

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



Office of the Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: D.C. Zoning Commission
FROM: *YS for*
Ellen McCarthy, Director
DATE: February 16, 2006
SUBJECT: Z.C. Case No. 05-40
Wesley Theological Seminary Campus Plan
4500 Massachusetts Ave., NW. Square 1600, part of Lot 811

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APPLICATION

The Wesley Theological Seminary of the United Methodist Church (the Seminary) seeks Zoning Commission approval of its campus master plan for the years 2006 through 2015. Accordingly it has filed for § 3104.1 special exception relief pursuant to §§210 and 3035 of 11 DCMR.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning (OP) is favorably disposed to the proposed campus plan, as is the ANC. However, OP believes that additional information is needed before it can determine whether to recommend the commission approve the request. The information requests are noted at the end of this report. If this information is supplied before the hearing, OP will attempt to submit a supplemental report.

BACKGROUND

The campus was established and constructed in 1958-59 and has not had substantial new construction since then. Consequently, this is the Seminary's first campus plan.

The Seminary is located in northwest Washington, just north and west of the intersection of Massachusetts and Nebraska Avenues at Wesley Circle. It is bounded by Massachusetts Avenue on the east, University Avenue on the west and the American University Campus on the south and southwest. It currently occupies approximately 8.76 acres (381,877 sf), with most development being atop a wooded hill that slopes down to single family homes across University Avenue.

The site is zoned D/R-5-A.

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The principal part of the campus consists of two quadrangles. The northeastern quadrangle is devoted to classroom, administrative, dining, chapel and library uses. It is landscaped and is accessible only to pedestrians. The architecture is mid-20th century modern and of very high quality. Its principal materials are brick, aggregate, stone and glass.

The southwestern quadrangle consists of the back of the library, two dormitories and a fence along the property boundary with American University. The middle of this quadrangle has little landscaping and is devoted almost entirely to automobile parking. The architecture is also mid-20th century modern and of the same materials, but of lesser quality design.

On the slope of the hill to the north of the dormitory quadrangle, nearest the residential neighborhood, there is a house that was formerly used as the Seminary president's residence and is still used for campus purposes. The Seminary has stated it intends to sell-off 24,996 square feet surrounding and to the northwest of this house and has therefore filed for a subdivision of that land into three separate lots, and excluded that land from the proposed campus plan.

Excluding the 24,996 square feet, the campus plan covers 8.19 acres (356,996 square feet).

The Seminary's application text says that the institution currently enrolls 650 graduate students, 24 full-time faculty, 25 part-time faculty and 40 administrative staff.

CAMPUS MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL

The applicant's stated intention for the campus plan is to "maintain current enrollment levels" while expanding dormitory and other academic and support facilities. The proposed plan would:

- Retain the existing general site plan;
- Demolish the two dormitories on the north and west sides of the southwestern parking and residential quadrangle and replace them with 30,000 square feet of new, larger four-story dormitories on the west and south sides of that quadrangle. This would increase bed capacity from 160 to 220;
- Build 30,000 square feet of new academic facilities, including new library with 72% greater capacity on the north side of the southwestern parking and residential quadrangle, where one of the existing dormitories now stands;
- Convert the existing library to offices and a campus center;
- Expand the chapel, on the eastern side of the northeastern quadrangle, by 5,000 square feet;
- Expand mechanical and dining facilities on the north side of the northeastern quadrangle;

- Build a new President's house of an unspecified size near University Avenue, north of the existing dining hall;
- Exclude 24,996 square feet at the northwest corner of the existing campus, along University Avenue, from the campus plan;
- Continue to occupy the former president's house on the 24,996 square foot site for campus uses until the Seminary chooses to demolish the house;
- Build an underground parking facility where the existing parking lot is, and landscape its roof as a 23,000 square foot pedestrian quadrangle;
- Reroute the current one way south-to north (Massachusetts Avenue to University Avenue) circulation system into a two way circulation system with an entrance and exit on both streets, and with the University Avenue entrance being relocated slightly to the north of the existing entrance in order to align with Sedwick Street on the other side of University Avenue. University Avenue would be the principal loading entrance and Massachusetts Avenue would be the principal entrance to parking areas;
- Maintain current enrollment levels;
- Increase parking capacity from 174 spaces to 200 spaces.
- Institute various Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures.

With 30,000 additional square feet of new dormitory space, 30,000 additional square feet of new academic and administrative space, 5000 square feet of additional chapel space, and 7500 square feet of new mechanical and support space, the new construction would add 72,500 square feet of new space to the existing 138,000 existing gross square feet (gsf) for a new total of 210,000 gsf. This does not include underground or surface parking areas. It is not clear whether it includes the new president's house.

EXISTING ZONING

The property is zoned D/R-5-A, which permits 0.9 FAR. 11 DCMR § 352.2 empowers the Zoning Commission to approve the zone district's use by colleges and universities as special exceptions.

R- 5 District

§ 350.1: The R-5 Districts are general Residence Districts designed to permit flexibility of design by permitting in a single district...all types of urban residential development... The R-5 Districts shall also permit the construction of those institutional and semi-public buildings that would be compatible with adjoining residential uses and that are excluded from the more restrictive Residence Districts.

§ 350.2: In R-5-A Districts, only low height and density shall be permitted. It is designed to include those areas now developed primarily with row dwellings, but within

which there have been a substantial number of conversions of the dwellings into dwellings for two (2) or more families."

COMPLIANCE WITH SPECIAL EXCEPTION CRITERIA

Unless otherwise noted, the application is generally in conformance with the criteria contained within §210, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (R-1), as described below.

§ 210.1 *"Use as a college or university that is an academic institution of higher learning, including a college or university hospital, dormitory, fraternity, or sorority house proposed to be located on the campus of a college or university, shall be permitted as a special exception in an R-1¹ District if approved by the Zoning Commission under § 3104, subject to the provisions of this section."*

This application is for the use of the subject property as an academic institution of higher learning, including dormitories.

§ 210.2 *"Use as a college or university shall be located so that it is not likely to become objectionable to neighboring property because of noise, traffic, number of students, or other objectionable conditions."*

Noise

The minimum distance between a campus building (other than the former presidents house) and a residential property is approximately 500 feet from the nearest residential property. The campus has existed on the site for the last 48 years and is oriented to a student body of graduate-level ministers and future ministers. OP has checked with the ANC, which is not aware of any noise-related complaints due to behavior on the campus. The closest non-seminary building to the campus is a mid-rise undergraduate residential dormitory at the American University. This is immediately adjacent to the Seminary's property line and looks out over the southwestern quadrangle of the Seminary, where the two new dormitories would be constructed. OP does not believe the Seminary's dormitories would generate noise that would be objectionable to the American University undergraduates. The residential area to the east is separated from the campus by a deep and steep hill on the southwest side of Massachusetts Avenue, plus the six lane Avenue and buffer plantings on the east side.

There are also no outdoor athletic facilities.

¹ This also applies to the more intensive R-5-A zone district.

The application does not propose the expansion of the campus beyond its current boundaries. Therefore, the University will not shift any closer to the surrounding residential areas than it is now and the proposed changes should not have any greater impact on the surrounding area than it does today.

Traffic and Parking

The plan proposes a reworking of the vehicular circulation system, the relocation of most parking to an underground garage, and the institution of several Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures. The existing circulation pattern guides vehicular entrances to Massachusetts Avenue and exits to University Avenue. The new system would make each point into both an entry and exit, with only right turns permitted at each exit. The Massachusetts Avenue entrance would be the principal entrance to the 200 parking spaces, most of which would be in a new underground garage. This would be an increase from the current 174 spaces. The University Avenue entrance would be the primary delivery entrance.

The campus plan's parking study states that "Parking demand is expected to exceed supply on all weekdays, except Friday". The study also notes that 90% of commuting students and faculty drive alone, an unusually high percentage. Accordingly, the transportation consultants recommend the following TDM measures:

- Improved use of existing transit, primarily by measures that promote the use of the American University's shuttle to the Tenleytown Metro;
- Establishment of a physical or virtual commuter coordination center for carpooling;
- Leasing of remote parking, although the study provides no details on this or any shuttle to connect such parking with the campus;
- Increasing parking fees to reduce parking demand;
- Staggering class schedules to reduce peak demand.

The campus plan commits the Seminary to establishing a Transportation Management Plan to: increase the use of transit by students, faculty, staff and visitors from the current 10% to a targeted 15%; to establish a carpooling target of 10% of vehicular commuting, and to reserve priority parking spaces for carpoolers, and; to alter class schedules to reduce peaks and better-use the expanded parking facilities.

In OP's opinion, the plan is under-detailed on the plans for implementing some of the TDM recommendations. However, OP notes: 1) the Seminary states it is not proposing an increase in enrollment beyond the general numbers it has had for the last decade; 2) the Seminary plans to house a higher percentage of students on campus than it does now – thereby decreasing some commuting,

and; 3) the campus plan proposes 26 more parking spaces on campus than the campus provides now.

11DCMR § 2101.1 requires that for each building there be 2 parking spaces for every 3 teachers, plus 1 for each 10 classroom or auditorium seats. The section also requires 1 parking space for each 5 dormitory beds. The campus would have no stadium. § 2106 permits the Commission or the Board of Zoning Adjustments to set different parking requirements in approving a campus plan.

The proposed 220 dorm rooms would require 44 parking spaces, assuming there is one bed per dorm room. However, the applicant's transportation and parking does not document the number of teachers per building, or the number of seats. OP has been unable to assess whether the proposed 220 parking spaces comply with the zoning requirements and has asked for additional information

The D.C. Department of Transportation has not yet prepared a report on the campus' traffic impact.

The Advisory Neighborhood Commission has asked that the amount of parking provided on campus be no less than that required by zoning.

Number of Students

The proposed campus plan does not anticipate an increase in the number of students over that which existed during the projected 2005 – 2006 school year levels. The Seminary's application text says that the institution currently enrolls 650 graduate students, has 24 full-time faculty, 25 part-time faculty and 40 administrative staff.

Based on the information provided in the application, and on conversations with the applicant, OP has found it difficult to confirm these numbers. From the charts included in the applicant's Tab 7, it appears that the enrollment figures for 2005 – 2006 are approximately as follows:

Type of Degree	Head Count	FTE's
Masters	550	275
Doctorate	200	125
Total	750	300

However, the Seminary's administration has noted that a substantial portion of those enrolled are based either off-campus at cooperative programs housed in other parts of the District, or are in programs or ministries in other parts of the country or world. It has therefore reduced the head count for enrollment by 100 students, to 650 students, but has left the head count for full and part-time faculty and staff at 89-90

The applicant's parking study assumed 446 commuter students, 57 on-campus permanent resident students and a total head count of 503 students and 124 faculty and staff.

The applicant's housing goal (see below) is to house 20% of its students on campus. The plan proposes a total of 220 dorm rooms on campus. If one student resides in each room, and this number of students is 20% of the enrollment, this implies that the student population would be 1100 students.

OP has had conversations with the Seminary about clarifying the numbers of students enrolled and the number of students actually attending the campus and has asked for additional information.

OP has also spoken to the applicant about the need to establish a measurable cap on the total number of students or the number of students taking classes at the Massachusetts Avenue campus during a given semester. The Seminary has been reluctant to define such a number, or to propose an alternative measurement tool. OP believes that it is essential for such a number to be established as part of this campus planning process.

Housing

The Seminary is, and will remain, a commuter campus. The application indicates that a goal of this campus plan is to have 20% of the students live on campus. To achieve this, the plan proposes the demolition of the existing 160 outmoded dormitory rooms, and their replacement by 220 new dormitory rooms.

If the Seminary does indeed retain its current enrollment level while increasing the number of students living on-campus, the plan would seem to will decrease the current impact, if any, of Seminary students on the surrounding supply of housing. However, as noted above, the Seminary needs to clarify the seeming mathematical discrepancies among the stated enrollment being 650 students, 20% of the stated enrollment being 130, and the Seminary's plan to build 220 dorm rooms which, if housing 20% of the student body, would imply a total enrollment of 1100 students.

OP believes this should be clarified and has asked for additional details.

Possible Other Objectionable Conditions

OP is unaware of any possibly-objectionable conditions that would be created by the implementation of the campus plan, nor were any raised by the neighborhood during the plan's presentation to the ANC.

§ 210.3 *"In R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5-A, and R-5-B Districts, the maximum bulk requirements normally applicable in the Districts may be increased for specific buildings or structures; provided, that the total bulk of all buildings and structures on the campus shall not exceed the gross floor area prescribed for the R-5-B District. In all other Residence Districts, similar bulk increases may also be permitted; provided that the total bulk of all buildings and structures on the campus shall not exceed the gross floor area prescribed for the R-5-D District. Because of permissive increases as applicable to normal bulk requirements in the low-density districts regulated by this title, it is the intent of this subsection to prevent unreasonable campus expansion into improved low-density districts."*

The gross floor area permitted within the D/R-5-A District is 0.9. At 0.59 FAR, the Seminary's proposed maximum FAR is well within what is permitted.

§ 210.4 *"As a prerequisite to requesting a special exception for each college or university use, the applicant shall have submitted to the Commission for its approval a plan for developing the campus as a whole, showing the location, height, and bulk, where appropriate, of all present and proposed improvements, including but not limited to the following:*

- (a) Buildings and parking and loading facilities;*
- (b) Screening, signs, streets, and public utility facilities;*
- (c) Athletic and other recreational facilities; and*
- (d) A description of all activities conducted or to be conducted on the campus, and of the capacity of all present and proposed campus development."*

The proposed campus master plan contains a description of all buildings, parking facilities and athletic facilities, including those to be constructed, with the exception of the new president's house. (OP has asked the applicant to supply this information). It does not, however, give individual building-by-building breakdowns on square footages or square footages by uses within each building. The plan contains a description of activities on campus conducted by the University and uses of specific buildings, including the proposed floor area ratio in comparison to the maximum permitted. The plan describes existing Metrobus lines, shows pedestrian pathways and vehicle roadways, and describes the existing water, electrical, and gas lines. The plan does not propose the substantial amounts of additional screening or signage to the campus.

§ 210.5 *Within a reasonable distance of the college or university campus, and subject to compliance with § 210.2, the Commission may also permit the interim use of land or improved property with any use that the Commission may determine is a proper college or university function."*

The applicant proposes not including the former president's house in the existing plan, so that it may be part of a requested subdivision that is currently being processed. The applicant does, however, request interim campus usage, for an unspecified time, for the former president's house, which would technically be off-campus if it is excluded from this first campus plan.

OP believes that if the house is used for campus purposes it should be included within the campus plan, as it is currently part of the campus and functions with campus uses, even though there is no existing campus plan. If, as part of its current subdivision plan, the University should later wish to demolish the structure and divest itself of surrounding land, this should be done through a modification to the campus plan.

Should the former president's house area be included in the plan, only approximately 16,000 square feet of the 24,996 square feet now proposed for exclusion could be excluded from the campus plan.

If, however, the Commission wishes to grant permission for such an interim use, OP would recommend the interim use be permitted for a limited time of no more than five years.

§ 210.6 *When a major new building that has been proposed in a campus plan is instead moved off-campus, the previously designated site shall not be designated for, or devoted to, a different major new building unless the Commission has approved an amendment to the campus plan applicable to the site; provided, that for this purpose a major new building is defined as one specifically identified in the campus plan."*

This section is not applicable. The subject application does not propose to move off-campus any major new building that had been proposed in a campus plan.

§ 210.7 *"In reviewing and deciding a campus plan application or new building construction pursuant to a campus plan, the Commission shall consider, to the extent they are relevant, the policies of the District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan."*

The Comprehensive Plan Ward 3 element includes the following references to the Seminary:

1401.2 “[With respect to the relation] of Ward 3 to the declaration of major policies in the Economic Development element of the Comprehensive Plan: (e) The ward is host to major institutional activities such asWesley Theological Seminary...

1409.1 (f) There are a large number of institutional uses in Ward 3. These include...Wesley Theological Seminary...Many of these facilities have structures that are an exception to the neighborhood’s land use or that do not conform to the underlying zoning. The compatibility of these uses must be maintained, expansion carefully controlled, changes to neighborhood-related uses encouraged, and conversion to other nonconforming uses prevented.

In OP’s opinion, the proposed campus plan is consistent with these policies.

§ 210.8 *“As an integral part of the application requesting approval of new building construction pursuant to a campus plan, the college or university shall certify and document that the proposed building or amendment is within the floor area ratio (FAR) limit for the campus as a whole, based upon the computation included in the most recently approved campus plan and the FARs of any other buildings constructed or demolished since the campus plan was approved.”*

This is a new campus plan. As such, this criterion is not applicable at this time.

§ 210.9 *Before taking final action on an application for use as a college or university, the Commission shall submit the application to the D.C. Office of Planning and the D.C. Department of Transportation for review and written reports.*

The subject application was reviewed by the D.C. Office of Planning and has been referred to the District Department of Transportation. This report serves as the written report of the Office Planning. The written report of the D.C. Department of Transportation has not yet been submitted.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS

ANC 3D voted to support the application, with three conditions:

1. The Seminary shall agree that, if and when it sells the 24,600 square feet near the former presidents house that it is not including in the campus plan, and for which it has requested a subdivision of three approximately 8,000 square foot lots, it will impose covenants restricting the development of each lot to no more than one single family house.

2. The parking supplied must comply with zoning requirements.
3. The enrollment and staff shall remain at no more than the current levels plus ten percent: i.e., based on an assumed current level of 650 students and 90 faculty and staff, there could be no more than 715 students and 100 faculty and staff.

OP believes the Seminary needs to clarify exactly how many students are enrolled and taking classes on the Massachusetts Avenue campus during any given semester and propose a measurable cap based on that. This may require revisiting the traffic and parking study. While OP believes the ANC resolution is very sympathetic to the Seminary with respect to enrollment, OP believes additional information is needed from the applicant before recommending a specific cap.

CONCLUSION

The Office of Planning has reviewed the proposed campus master plan for Wesley Theological Seminary and finds it to be in general conformance with Section 210 of the Zoning Regulations. However, there are details that need to be addressed before the Office of Planning could recommend the Zoning Commission grant special exception approval to the plan:

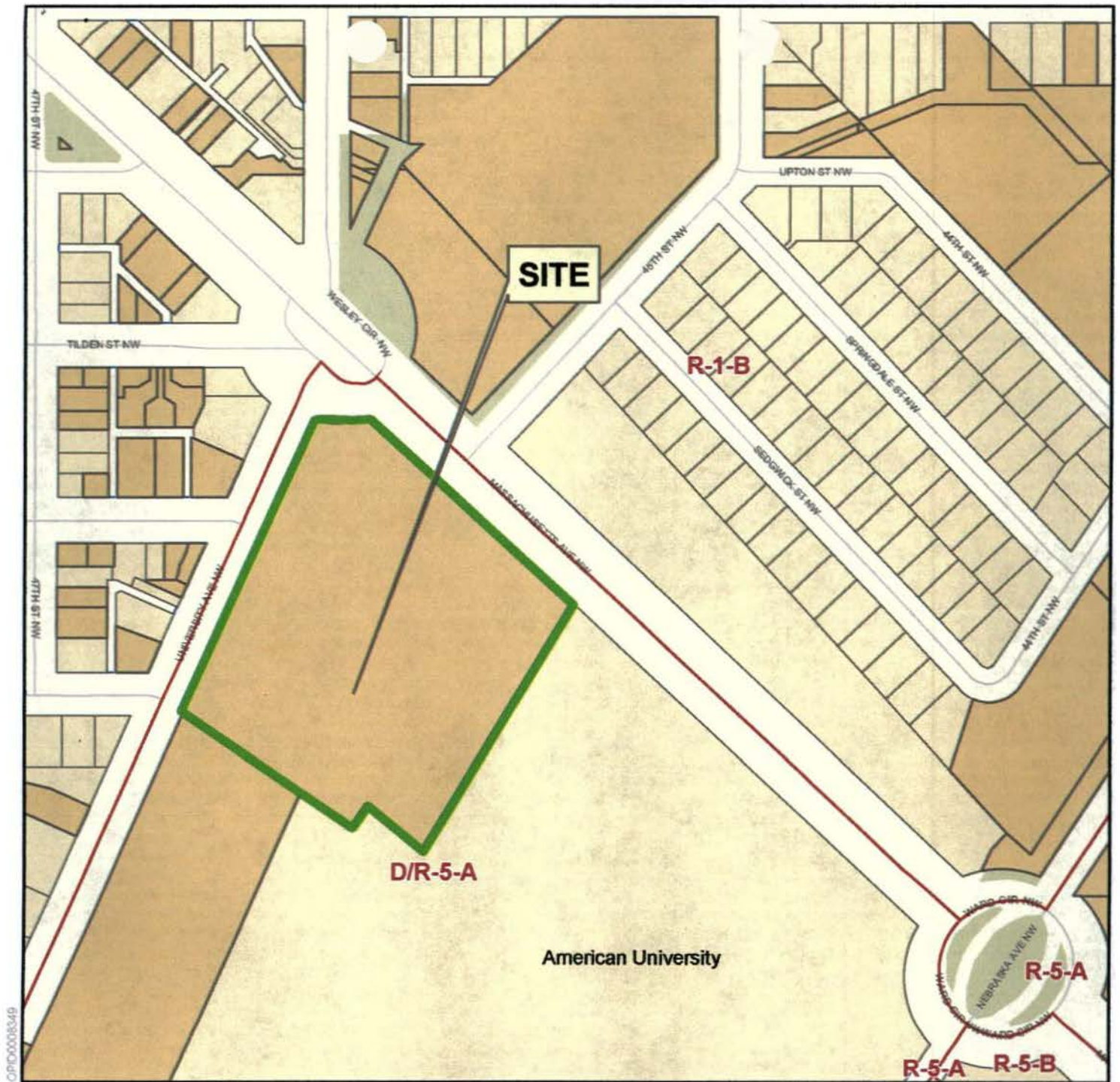
- (a) The plan should include a clearer statement of the exact numbers of students attending classes on-campus during each of the last four years, and shall develop a clear, measurable cap for either the number of enrolled students, or the number of enrolled students taking classes at the Seminary during a semester.
- (b) If the proposed cap would imply a greater number of commuters to the campus than are assumed in the plan's traffic study, the traffic study should be supplemented accordingly.
- (c) The plan should include individual building-by-building breakdowns on square footages or square footages by uses within each existing building, building to be demolished, and new building or addition, including the new president's house.
- (d) The plan should include the number of classroom and auditorium seats in each building, as well as the maximum number of teachers projected to be teaching in each building.
- (e) The plan should demonstrate how the number of parking spaces complies with the requirements of § 2101 or, if it does not, request relief under § 2106.
- (f) The Transportation Demand Management plan shall be presented in greater detail, so that it can be incorporated into a campus plan approved by the Commission.

Details to be addressed should include: arrangements for off-campus parking and shuttling; projections for the percentage of the proposed 200 parking spaces that would be occupied by vehicles owned by the proposed 220 students to be housed on-campus; a survey of the number of Seminary-related vehicles that currently park in the surrounding neighborhood on a typical Monday – Thursday during a semester.

- (g) The Seminary should either: 1) include the former president's house in the campus plan, along with the approximately 8,000 square feet of land surrounding it and joining it to the rest of the campus, if the house is to continue to be used for campus purposes or; 2) if the Seminary wishes to exclude the house and land from the campus plan, the Seminary should cease using the house for campus purposes upon the adoption of the campus plan. If, however, the Commission wishes to grant the applicant's interim use request for the former president's house, it should be permitted for no more than five years.

EMC/slcAICP

attachments



District of Columbia Zoning Commission Case No. 05-40 Wesley Theological Seminary Campus Plan

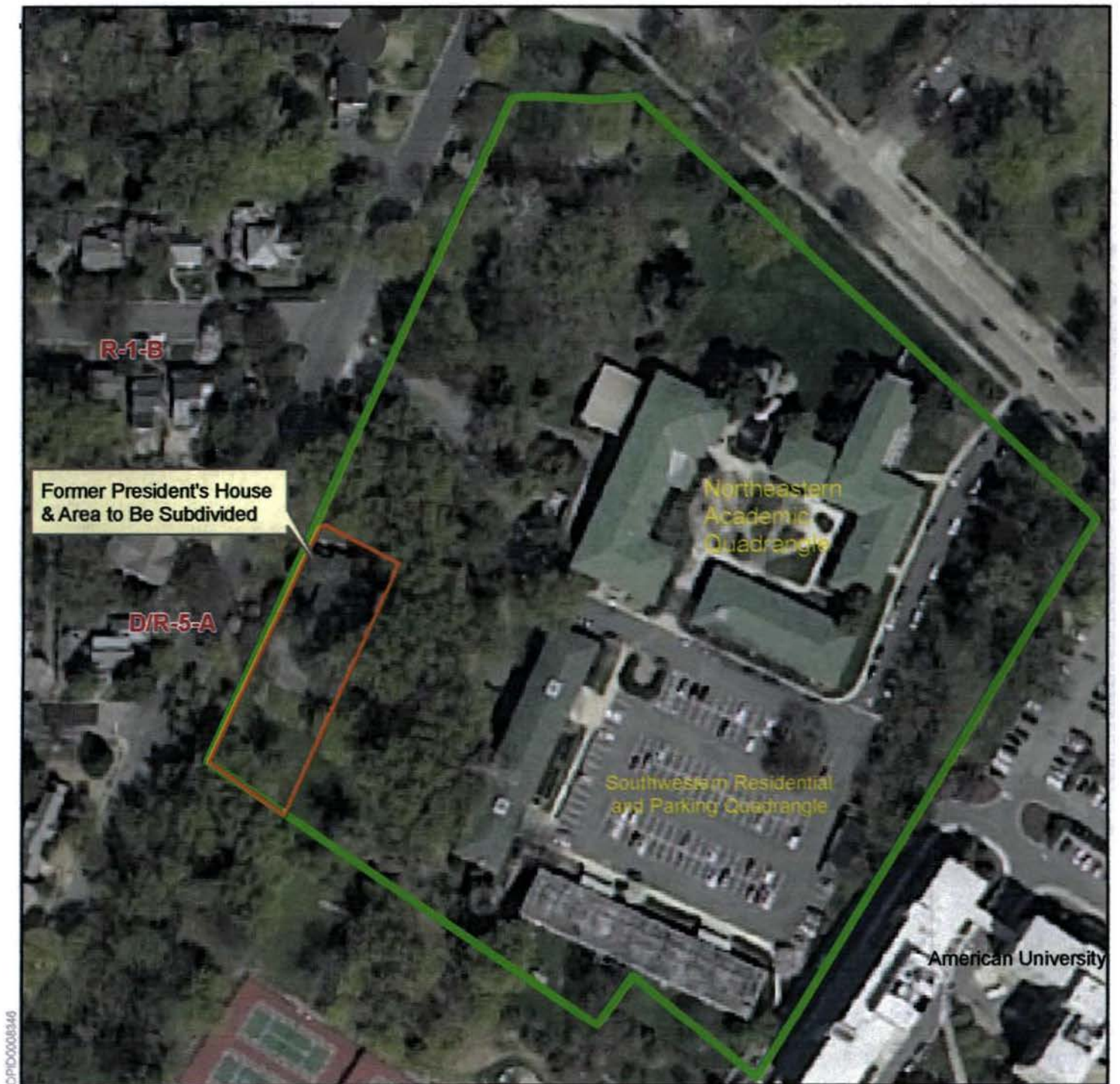
- Water
- Street Centerlines
- Property Squares
- Zoning Districts

Attachment 1 Site Area

★ ★ ★ Government of the
District of Columbia
Anthony A. Williams, Mayor

Office of Planning ~ February 9, 2006

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District of Columbia Zoning Commission Case No. 05-40 Wesley Theological Seminary Campus Plan

- Water
- Street Centerlines
- Property Squares
- Zoning Districts

Attachment 2 Site Detail

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