Natalie Hill

From:	jane@tropicalinn.com
Sent:	Wednesday, October 02, 2019 1:39 PM
To:	Natalie Hill
Subject:	Montessori Children's School Conditional Use Application
Attachments:	Bike rack on sidewalk.jpg; Parking on Varela during school.jpg; Parking on Varela after school.jpg

Mr. Bishop: sorry, it appears that you were not copied on this very important email sent yesterday to the Mayor, City Commissioners, and Planning Board members. I apologize for the oversight.

Jane Lowe

October 1, 2019

Re: Development Plan and Conditional Use Application for 1221 and 1217 Varela St., presented to the Development Review Committee of the Key West Planning Department on Thursday, September 26, 2019, on behalf of the Montessori Children's School of Key West, Inc. by authorized representative, Serge Mashtakov of Arbitus Design, LLC

To: Mayor, Planning Board Members, and City Commissioners of the City of Key West, Florida

Dear Representatives,

Permit me to bring to your attention a situation that has potential to cause quite a disruptive influence on property values, quality of life, and overall enjoyment of our homes in the immediate neighborhood of the Montessori Children's School located at the corner of Varela and United Streets.

In January of this year, Montessori Children's School of Key West purchased a parcel of real estate adjacent to our home at 1215 Varela Street. It is a single-family home at 1217 Varela Street, zoned HMDR, that has, since its construction in 1963, served as housing for local residents.

This home shares a property line with the current Montessori Children's School campus, which is also located in the HMDR zoning, but has been operating for many years under a variance as a day care center and school for lower grades. Over the years, the school has sought to incorporate the home at 1217 Varela into its campus with the intention of converting the residential space into classrooms and support facilities for the school -- a commercial use. Each time, it has been met by neighborhood resistance.

Attempts at said incorporation have been made very discretely, without communication with or consideration of any of the neighbors. In the past, when the neighbors have found out, they have fought to prevent the negative impact such conversion would have

on their quality of life and property values. Some 15 years ago, in 2004, in the face of 100% opposition by all the neighbors, they withdrew from a lease they had arranged with the home's owners and dropped their request with the City for approval of a variance that would have enabled the conversion -- but not before forcing the family who had occupied the property for 19 years to find replacement housing.

Since purchasing the property in January, 2019 -- once more forcing out a family who had occupied it for many years -- it has retained its residential use under the guise of staff housing. But, on September 26, a representative for MCS submitted the above-referenced application to once again attempt to use the property to expand the school. The proposed conversion would allow for the addition of 12 fourth-grade students (the campus now serves only through grade 3) and 2 additional faculty members.

No mention is made of the open land use, but since it abuts the current playground, presumably that would be expanded. This would bring playground activities to our property line and, specifically, within seven feet of the entrance to our home -- a scenario that would impose considerably on the "quiet enjoyment" assured under our nation's "homeowners bundle of rights".

Besides losing yet another residential unit from Key West's dwindling housing stock and the increase in proximity and level of noise that is already a major negative impact, additional vehicle traffic and parking problems -- long a source of considerable conflict between the school and the neighbors -- would only further contribute to the overall deleterious effect. Illustrative of this are three photographs attached to this email, all taken on the same day, January 31, 2019.

One photo shows the bike rack the school has placed on the public sidewalk, obstructing foot traffic during school hours (this is submitted as exemplary of their expansionist attitude). The other two are of the parking situation on the street; one taken when school is in afternoon session and the other late in the day, after the school has closed. It is not at all unusual for residents to have to park a block or so away from their homes (imagine this with a car full of groceries needing refrigeration) when they find all the parking spaces on the block occupied by teachers and parents of MCS students.

For the above-cited reasons -- and not even touching on code compliance requirements for schools as relative to parking, playground space based on number of students, safety issues, etc. -- we adamantly and unequivocally oppose the allowance of any expansion whatsoever to the current MCS campus, whether by conversion of use of currently held real estate or those leased from by others. Such action would be beneficial only to MCS, which has a long history of operating in secrecy as it makes plans historically proven to be met by neighborhood resistance. Our objection at the present time is identical to our objection in 2004.

The Planning Department is charged with researching the issues that contribute to decisions that mould the future of the City for the benefit of its residents. We, the neighbors of MCS are the residents. Faculty and enrollees of the school are mostly residents of different neighborhoods, many not even on the island. If the school wishes to expand, we maintain that the prudent measure would be to seek a more appropriate

location -- NOT to further encroach on our neighborhood, quality of life, and property values.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane Lowe
Allen Lewis

1215 Varela St.
Key West

(305) 292-4143
(305) 797-5653