

Preschool's growth rate upsets some neighbors

By TRIGIE EALEY
Daily staff writer

The Alexandria City Council has approved a request by Hopkins House Center for Children and Families to increase its preschool enrollment to include a program for infants — a move opposed by some neighbors.

The school, at 1218 and 1224 Princess St., is in the inner-city neighborhood known as the Parker-Grey District. The neighborhood also is home to the Inner City Civic Association, and some residents who are split on the school's increasing enrollment.

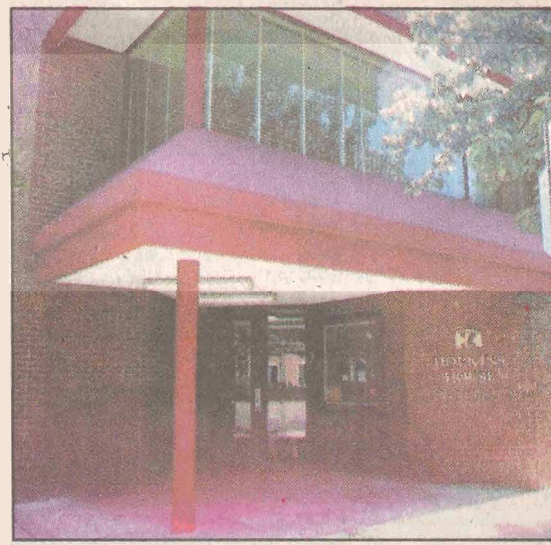
City Council last week unanimously approved the request for the school's enrollment to grow from 49 to 55 pupils, overriding

a Planning Commission recommendation that it be rejected. Last year, the school's enrollment jumped from 25 to 49 pupils.

Sandi Stancel, who lives at 1214 Princess St., said the conflict breaks her heart.

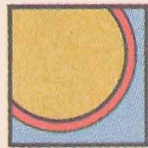
"I need somebody to tell me what it is about this issue that is creating this horrible rift in a neighborhood, which, in the 29 years I've been here, has always stood together," she said Saturday as City Council heard residents speak at a public hearing on the issue.

Some residents also had appeared before City Council last year to oppose Hopkins House's application for major building renovations.



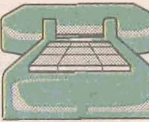
The City Council has approved a new program for Hopkins House Center for Children and Families.

Please see SCHOOL, A8



TOMORROW
Sunny, highs in the mid-80s, lows in the mid-60s.

Bridge.....	D4	Dear Abby.....	D4	Opinion.....	A6
Business.....	C8	Home PC.....	D1	Police Beat.....	A4
Chess.....	D4	Horoscope.....	D4	Sports.....	B1
Classified.....	C1	Letters.....	A6	Stocks.....	C8
Comics.....	D3	Lotteries.....	A3	Trivia.....	D3
Crossword.....	D3	Movies.....	D2	TV Listings.....	D4



Preschool saw 'need' to expand

SCHOOL from A1

vation plans and increased enrollment.

Mark Webster, an opponent of expansion last year and this year, said he wanted assurance that increased enrollment would not be an annual event.

"Why are we here?" he asked. "This is tearing our neighborhood apart."

He said the six additional children will not overrun the neighborhood, but he questioned the future of the center.

"The question is: Is it six more the next year?" Webster said. "Is it 10 more the year after that? Where does it stop?"

Asked by City Council member Joyce Woodson to explain what would make him happy, Webster asked for finality in the preschool's plans.

"What you are suggesting is that you would be made happy if Hopkins House never, ever came back and asked for anything again," she said. "Is that correct? That's what I'm hearing."

She said only Webster has characterized the neighborhood as being torn apart by the issue.

*/Countering Webster's assessment, Patrick M. Flood, another resident, said the debate over Hopkins House has brought the neighborhood together.

"It is very, very rare in the in-

ner city where I live, where ordinary citizens come together and support a cause so strongly it has the power to unite a community," Flood said, adding that the support has built bridges among neighbors who once were divided by race, gender, religion, age and income level.

"A few weeks ago, many of us were strangers until this came up," Flood said. "Now many of us call each other 'friend.'"

Also speaking in support of the school were Amy Maddox, a neighbor; and Camille F. Leverett, president of the Inner City Civic Association, who said her group voted 18-1 to support the plans, with three taking no position.

J. Glenn Hopkins, the school's executive director, said the 62-year-old nonprofit preschool program — where tuition is about \$150 a week — now will include children ranging from 6-week-old infants to 6 years of age.

Hopkins — no relation to the organization's namesake, Dr. J. Milton Hopkins — said the school has no plans for further expansion or building renovations.

When the renovations were completed, Hopkins said, the center received many calls from parents seeking infant care. He said that Alexandria has five child-care centers that accept in-

fants and that the only accredited one, as of November, had a waiting list of 140 infants.

"It was clear to us that there was a serious need out there," Hopkins said.

The Planning Commission had voted 3-3, with Commissioner Stewart Dunn recusing himself because of a conflict of interest.

After last year's controversy, the parties signed an agreement stating that the two sides would form a Hopkins House advisory committee to resolve parking and noise issues as well as keeping open the lines of communication.

Mayor Kerry J. Donley said the advisory committee needs to continue working together to maintain communication. It also was suggested to Hopkins that any long-range plans be shared with the neighbors.

Last year's \$180,000 renovation transformed what had originally been an office building into a school, for a total of three classrooms and improved accessibility for the disabled. The upstairs was turned into a community room and Hopkins House board room, Hopkins said.

In addition to enrollment changes, the school has plans to convert an outdoor area into "an environmental center," at a cost of \$10,000 to \$15,000.