

McMillan, Acquanette (Netta)

From: Carl Smith
Sent: Monday, February 6, 2023 8:46 AM
To: PublicComment-AutoResponse
Subject: Mayfield School Master Plan

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I am writing regarding the Master Plan for Mayfield Junior School. I live directly across Euclid Avenue from the main entrance to the school. I am in a high-risk COVID category and try to avoid public meetings, and for this and another personal reason it is difficult for me to attend the February 6 City Council meeting in person. If I can, I will try to speak. I attended the Planning Commission meeting on Mayfield in December, and I reviewed the documents posted on February 2, 2023.

This comment consists of background discussion and six proposals.

Background

Mayfield Junior School is a locked, fenced, and gated private institution (as far as I know it is tax-exempt) occupying 4.16 acres within an otherwise entirely residential area.

Twice every school day it brings heavy traffic to public streets in this quiet neighborhood through a drop off, pick up, and parking plan for its over 600 students, faculty, and staff. This plan relies overwhelmingly on individual private motor vehicles that line the block. To facilitate this, the city forbids public parking every school day from 7 am to 5 pm along Bellevue Drive and Waldo Avenue and from 7 to 9 am and 2 to 4 pm along Euclid Avenue.

This plan places a considerable burden on the residential neighborhood every day school is in session. It also ignores pressing concerns about air quality and climate change.

In addition, the school frequently places orange traffic cones along portions of Euclid Avenue for its purposes at other times besides 7-9 am and 2-4 pm. I do not know if this blocking off public parking space for private purposes is legal.

Nonetheless, at the Planning Committee meeting the school described itself as a "good neighbor." Besides meeting the minimum standard of obeying the law (which the possible exception of the traffic cones), this is highly debatable. It does not look out for its neighbors except as legally required to do so. Its traffic imposes a burden every school day.

Now it proposes a ten-year, four-phase plan that involves the demolition and reconstruction of virtually the entire campus and a complete upgrading of its recreation areas. This involves an increase of the floor area of buildings from 71,197 to 114,053 square feet, or approximately 60%. The demolition and construction will bring considerable additional traffic, noise, and other disruptions for a projected decade.

Although this project entails an almost total demolition and reconstruction of the existing facilities and a major expansion of built space, it has been somehow classified as a "Minor Addition," and the proposal before the Council waives an environmental review.

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Nowhere in the Master Plan is a proposal to take advantage of this almost reconstruction, as a good neighbor might be expected to do, to ease the traffic and pollution burden on the adjoining public streets by including an improved traffic plan to benefit the neighborhood when the project is done. Instead, the school strategically specifies that it does not currently intend to raise enrollment, which would require it to submit and gain approval for a new traffic plan. It does not reveal if, after this major expansion is completed, it may raise that enrollment.

The Planning Commission's endorsement includes the recommendation that approval by the City Council require "that the applicant further study the onsite circulation and ingress and egress to the underground parking garage to minimize on-street traffic conflict." This is a vague and weak condition since it does not require the school to do anything more than "study" the problem. It neither requires the school to come up with a proposal nor to explain a failure to do so. Weak as it is, this condition does not, as far as I can tell (please forgive me if I'm wrong) appear in the resolution before the City Council.

I endorse the mission served by the school and respect its right to improve its physical plant. I also appreciate the extent to which the Planning Commission, within the limits of its powers, has placed certain other conditions on approval. I regret, however, the very real limits of these powers, the very small number of occasions offered for public review, the minimal and one-sided information available to the public at those times, the waiver of environmental review, the very short period (from February 2 to February 6, which includes two weekend days) between the availability of this information and the City Council Meeting, and the omission of reference to the required study of the onsite circulation problem in the resolution.

Proposals

1. That the City Council make remote participation possible in future meetings and make relevant information, if not its precise agenda, available a longer period in advance.
2. That the City Council reconsider the environmental waiver for the Mayfield Master Plan, given its major scale. It is, in effect, a new and far larger project, not a "minor addition."
3. That the City Council find ways that public participation in the process be made more meaningful, with fuller sharing of information and more opportunity for input.
4. That the City Council explicitly include in the resolution the requirement that Mayfield further study the traffic circulation problem, and that as evidence that it has done so come up with a proposal or a detailed reason why improvement is impossible. The environmental impact of the current and alternative plans should be part of the study.
5. That, if it is illegal to place on traffic cones to block off parts of Euclid Avenue when public parking is permitted, the City Council instruct Mayfield to cease or face fines.
6. That the City Council request that Mayfield also consider how it might more fully become a good neighbor, especially by considering its proposals from the point of view of its neighbors and perhaps by sharing its resources (e.g., opening its recreational areas to the neighborhood outside of school hours) with the neighborhood.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl Smith