

**BEFORE THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
ZONING COMMISSION**

Application of the
University of the District of Columbia

ANC 3F
Hearing Date: May 2, 2011

**APPLICATION FOR FURTHER PROCESSING OF A CAMPUS PLAN FOR
CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW STUDENT CENTER**

**UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
VAN NESS CAMPUS**

I. NATURE OF RELIEF SOUGHT

This is an application of the University of the District of Columbia (the "University" or "Applicant") for further processing of its 2011-2020 Van Ness Campus Plan pursuant to Section 210 of the Zoning Regulations. The Campus Plan was filed with the Zoning Commission on February 8, 2011 and scheduled for a public hearing on Monday, May 2, 2011. The University respectfully requests that this application for further processing be consolidated with the Campus Plan for reasons of efficiency and be heard in conjunction with the Plan itself. In this application, the University requests approval of a new student center in the southeast corner of its Van Ness campus, at the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Van Ness Street and adjacent to the Van Ness Metrorail Station.

II. EXISTING CONDITIONS AND BUILDINGS

The Property that is the subject of this application is part of the Van Ness Campus of the University of the District of Columbia. It is located 4200 Connecticut Avenue, NW (Square 1964, part of Lot 803).

Existing campus conditions are generally described in the 2011 Campus Plan. The specific location that is the subject of this application is improved with a large hardscaped plaza

that is bounded by Van Ness Street on the south, Connecticut Avenue on the east, and Veazey Terrace on the north. West of the plaza, set back a significant distance from the property line, are two University buildings, Buildings 38 (north) and 39 (south). Both structures currently contain a mix of academic and administrative uses, including a bookstore and dining facility. Buildings 38 and 39 are five stories tall each (as viewed from the plaza) and primarily composed of concrete. They are connected in the middle by a multi-story bridge that serves as the primary public entrance. The existing conditions are shown on photographs included as pages 13-14 of Exhibit A.

Located immediately west of Buildings 38 and 39 is Dennard Plaza, which is a large open area that serves as the spatial core of the campus. As described in the 2011 Plan, Dennard Plaza is currently being renovated and transformed from a hardscaped plaza into a sustainable landscaped terrace. The primary vehicular entrance to the campus is located at the level of Dennard Plaza, and is accessed from Van Ness Street. This entrance includes both a covered drop-off area and an entrance to the parking garage. Loading docks are located under the northeast corner of the plaza (due west of Building 38) and are accessed off Connecticut Avenue via Veazey Terrace.

The campus is located in the D/R-1-B Zone District. The western entry to the Van Ness-UDC Metrorail Station is located immediately to the north, across Veazey Terrace. (A second station entrance is located across Connecticut Avenue to the east.) Subsurface equipment related to the Metrorail station is located south of Veazey Terrace, on the northern portion of the proposed building site. Commercial development containing a mixture of retail and office uses is located along Connecticut Avenue to the north and to the east, and is located in the C-3-A

Zone District. The Intelsat administrative headquarters building is located to the south across Van Ness Street, and is in the D/R-1-B Zone District.

III. PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

The University requests further processing of its 2011 Campus Plan in order to construct a proposed student center at the intersection of Connecticut and Van Ness, which is at the southeast corner of the campus. The proposed student center will include new construction on the existing hardscaped plaza as well as some renovated areas within Building 38 and the multi-story connector bridges. It will transform the existing space into a pedestrian-friendly and environmentally-sustainable center for campus activity that will activate this corner and establish a physical and figural identity for the University along Connecticut Avenue.

The Student Center is being funded primarily through \$35 million in funding from the D.C. Council. This legislation requires that, as a condition of the funding, the Student Center be completed by August 2012. Construction of the Student Center is expected to commence in Summer 2011 and last approximately one year.

A. Building Location

As discussed in the Campus Plan, the location at Connecticut and Van Ness was selected after a thorough consideration of multiple potential locations and other building considerations. Ultimately, this location was selected for a variety of reasons.

- The location offers high visibility at a prominent intersection, which provides an opportunity to redefine the university campus, image, and relationship to the community.
- At the same time, the existing hardscaped plaza is an underutilized and inactive space, which provides a unique opportunity to improve the location's sustainability and urban design through the construction of a new building.

- The location is adjacent to the campus core, which is organized around Dennard Plaza. This allows the new center to connect to existing structures and spaces in a variety of ways as well as capitalize on existing parking, loading, and service spaces.
- Finally, while the relatively small site pad is not large enough to accommodate any meaningful housing or other use, it is the right size for the combination of uses needed for a student center.

The site selection was also supported by representatives of the Office of Planning and community members who participated in the campus planning process.

B. Site Planning and Building Entrances

The new Student Center provides a fully functional and modern design that bridges together the campus and community, accommodates a series of site constraints and connects to existing campus infrastructure and development.

- First, the bulk of the mass has been shifted to the south, toward the prominent corner of Connecticut and Van Ness and away from the existing Metrorail station and related below-ground subsurface features. This effectively creates smaller, human-scaled plaza between the Metrorail entrance and the new student center
- Second, the primary building entrances have been oriented towards the Metrorail station. These include a direct ground-level entrance into the Student Center as well as a monumental staircase to a second-story terrace that will provide access not only to the Student Center but also to Buildings 38 and 39 as well as Dennard Plaza and the core of the campus itself. Other entrances may also be provided from the street directly into the active ground-level uses. See page 4 of Exhibit A (circulation diagram).
- Third, each floor elevation carefully balances the need to connect to existing infrastructure yet also engage the urban design needs of the adjacent public street.
 - At the lowest level (the C level), the floorplates align, which permits a direct connection from the existing loading docks west of Building 38 to the new student center. (See page 6 of Exhibit A.)
 - The ground level (the B level) is located so that it provides an at-grade entrance at the primary pedestrian entrance closest to Connecticut Avenue and tall floor-to-ceiling heights yet also provides for a connection to the existing B level in Buildings 38 and 39, which is approximately 5' feet above this level. (See page 7 of Exhibit A.)

- The next floor up (the A level) is again aligned with the existing campus development at the Dennard Plaza level. (See page 8 of Exhibit A.) The monumental stair from the ground level to this terrace will therefore provide a new “front door” into the heart of campus, and the connection to Dennard Plaza itself will “break open” the existing structures and provide a physical and visual extension of Dennard Plaza through Buildings 38 and 39 to the Student Center and Connecticut Avenue. This also permits a connection through the existing buildings to the vehicular drop off and parking garage located off Van Ness Street.
- The location of the ballroom at the top story (the 1 level) allows for a clear span as well as some separation from the student center’s day-to-day activities. (See page 9 of Exhibit A.)
- Fourth, the overall plan will replace an existing hardscaped surface with a variety of landscaped surfaces that will include significant amounts of permeable surface, both at the ground level and on the building’s roof. (See pages 3 and 5 of Exhibit A – Site Concept.)

The resulting building will both greatly improve and enhance existing site conditions within a building that will accommodate the University’s needs.

C. Program Summary

The new Student Center will contain a mix of student-focused spaces and related support areas that have been strategically located within the structure to both activate the surrounding public streetscape and harmonize with the existing campus layout. The Student Center is at once familiar and unique: it essentially anchors the corner with a common ground-floor restaurant and fitness center above, yet also provides a mix of uses and spaces that specifically address important university needs and public design goals.

- C level: This level of the Student Center is completely below grade and will contain mechanical and storage space to support the uses above. This level will also provide a service connection to the existing loading dock at the northwest corner of Building 38.
- B level (Ground Level): This is the ground level of the Center and will therefore contain active, street-oriented uses along its Connecticut Avenue frontage including, most prominently, a restaurant/dining facility at the corner of Connecticut and Van Ness. Other active uses will include potential retail space at the northern end of the building, near the Van Ness Metro station, and student lounge spaces along the center of the

frontage. Other student spaces will be located in the interior infill area between the new building and Buildings 38 and 39.

- **A Level (Dennard Plaza Level):** The A level serves as the main floor for most of the existing campus infrastructure, which is organized around Dennard Plaza at this level. The student center design ties directly to this main level through an outdoor plaza at the center of the site (that serves as the roof of the infilled area on the B level) . To emphasize this physical and visual connection, the existing enclosed escalators and entrance will be removed and replaced with a breezeway that effectively extends Dennard Plaza out to Connecticut Avenue through Buildings 38 and 39. South of the plaza extension, the primary uses in the new building at this level will include a fitness center and multipurpose room, as well as other student lounge and activity spaces. North of the plaza extension, an expanded bookstore within Building 38 will further activate this level of the building. This level will also provide a direct connection from the parking garage and drop-off area to the Student Center.
- **1 Level:** The primary feature of this floor is a ballroom space with capacity for up to 500 people (seated) and the ability to be sub-divided into smaller meeting rooms. This will provide the University with an additional on-campus venue for students, speakers, and special events. More informal student lounge spaces will be located on a bridge piece that extends to the north over the plaza below.

The University will construct a total of 80,546 net new square feet of gross floor area (0.091 FAR) as well as use some of the existing building area to accommodate the above uses.

D. Architectural and Landscape Design

The design goal for the Student Center is a building that serves as a figural place-maker to identify the University and provide a stronger form at the key intersection of Connecticut and Van Ness and adhere to the University's high standards of environmental design. As a result, the building is being targeted for a LEED Platinum rating, which in itself is an exceptional achievement that is rarely matched in the District.

As discussed above, the architectural design of the building will support goals for improved urban design at this location. The building design will use a combination of masonry, glass, and metal materials that modulate between the institutional nature of the campus and pedestrian nature of the street. For example, the metal used will likely be a bronze color that

matches mullions on existing buildings, and generous ground-level floor-to-ceiling heights and large amounts of glass at the ground level will permit the uses within to activate the surrounding features during both day and evening hours.

Surrounding landscape and streetscape improvements will balance urban design and sustainability objectives to create an environment that is at once significantly more green than the current experience yet also provides more activity and interest befitting the transit-oriented location. Specific features being investigated include raingardens at the southern end of the site, between the new student center and Building 39 along Van Ness Street, and potential bioretention facilities both within the public right-of-way and on private property along Connecticut and Van Ness. Special attention will also be paid to the ground floor plaza at the entrance to the Student Center itself to use a variety of landscape and streetscape features to create a more pedestrian-oriented and inviting environment. Again, the active uses within the building will help to animate this area adjacent to the metrorail entrance.

Key architectural features of the building itself that will improve its sustainability include the use of atriums both in the center of the student center itself and the connecting plaza to provide natural daylight to the spaces below (indeed, all spaces except possibly the ballroom will have direct access to natural light) and a green roof at the top of the building.

IV. DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY AND RELATED RELIEF

Plans, elevations, and drawings of the proposed student center as well as photographs of existing conditions are attached as Exhibit A. In conjunction with this request for further processing and pursuant to 11 DCMR § 210.8, the University certifies that the FAR for the campus with the proposed student center will be approximately 1.35, which is within the

permitted limit of 1.8 FAR. The development proposed herein will have a minor impact on the overall FAR of the campus.

The proposed building will have a height of approximately 55 feet, as measured under the applicable Zoning Regulations and related definitions. Specifically, the height of the building will be measured from the finished grade level at the middle of the front of the building (i.e. the portion of the building that immediately fronts Connecticut Avenue) to the ceiling of the top story, as is permitted in zone districts where height is limited to 40 feet. See 11 DCMR § 199.1. Furthermore, as permitted under 11 DCMR § 400.9, the building will be set back from the Connecticut Avenue and Van Ness property lines by a minimum of 15 feet, which will permit an additional 15 feet of height.¹

The proposed building will occupy approximately 22,486 square feet of lot area, as measured at the A level, which is the main level of the main building on the campus. The building will increase the total lot occupancy of the campus to approximately 30%.

The University will address the specific standards of Sections 210 as well as Section 3104 in its pre-hearing submission. In general, the proposed Student Center will not impose objectionable or adverse impacts on neighboring property. Quite to the contrary, it will provide a host of amenities and benefits to surrounding property owners and residents. Key features include:

- Exemplary design and site planning that activate the public realm and transform the site into a pedestrian –friendly streetscape
- Exceptional commitment to sustainable design through a LEED Platinum building and specific features such as green roofs, raingardens, and bioretention facilities that significantly improve the permeability of the site

¹ The current version of the building plat erroneously shows a ten-foot setback along Van Ness Street. This will be updated in the pre-hearing submission prior to the public hearing.

- Amenities such as the ground-level restaurant, fitness center, and bookstore, as well as other potential retail spaces, which will be available to the public either as patrons or through a membership fee.

For all of these reasons, the University respectfully requests approval of the proposed student center.

V. EXHIBITS

In support of this application, the following exhibits are attached to this document:

EXHIBIT A Architectural plans, photographs of the site, and building plat

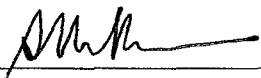
EXHIBIT B Application and self-certification form

EXHIBIT C List of property owners within 200 feet of the property

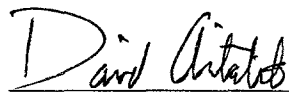
VI. CONCLUSION

For all of the reasons above, the University respectfully requests that the Zoning Commission approve the further processing of the campus plan as described herein and related areas of relief.

GOULSTON AND STORRS, P.C.



Allison Prince



David Avitabile

Date: February 28, 2011