

Testimony of Jacques Arsenault
1685 35th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20007
to the D.C. Zoning Commission
In Support of the Georgetown University Campus Plan

Good evening Mr. Chairman, and Commissioners. My name is Jacques Arsenault, and I live at 1685 35th Street NW. I am an alumnus of Georgetown University, undergraduate class of class of 2001 and masters in public policy class of 2007. I am currently an analyst for the U.S. Government Accounting Office.

My wife and I live on the border of West Georgetown and Burleith, on 35th Street across from Ellington School. We have lived in our current apartment for the past four years, having previously lived on the west side of Georgetown's campus in Foxhall Village.

When I was an undergraduate at Georgetown, I was a student association leader and worked on the 2000 campus plan. In recent years, after finishing my graduate studies, I have kept up with the university's latest campus plan through the Georgetown Current, the Georgetown yahoo listserv and other local blogs and news sites.

I decided to speak out in favor of the campus plan in part because so much of what's being said sounds so familiar. When I was an undergraduate living on campus, I was never really sure if what the neighbors said about the students living off campus was real or not. Now that I have the experience of having lived in the West Georgetown-Burleith area, I feel I can truly speak first-hand about my experience and I must say, it's not anything like what I've read in some local reports, or heard about in the ANC2E presentation last month.

We live on a block with several group houses (at least six) including some that have undergraduate students. In the past four years, we have likely seen more than 100 people live in those houses. There have been times when the students have had parties, but nothing like the volume or intensity described by CAG or the Burleith Citizens Association, and certainly not the "neighborhood swamped by objectionable impacts" as described by the ANC2E representatives in the last meeting.

In those four years we have lived on our block, there have been exactly two occasions in which we were either woken up, or had a hard time falling asleep due to noise. On one of those occasions, the students next door had left a note on our door providing their phone numbers, asking us to call them if it was too loud. On both occasions, we closed our windows, turned on a fan, and were asleep within 15 minutes.

We absolutely love living in the neighborhood, and we are grateful for the foot traffic provided by students, which we feel lessens the amount of crime. Last year, our downstairs neighbors had a bicycle stolen overnight from its locked spot in the front yard, exactly one week after most students had moved out of the neighborhood. This may have been a coincidence, but as they had been storing the bike there for several months, it seemed more than coincidental that the opportunity for theft was increased by a lack of evening foot traffic.

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Is there occasionally noise from students passing through? Sure, but in our experience, it is not something that is either constant or massively disturbing. Living on a city street with significant traffic from Metrobuses, garbage trucks, and ambulances, as well as students from the Duke Ellington High School for the Arts, occasional noise is a minor annoyance that we feel comes with living in a lively neighborhood.

As a Georgetown alumnus, I feel strongly that the University should develop in a way that ensures it maintains its standing in the world as a well respected institution. And, one of the ways that can occur is to carry through on some of the projects that are envisioned in this plan, particularly those such as the library expansion, the New South student center and the renovations to Kehoe Field, as well as the addition of more than 200 beds on campus, all of which will further move the center of student life to campus. I worry that the recommendation of the Office of Planning to house 100% of undergraduates on campus will be financially draining to the University such that none of the projects will ever get built.

Also, as a relatively recent graduate, I can tell you that not every senior wants to live on campus. For the university to spend literally millions of dollars building new housing that may never be filled at the expense of projects that could enhance the academic quality of the University, just doesn't make sense.

Finally, and speaking again primarily as a resident, my experience has seen the presence of the students in the neighborhood as a mostly positive factor, and not the invasion or overrunning of the neighborhood that has been described by some opponents of the plan.