Testimony of Michael Thomas on Behalf of the Foggy Bottom Association
The George Washington University – Foggy Bottom Campus Plan
BZA File No. 16553

Thank you, Chairperson Reid and members of the Board.

I am Michael Thomas. I reside at 2501 M Street NW, Washington 20037.

I am here today as president of Foggy Bottom Assn, a neighborhood association in and for the neighborhood called both Foggy Bottom and West End for over 40 years.

FBA is not anti-student. Students are welcome as members – their dues are discounted. We partner with the GW Student Assn on community projects.

Our concerns are rather with institutional policies of GW that have become very damaging to FB/WE over the term of the expiring plan. We cannot survive as a residential community if anything like the same policies are allowed over the next several years.

The core problem has two main causes, and two principal manifestations:

- GW has had no meaningful constraint on enrollment, and has grown in great spurts since 1993.
- There has been no requirement to house added students on campus, and it has largely not done so.

Because enrollment, especially FT/UG enrollment, has greatly exceeded on-campus housing, two phenomena have resulted:

- Student renters flooded the private market, turning apartment houses into de facto dorms and row houses into informal frat houses.

BZA
Case No. 16553
Exhibit No. 212

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16553
EXHIBIT NO.212

- GW bought about three dozen properties outside the authorized campus but within FB/WE, mostly to house students.

The result has been the displacement of large numbers of long-term taxpaying residents – the stakeholders in our community – by students; the loss of large amounts of tax revenues; and the evisceration of an old established residential neighborhood.

Prior to 1985, there was relatively little incursion by GW ownership or GW student renters in FB/WE. In the '85 plan, GW projected that enrollment would grow by only 12% in 15 years, and that the bulk of that growth would be in graduate students. Until '93, when the final order on the plan was entered, enrollment of FT students was flat – up 2/10 of one percent. But then it grew almost 19% over the next six years, and 84% of that growth was in FT/UG.

In fall '99, GW housed 4,466 students, or about 65% of its FT/UG. That meant 2,380 were not housed by GW. Nearly 1,000 of those offered housing were housed in apartment houses GW had recently bought off-campus. Nearly 5,000 FT graduate students were also in the rental market.

What did this surge of renters and acquisitions mean to FB/WE? Let me show you on the map.

- This is FB/WE – from 19th to the river and Rock Creek, from E Street to N Street. It is served by one ANC and is treated as having shared assets and problems by the Comprehensive Plan.

- Authorized campus: 43 acres of underdeveloped prime downtown real estate.
- Red: owned by GW. Almost all purchased since '95.
- Blue: half or more of the units occupied by students early this year. Note Columbia Plaza – partly owned, and mostly student occupied, with the exception of the Envoy.
- Pink: recent attempts to buy.
- Orange: significant but unquantified student occupancy.

Little is left of the southern tier of FB/WE. This board removed Square 43 from the campus, finding that "essential" to any effort to protect and preserve the neighboring residential community. GW took that as a green light to buy and raze the residences on Square 43. What they are asking now is that you expressly condone their turning all of the southern tier (Squares 58, 81, and 122) into unregulated campus, and that you implicitly approve their continued acquisition of properties elsewhere in FB/WE, with the right to subject them to university uses in 2005 or sooner. They also want your blessing for their continuing to turn Columbia Plaza into a dorm. That is what they mean by the exception for properties where they already own an interest, in their already highly conditioned and time-limited offer to curtail off-campus acquisitions.

These proposals would give them an argument against regulatory reform of "of right" uses ("Look, we've already reformed in a way the BZA approved") as well as an argument that new regs can't be applied to them

during the term of this new plan ("We've got vested rights under the trade-offs agreed to under our campus plan").

To the west, GW has made very large inroads. The old established residential neighborhood is now Swiss cheese. And now they want to go north – that is why they define FB to stop at Pennsylvania Ave, so that the northern third of the community becomes a GW free-fire zone.

Maybe the Board can't stop off-campus acquisitions, but you can certainly state in your order that they are to be discouraged, not encouraged.

Both the existing pattern and the proposed plan violate the law. Sec 210.2 does not permit university uses to be located so that they are <u>likely to become</u> objectionable to neighboring properties by reason of numbers of students or other objectionable conditions. Here, university uses, and especially numbers of students not housed on the campus, <u>have become</u>, not just objectionable to, but destructive of, the entire neighboring residential community. Sec 210.7 of your regs requires consideration of relevant portions of the Comprehensive Plan. We have quoted some of the more pointed statements in the Plan concerning the damage being done by GW's practices and the need for this board to address these issues. Let me quote one:

> "At a minimum, GWU should include dormitory construction . . . not only to meet the needs of additional enrollments but also to correct the over-intrusion of the student body into the housing stock outside the campus area."

The provision goes on to state the obvious – that the intrusion is detrimental to an established residential neighborhood that contributes income and property taxes as well as a labor force to the Downtown. Note that in 1994, when that was written, there were 1,600 fewer FT/UG students than this fall.

GW's proposals on housing are completely inadequate.

- GW's enrollment projections have been uniformly low. GW bought the Howard Johnson hotel as an investment property, but converted it to a dorm when they were surprised by 400 more freshmen than they had projected. Dr. Linebaugh testified before you in April that they would have about 7000 FT/UG in September. They have 7200, and no place to put many of them.
- They are asking for an undifferentiated 20,000-student cap with no guarantee against more students living in FB/WE. Given recent experience, we have to proceed on the assumption that GW will do what is allowed, not what is projected. Their official projection is 8,000 FT/UG by fall 2005, but at recent rates of growth (5% per year, with freshmen up 20% in two years) they will be at 9,189 FT/UG by 2005 – and still have lots of room under their cap. Dr. Linebaugh conceded that it was possible they would have 9,000 FT/UG by 2010. At 5% annual growth, there will be over 11,700. Even at 3% growth, they would have over 9,500.
- There's no unconditional commitment to add any on-campus dorms. Their conditions may never be met on Square

- There is no provision for what happens if GW has not met housing commitments. There is no provision for amending the housing, student conduct, or enforcement provisions to respond to any defects in the plan that are identified during the review.

If the Board does not provide for meaningful, unconditional commitments as to housing students, and meaningful enforcement, in its order approving a plan, it will be hamstrung later when the plan proves inadequate. I am unaware of anything in the current regulations that would allow the Board to amend a plan in mid-term, even if convinced the changes were essential.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to represent the views of our neighborhood and its association.