

**Zoning Commission Review of GWU 20 Year Comprehensive Plan
And Square 54 PUD
Case Nos.: 06-11 and 06-12**

Madame Chairman, Members of the Board.

My name is Russell Conlan and I have been a resident of the Foggy Bottom Historic District for the past 16 years. The first five as an owner at the Griffin Condominiums at 955 26th Street and the last eleven as an owner of a rowhouse at 2415 I Street.

I was first drawn to Foggy Bottom by its convenient location, close to the metro, Georgetown, and the Kennedy Center and to its architecturally historic character. I soon discovered that Foggy Bottom is a unique community. People get involved, truly care about the city, and watch out for each other and their neighborhood. It is like a village in the middle of the city. It is also one of the last, if not the last, truly residential neighborhood in downtown Washington. It is that character that I believe is worth fighting for to preserve.

Since moving into the Foggy Bottom, I have witnessed the negative impact of GW's expansion of both student body and its facilities on the community. Over the years GW has increased its student population well beyond its ability to house that population on campus in university owned facilities. The result, GW has forced students to seek off campus housing in apartment buildings such as the Statesman, the York, and Columbia Plaza, turning them into defacto dormitories, and there are an increasing number of group houses throughout the Foggy Bottom Historic District.

Drop by any Thursday, Friday or Saturday night between 10PM and 4AM to witness the results. The off campus buildings and row houses have become party central. Keggers, some charging an admission fee, are weekly events. Living in a large expensive condominium building, such as the Watergate or The Plaza with a minimal presence of student renters, it is easy to be removed from many of the problems generated by the University's over enrollment that has forced students into off-campus housing. In the moderately priced buildings and row houses, it is not so easy. In fact, the row houses in the Historic District are so close to the sidewalk that when the

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late night party noise begins, I sometimes feel as if there right beside my bed.

I can't tell you how many times I've been awakened in the middle of the night by parties spilling into the front-yards of group houses or by inebriated partiers screaming their way up the street oblivious to the community around them. At 4AM on one such occasion I asked a group to please keep it down. This after listening to them carry-on for 10 minutes expecting they would either wear themselves out or at least move on. I explained that they were in a residential neighborhood and further explained that my neighbor, a retired GW professor who was undergoing cancer treatment and had just been released from the hospital, needed quiet. I was shocked with the response I received. I was informed that the Historic District was part of the campus and "we can do whatever we want". On more than one occasion inebriated partiers have been caught urinating on the fronts of homes and in the pedestrian walkways throughout the neighborhood. Not a very pleasant sight or smell I assure you. And of course the day after these parties beer bottles, plastic party cups and other trash are found in the tree boxes, shrubs, and gutters throughout the area.

At one time the campus extended more or less to 23rd street. Then the University determined it wanted more intensive use between 23rd and 24th Streets. What followed was the University acquisition and demolition of nearly two city blocks of row houses to make way for huge University buildings. Its assertion that its new plan is to limit future growth strictly to the center of campus is disingenuous as best. Having built two huge dormitories, a massive recreation center, and the new hospital along the extreme western boundary of the campus, the University has no place to go but back toward the center of the campus. The damage having been done, the University would like us to believe that it is doing the neighborhood a great favor by building the only place it has left to build.

The University has purchased the former Foggy Bottom Inn, the hotel on Washington Circle, and the former Howard Johnson's, among others. Should the University not be precluded from further acquisitions within the Historic District, I believe the University will add the 925 25th Street apartment building and even the River Inn to it expanding real estate

portfolio. That said, why not purchase one or two row houses per year, directly or through a front man, and in twenty years the University will have the whole Historic District wrapped up. Conspiracy theory? Maybe. But given past experience, would anyone be surprised?

Finally, since the construction of the new GW Hospital, street parking, that in the past had been difficult to obtain, is now, for most times throughout the day nearly impossible to find. This is especially problematic for residents in the row houses without access to off street parking. I ask the Board to consider how much worse it could be if the commercial development proposed for Square 54 and the massive additions to the campus are approved?

Do I expect the quiet life of the country? Of course not. I live in the middle of an urban area and fully accept street noise and activity as part of the package. Do I expect respect for the community? Yes. It is not fair to demonize those of us who speak-out against massive University expansion projects that would exacerbate these problems. GW dismisses anyone opposed to their expansion plans as naysayers or obstructions. They refuse to acknowledge that we are simply concerned citizens who want to preserve the fragile character of our community. As residents and tax paying citizens of the District of Columbia, we expect the same quiet enjoyment of our homes as enjoyed by other residents. There was a balanced, peaceful coexistence between the University and the community that lasted for decades. That balance has been shattered by GW's quest for exponential growth. The pursuit of profit should, in and of itself, not be a sufficient justification for destroying the unique character of the Foggy Bottom community. Are we being told the only way that GW can achieve world class status is by the systematic destruction of this neighborhood?

The decision made by this commission will impact not only GWU and Foggy Bottom, but will, I believe, set a dangerous precedent for discussions between other universities and their surrounding communities, such as Howard University and LeDroit Park. I ask you to decline the request for a new campus plan. The University should continue to work within the framework of the existing plan. A plan the University had a substantial hand

in drafting only to file suit against it before the ink was even dry. A plan acknowledged by the Chair during previous testimony as standing the test of time. The University should prove that it can deal in good faith with the city and the community and abide by both the letter and spirit of its commitments. We can hopefully sit down together during the last three years of this plan and work out a new campus plan that all parties will have had a hand in shaping and a plan that will be a benefit to all involved.

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