Foggy Bottom and West End
Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC-2A)

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Statement before the Board of Zoning Adjustment on BZA Application No. 16553 -- George Washington University's Proposed Foggy Bottom Campus Plan -- Years 2000-2010 Barbara Spillinger -- September 13, 2000

Good morning Chairperson Reid and Members of the Board --

My name is Barbara Spillinger. I am Chair of ANC-2A and represent Single Member District 2A04. I am speaking today as authorized spokesman for ANC-2A. which encompasses the entirety of George Washington University's (GWU) Foggy Bottom campus.

Members of the ANC appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and to plead our case. As was pointed out in our filing of September 8, ANC-2A held a Special Public Meeting on Wednesday, August 30, at which it confirmed its support of its previously filed resolutions. The specifics of our case are spelled out in the Report of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A to the BZA dated April 17, prepared by James Draude and filed with the BZA with my letter of April 18.

This Report, as will be the case with so many who will testify today, fortifies its opposition to the Campus Plan by citing 11 DCMR 210 and the City's Comprehensive Plan, which includes numerous specific provisions regarding the University and its impact on the Foggy Bottom/West End residential neighborhood.

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the deleterious effects of housing large numbers of GWU students in residential areas outside GW's campus plan boundaries, e.g.:

> Section 1325.3: Loss of housing stock is also a critical problem in Foggy Bottom/ West End, aggravated by the lack of dormitory construction on the George Washington University (GWU) campus * * *. Conversions of housing units, particularly apartments to transient use (hotel, de facto hotels, and corporate apartments), to university dormitories and offices, and to medical offices/clinics is a major cause of depletion of the housing stock. (46 DCR 1757-1758 (1999)).

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And most telling is Section 1358.1, which I quote only in part:

> Intense student pressure on Foggy Bottom's housing stock outside the campus, combined with the impact of university generated traffic has had a negative effect on residential Foggy Bottom. The University must continue to construct student dormitories to alleviate the pressure on the housing stock outside the boundaries of the campus plan. The University must be sensitive to the surrounding residential neighborhood.

In addition to these statutory requirements, one of the primary goals addressed in the Mayor's neighborhood initiative program is the stabilization and preservation of neighborhoods, with special emphasis on enhancing and protecting established residential neighborhoods in the "ring" around the Central Employment District.

As cited and footnoted in our April 17 report, "The District of Columbia Court of Appeals has stated that 'the thrust of the [zoning]regulations is * * * to keep universities from expanding into residential neighborhoods without control.' The purpose of the Board's review of a campus plan is to evaluate the effect of the campus plan as a whole on the surrounding neighborhoods."

The community's major concerns are three: (1) the unregulated and uncontrolled use of land by the University in the surrounding area outside the currently approved campus plan boundaries; (2) the failure of the University to build sufficient dormitories to house its students within the campus plan boundaries, thus forcing large segments of the student population to find housing elsewhere, and (3) the failure of the University to provide sufficient on-campus, off-street parking or to even attempt to address traffic and parking impacts on neighboring residential areas outside the campus plan boundaries.

At this time, I would like to give particular recognition to the Supplemental Recommendations on the GWU Campus Plan filed September 8 by the Office of Planning, which give a thorough analysis of the impacts that threaten the continued viability of the University's adjacent neighborhoods, the incremental steps that have brought us to the current impasse, and recommendations for change that would alleviate current negative conditions. It is a thoroughly professional, thoughtful and constructive document.

I would also call your attention to the September 8 filing of the Foggy Bottom Association. This statement is especially relevant in that its author, Michael Thomas, was the lead spokesman for the community in the recent negotiations held by the Office of Planning, the community and the University. He gives a detailed, cogent critique of the community/GW Campus Plan controversy including its history, current status and options available.

Both of these documents address in some detail the September 7 draft of the University titled "Proposed conditions for GW Foggy Bottom Campus Plan." The ANC obviously has been unable to address GW's latest submission in a public meeting. However, at its August 30 Special Meeting, the ANC approved in concept OP's Location-Based Recommendation, and I venture to say that we are in concert with the conclusions reached by both OP and Mr. Thomas.

ANC-2A does, however, stand by its April 12 resolution, passed with all six commissioners present, which concludes, "ANC-2A finds GWU's Campus Plan as submitted unacceptable and asks particularly that student enrollment be curtailed until adequate on-campus housing, parking and other facilities are made available and result in a quantifiable decrease in the number of students forced to live in the surrounding off campus residential neighborhood. (emphasis added)

In commenting on ANC actions, I should also point out that in its April 17 Report, ANC-2A included the following conditions:

a. The full time undergraduate student population will be capped at the current level (headcount).

b. No further non-residential development will be approved within the campus plan boundaries until GWU constructs sufficient dormitories to house full-time undergraduate students under conditions that will assure that no full-time undergraduate GWU students reside in residential areas of Foggy Bottom/West End by the academic year beginning the fall of 2002, and every year thereafter.

c. As a condition of approval of the campus plan, GWU will not acquire any further property, directly or indirectly, in residentially zoned areas within the boundaries of ANC 2A.

In a footnote at page 20, the OP report refers to this proposal but does not offer support "...because of the virtual impossibility of compliance." I personally am in agreement with OP's assessment, but these stipulations were adopted at a time when the community could see little progress in negotiation or offers to compromise on the part of GW. A hard line on our side seemed the best way to address what we perceived as equally imperious demands by GW in its Campus Plan (page 23, GW "...will continue, as it has historically done, to use property outside the Campus Plan boundaries...." ; a student cap of 20,000 with no reference to graduate/undergraduate ratios; carte blanche with respect to the future use of the old hospital site, Square 54).

Granted in its September 7 statement, some of these conditions have been ameliorated. and, as a result of the negotiation effort, it was generally agreed that over a two-year period freshmen and sophomores will be required to live on campus; the code of student conduct will apply to students living off campus; a verifiable census of undergraduate students in Foggy Bottom/West End will be conducted; a transportation management program will encourage metro use by GW students, faculty and staff; and an Advisory Council of Community/GW representatives will be established.

However, on the substantive issues that divide us, we did not reach accord. Our concerns and recommendations are recounted in some detail in our filing of September 8, and we continue to ask that the Board deny this Application.

In closing, I would like to quote in part from a letter written by Councilmember Phil Mendelson to GW President Trachtenberg, "I wrote November 11 that the plan should define the neighborhood and then state how it will be protected....Zoning is not just about the geometric aspects or architecture, it is also about use. Use is about relationship, and campus planning is especially about the relationship of a university with other uses (e.g. residents) around the campus. * * * The campus plan can start from the premise: what does the university want to be in 2010; or it can start from the premise: how will the university relate to Foggy Bottom in 2010. * * * Instead, the plan is still focussed on bricks and mortar and GWU's programs. Meanwhile, since last fall the neighborhood has gotten all the more agitated over GWU's acquisition of Columbia Plaza and the razing of townhouses. Whether these actions are of-right has nothing to do with the need for the University to improve its relations with Foggy Bottom residents.. * * * ...a campus plan is about much more than just facilities planning."

Thank you for your attention and the opportunity to appear before you.