

Oakton Neighbors Oppose Regional Distribution Warehouse in Residential Zone

The Girls Scouts of the Nations Capital have applied for a Special Exception zoning approval at the Camp Crowell location in Oakton, VA to increase camper numbers and to construct a 6,000 square foot corrugated metal warehouse, over twenty six feet in height, with an approximate footprint of 60' x 100' which would serve nine camps and facilities across three states and the District of Columbia.

The Girl Scout organization is one that provides a valuable service to girls and to our society at large, and their mission is well supported by their Camp Crowell neighbors. Camp Crowell and the nearby residents have operated for many years on a basis of collegial collaboration. However, the Girl Scout organization has now set about changing the residential zoning status shared by their neighbors without regard to the impact on them.

Camp Crowell is a traditional Girl Scout camp operating under a Special Exception approval on a nearly sixty-eight acre site in Oakton. Private homes surround the camp. The campsite and the surrounding neighborhoods are zoned "R-E" residential, where single family residences are permitted and certain specific compatible uses (like schools and places of worship) may be allowed under a Special Exception. Warehouses are explicitly prohibited in the RE zone under the local regulations. The Girl Scouts have described the proposed structure in their application as an accessory shed to support Camp Crowell activity, but they have admitted that it is in fact planned as a regional warehouse, maintenance, storage and distribution operation, separate from the camp itself, with employees, delivery trucks, office space, maintenance area, and a large parking lot. It is intended to replace an existing warehouse facility located in an industrial zone where the lease is shortly to expire. Although other warehouse space is available to lease in nearby industrial zones, the Girl Scouts insist on building the replacement warehouse facility in residentially zoned Camp Crowell.

Placing a regional distribution warehouse, an industrial zone operation, in the midst of a residential zone would have a significantly negative impact on property values resulting in the erosion of the tax base for an economically strong, and hence important, portion of Fairfax County and Northern Virginia. Zoning law is designed to uphold and protect land use. The reason sound land use, planning and zoning, are so important is to sustain a healthy economic base for residents and businesses. Co-mingling industrial use in a residential area would defeat the intent and purpose of zoning law.

Again, the Girl Scouts serve an important and valuable mission in support of girls. The integrity and value of their mission is not the subject of this Special Exception Application, however. While they may rely upon support for their organizational mission as a way to gain permission to build an industrial warehouse in a residential

area, “who” they are is not the real issue. The scope of their proposed activity is the real issue. A regional distribution warehouse operation is not compatible with a residential neighborhood, and even the Girl Scouts admit that it is not compatible with the girls’ camping activities. In addition, the Girl Scouts have presented their own economic difficulties as a reason why this application should be approved, but the economics of the applicant are not the responsibility of the County, nor of the surrounding neighbors. The surrounding neighborhood would suffer a real blow to its residential character, safety, and peace and quiet resulting in significant property de-valuation if a regional warehouse operated here and accessed the local no outlet streets. If industrial uses are allowed to infiltrate residential neighborhoods contrary to zoning regulations, no one will feel secure investing in Fairfax County real estate, and the County’s tax base and economic stability will be jeopardized. The zoning laws protect the stability of the County and its citizens, and they apply to everyone – even to the Girl Scouts.

Please keep Camp Crowell and the surrounding neighborhoods zoned R-E, both in name and reality, by prohibiting the construction of a regional distribution warehouse center in its midst. Please consider the lasting devastation to a green space and natural setting that will occur if this huge metal construction and the associated traffic and commerce are allowed to go forward. Please consider the destruction of a residential quality of life in the Oakton community, and the associated loss of tax base and a sustainable economy, if the Girl Scouts are permitted to build a regional distribution warehouse in an improper location because of “who” they are or because they cite economic difficulties.

The Girl Scout mission is important and valued in our society. Zoning laws are in place to ensure that planned land usage can support and sustain a strong and viable community. Without a healthy community to operate within, the Girl Scout mission will face challenges far greater than locating a regional distribution warehouse. By maintaining the R-E zoning standards, and preventing the construction of this regional distribution warehouse, both the quality of life in Oakton for residents and the long-term outlook for the Girl Scouts to deliver their mission, are best served.