



# CONSORTIUM OF UNIVERSITIES

## OF THE WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA

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September 27, 2006

Ms. Carol Mitten  
Chair  
Zoning Commission  
District of Columbia Office of Zoning  
441 4<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Suite 210 South  
Washington, DC 20001

### ZONING COMMISSION

CASE No. 06-11

EXHIBIT No. 165

Re: The George Washington University Campus Plan 2006-2025,  
Zoning Case Nos. 06-11, 06-12

The purpose of this letter is to provide comments by the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area in support of the above titled proposed case.

The Consortium of Universities represents the major institutions of higher education in the greater Washington region. Twelve of its 15 members have main campuses in the District of Columbia. While The George Washington University campus plan is specific to that university, some of the principles under discussion in the plan could have implications for the campus plan process and therefore could impact plans at American University, The Catholic University of America, the Corcoran College of Art + Design, Gallaudet University, Georgetown University, Howard University, Southeastern University, and Trinity University.

On behalf of these institutions, the Consortium of Universities supports the concept of flexible planning that gives each campus the greatest opportunity to develop buildings and physical space in a way that meets the academic and administrative needs of the university while remaining mindful of campus impacts on the surrounding communities. That said, there are certain principles that apply to all campuses and should be taken under advisement as the Zoning Commission reviews GW's campus plan.

#### *Campus building placement and selection are often part of a broader academic mission*

It has been suggested that GW should abandon its efforts to expand "up not out" in favor of a new plan that would expand new programs to "satellite campuses." While possible, the placement of undergraduate programs in facilities distant from the main campus has been exceedingly rare (if ever) done in the District of Columbia. There are important reasons to keep undergraduate programs "close to home." First, contiguity between ALL undergraduate programs to enable easy multidisciplinary studies is important, particularly for undergraduates who are still mulling over their academic options. Second, many of GW's most popular programs deal with government and public policy. The Foggy Bottom campus, with its close proximity to the White House, presents an attractive option for students who are interested in government. The symbolic importance of studying the federal government within blocks of the seat of the President of the United States cannot be over-emphasized.

For those D.C. campuses that have opened satellite campuses, in general, the new campuses have been placed separate and apart from the Main Campus for historic reasons or academic ones. The

most famous academic placement of a campus is the Georgetown University Law School. The placement of the law school proximate to the Supreme Court established the same powerful symbolism for the GU program as has been established by the placement of Foggy Bottom's undergraduate programs near the White House. In addition, the Law School serves only graduate students who rely less on campus services and are less likely to include multidisciplinary students. Thus, their remote placement does not as directly impact their academic experience.

Other D.C. satellite campuses have been placed almost exclusively for historic reason where a new campus became available and the university secured it as a university asset rather than the university planning to physically move a program to a new locality, as was the case with GU Law. Examples of such "historic" satellite campuses include the Howard Divinity School in Ward 5, the Howard University Law School in Ward 3, American University, Tenleytown Campus in Ward 3, the American University Law School in Ward 3<sup>1</sup> and GW's Mount Vernon Campus in Ward 3.<sup>2</sup>

*Interfering with decisions with academic underpinnings could put the Commission at odds with the D.C. Court of Appeals*

In 2003, Georgetown University challenged the Board of Zoning Adjustment's position on its campus plan. In *Presidents and Directors of Georgetown College v District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment*, the court warned "the Board has involved itself in matters outside its expertise and has intruded to an impermissible degree within the management prerogatives of the University. Accordingly, we vacate the Board's order . . ." (837 A.2d 58 D.C. 2003). What could be more inimical to the "management prerogative" of the university than where it places its academic programs? It would seem that as long as the general principal as established in the Zoning Regulations is met, that the Commission should not tell a university where specifically to educate its students.<sup>3</sup> "

*Campus building placement and selection often has administrative implications*

Of the six satellite campuses, discussed above, it should be noted that only the Mount Vernon and Tenleytown campuses provide educational programs for undergraduates. It should not be forgotten that college undergraduates range from 17 to 22. For purposes of the law, they are, in many cases, unemancipated minors. Thus, the university has some responsibility for their safety. Requiring undergraduates, particularly freshmen and sophomores, to travel distances between their living space and their study space could result in less than optimal conditions for those students.

In addition, certain services such as medical care, emergency preparedness, student socialization, academic support (libraries, technology services) and easier access to instructors are premised on

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that AU's placement of its law school in a building a few blocks from its Main Campus engendered tremendous community opposition precisely because it was too close to campus. Residents complained that students would create traffic and noise as they traveled to and from campus raising the question—how far away must the satellite campus be?

<sup>2</sup> This submission will not address satellite campuses that have been established outside the boundaries of the District of Columbia as it is assumed that the Commission is not suggesting that universities leave the District altogether.

<sup>3</sup> The applicable regulation states:

"Use as a college or university shall be located so that it is not likely to become objectionable to neighboring property because of noise, traffic, number or students, or other objectionable conditions." 11 DCMR 210.2.

the supposition that the majority of undergraduates will be located close to those services. Cost and administrative ease make it difficult to offer such services in satellite locations. Thus, asking a campus to open a satellite campus goes beyond placing an academic building and dormitory in a new neighborhood. There are very real financial and administrative reasons that campuses remain as compact as possible, hence, GW's goal of "growing up not out."

*Campus building placement and selection is often part of a multi-year planning process*

As the Commission knows, the steps leading to campus plan submission and Zoning Commission review take years. A brief glance at the often contentious relationship between GW and its neighbors shows that this campus plan was an attempt to address previous complaints. In 1997, as part of the Comprehensive Plan amendment process, Foggy Bottom residents sought to separate the Foggy Bottom neighborhood from all GW students. Neighbors demanded 100 percent on-campus housing<sup>4</sup> and 100 percent on-campus parking.<sup>5</sup> Reflecting both the Comprehensive Plan and continued community sentiment, the university developed a plan that achieved its needs while doing what the community asked for—pulling more university operations onto campus. It is only in the last few years, well after the university developed its current Campus Plan, that the government has suggested it examine satellite campuses. It is too late for this campus plan to incorporate the satellite campus proposal. Moreover, it is unclear whether, even if the university adopted such a plan, the Commission would support it as the city's ideas about how campuses should grow might change again.

*City policies currently do not favor satellite campuses*

Indeed, there is no evidence that the city is committed to the idea of satellite campuses. In the current draft of the Comprehensive Plan, development of satellite campuses "is strongly encouraged," but the plan doesn't identify any specific land in any of the Area Elements that would be appropriate for such a use.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in recent Zoning Commission cases establishing zoning for "new neighborhoods" which would be ideal for such satellite campuses, the proposed zoning is so strict and selective that campuses couldn't possibly establish there. Encouraging universities to establish satellite campuses without providing guidance and zoning that enables the establishment of such campuses is not a workable solution for any D.C. Campus.<sup>7</sup>

More specifically, the enrollment caps, instituted under the campus plan process, may militate against satellite campuses. For example, in general a student enrollment cap imposed on the main campus of a local university as part of its campus plan does not include any enrollment at a satellite campus.<sup>8</sup> However, it has been suggested that GW's Foggy Bottom campus enrollment

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<sup>4</sup> "Both GWU and Georgetown University should move full time undergraduates residences and offices out of the local community and onto the campus." See Proposed Amendment Submission ID Number 96-010, Ward 2 Plan Proposed Amendment, Foggy Bottom and West End Advisory Neighborhood Commission, Comprehensive Plan Amendments Act of 1997, Bill 12-99.

<sup>5</sup> "[George Washington and Georgetown Universities] . . . should provide on-campus parking for student cars not registered in D.C." See Proposed Amendment Submission ID Number 96-010, Ward 2 Plan Proposed Amendment, Foggy Bottom and West End Advisory Commission (ANC 2-A) Comprehensive Plan Amendments Act of 1997, Bill 12-99.

<sup>6</sup> See Mayor's Draft, Comprehensive Plan, Policy EDU-3.3.1, "Satellite Campuses"

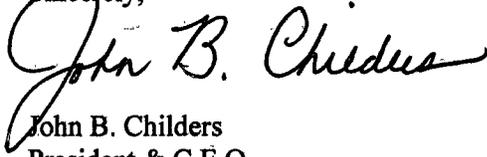
<sup>7</sup> Indeed, due to constrictive zoning in the District, several D.C. campuses have established satellite campuses outside District boundaries including GW, Georgetown and Howard Universities.

<sup>8</sup> Georgetown University's enrollment cap does not include the students enrolled at its Law Center. Likewise, the enrollment cap for Howard's main campus does not include the students at either its West Campus or East Campus.

cap apply to both its Mount Vernon campus and all future satellite campuses. Such a policy would act as a significant disincentive to establishing any satellite campus in the future. Institutions would correctly realize that they would be “shooting themselves in the foot” by establishing a satellite campus, since it would limit their flexibility to enroll additional students at the main campus. The significant expenditure in time, energy and financial and human resources in establishing satellite campus would be completely undermined by requiring the institution to, in effect, double count the students at the remote location. Thus, the possibility that satellite campuses at some future date may count against the main campus enrollment count would eliminate their attractiveness as an option for all D.C. campuses, including GW.

In sum, the Consortium supports GW in its “up not out” campus plan submission and asks the Zoning Commission to support GW’s campus plan and reject calls for GW to abandon its efforts in favor of a satellite campus system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John B. Childers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

John B. Childers  
President & C.E.O.