

West End Citizens Association

Washington, D.C.

Boundaries: 15th Street on the East • Potomac Park on the South
Rock Creek and the Potomac on the West • N Street on the North

August 12, 2020

Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia
Attn. Sharon Schellin, Secretary to the Zoning Commission

Re 8/7/20 Notice of Emergency & Proposed Rulemaking ZC Case No. 20-17, Suspension of Certain Types of Conditions of Approved Campus Plans During 2020-2021 Academic Year Due to COVID-19 Pandemic

This letter provides comments by the West End Citizens Association (WECA) on the August 7, 2020 published Notice of Emergency and Proposed Rulemaking in ZC Case No. 20-17, Suspension of Certain Types of Conditions of Approved Campus Plans During 2020-2021 Academic Year Due to COVID-19 Pandemic. The WECA is the oldest citizens association in the Foggy Bottom–West End Area of Ward 2, including the Foggy Bottom campus of the George Washington University (GWU).

On June 15, 2020, GWU submitted to DC its “Plan for Fall 2020” in which it requested temporary relief from DC from only two conditions in the current Foggy Bottom Campus Plan: (1) Condition C-6, Number of On-Campus Beds Required for Full-Time Undergraduates, and (2) Condition P-1, Prohibition on Purchasing or Master Leasing Residentially Zoned Properties Off Campus in the Foggy Bottom/West End Area (p. 12). Later, GWU informed the community that it would no longer need relief from Condition P-1. On July 22nd, the Office of Planning (OP) submitted to the Commission a 4-part proposed text amendment which broadened the requested relief to universities (including GWU) beyond GWU’s requested Condition C-6.

The WECA is concerned about three of OP’s four proposed relief provisions: “(a) Requirements to maintain a minimum number of on-campus beds or provide housing for a minimum percentage of students; (b) Requirements that certain classes of students reside on campus; and (c) Limits on housing for certain classes of students to specific locations.” Unfortunately, GWU’s late decision to hold almost all classes virtually was announced after many students had already rented off-campus housing in the Foggy Bottom-West End residential neighborhood. Since then, additional students who did not meet GWU’s “extenuating circumstances” criteria for limited on-campus housing have sought additional off-campus housing.

On August 10, 2020, in response to a concern expressed by the off-campus Monroe House Condominium, GWU wrote that “While the university has actively discouraged students from returning to D.C. and moving into off-campus housing, we are aware that some may still make the decision to sign leases for the upcoming fall semester. GW is committed to and has every intention of enforcing the guidelines and policies set in place by the Mayor’s Office, Department of Health, and the CDC. The university will direct all students to comply with public health protocols including; adhering to the District’s 14-day quarantine requirement, limiting the size of gatherings, wearing masks and social distancing.” Directing all students to comply with the public health requirements and then only committing to case-by-case adjudication for violations will not adequately address off-campus problems from the students’ presence in the Foggy Bottom-West End off-campus neighborhoods. Many residents

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(including the elderly with pre-existing health conditions) fear for increased exposure to COVID-19. Even pre-COVID-19, the community had to request help from the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) since GWU would not take responsibility and enforce problems (e.g., loud and huge late-night student parties) in the off-campus residential neighborhoods. In fact, GWU again says that residents need to call MPD – and not GWU – for such violations.

The bottom line is that the WECA recommends that OP's produced text amendment be revised to require universities (including GWU) seeking relief from their Campus Plan Conditions to assume responsibility for enforcing student COVID-19 violations off-campus, such as not wearing masks whenever outside and not meeting in groups over the Mayor-established limit. In addition to assuming responsibility, the WECA recommends that the universities (including GWU) strengthen their penalties for off-campus student violations to act as a stronger deterrent to student behavior adversely affecting off-campus residential neighborhoods (including high-rises and single family homes).