

Natalie Hill

From: adele williams <adeleyvonne@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, October 02, 2019 7:16 PM
To: Natalie Hill
Subject: Montessori Children's School Conditional Use Application

October 2, 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 an 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,

As the owners of 1216 White St, the property that abuts 2017 Varela St, we would like to express our concerns about the proposed expansion of the Montessori Children's School of Key West.

On September 27, 2019, Amy O'Conner, the Executive Director of the Montessori Children's School, asked us to sign a letter supporting the conversion of 1217 Varela St into a classroom. The single-family home is zoned HMDR, and has, since its construction in 1963, served as housing for residents. It came as a surprise to us that the school had purchased the property without the consent of the neighbors. I was a teacher at the school between 2006 and 2013 and was acutely aware of the neighborhood's opposition to MCS's proposed expansion of the school, through the purchase or lease of 1217 Varela St. When asked how the school was able to purchase the property without neighborhood approval and variances, Ms. O'Conner responded with the following;

"We are currently using it as staff housing. Our hope is to get a variance, but we need neighbors' support. We now go to 6th grade and would love to get the 4th to 6th graders in a bigger space. They are quite confined now".

We believe that a move of this nature will adversely impact the quality of our life and the value of our property. The planning department must already be aware of current code compliance issues associated with traffic flow, parking, and access to sidewalks along the adjoining streets. These matters will inevitably be compounded with increased student numbers. There are areas of Key West that are more suited to the education of elementary and middle school students. A small residential backyard is neither appropriate or beneficial for adolescent development. While employed as a teacher at the Montessori Children's School I dealt with the daily issues associated with limited playgrounds. The disparity between the number of children and the available play area will only increase as the school proposes to take on elementary and middle school students. An important fact to also consider is that as a private school, the standard hours of operation far exceed those of the public school system. The school operates almost year-round, offering after-care, holiday camps, slumber parties, evening meetings, weekend birthday parties, movie nights, and frequent fundraising events; giving the neighbors little reprieve.

While I have been committed to the education of the children in our island community, I realize that there must be limitations to the growth of schools in residential areas. 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 only be beneficial to MCS, which has a history of operating in secrecy to avoid neighborhood resistance. Our current objection is identical to the opposition posed by the neighbors in 2004.

I hope we can resolve this matter with transparency and expediency and that the school will consider more viable options for their students.

Please note that we may not receive a notice for a request for variance as we are traveling.

Kind regards,
Adele Williams and Shawn Cowles

--
Adele Williams