

American University Campus Plan Task Force Meeting Notes
September 28, 2010
7-9 p.m.
Mary Graydon Center, Rooms 2 & 3

Meeting Agenda

Welcome & Introductions	David Taylor, AU
Review of Previous Information	Don Edwards, JSA
Updated Campus Plan Presentation	Jorge Abud, AU
East Campus Proposal	Shannon Rydell, Little Diversified Jim Williams, Little Diversified Steve Kelly, Little Diversified
Discussion	Don Edwards
Other Issues	Don Edwards
Future Meetings	Don Edwards
Adjourn	

David Taylor opened the meeting, and made introductions. He turned the meeting over to Don Edwards from Justice & Sustainability Associates (JSA), who AU has hired to facilitate the Campus Plan Task Force meetings. This is Don Edwards' second meeting to facilitate.

Don Edwards reviewed the ground rules established at the previous Campus Plan Task Force Meeting.

Jorge Abud presented a Campus Plan presentation detailing where we have come since initial meetings with the community began in July 2009, and some of the changes that have been made as the plan has developed. The presentation and all other meeting documents are available on the AU Community Relations Web page at www.american.edu/finance/fas/campus-plan.cfm.

He reviewed the objectives of the Campus Plan to support the University's Strategic Plan. Overall planning goals are to:

- support university needs and priorities
- focus on quality
- capitalize on opportunities to re-use existing space
- maintain and recapture green open spaces
- organize facilities in a more coherent way
- have an open inclusive process

Facilities priorities to support these goals are:

- Increase undergraduate student housing and bring more students back to live on campus

- Improve the quality of recreation, dining and activity space
- Build a new facility for the Washington College of Law which has no opportunity to expand in its current location
- Additional faculty offices
- Improve science instruction and research facilities
- Add athletic facilities to provide adequate space for both athletic teams and recreational use
- Move the Admissions Welcome Center from the Katzen Arts Center
- Create an Alumni Center to attract alumni back to campus and give them some support

Student population and projections for the new Campus Plan (including a new law school) include a minimal undergraduate increase of 4.5% , an addition of 880 graduate students, and a new facility for the law school that would grow to 2,000 by 2020.

The proposed total housing capacity for 2020 is 4,990. The plan proposes to create approximately 2,000 new beds. 1,100 of these beds would be replacements for existing beds (reducing triples, discontinuing AU rentals in the Berkshires, bringing 500 students to the main campus from the Tenley campus, and discontinuing use of Roper and Clark for housing.) The other new beds would be 150 new undergraduate students in the next 10 years, plus an estimated demand for 757 students to live on campus who currently live off campus

Jorge Abud reviewed the potential site inventory to show new sites not previously considered. He then reviewed proposals that were discussed with the community, beginning in January 2010. In February, 2010, AU took Clark off the plan with the intent to keep housing at Tenley. In the third proposal in April, 2010, as a result of listening to neighbors and the university's own internal analyses, changes were made including new dorms to the South side of the campus. In May, the Clark site was added back. The site at the President's office building was removed.

Jorge Abud also reviewed transportation findings, including data showing that AU generated traffic is trending down and that changes in traffic generated by the Campus Plan would be slight and could be minimized through channelizing pedestrians to signalized crosswalks and employing signal timings that separate pedestrians and vehicles. He said the university will continue to be aggressive in supporting use of public transportation. He said the university has started and will continue discussions with DDOT, NPS and DHS to explore "big ideas" to change Ward Circle to improve conditions for vehicular traffic and pedestrians.

Jorge Abud said that the university plans to pursue further processing (???) for the Nebraska Hall addition and for the East Campus.

Shannon Rydell of Little Diversified Architectural Consulting, which has been hired by AU to design the East Campus, described the project's goals including:

- to promote student life, to diversify housing options on campus
- to be a sensitive neighbor to its surrounds
- to provide an expanded campus that is safe for students and residents
- to promote an architectural character consistent with the existing campus

He described community concerns as including

- increased noise
- the location of new student housing
- concern about pedestrian safety at Nebraska and New Mexico Avenues
- increased traffic
- that residence halls are uphill and seem imposing
- issues of height and density
- visibility from new buildings into residences

The latest draft plan reduces the proposed East Campus residences from five to four buildings. There is a pedestrian gathering zone at New Mexico and Nebraska Avenues, and a generous buffer of 80 to 120 feet that will be planted with heavy vegetation between the residence buildings and Westover. There are sizable 45 foot setbacks from the curb to buildings on New Mexico Avenue. The green buffer will remain along Nebraska Avenue and there is a 70 foot setback similar to the other part of the campus.

The crest that currently exists in the land in the parking lot will be removed so that the site is flat all of the way back to Westover. All parking and service will be below grade.

As part of plans to address student behavior, no students will live on the first floor of the residential halls. The first floor will contain staff/faculty apartments, meeting space, residential support space and retail space. Residential directors will monitor the first floor.

At this point, a task force member noted that AU had made an effort to reduce the number of beds that were first proposed on the East Campus from 1,000 to 853, and had also tried to reduce the scale there. He also suggested that if neighbors want less retail, AU should consider eliminating it. Jorge Abud said that AU does want to have some food retail open to students and the community.

Questions were asked about what mechanical equipment would be on top of the buildings such as heating and cooling.

Jim Williams, National Director of Design for Little Diversified, and the lead designer on this project, said that Little had just been working on the project in the past 4-6 weeks. "We're only showing concepts and we want to hear your comments," he said. He added that the buildings will be placed to enhance student behavior, and that the tree canopy that exists along Nebraska Avenue

today will be maintained along with as much of the mature vegetation along New Mexico Avenue as possible. The full presentation is available on the Campus Plan Web page at www.american.edu/finance/fas/campus-plan.cfm.

Steve Kelly of Little, talked about the landscape plans including dealing with the changing grade on the East Campus, promoting a sustainable landscape, and providing a buffer between the buildings and Westover. The plan is to keep all of the existing trees along Westover, and to enhance that with sustainable native plantings. He also showed design views of how the buffer would screen new residential halls from Westover, and what would be seen from the Westover townhouses.

At 8 p.m., Don Edwards led a discussion about the presentations with the Task Force.

Talking about the setback from the street to the buildings, one task force member said it is important to development a consistent setback.

A task force member from Westover asked whether AU would be increasing the height of the wall (No) and expressed concern about views in winter when taller trees lose their leaves.

Another task force member noted that the Westover townhouses are three stories, and asked whether it would make sense to limit the buildings on this side of the East Campus to three stories.

Shannon Rydell of Little Diversified noted that steps have already been taken to reduce the height and number of buildings.

Another neighbor said that creating a gathering space at the corner of Nebraska and New Mexico Avenues on the East Campus “is a great idea” and wanted to be sure that space was replicated on the other side of Nebraska.

The idea of a tunnel under Nebraska was raised again. Jorge Abud said that generally people don’t like to go a story or two underground to cross and will more often take the easy route across the street above ground.

Another task member suggested putting retail entrances on the interior of the East Campus to discourage retail customers from double parking in front of retail stores. Jorge Abud said the university can take a look at this idea.

Another neighbor asked Little representatives if AU had placed any design constraints on the firm with regard to light, sound, and visibility from Westover. The answer was no.

Asked what the East Campus would look like if the crest were removed, Little representatives said that the first floor would still be at grade level.

Re: a question about traffic flow to New Mexico and Massachusetts Avenue from the East Campus. Jorge Abud said the plan includes a subterranean entrance/exit on New Mexico Avenue and at Massachusetts Avenue across from DHS. A neighbor asked for AU to produce a perspective of that. AU agreed to do so.

Jorge Abud said the historic Glover estate gate near Massachusetts Avenue would be incorporated into the design for the East Campus.

Asked whether there would be a charge for parking in the underground garage, Jorge Abud said yes. There would be some validation arrangement for retail customers.

Asked about retail on New Mexico Avenue, Shannon Rydell of Little Diversified said that there would be a buffer of 45 feet from the street and that this retail would be more community based. Jorge Abud said that AU wants to hear more about what kind of retail the community would like to have, adding that AU “wants to serve the university and the community, and not the 25,000 people driving by.”

Another neighbor compared the designs of increasing retail to the changes that have happened in Bethesda, and noted that it is an oncoming wave. “You could create a really vibrant area for the university and the neighborhood,” she said.

Shannon Rydell said that Little Diversified are student housing experts and that they have built more than 20,000 units across the country.

Another neighbor suggested that a model showing the scale of the houses and the buildings might be helpful to the discussion and save a lot of time.

Another participant asked if thought had been given to putting in a berm between Westover and new residential facilities. Little representatives said that it would help raise the trees, but there would have to be space between the building and the tree roots.

Asked about summer use of the buildings on the East Campus, Chris Moody, Executive Director, Housing & Dining, at AU, said there could be meetings there during the summer but that they would be mostly adults. AU uses its existing halls for any summer programs that involve high school students.

Don Edwards thanked everyone for their comments, saying “you’ve been comprehensive and listened.”

David Taylor said the agenda for the next meeting would focus on a discussion involving AU Housing & Dining and the Office of Campus Life about life in AU residence halls. Jorge Abud added that AU also expected to have more information on the massing of the buildings on the main campus for the next meeting.

Asked about the status of plans for the Tenley campus, David Taylor said that AU plans to file one plan that includes a new law school at Tenley. AU does not plan to do further processing for Tenley because the work cannot be done in time for the filing of the Campus Plan with the Zoning Commission. He said AU currently is in the process of picking an architect for Tenley.

Jorge Abud urged anyone with questions to email and call AU representatives at the meeting, and also to use the AU Campus Plan Web page.

Don Edwards provided his phone number to the task force members: (202) 297-1603.

The meeting was adjourned.