

Aaron Golds, Testimony 5/12/2011, In support of Case 10-32 (Georgetown University Campus Plan)

Good evening. My name is Aaron Golds and I am a senior at Georgetown University. From January 2009 to December 2010, I served as an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner on ANC 2E. I would like to spend my time this evening speaking about the process that has taken the University to this point as well as my involvement in that process. I realize that many will consider my testimony this evening quite biased, but I came into this process without any preconceived notions of town-gown relations in Georgetown. The opinions that I will express here tonight come strictly from my involvement in this process as I see it.

I am happy to be here tonight as I see this testimony as the culmination of more than two and a half of years of work. I am also happy to be speaking to you tonight as I feel the DC government has not heard the student voice in this process. I made attempts to reach out to the Office of Planning during this process to give them the student voice, only to have my phone calls and emails go unreturned. Because of this, I am excited to share my perspective, the student perspective, tonight.

The process began for me just days after my election at an all-day meeting with University administrators and community members. At this meeting, GU shared some of their ideas for the plan and got feedback from the community. At that meeting, a popular refrain from the neighbors was "no new heads without new beds." GU committed to abide by that motto, and in fact is doing one better—they are adding beds without increasing undergraduate enrollment. Since that time, GU has made a number of concessions to the community, the vast majority of which has gone unacknowledged, despite the negative effects these concessions will have on student life. I have attached a list of these concessions to this testimony.

I would now like to speak about the most contentious issue in the plan—student housing. Despite OP and the community's recommendation to have 100% of undergraduates on campus, the University and I were not presented with this view until well into the process. The first record I have of such a request is from a meeting in August of 2010, well after that first November 2008 meeting and well into the University's planning process. I have spoken to countless students on this issue and a few clear patterns have emerged. First, students choose to live off-campus, will always want that choice, and will always make that choice. Filling beds to capacity will not happen. Second, a satellite campus is not an acceptable option for students. Students have a right to live near the campus they attend. Finally, housing all undergraduate students on campus is not a realistic solution to the problems in the neighborhood. Forcing students to live on campus will not prevent students from walking through the neighborhood at night and will not convert group homes into single-family dwellings. Landlords will still rent to young professionals and students at other universities.

I'd like to close by stating that this plan is good for the students of Georgetown in countless ways, many of which my peers will speak about tonight. I encourage you to approve the campus plan as presented. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 10-32
EXHIBIT NO. 112

Concessions Made by Georgetown University During the Development of the Campus Plan

1. Removed three proposals of concern to the community:
 - a. A convocation center
 - b. A proposal to build 250 undergraduate beds in the 1789 block, which is within the campus boundaries
 - c. A chimney extension on the heating and cooling facility
2. Proposal to change the definition of undergraduate students which the community has complained about for years.
3. Eliminate averaging of Fall and Spring enrollment, which the community has complained for years and, in fact, CAG even took the University to court over it; in 2007, the Court of Appeals ruled in the University's favor
4. Proposal to freeze undergraduate enrollment
5. Proposal to freeze Medical School enrollment
6. Proposal to cap undergraduate and graduate enrollment at proposed levels
7. Construct a loop road, at the request of the Georgetown neighborhood
8. Add an additional 250 undergraduate beds on campus
9. Reduce enrollment from previous proposal of 16,133 to 15,000
10. Move 1,000 students from the School of Continuing Studies to a satellite location
11. Removed a proposal for 1,000 additional parking spaces on campus
12. Commit to stricter off-campus disciplinary policies, including tougher sanctions and more oversight