



Allen L. Sessoms
President

October 24, 2011

The Honorable Kwame R. Brown, Chairman
The Honorable Mary M. Cheh, Councilmember, Ward Three
The Honorable Michael A. Brown, Councilmember, At-Large
The Honorable David A. Catania, Councilmember, At-Large
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Councilmember, At-Large
The Honorable Vincent B. Orange, Sr., Councilmember, At-Large
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Brown and Councilmembers:

In a letter dated September 29, 2011, you requested that the University of the District of Columbia make numerous and substantive modifications to its campus master plan. The University's campus master plan was approved unanimously by the Zoning Commission on June 27, 2011

The requested changes to the University's campus master plan include: creating additional parking spaces; counting law students in the University's enrollment cap; reducing the number of proposed beds by nearly 60%, from 600 to 250; considering alternate dormitory locations away from the Van Ness Campus; and phasing in dormitory construction. In addition, the letter requested that the University refrain from entering into future master leases and expressed concerns over the University's handling of community relations.

While I acknowledge that the approval of our current, and first-ever, campus plan was met with specific concerns from a vocal minority, I trust that the Zoning Commission fairly weighed the concerns of the larger community, the needs of our students, faculty, and staff, and the general interest of the city at large. All parties voicing concerns and

questions were given a public forum to provide testimony and offer evidence by the Zoning Commission; the even-handedness of the Zoning Commission's review and approval procedure has never been questioned. However, in order to fill in any possible gaps that the Zoning Commission's approval order may have left, I will address each of your concerns below.

1. Parking

As referenced in your letter, the Zoning Commission and the Department of Transportation concluded that no additional parking would be required in light of the University's planned expansion and construction of on-campus residential facilities. As you well know, parking is regularly a top concern of residents in neighborhoods where universities are located.

At the request of the Zoning Commission, the University hired a traffic consultant to provide additional evidence of the University's current parking needs, current capacity, projected growth in demand, and projected capacity increases. In addition, the consultant provided the University with recommendations on controlling traffic demand to limit any detrimental impact on the surrounding neighborhoods. The Zoning Commission's order reflects these recommendations, including the implementation of a Traffic Demand Management system by the University, the prohibition of students utilizing on-campus housing to bring their cars with them, notification requirements for special events, and the establishment of proprietary enforcement procedures for students who violate parking restrictions on neighborhood streets.

The University is committed to addressing the neighborhood's parking concerns in any reasonable way. Furthermore, as part of the University's sustainability initiative, we are committed to reducing the number of cars traveling to campus each day; to increase parking capacity would be directly contrary to this goal. I strongly believe the current campus master plan and Zoning Commission Order more than adequately addresses the surrounding neighborhood's parking concerns.

2. Enrollment Level

The campus master plan sets an enrollment cap of 6,500 students for the Van Ness Campus, as approved by the Zoning Commission. The University, as a matter of right, is not required to include any commercial-zoned property in its plan.¹ Acting upon this right, the University chose not include Building 52 in its campus master plan.

¹ Z.C. Order No. 11-02/11-02A (June 27, 2011) at 19.

Your letter correctly states that the David A. Clarke School of Law is now occupying Building 52. It presently has an enrollment of less than 400 students. Building 52 is set apart from the main Van Ness Campus by two blocks and has two large off-street parking facilities at its disposal.

The University chose to exercise its right to exclude Building 52 and law student enrollment from its campus master plan for two reasons. First, to maintain a low, accessible tuition rate at the law school, income from the University's undergraduate programs is utilized to make up the difference between revenue and operating costs. If law students were included in the enrollment cap, the number of subsidized seats in the law program would be ratably reduced, as the law students displaced undergraduate students. Second, the law school is almost entirely self-contained with Building 52 and contributes very little, if at all, to neighborhood concerns of noise, litter, and parking difficulties.

The 6,500 enrollment cap was negotiated between the University and the surrounding community. The Zoning Commission endorsed this number as a fair compromise between both parties and the University continues to act in compliance with it.

3. Dormitories

Your letter makes a number of requests regarding the University's plan to construct on-campus residential housing with 600 beds, including studying alternative sites for the housing, phasing in construction, and reducing the number of beds.

I strongly believe that a complete, on-campus residential college experience is necessary for many students to remain focused on their studies, expand their horizons, and become involved in activities they would rarely be exposed to at home. This is in line with my commitment to rebuild the University of the District of Columbia, inclusive of the community college, into a worthy public institution that provides all high school graduates in the District of Columbia and the region with an accessible, affordable and most importantly, quality post secondary experience that prepares them for careers and contributions in the 21st century. An institution that lacks an on-campus residential option for matriculating students will be unable to fulfill this vision.

The site selected for the University's on-campus housing is optimal for creating a healthy, supervised and complete postsecondary experience. Your letter suggests exploring options closer to Connecticut Avenue. This would invariably drive up costs significantly and require the purchase of additional real property, the demolition of existing facilities, further congestion on the Connecticut Avenue corridor, or all

three. These options contradict the University's commitment to maximum utilization of scarce fiscal and environmental resources.

The same considerations apply to the suggested reduction of total beds from 600 to 250. We currently have a wait list for flagship and community college students who want to live in the university housing currently provided. This would make the construction and operation of the housing units impractical and financially indefensible. Furthermore, it would only provide beds for a fraction of the University's students and would do little to promote the on-campus community culture the University needs.

Finally, your letter suggests that the University consider the phasing in of student housing. The University has already undertaken this approach with its temporary location of students in the Van Ness South complex. This approach was taken to test student demand for on or near campus housing, which has proved strong. It has also allowed the University to establish policies and procedures for managing residential life. Our initial offerings have resulted in minimal actual disruption and it has provided the University with the necessary impetus to expeditiously move toward substantial on-campus housing.

As the planning for the University's first on-campus residence life program continues, I can assure you that the community's concerns will be addressed as appropriate.

4. Freeze on Additional Off-Campus Housing

Concerns over the presence of University students have been expressed by several residents of the Van Ness South apartment building. The University has acknowledged these concerns and taken steps to address them. The University has also agreed to freeze the number of units it has leased in the Van Ness South building.

The University respects the concerns of the Van Ness South residents and seeks to ensure the relationship between the institution and the community is open, meaningful, and effective. However, we do note that the Board of Zoning Adjustment ruled that the University's leasing of units in the Van Ness South building for use as student housing is allowable.² The University entered into a legitimate lease with the building's owner under which the proposed purpose of the units was understood by all parties.

² B.Z.A. Appeal No. 18151 (vote taken April 5, 2011).

As stated previously, the University does not plan to lease any additional units beyond the amount allowable, and thus, is already in compliance with the request contained in your letter.

5. Community Relations

Pursuant to the approval order of the University's campus master plan, a University-Community Task Force was established. The Task Force is currently in operation and held its first meeting on September 13, 2011. I am troubled by your contention that the scheduling of the first meeting on August 23rd was inappropriate. The original University-Community Task Force meeting was scheduled for August 23rd because the Zoning Commission's Order directed the establishment of the Task Force within one month of the campus plan approval date of July 29, 2011.

Two collateral issues were raised under the heading of "Community Relations", and they have been addressed. The student center design was modified to incorporate a pathway to the Metro prior to the Zoning Commission Order and the sidewalk repair as recommended by the District Department of Transportation will take place after the plaza construction is completed.

6. Construction Management

The University is utilizing all available actions to direct construction traffic to avoid routes through adjacent residential communities as required by the Zoning Commission Order. Construction traffic management provisions will be included in future construction contracts as applicable and negotiated. Throughout the construction timeline, this concern will be addressed through the University-Community Task Force.

As initially stated, I firmly believe the Zoning Commission's unanimous approval of the University campus master plan was arrived at under a fair and open process. Community concerns were balanced with the needs of the University in numerous different areas. The approval order cites a long list of evidence, testimony, and legal conclusions that support its decision.

I respectfully take your recommendations under advisement and assure you that the University will continue to work with the community through the appropriate channels to ensure all concerns are addressed. We do not, however, anticipate making substantive changes to the already approved campus master plan.

Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you would further like to discuss this issue or any other University matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Allen L. Sessoms". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Allen L. Sessoms