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ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 06-12

EXHIBIT NO. 89

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My name is James Morris. I've lived in Foggy Bottom for 15 years, at the intersection of H Street and New Hampshire Avenue, one block from the western boundary of the George Washington University campus. The Foggy Bottom I know--and walk daily--bears no resemblance to the crowded, airless, overrun place described by intransigent opponents of the university, as if they were living in Hogarth's London. The fantasizers really need to get out more. Along with many, many other residents of Foggy Bottom, I believe that George Washington University is an asset of immense value to the community--not just for the intellectual and cultural opportunities it offers but for the long-term stability it assures the neighborhood. The university is an amenity to be embraced, not a presence to be deplored. It's a reason to move to Foggy Bottom.

Before coming to Washington, I was for 16 years a director of the higher education program of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York, which was, at the time, the nation's largest private-foundation program for higher education. In that capacity I evaluated thousands of proposals from universities wanting grant money for projects of every description. Reading the new campus plan of George Washington University against that experience, I cannot help but commend its ambition and detail. Let's not forget that the plan's fundamental purpose, so little discussed in these hearings, is to ensure that the academic mission of the university will be enhanced in the coming decades, have a base of sound financial support, and keep faith with the community. That admirable goal runs up against the astonishingly narrow "gotcha" mentality of critics who are indifferent to the contribution a major university can make to a neighborhood, a city, or a nation but are energized by the prospect of counting excess cars and students.

Will the university's plan proceed exactly as drawn for 20 years? Doubtful. No one with a foot in the real world should expect it to. Does the plan raise issues that need clarification and elaboration, not just in the community, I should think, but within the university? Of course, and would be less than forthcoming if it did not. Are the uncertainties a reason to condemn the plan? Of course not. The contentious issues should have triggered a process of frank discussion and negotiation between the university and the community. The university's representatives were open to that process. No matter how they now choose to explain away their resistance, those who profess to speak for the community were not.

Finally, as a member of ANC 2A since January 2005 and the commission's current secretary, let me dissociate myself from the course of protest here taken by the group. Our ANC consists of six commissioners. Three oppose the university's plan, two favor it, and the last has concerns but finds in the plan more merit than not. So the ANC is much closer to an even split than to a stance of solid opposition. Moreover, from November 2005 till August 2006, a period of nine months, the full membership of the ANC was never given an opportunity to debate, in public or in private, the university's plans. Nor was a vote taken on them. No GWU development issue was allowed on our public agenda. When the university was finally permitted to present its plans at a public meeting of the ANC, in August 2006, the letter protesting them had already been written. The university deserved better. And so, especially, did the community.

Thank you.



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