Testimony of Foxhall Community Citizens Association regarding
BZA case #16566 – Georgetown University Campus Plan 2000

Madam Chair and members of the Board, my name is Robert Andrew, President of the Foxhall Community Citizens Association (FCCA). DC Zoning Map display shows FCCA members encompass that entire area of Ward 2 west of Georgetown University.

FCCA Past President Scott Polk and I will present testimony about Graduate Student enrollment, pressures on open space, parking issues (both offsite and onsite) and lack of comprehensive and current traffic measurement data covering all of the residential areas around GU.

The 49.6% (1286) Increase in Graduate Student Enrollment (Scott Polk)

Twice in the Georgetown process of meeting with the public on their ten-year campus plan, I asked very specifically if Georgetown University intended to increase their graduate student enrollment. On both occasions I was publicly told that the University did not intend to increase their graduate student numbers. In March I submitted the same question in writing for the Georgetown University's question matrix. The written answer was again, that the University did not intend to increase its graduate enrollment. In the traffic supplement of a University handout, Georgetown University spells out that it is seeking an increase of 49.6%, a 1286 student increase.

I believe that this is a primary example of how the University has consistently dealt in bad faith, all the time claiming how it has worked with the public since November to keep them informed.

An increase of 1286 Georgetown University grad students will have an adverse effect upon our neighborhoods.

The GU real estate expert testified that a decrease in student rental homes within the community would increase property values, or stated differently, that student rental homes have an adverse impact upon a community. The same is true for graduate student group homes:

Graduate group homes appear the same from the exterior as undergraduate group homes. Because of the density there is the same accumulation of trash and garbage. Graduate students are more likely to own cars, which further aggravates parking. The yard and outside of the house, which are not maintained by the landlord or the grad students appears the same as undergraduate group housing

FNMA and FHA have lending guidelines within condominiums. If owner occupancy is below certain levels they will not approve loans to prospective owners. The reason is clear. High investor ratios have a rapidly depreciating effect on a building. The same effect is true in neighborhoods. This is not to say that rental housing should be eliminated from the neighborhood, only that it should be more in balance than what we have currently seen within our neighborhoods. What gains we have made in an improved real estate market over the last two years, we would hate to lose because of increased enrollment and further pressures on our communities.

I would like to comment on the average age of the GU grad student. GU has represented that the average age of the graduate students living in our communities is 30.1. A more important number would be the median age of Georgetown's full time graduate students. As an example, if you have 4 students age, 23, 24, 25, 26 and one student age 50, the average age is 29.4. The median age is 24.5. The median age is more representative. Even more so because the 50 year old is in all likelihood married, works for a living, and lives somewhere else. I believe the median age would be a more truthful representation of the age of graduate students living within our communities.

BZA
Case No. 16566
Exhibit No. 150

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16566
EXHIBIT NO.150

My observations as well as Georgetown's testimony, is that Med. students and grad students are most likely to live in Foxhall, Glover Park, and west Georgetown. They tend not to like Burleith because the quality of life has been too low. Please remember that Med. students and MBAs are going into debt at the rate of $28,000 per year for the opportunity to earn a better living upon graduation. In other words, current performance equals future earnings. Living in Burleith doesn't support or benefit their current performance. As a result they have lived elsewhere. If the undergraduate population were to diminish within Burleith, graduate students would in all likelihood fill the vacancies.

We are concerned about the increased demand for rental housing within our community that would occur with an increase of 1286 graduate students. To the present, in Foxhall, we have managed to cope with the problems of group homes in the numbers that currently exist. We are not looking forward to an increase in the number of group homes that would likely occur with the increased graduate enrollment. We believe that the current number of rental homes have held our communities back in appreciation versus other communities. The appearances of these homes, the trash problems, and the clustering of automobiles are a burden on the community. Every group rental home should also be looked upon as a non-contributing, non-performing member of the community. Again, these are not bad people, but their homes are an eyesore within the community and the spot density of population creates problems. We are not trying to do away with rental housing; rather like FNMA and FHA we are trying to keep it in balance to avoid the depreciation of our neighborhood.

The GU real estate expert painted a rosy picture based upon current price trends. What he failed to state is that the real estate market, like the stock market makes corrections. I point to the year 1990 when real estate prices fell 20% or more in NW Washington after a consistent eight-year run up. Following this crash in real estate, prices remained stagnant from 1990 to 1998. During this weak market investors took advantage of the low prices, and purchased rental homes as investments. Also, in a market that loses value rapidly, newer owners are trapped when they are forced to relocate. Instead of selling at a $50,000 to $80,000 loss, they are forced to rent, thereby further increasing the rental inventory. In short, a failing real estate market burgeons the rental inventory. An increased demand for rental housing from an additional 1286 graduate students, not to mention the increase proposed in undergraduate numbers, coupled with a weak real estate market, would have a grave effect upon all our neighborhoods. It would quickly lead to an increase in rental housing to meet the strong demand of very attractive, close in rental housing for the University's off campus needs. The University would benefit greatly from a weak housing market that could provide inexpensive, readily available housing in the surrounding communities.

This was the scenario that nearly caused the ruin of Burleith. Only the perseverance of community leaders and a resurgent real estate market kept Burleith from an imbalance that would have meant the demise of the neighborhood.

Again, the rosy picture painted by the GU real estate expert is based on the last two years trend. As community leaders, we are concerned not about the last two years, but the next ten. The recent past and the near demise of Burleith are very vivid in our minds. We are very strongly opposed to the increase of 1286 graduate students and the 389 undergraduates at Georgetown University.

During the next five years, we would be amenable to an increase of 200 graduate students and then review the effects of the many changes being brought to bear on our communities.

Pressures on Open Space (Robert Andrew)

Three years when the Control Board was attempting to sell off "surplus" school board property, GU attempted to buy the Hardy School and playgrounds at Foxhall and Q St NW, until DCPS realized the playground is

actually our Recreation Center, and the only city-owned open space within our association area. Having been saved, this field is alive with youth soccer, Stoddert "Under 8" co-ed on Saturdays and City Snicker League three afternoons a week.

GU also attempted to buy the DCPS-owned Ellington Field at 38th and Reservoir, the practice field for Wilson High School and recreation space for the police-sponsored Boy's and Girl's Club. Both these attempts were defeated as the Control Board accepted our argument that this open space, traditionally for neighborhood purposes, should remain that way.

The reason GU desperately needed such space is that their planning for onsite academic facilities such as in Science and Business, would have to be developed on top of open space on campus. Now already their Soccer team has to practice out in Cabin John in Maryland, and the only new athletic space is a Women's softball field.

The limitation on open space is one more sign this campus should not be allowed to expand its undergraduate student numbers, for the sake of the quality of student life.

Parking Issues (Off-Site and On-Site)

Scott Polk has already spelled out the increased demand from group homes for on-street parking. Onsite faculty parking, for which the demand would also go up proportionately with projected 49.6% increase in graduate students, is also already at saturation

GU already faces real challenges in managing its onsite parking at a BZA-mandated cap of 4080. With MedStar now occupying the whole North Campus as of July 1st, the proportion of hospital-staff assigned parking spots has already increased to the detriment of medical research staff and all other GU academic staff and support staff, with many now having to go to satellite parking in Rosslyn and Arlington. Right now, GU has already paved an additional 465 spaces above their cap. Although they claim it to be a temporary need driven by S/W Quadrangle construction, how many more times over the next decade will construction need for lay-down area and construction worker vehicles disrupt campus life. Again, another sign this particular GU campus is already at or even exceeds its optimum size for staff. FCCA urges the BZA to retain the cap on GU parking and to maintain the policy of card-controlled internal north-south barrier arms to through traffic.

Lack of Comprehensive Traffic Measurement Data

Although already approved in concept by NCPC, the FHWA-designed four-way entrance on Canal Road lacks measured traffic counts since the early 1990's, thus entirely missing recent significant changes in employment patterns, reverse commuting, which has resulted in major increase on north-south traffic load on Foxhall Road. Within bordering West Georgetown, there simply has not been any traffic data measured, and on Reservoir Rd, testimony from the traffic expert for Hillandale will testify that the intersection Level-of-Service simulations by Gorove-Slade simply do not match the reality.

In conclusion, given these issues we have just laid out, FCCA members are concerned over the lack of basis for 1286 extra graduate students, and apparent inability by both GU and MedStar to plan more than a few years out. We were willing to agree on the proposal of 400 growth over ten years, as proposed by Office of Planning in mediation, but would be more comfortable with 200 over 5 years, with a GU-funded annual report of actual traffic loads in the surrounding areas as a baseline for the years beyond 2005.

Submitted 18 July 2000

References: DC Zoning Map Tile 6
http://www.foxhall.org/#Campus