

Late Backup

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Austin Independent School District

Meria Joel Carstarphen, Ed.D.
Superintendent

November 4, 2013

The Honorable Lee Leffingwell, Mayor, City of Austin and
The Honorable Members of the City of Austin City Council
P. O. Box 1088
Austin, TX 78767

Re: Zoning Case C-14-2013-0060 – Bluff Springs Food Mart

Dear Mayor Leffingwell and Council Members,

The community of Dove Springs in Austin, Texas has traditionally suffered from a number of social and socioeconomic challenges, including the highest rate of childhood obesity in the City of Austin. Additionally, various schools in the Dove Springs community continue to be challenged by such issues as lower rates of student attendance and higher rates of unexcused absences, both of which affect the academic outcomes of the students of Dove Springs. Most recently the community has suffered extensively due to flooding that led to displacement of families from their homes and community.

As I saw this weekend with Mayor Leffingwell and Chief of Police Acevedo, the residents of Dove Springs in AISD District 2 are organizing themselves to improve and rebuild their community. Since my tenure as Superintendent over the past four years, I have witnessed further community efforts to promote the health and wellbeing of students in that community through such practices as physical exercise and healthy eating habits. Residents of Dove Springs are currently concerned about the attempts of businesses that might be established in their community that might sell alcohol and unhealthy food options near school crossing zones and along routes walked by elementary school students.

Specifically, AISD's Langford Elementary School is home to nearly 900 students, a vibrant neighborhood institution, and a hub of community activity. As the District has noted consistently in the past, the sale of alcohol near schools within the District is not in the best interest of its students. Concerning the above-referenced zoning request that locates the sale of alcohol and "junk food" 1200 feet from Langford Elementary School, if the subject location had been just a little closer, the law would have required the City to formally ask for the District's position on the matter. The District's practice of many years would have been to oppose the zoning request. The District's position is derived from the belief that alcohol sales near schools are not conducive to a positive and safe learning environment. It is the prerogative of the City of Austin to exercise discretionary zoning authority as "a power granted to municipalities by the State in order to promote public health, safety, morals, or general welfare, and to protect and preserve places and areas of historical, cultural, or architectural importance and significance". I fully understand that the City must comply with existing law, and ask that the impact of alcohol sales near schools like Langford and city parks like Kendra Page Park be considered to the extent the law allows.

Sincerely,


Meria Joel Carstarphen

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