



December 2, 2012

Dear Fellow East Siders:

The Education Committee met this past Wednesday night to discuss federally-funded programs and proposed changes at the Martin Luther King Elementary School. Two weeks ago, the original King application could not move forward because the faculty failed to support it in sufficient numbers. In a surprising development, the school revised its application and submitted it to the School Board on Monday night as described in this [Newspaper Article](#). Under the new application, the King School would remain, but the school's current principal, vice principal and several teachers would leave next year to start a new charter school. If implemented, this proposal would disrupt King next year, and parents of children currently enrolled at the school are worried about the future. While I support the concept of parental choice, I am concerned about how the School Department's encouragement of charter schools has impacted our neighborhood and this school, and I will continue to advocate for a strong neighborhood school at King.

The Education Committee also heard a presentation from the School Department about its \$58 million federal budget. The School Department endeavors to integrate these funds, which carry various restrictions, as smoothly as possible into the rest of the budget. As a result, anticipated cuts in federal programs for next year could have an impact on all of our public schools, at a time when the City's contribution is unlikely to increase much if at all due to our own budgetary stresses. In this framework, we must think carefully before authorizing expensive new programs. For example, the School Board voted on Monday night to "convert" the Spaziano school to "in-district" charter status, a move the Finance Department estimated will cost the rest of the District as much as \$2.9 million annually for the approximately 650 children who currently attend the school. It is not clear whether the school will receive the full benefit of this increase, as it will become directly responsible for providing services (such as food, transportation and human resources management) that are currently handled at the District level.

This past Thursday, the Ways and Means Committee deferred further review of the 257 Thayer Street tax agreement. At a November 20 hearing (described in this [Newspaper Article](#)), I questioned the Tax Assessor about the basis for the \$10.5- \$13.5 million tax valuation that supported the proposed agreement. He stated that he used a pro forma financial statement the developer submitted to the City, which we reviewed at the hearing. This pro forma calculated the tax valuation by multiplying expected revenue. It pegged that revenue to an expected rent per tenant per month of \$850. I stated that this figure is significantly inadequate for a luxury apartment in the heart of Thayer Street, including furniture, utilities, TV and Internet and numerous other amenities. As a result, the proposed agreement would yield a significant tax subsidy for the developer. I oppose such a subsidy, because it would (1) harm the City's finances, (2) demoralize taxpayers currently paying the full rate and (3) disrupt the current rental market by giving the developer an unfair competitive advantage. In the meantime, the administration stated that it would require the developer to sponsor a construction apprenticeship program that the developer opposed. Unless and until these two issues are resolved, the agreement will not be approved by the City Council.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Samuel D. Zurier'.