

DC Zoning Commission re: GWU Campus Plan
Statement of David Lehrman, ANC 2A-01
September 25, 2006
Cases: 6-11 & 6-12

CASE NO. 06-12
EXHIBIT NO. 95

Good evening. My name is David Lehrman and I am the Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner for 2A-01. I have lived in Foggy Bottom for 14 years and have been an ANC commissioner for 4 years. I served our government as an attorney for the US Department of Transportation, and continue to write about the US Supreme Court for a prominent legal newspaper. I am running for my third term and it will be a privilege to serve this community which has given me so much.

Just one personal aside to the point that when you serve our ANC it is not far from your mind even if you are on a 45 thousand mile world circling trip. In South Africa I visited Nelson Mandela's home and saw the impact that leader made in healing his country. Their own ANC, of course has a different acronym, but one associated with the assertion of human rights, dignity of all peoples, and genuine debates among differing peoples. My question is: where is the Nelson Mandela in the tension we witness between GW and some non-representative community members. Who will stand up and make themselves a symbol of reconciliation so that poisonous vitriolic exaggerations about the GW limit growth for Foggy Bottom.

Too often I have attended meetings in which the most negative or cynical view of the University whips up a feeding frenzy lacking any proportion or balance about the university's role here. Simply put: the University enables bright talented young people the chance to study the at seat of national power in a safe and stimulating environment. The library is available to local residents, courses can be audited, and if you become ill the hospital may even save your life. Is that so bad? In fact when students leave the area at break time, the collective safety influence they have is so missed that I consciously avoid certain local routes of walking because I do not feel made an unexpected trip out of the country this summer that caused me to miss the as safe as when streets are full of dynamic, energetic, healthy young voices.

When I was in Johannesburg recently I asked a young woman from Soweto, symbol of the fall of apartheid, about Nelson Mandela.

He's not Christian is he, I asked?

No, she replied.

He doesn't pray, does he I asked?

No, he doesn't.

Then how did he invite his jailor to this inauguration, and act so noble.

That's simple, she replied.

He doesn't have to believe in God. We South Africans revere him so, we cannot help but conclude that he has to have been sent by God.

Believe, me, I am not here to endorse theological views, especially ones that I do not share, but I do ask some selfless, ethical, genuine leader of this group of nay sayers and negtivists to show the courage of a Mandela and start a GENUINE debate on the role the

GW can play in growing this community. But it starts with leadership among home owners and mature long time residents, and I am disappointed at not seeing that kind of real reconciliation coming from those who attend the ANC foggy bottom meetings. I have long said that an ANC meeting is a kind of Rohrsach test of your own views towards not just GW but youth-anyone who is mature can be curmudgeonly or they can celebrate the freshness of vision and vitality our area is surrounded by in the person of GW students. Mere gripe sessions at ANC meetings may seem “therapeutic” but I hold my community to a higher standard.

I admire the individuals I have come to know at the FRIENDS meetings who “march to their own drummer” and are willing to try and spark a more constructive dialogue with GW. Alas, I missed the August meeting where the ANC voted to oppose this Campus Plan. If I were at the August meeting, I would have voted to support the Campus Plan. Allow me to apply my previous remarks and explain why I would have voted in favor.

1. FRIENDS started over four years ago when a group of Foggy Bottom residents approached University officials seeking a forum to discuss community issues. The environment at meetings of established community groups, including the ANC at the time, had become so poisoned by hardliners on both sides that no real dialogue was possible. The University agreed that a new approach was needed and offered to provide space for a community meeting. The first meeting attracted 6 community members and 3 GW officials. Out of that meeting came a list of over 40 issues where both sides thought more could be done. Today nearly 350 people are part of the FRIENDS group and monthly meetings regularly draw 65-75 individuals, making FRIENDS by far the largest monthly community forum. The meetings are open to everyone and community attendees are asked to set the meeting agenda. GW officials are on hand to facilitate discussion and listen to community concerns. Initiatives as significant as the formation of an Office of DC and Foggy Bottom/West End Affairs, the publication of a Community Calendar of Events and the formation of a Neighborhood Action Team all have their roots in FRIENDS discussions. This coming Sunday (October 1st), FRIENDS will be holding its Fourth Annual Foggy Bottom/West End Neighborhood Block Party. Last year’s event drew over 1500 people. I am submitting a copy of this year’s Block Party flyer so that the Commission can see the impressive listing of over 100 community groups, churches, businesses and restaurants that will be participating. There are groups in the community that refuse to participate in this event, citing the fact that GW covers the capital costs for staging this event as a primary objection. Personally, I do not understand this position. The Block Party is planned by a committee made-up mostly of community residents. I would argue that GW can – and should – pay for the costs of the event.

I spent time talking about FRIENDS, because it represents a real shift in how community issues are addressed. Furthermore, it illustrates the good that can come about when community members and GW officials sit down and discuss important issues in a cooperative, not adversarial, manner. This leads me to point number 2.

2. GW came to the ANC at the earliest possible point seeking input on Square 54 and related campus development. GW officials first asked to begin a dialogue on these issues in July 2004. Though individual informal conversations did take place, the first opportunity GW was given to make a formal presentation on the Campus Plan at a public meeting of the ANC was not until August 2006. As with the Advisory Committee that has never met, I am frustrated by how often politics gets in the way of real dialogue. I am not so naive as to think that talking will solve all town/gown tension, but I do think *both* sides have an obligation to make a good faith effort.
3. There was a formal process in place to collect community concerns relating to the Campus Plan and, in my opinion, the University made real changes on the basis of these concerns. For example, early plans showed significant development on 23rd Street and along F Street. My constituents did not have a problem with density, *per se*, but rather density that was located at the outskirts of campus near residential Foggy Bottom. As a result of these concerns, and a renewed focus on historic preservation, GW refocused the most intense development on the core of campus and away from the residential neighborhood. The School Without Walls development on F Street is a notable exception. However, the public private partnership that is at the heart of this joint project necessitates the location of a GW building on that site.
4. In conclusion, perhaps the Nelson Mandela's of the world are too few, and it's a bit much to ask for a Foggy Bottom equivalent. But it is not too much to credit broad minded individuals in FRIENDS seeking a balance between the role GW can continue to add to quality of life here, and yet to have a dialogue of intellectual honesty and genuine critical thinking about where the University can improve its additions to this community.

Thank you for the privilege of testifying before this commission.

The 4th Annual Foggy Bottom & West End Neighborhood BLOCK PARTY

~ Brought to you by FRIENDS ~



You're Invited!

Sunday, October 1st

1:00 - 4:00 PM Eye Street Mall

(at the Foggy Bottom Metro, between 23rd and 24th St., NW)

Rain Date: Oct 8th, same time/place—Call 202/994-5050 for day-of weather updates

FRIENDS is a group started at the request of local residents to promote positive dialogue between GW and its neighbors. The group is dedicated to building a better Foggy Bottom / West End through *communication, cooperation and collaboration.*

For more information on FRIENDS or this event, please call 202/994-9132.

A Fun-filled Day for the Whole Family!

Participants include:

- AARP DC
- Active Minds
- Allies Building Community
- American Medical Student Association
- Black International Affairs Society
- Church Information
- CNN At GW
- CODE BLUE
- Colonial Community
- Colonials Weekend
- Comcast D.C.
- Consider It Done Home Improvements
- Councilmember Jack Evans
- Cultural Tourism DC
- Cup'a Cup'a
- D.C. Citizen Corps
- D.C. Department of Health
- D.C. Department of Public Works
- D.C. Emergency Management Agency
- D.C. Sierra Club Chapter
- D.C. Snacks
- EMERG
- Foggy Bottom/West End Business & Professional Association
- Forbidden Planet Productions
- FRESHFARM Market
- FRIENDS
- Global Languages
- GW College Democrats
- GW College Republicans
- GW Dance Marathon
- GW Department of Theatre & Dance
- GW Hospital (health screenings)
- GW Hospital Women's Board
- GW Medical Center
- GW Performing Arts
- GWSTAND
- Hillel/Jewish Student Association
- Hotel Lombardy
- Hunan Peking
- International Monetary Fund
- Iona Senior Services
- Jackie Robinson Society
- Juice Zone
- Karma Bar and Lounge
- Lamaze International
- Market at Columbia Plaza
- Metropolitan DC Police Department
- Metropolitan Optical
- Miriam's Kitchen
- Mount Vernon Programming Council
- Multicultural Food and Festival Aficionados
- Newman Center
- Neighbors to the President Museum Consortium
- Nirvana Restaurant
- Office of the Clean City Coordinator
- Office of District of Columbia and Foggy Bottom/West End Affairs (GWU)
- Office of Off-Campus Student Affairs (GWU)
- One Washington Circle Hotel
- Oxfam America
- Pangea
- People to People International
- Pita Pit
- Presidential Administrative Fellows
- Protestant Campus Ministry Association
- Red Cross
- Scarves by Auntie Do
- Sizzling Express
- Sons of Pitch
- Spice of the Caribbean
- St. Mary's Court
- St. Mary's Episcopal Church
- St. Paul's Episcopal Church
- St. Stephen's Church
- Starbucks
- Stephen Joel Trachtenberg Scholars
- Student Association (GWU)
- Students for Fair Trade
- Square 54 Information
- The Quincy Hotel
- Tresses Salon
- Troubadours/University Singers
- United Church Food Pantry
- Gelman Library (University & Foggy Bottom Archives)
- University Police Department
- Urban Professionals in D.C. (UPnDC)
- U.S. State Department
- Washington Capitals
- Washington Mystics
- Washington Wizards
- Washington Writers' Publishing House
- West End Library
- Western Presbyterian Church
- WRGW
- Esteem Cleaners

...and many more!