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May 16, 2011

District of Columbia Zoning Commission
One Judiciary Square
441 4th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

RE: Case No. 10-32, Georgetown University Campus Plan 2010-2020

Chairman Hood and Members of the Commission:

As a citizen of the District, a former resident of the Burleith neighborhood, and a recent alumnus of Georgetown University, I am keenly interested in the on-going review of Georgetown's 2011-2020 campus plan. I have followed the development of the campus plan closely and I have been deeply disappointed by the tenor of the debate surrounding the plan. The vitriol and hatred directed at the University and its students by a vocal minority of area residents has been astounding and I was shocked and dismayed to see that warped view adopted almost without question in the recent Office of Planning report. I write in support of the University's plan and to provide a different perspective on the issues surrounding the plan.

First, as a former student, I'd like to highlight a key fact that has gotten almost completely lost in the current debate over the plan: that the planned development on campus will make meaningful and important improvements in student life, improve campus cohesiveness, and ensure that Georgetown continues to be a world-class university. One key challenge facing students and student organizations during my time at Georgetown was space. There was a constant battle for study, meeting, and activity space on the small campus. During finals, it was virtually impossible to find a seat in Lauinger Library. Student organizations frequently found events and meetings postponed or canceled due to lack of suitable space. The campus plan's proposed creation of a new student center, as well as additions to Lauinger, Reiss, Walsh, and Leavy Center would go a long way to remedying the student space challenges I faced during my tenure as an undergraduate. Other aspects of the plan, including developments at Kehoe Field, a new contemplative space, and improved pedestrian access would also help bolster on-campus life, while the proposed transportation improvements will help facilitate the movement of students, staff, and visitors to and from campus.

Second, as a former resident of Burleith, I want to provide a different perspective on the housing situation and the relations between student and non-student residents. Like many Georgetown students, I choose to live off-campus my junior and senior years. My reasons for doing so were twofold: 1) living off-campus provided a cost effective way to obtain summer housing while working full-time in the District and avoid repeatedly moving and 2) living off-campus gave me the opportunity to have a bedroom of my own, cook in my own kitchen, and enjoy a greater

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degree of independence than I could in any on-campus housing. I think these reasons, rather than any lack of on-campus housing, explain why most students who live off-campus choose to do so. These reasons will not go away even if the University were forced to provide beds for 100% of its students.

Once students do move off-campus, the vast majority are conscientious neighbors who make a positive and vital contribution to the community. During my time in Burleith, I participated in neighborhood clean-ups where I worked with both student and non-student residents to beautify the area, shoveled snow side-by-side with permanent residents, and watched out for my neighbors' home when they were away. I enjoyed the sense of community I felt when exchanging pleasantries over the back fence or seeing neighbors at the park or farmer's market. Even when there were tensions, my neighbors and I were able to resolve them satisfactorily through calm discussion, like adults, rather than by finger-pointing and accusations.

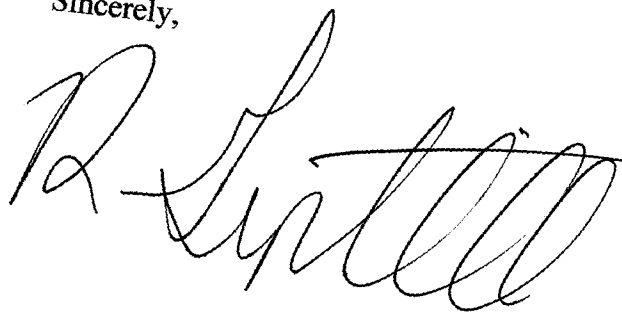
It was my experience that the vast majority of student and non-student residents alike were able to live harmoniously. While there were certainly some students who failed to respect their neighbors, they represented only a small minority of the student population. The same goes for the small cadre of non-student residents who aggressively targeted students for harassment, from door-to-door "surveys" aimed at telling students "we know where you live" to signs urging the city to kick students out of their homes to simply rude treatment when students tried to show common courtesy. Neither minority should be taken to represent the greater whole, which is why I was deeply disappointed to see that the Office of Planning's report adopted the position of that vocal minority – that any student in the neighborhood has an "adverse effect" just by being there.

Third and finally, as a citizen of the District, I want to highlight the vital contributions that students make to the surrounding communities and the District as a whole. Students are vital supporters of local businesses and cultural activities. They provide a wide range of community services, supported by the University, which improve the lives and well-being of numerous District residents. Many, like me, worked while at school and paid taxes in the District. And recent graduates, like myself, help form the city's economic and intellectual backbone if we decide to remain in the District.

For me, the decision to make Washington, D.C. my home was based in large part on the positive experiences I had, not just at Georgetown, but in the surrounding community. It would be a tragedy if an arm of the District government sent the message to students that, rather than being welcome contributors to life here in the District, they were unwanted invaders, to be kept out of sight and out of mind for their four years as students. I fear that is the message that a 100% on-campus housing requirement or other draconian restrictions on the campus plan will send to students. It is a message that runs contrary to the spirit, if not the letter, of the Human Rights Law prohibiting discrimination based on matriculation status. And it is a message that will make many students think twice about deciding to make this city their permanent home. That would be a terrible outcome for all of us who live in Washington.

I strongly urge you to approve the 2010-2020 Campus Plan as proposed by the University and to reject the draconian restrictions suggested by the Office of Planning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R. L. Smith". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".