



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

September 29, 2011

Dr. Allen L. Sessoms, President
University of the District of Columbia
4200 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008

Dear Dr. Sessoms:

Members of the Van Ness Street Residents Association and other residents of the North Cleveland Park neighborhood surrounding the University of the District of Columbia campus have met with us to explain their concerns about the University's expansion. While both the neighborhood and the Council are strong supporters of the University's role in providing affordable education for District residents, there are grave concerns that the expansion, as currently planned, will lead to unacceptable intrusions upon a well-established residential area.

The neighborhood's primary concern is the conversion of the campus to a residential college, with an accompanying increase in enrollment to 6,500 students or more. We are familiar with the complaints of neighborhood groups in areas surrounding other major Washington universities. Because of that familiarity, we see that the location and scale of the dormitories, which are now planned for the southwest corner of the campus along Van Ness Street, threaten to bring the same problems inevitably created when college students live in residential areas—noise, litter, and parking difficulties. The University has already housed 104 students in 31 units in the Van Ness South Apartments. We already know that apartment residents have complained vehemently and repeatedly about inappropriate student behavior. The University's failure to manage and discipline these students sparked the North Cleveland Park area's concerns, and does not inspire confidence that similar difficulties will not also occur closer to the campus.

In recognition of the importance of protecting residential neighborhoods, we ask that you undertake needed revisions of the expansion plans to accommodate the neighborhood's requests:

- **Parking**: Traffic and parking are already a problem, and no new parking is envisioned in the University's campus plan. Notwithstanding the fact that the Zoning Commission and the District Department of Transportation concluded that additional parking is not required, the residents request that the University consider providing more parking in the ratios suggested by the Zoning Regulations, which is 1 space for every 5 beds. This additional parking would serve not only students but also those visiting the campus.
- **Enrollment Level**: The University's enrollment cap of 6,500, approved by the Zoning Commission, does not apply to Building 52 because it is zoned as commercial property, which the Zoning Regulations exclude from campus plans. Because Building 52 is a part


of the University's Van Ness Campus, the students who occupy Building 52 should be included in the enrollment cap. Indeed, the building is now home to UDC law school.


- **Dormitories:** A review of the impact of dormitories and well-known, associated student behavior on residential areas is required in order to minimize adverse impact and tension between UDC and its neighbors. UDC should be responsive to neighborhood requests for use of alternate sites, phased construction, and a reduced number of beds. In particular, the University should commit to study alternate sites closer to the Connecticut Avenue apartment buildings. Instead of constructing a 600-bed dormitory, the University should consider phased development, and the reduction of the number of beds to 250, until it has more experience with management of residential facilities and provides evidence of acceptable student behavior.
- **Freeze on Additional Off-Campus Housing:** Given the problems already experienced in Van Ness South, a freeze on all off-campus housing is critical, until there is suitable campus space, lodging and more experience with and effective supervision of residential students. Although the Zoning Commission approved University's plans for master leases of a maximum of 100 units (or approximately 400 students at the rate they are housed in Van Ness South), no further master leases should be signed by the University.
- **Community Relations:** UDC needs to work more on both effective communication and responsiveness to neighborhood concerns – scheduling the first Community Task Force meeting for the August 23 meeting, while many were away, was not an auspicious beginning. The University's refusal to add a single doorway to the new Student Union in order to preserve pedestrian access to the Metro is representative of its failure to respond to neighborhood concerns. Residents have also pointed to the continued neglect of the Van Ness sidewalk as another example of lack of consideration for the neighborhood. While this work may be primarily a matter for DDOT, we believe that the University should work vigorously with DDOT to have these conditions improved.
- **Construction Management:** There is a need for robust enforcement of a construction management plan to keep trucks out of residential neighborhoods. Effective implementation is key.


We believe that the District should support and encourage the activities of both students and residents. Both make important contributions to the city's economy and cultural life. Modifications to UDC's plans to accommodate the needs of the surrounding residential area are essential to support the District's goals of creating a livable environment for all of its residents and institutions.


Sincerely,

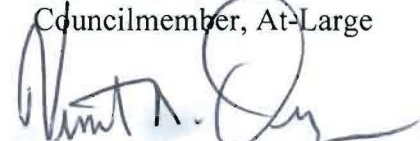

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