

Freire Charter School did not follow State Dept. of Education Rules re: Major Modification

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Fri 6/12/2015 3:34 PM

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Below is my final Online Comment regarding Freire Charter School:

This has been a long and difficult seven-month struggle for me and many of my neighbors, in our efforts to be heard and responded to by CSAC and the State Department of Education. I, and many others opposed to the location of Freire in our small neighborhood, have submitted many online and US mail comments; we have also spoken at several CSAC Public Hearings; so far, to no avail.

It is my hope that CSAC, DOE, and the State Board of Education will pay careful attention to our neighborhood's plea to revoke or delay Freire's Charter due to non-compliance with the City of Wilmington's Zoning Code, as well as with Charter School regulations. (Our issues re: the Zoning Code are being handled by our legal counsel, Richard Abbott, Esq.)

We have been requesting that the Department of Education require Freire to submit a Request for a Major Modification to their Charter (BASED ON CHANGE OF LOCATION) since the end of last year. This Request should be reviewed CSAC, DOE, and the State Board Of Education. On December 28, 2014 a letter was sent to Secretary Mark Murphy by our Neighborhood Association President, Ben Cohen. That letter was never answered. Nor were letters and requests at CSAC Public Hearings by several neighbors.

This past Monday, I again made this request at the CSAC Final Public Hearing. I also submitted paper copies of all the oral testimony, online comments, and exhibits that our neighbors and local elected officials have provided to CSAC since February 2015. In addition to a copy for CSAC, I submitted a hard copy for the State Board of Education. That paper testimony fills a 2-inch loose leaf binder.

Here is a brief summary of why we are asking for this Major Modification Request:

Freire's original Charter specified that they would be in a "Flagship" Building at 920 French Street, and everything from square footage to programs was written around that premise in their Charter application. Apparently, a Public Hearing was held about that location, which is more than 8 blocks from our neighborhood, but we had never heard about it. Then, Freire was rejected for that location, and chose our neighborhood. We were never given the opportunity to attend a Public Hearing or object to the location before CSAC made a decision.

There is supposed to be Community Representation on the Charter School's Board. There are no members of this neighborhood on the Board. There are only 5 Freire Board members, none of whom have attended any CSAC or School Board meetings, or responded to neighbors' letters, until just this past Monday. Freire refers to "community involvement," but it has been non-existent.

On the Department of Education's Website you will find the "Delaware DOE Charter School Modification Application" form. That document clearly states and requires that Charters submit a Request for a Major Modification due to Change of Location. This was actually required of the Design Lab Charter, but not of Freire.

Section H-2 of that form requests information about changes in siting; space availability; cost differences; safety; co-locating of programs, etc. I can't fully address all of those topics in detail here. They should have been addressed in a Public Hearing re: the appropriate Major Modification Request that was never submitted by Freire.

Here are some of the changes that have resulted from the Change in Location:

The school has a single small entrance on a narrow, one-way street.

Traffic is already congested, and child safety will be a concern.

There is no transportation plan; buses cannot fit down our small street. Freire relies on DART dropping students off blocks away from the school.

There is insufficient parking, as required by City Code.

The school now has \$2 million dollars in loans (Barclay's Bank and McConnell/Johnson developers) and a \$800,000 Line of Credit (Barclay's Bank).

There is no longer a Gym as specified in the original application.

There is no longer a Physical Education program or teacher, till year #3.

There is no longer a cafeteria -- but a lunch room and boxed lunches, instead.

There is a business located on the 2nd floor (Freire will be on the 1st and 3rd floors). They will be sharing an entrance, an elevator and a staircase.

There is no longer a Head of School; instead, there are two "Academic Heads," each with only 4 years of teaching experience, and none in leading a school.

Once again, I urge CSAC, the Delaware Department of Education, and the State Board of Education to revoke or delay Freire's Charter.

Sincerely,

Marilyn J. "Lyn") Doto