

Friends of North Broadway District

January 31, 2006

Seattle Department of Transportation
700 5th Avenue, Suite 3900
P.O. Box 34996
Seattle, Washington 98124-4996

Dear Mr. Estey, Mr. Nelson, and Ms Hoyt,

On behalf of the North Capitol Hill area and our neighborhood association let me take this opportunity to thank you all for taking time from your busy schedules to take a first hand look at the Bertschi School morning drop-off sequence.

While we were talking and observing the whole operation it was not possible to get a vehicle count or a vehicle distribution breakdown over the period of time that we observed the operation but typically there are 110-120 vehicles, with 85% clustered around the school's start time of 8:30 am. The Traffic Surveys included in the packet I left with each of you includes a look at 6 random days of drop-off sequences since the school started the curbside drop-off.

My sense is that you were all reasonably satisfied with what you observed. And, Ms. Hoyt, since you have seen both alternatives: (a) the use of the drive-through or (b) the use of the curbside, I can appreciate your observations and comments that the curbside is more acceptable than the drive-through. And given the simple choice of (a) or (b) I am sure the (b) option would be the choice for most.

The drive-through was never designed to accommodate this level of traffic. It was constructed in 1972 for a daycare center, not a school, with a reported population of 30 children. Drop-off traffic was intermittent and for the size of the operation it was undoubtedly adequate. But current owners of the Bertschi School purchased the daycare center in 1976 with stated intentions of establishing a "nongraded school." The threshold land use permit for this conversion (daycare to nongraded) was issued in 1981. It was conditional on satisfying a number of Seattle Engineering Department recommendations to greatly increase the utility and volume of traffic for the drive-through-- to meet enrollment projections that would increase to 88 students immediately, but per permit, "never more than 100 at any one time."

While some of this may be old news to you, it is important to note two facts.

First, the drive-through was never widened and elongated per the 1981 plans issued by the Engineering Department. The drive-through was a chokepoint then and obviously remains one today but certainly not because city planners and engineers didn't see it coming and try to do something about it. The school, for whatever reason, chooses not to comply with the prescribed improvements that were recommended and approved. We recognize this is a code compliance/enforcement issue and this matter has already been identified to DPD in a complaint filed in June 2005.

Second, the enrollment limit of "no more than 100 at any one time" has certainly been exceeded. The school's enrollment is right at 220. It's little wonder that a drive-through designed for 30 intermittent daycare children cannot accommodate the drop-off traffic of a Pre-K through 5th grade private elementary school with this current level of enrollment. This is another code compliance/enforcement issue that has been filed with DPD (August 2005).

What we said in our position paper (the front document in your packet) is worth repeating. All in this neighborhood recognize that private schools like Bertschi seek to provide an educational service to the greater Seattle area. But what is often overlooked is the fact this service comes at extreme expense to neighborhoods such as this. We are simply ill equipped to support the services that private institutions of this order and magnitude seem to command. The central problem is that the Bertschi School has outgrown its location. It has failed to provide a supporting infrastructure for an enrollment that grossly exceeds its permit threshold and for an enrollment that goes far beyond the vision of City planners and the neighborhood when it granted the daycare center a conditional approval to convert to a "non-graded" school with "no more than 100 students at any one time."

So the question is not so simple as to whether curbside drop-off is preferred over the use of the unimproved drive-through. This has an easy and obvious answer. The question is at what point do the needs of a specific development, like the Bertschi School, substantially aggravate traffic and substantially compromise parking shortages that they become materially detrimental to the public welfare and injurious to property in this vicinity? Over time the Bertschi School has shifted all of its loading and unloading responsibilities to the streets of Seattle. The same can be said for parking, as their entire staff of over 40 must compete for limited on-street parking.

Granted this may be more of a "land use" issue that rightfully belongs in the DPD arena but the change to curbside drop-off is within SDOT's purview and is an important contributing factor to the school's ability to absolve themselves of rightful responsibilities to mitigate the adverse impacts of its ever expanding operation in this residential community. As such we do not endorse this decision and would appreciate information concerning appeal procedures.

Again thank you for your time and thoughts this morning.

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