

WECA's Response to GWU's Revised Plan for Square 54 (ZC PUD Case No. 06-27)

On 2/26/07, the Zoning Commission asked the George Washington University (GWU) to substantially revise its proposed Planned Unit Development (PUD) for Square 54 (Case No. 06-27). On 3/12, GWU submitted a revised plan. During its 3/12 business meeting, the Commission asked the Parties to respond to GWU's revised plan by 3/19. This document constitutes the West End Citizens Association's (WECA's) response. In summary, the WECA believes that GWU's revised submission is only partially responsive to the Commission's explicit direction and, thus, recommends that, on 3/26, the Commission direct further revision.

Here are the WECA's views on each issue raised by the Commission¹:

1. Residential use around Washington Circle – Vice Chair Hood stated that, because of community testimony, including about a “dead zone,” residential use should be around the Circle. Commissioner Jeffries said that housing around the Circle would be “attractive to him,” and Commissioner Parsons said that “he’d love apartments on Washington Circle.” Nevertheless, **GWU made no changes** in its plan to only have commercial use around this historic Circle which was especially provided for DC in the original L’Enfant Plan.
2. Height around Washington Circle – Since Square 54 overlooks the low-scale landmarked Schneider’s Triangle townhouses and would block air and light for residents and individuals passing through the Circle itself, the height around the Circle should not exceed the matter-of-right 90 feet. **GWU’s revision adds height to its proposal from the sidewalk, resulting in 93’5” versus the originally proposed 90’.**
3. Transition between setback height around Washington Circle – Both Commissioners Parsons and Mitten objected to the “abrupt” change, with Chair Mitten admitting that the new building will “dominate” the Circle. **GWU’s revision still presents an abrupt transition of 23’6.”** GWU’s revision calls for 93’5” from the sidewalk with a setback to 116’11,” i.e., a mere 3’1” reduction from the originally proposed 120’.
4. Height along 22nd Street & at the corner of 22nd & I Streets – Commissioners Parsons, Hood, Jeffries, and Mitten all called for a reduction, with Mr. Hood calling for no more than 90’ in height. Chair Mitten directed that the height along 22nd Street be no more than 110’. Mr. Jeffries suggested a non-abrupt setback along 22nd Street. GWU’s revision does not lower the height along 22nd Street to 110” and does not include such a setback. Instead, the revision has heights of: (a) 119’9” from the sidewalk along 22nd Street, (b) 122’ from the sidewalk at 22nd & I Streets, and (c) 125’ from the sidewalk at 23rd & I Streets. **Revisions cited at (a) and (b) exceed that allowed under the Height Act.**
5. “Overwhelming” Washington Circle – Mr. Parsons opined that the proposed architecture on Washington Circle is “overwhelming.” He said that the use of glass “overwhelms” the purpose of the Circle that honors our first President George Washington and suggested in its place stone or precast stone. Nonetheless, **GWU made no changes in the use of glass construction in the building fronting on the historic Washington Circle.**

¹ Commissioner Turnball was not present for the 2/26/07 Commission discussion.

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