association. Overall, compared to other development projects our members have observed around Brookland in recent years, the reaction to this project has largely been one of surprise and exceeded-expectations.

Our primary concerns relate to existing traffic problems and safety issues that will, at a minimum, be exacerbated by this project. Traffic and construction mitigation plans are essential. We understand that the local community can expect to see an increase in congestion at some intersections around this development, especially at 12th and Allison, where the Providence Hospital parking area also exits onto 12th Street NE. We are also concerned about increased traffic, safety, and speeding risks, particularly at the intersection of the newly-expanded Webster Street and 13th Street NE. BNCA understands that EYA supports a 4-way stop at this intersection, and we also support this adjustment. We have been informed that DDOT, for some reason, is opposed to this. DDOT's priority should be the safety and well-being of residents, not minimizing the transit time of non-resident speeders and polluters using our neighborhood streets as thoroughfares through the City. DDOT ought to take seriously, implement, and expand upon the suggestions of this developer regarding safe traffic patterns, emphasize alternative modes of transit, and finally implement real action plans to eradicate excessive traffic and traffic violations throughout the Brookland area. BNCA strongly supports all efforts at traffic calming, traffic enforcement, and alternative modes of transit around this development in order to enhance the safety and quality of life for pedestrians and residents.

In addition, while we express qualified support for the virtues of this project, BNCA remains deeply concerned regarding the net loss of public green space and park space in our community. EYA may have admirably retained and protected the remaining open space around this development, but the fact remains that this is yet another net loss of open park land for residents of Brookland and Michigan Park to play and recreate in. The Howard Divinity campus, the Franciscan Monastery, the Brookland Green, other institutional spaces, and McMillan Park – the pressure to develop these places is unrelenting. Unless the City takes proactive steps now, thoughtless development is inevitable along with a corresponding loss in the quality of life of all residents, old and new, of Northeast DC.

Finally, it is essential that, in reviewing EYA's application, the Zoning Commission ensure that the many laudable public amenities EYA has put forward are seen through and executed. The

many virtues of EYA's project were not arrived at without significant input and pressure from neighbors and community groups such as NSJS. We expect the ZC to insist on the enforceability of these commitments. To the extent that EYA's commitments in this PUD process exceed minimum legal requirements (and by definition, they must), we also believe that EYA has established a new bar that future developers should be held to, whether proceeding through a PUD process or otherwise. Brookland is one of the greatest urban neighborhoods in the country. Given the never-ceasing increase in property taxes assessed here, we expect nothing less than nationally excellent projects in our community.

Because this project sets a new, minimum standard for what is expected of any infill development in the Brookland community, the BNCA offers its qualified support for EYA's zoning request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Schramm".

Daniel Schramm
President, BNCA