

Estate of Ruth H. Buchanan

4220 Nebraska Ave. NW
Washington D.C. 20016

Dear ANC3E Commissioners,

Ruth Buchanan, who lived at Under Oak until her death two years ago, is our grandmother, and we as co-trustees would like an opportunity to write to you as fiduciaries of the estate in support of the River School as the best possible purchaser of this property.

We attended the ANC3E meeting in May. When a neighbor, Anne Chrun, remarked both during the River portion of the meeting and again during the GDS portion that GDS and NPS have a “right to be there” but River does not, we decided then we’d reach out to all of you.

River has as much of a right as any entity to attend. They do wonderful work in the community that no one else is doing. We are choosing to sell to them because they, like us, see Under Oak as a piece of history. Having met their Head of School and Board chair, we feel confident that no other buyer would be so extraordinarily willing to address the direct concerns of the neighborhood that borders the property. They have the desire and intention to go above and beyond what would be required to be a great neighbor and to not only mitigate the impact but to improve the traffic situation we find in this neighborhood. Our family’s goal is to preserve the dignity and beauty of this property, and River School is the best-suited buyer to do so, honoring (and calling attention to) it’s history in their plans while giving it a new life and vibrancy.

Although we don't agree that one needs a "toehold" in ANC3E to have a right to be here, our family has that. Our cousin's niece started at the River School when she was 18 months old because she was born with only 30 percent hearing. The school literally changed her life. She is currently in the 10th grade at a mainstream school, and we are grateful to the services River School provided her in those early years.

River School has the most earnest of intentions out of any other potential buyer/developer. Other buyers would have commercial intentions for sure. The River School wants to preserve the original house and gardens, which means a lot to us and we hope it does to you, as well. Also, and this might resonate with several commissioners, they have agreed to close the 42nd street curb cut, which it is difficult to see anyone else conceding since it's currently open by right.

The River School has hired architects who understand historical properties, landscape designers, transportation specialists and outreach specialists, all in an effort to make this the most mutually beneficial project for all the neighbors. If, for example, an existing charter school was to purchase the property, or an independent school was to form a charter, our due diligence reveals they would not be beholden to the same review requirements that a private institution must follow. They would have a lot more leeway to do whatever they wanted without having to consider the neighbors, and could have a larger enrollment. Also a block of McMansions here with multiple entrances surely would not serve the cohesiveness of this property, this community or its spirit.

We understand that traffic on Nebraska is challenging, but we'd like to see you show a willingness to work

constructively with River on a solution—and indeed *with all the schools* on a solution, as one of the neighbors suggested in the ANC meeting chat room. When we heard one commissioner say that the buyer must have *no new impact*, we were deeply concerned. Our 102-year-old grandmother lived here since 1941 without making any major updates. How can any buyer meet that standard? River’s plan has an onsite queue and a serious enforcement mechanism—all of which they’ve been refining at your request, and they are preparing mitigation strategies and suggestions for solutions to pre-existing problems. We heard a lot of not-in-my-back-yard complaints about the school at the meeting, but no clear-cut expression of why this data-driven plan is objectionable or how limited additional traffic affects the neighbors. Change is hard, but River offers the most positive face of change. (We cannot help but feel strongly that the dishonest negative hyperbole contributes to a sense of panic.)

As members of one of the longest residing families in this neighborhood, who remember roller-skating on the drive decades ago, we deeply cherish Under Oak and the community we grew up in. We hope you will work with the River School to be the best community member they can be.

Best,
Helen Hilliard and Todd Traina