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02-20 Catholic University Campus Plan

Zoning Commission
District of Columbia
Case 02-20
59

February 20, 2003

Dear Board of Zoning,

I'm writing this letter directly after our lengthy hearing earlier this evening. There are a few points that need to be made that are new and a few that need to be reiterated.

In my personal experience I have found that the problem houses have students in them that have already been a problem on campus. In at least one case there was a student on our block that had been kicked off of campus or kicked into our neighborhood -- depending on how you look at it. Simply put, students that are known trouble makers need to be forced to stay on campus -- perhaps there needs to be a policy stating that **"students unable to behave and follow campus rules will not be permitted to become off campus students during their junior and senior years"**. Currently, I believe the practice is exactly the opposite -- Misbehave and you might become an off campus student **before** your junior year.

When Ms. Pervi stated that the video taping and very problemed houses was "old news" she couldn't have been further from the truth. First of all, we are looking at the past ten years and making an acceptable plan for the next ten years as I understand it. As Mr. Drudi so articulately explained, once a critical number of houses on a block become student occupied, the whole character changes -- this goes back to the middle school behavior model and the group mentality. If we allow Catholic University to mismanage (perhaps purposefully) their campus plan, where students will be forced into our neighborhood, we could have a repeat of those taped episodes. In each case, the worst environments occurred when there were two or more student houses within close proximity. Even if the students seem to be good members of the community, when that second and third student house gets added to the block the whole dynamic changes. It was very easy for Ms. Pervi to laugh off this part of my testimony as, "Old news" , but I lost sleep and was regularly side tracked at work trying to solve this problem for TWO YEARS. Father Friday may have held the position that she now holds at CUA, but she was still part of the administration when living on our block was hell! She stood WITH Catholic University and did nothing until we embarrassed their school with nationally syndicated footage of an individual being kicked down a flight of steps and out to the street. Only when alumni from the west coast began to call their office did they begin to act. It is not "old news" that The Catholic University of America will only act when forced to act.

I now recall another context for how the issue of knowing students' off campus addresses came up. Ms. Pervi spoke of an orientation style meeting for off campus housing. At a 5C meeting I suggested this as a REQUIREMENT for all off campus students every year. Their response was that they didn't know where their students lived and had no way of tracking that information -- furthermore they said that they had no way of requiring the attendance even if they did make the contact. Issuing fines to be added to their tuition payment, or holding back their report cards until they attended this seminar are just a couple of methods that come to mind. The students that are going to lead the trouble making in the neighborhood are not going to attend this seminar if they can get away with not attending it. **Again, if The Catholic University of America is not specifically forced to REQUIRE ALL off campus students to attend such a seminar, you can be sure that they will not do it.**

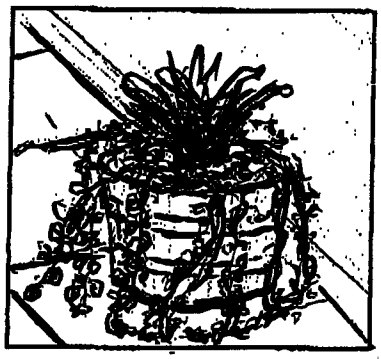
ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.02-20
EXHIBIT NO.59

The Greater Brookland Garden Club

Green Space Improvements



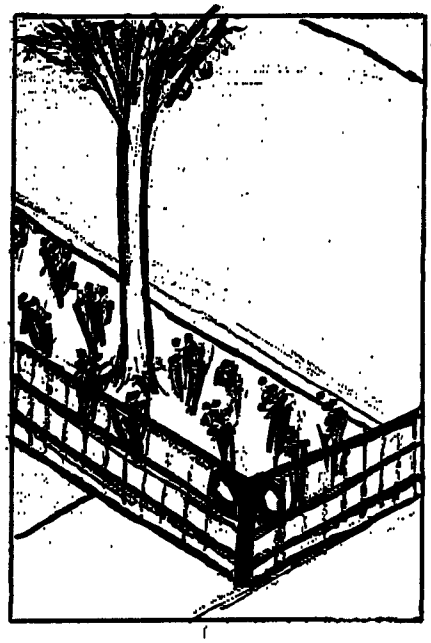
12th and Monroe Garden Nov. 1998



12th St. Garden Barrels
(with Brookland Bus. Assoc.)
1999



12th and Newton Garden (with Boy Scout Troop 98) Oct. 1999



Memorial Tree Garden
12th and Newton
Nov. 2000



Gateway Garden 12th and Michigan Nov. 1999

Another important issue that was touched on by a board member is the way the property will be left in the south of Michigan Ave. campus after the other buildings are demolished. If you think think of this process in a slightly larger perspective and bring in the historic district component, a horrible trend is revealed. The Catholic University of America bought almost the entire block of houses in the 700 block of Monroe, tore them all down, put nothing in their place but a 6 foot chain link fence, and is now being asked to work with Historic Preservation on their campus plan. Ironically, the very houses that The Catholic University of America tore down would have been included in the now completed first level survey of The Historic Brookland CDC's Historic District. I was at a meeting where Sue Pervi said to me, "We tried to buy the other three houses on the block, but the owners were crazy -- they wanted $150,000 each for their properties." I understand that two of the properties have sold for over $200,000 and are now being renovated to be lived in.

The community held the line on The Catholic University of America.

This is a terrible pattern for a University to inflict upon a neighborhood. This board has failed the community by allowing this to happen, but now has an opportunity to right a wrong. It is CUA's prerogative to tear down it's campus structures, but at this point they should be REQUIRED to redevelop them as carefully planned and accessible park space. This land was originally residential and now needs to be returned to the community as quality park space. If this land is going to be considered part of campus, then make this a project for the Landscape Architects and implement the project with maintenance workers and volunteer organizations on campus. Ms. Pervi had an actual book of services provided to the neighborhood – how about providing some volunteer work of their own on their own property? The Greater Brookland Garden Club has installed (and currently maintains) four public gardens in the neighborhood -- CUA even donated two Crape Myrtles in this effort. The Brookland Community has given the leadership and has set the bar in this area and The Catholic University of America must be required to take their own initiative in creating an accessible and quality park-like setting in this soon to be demolished and abandoned area.

The Board of Zoning is on the right track when it starts asking questions about landscaping this area. But again, if you don't specifically state in no uncertain terms that **these areas of demolition must**

1) be landscaped in a professional manner in a park like setting,

2) be completed within six months of the demolition,

and that just putting up a 6 foot chain link fence around a grassed in area is not acceptable,

then you can be absolutely assured that they will not fulfill this BASIC need to the edge of their campus.

The Catholic University of America has been permitted to chew gaping holes in the surrounding community to "create a buffer for their campus". This trend must be stopped.

Sincerely,

Jeff Wilson

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(p.s. Please find the enclosed documentation of the garden club's public gardens.)