

**DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS/GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
CONSOLIDATED PUD AND MAP AMENDMENT
Z.C. CASE NO. 06-17**

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STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

BY JAMES MORRIS, FORMER ANC 2A COMMISSIONER

School without walls, or ceilings

Rarely has Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A seemed a more misbegotten little parliament than it did at its October 18 meeting, when four of the six members cast votes that each of them should now wear as a badge of shame. (I was in the minority of two and resigned from the commission the next day.) The ANC went on record as opposing support for a project that would transform the neighborhood's physically deteriorating School Without Walls (SWW), on G Street, into a state-of-the-art high school facility. The basis of the opposition? Some \$12 million of the approximately \$18 million needed for the project would come from George Washington University (GWU) in exchange for the university's being allowed to build a large dormitory on an F Street site behind SWW and--the kicker--exempt the mass of that 90-foot-high dorm from counting against the amount of development space remaining under its current campus plan. The renewed SWW and the new dorm are a package deal, and, for the relentlessly anti-GWU ANC, the big dorm is a deal breaker.

The anti-GWU votes were not to be construed as anti-SWW, insisted the naysayers. No, the votes were cast with heavy hearts and deep regret about the consequences to SWW, for which the ANC has nothing but the highest regard, and the greatest admiration, and the warmest, fuzziest feelings, etc. The commission stands foursquare behind high-quality high school education for DC kids. How's that for courage? But when the welfare of the young is balanced against the anti-GWU animus of the gaggle of neighborhood scolds who have the loudest voices at the ANC's meetings, well, the high school kids just have to be prepared to let the plaster fall on their heads.

SWW officials testified that the school has had a longstanding and much appreciated cooperative relationship with GWU. So it required a special kind of arrogance for a member of the ANC to say at the October 18 meeting that SWW has been used as a "pawn" by GWU and, in effect, just didn't know any better. To that assertion the recently retired principal of the school took firm and, under the circumstances, far too graceful exception.

The domino theory, which had a golden age 40 years ago ("As Vietnam goes, so goes Sacramento"), glitters still in Foggy Bottom. Allow GWU the development exceptions it seeks (on property, it should be noted, within the campus boundaries) and Foggy Bottom, or what's left of it, is lost. The State Department had better post extra guards against a university putsch, and why not a Kennedy Student Center? All too predictably on October 18, the chairman of ANC 2A invoked the Halloweenish specter of "a tipping point." The words play awfully well to his base. But when I asked him to give the

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 06-17
EXHIBIT NO. 27

button-pushing phrase some content--“What exactly would a Foggy Bottom that has past this (perpetually receding) tipping point look like?”--he just as predictably refused to do so. Instead, he retreated to the desperate low road of high indignation: “I won’t dignify the question with a response.”

But if you’re going to talk the doomy talk, you’d better be prepared to walk the post-apocalyptic walk. And thus far neither he nor the leadership of the Foggy Bottom Association, from which the ANC takes its cues, has been willing, or able, to give that tour and make it persuasive. Perhaps they’d be happiest if the area returned to factory sites, or maybe pasture land--except, of course, for their tony high-rise redoubts in the Watergate, the Griffin, the Plaza, the West End, etc.

Sane folk of Foggy Bottom, take back the future of our neighborhood from these people.

James Morris, a 15-year resident of Foggy Bottom, was, until recently, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner 2A04. He is a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and editor at large of The Wilson Quarterly.