

## Zoning Commission Testimony

June 6, 2011

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I have decided to speak tonight because I felt it was important that the Zoning Commission hear from someone who belongs to the small number of people who have recently purchased homes in Burleith as their permanent residences.

A year ago my wife and I leapt at the chance to live in Washington and be a part of its vibrant neighborhoods and downtown. After our first year in Georgetown we felt it was time to purchase a place of our own. My wife wanted to continue living close to her work, and it wasn't long before we realized Burleith was our best option.

We found housing prices within our financial means. The homes had adequate space for our needs and provided enough room for either of our two children and their families to come for extended visits. For financial as well as lifestyle reasons we are a one car family. We found Berleith to be the only community that could accommodate that choice because of its unique location. We are in walking distance of both Glover Park and Georgetown. The circulator bus stop is a short distance from our home. For us Burleith is a marvelous gateway to all Washington has to offer.

However, despite all of the positives we were confronted with one troubling fact. It was evident from numerous lawn signs that many residents were at odds with the Georgetown Campus Plan . A considerable financial commitment, we now had to concede might be at risk if in years to come Burleith's transient student population continued to expand and property values diminished. After a number of consults with family and friends and taking into account a seemingly recession-proof housing market in Washington, we decided to remain optimistic and purchase a home in Burleith.

After four months, our initial fear remains. Errands and dog walking duties make my trips through the neighborhood frequent and at all hours. I've come to realize that it is impossible to walk in our neighborhood without encountering

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students or groups of students coming and going at almost any time of day or night. Even on late night dog walks I'll find students walking through the neighborhood arriving or leaving in cars or taxis, encamped on back porches and street corners. There is a palpable feeling that Burleith has reached a tipping point in its student population. Properties owned by absentee landlords become increasingly easy to spot, as they wait until students-turnover before attending to them: grass gets sometimes knee high and tree limbs rip away at gutters and roofing shingles, overgrown shrubbery make sidewalks difficult to pass. Trash and rubbish from overflowing bins of student houses accumulates in alley corners and parking spaces. My wife and I are considering weekend sweeps to keep our alleyway free of debris and rat infestation if possible. As new homeowners we now share the community's concern that it cannot sustain the number of students currently living there.

My wife and I are part of a familiar demographic trend know as "empty-nest" couples looking to go back to cities as a way of enriching their later lives. People like us provide a long-lasting stream of revenue in paying city taxes, and supporting businesses, and merchants. Communities gain homeowners who are responsible for maintenance and upkeep of their property. However, it's difficult to perceive such a trend at work in Burleith. In fact, my wife and I sometimes feel we're more an anomaly then a trend. Instead, Burleith continues to fight being labeled a "student neighborhood". The changeover of homes to student rentals is perpetuated by GU's reluctance to provide attractive housing options for 100% of those who enroll there. The GU Campus Plan as it stands undermines the value we see in this unique DC community and our reasons for living there. And if not changed does a disservice to Burleith, forcing potential homeowners who would otherwise be attracted to it for the same reasons I've presented look elsewhere.