ZONING COMMISSION FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Case No. 09-19
The 2010 George Washington University – Mt. Vernon Campus Plan

Testimony of Alma Hardy Gates, Neighbors United Trust
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I am here in support of a process. A process that over the past 10 years has changed the George Washington University Mt. Vernon Campus from an adversary to a neighbor. The 2010 campus planning process and willingness of the university to listen, change and implement to meet neighborhood concerns is the reason a new campus plan is before you tonight with little or no opposition. The success of this planning process is an anomaly and credit mainly belongs to the efforts of three individuals:

- Fred Siegel, Associate VP and Dean of Freshman, has spent the past seven years changing the face of Mt. Vernon in the Berkeley community. As an immediate campus neighbor, Fred is keenly aware of town/gown issues and has worked tirelessly to open up university facilities to the neighborhood. Quarterly meetings, a condition of the 2000 Campus Plan, are opportunities for both the university and the neighborhood to exchange suggestions for improvement. This is the intent of the condition and here you have an example of quarterly meetings that are well attended with positive outcomes.
- Matt Bell, EE&K Architects, project architect and facilitator for the 2010 plan, deserves tremendous credit for his ability to listen, visualize, implement and deliver on changes suggested by the community.
- Alicia O'Neill, Senior Associate VP for Operations, has taken neighbor-suggested changes back to the university for inclusion in the plan that will meet the needs of the university for the next ten years and keep new construction in the context of existing campus architecture and neighborhood scale.

The GW/Mt. Vernon 2010 Campus Plan is unique because only a modest increase in square feet (19,000 sq/ ft.) is requested beyond what was approved under the 2000 Campus Plan; and, a FAR of 0.513 will maintain the low density development sought by neighbors. The placement and height of new academic and residential buildings is sensitive to the surrounding R-1-A and R-1-B residential community. New academic buildings would ring the north campus perimeter while a new residence hall would be nestled on the interior of the campus. The plan also addresses the elements of Section 210 of the Zoning Code:

Noise: Noise has not been a concern except for an occasional loudspeaker that seems to reach all corners of the neighborhood during sports events. To help eliminate the impact of amplified sound and student voices on campus, a sound barrier is proposed for the north end of the soccer field.

Sound attenuating measures are proposed for the air handlers positioned on Foxhall Road behind Eckles Library. This improvement is timely for the residents of an exclusive new housing development on the opposing side of Foxhall Road at Phillip Park.

Traffic: Under the 2000 Plan, the university implemented a shuttle bus that efficiently ferries students between campuses. There is little need for personal vehicles and resident students seem comfortable walking between the neighborhood commercial areas and the campus. The shuttle is open to neighbors and is used as a means of reaching Foggy Bottom and the Metro.

The creation of a formal Whitehaven Parkway entrance for vehicular access will effectively remove the potential for any impacts associated with the GW/Mt. Vernon Campus from W Street; and, the W Street entrance will be redesigned to permit pedestrian and emergency equipment access to the campus.

A generous parking lot, situated beneath the tennis courts, with access from Whitehaven Parkway, meets the university's current and future parking needs.

Number of Students: As a former ANC Commissioner for six of the past ten years, and quarterly meeting attendee, I cannot recall one complaint involving a GW/Mt. Vernon student. The requested increase in students seems a bit ambitious given the university has not reached its 2000 cap, however the phasing suggested by ANC 3D may ease the potential for too many students to overwhelm the neighborhood.

Other Objectionable Conditions:

Over the course of several special exception approvals, the University agreed to a series of landscaping plans that have not taken root. The 2010 plan proposes a more aggressive approach to greening and treeing the campus edges. Views from Foxhall Road, W Street and Whitehaven Parkway will be greatly enhanced when the proposed perimeter landscaping plan is implemented.

Stormwater Management has been a consistent concern of neighbors living below the campus on W Street. The university continues to address the flow of water from the campus and has committed to implementation of a comprehensive stormwater management plan over the life of the 2010 plan and "to manage all natural watershed and site-generated runoff on the Mount Vernon Campus."

Conclusion: Rather than issue a green light for all future construction, as proposed in the new zoning regulations under consideration by the Office of Planning, the Zoning Commission needs to recognize that once a campus plan has been approved the necessity for further discussion between an institution and the community would be eliminated. As I noted in the opening sentence of my testimony, I am here in support of a process. I strongly support the current zoning process that shaped GW's 2010 campus plan, and believe its success will raise the bar for campus plans that come before the Zoning Commission in the future. The applicant has met its burden of proof and provided a framework against which impacts, size and scale will be judged going forward. The process followed for the GW/Mt. Vernon 2010 Campus Plan underlines that keeping a continuing process in the new zoning regulations will help not hinder good will; and, that ongoing discussions will generate and ensure community connectivity throughout the life of the Campus Plan.