

2316 Broadway Avenue East
Seattle, Washington 98102

December 3, 2004

Mr. Cliff Portman
Department of Planning and Development
700 5th Avenue, Suite 2000
P.O. Box 34019
Seattle, Washington 98124-4019

Re: Request for EIS -- Master Use Permit # 2306429 (Bertschi School)

Dear Mr. Portman,

It is our understanding that the Department is considering a Declaration of Significance (DS) for this project. Our neighborhood strongly supports this course of action and we solicit your approval. We fully appreciate and acknowledge that this is a significant undertaking but it is our strong belief that the merits of this project clearly warrant this level of comprehensive review and analysis.

The recent decision by the City's Landmark Preservation Board to accept the nomination of the Reid Court Apartments has reportedly triggered the Department's consideration for a DS. The Reid Court Apartments are, of course, the central component of this MUP. This project would demolish the apartments to permit the construction of a gymnasium/auditorium and several new classrooms for the applicant, the Bertschi School. The historic preservation nomination of the Reid Court Apartments has been followed closely by our neighborhood. The apartments, constructed in 1925 have made a significant contribution to the cultural and economic heritage of our community. It is an easily identifiable visible feature and has unquestionably contributed to the distinctive quality and personality of our turn-of-the-century neighborhood. Our neighborhood applauds the Landmarks Preservation Board's acceptance of the nomination. A DS to consider this preservation initiative is strongly endorsed and supported.

We would also urge the Department not to limit or constrain the DS solely to the preservation issue. Following the applicants MUP submittal on May 24, 2004 the neighborhood's response has been overwhelming as evidenced by the September 9, 2004 public meeting sponsored by your Department. The "packed house" at the Montlake Community Center expressed a wide variety of concerns relating to the long standing impacts that the School has created, continued to exacerbate, and failed to mitigate. A detailed list of these concerns is attached to this letter. This prompted residents in the community to submit a request to DPD to call for a Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). It was (and still is) our strong contention that the impacts of this project were so significant, so invasive and so without migrating solutions that a formal EIS was needed to fully and completely look at all of the issues and to evaluate and consider all of the possible alternatives that might be available to lessen the impact of this project. The SEPA Checklist and transportation study submitted with Bertschi's Master Use Permit application simply fail to adequately address the issues.

Several recent events have once again prompted the community to request a more robust review of the impacts of this project:

1. The only mitigating traffic initiative proposed by this project when the MUP was filed in May of this year was an extension of the existing drop-off/pick-up zone by three car lengths for a total of five off-street vehicles. In October the School canceled this initiative and submitted no alternative design changes for mitigation of traffic and congestion. The Bertschi School has no transportation assets and has no post-project plans to incorporate such assets into

- their capability. The School accounts for nearly 800 trips per day. Single occupancy vehicles make nearly all of the trips. The trips are clustered around the morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up sequences so the impact is more pronounced and concentrated causing extended queues, gridlock conditions on the neighborhood's only arterial and its narrow and cramped side streets. This impact will increase after the project as student enrollment and the number of teachers increase.
2. The School's post-MUP initiative to mitigate morning traffic in the neighborhood was to extend the drop off time from 8:00 to 8:30 am; previously it was 8:15 to 8:30. This change, implemented with the start of the new school year, has simply not met expectations. Detailed traffic surveys have confirmed that this has not been effective (see Attachments 2 and 3). Bertschi traffic is still heavily clustered around the original 8:15 am to 8:30 am timeframe perpetuating long drop-off queues and the gridlock conditions for southbound traffic on 10th Avenue East. The queues frequently block the City bus stop and side street traffic attempting to enter 10th Avenue East. The school has never addressed the afternoon pick-up sequence impacts. Shortly after the beginning of the school year they School hired an off-duty uniformed officer to "monitor" the problems. But the problems associated with 150 vehicles circling around the neighborhood looking for a place to park, blocking driveways and side street access and creating considerable congestion and safety problems on 10th Avenue East remain and have not been addressed.
 3. Following the MUP submittal the neighborhood submitted and received City approval to implement a Residential Zone Parking (RPZ) permit program on streets surrounding the School. The program went into effect November 30, 2004. The School as no on-site parking for staff and long-term visitors. Only 4 spaces exist in front of the school but they are reserved for short-term visitors and deliveries. Over 40 staff and faculty plus 10 or so long-term visitors now compete for parking in the narrow side streets of the neighborhood. The introduction of the RPZ has only caused them to cluster in other areas of the neighborhood not covered by the RPZ. The neighborhood is responding with a request to expand the RPZ and given the high density parking situation in this area the City will be compelled to approve such a request. The School has provided no other parking alternatives for its staff. In fact, they have compromised long-term parking by eliminating 8-10 spaces along 10th Avenue East by getting the City to post no-parking and 2-hour time limitations on this section of the street as a way of facilitating their traffic flow for morning drop-off and pick-up. The project proposed by this MUP provides for only 18 vehicles in a below grade parking lot leaving 60% of the School's staff and teachers competing for on-street parking in a neighborhood now controlled by an RPZ.
 4. The School is requesting an Administrative Conditional Use (ACU) variance for a new playcourt (SMC 23.45.096D) but to date there has been no noise abatement features advanced by the School. This playcourt would be contiguous with the School's principal playcourt. The noise from existing playcourts is a significant issue for 40-50 residential properties surrounding the school. The existing playcourt abutting the residential properties to the west on Broadway Avenue East does not meet the 20 feet setback restriction. The asphalt surface of the playcourt extends all the way to the property line putting dozens of children literally in the backyards of these neighbors. We are unsure how this condition originated nor how it has been allowed to prevail. The School has yet to submit noise abatement features into the project for this playcourt.
 5. The School is also requesting an ACU to exceed the building width of is new gymnasium/ auditorium. Construction of this building of course presupposes that the Reid Court Apartments will, in spite of its Landmark Status, be demolished. The size of this new building is understandably a very important issue for our neighborhood. Neighbors point to the monolithic and out-of-context appearance of the proposed building. Allowing the building to exceed SMC maximum width by nearly 20% is considered excessive and unacceptable. If it is going to be built the structure should be resized to fit within the SMC dimensions. The School itself is a collection of classic turn-of the century homes and an old church of classic

style and design. The proposed building does not fit the image of the school or the neighborhood and fails to meet the conditional use criteria established by SMC 23.47.006B. 1.a: "The design of the structure, including architectural treatment, signage, landscaping and lighting, {shall be} compatible with other structures in the vicinity." An EIS would provide for a more exhaustive assessment of the impact of this proposed building.

There continues to be a large number of open issues surrounding this project. Issues that the Bertschi School has not resolved but only magnified with their project – issues such as the historical value of the apartments – issues about traffic, congestion, parking, safety, noise, and how to deal with the introduction of special after-hour events. The School has grown steadily in size and footprint over the last twenty-five years all without a real dedicated review and study about the big-picture impact that such growth has had on this neighborhood. All of their previous expansion projects have presumably come in just under the EIS radar. If this expansion is allowed to proceed the School will command well over 55% of the city block that once started as a rented space in the basement of a community-serving Methodist Church. But it's more than just physical size; it is the impact on the neighborhood's structure, the transportation and parking network, the cultural and economic heritage, and the health and welfare of its residents.

Our neighborhood truly believes that a comprehensive EIS is warranted and justified in this case. Only through the EIS process will we be able to get the rigorous analysis of all the factors that must be considered. An EIS will hopefully allow the Department, the applicant and the neighborhood to develop a set of strategies and programs that will mitigate the impacts of the Bertschi School. We solicit your support of our request and trust that the Department will review and consider our request very carefully. If we can provide any further information or assistance please do not hesitate to contact us. We would appreciate a response as to the Department's course of action on this matter.

Respectfully,

See attached signature pages (x4)

Attachments

1. Bertschi School Impacts
2. Bertschi Traffic Survey Report, September 28, 2004
3. Bertschi Traffic Survey Report. November 3, 2004

Cy to:

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