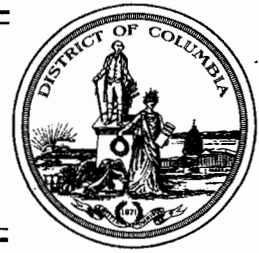

OFFICE OF MARY M. CHEH
COUNCILMEMBER, WARD 3
CHAIR, COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
AND THE ENVIRONMENT



**Testimony of the
Honorable Mary M. Cheh
Councilmember, Ward 3**

**Before the
Zoning Commission
of the District of Columbia**

May 12, 2011

Commissioners, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you tonight about Georgetown University's Campus Plan. As you know, many District residents have concerns about a number of issues related to the Campus Plan. However, I would like to focus my testimony on two issues that are very important to a great many residents in Ward 3: (1) Opposition to the construction of the proposed "Loop Road" and (2) Support for a requirement to house undergraduate students on campus.

1. Oppose the Loop Road

One of the Georgetown's goals is to reduce traffic in the neighborhood. This is a good goal and will certainly benefit the University's Ward 2 neighbors. However, the way that Georgetown proposes to achieve this goal will have a significant, negative impact on the residents of Ward 3. Georgetown currently has a road, called "West Road" that runs through the

center of campus. The University proposes rerouting its shuttle busses so that they enter the campus from Canal Road, drive up West Road, and then turn and drive back towards Canal Road along a new road, called the "Loop Road" that the University wishes to build along the western edge of the campus that adjoins Glover-Archibold Park.

The construction and use of the Loop Road will create substantial noise pollution, light pollution, and air pollution. In January, I visited the site of the proposed Loop Road with Georgetown officials, ANC Commissioners, and the Foxhall Citizens Association president. Standing where the road would be, I could easily see many Ward 3 homes across the park through the trees. Residents calculated that based on Georgetown's projections, a bus will drive down the road every 2.5 minutes, from before dawn until late at night – every day. Consequently, residents of Foxhall would see a paved road and large busses, smell the fumes, see the lights, and hear the rumbling of the vehicles, day and night. It also seems likely that this road would violate the scenic easement held by NPS. There is a steep drop off and Georgetown will either encroach on the easement for the road itself or need the easement to create a stable road. I am hoping that the National Park Service will weigh in on this.

What struck me most about my visit to Georgetown was that the construction of the Loop Road seems entirely unnecessary for the University to achieve its goal of having its shuttles enter and exit the campus from Canal Road. Instead of building the Loop Road, Georgetown could easily build a bus turnaround in front of the cancer center or by the helipad. During my visit, there seemed to be more than enough room to do this. By

building a turnaround, busses could enter from Canal Road, drive up West Road, turnaround, and exit out Canal Road – without disturbing Ward 3 residents. Most disturbingly, it seems that the University has never seriously considered these alternatives that seem quite viable.

And what might the future hold? Georgetown's current proposal would limit the use of the Loop Road to just shuttle busses and service vehicles. However, residents fear that this road could be opened to regular traffic in the future. The University wants to build a new hospital. One of the key sites being considered is Kehoe Field, in the center of the campus adjoining the proposed Loop Road. Residents reasonably worry that if the new hospital is indeed built on this site, the Loop Road would become a primary access road for hospital traffic. Expanding the use of this road in such a way would significantly compound the noise, light, and air pollution that just the shuttle buses would create. Residents fear that the University's claim that the road is necessary because it cannot build a bus turnaround is simply a pretext to construct a road that could be used by a new hospital.

In summary, construction of the Loop Road would have a substantial, negative impact on many residents in Ward 3. While visiting Georgetown, it was clear to me that this road is unnecessary, that bus turnarounds could be built at several points along West Road. Therefore, I respectfully request that the Commission deny Georgetown's request to build this road. This issue – particularly the effects that the road would have on Ward 3 residents – has been essentially overlooked by the Office of Planning and the District Department of Transportation. I hope, however, that this body will focus on this important issue.

2. Requiring Georgetown to House Students on Campus

Another concern of many Ward 3 residents is a growing number of students – undergraduate and graduate – who choose to live off-campus in neighborhoods, thus displacing non-students, long-term residents, and families. For Ward 3, the Foxhall community has seen a growing number of graduate students renting apartments, houses, and basements, which can significantly affect the character of a residential neighborhood. The fear among many residents is that if Georgetown's enrollment is allowed to increase, this problem will only worsen.

A positive development has been the Office of Planning's recommendation that Georgetown aim to house 100% of its undergraduates on campus. I want to add that I support this goal and note that such a requirement is not unusual for universities. Requiring all undergraduates to live on campus would benefit Ward 3 by increasing availability of rental housing for families and residents. And communities can develop and grow as communities not as transient populations. It's also not a unique situation. Earlier this year, U.S. News and World Report reported that Princeton houses 98% of its undergraduates on campus, Harvard houses 96%, Columbia houses 95%, MIT houses 92%, and Stanford houses 91%. If other schools can do this successfully – for both neighbors and students, so can Georgetown.

Thank you very much for your consideration of the effect that Georgetown's campus plan would have on Ward 3, and for your service to the District of Columbia.