

LETTER TO THE EDITOR AT WASHINGTON POST

We regret the recent Washington Post editorial board opinion concerning Georgetown University's ten-year plan. The editorial was biased in favor of this plan even though it clearly violates zoning regulation 210-2, "use as a college or university shall be located so that it is not likely to become objectionable to neighboring properties because of noise, traffic, number of students, or other objectionable conditions."

The editorial unfairly states that those opposing this GU plan are "disinterested in promoting a knowledge-based economy." That is simply not true. We strongly support planned and thoughtful growth for the university. We strongly oppose, however, the objectionable results an expansion of more than 4,000 students in the past ten years has had on the communities surrounding GU.

It is important to note that in 2000, GU stated that in ten years the number of students living in the adjoining neighborhoods would decrease, total enrollment would be under 10,000, and the number of group homes in Burleith would decline significantly. None of these assertions has proven valid. Rather, total GU enrollment has increased to over 14,000, and the 2010-2020 plan calls for close to 15,000 students by 2020.

The most serious consequence of this dramatic expansion is the conversion of single-family, residential row houses into transient student group rental homes. Of the 535 houses in Burleith, for example, 166, or almost one-third, are student group rentals. In the next ten years, if only 30 additional graduate or undergraduate students come to live in Burleith, there could easily be a loss of ten or more houses.

The result of too many students living in the residential areas is an unacceptable level of noise, poorly maintained homes and yards, increased traffic congestion and a lack of adequate parking. None of GU's attempts to address these accelerating problems has succeeded. The 2010-2020 campus plan exacerbates the negative consequences of the previous expansions to the surrounding communities.

Yes, the District's Office Of Planning has told GU that it must house 100% of its undergraduate students on campus or on sites outside zip code 20007, thus agreeing that GU has violated zoning regulation 210-2. In an unprecedented show of support, Mayor Vincent Gray, Councilmembers Jack Evans, Mary Cheh, Vincent Orange, and Phil Mendelson, and Advisory Neighborhood Commissions 2e and 3d have joined the Citizens Association Of Georgetown, Burleith Citizens Association and Foxhall Community Citizens Association in opposing this ten-year plan. The District, rightfully so, recognizes that a strong remedy is necessary in order to repair the damage GU's enrollment and housing policies have inflicted on these residential communities for over the past twenty years of unchecked growth.

In sum, GU must respect its adjoining communities and their legitimate concerns, which have existed for more than twenty years. The university must bring a substantial number of students back onto campus or into satellite housing outside zip code 20007. The Washington Post editorial states that such a proposal is "laughable." The university already has a site in Arlington for its continuing studies students and on Capitol Hill for its law school, so the idea is not unreasonable. Schools around the country house their students on campus and/or have satellite campuses. If GU can find funding and campus sites for a business school, a science school and a new athletic center, surely it can build student dorms

on campus or find good housing in places outside zip code 20007. And they can do so at reasonable costs by repurposing buildings, designing multi-use buildings, taking advantage of modular construction and arranging for favorable leases in existing apartment buildings.

If GU is allowed to expand irresponsibly, the danger exists that valued residential neighborhoods will become predominantly off-campus student group housing. Such an occurrence would be a significant loss to the residents and to the city as a whole.

For these reasons, we have asked the Zoning Commission to direct the university to come back with a plan that effectively addresses the serious concerns of the affected communities.

Lenore Rubino, President, Burleith Citizens Association

Jennifer Altemus, President, Citizens Association Of Georgetown