Burleith Citizens Association
Citizens Association of Georgetown
Cloisters in Georgetown
Foxhall Community Citizens Association
Georgetown Residents Alliance

April 18, 2000

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
2000 APR 18 P 1:15

Ms. Sheila Cross Reid, Chair
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 Fourth Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20001

Madam Chair:

Re: BZA Application 16566, by Georgetown University,
under Section 210 of the Zoning Regulations,
for Special Exception approval
of the university's proposed 2000-2010 master campus plan

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, this letter requests a sufficient postponement of the Board's proceedings on BZA Application 16566 to permit a professional-level mediation effort, sponsored and partly funded by the D.C. Office of Planning, that would aim either to resolve or significantly reduce the presently substantial differences concerning this proposed campus plan, between the applicant and citizens organizations representing residents of the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Such a postponement, we think, would in the end save time and expense for all concerned because of the mediation effort's potential either to reduce or eliminate the possibility of time-consuming adversarial activity and litigation over the campus plan before the Advisory Neighborhood Commission, the Board, and eventually the Court of Appeals. We understand from the Office of Planning that a similar mediation effort led by the same professional mediator was highly successful in increasing understanding and minimizing town-gown differences concerning the Mt. Vernon campus plan. We think that mediation offers the serious possibility of creating a "win-win" situation from which the university, its neighbors, and the city would all benefit.

Although this application was filed several months ago, on January 31, 2000,following several months of informal consultations with neighborhood groups during the second half of 1999, the university's 1999 consultations concerned a "plan" which the university itself only talked about orally, and never bothered to present to its neighbors in writing for careful study. The written draft application which the university first circulated for comment on January 13, 2000, was vague and uninformative in many respects. It was filed with the Board shortly thereafter, virtually unchanged, before serious neighborhood comment could be formulated. In the consultation process that has ensued, the university has refused or failed to answer written questions that have been put to it reasonably seeking to find out what the university means and intends.

The enclosed recapitulation of just some critical areas of omission is, we think, a fair indication of the kinds of important information which we have been denied.

BZA
Case No. 16566
Exhibit No. 29

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16566
EXHIBIT NO.29

The undersigned organizations have been working diligently on behalf of our members in attempting to review and assess the proposed Georgetown University campus plan. This effort has been seriously hampered, not only by the incomplete information contained in the campus plan as filed, but also by the university's refusal or failure to answer many of the questions which neighborhood groups have put to it in the university-controlled consultation process. Despite the number of months this process has taken, and the number of meetings that have occurred, we still have not been given information necessary to assess fully the impact of the proposed campus plan on neighboring properties in our communities. Our ability, moreover, to suggest mutually-acceptable alternatives and compromises is also compromised by the university's efforts to be circumspect about its actual plans, and thereby retain "flexibility" for future decision-making.

We believe that the mediation process recommended by the Office of Planning offers many advantages. It should result in the production of much of the relevant information needed to build trust and formulate agreements. We are ready to participate just as diligently in that process. However, we will have great difficulty doing so effectively if the existing litigation submission deadlines for the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions - and for community organizations - remain unchanged. If we are going to participate effectively in the mediation effort, we need the time and ability to give such a process the serious effort it deserves. It will be difficult to do so if we must spend time and resources preparing for litigation.

Because a mediation process precludes advocacy on critical issues while it is on-going, there is no way in which an ANC public meeting can be called, with effective input from affected communities in response to a university presentation.

For these reasons, we request a delay of a month in the two scheduled hearings on May 16 and June 18. Because of the magnitude of the changes proposed - and the paucity of essential information - we ask that you give our communities a chance to make mediation work as an alternative to contested-case hearings and potential litigation. Other organizations, we believe, will join their voices with ours in support of a strong mediation process.

Sincerely,

Burleith Citizens Association – Patricia Scolaro, President

Citizens Association of Georgetown – Barbara Woodward Downs, President

Cloisters in Georgetown – Stephen Hopkins, President

Foxhall Community Citizens Association – Robert Andrew, President

Georgetown Residents Alliance – Don W. Crockett, President

Copy: Andrew Altman, Director of Planning

Illustrations of Critical Information Not Provided in Proposed Georgetown University Campus Plan 2000-2010
(A partial listing)

• The proposed plan does not provide information about housing for the requested 500 additional undergraduate students – or give any other information to demonstrate that their presence will not be objectionable to the community. There are no plans for how they will be housed, despite the clear commitment in the approved campus plan that the university should provide on-campus housing for 100% of its students.

• The deficiencies of the plan filed with the Board also include a failure to mention the proposed lease and sale of a major part of the University's north campus medical center to a private hospital management organization known as MedStar Health (which would also lease and gain exclusive operating control over the helipad). MedStar Health is not a university. It is not eligible to own, lease, or operate a hospital, a clinic, and medical office buildings on the R-3 land where the University's north campus is located. The application pending before the Board fails to report any such proposed change of mission, ownership, or control, of the north campus, limiting itself only to mentioning the proposed new construction that such a change of ownership and control would finance.

• The proposed plan fail to show the location of all present and proposed improvements, and fails to include a description of all activities conducted or to be conducted on the campus, as required by 11 DCMR 210.4. One example of the significance of this ommision is the failure to mention the location or operation, present or proposed, of a "helipad" for the flight of helicopters to and from the campus. Similarly excluded is any explanation of why this planned but unmentioned activity and facility would not be objectionable to neighboring properties in terms of noise and safety. This "helipad," we now understand, would neither be operated nor controlled by the university, but would be contorlled by a different private organization for its own "exclusive" use (according to documents just filed with the D.C. State Health Planning and Development Agency on April 3, 2000).

• The pending campus plan would expand the amount of proposed new construction nearly two-fold, compared to the plan orally presented in 1999, from over 800,000 square feet of gross floor area ("GFA"), to 1.3 million square feet of GFA. The additional new proposed construction added in 2000, moreover, would be located primarily on the University's north campus, potentially affecting traffic flows on Reservoir Road. The plan's summary traffic assessment, however, as circulated for comment on January 13, 2000, and later filed with the Board virtually unchanged on Janaury 31, 2000, does not assess traffic flows on Reservoir Road, even though it is that road which would provide exclusive access to the proposed new construction. The traffic assessment as filed with the Board instead assesses the unwritten and unfiled 1999 campus plan for which little or no new construction was proposed on the North Campus adjoining Reservoir Road.

• The MedStar certificate-of-need application indicates it will take control of up to 3000 of the 4080 authorized parking spaces on campus, leaving just over 1000 places for all other university purposes. The university has indicated it would lose as few as 2000 spaces to MedStar purposes. Clearly this reallocation of essential parking spaces poses the potential for great dislocation of vehicular traffic. Without

reliable, detailed information, it is impossible to assess how great an impact this will have on the surrounding neighborhoods.

• Georgetown has refused to answer numerous questions about this arrangement, claiming that the information sought is "proprietary." MedStar itself, moreover, has disclaimed any clear knowledge of the nature or scope of its activities on the north campus more than three years from now. However, the transaction documents would transfer ownership and control to MedStar either in perpetuity, or for decades, not for just three years. Some public record information concerning the change has only recently begun to surface from MedStar's April 3 application to the D.C. State Health Planning and Development Agency for a certificate of need to acquire ownership and control of much of the University's north campus medical center.

• Yet another deficiency of the plan as filed, which both hampers its review, and magnifies neighborhood suspicion and opposition, is another consequence of the plan's failure to disclose, as required, a description of "all activities conducted or to be conducted on the campus," 11 DCMR 210.4(d). Instead, all land uses are lumped into one of four multi-use categories, each of which encompasses numerous individual uses articulated in the Zoning Regulations. The plan's four "use" categories are either "commercial" use, "academic/administration" use, "residential/campus/athletic" use, or "medical/health care" use. As a result, there is neither any particular description either of how the campus is now used, or how it would be used in the future. Many different types of present and future uses, and numerous changes of use and intensity of use, are concealed within these four broad and multifaceted use "categories." They are virtually useless for enforcement.