

District of Columbia Zoning Commission
Office of Zoning
441 4th Street NW #200
Washington, DC 20001

June 9, 2022

Re: Zoning Commission Case No. 22-13
Application of The Wesley Theological Seminary of the United Methodist Church for Approval
for a Campus Plan to Thrive in Place (2022-2032)

My name is Elizabeth Pemmerl. I am the ANC representative for Single Member District 3D02, the area of Spring Valley that borders the Wesley Seminary. Today I testify with qualified support for the Wesley Seminary Campus Plan, consistent with the points shared by ANC3D in its letter to the Zoning Commission dated June 3, 2022.

The letter sent to the Zoning Commission was posted on the ANC website for one week prior to our June meeting. It received feedback in writing from 12 members of the community and Commissioners, most improving and clarifying the content. A redlined copy of the letter was posted on the ANC website prior to the meeting. During the June 1 meeting, I offered a brief presentation on the overall campus planning process and the structure of the letter. ANC3D then invited comments and questions from Commissioners and from members of the community. A roll call vote was held and the motion to approve the letter passed unanimously.

The process to produce the ANC letter is a sound representation of the overall campus planning process: inclusive, collaborative, and iterative. There have been 12 Community Liaison Committee (CLC) meetings held by Wesley Seminary since 2019. These meetings were noticed by mailings to community members and posted on local email list serves. Upcoming CLC dates were shared during ANC meetings. The CLC meetings consistently included immediate neighbors and representatives from the Spring Valley Neighborhood Association, the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens' Association and Neighbors for a Livable Community. In addition to the CLC meetings:

- The Seminary presented on the Campus Plan at ANC3D meetings held on February 3, 2021, November 3, 2021, and March 3, 2022. The presentations included detailed renderings of the proposed new construction. Representatives from the dormitory developer, Landmark Properties, and from the Seminary's transportation consultant, Gorove Slade, participated in the presentations and answered questions from the community.
- I provided updates on the Campus Plan progress and process at ANC3D meetings held on June 6, 2021, December 8, 2021, January 5, 2022, February 2, 2022, and May

11, 2022. I encouraged neighbors to participate in CLC meetings and to provide feedback to ANC3D on the proposed plan.

In addition to my close engagement on the process, I have strong personal connections to the Seminary campus. I have lived one block away for ten years. I walk the campus almost daily with my family, including my two dogs; we sled there on snow days, enjoying the company of countless neighbors. On days my daughter and I walk to Horace Mann Elementary, we travel up the University Avenue entrance and cross the Seminary campus. I am hopeful the Seminary can thrive in place for years to come. I also understand how the changes proposed in the Campus Plan – particularly, construction of the new dormitory – could impact immediate neighbors and our community.

The CLC discussion covered a range of topics including but not limited to traffic, parking, noise, light, pedestrian flow, campus safety, and community amenities like the proposed playground. The community and the Seminary worked through many of these issues in the CLC process. The ANC letter focuses on the issues we identified as most important for careful Zoning Commission consideration. These include a handful of items related to neighborhood impact and consideration of the proposed dormitory in relation to the District's commercial use provisions.

The latter topic was discussed during several CLC meetings. Wesley Seminary shared legal analysis on the topic with all CLC members on May 10, 2022. Neighbors shared their own analysis. The ANC reviewed all materials provided and reviewed applicable regulations. Given the current regulations do not contemplate this specific scenario, ANC3D emphasized in our letter *“that the proposed dormitory should be reviewed carefully by experts from the appropriate District agencies as there is a possibility of new precedents being set by this ownership structure and use case.”* We recognize the District of Columbia Office of Planning memo sent to the Zoning Commission on June 3, 2022 recommends approval of the campus plan, subject to the proposed conditions (with minor suggested modifications).

The relationship between American University and Wesley Seminary was also discussed at length as part of the campus planning process. Given the two institutions share a property line and that the majority of residents in the Seminary's proposed dormitory will be American University students, it was particularly disappointing to ANC3D that the Seminary and American University had no public collaboration in the creation and submission of their respective Campus Plans. Coordination on issues of security across the two campuses, parking, and traffic (including enforcement of the off-campus parking prohibition), campus life and pedestrian flow would benefit both institutions, students, and the surrounding neighborhoods. We address some of the specific issues that need coordination at several points in the ANC3D letter. We would very much appreciate the assistance of the Zoning Commission in encouraging collaboration between American University and Wesley, by whatever means the Zoning Commission finds appropriate.

Of particular interest to stakeholders in the Seminary campus planning process is the issue of the fence separating the two campuses. Today, only limited pedestrian flow between the two campuses is permitted for students. Allowing students to freely move through the gate located at what is now the back of the Seminary parking lot and which will be directly adjacent to the new dormitory would permit students living in the new dormitory to easily access American University for classes or other purposes. Without this access point, these students will instead

have to walk down the Seminary exit to Massachusetts Avenue, then towards the American campus, at significant inconvenience to the students. We request that Zoning Commission instruct the two institutions to reach agreement on pedestrian flow between the campuses, in consultation with the neighborhood.

In summary, ANC3D believes that this campus planning process has been thorough and inclusive. The Campus Plan and the proposed conditions reflect many dozens of hours of community input and discussion. Potential impacts to neighbors have been mitigated in the proposed conditions, and ongoing monitoring and reporting structures are proposed in the conditions to ensure continued collaboration and oversight. ANC3D offers its qualified support for the Wesley Seminary Campus Plan.

Thank you for your consideration.