Testimony of Maybelle Taylor Bennett
Director, Howard University Community Association
Before the
Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia
Case 03-17
New Bethune Hall Dormitory
Monday, 29 September 2003

Good evening Madam Chair and members of the Commission. My name is Maybelle Taylor Bennett, and I am Director of the Howard University Community Association.

The Community Association is the chief administrative liaison between the University and the communities surrounding the central campus. It was established in 1996 to facilitate the development of authentic, respectful working relationships between the University and her neighbors.

The Association is the entity that established the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) in fulfillment of condition # 10 of BZA order #16330 which approved the 1998 Campus Plan for the University. That entity has met, as required, on a quarterly basis (16 times) since the plan's approval in March of 1999. Working groups of the CAC have met in an additional 31 times over issues of special concern to the neighbors and the University (such as traffic, grocery outlet development, the restoration of the Mary Church Terrell Home, the establishment of the proposed Town Center Development and the Middle School of Science and Mathematics).

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The CAC has improved overall communication between the University and the community leadership in neighborhoods that surround the campus; facilitated the resolution of specific problems raised by the neighbors and the University through the establishment of working groups; yielded tangible neighborhood improvements through cooperative working relationships between the University, the residents, and the city; and created an amenable forum for ongoing discussion and debate around unresolved areas of concern.

Plans for the proposed Bethune Hall were presented to the CAC on the 19th of March, where there were no concerns expressed at the time. The same plans were presented to the Bloomingdale Civic Association on the 16th of June, ANC 5C on the 17th of June and again on the 16th of September, the LeDroit Park Civic Association on the 24th of June, and ANC 1B on the 7th of August.

Letters of support from all of these groups are in the record. There were no objections to the siting, massing, use or design of the proposed replacement building. The substantive issue raised about the development of the dormitory came primarily from ANC 1B and LeDroit Park Civic Association.

These communities experience the greatest pressure of competition for on-street parking from members of the University community. As a result, though they understand the danger and cost involved in developing underground parking for the dormitory, and are aware that

parking requirements for this facility would be minimal, they requested that the University identify additional parking spaces that would come on line when this facility is developed. Such spaces would enhance the off-street parking available to the University community and help to alleviate the tight parking felt within the neighborhood.

The University identified 16 potential spaces at the 515 "W" Street site, and 64 potential spaces at the former Texaco Station site at the northeast corner of Georgia Avenue and "W" Street.

In general, the community is supportive of the development of the new Bethune dormitory, and believes it will not only improve the quality of students' residential life but is also a positive addition to the neighborhood as a whole.

Thank you, and I am ready to answer any questions you may have.