THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

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NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM
401 F STREET, N.W., SUITE 312
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24 July 2003

Dear Ms. Honey:

During its meeting of 17 July, the Commission reviewed the proposed concept for a George Washington University residence hall to be located at 2025 F Street, NW (S.L. 03-116). The members were not convinced that current design deserves to exceed the height restrictions in this primarily horizontal city. More definitive presentation materials, such as a massing model including neighboring buildings, might strengthen the argument for some additional height. However, the west elevation also requires additional investigation and should include windows where permitted by code. The bays on the lower part of the building provide a good street presence but the design in general appears overwhelming on the block.

The Commission looks forward to the further review of this project. As always, the staff is available should you require guidance.

Sincerely,

David M. Childs, FAIA
Chairman

Michelle Honey, AIA
Director, Architecture, Engineering & Construction
George Washington University
2025 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20052

cc: Richard A. Ayers, AIA, Ayers Saint Gross Architects

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
Case 03-29
Exhibit 12

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.03-29
EXHIBIT NO.12

THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

COMMISSION MEETING

Washington, D.C.

* * *

The meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts was convened at 10:12 a.m., Thursday, July 17, 2003, at the Pension Building, 441 F Street, N.W., Suite 312, Washington, D.C. 20001, DAVID M. CHILDS, Chairman, presiding.

In Attendance:

Members of the Commission of Fine Arts

DAVID M. CHILDS, Chairman

BARBARALEE DIAMONSTEIN-SPIELVOGEL

PAMELA NELSON

DIANA BALMORI

ELYN ZIMMERMAN

Staff:

Charles Atherton, Secretary
Frederick Lindstrom, Assistant Secretary
Sue Kohler, Historian,
Jose Martinez-Canino, Architect
Kristina N. Alg, Architect
Susan M. Raposa, Information Specialist
Sarah Garber, Intern

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A F T E R N O O N S E S S I O N

[2:12 p.m.]

MS. ALG: The next item on the agenda is at 2025 F Street, N.W. It's George Washington University's new 103-unit residence hall and it's here for concept design.

There are a couple of issues I want to bring to your attention. The staff does have some concerns about the west elevation and there is going to be a submission for a zoning variance for the height. Currently that square is zoned for 90-foot height and they are requesting 120-foot height variance.

In addition, Dorothy Miller, the ANC chairman from Foggy Bottom, is here and there might be other people here for public comment. She's also submitted written comments for you to review. I apologize that we didn't have them for you sooner today but they were just submitted this morning.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: That's fine.

MS. ALG: Alex Dearie will be making the primary presentation but Michelle Honey will be introducing the project.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: Given our schedule here w welcome you but we ask you to be brief and concise, but please give us all of your thoughts.

MS. HONEY: Good afternoon. Thank you very much for having us come today. My name is Michelle Honey. I am an architect and the director of architecture, engineering and construction at the George Washington University.

I have a few brief points to make and then I'm going to introduce you to Alex Dearie from Ayers, Saint Gross and he will go through the presentation.

First of all, the BZA order for our campus plan required us to provide housing on campus for 70 percent of our undergraduate students. In this endeavor we plan to place this building on square 103, which is within the campus boundary, for a residence hall that will house 530 beds. Our objective again is to maximize beds based on that original order. And I don't want you to think that we're sandwiching these students into the building but we've worked with a basic unit size for two beds in each unit that is similar to all of our other new residence halls and we're using the same module for this project.

I charged the architect to come up with a very simple, straightforward design that was placed in

this midblock, so it's not a signature location but it certainly is important to the university. We wanted to ensure that it works within the materials of the university--brick and precast--and that it fits with the synergy of the whole university that we're trying to create.

With that note I'm going to turn over the mike to Alex Dearie.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: Thank you.

MR. DEARIE: We're going to walk through this actually with a PowerPoint presentation. We thought it would be easier to see.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: At a trot.

MS. HONEY: Okay, we'll try.

The first couple of slides, actually we can skip that and we'll get back to that image. The next series of slides are basically going to show you some of the site, so you know where it is--along F Street, bounded by 21st and 20th Streets, and obviously the rest of the site. Here's a little bit more, a tight view of the site. There's a service alley behind. The bounds of the site are basically where you see the blank building. That's the footprint of the proposed building. Next to it is a support building, which is

part of the lot area. And you can see F Street along the bottom, 20th along the right-hand side.

And these are quick photos. We're just going to flip through these so you can get a sense of the character of the site and some of the building massing. These just give you a sense of the texture, the varying heights, and the things that occur along the street.

Here's the entry plan. I'll go through the plans really quickly. This is mostly, as you would guess, mostly entry-related--some offices and things. There's a small venue on the left-hand side which has not been designated yet.

This is a typical floor, just showing you the units that Michelle alluded to, the two beds flanking a single bathroom, fairly standard for the university.

This is a roof plan. We'll skip this section. The next section's a little bit easier to read.

One thing that you notice is because we're in an attempt to maximize beds, we have 14 floors. One of those floors is actually an English basement, so it's slightly lower, so we've been working with a way of easing that and making a really nice kind of

promenade courtyard in the center of it, a double-head entry. And we have a pretty standard--we've done a couple of dormitories, residence halls for the university using an eight-foot-eight floor-to-floor, which allows us to maximize the amount of beds on the site.

This is the first elevation, which because it doesn't show the brick is a little bit harder to read and I'll probably move quickly through these but you get a sense here--there's these kind of projected bays, kind of standard. We did a quick study early on of the residence that will kind of go along with the D.C. tradition and a lot of the entry, a lot of the bay projections we've tried to make fairly standard based on some of those ideas.

This is the west elevation. The shading on the rendering will help you read this but basically the projection of the front bay comes out. We decided that it made a lot of sense to have it be a kind of blank facade, just simple, and allow the rest of the windows to kind of wrap it. So this is pretty much the only point where you have that.

Quickly, this is the rear facade at the alley, which is fairly functional, just allowing at the end of the court, typical corridor, allowing some

window view out, some light into the corridor, which is fairly long. Then that's kind of a mirror of the opposite west facade, except for that there's a building there.

And these are two renderings that we'll go through. You can see the bays alluded to at the bottom. We've tried to respond to--Francis Scott Key is the large dormitory on the corner site--respond to the kind of height of the cornice lines, the height of certain belcourses, things like that, and also to try to reduce the size of the massing we tried to use the kind of brick--the brick in the center responds fairly well to the size of the facade there on Francis Scott Key. The bays respond to the size of the support building adjacent to the site.

And here's the last perspective. One perspective view I think would be actually a little bit better to look at would be one that's closer in because you get a better sense of how the bays kind of respond as you move along the site.

And then this is the kind of final image, which shows you pretty clearly the way that we've allowed these belcourses to kind of pull through, the heavy cornice, which is related to Francis Scott Key, which hopefully brings the height issue down a little

bit, and then the kind of tracking of this kind of banding across, which we've tried to pull from the adjacent site.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: If I can begin the conversation here, I think it's an obligation of an applicant to prove their case and a tool to talk about site planning and massing that is most effective is a model. I think it's possible that your case could have been made stronger with a model if you'd had that. That's just a beginning comment.

But without that I think, and I've spent enough time looking at drawings that I can see that this building stands up in a way that is, to me, inappropriate in this area. Just because the need of a great institution--this is one of the greatest institutions of education in this country, let alone the city, and we're well aware of their importance and need to keep their operations. Nevertheless, that's not enough reason to violate zoning in a horizontal city.

So first of all, I'm not convinced that it's in the interest of the public to allow a variation to go up higher. And the methods that you've used to change the color--paint the top and it'll go away--really will not be effective, that this building will

stand out in a way that is not appropriate in that area.

But secondly, the elevations of it, particularly that projection on the west facade--I think it's the west facade--oh, I wanted to say there were several photographs which were helpful looking down the street and I think your photographs down F Street looking east really showed my case, which is that there's nothing in the area nor on the perspective line that has the same kind of aberrant height.

But then going to that elevation you'd see looking eastward that those rooms or at least the corridor, as you have done on the north elevation, would be vastly improved from an interior point of view if the end of that corridor would have light.

The plan seemed to be extremely well thought out, functional, nice. I think, in fact, it would be a nice place to be, but that end room would be kind of special if it also had a window in it. It's a corner room and air could flow through it and you could put your bed underneath the window and it would be not only handsomer--you'd have the tools that an architect needs to compose an elevation--but it would make the

spaces better for the occupants that would live in there.

I would guess that you have some fire wall issues but they may be able to be relaxed in certain ways or above a certain height that permit windows to go in there, so I would encourage that from my point of view on the elevation. But I would say that the larger issue for you and your client is the one of height and because of the density that you get on the site and from my point of view and from a brief discussion that we've had looking at the earlier matters, I think we feel pretty much unanimously about that.

Are there any changes to that?

MS. DIAMONSTEIN-SPIELVOGEL: No, I think you said that very well.

MS. NELSON: You said it well. I think it had a good approach with the bays and there was some strength in the design but I just think it's just too overwhelming.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: Do we have any other people who'd like to talk before us here on this matter?

MS. ALG: Dorothy Miller, the ANC chairman.

MS. MILLER: Good afternoon. I'm Dorothy Miller, chair of ANC 2A and commissioner for ANC 2A-05.

I have some closer pictures which a friend took for me from our community that I can pass around to show you what F Street really looks like. We had our meeting last night and I only heard about this the middle of last week and I wished I'd had more time to prepare.

Mr. Kelly, who is a city planner, was unable to be here today because of a business commitment but he did send his statement in, which is very, very good.

And I agree with the chair that it does violate the Shipstead-Luce Act on height, density, and everything else.

Now it's not that George Washington doesn't have a better place to put these students. The old hospital is empty but they want to commercialize that. They could house all of their students.

Now the Planning Commission asked them to try to get out of the neighborhood because they were killing our neighborhood and to put them on campus. They went to court and the court has stayed this until 1906. So it's not like they've got to do this

overnight. They're tearing down the hospital. We feel they're over their FAR and we feel they're already over 2,000 over their students and they want to go to a trimester term. When I look at this and notice what happens at the Howard Johnson of the students moving in and out, you're going to have trucks on that street double parked most of the year while these students move in and out.

Now I have deviated from my text but I gave you a copy.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: And you've been very articulate and the essence is that you have a Commission that has indicated its support for the issues that you raised.

MS. MILLER: I had everybody's support last night. Unfortunately, one got sick, one had a member of his staff's family die--

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: I meant this Commission.

MS. MILLER: Yes, that's what I'm talking about. I was trying to get a public vote last night and I had the approval of all of my commissioners and they approved what I was going to do but we couldn't get it to a public vote because we lost our quorum. But we do all agree on this and it does violate the Shipstead Act by the size of it, the height of it, and

you certainly ought to be able to see it from the Mall.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: We think that you're probably right.

MS. MILLER: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: Thank you very much.

MS. MILLER: And I hope you read Mr. Kelly's because he's marvelous.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: We'll do that. Thank you very much.

MS. MILLER: They need to work out a few more things before--

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: Thank you.

MS. DIAMONSTEIN-SPIELVOGEL: Mr. Chairman, do we have, as part of our new and revised rules, some procedure that if a variance is required it would be in place before a submission is made to this Commission?

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: I would say we don't.

MS. ALG: This is a concept submission, not for permit.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: I don't know how to respond to that, really.

MS. DIAMONSTEIN-SPIELVOGEL: I think it should be on our list, then.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: Yes, it definitely ought to be on our list. We'd like to get our thoughts out quite quickly on the matter. We don't want them to get the variance and then come to us and say it's a done deal.

MS. DIAMONSTEIN-SPIELVOGEL: It's something we considered when we talked about another Georgetown submission. Remember those houses?

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: Oh, yes, I do. Georgetown, not the university but the area.

MS. DIAMONSTEIN-SPIELVOGEL: Yes.

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: Thank you very much. I think that we have a consensus here. Would you like to have one more comment?

MS. HONEY: I just want to add two things. One block away between 20th and 19th Streets there are buildings that are 130 feet high.

Also, in contrast to what Dorothy Miller tried to suggest, we requested that we would have a presentation to the ANC last evening and we were not able to. There may be some opportunity for us to have an opportunity to share with them the actual plan and get full response from all the commissioners, rather than something that--

CHAIRMAN CHILDS: With additional input and additional materials we're always willing to take a look at it, but I think that our feeling is fairly strong on this matter of height. We're always willing to look at further developments and models and other things, but that would be our advice to you today and without any further discussion, unless there are other thoughts, we'd like to pass that on to you. Thank you very much.