

Position Statement Regarding the Washington School Redevelopment

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From the Washington School Neighborhood Association.

Submitted to BVSDWatch.org August 18th, 2007 by John Gless, jgless(at)cybersafe(dot)net .

The Washington School Neighborhood Association is a large group of neighbors and friends of the Washington Elementary School building and property. This group came together to enable its collective voice to be heard by the City of Boulder and Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) when we realized that our individual voices were falling on deaf ears. Despite clear indications that the MOU process was seriously flawed, in particular that the lone remaining applicant had received the least support from the city-appointed Citizens Review Panel, the City and BVSD failed to reconsider whether the process was working effectively. Over the two-year course of the process, members of our neighborhood and community repeatedly expressed their concerns to the City and School District in every appropriate venue, including Planning Board meetings, City Council meetings, Board of Education meetings, and public neighborhood meetings. Yet our government has, to date, "stayed the course".

We are not opposed to co-housing, nor are we opposed to the redevelopment of the Washington School property. But we are opposed to the specific plan from Wonderland Hill Development Company (WHDC) due to its harmful impacts on the neighborhood, its reliance on numerous exceptions to established codes, and its lack of offsetting benefits for the neighborhood and the greater community. This proposal is not respectful of the site or of the community that has enjoyed over a century of continuous public access and use of the site.

We ask that:

- The City of Boulder inform WHDC that their proposal is unacceptable because it still does not adequately address valid concerns about neighborhood sensitivity and many other issues raised by the Planning Board and the public during preliminary reviews.
- The Boulder Valley School District consider refunding WHDC's earnest money deposit as the company has already incurred substantial costs while trying to work within government mandates.
- The MOU/RFQ/RFP process should be replaced by a more financially realistic plan that respects the School property, meets the financial goals of the District, and provides true Community Benefit. In order to achieve these goals, we suggest the following:
- The neighborhood should have direct involvement in soliciting and reviewing new proposals.
- BVSD should be more flexible in its asking price and closing terms in order to avoid compounding the impact on this neighborhood, which has already lost its elementary school.
- The City of Boulder, in light of the emphasis on small neighborhood parks contained in the new Parks and Recreation Master Plan, should consider establishing a pocket park on a portion of the site which has served public recreation needs in North Boulder for generations.
- The City of Boulder should dedicate adequate staff resources to help research and apply for outside financial resources such as Conservation Easements and Historical Rehabilitation Grants.
- The Neighborhood, City, BVSD, and a new developer must work together for a successful project. While the process that was set in motion two years ago was well-intentioned, it was almost certainly doomed to fail due to the very restrictive purchase terms and the lack of true neighborhood involvement. At any time the process could have been re-evaluated, but the various governmental entities and the developer chose to ignore obvious shortcomings. If WHDC's plan is allowed to proceed, it will forever damage our neighborhood, and it will fall far short of achieving the original community goals set by BVSD and the City of Boulder.