

**Inner City Civic Association**  
**Comments Regarding Staff Report and Recommendations**  
**Concerning**

Docket Item #21-A  
MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT #99-0012  
REZONING #99-0012

Docket Item # 21-B  
SPECIAL USE PERMIT#99-0092

Docket Item # 21-C  
SPECIAL USE PERMIT #99-0148

Planning Commission Meeting  
March 7, 2000

ISSUE:                   Consideration of a request for amendment to the Braddock Road Metro Station Small Area Plan of the 1992 Master Plan to change the land use designation from RM to RH and request to change the zoning designation of the subject property from RB to RC, with proffer.

                                  Consideration of a request for a special use permit to expand a preschool, with site plan modifications of the zone transition setback and yard.

                                  Consideration of a request for a special use permit amendment to increase the number of permitted children at an existing preschool.

APPLICANT:           Hopkins House  
                                  By Harry Hart, Attorney

LOCATION:               1224 Princess Street  
                                  Alexandria, Virginia

The Inner City Civic Association strongly opposes the request for

consideration of a request for amendment to the Braddock Road Metro Station Small Area Plan of the 1992 Master Plan to change the land use designation from RM to RH and request to change the zoning designation of the subject property from RB to RC, with proffer,

consideration of a request for a special use permit to expand a preschool, with site plan modifications of the zone transition setback and yard, and

consideration of a request for a special use permit amendment to increase the number of permitted children at an existing preschool,

because it believes that granting the proposal will negatively and irreparably harm the residential character of the surrounding neighborhood.

It is ironic that Hopkins House's violation of its 1988 SUP now constitutes one of the primary arguments for granting their request for a change in zoning and related SUPs. The 1998 SUP covered a pre-school childcare facility for 25 children. In the staff report, SUP #99-0148, number 5 states that "According to the applicant, Hopkins House's current enrollment is now 38, but that number is growing and should reach as many as 49 in the near future." The applicant has not complied with the requirements of the existing SUP.

In addition to seeking to legalize the number of children that it is currently serving, the applicant also intends to expand its facility. It's important to note that the existing building currently accommodates 40-42 children and that this expansion is not needed for its current mission.

The Boys and Girls Club, across the street from the applicant, has approached city staff to discuss the Club's expansion. If the Hopkins House is rezoned RC, it would be difficult for the Planning Commission to deny a similar request by the Club. The Boys and Girls Club already has an approximate FAR of 1.00, similar to the existing Hopkins House building.

The 1988 SUP has been seriously violated. Although the staff report states that the Health Department has no comment, health inspections have revealed critical violations. The most recent health inspection report is attached. The lack of a licensed food handler has been cited no fewer than 4 times (10/28/96, 9/24/98, 1/21/99, 12/20/99). And yet, Staff is proposing to grant a new SUP, subject to the applicant having a food handler. Shouldn't the applicant be required to first come into compliance?

Furthermore, the National Association of Education of Young Children no longer accredits the Hopkins House preschool program. Accreditation lapsed in 1998. Why does the City wish to grant so many accommodations to an unaccredited institution, when there are already six NAEYC-accredited programs in our zip code? A copy is attached.

Staff is proposing to give an existing institution up to 1 year to regain its accreditation. Without accreditation, as noted by Staff, the applicant does not meet the definition of a private school. Why not require that the applicant first comply with this requirement? Otherwise, we are writing a blank check.

When the Braddock Road Metro Station Small Area Plan Chapter of the 1992 Master Plan was approved, Hopkins House was granted an SUP because it was generally recognized that the services offered were valuable to the neighborhood. No evolution was envisioned either by the applicant or by members of the community.

The existing preschool program serves clients from as far away as Maryland. Eighteen or more staff members park on the residential streets... including the director... at a time when spaces are at a premium. Hopkins House provides no off street parking for staff, when church parking lots are only one to two blocks away. Parents double park to escort children into the building. Noise levels on the playground exceed reasonable standards. Community support, even among long time residents, has eroded, in particular because the applicant has only attempted in the last two weeks to communicate its goals to the neighbors.

Yet the Department of Planning and Zoning Staff recommends approval of the proposed master plan amendment and rezoning, subject to a proffer submitted by the applicant. Staff recommends in favor of the request because they believe it will have little impact on the neighborhood and

Like Hopkins House, they surely would request the maximum density and uses allowed under the RC zone. Since they also own the large lot to the north of the existing building, it is reasonable to expect that their request would be to use that lot in any expansion plan.

This situation is a prime example of the harm “spot zoning” can inflict upon a neighborhood. We oppose spot zoning in general, and in this specific case. We also believe that staff should not be supportive of a change in the 1992 Master Plan, since the design of this Plan was to protect residential neighborhoods. The consequences of land-use intensification and further loss of open space are major concerns of the neighborhood.

Hopkins House has been essential to many long-time community residents. But Hopkins House is no longer the settlement house of prior years. It now desires to become a pre-school only. When Linwood J. Oglesby, the former Hopkins House director, requested an SUP for a child care facility with 25 children in April 1988, the Inner City Civic Association, along with many of the neighbors, signed a petition supporting that request.

The SUP was granted, subject to compliance with applicable codes, ordinances and staff recommendations, as follows:

1. That the permit be granted to the applicant only or to any corporation in which the applicant has a controlling interest.
2. That the applicant obtain a certificate of occupancy and other required licenses prior to operation of the preschool.
3. That the preschool be limited to a maximum of 25 children as requested by the applicant.
4. That the preschool be operated Monday through Friday, from 7:00 A. M. to 6:00 P. M., as requested by the applicant.

It was also noted that Hopkins House “must comply with all State Health Department requirements. Must have City food handling permit. If food preparation is done on premises, must submit kitchen plans.”

because the proffer limits the effect of the RC rezoning. We submit that the damage to the neighborhood will be substantial. It is reasonable to expect that other similar properties will request and receive chances in zoning from RB to RC. Furthermore, Hopkins House has a record of not complying with requirements imposed by the Planning Commission. Why should complying with this proffer be any different, especially when the property will be more valuable with an RC zone designation?

The report says, "Although staff would ordinarily not be supportive of a change in master plan and zoning to a designation foreign to the neighborhood, staff finds the proffer to ameliorate its concern." Hopkins House has lost credibility with the neighborhood. While the proffer may satisfy staff, it does not satisfy the neighbors. If Hopkins House cannot be trusted to comply with the requirements of the existing SUP, how can they be trusted to comply with a proffer?

We also oppose the expansion of the pre-school into the neighboring property at 1218 Princess. This represents a serious loss of residential space in our neighborhood at a time when demand for housing is at an all time high. The house next door, at 1216 Princess, could also be a target.

We offer several solutions to this dilemma. One obvious solution to the second floor access problem is the installation of an elevator (at a cost far less than the \$180,000 addition/renovation), provide staff parking at a nearby lot, limit the number of children to the allowed 25 and get involved with the neighborhood. A second solution is for Hopkins House to relocate to a suitable facility in an appropriate area and provide excellent preschool services to as many children as need services. A third solution is to send children to the 6 approved programs in our zip code area, and restart community responsive programs.

Mark A. Webster  
President  
Inner City Civic Association  
March 3, 2000