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## JPDS gets nod for plan to add middle school

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Plans to add seventh and eighth grades to the Jewish Primary Day School's Brightwood campus breezed through the zoning approval process last month without community opposition.

The school is seeking permission to boost its maximum enrollment from 300 to 350 and to expand its building to accommodate the growth. Last spring the school received a \$20 million donation to help fund the expansion, which is expected to be in place by the 2018-19 school year.

In an interview, head of school Naomi Reem said that the school currently offers pre-K through sixth grade while most local elementary programs stop at grade five and middle schools begin at grade six. This leaves parents struggling to decide whether to pull out their students after fifth grade or to start them a year late in another middle school.

After the expansion, said Reem, "they can go to middle school in the community that they love, that they've been part of since they were 5 years old."

The changes affect only the campus at 16th Street and Fort Stevens Drive NW, where students begin in the second grade. Younger students are housed in a separate campus about a mile south, at 4715 16th St. NW, which

isn't slated for any changes.

Private school expansions are often controversial affairs in D.C. neighborhoods, with nearby residents worried about extra noise, density and traffic.

But the Jewish Primary Day School won letters of support from the Shepherd Park Citizens Association, the Brightwood Community Association, the 16th Street Heights Civic Association and these communities' advisory neighborhood commission, ANC 4A.

The support did not go unnoticed at the Board of Zoning Adjustment's Jan. 12 hearing.

"It's kind of unusual to get an enrollment cap changed before the BZA without people raising concerns, either from the ANC or the immediate neighbors or what have you," board member Peter May told school officials. "So whatever you did to make this work, you've done very well and it's commendable."

Asked in the interview what the trick was to avoiding opposition, Reem responded: "There's no trick — it's a lot of hard work. ... We really work hard in minimizing the impact to the neighborhood, and our neighbors recognize that."

To mitigate traffic concerns, Jewish Primary encourages carpooling and has already provided 40 percent subsidies for students who ride buses to school. Transportation consultant Nicole White recently told residents that as of last spring, 48 percent of the current student body came by bus, 25 percent in carpools and 27 percent were driven alone. Additionally, the school will provide 25 off-site parking spaces for staff at a Chevy Chase, Md., synagogue.

At the zoning board hearing, ANC 4A commissioner Dave Wilson praised both the bus subsidies and the off-site parking spaces. "We're in agreement that they are doing all the right things to minimize the impact of traffic on the neighborhood," he testified.

As part of Jewish Primary's zoning approval, only a certain number of average daily vehicle trips are allowed for the campus, and the school must implement more stringent transportation demand management strategies if those limits are exceeded.

In addition to the transportation and enrollment matters, the school received permission to construct a three-story addition on the east side of the existing building; to tear down a multipurpose room on the south end of the existing building to construct a regulation gym with a playing field on its roof; to build a small addition and third floor on the north side of the existing building; and to reconstruct the center of the building to create a chapel with an entrance to 16th Street.

Reem, the head of school, said officials are currently in the midst of a \$500,000 fundraising campaign to cover most remaining costs of the expansion. The school hopes to break ground in June 2017, with construction lasting 14 months.

"We are excited and we are looking forward to staying in the community for a very long time," she said.

*Current staff contributed to this report.*