

**UPTON & TILDEN NEIGHBORS' STATEMENT ABOUT PROPOSED LAND USE
CHANGES TO HOWARD UNIVERSITY WEST CAMPUS
OCTOBER 2020**

A. Introduction

Neighbors on Upton and Tilden Streets, NW, east of Connecticut Ave., along with residents of Linnean Avenue and Lenore Lane, NW, have come together to consider proposed changes to the Comprehensive Plan and to endorse the Mayor's goal of more affordable housing in Ward 3. **One element of the Office of Planning's (OP's) proposed changes is of great concern, however: the proposal to allow high-density residential development on a portion of Howard University's West Campus.** That property comprises the Divinity and School of Law buildings, parking lot and surrounding green space between the north side of Upton St., NW on the south and Soapstone Valley and Rock Creek Park on the north.

The OP last year proposed to change the future land use of the property from institutional to a combination of *institutional and medium density residential*. We later learned that, following a March 5, 2020 community meeting at Edmund Burke School that Howard University representatives attended, the OP changed the proposed uses to *high density residential* on the northern part of the property, and low density residential on the southern part fronting Upton St., NW.

As we explain below, high density development would directly affect Upton Street and the surrounding neighborhood. Moreover, any proposal to change the uses of the property is premature. For these reasons, we ask that the Council remove the property from the proposed Comprehensive Plan changes altogether, and allow development to be governed by other standard zoning processes under the Zoning Regulations of the District.

B. Impact of Development of West Campus on Green Space in Our Neighborhood

1. Historic institutions on Upton St.

Upton Street east of Connecticut Avenue includes several significant institutions, including the Edmund Burke School at the corner of Upton and Connecticut, Howard University Law School, Levine School of Music, and the Embassy of the Netherlands. These institutions exist in an historic and complimentary relationship with the neighborhood formed over many decades—a neighborhood that includes a variety of single-family residences, including row houses and homes on larger lots, some with tenants occupying single floors or basement apartments.

2. The athletic field on Upton St.

Green space is of crucial importance to Upton and Tilden residents and to the entire Van Ness neighborhood. The Law School property includes areas of green space protected by the Forest Hills Tree and Slope Protection Overlay District established in 2007, <http://dcrules.elaws.us/dcmr/11-1516> (“Overlay”). The property includes, on the north side of Upton between the historic buildings and Levine, a field the neighborhood uses for recreation and that Edmund Burke School uses for athletic activities. Howard University, through its planning spokesman, indicated at a March 5, 2020 community meeting that such use is intended to continue. We note, however, the OP’s latest proposed use is for low density residential development on that field.

3. The portion of the property north of the field.

North of the field, extending along the west boundaries of Levine and the Embassy of the Netherlands all the way to Soapstone Valley and Rock Creek Park, the property includes green space also protected by the Overlay and used by Howard students and area residents, including residents of high density apartment buildings on nearby Van Ness and Veazey Streets and Connecticut Avenue, for outdoor recreation. In addition, the property provides habitat connectivity for wildlife traveling between Soapstone Valley Park on the north and Rock Creek Park to the north-east, a priority in the Mayor’s Sustainability2.0 strategic plan, http://www.sustainabledc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/sdc-2.0-Edits-V4_web.pdf, p. 115.

4. Preserving green space for all.

As neighbors of the Law School, we are immensely grateful for the University’s maintaining this green space. Eliminating it will negatively affect the environment, and will diminish the opportunities and quality of life for residents of the Upton/Tilden/Van Ness neighborhoods east of Connecticut Ave. and residents from other parts of the District who enjoy this neighborhood because of its green space.

C. Impact of Development of Law School Property on Public Safety in Our Neighborhood

Upton and Tilden Streets east of Connecticut have seen an influx of families with children; thus, neighbors recently organized to secure stop signs at Upton and 29th Sts., NW and 15MPH speed limit signs on the 2900 block of Upton. The 2500 through 2800 blocks of Upton comprise single family homes on large lots, consistent with their current R-8 zoning.

We are concerned that development of the Law School property will increase traffic on the 2900 and 2800 blocks of Upton east of Connecticut Ave., NW, to the detriment of

children and residents. There is already too much traffic on Upton. Students and faculty from Burke, Howard and Levine drive and park on Upton. Commuters, parents of students at Burke and Levine, and Uber and Lyft drivers daily use Upton to cut through the neighborhood: eastbound drivers use Upton and 29th St., NW to avoid the Tilden-Connecticut Ave., intersection and access Rock Creek Park and Beach Dr., while westbound drivers on Tilden turn onto 29th, then to Upton, to access Connecticut Ave.

D. The Proposed Change to the Comprehensive Plan is Premature: The University has no plans to develop the property.

At the March 5, 2020 neighborhood meeting at Edmund Burke School, the University's planning representative stated that Howard had no intention to develop the property, that the University would not propose development until it had updated and submitted its West Campus Plan for public zoning review and approval, and that it did not intend to propose development along Upton Street. Thus, OP's proposed change to the uses of the property is completely premature. We note that the University's representative also stated that any changes would be proposed in *collaboration* with neighbors in a transparent and cooperative process. This engagement is of the highest value to both and is in concert with the best of the planning process in our city.

E. Our Proposal for Next Steps

1. The Council should direct OP to withdraw the proposed changes to Howard University's West Campus from its proposed changes to the FLUM in the Comprehensive Plan.
2. We believe the Mayor's affordable housing goals could be advanced by building more units near existing higher density buildings on Van Ness and Veazey Sts., NW, east of Connecticut Ave., NW. With respect to the West Campus specifically, however, the University should undertake no development until after the promised robust collaboration with neighbors of Howard's West Campus.
3. Any future residential development on Howard's West Campus should include the following:
 - a. Preservation of the Dunbarton College buildings that comprise Howard University School of Law and School of Divinity, excluding the old library, which Howard University has informed us it plans to demolish.
 - b. Consistent with the 2007 Forest Hills Tree and Slope Protection Overlay District:

- i. Retention of the green buffer (trees, slope and permanent vegetation) between the former Dunbarton College buildings and Upon St. on the south and between the buildings and neighbors to the east and west on Upton St.; and
- ii. Preservation of the green buffer (trees, slope and permanent vegetation) along Howard's eastern border with Levine Music and the Embassy of the Netherlands; and
- iii. Preservation of the green buffer (trees, slope and permanent vegetation) between the north side of the Howard property and Soapstone Valley Park and Rock Creek Park.

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