

NEIGHBORHOOD UPDATE

A NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED JOINTLY BY
THE SPRING VALLEY-WESLEY HEIGHTS CITIZENS ASSOCIATION
AND NEIGHBORS FOR A LIVABLE COMMUNITY

FALL 2020

THOMAS M. SMITH, EDITOR

News And Analysis:

AU PROPOSES 747,500 SQUARE FEET OF NEW DEVELOPMENT IN CAMPUS PLAN PROPOSAL

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THANK YOU, MEDIUM RARE RESTAURANT!

Medium Rare, the Cleveland Park steak frites restaurant, has been delivering thousands of free meals to residents across the city during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although they are not located in our neighborhood, their efforts are worth a special thank you.

For Thanksgiving Day, **Medium Rare** delivered free meals to anybody over 70 who would be alone for the holiday. But, the restaurant has been providing thousands of free meals, including to first responders and senior citizens throughout the pandemic.

For those residents who are still dining out, we hope you will patronize restaurants in our neighborhood, but also give some thought to patronizing **Medium Rare**, which is giving so much to help those in need during these difficult days.

AU Seeks Zoning Commission Approval To Build Minimum 60-Foot Tall Athletic Center On Existing Tennis Court Site; 4 New Dorms; And Flexibility On Enrollment

Despite projecting a loss of at least \$116 million in Fiscal Year 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, American University (AU) will submit a new Campus Plan to the D.C. Zoning Commission this month that proposes 747,500 square feet of new construction over the next ten years. The bulk of this new construction – more than half of the new square footage – will be built on the western part of campus – what AU describes as “back of house” – to “create an athletic, residential, and campus life village” near Reeves Field. Reeves Field is located across from single family homes along University Avenue. AU plans to submit the plan formally to the D.C. Zoning Commission in mid-December. Public hearings are likely to be held sometime in the first half of 2021.

The amount of new development near Reeves Field will be the equivalent of adding three Katzen Arts Centers at the site.

The new construction will include a minimum 60-foot tall Center for Athletic Performance (CAP) on the current site of the tennis courts. The 58,000 square

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AU PROPOSED PLAN WOULD ADD 747,500 SQUARE FEET OF NEW DEVELOPMENT; PROPOSAL INCLUDES MINIMUM 60-FOOT TALL ATHLETIC CENTER ON TENNIS COURT SITE

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foot athletic center will include training facilities, a volleyball venue, and practice gymnasiums for basketball. New student housing also will be built adjacent to the athletic center to accommodate as many as 680 new beds, according to AU's Campus Plan. In all, four new buildings are planned for the western campus site closest to Reeves Field.

The Campus Plan proposal does not specify the height of the new CAP except to say it will be 3 stories tall. In response to questions from Spring Valley neighbors posed at a December 2 community meeting, AU indicated in writing that the 3-story building height will be 60-feet.

Typically, according to D.C. building height regulations, an additional "penthouse" for mechanical equipment can add 15 feet in height to any building, which would increase the height of the CAP to 75 feet. Building height measurements can vary also based on where the measurement is taken, according to city rules. For example, in the case of the CAP, if the 60-foot measure is based on its location along the roadway at the Bender Arena, the new athletic center potentially could be higher than 60-feet on the side of the building facing University Avenue.

Other Major Construction Planned For Rockwood Parkway/Nebraska Avenue Site

The other major construction proposed in the Plan will take place on the corner of Rockwood Parkway and Nebraska Avenue. AU is proposing to add two buildings – a total of 247,000 square feet – at the site. One is slated to be an academic building and the other is student housing consisting of a maximum of 350 beds, according to the Plan. By comparison, the Katzen Arts Center is 130,000 square feet. These buildings would replace the low rise buildings that include some student housing at this time.

In fact, the proposal to tear down and replace the low rise buildings has prompted a controversy among AU students. Roper Hall, one of the low rise buildings that would be replaced, had been designated as the site for long-awaited Black Affinity Housing on campus. AU has not advised students where the Black Affinity Housing will be relocated if Roper Hall is replaced by the 7-story new dorm that AU is proposing for the site.

At the December 2 community meeting, AU said it only planned to add 500 new beds on campus for student housing. However, the plan that AU will submit to the Zoning Commission proposes adding as many as 1,130 new beds. AU would not explain at the meeting why its Campus Plan filing is at odds with its oral presentations to the community.

The other major construction proposed by AU would add a new 135,000 square foot academic/administrative building on the East Campus at Ward Circle adjacent to Westover Place townhomes.

AU also proposes to build a sound wall and a video tower at Jacobs Field adjacent to residential property in Spring Valley.

AU Proposes To Increase Student Enrollment Cap

The Plan also proposes to increase the overall student enrollment cap to 14,380 – larger than the cap governing enrollment at Georgetown University. AU's current student cap is 13,600. AU notes that the increase in the enrollment cap will not have the effect of adding any new students because changes in zoning regulations now require AU to include in its student population counts any students attending classes at commercially zoned sites.

AU owns buildings at three commercial sites: 4801 Massachusetts Avenue NW in Spring Valley; 4200 Wisconsin Avenue in Tenleytown; and 3201 New Mexico Avenue in Wesley Heights. According to AU, classes are held only at the 4801 Massachusetts Avenue commercial site. However, AU has been required since 2012 to include in its enrollment count any student who attends at least one class on the main campus even if most of their classes are held at a commercial building site off the main campus.

AU's existing student cap includes a 2,000-person sub-cap for the Tenley Campus which can only be used to house the AU Law School. AU's current Law School student population falls below this cap by 737 students. Since construction of the new Law School, AU's Law School enrollment has never reached the 2,000 mark.

The University reported that its current enrollment as of December 2 is 11,799 students, including 6,933 undergraduates. AU's undergraduate enrollment has increased by 11.9 percent since its last Campus Plan was approved in 2012.

AU's undergraduate growth since 2012 is part of a longer and steady growth pattern for the university in its undergraduate population. Since 2000, AU's undergraduate student population has increased by nearly 2,000 for a growth rate of 39.5 percent despite the fact

that AU testified before the Zoning Commission as part of the 2001 and 2011 Campus Plan zoning cases that the University planned only a minimal increase in undergraduate enrollment.

Despite never reaching its current 13,600 cap since it was approved in 2012, AU is still proposing an increase in its enrollment cap. If AU reaches the proposed new cap of 14,380 students over the next ten years, it would result in a 21.8 percent increase in its current enrollment – a significant increase by any measure – with most of that increase likely to be in the undergraduate population.

Proposed New Student Housing Will Give AU More Flexibility To Increase Undergraduate Enrollment

Based on the plan proposed by AU, the university would have the flexibility to increase its undergraduate enrollment by at least 25.1 percent to as much as 37.2 percent. With the flexibility sought by the University, AU could add 1,742 new undergraduates or as many as 2,581 new undergraduate students. Undergraduate enrollment could be as high as 9,514 during the ten year cycle of the plan, based on the plan proposed by the University. This number could increase even more if AU experiences a decline in graduate students, including law school students.

By comparison, the Zoning Commission capped the undergraduate population for Georgetown University at 6,675 students in 2017 for a 20-year period. AU does not currently have an undergraduate enrollment cap.

Because the Law School is undersubscribed, AU is proposing also to open the Tenley Campus to undergraduate students and other non-Law School students. AU's Campus Plan proposal does not indicate whether the current 2,000 sub-cap would apply to the Tenley Campus as a whole or just the Law School.

In order to facilitate growth of its undergraduate population, AU is also asking for permission to offer “on-campus” housing in off-campus apartment buildings in the neighborhood in addition to proposing construction of 1,130 new beds on campus. Currently, AU has a master lease with the Frequency, an apartment building in Tenleytown, for 200 beds that it counts as “on-campus” housing. AU is seeking permission to expand its use of off-campus apartment buildings as “on campus” housing that would enable the University to meet the housing needs of an expanding undergraduate population and increase its overall revenue.

In a November 23 editorial, *The Eagle*, AU's student newspaper, questioned AU's decision to build new housing saying it won't "solve the problem of why so many students move off campus." *The Eagle* noted it was often less expensive for students to move off campus than live in AU's student housing.

"Whether this housing is to attract upperclassmen students to stay or to add more beds for larger, tuition-paying freshmen classes, is unclear," *The Eagle* added.

The Eagle also complained about "the lack of transparency and plan about where Black Affinity Housing would go" and said that AU's actions were "at best, thoughtless."

"Black student activists at the University have been advocating and fighting for this housing for years," *The Eagle* said, "and for the identified location to potentially be written off with no plan is harmful. Black students have worked too hard for the University to finally agree to this housing option to be given so little information now."

Unlike previous campus plans, AU has provided no specific undergraduate population projections. AU has argued that an increase in the number of students poses no impacts on the surrounding neighborhood. This position has been championed by Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 3D Chairman Chuck Elkins and Spring Valley ANC Commissioner Troy Kravitz.

At the December 2 community meeting, Kravitz defended AU's omission of student enrollment projections on the basis that they were not enforceable and that AU has not always complied with the projections anyway.

DC zoning regulations (Subtitle X-Chapter 1) require the Zoning Commission to evaluate the Campus Plan proposal on the basis of whether it is likely to "become objectionable to neighboring property because of noise, traffic, parking, number of students, or other objectionable conditions."

The absence of any projections for undergraduate enrollment – combined with the proposal to add 1,130 new beds and additional "on-campus" housing in neighborhood apartment buildings and AU's financial problems – fuels speculation about AU's interest in expanding undergraduate enrollment significantly over the next ten years.

AU also is required to offer enough "on campus" housing for 67 percent of its undergraduate population under the current and proposed new Campus Plan. The new housing proposed by AU would enable the University to increase undergraduate enrollment

and still meet this requirement. The 67 percent requirement does not mandate that 67 percent of AU's undergraduates actually live in the housing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit AU very hard financially because its small endowment makes it heavily dependent on tuition and student housing revenue, thus fueling AU's ambitious plans for growth of its student population and new housing in its latest Campus Plan. According to recent reports in the *Wall Street Journal*, many universities across the country experienced a decline in undergraduate students this fall because of the pandemic. But, AU's undergraduate population actually grew slightly.

A study by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported recently that undergraduate enrollment at private 4-year colleges and universities declined by 2 percent, but that the number of first-year students declined by 11.8 percent. More significant declines were experienced at public institutions.

ANC 3D Votes To Support AU Campus Plan Zoning Proposal

ANC 3D voted on November 4 to support AU's Campus Plan proposal with all but one Commissioner – Wesley Heights Commissioner Dr. Christine Warnke – supporting the AU Plan. AU indicated at the December 2 community meeting that ANC 3E would approve the plan when the ANC meets on December 10.

Once officially submitted, the proposed plan will be posted on the Zoning Commission web site for review and comment by the public. However, AU encouraged the ANCs to act in advance of the filing so the university could indicate ANC support for the plan as part of its official filing.

AU originally hoped to submit its official plan to the Zoning Commission before Thanksgiving, but ANC 3E delayed its formal vote until December.

ANC 3D decided last July – even before the plan was drafted – that it would vote on the plan at its November 4 meeting. Several neighborhood groups and residents asked ANC 3D to delay the vote so they could have more time to review the plan, including a nearly 800-page transportation report that was issued just a week before the ANC 3D vote, and provide feedback to the ANC. ANC 3D Commissioners – half of whom chose not to seek reelection this year – dismissed the requests for the one-month delay.

Once the plan is submitted, the Zoning Commission will begin the public notice process, including outlining a schedule for public hearings likely to take place in the first quarter of 2021.

NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS TESTIFY AT DC COUNCIL IN OPPOSITION TO CITY PROPOSAL FOR HIGHER DENSITY IN SPRING VALLEY COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

In separate testimony before the D.C. Council recently, three neighborhood groups opposed changes to the city's Comprehensive Plan that recommend adding higher density in Spring Valley's commercial corridor. The D.C. Council is considering legislation that would amend the city's Comprehensive Plan that would include allowing the construction of 60-80-foot tall residential apartment buildings in the corridor now designated as low density commercial. This includes the locations for the two Spring Valley Shopping Centers on Massachusetts Avenue NW and the professional services buildings and parking lots adjacent to the Spring Valley West neighborhood.

The changes proposed in the Comprehensive Plan would incent developers to replace existing retail and other professional services available at the current sites with new higher density multi-unit housing. These changes are intended to advance a plan by Mayor Muriel Bowser to add 36,000 new residential units in the city by 2025.

Groups opposing the change in what is known as the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) were the Spring Valley West Homes Corporation, the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association (SVWHCA), and Neighbors for a Livable Community (NLC).

Spring Valley West Homes Corporation President Scott Parker focused his remarks on the professional services buildings and parking lots bordered by 49th Street NW, Massachusetts Avenue NW, Yuma Street NW, and 50th Street NW. He noted that further development of the site is "significantly restricted" until October 2033 as part of the formal agreement that allowed the Miller Companies to develop the site in the early 1980s. That agreement was negotiated in 1983 between Miller and the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association. Parker noted that there also were "perpetual" limitations in the agreement that limited the amount of square footage that could be built at the site.

Parker warned that revising the zoning for the site to allow for additional multi-unit higher-rise apartment buildings would "not be in the best interests of the community" because it would "likely reduce the total commercial space in the area, mostly the medical and dental services."

SVWHCA President Dr. Jeffrey Kraskin noted in his testimony that adding new housing was one of the city's highest priorities, but that "not every commercial space in the

District is appropriate for the higher density housing proposed by the DC Office of Planning.” He said the city should prioritize the preservation of low density commercial sites that offer neighborhood-serving retail services.

“This should not be a gambit between two competing priorities: preserving neighborhood retail vs. adding higher density multi-unit housing,” he said.

(The full testimony by SVWHCA can be found on its website at: www.svwhca.org)

NLC President Dennis Paul said the organization was not opposed to additional housing in Spring Valley or AU Park, but that new housing “should not jeopardize existing commercial services, including retail, that are already in very limited supply.”

NLC noted that people choose to live in Spring Valley because they want to live in “a low density area, not in an apartment zone” and the existing retail and professional services “enhance the walkability and livability of the neighborhood.”

“Our low density commercial services should be as valued as new higher-rise multi-unit housing – if not more so,” Paul said.

The D.C. Council is expected to take action on the Comprehensive Plan legislation early next year.

DDOT EXTENDS 2020 VISITOR PARKING PASSES INTO 2021

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) announced recently that residents should continue to use the existing 2020 Visitor Parking Pass (VPP) into 2021. The VPP program allows DC residents to register for an annual pass that is used for guests to park for more than two hours on Residential Permit Parking (RPP) zoned blocks.

DDOT is advising residents who are new to DC or need a replacement VPP to visit the local Metropolitan Police Department Precinct Station to request a temporary parking pass instead of a VPP.

For the duration of the public health emergency, DC government has suspended enforcement for the following infractions:

- Expired residential parking permits and visitor parking permits/passes;
- Expired DC license plates and inspection stickers; and

- Expired meters.

For more information, please visit www.coronavirus.dc.gov/page/stay-home

WATCH OUT FOR NEIGHBORHOOD THIEVES

According to the city government's statistics, crime in Washington, D.C. has actually decreased this year. However, the number of murders and car break-ins has jumped significantly. Public safety officials warn that the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have helped fuel more burglaries, break-ins, and crimes involving handguns.

As the holidays approach, be sure to take extra care to protect yourself from crime. If you are having packages delivered to your home during the holiday season, try to take extra precautions to avoid your packages being stolen from your front doorstep.

Always lock your car doors when you park your car outside your homes or in your driveways. **Do not leave anything of value in your car that would tempt somebody to break in – not even a gym bag or spare change, and especially not a garage door opener.** Take sensible steps to protect against crime in the neighborhoods. Be aware of your surroundings. If you see something suspicious, call 911 immediately.

If you are doing home repairs, keep ladders out of sight of those who might use them to break into an unlocked upper story window. If strangers come to your door to sell magazines or other products, ask if they have a license or better yet, call 911 and let the police determine if they have the appropriate license. Few legitimate vendors go door-to-door anymore, especially at night.

SLOW DOWN WHEN DRIVING ON NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS; REMEMBER TO WEAR A MASK AND SAY HELLO

Mayor Muriel Bowser has extended the city's coronavirus state of emergency to last through the end of the year. Like most of the country, the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area is experiencing an increase in coronavirus cases.

More and more neighbors, including children, are out every day walking, running, and biking on neighborhood streets. **If you are driving in the neighborhoods, please slow down!**

Masks are required when outside unless you are engaged in vigorous exercise and not close to anybody else. Social distancing also helps to protect each other. Thank you for wearing a mask – even if it means popping it on only when you notice somebody in

sight. If you can, say hello to a neighbor you might see on your walk, run, or bike ride. A hello, wave, or even a nod, albeit brief, is a nice way to keep connected.

For more information on the city's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, see www.coronavirus.dc.gov

Neighborhood Update is a newsletter established by the **Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association (SVWHCA)** (www.svwhca.org) and **Neighbors for a Livable Community (NLC)** to report news and information on issues of importance to residents of Spring Valley and Wesley Heights. You may send information appropriate for publication to Tom Smith at tmfsmith@rcn.com. No portion of this newsletter may be duplicated without written permission from the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association. This newsletter is distributed electronically. If you want to be on the distribution list, send your email to tmfsmith@rcn.com. Please share this with your own personal e-mail networks.

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