

**Forest Hills Neighbors For Responsible Preservation**  
**C/o 4835 Linnean Ave. NW. Washington DC 20008 Tel: 202-9666-7734**

August 1, 2004

**BY HAND DELIVERY**

Alberto Bastida  
Secretary  
District of Columbia Zoning Commission  
Room 210  
441 4<sup>th</sup> Street N.W.

Re: Forest Hills Tree and Slope Protection Overlay District/Zoning Commission Case No. 02-19

Dear Mr. Bastida:

The Forest Hills Neighbors For Responsible Preservation (FHNRP) submits these comments as follow up to testimony before the July 22 2004 hearing of the Zoning Commission on the Office of Planning's proposed Forest Hills overlay. Specifically, this letter presents expert testimony regarding the Tree and Slope Overlay (TSO) survey conducted by George Clark and his consultant, Maeve Hebert. We submit that the survey is fatally flawed and should be rejected as representing the sentiments of the Forest Hills community. The questionnaire was unfair, the respondents do not represent the community, and any conclusions from the survey are inevitably erroneous.

**I. The questionnaire was unfair**

1. Surveys are difficult to craft so that the questions do not bias the answers. This is particularly difficult when those developing the survey strongly believe in what they want the outcomes to be. That is the case here. The standard solution to this problem is to develop the survey with different perspectives represented among the authors. This was not done. By their own testimony, Mr. Clark and Ms. Hebert admitted that not only did they not receive input from other members of the community – they deliberately did not seek their participation.
2. Instead of sticking to the facts, the advocates of the original TSO defined the arguments the proponents of the OP plan *might* make and asked survey respondents to evaluate the *alleged* position of the other side. This situation is similar to a debate in which one side gets to define the other side's arguments. Very convenient!
3. The survey is filled with misinformation that makes the case for the TSO look more attractive. For example, by asserting in question 22 of the survey that the tree canopy covers 75% of the TSO area – an unverified estimate that includes street trees and public parkland – and contrasting that with the OP's canopy estimate of 36%, which covers only developed, privately owned R-1A lots, Mr. Clark all but ensures that only the most desert-loving respondents would favor the original TSO.
4. Many questions create a worst-case scenario regarding the actions of home owners in the area (see, for example, questions 18, 19, 20 and 25). These "questions," not surprisingly, are similar to the arguments in favor of the TSO. They are conjecture, not fact.

**II. The respondents do not represent the community**

1. Ms. Hebert testified that the survey is a random sample. That is not true. She and Mr. Clark attempted to conduct a *census*, not a sample survey. The questionnaire was mailed to every household in the TSO district, not to a random sample of residents. The survey would have been a good barometer of opinion if everyone had responded.

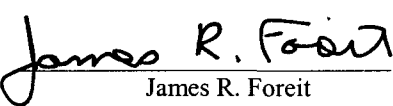
**ZONING COMMISSION**  
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2. In point of fact, nearly twice as many households did not respond as those who did. This poses a serious problem for the analysis and interpretation of the results. Guidelines from the US General Accounting Office (GAO) about the interpretation of survey data state, "It can be a serious mistake to assume that the nonrespondents are like those who do respond" (see attached). The GAO offers remedies to correct for low response rates, but Ms. Hebert did not use them.
3. We have shown that the questionnaire was not fair. When potential respondents to a survey sense that it is biased in one direction, the people supporting that direction will tend to respond in greater numbers and those who oppose will tend not to respond at all. Anyone who is knowledgeable about the community controversy (those most likely to respond to a survey) can easily see that this survey not only comes from the opponents of the OP proposal but that the questions will inevitably render a response favorable to the opponents. Thus to assert that the survey is a random sample is naïve at best. The correct term for Mr. Clark's collection of respondents is a *self-selected sample*.

### III. Any conclusions based solely on the survey "findings" are inevitably erroneous

1. As indicated above, the content of questionnaire unfairly shaped the response, and those who did respond were likely to be self-selected respondents who already favored the original TSO.
2. Any interpretation of faulty data stemming from an unfair survey is inherently flawed.
3. The most that can be said from the FHCA survey is that out of 224 residents who chose to respond, 76 "strongly support" and 63 "somewhat support" the current TSO. In contrast, FHNRP submitted 161 signatures of residents opposed to the overlay. *Far from demonstrating community consensus in favor of the TSO, Mr. Clark's survey once again supports the FHNRP position that the community is deeply divided.*

|                                                                                                      |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <br>Willis Hawley | <br>Karen Foreit | <br>James R. Foreit |
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### Commentators' Credentials

Willis Hawley, Ph.D ( 2828 Upton Street NW, Forest Hills) is a political scientist who taught at Yale, Duke, and Vanderbilt Universities before joining the faculty of the University of Maryland, College Park . He published over a hundred scholarly and professional publications. He recently chaired the National Research Council's study of the measurement of educational opportunity.

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United States General Accounting Office

**GAO**

**Program Evaluation and Methodology  
Division**

**Revised  
May 1992**

# **Using Statistical Sampling**

**GAO/PEMD-10.1.6**

## The Problem of Nonresponse

One of the most troublesome problems in any type of data collection operation—whether it is a sample or a census—is nonresponse, sampling units for which the data cannot be collected. Examples are persons who do not bother to fill in and send back questionnaires and those who send back incomplete questionnaires, persons who are not at home or prefer not to be interviewed in person or by telephone, and documents missing from a file from which the sample is selected. Therefore, we have two types of nonresponse: (1) unit nonresponse in which data for the entire sampling unit is not collected and (2) item nonresponse in which one or more measurements on the sampling units are not made.

It can be a serious mistake to assume that the nonrespondents are like those who do respond. For example, suppose that we want to know whether prisoners at a state penitentiary favor abolition of the death penalty. The population is the 2,500 prisoners at the penitentiary on a certain date. We send each prisoner a questionnaire asking only one question: "Do you favor abolition of the death penalty? (Circle one) yes no." We receive 1,500 completed questionnaires (a 60-percent response rate). A tabulation of the responses is shown in table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Tabulation of Responses to Question on Abolition of the Death Penalty

| Response     | Number       | Percent    |
|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Yes          | 900          | 60         |
| No           | 600          | 40         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>1,500</b> | <b>100</b> |

From this, we might conclude that the prisoners favor abolition of the death penalty by a majority of three to two. If we then assumed that the nonrespondents looked like the respondents, we might think that 1,500 prisoners were in favor of abolition of the death

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penalty and 1,000 were not in favor. However, if  
information were available that permitted us to  
analyze the type of sentence the respondents had  
received, we might discover the data in table 8.2.

Table 8.2: Type of  
Sentence Respondents  
Received

| Response | Death<br>sentence | Other<br>sentence | Total |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|
| Yes      | 600               | 300               | 900   |
| No       | 0                 | 600               | 600   |

Also, let us suppose that the 1,000 nonrespondents  
were all prisoners who had received another sentence.  
This additional information might lead us to revise our  
conclusions about the prisoners' attitudes.

The effect of nonresponses can be overcome by  
making multiple follow-ups in order to try to reduce  
the number of nonresponses to, say, 5 percent, unless  
this percentage includes potential nonrespondents  
who may have a disproportionate effect on the results  
(such as several very large firms that fail to respond in  
an economic survey).

In questionnaire surveys, we can take a random  
sample (say 25 to 33 percent) of the nonrespondents  
and attempt to interview them by telephone or in  
person to obtain answers to at least the key questions.  
The responses from this sample of nonrespondents  
then can be weighted so that the results are  
representative of all nonrespondents. Then, using the  
stratified approach, we can make an overall estimate  
using the results from the respondents and the  
nonrespondents. This resulting overall estimate will  
be unbiased, but the sampling error will be larger,  
because responses have not been obtained from the  
full sample originally selected.

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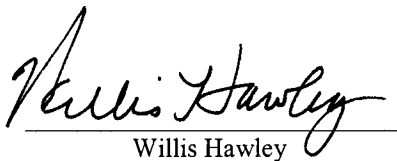
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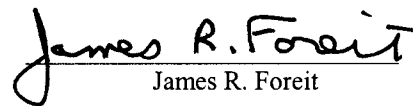
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