

Tuesday, May 24, 2011

Re: Case No. 10-32, Georgetown University Campus Plan 2011-2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I write to express my opposition to the Office of Planning's report on the Georgetown University campus plan proposal, and to encourage the Zoning Commission to vote for the Georgetown University campus plan without unduly hindering the University.

The Office of Planning's proposed requirement that 100% of undergraduate students live on campus is plainly unfeasible, especially given that the Office of Planning insists that the University not build additional student housing on its property in zip code 20007. As a student of Georgetown University, I assure you that there is not space on campus for all undergraduates to be housed in zip code 20057. Georgetown houses a greater percentage of its undergraduates than all other universities in the District of Columbia save for Gallaudet. Georgetown does not have the endowment to pay for housing all undergraduates. The high price of real estate in Northwest DC and Arlington means that adding satellite dormitories is not feasible.

In brief, assenting to the Office of Planning's recommendation would force the university to cut enrollment, which consequently would result in a loss of jobs in the District both in terms of Georgetown University employees and employees of businesses catering to students. Georgetown and its students generate a substantial positive economic impact in the District of Columbia, and to force the university to cut enrollment would do great harm not only to the University, but also to the economy of the District given that Georgetown is one of the district's largest private employers.

I would also like to add, for the record, that Ms. Steingasser's testimony before the Zoning Commission was woefully uninformed: her claim that the university could provide additional beds by converting "luxury suites" does not make sense. I invite Ms. Steingasser to actually visit campus and show me, or any student, where these "luxury suites" actually are. Her inability to discuss on campus facilities in even basic detail (she did not even know of LXR hall, one of the University's largest on campus dormitories and itself very packed), along with her dubious assertion that correlation implies causality (911 calls do not, by themselves, prove that students cause crime or disturbances, especially given that the Georgetown neighborhood is a prime bar scene) suggest that she was utterly ignorant to the actual realities on the ground.

I question whether enacting a 100% on-campus housing requirement in the campus plan would be lawful under the DC Human Rights Act. The Act, as I am sure you are aware, expressly prohibits discrimination against students and prohibits discriminatory practices in real estate such

as redlining. Forbidding students from living in zip code 20007 is, quite simply, redlining. Although courts have upheld enrollment caps in years past, it remains an open question whether such a sweeping restriction on both student residents and the University would be upheld in litigation.

Keep in mind that a great number of Georgetown undergraduates permanently relocate to the District after graduation. Banning students from living off-campus will discourage students from relocating, causing irreparable harm to the District's long term demographics and tax base. Moreover, students are residents just like any other, and do not deserve to be labeled "transients." For the past two years, I have been an employee of the U.S. Department of Justice. I paid District of Columbia income taxes. I am hardly a "transient" resident of the District.

The vast majority of undergraduates at Georgetown are responsible members of the Georgetown, Burleith, Glover Park and Foxhall neighborhoods. We are not the irresponsible drunken revelers that a small group of fanatics in local government portray us to be. While there will always be tensions between college-age residents and older residents, banning Georgetown undergraduates from living off-campus will not alleviate these tensions: the homes currently rented to Georgetown students will just be rented to other young people, and Georgetown residents will no longer be able to turn to the University to patrol and sanction young people's actions in the neighborhood.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Schmidt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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School of Foreign Service Class of 2012
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