Community Position, Georgetown University Campus Master Plan

Peter Pulsifer, ANC 2E/Burleith
Draft of July 17, 2000

1. Identification, qualifications, purpose of talk

My name is Peter Pulsifer. I have lived at 3803 T Street, NW, in Burleith, since 1989. Currently I am the ANC Commissioner for SMD 2E-03, which encompasses Burleith and North Georgetown. I have served on the Board of the Burleith Citizens Association since July, 1991, and was President of the Citizens Association between 1994 and 1997. Relations with Georgetown University have been a major community issue throughout this time, and I have invested a great deal of effort over the years trying to improve these relations.

Today I will introduce what is called the "community position" regarding Georgetown University's proposed campus plan for the next ten years. This position represents the unified stand of the six well-established community organizations that are parties to the campus plan proceedings (given in rough geographical order, west to east):

1. Foxhall Community Citizens Association
2. Hillandale Homeowners Association
3. Burleith Citizens Association
4. Cloisters in Georgetown Homeowners Association
5. Georgetown Residents Alliance
6. Citizens Association of Georgetown

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These organizations constitute all of the citizens associations (except for one, the Cloisters West Homeowners Association) in the vicinity of the University, and cover the entire area surrounding the University.

My presentation will basically serve as an overview of the community position. Afterwards, representatives of each organization will speak at greater length about issues of particular concern to their members.

2. Importance of strong neighborhoods to the city (and to the University).

Well-established and cared-for neighborhoods are the bedrock of the living city. Thriving neighborhoods provide more than just a good place to live for their occupants–and a solid tax base for the government–they reduce commuter traffic, reduce crime, provide an attractive destination for visitors, and promote long-term community connections that strengthen the civic fabric of the city. Georgetown University, for one, has greatly benefited from its proximity to strong neighboring communities, which give it both a higher quality of life and, I believe, a recruiting advantage compared to some of its competitors.

Unfortunately, it's difficult for large institutions to coexist peacefully with residential neighbors. It's all too easy for pressures within the institution to overbalance concern for community needs. In the end, it is up to our government, through agencies like the BZA, to protect us.

3. Strong neighborhoods are not inconsistent with a strong University. The community supports Georgetown University, although we oppose elements of the proposed plan.

Because community opposition to parts of the campus plan is sometimes portrayed as opposition to the University itself, we want to emphasize that all of our community organizations strongly support Georgetown University and desire its success as a top-ranked institution of higher learning. We want the University to grow in excellence, as we know it can, while recognizing the

BZA
Case No. 16566
Exhibit No. 151

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16566
EXHIBIT NO.151

limits to its physical growth imposed by its location on a finite-sized campus within a densely populated residential community.

We supported the Southwest Quadrangle, a massive development project that as you well know is far more than just a dormitory, in part because of our support for the improvements in campus life and the increase in student activity space it promises. (This project provides much more space for undergraduate student life than anything in the proposed campus plan). This is a good use of limited space, both for the University and the community.

Turning to the proposed campus plan, we find that we support most of the goals of the plan, as articulated by Father O'Donovan at the last hearing. We support the proposed infrastructure improvements, have no conceptual criticism of the new academic buildings, and strongly support the goal of reinvigorating campus life, as long as such improvements are primarily for the benefit of Georgetown University students.

Where we have concern is where the University, in its current or future operations, intrudes into the community and causes sometimes unintentional harm.

4. Bases for community objection

Recognizing the importance of preserving the livability of residential neighborhoods such as ours, DC law mandates that University operations **not be objectionable to neighboring property** because of "noise, traffic, number of students, or other objectionable conditions". Georgetown University has failed this test: Present University operations are objectionable to neighboring property, The proposed plan, while in many ways an improvement over the present plan, fails to address existing impacts, and we fear that some future operations in the proposed plan could make things worse. These points will be elaborated on in the following presentations.

One striking attribute of the proposed plan is the large number of unknowns even before execution of the plan is to begin. This has led to a great deal of conjecture, especially regarding impacts from number of students and traffic. For example, major development projects (Canal Road, Southwest Quadrangle) are underway and won't be completed for many years. The change in Medical Center operations due to the MedStar acquisition will begin next year with a massive reallocation of parking and be phased in over several years. Also significant are the changes in University administration in next two years (a new Dean starts this year and a new President in two years). The current (1990) campus plan was completed in the waning years of the former University President's term, and partly as a consequence it was arguably a failure: only 20% of the proposed development in that plan was completed, most of it in a different form from originally approved.

Because of these unknowns and the consequence on the planning process, it might be more appropriate for the BZA to approve a more modest, five year campus plan instead of committing to the full ten years of the current proposal.

5. Critique of ANC 2E majority opinion

The ANC 2E position presented here earlier was approved by a 5-3 vote. As a member of the minority on the ANC, I feel it important to explain why the minority thinks the majority erred in their decision, and why the minority position should carry considerable weight (if not the statutory "great weight") with the Board.

1. The majority took its position without consideration of the community comment at the meeting. The ANC public meeting was well attended, and included over an hour of comments by community members, almost all of them critical of the proposed plan.

Following community comment, a motion was read from a preprinted sheet that had been distributed to some but not all of the Commission members. The majority refused to consider postponement or amendment of that motion and summarily voted in favor of what is the ANC position you heard earlier. This capricious behavior disregarded the complaints of the large majority of the community, and caused considerable public indignation.

2. The ANC minority is more representative of the areas impacted by the University operations, and all three minority commissioners have actively worked on University-related issues for a decade or more. The majority includes:
    - two districts not much impacted (farthest from the University)
    - one Georgetown University undergraduate, elected as such
    - one commissioner not elected (vacancy appointment), and whose home is in a non-impacted area
3. The ANC position is based on several questionable assumptions, among these:
    - GU will reduce off-campus housing demands on nearby neighborhoods in zip code 20007 to approximately 400 undergraduate students by 2003;
    - GU will "strengthen its Off-Campus Student Affairs Program" ("ANC 2E conditions its approval of Georgetown University's campus plan..." including such measures as suspension of a student or students who are cited for the repeated and continued residential neighborhood disturbances, that such student or students be required to move from off-campus housing back onto campus *[which is it?]*)
    - The University, and MedStar have initiated mitigation strategies to resolve traffic impasse and concerning Reservoir Road entrances and traffic flow *[such as what?]*
    - Traffic mitigation might include making Entrance 1 one-way in and Entrance 4 one way out (or vice versa).
4. The ANC position does not relieve the Board of its mandate to ensure that the University does no harm to its neighbors, nor does it deny our reports that harm is being done.

6. Overview: Principal Community Concerns

Now I'll review the principal community objections to the proposed plan.

The proposed enrollment increases are by far the greatest community concern. But before I get into this, there is an important technical detail I must mention. This concerns how enrollment is measured.

Note: Change in terms describing enrollment

In the 1990 plan and BZA approving order, enrollment was described in terms of FTE, which is computed by taking total tuition charges and dividing by the charges for a full time student. In the proposed year 2000 plan, a combination is used of "traditional full-time undergraduate", FTE (graduate) and FFTE (medical).

Does this disguise an enrollment increase? (It appears that "traditional full-time undergraduate" is smaller than FTE: In 1990-91, 5372 FTE=5055 TFTU).

If not involving an enrollment increase, we don't object to new terminology, but the University has not provided FTE figures for duration of 1990 plan, and the Board should insist on obtaining this information.

1. There is community opposition both to undergraduate and graduate student increases, but people are most upset about the increase of 389 students in the undergraduate enrollment cap.

Neighbors, all of the local newspapers, and even the student press have all expressed opposition.

The basic reason the Board should maintain the present cap is as follows. It is accepted by all parties that large numbers of students in the community cause a negative impact, because of behavior, housing and other issues. University efforts to mitigate this impact have helped, but not solved the problem. It is therefore an unavoidable conclusion that increasing the cap will increase objectionable conditions in the community because of numbers of students. The Board **cannot** allow this increased impact.

It may be that opening of the SW Quadrangle will reduce the impact as promised; this is a matter of conjecture, and in any event the SW Quadrangle is outside the proposed plan. But there's no denying that an enrollment increase, particularly without on-campus housing, will make things worse than they would otherwise be.

2. Traffic impact is a second major concern, both on the north and south campus. To the north, concerns are about Medical center development exacerbating existing flow problems on Reservoir Rd. To the south, concerns are about special events in new facilities (two athletics facilities, theater).

   Overall, the community is unhappy with the poor state of knowledge about traffic conditions around the University and the limitations this places on the University's ability to respond to any problems that do arise.

3. Off-Campus operations by the University in the community should be known, because of their close relationship to on-campus operations and their comparable impact on the community.

4. Medical Center operations under MedStar are a serious community concern. Zoning issue: Since this use is apparently not allowed by the zoning regulations, it is unclear how the use will be regulated at all. Higher intensity uses may be incompatible with a teaching hospital (possible commercial uses, increase in trauma care, etc).

5. New high-density development proposed on campus
   - New construction on north (Reservoir Rd) campus changes character there
   - (Mid campus development significantly reduces open space)

6. Flaws in the plan and planning process
   - Description of current and future use by four categories is inadequate
   - Proposed plan lacks important information
   - University has been unresponsive in plan process to community concerns

7. Other concerns (including noise from University-sponsored and University-sanctioned events - see Appendix K of proposed plan).