

Statement of
GEORGE H.F. OBERLANDER, AICP
on behalf of
THE CITIZENS ASSOCIATION OF GEORGETOWN
and
THE BURLEITH CITIZENS ASSOCIATION
On the Special Exception Application, DC Z.C. 10-32
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY 2010-2020 CAMPUS PLAN
before the
Zoning Commission for the District of Columbia
May 16, 2011

Chairman Hood and members of the Commission, my name is George Oberlander. A copy of my Report, (96 pages of text and 25 of appendices) dated March 2011, has been submitted. Due to hearing time constraints, my testimony will only summarize the content and my conclusions.

Before presenting my conclusions, I would like to call your attention to certain specific factual matters pertaining to the student off-campus residential locations and the currently existing objectionable impacts they are creating in the neighborhoods adjacent to the University.

- The West Georgetown and Burleith neighborhoods are severely impacted, due to the previous Campus Plans, by the quantity and quality of the many off-campus student group-homes.
- **The Burleith Housing Survey [Appendix D-2] found 165 units, 31% of the total Burleith housing stock surveyed, accommodating students.** The figure may actually be higher due to some lack of survey response **and the fact that only group houses were counted.**
- In 2010, students occupied 9 of the 22 homes or 41% of the 1900 block of 38th Street NW in Burelith.
- Many student group houses are **poorly maintained** investor property.
- Collectively and individually, these and the other identified **objectionable conditions adversely impact the quality of life in Burleith and West Georgetown.** *(OP May 5th Report, similar objectionable findings, page 5&7).*
- **The continued influx of Georgetown University students alters the existing low-density residential character and stability of these and other nearby neighborhoods.** *(OP May 5th Report verifies student off-campus locations)*

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- **Other examples of specific impacts:** In 2009, there were 477, 911 Disorderly phone calls (mapped by street address), concerning disorderly conduct, destruction/damage of property and possession of open liquor containers. *(Verified and documented in OP May 5th Report, pages 9&10).*
- When mapping disorderly conduct calls by street locations, it is evident that **group home locations closest to the Campus generate the greatest number of calls.** *(Verified in OP May 5th Report, page 9).*
- To provide a sense of daily incidents, affecting the neighborhood quality of life, **during the four months between September and December 2009, there was an average of 78 calls per month.** (My Report, page 32 footnote 37 explains)
- The students living in University owned, off-campus, west side of 36th Street, **Magis Row houses, significantly disrupt the lives of property owners and residents adjacent and across 36th Street.** (Appdx. J gives additional information).
- **I have reviewed the CAG and BCA data, tables, charts and graphics presented to you.** They clearly document the cumulative adverse impacts created by the concentration of students living in residential (one-family) ownership properties converted to group homes and dormitory living.
- The lessons from the George Washington University Campus expansion nearby demonstrate that **the existing problems in Burleith and West Georgetown will only be compounded if additional students take up residency adjacent to GU.**

Based on my review of the Campus Plan, as amended, and the relevant factual background, I reached certain conclusions, set forth in the Report, which I now summarize:

- The major adverse impacts have been, and continue to be, generated by the current number and concentration of students living near the University.
- The 2010-2020 Campus Plan has not adequately addressed the need to reduce the concentration of students in group housing living in the adjoining low-density residential areas.
- **The recent conditional offer of 250 new undergraduate housing units is inadequate.** My Report examined the impact of the construction of the 780-bed Southwest Quadrangle (year 2003). That large dormitory did absorb some of the off-campus undergrads **but the number of units vacated in the community were re-filled by 2009.** 250 students at 6 to a house is at most a reduction of 42 houses or 15% of the 275 undergraduate residences in West Georgetown and Burleith in Fall 2010 [GU Pre-hearing Submission, Ex B, p.9] To achieve the required favorable impact on the community housing, **over four times that number of undergraduates must be provided housing.**

- The proposed graduate enrollment increase will further increase transiency in Burleith and West Georgetown contrary to Comprehensive Plan policies, among which is “relieving growth pressures on neighborhoods adjacent to existing campuses”. (EDU-3.3.1, par. 1214.5)
- **The new proposed IPEDS total headcount of 15,000, without a substantial on-campus housing increase, will only exacerbate the existing adverse impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods.** An increase in graduate enrollment of almost 1000 students will likely lead to an increase in the 152 graduate residences in West Georgetown and Burleith [Prehearing Submission, Ex B, p.9]. The number of graduates living in Burleith jumped 22% in the last ten years. It is difficult to predict with any accuracy, the number of graduate students who may try to live in the adjoining communities, since this additional 1000 is on top of a graduate enrollment of around 6000 students for whom the University provides no housing.
- The concentration of student housing has altered the one-family home ownership character of large sections of the adjoining neighborhoods to transient conditions, adversely impacting the quality of daily life and contrary to the intent of the R-3 zoning in place.
- The Zoning Regulations seek to “prevent the undue concentration of population and the use of land” as well as “lessen congestion in the streets”. (11 DCMR Sec. 101.1 (b)). The projected total campus population of around 24,000 students, faculty and employees by 2020 is an undue concentration of people on this site and it will increase congestion in the already congested streets surrounding the University. **One or more satellite campuses is the only responsible way for this University to grow, a conclusion the University itself seems to have belatedly recognized with respect to its School of Continuing Studies.**
- **The adjoining neighborhoods cannot tolerate additional conversions to group housing** without completely losing the character and fabric of the district as contemplated in the existing R-3 zoning as well as in the historic district of Georgetown.
- **Approving the submitted Campus Plan Special Exception without substantial specific changes** in the form of enforceable conditions such as provisions for adequate main campus and/or satellite campus undergraduate housing, **would be inconsistent with various policies in the District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.** (Pages 34-39)
- **The Plan should not be approved as presented** (even with the suggested amendments) because use as a University has become objectionable to neighboring property because of the individual and cumulative noise, traffic, number of students, and other identified objectionable conditions in violation of the Regulations (11DCMR Sec. 210.2). **The Plan does not adequately mitigate those objectionable conditions and instead proposes to exacerbate them.**

- **An additional reason** for denying the Special Exception approval is the fact that the Plan would “tend to affect adversely the use of neighboring property” in violation of the Zoning Regulations (11DCMR Sec.3104).

My Report concludes that the submitted 2010-2020 Campus Plan should be revised to incorporate the objective of housing **all undergraduates on the Main Campus**, to the maximum extent possible and to house the remainder, including any additional graduate students, in University owned or rented housing in a satellite campus outside of Zip Code 20007, **in keeping with the policies of the Comprehensive Plan.**

Due to community opposition, the University is now making last minute amendments to its Plan in order to obtain the Commission’s approval. The OP report seems to accept this December 30, 2010 filing and the more recent conditional modifications as further proposed to be modified by OP as an adequately thought-out Campus Plan. In my opinion, the document lacks complete campus wide plan integration.

Proposing to consider the 250,000 sq. ft. Leavey Student Center as a location for 250 undergraduate units is inadequate. **The construction of on-campus student housing needs to be a more immediate priority for the University and incorporated into the revised Plan.**

Recommendations of the Office of Planning May 5th 2011 Report.

The Office of Planning recommends that “the 2010 Campus Plan be approved with conditions”. The Report lists 14 recommended conditions dealing with enrollment, campus housing, enrollment calculations, medical facilities and the need for more information.

The Report finds, as my Report does, that “The number of students, noise and traffic **has created objectionable conditions** to neighboring residential properties...” (**Emphasis added**). (Page 5).

It also expresses the OP “concern that the maximum total enrollment of students-proposed in the prehearing Statement at a total of 15,000 by Fall of 2013, of which 6,652 would be undergraduates- **places the surrounding neighborhood at the tipping point of diminished residential character**”. (**Emphasis added**) (Page 7).

The OP Report lists relevant policies of the Comprehensive Plan, as my Report does, and finds that “**The proposed plan is inconsistent with many of the policies of the Comprehensive Plan**, including minimizing impact and reducing housing pressure on surrounding residential communities, providing on-campus housing...and supporting...neighborhood conservation”. (**Emphasis added**) (Page 22).

These OP findings reiterates my study findings that the Campus Plan application submitted December 30, 2010, **violates the zoning regulatory provisions dealing with adverse objectionable impacts and is inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. THEREFORE THE DECEMBER 30, 2010 APPLICATION SHOULD BE REJECTED.**

BCA and CAG believe, that based on the OP Report and the report I have presented, the Commission can and should **specifically direct the University to revise its 2010-2020 Campus Plan to incorporate all of the OP Report recommended conditions which are consistent with the recommendations in my Report dealing with enrollment and housing.** (These recommended conditions are listed on pages 19, 23 and 24 of the OP Report).

The only suggested additions are to accelerate the provision of undergraduate housing for at least 250 students to the Fall of 2013 and to delay any increase in graduate enrollment until GU has met its obligation to house 100% of its traditional undergraduate enrollment.

These conditions, **if specifically mandated by the Commission and integrated into the 2010-2020 modified Campus Plan,** will over time help mitigate and reduce the identified objectionable impacts currently existing in the adjoining neighborhoods.

In my opinion, **providing on-campus housing for all undergraduates would further enhance the image of the University and the student's academic experience.** Providing **some graduate housing,** on or off campus, would also contribute to stabilizing the adjoining neighborhoods by further reducing transiency.

Thank you for reviewing my Report and considering my testimony this evening. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.
