



Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3/4G

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COMMISSIONERS

3/4G-01 - Lisa R. Gore, Vice Chair 3/4G-02 - John Higgins, Treasurer
3/4G-03 - Randy Speck, Chair 3/4G-04 - Michael Zeldin 3/4G-05 - Connie K. N. Chang
3/4G-06 - Peter Gosselin, Secretary 3/4G-07 - Charles Cadwell

Minutes
ANC 3/4G Special Public Meeting
On Episcopal Center for Children-Maret School Proposal
February 1, 2022
Zoom Meeting 7:00 – 9:18 pm
Meeting [Link](#)

[00:00:00](#) **Introduction of Commissioners**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm with Commissioner Randy Speck, Chair (3/4G-03), presiding. Also present were Commissioners Lisa R. Gore (3/4G-01), John K. Higgins (3/4G-02), Michael Zeldin (3/4G-04), Connie K.N. Chang (3/4G-05), Peter Gosselin (3/4G-06), and Charles Cadwell (3/4G-07) Speck declared a quorum (being four Commissioners present).

[00:03:07](#) **Zoom Meeting Procedures & Special Meeting Limits**

As has been true since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, the Commission met virtually. Chair Speck described the ANC's Zoom meeting procedures. Speck also said that

the meeting was a special one called to discuss the Maret School application to the District's Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) to develop sports fields on a portion of the campus of the Episcopal Center for Children (ECC). He said that under the ANC's bylaws governing special meetings no other topic could be raised except with the unanimous consent of the commissioners.

[00:05:00](#) **Adoption of Agenda**

Chair Speck proposed modifying the agenda to change the order of presentations, then moved that the agenda be approved. The motion was passed 7 (Yes), 0 (No), 0 (Abstain).

[00:06:08](#) **Background on Maret School-ECC Proposal**

Commissioner Higgins, whose single member district includes the Episcopal Center for Children (ECC), provided the following background on Maret School's BZA application (Case No. [20643](#)) to build sports fields at the ECC campus:

“Our goal tonight is to provide the opportunity for the partners for the EEC field proposal to present their proposal in a full public forum sponsored by the ANC. Those partners are the Episcopal Center for Children and Maret School. The partners have reached an agreement for converting the open space behind the Episcopal Childrens' Center to a sports field. Maret has applied to the DC Board of Zoning Adjustment – the BZA -- to obtain permission to alter the field based on the DC residential zoning law exemption provision for educational organizations.

“This proposal has generated significant interest in the community including concerns about the zoning exemption being sought by the partners. A residents group called Friends of the Field has obtained representation status at the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA). The Friends of the Field application to the BZA noted that the group was filing for representation “in opposition to the exemption.” A representative of Friends of the Field will also present that group's position on the project tonight. So tonight's meeting will facilitate the opportunity for simultaneous presentations by all parties.

“Briefly, the Episcopal Center for Children is committed to its mission to provide educational and child development assistance to children with significant “special ed” needs. The center paused its operation as a result of Covid, overlaid with a deficiency in funding, despite some assistance from public funds. While several entities proposed projects for the field that might provide financial stability, ECC declined those offers until the Maret School offered to lease the field and convert it into a sports field. Both organizations saw a mutuality of interests in pursuing educational missions, and ECC saw an opportunity to use leasing income to enable long term financial stability. ECC

now plans to resume its program but at a somewhat lesser capacity than before. ECC sees this partnership as a way to maintain the field as a beneficial open space, although altered for athletic use.

“Issues of interest and concern include hydrology and stormwater management, traffic intensity, noise impacts, other aesthetic concerns, and perceptions that such a facility simply is inappropriate in a residential setting.

“By law, the ANC is authorized to contribute to the regulatory process and the ANC position is given “great weight” in such proceedings. Tonight’s forum will inform the ANC’s actions and assist all commissioners in considering this issue. On March 9 the BZA will hold a hearing and while Maret, the ECC, the ANC, and Friends of the Field will have standing as parties to the proceeding, residents may continue to submit letters to the BZA and petition for brief appearances at the hearing.

“Tonight’s meeting is an informational forum. It is not a debate. It is not an advocacy proceeding. No Commission action will be taken tonight, nor will any ANC action depend solely on this forum – it is one step in a process. Thus, we trust participants will state their case or positions in an informational, rather than a confrontational context.”

00:09:37

Special Meeting Sequence and Procedures

Chair Speck provided the following statement about the sequence of meetings the Commission has scheduled on Maret’s BZA application and details of how the night’s session would be conducted:

“This is the first of three special meetings on the Maret application. Each meeting will assist the Commission in forming its recommendations to the BZA. In this meeting, we hear from the parties. The February 16, 2022 meeting will give commissioners an opportunity to hear from and ask questions of the key District agencies that are responsible for reviewing Maret’s application — the District Department of Transportation (reviewing Maret’s Comprehensive Transportation Review), the Department of Energy and Environment (reviewing Maret’s stormwater management plans), and DDOT’s Urban Forestry Division (reviewing Maret’s Tree Preservation Plan). The February 24, 2022 meeting will review the Commission’s draft resolution advising the BZA of the Commission’s position on Maret’s application. We expect to make a draft of the resolution available in advance of the meeting, and we will take questions and comments from the community. The Commission must file its position with the BZA no later than March 2, 2022. Parallel with the Commission’s preparation of a resolution to the BZA, the ANC is continuing to talk with the parties in an effort to reach an agreement that all — or at least some — of the parties will accept.

“This meeting will be divided into three parts for presentations by ECC, Maret, and the Friends of the Field, each of which is a party in the BZA proceeding. ECC will have 15 minutes to make its presentation; Maret and the Friends group will each have 20 minutes.

The time remaining will be displayed in my video. After the presentations, there will be five minutes for questions to ECC from commissioners, and 20 minutes each for questions to Maret and the Friends group. If time permits, we will try to include questions from attendees that are placed in the Q&A. If commissioners have questions that we don't get to tonight, we may pose those questions to the parties and ask for written responses.

“We have invited and encouraged the parties to supplement their presentations tonight with whatever written submissions they wish to make. In order to take these submissions into account in the Commission's resolution, we ask that they give them to the Commission no later than February 22, 2022, two days before our meeting on the resolution on February 24, 2022.”

[00:16:02](#)

Episcopal Center for Children Presentation

Stephanie Nash, president and CEO of the Episcopal Center for Children, said the Center, which temporarily closed in 2019, has served children for 128 years, more than 90 of them in its Chevy Chase location, starting as an orphanage and subsequently becoming a school for emotional-disabled children. She said that prior to closing, ECC had 43 to 45 students. Some 84 percent were from the District. They had Individualized Education Programs, specialized teaching protocols, in public school, but their needs could not be met so they were referred to ECC. More than 90 percent were African-American or Hispanic-Latino. Some 91 percent came from families of limited means and qualified for free lunches.

Nash said that ECC differs from other special needs schools, which also closed in 2019 for lack of money, because it owns its own campus, which its board intends to leverage in order to re-open. “We do intend to re-open,” she said. “We do intend to look up, but look up to a smaller program.” During the next three years, she suggested that the student population might grow to between 20 and 25 and eventually to 30 to 35.

During the Q&A period, Commissioner Chang asked about the after school, neighborhood program that Nash mentioned. Nash said that ECC had carried out surveys in the past about after school needs in the neighborhood. They are thinking that students could come after their special after school sessions at Lafayette (and some from Blessed Sacrament) to engage in programming at ECC until 6 pm, which the school has not done in the past. When asked by Chang, Nash responded that ECC could accommodate 20-25 after-school students—the same number as regular day students when they restart.

[00:38:36](#)

Presentation by Maret School

Maret head of school Marjo Talbott said the proposed sports fields at ECC are “critically important” to Maret’s mission and also to ECC’s. She said the school intends the facility to become part of the surrounding community and said Maret “is committed to being a good neighbor.”

Trey Holloway, the school’s assistant head for finance and operations, said Maret has altered its design to respond to neighbors’ concerns by moving structures such as trash bins, batting cages and retaining walls away from the property boundaries deeper into the site to provide a buffer from surrounding homes. He presented charts showing proposed usage by Maret, youth sports teams the school would sub-let the fields to, and open time available for others including neighbors. Across the whole of the year, he said the fields would be open 64 percent of the time. Some meeting participants subsequently questioned whether that figure gave a false picture because most open times are during school and work days when few people would be available to use the fields. He reiterated a number of conditions Maret expects will be required of it and the school accepts. Among them:

- No lights at the facility other than downlights for security;
- No public address system or other amplified sound;
- Maret “may” permit use of the field by ECC and DC public schools;
- The community will have access to the fields;
- The school will provide security;
- There will be 48 off-street parking spaces;
- Trash and recycling pickups restricted to certain hours;

Jami Malianovich, Maret’s traffic consultant, presented a table showing that fields would generate 92 vehicle trips over current levels during weekday peak hours and 96 additional vehicle trips during peak weekend days. She said the school will propose that DDOT limit the effects of the additional traffic by, among other things, lengthening the switching time for traffic lights at Utah and Nebraska Avenue, perhaps removing some parking places on 27th Street NW, adding curb extensions to protect pedestrians and adding bike racks at the site.

Paul Tummonds, the school’s zoning lawyer, presented a calendar of the various steps in the approval process leading up to the March 9, 2022 BZA hearing on the application.

During a subsequent Q&A period, Commissioner Zeldin discussed an issue he has raised before, namely what does Maret mean when it talks about open field time. He said that in his experience practice fields are hard to find and, unless otherwise restricted, youth team coaches are likely to “squat” on the fields, claiming a certain block of open time as theirs. School officials said they intend to prevent this, but have not yet settled on how. “What we have heard over the numerous community meetings that we’ve had is that there is a variety

of opinions about how that open-field time should be delegated and exactly how much openness there should be,” Holloway said.

Chair Speck read a number of questions Zoom meeting participants put in the chat:

- What does Maret mean by downlights? Holloway said the school is looking for a middle way, with enough light to provide for security of the fields, but not so much that it’s troubling to neighbors.
- Did the school traffic study take account of the re-opening of Oregon Avenue? Milanovich said yes.
- Did the traffic study contemplate the closing of Beach Drive? Milanovich said no, but the estimates tend to overstate the likely increase in traffic and in this way, partially cope with the possible closure of the road.
- Had there been studies of how stormwater runoff from the fields would be handled? Tummonds said the site has no storm runoff management system now. The school will install one that meets municipal standards and will represent a substantial improvement from what currently exists.

Talbott addressed the question of multiple fields at the site. She said that the school needs a baseball diamond and baseball diamonds are in very short supply in DC. And it needs a field for soccer, lacrosse and football. But, she added, the way the fields are designed, they overlap so they can only be used one at a time.

[01:21:16](#) **Presentation by Friends of the Field**

Bruce Sherman, one of the leaders of the community group, said “What Maret is proposing is too big, too intrusive and too intensive in its proposed use for our residential neighborhood.” He said that the development process and the ANC’s review of it have been flawed and biased in Maret’s favor.

Sherman listed a number of goals the group is seeking. Among them:

- Only one field, not multiple fields at the site;
- Storm runoff managed to a 50-year standard, not the city’s current 15-year requirement;
- No subleasing of the field to outside youth sports teams. Use only by Maret and the neighborhood;
- Changing placement of the parking lot;
- No use before 10 a.m. or after 6:30 p.m.;
- Natural grass, not artificial turf;
- Maintain existing trees.

Ed Donahue, the group's lawyer, argued that since Friends of the Field represent nearby neighbors its views deserve "special consideration." Although he did not detail them in his remarks, he asserted the ANC's review of the proposal suffered from "procedural flaws" and "questionable chronologies."

Claudia Russell, an abutting property owner and architect, said the Maret proposal calls for a level of development that has not equivalent at fields elsewhere in the city, will block neighbors' view with retaining wall, produce noise, eliminate rain-absorbing soil, create a "heat island" with artificial turf and include a "strip mall-like parking lot."

David Patton, a 28th Street resident and transportation planner, said that more than two-thirds of homeowners within the 200-foot notification perimeter employed by the BZA oppose the Maret proposal. He showed pictures suggesting that one field might fit comfortably on the site, but not the two fields that Maret proposes.

Sherman called on the Commission to seek a delay in the March 9, 2022 BZA hearing on the application. "There is no need for a rush to judgement," he said, "There is abundant time to get this right."

During a Q&A period, Vice Chair Gore asked why the group embraced a 50-year standard for water runoff. Russell said the city's 15-year standard and Maret's promise to design a runoff management system to a 25-year standard are inadequate given climate change and the fact that runoff is a major carrier of pollution.

Addressing a criticism the group made in letters to the Commission that it knew about Maret's proposal months before it began a public review of it and the raising of this issue again in the Friends' presentation and oral remarks tonight insinuating that the Commission was biased which the Commission had already responded to in writing, Commissioner Chang said they were unfounded. The Commission did talk with the Episcopal Center for Children in winter and spring of 2021 because it was searching for a way to relieve overcrowding of pre-kindergarten classes at Lafayette Elementary School. "We were not aware of Maret School. We only heard of it through what was made public... We did not have access to plans. We were not involved in that way. And when we became involved, we immediately involved the community."

Sherman said that the group had "other concerns" that it had raised in letters to the Commission that they believed the Commission had not adequately respond to. But he indicated the group felt these should be handled privately. Commissioner Zeldin responded that the group's presentation during the meeting insinuated that the Commission has not

acted in good faith, is conflicted and is predisposed to one side. “It’s factually untrue,” Zeldin said.

Sherman again said the issues should be handled privately. Chang responded that there’s nothing private about the group’s concerns because the Commission has posted on its website the group’s letters suggesting that commissioners have conflicts of interest. It also has the Commission’s response, which, she said, is “We have none. None of us have a conflict of interest.” Commissioners Gore and Gosselin agreed.

Sherman said the group was not alleging a conflict, but then raised the fact that Chair Speck’s daughter had attended Maret. Speck previously disclosed the fact in response to the group’s letters and also the fact that the daughter’s time at the school was 25 years ago. Sherman also charged that Speck improperly provided Maret with “specific strategic and legal advice” about its BZA application.

Speck replied that the comments he and Commissioner Higgins made in marking up Maret’s application raised the very issues of noise, traffic, water runoff and so forth about which neighbors are concerned. Patton subsequently said that Speck gave him a copy of his markup and invited him to share it with the group, so he had immediately disclosed the concerns that he and Commissioner Higgins raised with Maret.

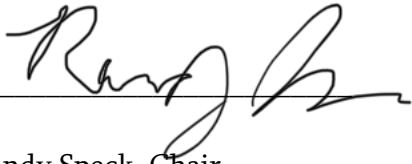
Commissioner Gosselin suggested that the exchange over conflicts and related matters was distracting the Commission from its primary job of reviewing the Maret proposal, examining its potential effects on the surrounding community and making recommendations. He said that if the Friends group wanted to pursue the former it was welcome to, but the Commission should move on. Commissioner Cadwell moved that the meeting adjourn.

Before adjourning, Nash, the ECC president and CEO, responded to a question asked earlier in the evening about whether, because public policy now favored mainstreaming special needs students, it was not likely the center could reopen, even if the Maret proposal with its funding stream for ECC was approved. “Our plan right now is to open in the fall of 2022,” Nash said.

02:18:00

Adjourn

APPROVED at a regular public meeting notice of which was properly given, and at which a quorum of four (4) of seven (7) members was present on February 14, 2022, by a vote of **7** yes, **0** no, **0** abstentions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randy Speck", written over a horizontal line.

Randy Speck, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Gosselin", written over a horizontal line.

Peter Gosselin, Secretary