



**Wesley Theological Seminary  
Campus Plan Preliminary Report  
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D  
October 28, 2021**

Wesley Theological Seminary seeks the support of our Advisory Neighborhood Commission for our Campus Master Plan. The centerpiece of the plan is the demolition of two old dorms and a parking lot and, in its place, the construction of a new larger student residence hall. It also includes the destruction of the old President's House on University Avenue and the construction of a building further up the driveway designed to look like a home but housing seminary offices. We will landscape the location of the Old President's House to provide additional green space along University Avenue. We believe this Master Plan will constitute the end of construction on this campus, retaining and enhancing a wide buffer of green open space surrounding the campus.

We keenly hope we can occupy the new residence facility in the fall, 2025. Working backward from that date, we intend to file a campus plan application at the end of December, 2021 for approval by June of 2022. Along the way, we will continue to work closely with our neighbors and the ANC to perfect the final plan.

Wesley, founded in 1882, is one of the nation's leading and larger graduate theological schools (most of which are known as "seminaries" or "divinity schools"). We moved to this campus 63 years ago from what is now McDaniel University in Westminster, Maryland. Most of the current buildings were constructed at that time, except for a residence hall built in 2014. All other buildings are renovated.

We came to this site and designed our campus to share this academic hilltop with American University, a sister school in the United Methodist denomination. This was part of a larger plan of a Methodist Bishop who chaired the boards of both schools and who also established the A.U. School of International Service and relocated Sibley Hospital with a vision for a "Methodist Center" in this region, joining with the National United Methodist Church in Wesley Heights.

Wesley is considered one of the few truly national and international seminaries. Center-progressive and one of the most ethnically diverse, our alumni serve as pastors and leaders of non-profit human service organizations around the world, including a strong presence here in Washington. We are broadly ecumenical, with students from 26 denominations and a similar number of both states and foreign countries. We offer three Master's degrees and a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) and several non-degree programs, with three substantial centers of research and teaching: Leadership, Arts and Religion, and Community Engagement. Our current enrollment is 368 Masters students and 342 D.Min. students. Pre-Covid, 2/3rds of Master's students commuted. D.Min. students come for two-week intensive sessions.

Prior to COVID, there were 80-100 persons on average living permanently in our three current dorms, including family members. An additional 60 commuters lived on campus mid-week and about 240 of the Doctor of Ministry students lived in the dorms for two-week intensives three times a year, often at off-semester times.

The centerpiece of this plan is the proposed new residence hall with about 679 beds, rising seven stories above ground. Of the 679 beds, 90 will replace those in Carroll and Straughn Halls that are being demolished. It will have underground parking. It will be a larger building than the existing structures, but will be nestled amongst similar-sized buildings, both existing and proposed, on the adjacent A.U. campus. Set back on the hill, it will be substantially obscured as sighted from homes on both University and Massachusetts Avenues. It will also be aesthetically more pleasing, and greener, than the parking lot and the aging dorms it replaces. It will meet LEED Gold standards. The size is meant to accommodate both Wesley and American University students. The size of the building is well within the FAR allowed for by our zoning. Indeed, we are forgoing the possibility of building out to the allowable FAR to preserve the 55% of the property as green space because we consider this a very important element of the spiritual environment of the campus.

The Wesley students who will live in this building come from across the country and around the world, including those who relocate from elsewhere in the mid-Atlantic region. From American University, full time, upper level undergraduate and graduate students will be the primary residents due to the proposed dormitory's orientation to the AU campus. As has been the case in other markets across the country, we expect these students who have been living in aging off-campus housing to be drawn to a purpose-built student dormitory that is immediately adjacent to their campus.

There will be about 360 spaces in the parking garage. Of these, 105 spaces will be replacement parking for Wesley, 232 spaces will be available to residents of the dormitory and the remainder will be visitor/guest parking. Resident parking will be reserved and leased separately to tenants. Landmark believes this level of parking meets the parking demand for student residents.

The reason for this development is to allow Wesley to thrive in place for the next generations. By some reckoning, the most prudent move for Wesley would be to sell this campus and relocate to a less expensive area in the mid-Atlantic region. But we are resolved to remain in Washington because we believe this city is central to our mission and our ability to attract both students and faculty. Wesley greatly values being a part of an academic community committed to liberal higher education with all the vibrancy that entails. Wesley and A.U. have always had some shared programming, and, under President Burwell, those connections are expanding. The high-end design of this dorm provides our students access to amenities they do not have now and enhances Wesley's appeal to younger students.

We must also be able to thrive in place financially. The size of the building provides for the number of beds necessary to achieve the financial benefit which is critical to our ability to remain in this neighborhood and be one of the leading seminaries in perpetuity. Wesley is currently one of only 30 seminaries competing nationally and internationally for the best students and faculty. But we are 20th in size of endowment. In a period of winnowing of the number of seminaries nationwide, this

project would effectively move us to 10th. We will devote most of the financial benefit to further subsidize student scholarships. The fundamental economics of our business is, seminary students must have a graduate-level education similar in length and depth to medical students, but seminary graduates earn a fraction of the salary over a lifetime. And so, our ability to discount the cost of this education is determinative of our ability to compete. Beyond that, Wesley is a national leader in research and innovation. Our growth edge is in non-degree and certificate education and other programs to support the church nationally and internationally. This growth does not have an impact on our home campus. But we must be able to thrive in place to have a home base of faculty and students in the more traditional mode of education with all Washington has to offer.

Our development partner is Landmark Properties, one of the nation's largest purpose-built student housing providers. Wesley will retain ownership of the site and long-term ground lease the land to Landmark to develop and manage the student dorm. Wesley receives a payment up front and then is paid annual guaranteed ground lease payments, sharing in neither the profit nor loss in any year. This is a standard arrangement with private vendors providing services to students from food services, bookstores, coffee to dorms on campuses across the country. Landmark manages these kinds of facilities and will have onsite management personnel at the property. The number of beds is well-justified by the market need for Wesley and A.U. students, not including those who are required to have housing at A.U. under its Campus Master Plan.

As a long-time member of the neighborhood, we've asked ourselves about the impact of this project on the neighborhood. The property occupied by Wesley and American University has been an academic campus since it was bare ground over 120 years ago. Everything from the businesses and the Tenley Metro station are anchored by our presence. This is a university neighborhood, which is an important reason why people live here and why Wesley moved to this campus. Nevertheless, there are "town and gown" issues dating back to Oxford and Cambridge. One of the central issues in this neighborhood is the desire for A.U. students to live on campus as much as possible. This new dorm greatly advances that agenda and will result in more neighborhood housing being occupied by non-students. We are also enhancing and preserving the park-like green space separating us from this corner of our campus by removing the aging old president's house. We are also planning to install a neighborhood playground near the current residence hall for the growing number of families on our side of Massachusetts.

We have been in consultation with neighbors and the plans we now offer our response to some concerns and suggestions some have made.

1. Pedestrian traffic and neighborhood parking. Neighbors on or nearby University Avenue have been concerned in the past about the potential for increased student pedestrian traffic through their neighborhood and the prospect of student parking on streets near the campus. This was a concern with the building of our small dorm in 2014 and AU's large new Cassell dorm. But it has not proven to be a problem because students use the Massachusetts Avenue sidewalks and public transportation and A.U. conscientiously polices parking by their students in the neighborhood. Cars belonging to residents of this building will carry a sticker and be easily identified. We also believe it is important to continue to address this issue and enhance

this academic hilltop academic community by orienting this new building and the Wesley campus toward the AU portion. This is anticipated in the design of the building. We hope this can be facilitated by removing the fence between the campuses so pedestrian traffic is encouraged within the precincts of our institutions.

2. Auto traffic. There is also a concern about the effect of this building on automobile traffic. The preliminary results of a traffic study conducted by Gorove Slade show a relatively low additional impact on traffic from this building because some of the students are Wesley students who are to be found in the existing pre-COVID traffic counts. Residential students do not own or use cars to the extent others do, and commuter student peak hours are different from rush hour. Parking in the underground garage will be priced to discourage students from bringing their cars to school. This comports with DDOT's desire to encourage the use of public transportation. Currently, most cars enter and exit on Massachusetts Avenue. This issue is still being discussed, but Wesley will press DDOT to allow us to severely limit University Avenue traffic.
3. Code of Conduct. Wesley, as a seminary, has a keen interest in this issue. This is to be a student dorm from design in perpetuity. Landmark's business is both the construction and management of these kinds of facilities and will have onsite personnel at the property. Only matriculating students and their families will be eligible to lease, and it will be based on the academic year. Residents will have to agree to a code of conduct as part of their lease and will face repercussions for violating the code of conduct. American University expects their students to abide by their Code of Conduct whether they live on campus or in nearby housing. They reserve the right to expel students based on egregious violations of that Code. All of this will be set forth in the Ground Lease, which will also include ways for Wesley to have oversight and strong provisions for remediation of grievance. With respect to the use of alcohol. This matter was of sufficient concern to Wesley to warrant its inclusion in the lease documents. Per this binding agreement, underage residents may not consume alcohol at the facility. For the residents of age, they are prohibited from consuming alcohol in any exterior public places that are located adjacent to the ground floor of the project. Landmark provides its own onsite management and security for all developments they manage, as they do in similar buildings throughout the country.
4. Relationship with American University. There is no formal agreement with American University. The demand for additional housing is predicated from market studies and enrollment information publicly available. Wesley is very interested in increasing the symbiosis between the two campuses and orienting this dorm and its students toward the A.U. campus. We look forward to discussing possibilities with A.U.
5. Is this a dorm or a "commercial" enterprise? The Zoning Administrator has confirmed that the proposed use for housing both Wesley and AU students is an appropriate "dormitory" use to be reviewed pursuant to the campus plan process. Further, the Zoning Commission has already reviewed the issue of housing both AU and Wesley students on the Wesley campus in two previous campus plan cases and the Commission approved the arrangement. If, the "commercial" concern relates to the fact that the project is being built and managed by a

developer and not Wesley, this is a common practice in D.C. and elsewhere. It is often in a university's best interest to engage a commercial developer which has expertise in financing, building and managing student housing, leaving the university to focus on its educational mission. This arrangement does not make the project a "commercial" use or enterprise.

6. Noise and light. We will continue to work closely with the neighbors to satisfy any concerns about noise or light pollution, and other aesthetic concerns as we did with the dorm we constructed in 2014. Significant design changes have already been made to address these issues and further changes are under active consideration.

Sincerely,



David McAllister-Wilson  
President, Wesley Theological Seminary