

Testimony Against Georgetown University Campus Plan

June 6, 2011

D.C. Zoning Commission,

Suite 210, 441 4th Street, N.W.,

Washington, D.C. 20001

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

Dear Zoning Commissioners:

My name is Eugenia Kemble and I live at 1409 35th Street NW near the corner of O Street. I bought my house in 1987 for a pittance because it had been rented for years to Georgetown students, and had been totally trashed by them. I rented to groups of students myself for a few more years to save up the money to fix the house. It was an unpleasant experience to say the least. The irresponsibility, mess and narcissism tried my soul. But I did it and now, after 100's of thousands of dollars in hard earned cash (I am not independently wealthy and have already worked for 45 years) I have a nice little place.

I sunk quite a bit into renovation – the house was supposed to fund my retirement and be a good place to raise my two adopted children, now both in their 20's. But now, I would say its value is precarious at best, given what is happening to the neighborhood. I hoped to leave them something of value. Yet, even my kids are stunned by what goes on, and have been since they were in high school – groups of 10 or 20 young people wandering up and down our street, yelling at one another, sometimes getting into fights, and certainly making lots of noise into the wee hours every school week from Thursday until Sunday. Here are just a couple of anecdotes. I am sure you have heard many like these:

- One night as many as 25 students were trafficking in and out of the house across the street. It was very loud and my daughter and I could not sleep so we went out with a camera to take some pictures. One male student came across the street and in a very threatening way, demanded we destroy the photo. My daughter was intimidated, and so promised to erase it.
- Another night I woke up and saw a young man staggering up the street, falling periodically to his knees. I called the police, hoping they would find him before he fell and was run over. He was literally a danger to himself.
- There are a string of newspaper coin machines in front of Saxby's. For some reason it is fun to knock them down one after the other – they make a sound like a machine gun firing as they hit the street. No one could sleep through it.
- I have heard brawls between young men and women, even witnessed men threatening women. When this happens I call the police.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 10-32
EXHIBIT NO. 236

- My block has at least 4 additional student houses since I have moved in. We are also on the thoroughfare to Burleigh. The walking and staggering talk is very loud – as if those engaging in it have absolutely no idea the impact on residents. My bedroom is on the front of the house. Sometimes I have to go sleep on the couch in the back room.

Enough. To make a long story short, my quality of life has deteriorated.

Let me throw in a couple of qualifiers. Not all students fit a negative stereotype. I know this first hand because when I renovated my house I created an au pair apartment. As a single mom I needed live in help to support me in raising my kids. When they grew up I was able to rent this studio (properly certificated, I might add), though this was not my original intent. I have chosen my tenants carefully and practically all of them have been Georgetown students. They have been quiet, take care of the place and have been considerate. I might also point out that demand is so high that I have never missed a month of rent. It's high enough that I know every apartment or house that might become available to students would be snapped up quickly.

Some might think this makes me a less credible testifier. Think of it this way. I've seen all sides of this – a renovator of a damaged student house, a renter, a parent of students and a renter to students. It's a pretty comprehensive picture.

What do you need to think about in making a decision?

- First, if I were you I would try to set aside the power issue. GU is powerful. If *The Examiner* is right, it is the largest private employer in the city – a city full of tax exempt universities. More students mean more employees, obviously. We residents know from the last fight about a GU campus plan that we don't have the money to wage the kind of fight the University can wage. I hope the Zoning commission is not just going through the motions here. This is an organized community that sees itself as threatened. We are counting on you to save Georgetown. It's a moral issue really, not a power play.
- Speaking of morality, GU was built because its founders wanted to spread what they regarded as core values. Despite this, we have not gotten a fair shake from the University. Endless meetings held with University representatives to gain our sympathy and support for this plan have avoided answering the questions we ask – such as how many students, really, have been expelled because of bad behavior. Or, why are the plans for the University and the plans for the hospital moving on different timetables when one plan is so clearly dependent on the other? Or why did the last plan not meet its commitments to us? We get a lot about how hard everyone is trying, as if that should suffice when the results are so inadequate and the back story so incomplete.
- About taxes – residents pay them. I pay over \$6,000 a year in property taxes. I expect this money to be used for the kinds of services tax-payers assume they are paying for: police, fire, safety, roads, parking, trash collection, etc. I do not expect to pay for amplification of these services because those who don't pay taxes (tax exempt institutions, non-residents) put more than their share of burden on the system. So, though I call the police if I think behavior is illegal

or intolerable, I resent it. I resent the distortion in demand from incidents that really need police attention to those that do. I feel the same way about trash complaints, streets full of out of DC cars. When the University says it is working with the police to discourage nonsense behavior I ask myself why my tax dollars should be spent on this.

What should you do?

- If the University intends to expand, let them do so at another site. This campus is saturated. Any increase at all will be harmful. And, it matters not whether these are graduate or undergraduate students. Frankly, I don't think on campus housing should be increased. There are too many students now, there were too many before the last plan was passed (and not adhered to). Even if they are all on campus the added traffic burdens and the presence of so many students coming and going will damage the neighborhood. We need no more students. (By the way, the argument that the campus has a higher percentage of its students on campus than most other universities is a non-starter. Such percentages are meaningless without all the other variables – campus size, surrounding neighborhood and its character, absolute size of student body, etc, etc.)
- The University should be accountable to DC for not overburdening its services. There should be a formula for assessing the University for extra police, trash, etc. services. None of its own provisions cover the overburden now.
- The University should be more transparent about what happens to student transgressors. Why shouldn't knowing about those who violate university rules be a matter of campus record – one that we would have access to?

Those of us who have taken the time to come and testify are not just a bunch of whiney conservatives. We are trying to live our lives as best we can without interference and unpleasantness. I urge you to take our complaints seriously and help us make Georgetown the wonderful neighborhood it deserves to be.