



March 22, 2021

RE: American University Campus Plan, Case No. 20-31

Dear Chairman Hood and Commissioners—

My name is Susan Kimmel and I appreciate the opportunity to support American University's Campus Plan on behalf of Ward3Vision.

Ward 3 Vision is a grassroots organization that advocates for community development based on the principles of Smart Growth and Transit-Oriented Development. Our ultimate goal is to promote and enhance the development of dynamic, vibrant urban communities that are sustainable and engaging places to live, work and play. Our vision for Ward 3 is to maintain and enhance the high quality of life that currently exists in our neighborhoods, while also recognizing and leveraging the tremendous assets already here to create an even more interesting and exciting place to live.

American University, along with the other educational facilities in the Ward (including Howard Law School, UDC, Sidwell Friends School, Georgetown Day School, as well as Wilson High and Deal Middle Schools) represents one of the most valuable assets we have. AU provides a range of employment opportunities to DC and area workers, and educational programs for the community. Universities are a major source of employment and economic investment for the District. Now that the law school is firmly established at the Tenleytown Campus, AU covers a significant swath of Ward 3 and contributes a tremendous amount to the economy, diversity and vitality of the community.

In order to satisfy the requirement of the zoning ordinance, AU has submitted an updated campus plan for review by the Commission. Not even counting COVID, there are 2 significant differences between the 2011 plan and the current submission. First off, the university, along with most other institutions of higher learning in the US, did not grow at the rate anticipated and is still in flux with what the future will bring in terms of number of on-campus students and sources of revenue. Secondly, American University was hammered by opposition for their 2011 plan and so engaged Justice and Sustainability Associates to devise a planning process to include community input from the very start and develop the proposed plan by means of dialog and negotiation. The result is an end-product of which we all can be proud that not only meets modest

increased in projected numbers of students but also works to reinforce the university's values of sustainability and providing a campus responsive to students' needs with updated classrooms, labs, and other teaching spaces, more opportunities for social interaction, and more recreational and support services.

Before summarizing the highlights of the plan, it is worth a shout out to AU for being the first university, first higher-education research institution to achieve carbon neutrality. It has a long history of working toward green buildings (in terms of energy consumption) and a green campus (which qualifies as an arboretum). But it has worked hard to put in place transportation plans to enable students to commute sustainably using metro, the biodiesel AU shuttle, and bicycles in addition to many other carbon offset practices. Hats off for this important achievement and let's hope it gets the recognition it deserves for such consistent effort.

We think that this thoughtfully crafted campus plan is a win for the community. Specifically, it:

- Ranks all potential parcels in terms of desirability for future development by evaluating them according to which retained the compactness of the campus and had least impact on surrounding communities;
- Proposes construction of a sound-barrier wall between Jacobs Field and adjacent residential sections of Spring Valley;
- Imposes better organization of groupings of student residential buildings into "neighborhoods" and defines academic/administrative or sports/recreation functions to enhance student informal socializing and making the campus a more attractive living environment;
- Makes better use of existing structures (such as the Mary Gradon Center, and other facilities around the Quad) and proposes new construction as infill acting more as connective tissue to create activity clusters.
- Takes pressure off of adjacent residential areas by encouraging students to live on campus with new dorms offer contemporary residential living arrangements and a renewed Mary Gradon Center offering more programming and activities.
- Provides illustrations of building envelopes of future construction to highlight opportunities for iconic gateway buildings at Ward Circle and Nebraska Gardens;
- The massing studies also looked at how to find the appropriate scale of buildings along the campus edges and made recommendations for sites facing Nebraska Ave.
- Provides campus-wide improvements for lighting and pedestrian circulation to improve safety and recommends building upon the historic Olmsted campus plan by reinforcing pathways that connect the campus from the southeast to the northwest.

- Traffic has been rerouted to minimize through-traffic across campus significantly improving the pedestrian experience as well as safety.
- Proposes a transportation management plan to encourage increased use of transit, biking, and walking to reach the campus.

With the new plan, AU can continue to be an important institution in our community, and in the city. Ward3Vision is pleased that the plan will ensure that they grow in a way that fits within our community fabric and continues AU's history of sustainability. The University has been generous in opening its doors to residents of DC with programs for young (Katzen Center art classes) and old (auditing courses and OLLI – for retirees) alike. We also commend AU for monitoring use of university-owned parking facilities before constructing additional spaces consistent with its efforts to reduce its carbon footprint.

Given the extensive community engagement, and constructive approach to addressing campus activity and impacts, we are pleased to urge the Zoning Commission to approve the campus plan.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Kimmel

Chair, Steering Committee