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Carol Mitten, Chair
Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia
441 4th Street NW, Suite 200 South
Washington DC 20001

Re: Case #06-17, School Without Walls – George Washington University PUD

Dear Ms. Mitten and Zoning Commission Members:

We write to support the PUD and zoning map amendment proposed by the DC Public Schools (for the School Without Walls expansion) and George Washington University (for a new residence hall).

We have been Foggy Bottom residents since 1993 and have enjoyed knowing that one of the foremost high schools in our city is housed within our neighborhood. We have supported the School Without Walls through our Safeway receipts and have met its inspiring students as they volunteered at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and elsewhere around the city. We have attended meetings with its principal and applaud the school's vision, its role within DCPS, and its success in producing well-prepared graduates.

We also have volunteered and worked with the DC Public School system through the DC Educational Compact, the Master Education Plan, and the Master Facilities Plan. We have come to know the opportunities and challenges that face DC schools in some detail. As the just-announced "Double the Number" coalition has pointed out, only 9% of DC ninth graders go on to graduate from high school and college in a reasonable time. School Without Walls has demonstrated one of the best records in the city for college entrance, yet struggles with old facilities and a lack of resources.

Imagine, then, how powerful this agreement with George Washington University could be for this school! Yet a small chorus of nay-sayers in our neighborhood has again chosen to see skullduggery in the announced plans and sue both the DC Public Schools and the University. And at what cost?

As briefly as possible, here are our reasons for asking the Commission to approve this PUD. Our reasons come from our perspectives as DC taxpayers, supporters of public schools, and neighborhood residents.

As taxpayers, this proposed PUD and its underlying agreement between DCPS and GWU is precisely the kind of public-private partnership that DC needs in order to leverage its funding for school modernization and involve its significant institutions of higher education in improving public school quality. The \$12 million dollar contribution from George Washington University in exchange for the small property addition for its dorm, frees up that much in funding for other schools in other neighborhoods awaiting their turn at renovation, without decreasing the city's property tax base.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 06-17
EXHIBIT NO. 232
ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
Case No. 06-17
Exhibit No. 32

Letter from Bill & Claudia Schechter, Foggy Bottom residents

As supporters of public schools, we want to encourage George Washington University to expand its already significant support for DC public schools. The memorandum of understanding upon which this PUD is based serves as a model that we hope DCPS will challenge other universities in the District to adopt. Improving student outcomes across the District is a mission that public-private partnerships can play a significant role in achieving.

As neighborhood residents, we wholeheartedly support George Washington University's recently adopted policy of "growing up, not out". One of the complaints neighbors have reiterated over the years is that not enough students are housed on campus. The proposed dorm helps to resolve that issue with a significant addition of several hundred on-campus rooms close to the core of the existing campus.

Some opponents have argued against the use of a PUD for this project. This modernization and expansion of School Without Walls cannot wait for the overall campus plan revisions to be worked out and yet is consistent with the spirit of the existing campus plan and fully consistent with the proposed campus plan now being considered.

Others have argued that the same intent can be accomplished with a rezoning rather than a PUD, but doing so could decrease the value of the property upon which the price has been negotiated, leaving inadequate funds for the modernization and expansion of School Without Walls.

Still others have said that the proposed residence hall will overwhelm the School Without Walls. But this location has already been identified and approved for housing in the existing campus plan. Other public bodies have already approved the design as compatible with the School and found its building height compatible with other buildings on F Street NW.

As the Commission considers this PUD, we urge you to require that both the residence hall and school expansion meet green building standards as well LEED certification requirements. Doing so has the added benefit of using existing GWU experts and serving as a local laboratory for sustainable development, environmental sensitivity, and energy efficiency that can provide practical education for students as well as neighbors.

We also urge that the landscaping and streetscape for both buildings include significant tree cover and indigenous plantings. This will help restore the green canopy for which DC has been known in the past, but is losing with its recent rapid development. This streetscape should be required both on-site as well as the adjacent public property (i.e. sidewalks and curb space.)

We thank you for considering our thoughts and ideas and hope that the Zoning Commission will approve the proposed PUD and zoning map amendment.

Sincerely,

Bill Schechter

Bill Schechter


Claudia Schechter