

BOARD OF EDUCATION HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

HATTIE MAE WHITE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT CENTER 4400 West 18th Street • Houston, Texas 77092-8501 Tel: 713-556-6121 • Fax: 713-556-6115

Harvin C. Moore Trustee, District VII

January 15, 2016

The Honorable John Culberson United States Congressman Texas, 7th District 10000 Memorial Drive, Suite 620 Houston, TX 77024

Dear Congressman Culberson,

I am writing to object, on behalf of my constituents in District VII of the Houston Independent School District (HISD), to a proposed development at 2640 Fountainview Drive by the Houston Housing Authority (HHA) that uses federal and state funds and guarantees to construct a 233 unit complex that will put new families with children into a neighborhood school that is already overcrowded, thereby displacing local families from their neighborhood school.

According to the HHA, the project is planned to include 156 studio and one bedroom apartments, and 77 two bedroom apartments, which means, according to HHA's guidelines on the number of individuals who may occupy each room, up to 387 children. The neighborhood school to which these children would be zoned is Briargrove Elementary School, which has an enrollment of 834, despite a capacity of 788 students. Clearly, there is no room for additional students at this school, and by placing families into the zone, a significant number of children will be forced to attend other schools where there is excess capacity.

I have spoken with the Chairman of the HHA, Lance Gilliam, who has confirmed that to his knowledge, the HHA never provided notice to HISD of its interest or intention of building this project and did not request any data from HISD that would be necessary in order to assess the human environmental impact of this project at this site. I have confirmed from HISD administration that they were not informed of this project. It is also my understanding from Mr. Gilliam that no other potential sites were analyzed for this project. Such an analysis would have revealed that there are numerous nearby areas where this project could be sited with far less human impact. Mr. Gilliam explained that this site was chosen because an existing \$17 million building went on the market and HHA felt it was a good deal and it met HHA's criteria as a high opportunity area.

Despite the clear lack of capacity in the neighborhood school, a constituent of mine located a document dated May 18, 2015 written by HHA as part of a required notice (which was never provided to me or other elected officials or to the school district) that stated, in part, "The City of Houston has determined that this project will have no significant impact on the human environment." I have asked HHA for the documentation behind this statement and was told they would look for it, but have not seen it. Given HHA has stated a goal of providing a good school environment for the children in its projects, then certainly the capacity, or lack thereof, in



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the neighborhood school, as well as the project's impact on the existing children in the area should have been assessed prior to the purchase of property.

HHA provided a map (attached here) showing numerous "opportunity zones" where they may build such projects. I asked HISD to overlay a map of elementary school attendance zones over the HHA map, and to include a colored circle indicating whether there is excess capacity in that school (this map is also attached). While many schools, like Briargrove, are at or above capacity, many, including several nearby this area, are not, and would have made better candidate locations for this project, had a site selection process that took human environmental impact into account, been done. All six of the nearby schools with capacity met standards under the Texas Education Agency's educational quality rating system. And those are just the nearby schools in HISD. Numerous Spring Branch ISD schools are also in adjacent qualifying opportunity zones.

This map overlaying HISD school capacity on HHA's opportunity zones took two hours for HISD staff to prepare, and is the sort of thing HISD is happy to do upon request from the general public or from a governmental entity seeking to evaluate educational impact. Had this map, or similar data, been requested at any time after HHA first identified the Fountainview property as a possible location for their project, a great deal of time and frustration could have been avoided, since the map makes very clear this is a poor choice of location given HHA's stated goals and requirements.

I have been told that the HHA often hears objections to its projects that are centered on, in the words of Mr. Gilliam, "not letting 'those' people into our neighborhood." Nothing could be further from the truth in this case. Briargrove Elementary is a very diverse school, with a non-Anglo population of 55%. This is because the attendance zone is also ethnically and economically diverse. In fact, part of the fallacy of claiming a need for subsidized housing in this area is the false belief that there is not already a great deal of low income housing in the area.

I have attached a map demonstrating the prevalence of low cost housing nearby, and it is clear that this immediate area has many units at or below, and in some cases far below, the planned rent levels in the Fountainview project. In fact, there is enormous additional low cost housing on the south side of Westheimer Road, as close as two blocks from this project. And while my understanding is that the HHA guidelines do not allow them to build a project on that side of Westheimer because that is outside the opportunity zone, it certainly must be considered as nearby and competing housing in any analysis. Overall then, there is already an very large supply of low cost housing very close to the proposed Fountainview project, which calls into serious question the reason for expending tax dollars on this project, even before considering the fact that there is literally no educational capacity in that location.

In short, Congressman, my constituents are shocked and disappointed that little to no analysis was done before making a decision to use significant tax dollars to build a project that is not



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needed by the target market of low income individuals, cannot meet the educational needs of the very people it is proposed to be built to assist, and will displace a large number of existing families from their neighborhood school. I believe that citizens and taxpayers expect a responsible analysis to be done before spending tax dollars or undertaking major projects, and that was simply not done – at all – in this case. In addition, I believe citizens do and should expect that governmental entities will coordinate with each other so that tax dollars and operations of one entity will not negate or oppose tax dollars and operations of other entities. Thank you for your efforts to assist in this matter.

Sincerely,

Harvin C. Moore

Trustee, HISD Board of Education

Attachments:

HHA Opportunity Zone Map for Greater Houston

HHA Opportunity Zone Map for Greater Houston with Overlay Provided by HISD of School Districts, Elementary School Zones and Capacities

HISD Provided Map of Average Rent Per Unit in Area Nearby Fountainview Project





