

June 12, 2011

DC Zoning Commission
Government of the District of Columbia
One Judiciary Square
441 4th Street NW
Suite 210S
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Chairman Hood, Vice-Chairman Schlater, Commissioners Selfridge, Turnbull, and May,

I write this submission in support of the 2010-2020 Georgetown University Campus Plan, Perhaps my strong feelings will not be fully conveyed in this letter, but I assure you that this issue is very dear to me.

Last summer, I wrote two letters, one to Councilmember Jack Evans, the other to the Office of Planning's Jennifer Steingasser. I was surprised when I received two replies from Councilmember Evans' office, but not surprised when I never received a response from Ms. Steingasser. As you know, both Ms. Steingasser and Councilmember Evans are two of the most high-profile opponents of this campus plan. I received this response from Councilmember Evans to a letter I sent regarding the concessions that Georgetown made in its campus plan process:

"John - I remain hopeful that the University and the neighborhood leadership can continue to talk and work together to continue to create not only a world class campus, but also a model neighborhood with respect and care for everyone. The primary concern I hear from residents of Georgetown and Burleith is students living off campus in the immediate neighborhoods, particularly the group houses whose tenants are not respectful of their surroundings or of the neighborhood, and not seeing enough action by the University in the past ten years to address inappropriate behavior, when it occurs, of students off campus."

In short, it is this kind of passive stance on the part of the opposition to the campus plan that prevents progress from being made on these issues. Instead of proposing realistic solutions, and accepting that compromise is a two-way street, Georgetown's neighbors believe that they should have all the leverage in the world. As our neighbors claimed at one of the recent Zoning Commission hearings on this case, we are going in circles. They were right. However, this is not Georgetown University's fault, the blame lies squarely at the feet of the ANC2E, the Burleith Citizen's Association, and the Citizen's Association of Georgetown. As they went on to say, the definition of insanity, according to Albert Einstein, is doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results. That is what the neighborhood opposition has been doing for upwards of 25 years, NOT what Georgetown University has been doing. Any alum from the time that this neighborhood opposition began becoming irrational and destructive, could tell you that Georgetown's policies to appease their neighbors have changed drastically since their time on campus.

You heard another Councilmember, Ms. Mary Cheh, testify in opposition to the campus plan, which is a great example of the irrationality I characterize the opposition with. Councilmember Cheh, is from a district that barely has anything to do with Georgetown University. As I understand it, the far reaches of her district are Foxhall Village, which shockingly is one of the main opponents to this campus plan. Foxhall residents themselves claim that they are separated from the university, by a certain Glover-Archibald Park. If they are so separated, which I completely agree with, why do they claim such objectionable impacts from a group of people who are completely unobjectionable, namely graduate students? Regardless, this is not Councilmember Cheh's fight. In her testimony, she claimed that many universities of similar stature to Georgetown house 100% of their undergraduates on campus. Immediately following that statement, she cited percentages from many Ivy League institutions, all of which were under 100%. Not only that, it has since been confirmed that none of these institutions even ATTEMPT to house 100% of their undergraduates on campus. Therefore, not only was Councilmember Cheh's testimony itself completely out of line with her constituency, it employed false assertions to attempt to justify what can only be called an irrational government response to anecdotal, unverified evidence on the part of a few.

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Where was Councilmember Evans testifying in front of this commission? He clearly represents the interests of the opposition more directly than Mary Cheh.

It is sad that I have to begin this letter by attacking my opponents' views, but the fact of the matter is, their preposterous claims would have more of an impact on the commission's views than any positive, VERIFIED, evidence Georgetown University puts forward would.

I'd like to make a claim of my own, in this vein, to demonstrate the absurdity of the opposition's argument. I recently found on the website thegeorgetowndish.com, this comment with regards to a story about a Georgetown woman being punched in the face by a youth on the corner of O St. and Wisconsin Ave.:

"I blame Georgetown University, as they are the demon behind everything evil and wrong both close to and far from campus. It was no doubt the G2 bus route that these "students" took, which originates at Georgetown University. So lets do away with that Metro bus route as well, in hopes that the University will shutter its doors and then all the georgetown residents will be able to sleep better at night and drive through empty streets during rush hours!!!"

Not only was this probably written as a joke, it was more than likely not written by a resident of Georgetown. However, by the trend started by our opposition with regards to submitting evidence, I feel compelled to submit this as evidence of the kind of discriminatory ignorance that we students deal with every day. The sad fact is, this statement, while clearly a joke, is not far off from what most vocal opponents of this campus plan would say.

Now to move on to the issues most discussed in this campus plan process. I will make some claims in this part of my letter that will undoubtedly seem preposterous to Georgetown's neighbors. I would just like to preface this portion, therefore, by saying that I stand behind these claims 100%. I do not make these claims merely to debunk any opposition to the plan, but rather to state the truth.

The first issue I'd like to address, since it is the furthest from an objectionable impact as any of the issues I will discuss are, is the loop road proposed by the university. Now for my bold claim: the Foxhall neighbors that oppose this plan claim that they do so to protect a national park, Glover-Archibold. However, in Glover-Archibold Park, Foxhall simply found a way to oppose what they most fear, which is clearly not the lack of destruction of park land which would occur from this proposal, but rather the university putting into effect any expansion, no matter how small or unobjectionable. Now to get to their real opposition: they argue that the GUTS buses that would go down this proposed road quite frequently would disrupt their daily lives. I can barely hear a GUTS bus approach behind me, when I am literally feet from it. I wonder if Foxhall has not done a decibel level study on this proposal, simply because they know if they do so it would completely debunk their opposition. Just a thought.

In reality, I believe any argument against the GUTS bus system becoming more used and more internal, preposterous. The opposition does not believe in the scientific evidence the university has provided that shows that the loop road is the only viable option to further internalize the GUTS system. If they don't believe in scientific proof, what will convince them? For years, the neighborhood has asked Georgetown to further internalize the bus system, which the university has admirably done, despite its objectionable impacts to the commuters that use the system, and to the university as a whole. The fact of the matter is the neighborhood opposition clearly did not consider the consequences of requesting that the university internalize the GUTS system. Not surprising from a group that clearly ignores all the MASSIVE consequences of their enrollment cap proposals, without even scratching the surface of the 100% on campus requirement.

Continuing with the transportation issues of this campus plan, I'd like to discuss the opposition to the alignment of 38th Street with the GU Hospital entrance. In my letters to Ms. Steingasser and Mr. Evans, I wrote the following:

"This intersection is currently incredibly dangerous because when one wishes to enter the university, they can't do it directly from 38th St. They first have to turn onto Reservoir Rd and then quickly turn again into the hospital. However, the community claims that aligning this intersection will, in fact, make traffic more dangerous because cars will be able to go directly, and thus faster into the hospital entrance. I question how that is possible. There is in fact no rational argument that proves that drivers will be more careless, or dangerous because of the alignment of this intersection, and in fact it would alleviate many of the traffic issues that currently exist near that exit, due to shuttle buses and cars having to make that horrific turn sequence. Once again, the negatives are based in something other than reality, while the positives are very clear and tangible."

I was fairly diplomatic in that assessment of the opposition. However, the more I've heard this same argument over and over and over and over again, I have become less diplomatic. This is quite possibly the most ridiculous, least based in fact, irrational argument I have heard anyone make in my life. The idea that "race-track Burleith," which is what the neighbors claim will happen if this alignment occurs is more dangerous than the most dangerous turn I've seen in my life(having spent 18 years of my life in Los Angeles, I've seen some pretty dumb road designs), is simply nuts.

Another incorrect assertion I have seen made countless times by the opposition, is that Georgetown University's campus ends at the front gates(37th and O Streets). Erroneous on all counts. Georgetown University's campus extends to 35th St, though the border is not a straight line. To ignore this fact should be taken as a slap in the face by any DC Government agency, considering these boundaries were established by the very same government of the District.

Finally, I would ask the commission to remove the videotape submitted by the neighborhood coalition from the evidence it considers against this campus plan. Not only is such filming unethical, it is unrealistic. Half of the video was clearly shot on M St., however, it was claimed to be in a residential neighborhood. It is a fact that the drunk driver incident described in the neighborhood testimony was not a Georgetown University student. The sad part is I have no doubt that at least half of the letters you've received in opposition contain similar "misprints" and "exaggerations". These claims insult the integrity of this campus plan process. You don't see me even begin to discuss the ridiculous actions our neighbors take in this letter, which are so absurd I don't even have to exaggerate them in order for them to hurt the opposition.

After approximately 3 pages of reasons why the opposition to this campus plan is irrational and destructive, I would like to share my thoughts as to why support for this campus plan is necessary, rational, and beneficial. As I'm sure you're aware, Georgetown's endowment sits well below its peers. Not only that, Georgetown's endowment size ranking is well below its US News and World Report ranking. Both of these facts mean that Georgetown is competing against similar schools at a massive monetary disadvantage. This has caused a significant gap between Georgetown University's facilities and those of its competitors, most notably in athletics, student space, and sciences. The science facility deficit is being partially closed by the current construction of the New Science Center, scheduled to be complete in Fall 2012. However, with regards to both athletics and student space, Georgetown has no concrete and shovel ready plans to improve those two crucial facets of campus life.

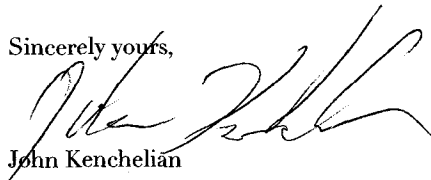
What Georgetown proposes in this campus plan, partially as a rollover from the 2000 Campus Plan, points to the fact that the university is prepared financially to improve on their athletic and student space facilities. I can't emphasize enough how big of a step it is for Georgetown to simply have the money to propose these structural changes to the Zoning Commission. These plans have taken years of planning, years of fundraising, years of many members of the university community's time and effort, in order to be even close to a reality.

So you may ask: does this mean that the Zoning Commission should always pass GU's campus plans no matter what? I do not mean to imply such a statement in this letter. Rather, I say all of this about GU's endowment to point out what a crippling blow a requirement of 100% of undergraduates to be housed on

campus would be. It would cost GU literally millions upon millions of dollars to meet such a requirement, and I'm just considering the construction of new beds to house the undergraduates who currently live off-campus. Now, in discussing a plan that proposes many million dollar construction projects, I believe we have lost sight of any real sense of the amount of money 1 million dollars is. Such housing construction projects, would be a MASSIVE capital investment. Not only would it cost money, it would cost many students the chance to have real athletic facilities on campus, or to have an acceptable student space for a campus like Georgetown's. The impacts of this proposed requirement can be proven to be very tangible, and very real. On the other side, the neighbors have not adequately proved that any objectionable impacts caused by not adhering to such a 100% requirement are tangible, or real. The opposition claims that it is trying to protect students from the university. A great analogy for this argument would be a cheetah protecting a gazelle from its mother. I do not need to be protected from the only stakeholder in this argument that actually cares about my well-being.

I knew going into this campus plan process that it would more than likely frustrate me beyond belief. It has not disappointed. However, the outcome does not need to be so frustrating. With a simple vote, you, the commission, can make this long and arduous process all worth it. I beg, I plead, I implore you to pass this campus plan, without adopting the requirement that 100% of undergraduates must live on campus as the Office of Planning proposes. The lives of many should not be negatively impacted by the beliefs of a few, and while the opposition may see themselves as the "many," they are far from it. Government in this great country is based on the rule of a majority, and the vast majority of stakeholders support the 2010-2020 GU Campus Plan. Finally, I would like to thank the Zoning Commission for conducting a very fair process so far, most notably allowing Georgetown students the chance to be heard before they returned home for summer vacation. I am a member of the greater Georgetown and Burleith communities, I am not some statistic showing residence in group houses. Please continue to treat myself and my fellow students as such. We are Georgetown.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Kenchelian', written over a horizontal line.

John Kenchelian

President, GU Jazz

Head of Jack Crew(handlers of the Georgetown University mascot)

Sports Director, WGTB Georgetown Radio