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Bainbridge Island, WA 98110

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Joshua Machen  
City of Bainbridge Island  
280 Madison Ave North  
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing in support of the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) requested by **Madrona School** for the property at **11478 North Madison Avenue NE** (aka Lowery Farm). My name is Victor Cheng. My three children and I have resided on Bainbridge Island for the past six years. During this time, one or more of my children have attended Madrona school. In addition, our former home was located one block away from Lowery Farm on Kallgren Road. I've driven, walked, or biked by the Lowery Farm location several times a day for several years. I know the area well. With this perspective in mind, I feel granting Madrona School a Conditional Use Permit makes sense for three key reasons.

First, the permit furthers Bainbridge Island's ability to attract and retain families with school age children to the island. The island already has a reputation as a "great place to raise kids". The permit helps sustain that reputation over time.

Families find Bainbridge Island's public and private schools attractive. Our small community offers both nationally recognized public schools and broad selection of private schools. Over the last decade, I've visited and toured nearly 20 schools in multiple cities. I have discovered it's extremely unusual for a community of only 20,000 residents to have private schools offering Catholic, Montessori, Carden, and Waldorf curriculums. Such diversity of private schools is more commonly found in communities with a population of 500,000 - 1,000,000 residents.

(For example, San Francisco and San Jose have a combined population of nearly two million residents, but only two Waldorf schools. That's one Waldorf school per one million residents.). Bainbridge Island offers new and existing families a small town experience with the educational options more typical of a mid-size city. This is Bainbridge Island's unique advantage in the Pacific Northwest.

As a Waldorf school, Madrona differs quite significantly from the other schools on the island. It offers a type of education not easily found elsewhere. Let me explain. Waldorf is an educational curriculum and philosophy that de-emphasizes technology, focuses on students learning in natural environments, and often teaches by referring to rhythms found in

nature. Because this philosophy is so unique, the school attracts parents to the island that specifically seek out this type of educational experience for their children.

Six years ago, we considered moving to one of several major metropolitan areas. In looking at the Seattle metro area, we selected Bainbridge Island primarily because of Madrona school. Having had previous experience with Waldorf education, we were delighted to find it on Bainbridge. If Madrona school were not here, my family and I would not be living on Bainbridge today. My family is not unique. In welcoming new families to Madrona school, I hear the same story over and over again. These families came to Bainbridge specifically for its Waldorf school.

Second, Madrona School has a track record of being a responsive and conscientious neighbor. One of the principles of a Waldorf education is to teach children how to be part of a community. The school's administrative leadership practices what its teachers teach. The school currently leases classroom space from, and co-exists well with, Eagle Harbor Congregational Church. When concerns have come up from the church, the school administration and the entire community have addressed them. As a parent, I receive weekly communication from the school usually related to school events. Occasionally, I am informed of something we as a community need to do to address a request from the church or other community members. I do my part and I know other parents do too.

For example, back in July concerns were raised at a public hearing about street parking at the Lowery Farm location. The school's leadership developed a proactive short and long-term traffic, parking, and lighting plan to address these concerns. At a recent all school event held at the Lowery Farm location, not a single car was parked on the shoulder of Madison Ave or Windsong Loop. A new on and off site event traffic flow plan was developed by the school. Offsite overflow parking and shuttle service was available and on stand-by if needed (it wasn't). All plans were communicated to parents and school visitors for this event. The event went extremely well with no negative impact on the Rolling Bay community. This is reflective of how the school operates within the broader Bainbridge Island community.

It's also useful to remember that Madrona school is currently located at the western end of Winslow — on the Southwest corner of the Madison Avenue South and Winslow Avenue intersection. This is arguably the busiest stop-sign controlled intersection on the entire island. Given the school can manage to not cause traffic or parking problems at its current location, I am confident it can address any current or future concerns at Lowery Farm.

Finally, Madrona's educational philosophy and development plans are in alignment with protecting the natural open space of the Lowery Farm property. Waldorf education is based in part on the principles of nature. Every week, children in kindergarten cut their own fruits and vegetables, make their own soup, and bake their own bread. In addition to learning traditional academic subjects, older children even learn how to knit their own clothing

items. The educational and facilities philosophy is to keep things in as close to a natural state as possible. The school's current playground doesn't have metal benches, bleachers, or plastic picnic tables. Instead it has tree stumps students use for sitting outdoors. There isn't a metal jungle gym. Instead, there's a big tree with a ladder tied to it. The school doesn't do this because it has to. It does so because it wants to.

While the school is required to keep 92.5% of the property as open space (far more open space than if the property was built as a sub-division), it would gladly do so even if were not required. The school will be keeping all of the large trees on the property, because it's both good for the community, the students, and is consistent with the Waldorf educational philosophy. I believe this philosophy will be quite compatible with needs of Rolling Bay residents and the broader Bainbridge Island community.

In closing, I urge you to approve the Conditional Use Permit for Madrona school. By doing so, you would allow Bainbridge Island to continue to attract and retain families with school age children. Residents of Rolling Bay will find Madrona school to be a conscientious neighbor and member of the community. Finally, the school's nature focused educational philosophy and property usage plans would fit in well with the current forested look of North Madison Avenue. I am confident that approval of a conditional use permit will be a net benefit for Bainbridge Island and all key constituents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victor Cheng", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Victor Cheng