

Testimony, September 29, 2016
Washington Episcopal Day School Hearing
Marnie Shaul, Vice-President, Town of Somerset Council

Dear Chairman Anderson and Members of the Planning Board,

I am Marnie Shaul, Vice-President of the Somerset Town Council, and I am speaking in favor of having both gates at the Washington Episcopal School (WES) open during school operating hours and in favor of having the school and the developer of the age restricted multi-family building support a traffic light at Landy Lane.

Nearly 10 years ago the Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights and neighboring communities like Somerset negotiated in good faith with the Washington Episcopal School and the multi-family building developer to accommodate their needs for building and the communities' needs for traffic management and pedestrian safety. I thought we reached a good agreement then: the school would keep its gates open on both River Road at Landy Lane and Little Falls Parkway and the school and developer would support a traffic light at Landy Lane.

It is very disappointing to me that over time, the school decided to close the River Road/Landy Lane gate and is asking not to open it going forward. Even without a traffic light, a 2008 traffic study sponsored by the school showed that about 25% of cars used the River Road/Landy Lane entrance. The school's 2016 traffic study reconfirmed these results. Closing the Landy Lane gate means that all school traffic is funneled past two residential communities: Somerset and Kenwood. This encourages cut-through traffic on Dorset in both communities, and if WES doubles or more in size, we can expect increased traffic on our residential streets. In contrast River Road is a state highway and provides commercial access to the school. In addition, without opening the Landy Lane gate, it is less likely that SHA will approve a traffic light.

I believe that a traffic light is needed at River and Landy Lane for safety. Right now, pedestrians have to cross 5 busy traffic lanes and the cross walk is poorly marked. Pedestrians have been injured there. Somerset youngsters often bike to Westland Middle School; a traffic light would improve safety for our children. Finally, with a new 121-unit senior high rise, there will be more cars attempting to exit onto River Road. If it is difficult to make a left turn, cars will likely turn right and cut through our neighborhoods.

A local government person once told me "citizens have to continue to fight on the same issues over and over again, while developers have to win only once". I would very much like to see the agreement that was reached in 2007 guide future development on the WES site.