

**American University Campus Plan Task Force Meeting Notes**  
**September 7, 2010**  
**7:00-9:00 p.m.**  
**Mary Graydon Center, Rooms 5 & 6**

**Meeting Agenda**

7:00 pm	Welcome	David Taylor
7:05 pm	Introduction of Justice & Sustainability Associates	David Taylor Don Edwards
7:15 pm	Q & A	David Taylor Don Edwards
7:25 pm	Confirm Ground Rules	Don Edwards
7:30 pm	Work Session	Don Edwards
8:50 pm	Next Steps	David Taylor
9:00 pm	Adjourn	

David Taylor opened the meeting. He then introduced two representatives of the firm Justice & Sustainability Associates (JSA). AU has hired JSA to facilitate the Campus Plan Task Force meetings. See page 5 for Don and Gary's contact information.

Don Edwards introduced the firm as a land-use mediation firm and reviewed practices they propose to follow for meetings. They include reviewing ground rules, providing a summary on a timely basis, and information in advance so that task force members know in advance what the meeting is about.

Don then disseminated a document titled, AU Campus Plan Stakeholder Issues List, which JSA compiled from conversations with residents and other interested parties. (The issues list is posted with this summary on the AU Campus Plan web page [www.american.edu/finance/fas/campus-plan.cfm](http://www.american.edu/finance/fas/campus-plan.cfm)) Don asked participants to review the list and to add any additional issues. Next he asked the group to state their top 3 issues.

The following are priority issues participants identified:

East Campus and Tenley Campus:

- Development will lead to a lot of pedestrian traffic across Nebraska Avenue all day.
- It's time to discuss the Tenley campus if AU plans to file with the Zoning Commission in 2010.
- When will Tenley and the Washington College of Law be on the agenda (Don Edwards answered that he believed there will be a separate focus on Tenley very soon.)

Density:

- Putting dorms too close to Westover, the height of new buildings, and a massive increase in the number of students overlooking well-established residential housing.
- Putting dorms too close, huge economic impact on existing homes.

- Are there other available sites for new buildings.
- If the Nebraska parking lot is developed, will the parking spaces be replaced?

Trust:

- Is there trust between the community and AU?
- At what point does the community begin to trust AU?
- There is very little response from AU which is why we feel we're not being heard

Traffic:

- The traffic study is incomplete. Where are the results?
- We need to think about overall traffic – not just AU. We are naïve to think that whether or not student buildings are built that we have solved the traffic problem. There will be more autos pushed onto the road by DHS. There are concerns that the community wouldn't have much influence on their plans.
- DHS is working on several options. We should see their options this fall. Ward Circle is the most dangerous place for cars in the area and this situation needs to be taken into consideration.

Periphery versus Core:

- Is it fair to impose that on the neighbors? If AU does, can it be done in ways that will be sensitive to the neighbors? AU hasn't moved off that fundamental position of dorms on the lot... There needs to be a consensus developed about this point.
- I can't envision the street if dorms are on the other side of the street – it will be horrendous.

Don thanked participants. He next asked AU to state its relevant policy positions regarding the priorities noted by the group as a way to frame the next discussion and focus it on University policy. . .

David said that AU is a much more prominent institution than it was 10-20 years ago. This is important to AU's competitiveness in attracting students. As AU becomes more prominent, it also wants to create a better campus experience for its students. Both outcomes are part of the university's strategic plan. The bottom line is AU has not built any large-scale housing for decades, and is required by the Zoning Commission to house two-thirds of its undergraduate students on campus.

David further stated that AU currently is housing 200 students at the Berkshire Apartments on Massachusetts Ave. and another 500 on the Tenley campus. The university is not planning any major growth in the number of undergraduate students in the 2010 campus plan.

Jorge Abud added that AU's proposed housing is extensive because AU needs to improve its housing stock. While the proposed plan calls for building 2,000 new beds, 1,100 are actually replacements for existing beds.

Don asked Jorge to address whether it is AU's policy that housing be built on the periphery. Jorge described the early plan for the AU campus with a quad in the center and housing built around it. "Essentially that is where the space was and is today," he said, adding that to a degree, the university is limited today by what its predecessors did. Don pondered out loud if there might be room for that strategy to be applied with some range?

Next, Task Force members shared the following miscellaneous responses:

- "Everyone should want AU to bring students back to campus. The current situation is untenable. I think we all want that housing close to campus. You [AU]changed your student code. The status quo isn't good. Bringing students back to campus is a question of distribution."
- "If it's a tall building next to campus, it should be community friendly".
- "I wouldn't consider it (the Nebraska parking lot) being part of your campus."
- "You are asking us to sacrifice for your success and give up our housing values and our quiet life. We have to find a way that AU can thrive but not at the expense of people who came to live here. AU is tuition based, it won't stop here. We are all worried about Balducci's. We need to find ways to go this way together."

Here, Don interjected, "I hear quality of life' being addressed. Reaching alignment here may mean accepting the most you can get. The hardest objective is getting all you want. So my question is what tradeoff are people willing to live with?"

Further participant comments:

- "What is the possibility of moving the proposed residence halls on the East Campus closer to Nebraska Avenue and stepping them down near Westover. What about a tunnel under Nebraska Avenue?"
- "We are not opposed to AU's expansion, it's the type of expansion and where you put it."

David then asked whether neighbors' main concerns were students – how close is too close and how close is too far away?

- "Dorms are 24 hours a day. The noise level on the street at night is staggering."
- "I'm a junior and living on campus is not an option" because of the lack of available housing."

Here Don asked whether participants thought the university promotes quality of life for its neighbors. A wide-ranging exchange then followed:

- "Yes", citing the landscaping and Arboretum, invitations from the university on a regular basis. "It certainly does reach out with information."
- "Student housing should be designed to be compatible with neighbors". But this resident didn't think housing values would suffer as some suggested, citing the value of many houses in Georgetown that are adjacent Georgetown University. "The issue is students."

Don: Can a rational person agree to trade-off having a residence near AU in order to benefit from the university's relationship with the neighborhood? What you sell this university on has to be measurable in the future. What is the issue with the student conduct code? Is it the building or is it the students?"

David: "The university has recently 'widened the umbrella' with changes in the Student Conduct Code that allow the university to act on complaints about off-campus student behavior."

- "While there are issues with cars parking and noise, the thing that hasn't been explored is how the university contributes in a positive way. Things have been enhanced and have value for the community."

Don then turned to David and Jorge: "You are getting some cues about how to parse these issues out. I hear some areas of possible agreement."

Participants then discussed student behavior and AU's related policies and practices:

- The Greenbriar is now about 40% students. Many of them are disrespectful of other residents. Many residents have instituted a policy that we now call the police."

David then introduced Michelle Espinosa, AU's new associate dean of students at AU, (who started in her job on Aug. 23). Michelle described the university's commitment to having its students be good neighbors and to be responsive to neighbors' concerns. David added that a new committee now meets regularly regarding students living off campus. David then gave the phone numbers to the group for Public Safety: 885-2527 (non-emergency) and 885-3636 (emergency).

Returning to the periphery issue, Don stated his observation from similar development projects that Task Force members might consider that if AU's policy is to bring students back to campus, it actually makes sense for them to build on the periphery first rather than put pressure on their core. That is because wherever growth occurs, you preserve the highest value land for as long as possible. That is AU's core. When all is built out on the periphery, then AU will have no choice but to go to its core. Consider that they maybe making tradeoffs now for what they will have to do 30 years from now.

Don asked participants to engage in a final exercise by answering the following question: "What's the evidence you are looking for from AU to earn your trust and to stay at the table?"

Participants' comments:

- AU can state what else could go on the East Campus.
- AU could come back with a greatly reduced number. If "no housing" is not possible, then significantly reduce the number. Trust would gained by meeting somewhere in the middle.

Don then suggested, "Trust is the thing that keeps you in the conversation. Does it mean getting what you want?"

- Keep all neighborhoods informed
- Show evidence that there is no other space on campus.
- Trust is a two-way street. Some credit should be given to the moves and changes that AU has made, even if people felt they were not enough.
- Demonstrate what a planted berm would look like in the parking lot
- Offer drawings at the next meeting so we can see how the pieces can be moved around.

Don thanked participants and asked them to fill out the comment sheets which had been distributed. He expected the meeting summary to be available within a week

David announced that the next meeting will be on Tuesday, Sept. 28 at 7 p.m. in Mary Graydon Center, Rooms 2 & 3. He further stated that a date for filing the new campus plan was still to be determined.

The meeting was adjourned.

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