



Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A

“Serving the Foggy Bottom and West End communities of Washington, D.C.”

March 31, 2020

Mr. Thomas LeBlanc
President
The George Washington University
1918 F Street NW
Washington, DC 20052
president@gwu.edu

Ms. Robbin Owen
Chief, Division of Permits Management
National Park Service
900 Ohio Drive SW
Washington, DC 20024
robbin_owen@nps.gov

RE: Comments on GW’s Commencement Permits on the National Mall for May 2020 and May 2021

Dear President LeBlanc and Ms. Owen,

At its regular meeting on March 25, 2020, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A (“ANC 2A” or “Commission”) considered the above-referenced matter. With seven of eight commissioners present, a quorum at a duly-noticed public meeting, the Commission voted unanimously (7-0-0), after a motion made by Commissioner Harnett and seconded by Commissioner Goldin, to adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS, a public health emergency, state of emergency, and national state of emergency were declared by the Mayor of the District of Columbia and the President of the United States in response to the SARS-CoV-2 disease (global coronavirus pandemic),

WHEREAS, any events with more than 10 people have been deemed as threats to public health and have been ordered postponed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and DC Health that were scheduled to take place between March 16, 2020 and May 4, 2020,

WHEREAS, the George Washington University (GW) announced on March 16, 2020 that it was cancelling its in-person 2020 commencement to be held on the National Mall on May 17, 2020,

WHEREAS, in doing so, the university made the right public health decision in calling off this year’s commencement, a decision that fits directly with guidance by public health experts at the CDC and DC Health, given the presence of thousands of people at this event and given that public health must always come first in the safety and security decision making for events,

WHEREAS, if the 2020 commencement ceremonies had not been called off by the university, the National Park Service (NPS) would have revoked their permits to be able to hold the 2020 commencement on May 17, 2020, in line with the same public health guidance from the CDC and DC Health,



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WHEREAS, however, the Commission has a vested interest in providing continuity to the programs, events, and services that this community has developed around for decades after this public health emergency concludes,

WHEREAS, permanently cancelling the in-person commencement for the Class of 2020 would not have been acceptable to the Commission or to the thousands of students and families that have and will continue to invest in the Foggy Bottom and West End neighborhoods,

WHEREAS, especially for immigrant, first generation families that have invested and overcome so much over years and decades to get to this moment, they would feel robbed of a capstone to their educational careers and would not be able to receive the validation that all their sacrifices were worth it, and

WHEREAS, a petition of more than 7,500 students was signed in less than 72 hours to call on the university to reschedule an in-person Class of 2020 commencement on the National Mall for a date after the public health emergency ends.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission thanks the George Washington University for deciding on March 23, 2020 to invite its graduates of the Class of 2020 to the Class of 2021 commencement on the National Mall, currently scheduled to take place in May 2021.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission supports the modification of George Washington University’s long-standing annual permit application to host its commencement on the National Mall to support a footprint twice its typical size, to accommodate the addition of the Class of 2020 and their families, for a single day event, or for an event with two separate class ceremonies held on different days, using the standard size permit application.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission urges the George Washington University to hold separate school-specific graduations for the Class of 2020 and the Class of 2021.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission urges the National Park Service to undertake any legally sufficient measure alongside the George Washington University to advance this National Mall permit application.

Commissioners James Harnett (2A08@anc.dc.gov) and Patrick Kennedy (2A01@anc.dc.gov) are the Commission’s representatives in this matter.

ON BEHALF OF THE COMMISSION.



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Sincerely,

Patrick Kennedy
Chairperson

CC: Kevin Days, Director of Community Relations, GW
Mark Diaz, Chief Financial Officer, GW
David Vela, Acting Director, National Park Service
Nicole Goines, Mayor’s Office of Community Relations and Services