

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

---

## Universities' growth requires city scrutiny

Across Northwest D.C., neighborhoods are being threatened by ambitious expansion plans of universities seeking to do to us what George Washington University did to Foggy Bottom through its makeover of a residential community into part of its campus.

Through our D.C. Council members and advisory neighborhood commissioners, we have been raising questions and offering alternatives. We hope the Zoning Commission will take seriously the almost universal community opposition. But the issues raised go well beyond those the Zoning Commission was designed to oversee.

Universities in the District have increasingly assumed the role of big businesses, seeing commercial

property management as an important institutional revenue source while using the properties as extensions of their campuses (as "off-campus" student food courts, for example). Meanwhile, the universities ignore the possible benefits to their students and other communities by refusing to consider satellite campuses elsewhere in the District.

Plans filed this year by Georgetown University and American University are unprecedented in their disregard for community input and their potential impact on neighborhoods. In response, communities have had to take on disproportionate responsibilities for fighting these plans to protect the future of our investments in the city and the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

As it now stands, the Zoning Commission tends to support university expansion as a matter of encouraging development. But the issues raised by the new form of university business expansion go well beyond what the current zon-

ing process foresaw. A proper response requires a holistic approach that only the mayor and council can provide. It is time for our leaders to bring current law and policy into line with the universities' modern business practices.

A first step would be for the mayor and council to support the necessary changes in the law and regulations — including those governing the Zoning Commission's consideration of campus plans — so the District government and citizens can take into account the full range of issues raised by the increasing activities of universities acting as businesses. Among the most pressing issues are District tax exemptions, use of District financing for expansion and inclusion of commercially zoned properties in campus plans. Changes should encourage coordination with neighborhoods and creation of satellite campuses to better serve the entire District.

**Gerard M. Gallucci**  
*Wesley Heights*