

TESTIMONY

MARILYN RUBIN, PRESIDENT, COLUMBIA PLAZA TENANTS ASSN
Sept. 28, 2006

Good evening. I am Marilyn Rubin, President of Columbia Plaza Tenants Association, a 5 building complex, with 800 rental units. located at 2400 Virginia Ave. NW in Foggy Bottom

Thank you Chairman Mitten and Board Members, for this chance to tell you why we oppose the new Campus Plan and of our experiences with George Washington University at Columbia Plaza.

To summarize the issue:

ANC Commissioner Michael Thomas stated it clearly, when he quoted the BZA:

“Once properties are part of the university inventory, they are irretrievably lost to the residential community.”

Now, as GW expands more and more, absorbing homes and apartment buildings, they continue to be, quoting the Washington Post: “The ~~Goat~~ ^{University} That Ate Foggy Bottom!” We have witnessed apartment buildings emptied of their residents, or overtaken by a student population. We have no problem with the students. But with the University’s policy of increasing enrollment each year, they deny housing to the very people for whom Columbia Plaza was built,--“moderate income residents, wishing to live and work downtown.” Frequent student turnover has allowed rents to escalate, and become unaffordable to many.

To call this a ‘town-gown’ issue, or to say that this is a campus town is absurd. This is a federal city, and the laws passed by the District, to protect residents, are not being enforced.

GW operates in a residential neighborhood under Zoning Regulations, which allow the exception, provided that they will not become objectionable and/or violate the quality of life for the residents. Three elements named are 1) traffic, 2) noise and 3) numbers of student population. All 3 issues have had a big impact on our neighborhood and building residents during the past years when a student population dominated our complex.

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We have learned through the years, promises made by GW to this neighborhood are later adjusted for their growing needs. They are known to violate every campus plan they present, and agree to, including the current one. Even in these Hearings, they acknowledged, that in another few years, they could come back and ask for changes again.

GW's Purchase of almost 30% Partnership in Columbia Plaza, in a SECRET AGREEMENT, allows GW the first right to fill all empty units in the five rental buildings with both undergraduate and graduate students, thereby keeping out TAX-PAYING RESIDENTS. In our suit to obtain information, we also learned through 'Discovery,' that they also have the first right to purchase ALL PARTNERSHIPS as they become available.

Our permanent residents feel that since GW became a partner, we are living with the certainty of their future intent to take over ownership or control of the complex. We were shocked with a remark by Mr. Trachtenberg a few years ago stating, "We will wait until they all move to cemeteries."

We have witnessed the discriminatory practice of "holding" the university's share of approximately 200 apartments for students directly, with additional apartments held by the rental office, for more students. Then, when GW sends these students over, they rent directly from the rental office. Once all students are settled, the building will rent to others. However, until this point, even though they do exist, applicants are told there are no vacancies, and to call back daily.

We fear that GW's promise of not purchasing any more properties in Foggy Bottom does not apply to investment properties such as Columbia Plaza.

We, too like living near a University, we just don't want it to destroy our homes, or the quality of life we have enjoyed here in Foggy Bottom.

Thank you.