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Principal Amy Schwentor
TOPS-Seward School
2500 Franklin Avenue East
Seattle, WA 98102

City Councilmember Rob Johnson
601 Fifth Ave., Floor 2
P.O. 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Scott Kubly, Director
Seattle Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 34996
Seattle, WA 98124-4996

Nathan Torgelson, Director
Dept. of Construction and Inspections
P.O. Box 34019
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

Importance of community involvement and observance of MUP #9700309 in addressing traffic and parking issues around TOPS Seward School

To officials of Seattle Schools and the City of Seattle:

Traffic and parking patterns are difficult and worsening in the Eastlake neighborhood. The area around TOPS-Seward public school is no exception. The school was remodeled and expanded (1999) on a very constrained site with less on-site parking and less space for school bus loading and parent drop-off and pick-up of children than in most other schools. Traffic and parking patterns were supposed to get better, but they haven't. Please work with us to reverse this situation insofar as TOPS-Seward School is involved.

Remodeling and expansion of TOPS-Seward School would not have been possible if, in approving the 1997 Master Use Permit, the City of Seattle had not granted many departures from normal requirements, allowing the project to go forward with less parking and loading space than would otherwise have been required. In exchange for granting these departures, Seattle imposed strong conditions to reduce the enlarged school's traffic and parking impacts on the surrounding neighborhood.

The Eastlake Community Council is concerned to note that key requirements that were conditions for approval of TOPS Seward School's Master Use Permit have not been carried out—and that in part for that reason, the school's traffic and parking impacts on the neighborhood have increased, not diminished. Also a matter of concern is that in recent years (and in recent weeks), TOPS Seward School representatives have sought from the Seattle Department of Transportation certain changes in traffic, parking and parent and bus loading that are clearly contrary to the permit conditions.

The Eastlake Community Council requests that any changes in on-street parking, bus loading, and parent drop-off and pick-up be withdrawn and not be requested until the relevant requirements in the 1997 permit (summarized below) have been fully complied with. ECC suggests that only then should changes from these requirements be considered, and only within a comprehensive and participatory transportation

management planning process. Such a planning process unfortunately is one of the 1997 permit requirements that so far has not even remotely been complied with.

Transportation Management Plan and Program (TMP). Among the many City conditions without which 1997 Master Use Permit #9700309 would not have been approved is for a transportation management plan and program (making TOPS-Seward School the first and apparently still the only public school required to have one). Here is what the MUP requires: Page 19: “Instead of imposing a cap on the number of children at the school, the Director favors relying on the development and implementation of a Transportation Management Plan and Program to mitigate the potential negative impacts of overflow parking. The TMP shall contain provisions that address all methods needed to reduce or eliminate the number of teachers, staff and parents coming to the school in single occupant vehicles in order to minimize and reduce the negative impacts of overflow....” Page 19: “...the District shall be required by the Director to prepare a Transportation Management Program containing measures to reduce use of single occupant vehicles by drivers to the school to ensure that the demand for more parking stalls by teachers, staff and parents is **reduced** [bolding in original], thereby helping reduce overflow daytime parking which will allow more on-street parking for neighborhood residents and businesses....”

The Master Use Permit also states (p. 43) that “The School District, TOPS-Seward School, and the School Advisory Council shall mutually develop a transportation management plan (TMP) that will be implemented by the School and monitored by the School Advisory Council.” And it directs (p. 18) that the School Advisory Committee will have the following membership : “up to five members including the principal...or designated representative, up to three people from within 800 feet of the school as appointed by the Eastlake Community Council, and a non-voting Parks Department representative.” Page 31 states: “Because of the tight parking situation and the limited on-site parking, there is a need to develop a transportation management plan that will be implemented by the school and monitored by the School Advisory Council. ... The School Advisory Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the Plan, and work with the school principal and the Dept. of Parks and Recreation to mutually achieve solutions to problems that may arise.”

The Master Use Permit (p. 43) further requires: “The TMP should develop procedures that offer incentives for staff and parents to reduce the number of single-occupant vehicles coming to the school during school hours as well as measures to mitigate impacts from evening and weekend special events. Specific targets shall be developed for each of the first 5 years of the school’s operation after re-opening by setting a goal of an increasingly greater number of teachers, parents, and volunteers coming to the school via means other than by single occupant vehicles (SOV). On-site spaces for evening spaces should be provided on an incentive or reward basis, such as only cars with two families may park in the on-site lot. The plan should also specifically address the parent drop-off/pick-up operation, developing information handouts for parents specifying the accepted locations for this function.”

Concern that the TMP process would not be meaningful was one basis for the Eastlake Community Council’s 1997 appeal of the MUP decision. The City Hearing Examiner responded (MUP-97043-W-DD, p. 11) as follows: “The appellant’s skepticism regarding the likely effectiveness of the required TMP is understandable. Not only is there no data to indicate how existing TMPs affecting the Eastlake neighborhood have worked, the Director provided no analysis of examples as to what TMP trip reduction methods might effectively be utilized here, or what results might realistically be anticipated. Instead, the Director leaves the identification of likely means and methods of reducing demand and the analysis of potential effectiveness to the School Advisory Committee....”

Although the Hearing Examiner did not find the lax oversight of the TMP process contemplated by the Department of Construction and Land Use to be “clearly erroneous”, she did add the following requirement to the Master Use Permit, that the Department [now the Department of Construction and Inspections] “shall assist the participants in the development of the TMP by providing information about TMP strategies and helping to set up meetings. Before the TMP can be implemented, DCLU must approve it and ensure that it has the potential to be both fair and effective. Once approved, the TMP becomes a condition of approval and can be enforced through the same means as other transportation management plans.”

Despite the Hearing Examiner’s requirement that DCLU/DCI take a stronger role (and exceeding the depths even of ECC’s originally low expectations for the TMP process), it appears that the TOPS Seward School Transportation Management Plan and Program that the 1997 MUP requires was never even begun. Nor has the School Advisory Council been formed that was to provide community involvement in addressing traffic and parking issues around the school. Surely the City and the School District can do better than this.

Bus loading. The 1997 MUP requires the following regarding school bus loading. Page 15: “Maintain the bus loading as it is today with buses loading and dropping off children on E. Louisa Street, conduct bus loading/loading for disabled on Boylston....” Page 16: “Staging children for afternoon pick-up by buses should be done in the new lunchroom area. Children to be picked [up] by parents must go to the gym area and wait in the courtyard area for pick-up or walk to the approved pick-up areas on Roanoke and Louisa.”

For a brief period in 2005 and without community involvement, this provision for bus loading was dramatically departed from (by prohibiting public parking on two blocks of Roanoke Street and Franklin Avenue E.) and then it was largely restored after community intervention. Although school bus loading largely occurs on E. Louisa St., ECC understands that there is a recent proposal to move some of it to Boylston Avenue East in order to create space on E. Louisa St. for parent drop-off and pick-up areas, at a possible sacrifice of general public parking on both streets. As quoted above, the Master Use Permit requires bus loading to be on E. Louisa St.; and as shown below, it does not allow parent drop-off or pick-up anywhere on E. Louisa Street. ECC requests that the City honor the meaning of its own Master Use Permit. ECC also suggests that any request to diverge from a condition in the Master Use Permit not be considered except within the transportation management plan and program process (which we hope will begin soon).

Parent pick-up and drop-off of children. The 1997 Master Use Permit requires the following conditions regarding parent drop-off and pick-up of children. Page 14: “Parent drop-off and pick-up of children should be primarily from within the new parking area accessed off of E. Roanoke Street. Page 16 [letters added by ECC for clarity]: “Additional parent pick-up and drop-off should be limited to: [a] on Roanoke west of the east ROW line of Franklin Avenue E.; [and] [b] on Boylston Avenue.”

Important note: the 1997 Master Use Permit listed the following possible pick-up and drop-off location which was later invalidated: “[c] E. Louisa Street only where a pullout could be provided at end of Franklin Ave. E.” The Seattle Hearing Examiner (MUP-97043-W-DD, p. 12, and explained more fully in the paragraph below) subsequently modified the Master Use Permit to remove this item (c), with the result that the City and the School District cannot allow any parent pick-up or drop-off on any part of the blocks of E. Louisa St. between Eastlake Avenue and Boylston Avenue E.

Page 16 of the Master Use Permit goes on as follows: “All of these locations for parent drop-off and pick-up need to have refinements made to enhance the safety of the children. These measures should include at least the following items: signage should be placed along the first block east of Boylston on E. Roanoke Street to prohibit parent drop-off and pick-up on the first block off of Boylston; school policy and procedures must include written instructions to parents with a map of the acceptable loading locations; an enhanced pick-up and drop-off area should also be developed at the south end of Franklin in the Louisa ROW.” In a 1997 decision (MUP-97043-W-DD, p. 12) cited in the previous paragraph, the Seattle Hearing Examiner modified the City’s Master Use Permit by deleting the condition that would have required designation of drop-off/pick-up zones at the north and south ends of the 2500 block of Franklin Avenue E. (the block of Franklin abutting the school, a blocks that ends at Louisa St. and Roanoke St.).

On-street parking for the general public. The 1997 Master Use Permit requires the following conditions regarding on-street parking for the general public. Page 15: “General public parking is provided on the north side of E. Louisa St., except during a.m./p.m. bus loading/unloading periods.... Parking on Boylston Avenue E. will remain as is.”

Note that the Master Use Permit allows drop-off/pick-up on Boylston Ave. E. but not the conversion of public parking places to restricted loading zones. As just quoted, p. 15 says that “Parking on Boylston Avenue will remain as is.” However, as quoted three paragraphs above, p. 16 says that “Additional parent pick-up and drop-off should be limited to: ... [b] on Boylston Avenue.” Clearly, under the Master Use Permit, the spaces on Boylston Avenue E. can be used for either public parking or parent drop-off/pick-up, but the City cannot restrict them to just one of these uses. If a space is available, it can used either for parking or for parent drop-off/pick-up. If there is a proposal to change this provision of the Master Use Permit, ECC requests that it not be done by the City unilaterally, but rather be brought to the transportation management plan and program process that has not yet begun.

Conclusion. The traffic, parking, and loading patterns around TOPS-Seward School affect the school, the Eastlake community, and Seattle at large. The Eastlake Community Council wishes to work with TOPS-Seward School, the School District, the Department of Construction and Inspections, the Seattle Department of Transportation, and the City Council to improve these patterns, and especially to ensure better observance by the City agencies and School District of the requirements in the school’s 1997 MUP as stated above.

ECC especially hopes that progress will be made soon in beginning the inclusive public process of developing a Transportation Management Plan and Program as overseen by the Department of Construction and Inspections—a process that has been required by the Master Use Permit since 1997. To do otherwise would be to address traffic, parking, and loading issues piecemeal and outside the mandatory regulatory framework; it would not solve problems but would make them worse. This opportunity is a teachable moment that will benefit students, staff, parents, agencies, and the community.

Sincerely,



Chris Leman (206) 322-5463
President, Eastlake Community Council
info@eastlakeseattle.org; <http://eastlakeseattle.org>