

TESTIMONY OF ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3D
ZC No. 07-12, George Washington University -- Mount Vernon Campus
Pelham Replacement Project
JULY 2, 2007

Good evening Chairman Mitten and Members of the Commission. My name is Alma Gates and I am here as vice-chair of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D. The ANC heard presentations from the university on the Pelham Replacement Project on May 2 and June 6, 2007 and voted 7-0-0 to support the application with conditions.

The Pelham Replacement Project and the 2000 Campus Plan

The University informed the Commission that the proposed Pelham Replacement Project includes 22,300 sq. ft. more than the dormitory proposed in the 2000 Campus Plan. University officials have proffered that the increase constitutes a *reallocation* of the total gross floor area allowed under the 2000 Plan; there would be no change to the nature or character of the campus; no increase in the student or faculty/staff cap; and, no additional traffic.

The campus is situated atop the Foxhall Road watershed and is surrounded on three sides by residential property (Berkeley Terrace, Foxhall Road and W Street); and, has Whitehaven Parkway on the south which has become mostly institutional in use. Under this proposal the replacement dormitory would be located to the rear of the campus above Whitehaven Parkway and separated from Berkeley Terrace by the 125-foot protected area specified in BZA Order No. 16505, Condition 8(d).

The existing Pelham Dormitory houses 78 students and has two apartments for professional staff. The new Pelham will house 287 students and contain three apartments for professional staff. The footprint of the building has been shifted to the south and east of the current building site, and the height of the building has been scaled down on the north wing to eliminate visual impacts associated with student rooms that would back onto the homes of Berkeley Terrace neighbors. The courtyard entrance to the new dormitory will face the central campus rather than Berkeley Terrace. Delivery vehicles would access the dormitory using a new entrance off of Whitehaven Parkway.

In addition to more student beds, the proposed new space will include an additional dining facility and, below-grade, residential/campus life support space such as meeting rooms, practice and performance space. The executive training facility and 100-car underground parking garage proposed in the 2000 Campus Plan Pelham replacement dormitory have been omitted from the current proposal.

Existing Storm Water Problems

In a review of the 2000 Campus Plan, The Neighborhood Agreement and BZA Order No. 16505, there is no mention of "stormwater" or any hint of problems being experienced by neighbors on any side of the campus. However, at the June ANC meeting and at meetings with the university, issues of storm water management were discussed at length by Tom Bradley, a resident of W Street, who noted that runoff from the campus has been a major problem since the start of construction under the 2000 Campus Plan. He discussed repeated flooding and sinkhole problems experienced by residents living along the campus side of W Street. The university said it had worked with WASA to replace a pipe that would ensure water was carried away from the

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campus. However, Mr. Bradley questions whether or not problems continue underground. I believe Mr. Bradley is here tonight and will address the Commission.

A long-time resident of Hutchins Place, Vaughn Wilson, appeared at my door on two occasions recently following notification of the proposed new construction on the Mt. Vernon Campus and noted that runoff from the Whitehaven side of the campus is contributing significantly to problems affecting streets below MacArthur Boulevard. He is concerned that the new access road will further exacerbate the run-off problem. Mr. Wilson has witnessed the increase in local development and he noted the WASA stormwater pipe, designed to meet the 15-year storm, carries water from Foxhall Road down Whitehaven Parkway to Reservoir Road and it is inadequate. Heavy rains cause the pipe to raise the surface and run across Reservoir Road below MacArthur Boulevard. Recent developments including the Field School on Foxhall Road, and the expansions of St. Patrick's School, The Lab School of Washington and GW/Mt. Vernon have created more surface runoff onto Whitehaven Parkway. Currently, stormwater flowing from Whitehaven Parkway sheets across MacArthur Boulevard during heavy rains and onto Hutchins Place where basements are being flooded.

Not long ago, everytime it rained heavily, the wood-chip surface of the St. Patrick's lower school play area would wash onto MacArthur Boulevard. This was caused by water cascading off of the perimeter road on the Mt. Vernon campus and flowing across the entire play area. The solution to this university-related problem was undertaken by St. Patrick's and appears to be resolved.

The commission asked the university to bring its stormwater plan for the entire campus to the June 6 meeting. The stormwater plan, presented by the university's civil engineer Arthur Bean, only addressed the Pelham reconstruction and would pipe all water from the Pelham side of campus to Whitehaven Parkway through a sand filter and into the same 15-year WASA stormwater pipe that is problematic for lower Reservoir Road. He stated the university is not required to consider sewer capacity. The ANC noted that the plan did not appear to include plans to accommodate runoff from the new Pelham access road or the existing perimeter road that has caused problems in the past.

Stormwater flowing from the campus has become an objectionable condition for the surrounding community. It is time for the university to work in conjunction with the DC Department of the Environment and WASA on a comprehensive stormwater management plan for the entire campus to ensure further impacts do not result from this proposed campus expansion.

ANC 3D understands it is not the Zoning Commission's responsibility or purview to oversee the repair of WASA pipes, but it is within your purview to ensure there is a comprehensive stormwater plan for the entire campus at GW/Mt Vernon that prevents continued impacts to areas downhill from the campus.

The New Whitehaven Access Road

At its June meeting, ANC 3D was informed that the new Whitehaven access road was approved under the Campus Plan; however, there is no mention in the narrative of the Campus Plan, BZA Order No. 16505 or the Neighborhood Alliance Agreement of a new access road. A dotted line in Figure 6 of the Campus Plan, showing the Proposed Plan for Parking and Loading Facilities, might be the proposed road. The Executive Conference Center and 100 car underground parking garage are no longer part of the Pelham Replacement application. With that change in use there is likely a need to reconsider the need for the proposed access road. The existing perimeter road

would serve the need to deliver physically challenged students and supplies. Removing the curb cut on Whitehaven Parkway and the access road would remove additional impervious surface on campus and the potential for more stormwater run-off onto Whitehaven Parkway. It would also ensure there is no interference with daily operations at St. Patrick's School.

Consultation with Neighbors

Prior to the May ANC meeting, the residents of Berkeley Terrace negotiated an exclusive agreement with the university to increase a "protected area" outlined in the 2000 Campus Plan, and to limit future development within the new protected area through the year 2030. In effect this agreement would place future university-related impacts onto the W Street side of campus. By the June 6 ANC meeting, the W Street Neighbors had entered into discussions with the university, but a number of unresolved issues remained. One of the points the neighbors raised was removal of the reallocated 22,300 square feet from the Hillside Residence Halls planned for construction under the 2000 Campus Plan; but, the university would only consider removing the space from future "residential/campus life support" space. This space is generally interior to the campus or below grade and will not improve the visual impacts the new dormitories are likely to have on abutting neighbors. The setbacks along W Street and Foxhall Road are 90 ft. and 60 ft. respectively and do not provide the same generous 125 ft. protected area provided for the Berkeley Terrace Neighbors.

Another issue raised by neighbors highlighted the fact the planned construction along Foxhall Road is complete; and, the result is that the university has turned its "institutional backside to the public." HVAC equipment is sitting prominently beside Foxhall Road along with miscellaneous stored equipment at the rears of Somers Hall and Eckles Library. Foxhall Road is a beautiful street and should be treated as such. Section 3(a) of The Neighborhood Alliance Agreement, which is included in the 2000 Campus Plan, states: "The University shall augment its proposed landscaping plan and add enhanced landscaping on the perimeter of the campus to screen and buffer campus activities from adjoining properties ..." Neighbors reminded the university that it is time to implement enhanced perimeter buffering conditioned in the 2000 Campus Plan for Foxhall Road and the area of W Street between Foxhall Road and the entrance to the university.

Commission Vote and Conditions

After hearing from the university and neighbors in May and June and considering the facts presented by all parties, the following motion with four conditions was made to support the Pelham Replacement Project:

ANC 3D supports the George Washington University's Mount Vernon Campus Application for special exception approval of an amendment to an approved campus plan and further processing approval for the replacement of the Pelham Residence Hall. The Commission recognizes the amendment involves the reallocation of approved square feet under an existing campus plan, but in all other respects meets the requirements of §§3104 and 210 of Title 11, the Zoning Code. ANC 3D approval is conditioned on the following:

- 1) The university will undertake a comprehensive stormwater management plan for the entire campus that meets best practices determined by the DC Department of the Environment and WASA to ensure there are no additional environmental impacts to residents of W Street, Hutchins Place and other surrounding areas;

- 2) The university will, in the future, reduce the proposed Hillside dormitories (located at W Street and Foxhall Road) by the 22,300 square feet reallocated to the Pelham replacement dormitory. This condition will carry forward to future campus plans until the Hillside dormitories are constructed;
- 3) The university will implement the landscaping buffer outlined in the 2000 Campus Plan along upper W Street and Foxhall Road;
- 4) The university will use its best efforts to reach a signed agreement with the W Street neighbors on issues of concern.