

Testimony of Stephen Kurzman
before the
Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia

June 2, 2011

My name is Stephen Kurzman. My wife, Patricia A. Goldman, and I reside in Georgetown at 3026 ½ Q St., N.W., Washington, DC 20007. We have owned our home for almost 21 years. I have resided in Georgetown for 50 years, in four different houses, the first two as tenants and the last two as owners. My late wife, architect Ellen Goldberg Kurzman, and I raised our two sons in Georgetown. I served as president of the Citizens Association of Georgetown from 1994 to 1996, for a number of years was on the CAG board of directors and a block captain in CAG's Neighborhood Watch program, and currently serve on its public safety committee.

I oppose the proposed Georgetown University 10-year Campus Plan in its present form and strongly urge the Zoning Commission to require the University to return to its former goal of housing 100 percent of its undergraduate students on its main and auxiliary campuses. I also urge you to require the University to relate increases in its overall student population to the availability of on-campus housing. The need for these changes in the proposed plan, and the legal basis for requiring them, have been amply documented in the testimony you have heard from the D.C. Office of Planning, ANC 2E, the Citizens Association of Georgetown and neighboring ANC's and citizens associations, and many of the residents whose lives are so heavily impacted by the growth of the University.

What I hope to add to this voluminous record is my own experience and perspective from the half century I have lived in this beautiful, historic residential community, in which Georgetown University is a valued, prestigious institution of higher education. Sadly, however, while growing in overall size and footprint in Georgetown, GU has put an inordinate burden on its resident neighbors by, in effect, placing thousands of students in off-campus group housing. My first point is that this unfortunate impact has been felt for many decades, and the University's repeated promises and efforts to address it have been unsuccessful. My second point is that there is no way to make student group housing work to everyone's satisfaction in our side-by-side townhouse neighborhood. The only way to solve this problem is to build sufficient student housing on campus.

On the first point, more than 15 years ago, in the December 1995 issue of *Georgetown Citizens*, the CAG newsletter, my President's Letter column began:

"The town/gown beat goes on, sometimes all too literally and too loudly, if you happen to live near off-campus student houses.

"This Fall, after years of irate complaints from neighbors about noise, trash, public drinking and student misbehavior, Georgetown University began holding orientation sessions for its 1,500 upperclassmen who live off-campus, in either rented private quarters or University-owned houses. Another 300 students were exempted from the sessions on a case-by-case basis because they are either 'commuters or older students.' The nine sessions, conducted by University officials and representatives of the D.C. police, D.C Department of Public Works, Burleith community, and Student Association, were designed to educate students about their responsibilities as good neighbors.

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"Nevertheless, during the first weekends of the current semester there were some wild, all-night parties which disturbed the neighbors. There was also a glaring failure of the University's telephone 'hotline,' on which residents are supposed to report student off-campus misbehavior. One hotline operator responded to a complaining resident by telling her to call the D.C. police!"

My column went on to detail the back and forth between CAG and the University on various remedies of the situation, but the bottom line is the same one you have heard in all the testimony on the current campus plan: the remedies simply don't work. The evidence for that conclusion has been accumulating for decades and is overwhelming.

My second point is more personal. All my homes in Georgetown have been on the east side of the village, so that student off-campus housing has not directly affected me and my family – with one exception. A few years ago our next-door neighbor moved overseas for a time and rented her home, which shares a common wall with our house, to a group of seven graduate students. Even though the students were of an age when the University says they are mature enough to be good neighbors, and even though my wife and I reached out to the students to welcome them as neighbors, the over-all experience was the one you have heard so much about: raucous late-night parties, garbage strewn about, towels left drying on the front porch, etc. We experienced personally what residents closer to the University have been experiencing for decades: student group houses are inherently a problem for their residential neighbors.

The only solution to this problem is in your hands, Commissioners, and now is finally the time to solve it: require Georgetown University to house 100 percent of its undergraduate students on-campus and to relate increases in its overall student population to the availability of on-campus housing.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your service to the District of Columbia.