

Friends Day School for Ecological Life Program Statement

There are many vital issues to assess in regard to the design proposal for the Friends Day School for Ecological Life. First, the program has been divided into three zones: Elementary, Cafeteria and Motor Room, and Administration and Preschool. The new buildings have been placed on the south side of the available parcel. This serves two purposes: first, the new buildings would not encroach the Meeting House and disrupt its entry procession on the north side, and to build them as far from 610, and its noise pollution, as possible. The buildings are aligned on a north –south axis, which echoes the land’s original one-acre north-south elongated divisions. By subdividing the program, the new buildings are small in scale much like the cottages of the existing residential neighborhood in which the site rests. Being smaller than the Meeting House was also an important consideration, so as not to disturb its hierarchal position in the site.

The existing Sunday School building has been removed. Its current location is a distraction from the procession into the Meeting House. The new buildings form a courtyard, which acts to roughly frame an axis to the main gathering space inside the Meeting House. Looking out from the meeting space one can view the entire courtyard. The Live Oak Friends Meeting has stressed the important role of natural and horticultural education in their society. Therefore, all the existing trees have been kept intact with new vegetation being planted as well. The existing parking for the Meeting House has remained for use by the new school. Since, the Meeting House and the new school will be occupied at different hours, this should be a sufficient solution. On the south end of the property, a drop-off has been added for the school. The drop-off is attached to the

administration area to permit ample supervision of the children upon arrival and departure.

The plans of the new buildings are in contrast to the orthogonal plan of the Meeting House. From the exterior, the buildings appear chaotic and unprogrammed. However, upon entry one sees a simple underlying order of structure and circulation. The interior circulation is orthogonal, running north to south, and parallel to the exterior circulation of the courtyard. This notion of an unordered exterior with a disciplined interior acts as a metaphor for the Live Oak Friends meetings as well as for the Montessori pedagogy. The Live Oak Friends meetings are “unorganized” meetings with no minister, pastor or leader. Any member is free to speak out at any time. This seems chaotic on the surface, but in fact it is quite ordered and quite effective as shown in the longevity of Quakerism. The “untraditional” teachings methods of Montessori also appear chaotic on the surface. There are no desks facing the teacher at the front of the classroom, who is giving lectures upon which the children will be tested later. Yet, it is also a very organized and effective method of teaching. Each child has his/her organizer containing his/her charts on which lessons are being completed. The classrooms have pockets or niches where the manipulatives for each subject are kept.

As outlined in the program, the new school will also attempt to respond to the ecology of the site. To achieve a strong relationship with nature the interior will be brought as close to the courtyard and its vegetation as allowed. The low flood plane is a substantial obstacle of the site. By applying various porous materials like the gravel in the existing parking lot, rainwater will be allowed to absorb more naturally and efficiently than with a concrete alternative. Also, an endeavor to collect the rainwater

from the sloping roofs and transport it to the sunken courtyard will further help solve this problem of flooding. An ecological response to the heat of the Texas sun is large roof overhangs on the south facades, as well as vertical fins on the east and west facades. The fins are detached from the windows and rest on pivots fastened in the ground. The fins are lightweight and can be mechanically operated by the children. Incorporating these responses into the program will yield a convincing Ecological Day School for the Live Oak Friends.