Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3-D
P O Box 40846
Palisades Station
Washington, D C 20016

December 12, 2005

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Ms. Carol Mitten
Chair
Zoning Commission for the District of Columbia
Office of Zoning
440 4th Street, NW, Suite 210-S
Washington, DC 20001

RE. Case No. 05-27 (American University – Further Processing of Campus Plan – 4400 Massachusetts Ave , NW)

Dear Ms. Mitten·

On December 7, 2005, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D (hereinafter ANC 3D) considered for a second time American University's (hereinafter AU) proposal to build an 80,000 square foot building to house its School of International Service. This issue was previously considered by the ANC 3D on October 5, 2005, at which time ANC 3D voted unanimously (6-0-0) to oppose AU's building proposal and issued by letter a detailed and well-reasoned decision in support of that conclusion to the Zoning Commission. At a D.C. Zoning Commission (hereinafter "Zoning Commission") hearing on November 7, 2005, the Zoning Commission sought additional information from AU and District Department of Transportation (hereinafter "DDOT"). After considering and discussing the additional submissions at its regularly scheduled meeting on December 7, 2005, ANC 3D voted unanimously (6-0-0) to oppose AU's building proposal.

At the outset it is important to note that AU's position regarding the creation of an additional lane on Nebraska Avenue is, to put it kindly, evolving. Following the ANC 3D hearing of October 5, 2005, AU proposed to widen Nebraska Avenue as required in its Campus Plan. Prior to that hearing, AU steadfastly refused to abide by this condition or, despite repeated prodding by the ANC 3D and community members, consider other reasonable alternatives to mitigate the effects of adding a 300 car garage and large office building on undisputed busy street In its submission to the Zoning Commission, AU stated that it would widen Nebraska Avenue as required by the Campus Plan. At the Zoning Commission hearing, however, AU was equivocal about widening Nebraska Avenue. Furthermore, in AU's "proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law", it proposes that the Commission not require it to widen Nebraska Avenue or take any other steps to mitigate the traffic congestion the proposed building will inevitably create. See AU's Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law at 12 ("While the Commission appreciates the Applicant's desire to address community concerns, the Commission

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agrees with the conclusions of the Applicant's traffic expert that the proposed traffic anticipated by the new SIS building does not justify the widening of Nebraska Avenue.")

DDOT, as noted above, also submitted additional views regarding AU's building proposal. DDOT remains concerned about the added congestion that AU's building proposal will generate. DDOT, like ANC 3D, stated its concern about the additional traffic congestion that the new building and its 300 car garage will create. DDOT made the following recommendation:

> DDOT would like to recommend that in addition to the intersection enhancements, American University and its consultants should embark upon a comprehensive neighborhood traffic audit. This audit should look at street systems in the immediate proximity that would allow for cut through traffic and present an analysis to DDOT that recommends and outlines specific streets which are candidates for left-turn prohibitions during peak hours.
> DDOT Memorandum at 3.

For the sake of clarity, ANC 3D reaffirms in full its earlier decision in this case. We write separately today to emphasize three points:

First, it is apparent that AU has additional work to do before its application can be given serious consideration, let alone granted. ANC 3D (and Mr. Michael Mazzuchi in his testimony before the Zoning Commission) has fully set forth the empirical flaws in the AU traffic studies. AU's virtual silence in response speaks volumes about its traffic studies. Moreover, as discussed above, DDOT makes plain its view that AU has more work to do. AU must engage in a more comprehensive and careful traffic study and then "work with" the community before a proposal can be approved. Thus far, AU has given merely lip service to its "work with" obligation and the legitimate concerns that ANC 3D and the community have raised regarding this project. DDOT clearly agrees with this view and requests that AU engage in further study.

Second, ANC 3D categorically rejects AU's contention that its internal campus roadways should not be considered as a means for ingress and egress to the garage. AU wrongly touts one provision in its Campus Plan (namely, reducing vehicular traffic on the interior of its campus) above all others. Indeed, AU uses this provision as both a shield (to bar internal traffic) and a sword (to place traffic into the surrounding neighborhood). This is plainly a cramped and erroneous reading of the Campus Plan that does nothing more than elevate AU's interests above the community's interests. In short, AU's campus will be quiet but the surrounding streets (including Horace Mann Public Elementary School and Metropolitan Methodist Nursery School) will be busy. AU's Statement that using internal roads "would also result in the loss of green space and trees" (Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law at 11) is wrong. The existing internal roadways are sufficient to carry the traffic and any adjustments would undoubtedly save green space elsewhere. In any event, the empirical evidence to support such a conclusion is sorely lacking because AU repeatedly rejected even considering (let alone actually studying) such alternatives.

Third, ANC 3D notes that AU states that "[t]he parking garage entrance has been reduced from three lanes to two lanes." Letter from Paul A. Tummonds, Jr. to Chairperson Mitten dated December 5, 2005 at 1. However, the drawings AU submitted (which are also dated December 5, 2005), show three lanes of vehicular traffic. While it is somewhat premature to reach this issue, given the work ahead, ANC 3D opposes any entrance that is wider than the entrance that serves the existing surface parking lot (the site of the proposed building).

In conclusion, it is apparent that AU has additional work ahead. ANC 3D remains willing to work with AU and facilitate meetings with the residents so that AU can truly fulfill its "work with" obligation in the Campus Plan

Sincerely,

Alma H. Gates

Alma H. Gates
Chair