

**Report of the Special Committee on the Marvin Center Name**  
**March 30, 2021**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### *Renaming Framework*

The George Washington University Board of Trustees approved, in June of 2020, a “Renaming Framework,” designed to govern and direct the process of evaluating proposals for the renaming of buildings and memorials on campus.<sup>1</sup> The Renaming Framework was drafted by a Board of Trustees-appointed Naming Task Force, chaired by Trustee Mark Chichester, B.B.A. ’90, J.D. ’93. The Task Force arrived at its Renaming Framework after extensive engagement with the GW community.<sup>2</sup>

Under the Renaming Framework, the university President is to acknowledge and review requests or petitions related to the renaming of buildings or spaces on campus. If the President finds a request for renaming “to be reasonably compelling when the guiding principles are applied to the particular facts,” the President is to: (1) “consult with the appropriate constituencies, such as the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, leadership of the Student Association, and the Executive Committee of the GW Alumni Association, on the merits of the request for consideration”; and (2) “appoint a special committee to research and evaluate the merits of the request for reconsideration.”<sup>3</sup>

### *Appointment of the Special Committee*

President LeBlanc established the Special Committee on the Marvin Center Name in July of 2020, and appointed Roger A. Fairfax, Jr., Patricia Roberts Harris Research Professor at the Law School as Chair. The Special Committee consists of ten members, representing students, staff, faculty, and alumni of the university, and two advisers, both of whom greatly assisted the Special Committee in its work.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Special Committee’s Charge*

Under the Renaming Framework, the charge of the Special Committee is quite narrow. The Special Committee does not decide whether the Marvin Center will be renamed; that decision is the sole province of the Board of Trustees. Nor does the Special Committee recommend what new name, if any, should replace Marvin’s, in the event that the Board of Trustees were to decide to rename the building. According to the Renaming Framework, the charge of the Special Committee is simply to research and evaluate the merits of the request for reconsideration of the Marvin Center name, and to determine whether there is a compelling case for renaming. The Special Committee does not have within its charge the consideration of the names of any other building, memorials, or monikers.

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<sup>1</sup> Naming Task Force Renaming Framework, Guiding Principles

<sup>2</sup> <https://gwtoday.gwu.edu/board-trustees-approves-renaming-framework>

<sup>3</sup> Naming Task Force Renaming Framework, Procedures, Review of Name Change Requests

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A.

### *The Work of the Special Committee*

The Special Committee received its charge from President LeBlanc on July 24, 2020, and immediately set out to complete its task. The Special Committee met regularly and remotely throughout the summer and fall of 2020, reviewing the guidance and considerations set forth in the Renaming Framework, reviewing primary and secondary historical materials provided by the Office of the President, the University Archives, and by members of the GW community. The Special Committee also had the opportunity to meet with President LeBlanc and representatives of the university senior staff to discuss questions related to the Renaming Framework.

### *Access to Historical and Other Materials*

The Special Committee's work was aided tremendously by the dedicated support of Brigette Kamsler, University Archivist, who provided access to hundreds of pieces of historical material. Included among these historical materials were personal correspondence of Cloyd Heck Marvin, internal office memoranda to and from Marvin, newspaper accounts of events occurring during and after Marvin's presidency, and scholarly writings about Marvin's tenure and legacy. In addition, the Special Committee benefited greatly from the assistance of Anne Dean, Development and Alumni Relations, who provided access to documents and insight regarding the donor-related issues animating the naming of the Marvin Center. Thanks to the hard work of Edward Howland, who provided administrative assistance, the Special Committee maintained a common virtual workspace and enjoyed ready access to archived materials and correspondence related to its work.<sup>5</sup>

### *Community Outreach and Engagement*

One of the Guiding Principles in the Renaming Framework counsels the Special Committee to ensure meaningful outreach to, and engagement with, the GW community. The Special Committee endeavored to engage the GW Community in a number of ways:

#### (1) Constituency-Based Outreach

The ten members of the Special Committee were selected after consultation with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, leadership of the Student Association, the Executive Committee of the GW Alumni Association, and academic leadership from across the university. The members of this representative Special Committee each have relationships with the communities they represent, and were able to relay feedback received from those communities.

#### (2) Email Account

The Special Committee was able to receive messages emailed to its attention through the [marvincommittee@gwu.edu](mailto:marvincommittee@gwu.edu) account.

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<sup>5</sup> While many of the materials provided to the Special Committee are available to the public and are outside of any restriction period, some materials the Special Committee reviewed remain confidential and within an applicable restriction period.

### (3) Feedback from Office of the President

The Special Committee also received community feedback sent to the Office of the President but directed toward the Marvin Center naming work.

### (4) Special Committee Website

The Special Committee commissioned a dedicated website, found at <https://president.gwu.edu/special-committee-marvin-center-name>, to enhance transparency into its work. The website provides:

- (a) an overview of the Renaming Framework and its prescribed process;
- (b) an overview of the membership of the Special Committee;
- (c) a portal for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and others to provide written feedback to the Special Committee;
- (d) a curated selection of pertinent historical materials; and
- (e) a link to news stories about the Renaming Framework and naming consideration processes

### (5) Three Virtual Town Hall Events

The Special Committee held three virtual town hall events on the afternoon of September 15<sup>th</sup>, the afternoon of September 17<sup>th</sup>, and the morning of September 22<sup>nd</sup>. The town hall events, which were held via WebEx, were open to the entire university community, and allowed attendees to ask questions and to make statements about the issue of the naming of the Marvin Center. Feedback from these events was helpful to the work of the Special Committee and even prompted the Special Committee to enhance the information made available on its website.

Through this outreach and engagement, the Special Committee received hundreds of pieces of feedback from alumni, students, staff, and faculty through its online feedback portal and its email account. In addition, nearly 300 GW community members registered for the three town hall events in September of 2020, and the ten members of the Special Committee have had many conversations and interactions with interested members of the GW community since the summer of 2020. All the while, the Special Committee's website – which has had almost 2,000 page views to date – has been available to the GW community with information about the process and the Special Committee's work. The historical materials linked on the website have been viewed hundreds of times.

#### *Renaming Framework – Guiding Principles*

The Renaming Framework begins with six Guiding Principles:

In applying the Renaming Framework, those charged with the responsibility for overseeing/executing the process shall:

- 1) Embrace the role of the university as a training ground for citizens and future leaders and be true to the university mission: In summary, to educate, conduct scholarly research, and publish.
- 2) Approach each petition for renaming with the understanding that the interested constituency is the entire GW community, inclusive of those with whom many, or some, may sharply disagree.
- 3) Establish credibility through meaningful outreach to, and engagement with, the GW community.
- 4) Model the behaviors of listening and compromise, which are essential to a vibrant campus community and healthy democracy.
- 5) Handle each individual petition with intellectual rigor and compassion for the individuals who will be impacted – on either side of the matter – by the university’s decisions on renaming requests.
- 6) View history in context and with a longitudinal, future-oriented perspective that will serve the community beyond the particular moment.

The Special Committee endeavored to adhere to these Guiding Principles and to ensure that they animated our work throughout our process.

*Renaming Framework – Renaming Considerations*

The Renaming Framework directs the Special Committee to “[a]ssess the strengths and weaknesses” of the case for renaming based on six Renaming Considerations:

Renaming Considerations

- 1) The prevalence and persistence of the namesake’s repugnant behavior.
- 2) The harm caused by the namesake’s behavior.
- 3) Strength and clarity of the historical evidence.
- 4) The namesake’s relationship to the university.
- 5) The university’s earlier consideration of the appropriateness of the name.
- 6) Opportunity for education.

Each of the six Renaming Considerations is accompanied by guidance to the Special Committee on how to apply the consideration and what factors weigh more or less heavily for or against the case for renaming. Below are the Special Committee’s conclusions on each of the six Renaming Considerations.

## II. EVALUATION OF THE RENAMING CONSIDERATIONS

### Renaming Consideration #1

#### The prevalence and persistence of the namesake's repugnant behavior.

The Renaming Framework directs the Special Committee to consider the prevalence and persistence of the namesake's repugnant behavior. As the Renaming Framework states, "[t]he case for renaming is most compelling when the behaviors were exhibited on a sustained basis as part of the namesake's public life." On the other hand, the case for renaming is less compelling when it is "an isolated incident" and not a "core element of the individual's public profile." Another possible mitigating consideration is found where there was "deep and consistent contrition expressed by namesake and accepted by affected parties" or "sincere attempts to rectify the prior behavior." Finally, the case for renaming is less compelling when the "historical record establishes that the behavior was considered consistent with the conventions of the time" and "despite the behavior in question, other aspects of the namesake's life and work are especially laudable."

The Special Committee concludes that the repugnant behavior at question – Marvin's support for, and vigilant preservation of, racial segregation at George Washington University – was both prevalent and persistent. Marvin supported and furthered the cause of exclusion of African American students from educational opportunities and campus life throughout his lengthy tenure as President of the university.<sup>6</sup> Marvin also expressed his endorsement of racial segregation and made public comments rooted in a belief that Black students were inferior or unable to handle the rigors of academic work at George Washington University.<sup>7</sup> Although the historical record does not provide insight into whether his discriminatory views manifested themselves in his private life and affairs, Marvin shared these views in both his private correspondence and public statements as President of the university.<sup>8</sup>

The Special Committee did consider the mitigating factors set forth in the Renaming Framework, and found that Marvin's support for racial segregation and the exclusion of African Americans from the university was not an isolated incident, but rather a core element of his public profile over multiple

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., [George Washington University Admissions Policy prepared by President Marvin](#), 1938, Series 2, Box 27A, Folder 2. RG0002 Office of the President Records, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University Libraries, Washington, DC.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., [Memorandum, 07 October 1952](#), Series 2, Box 27A, Folder 2. RG0002 Office of the President Records, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University Libraries, Washington, DC; [Letter to unknown person from President Marvin](#), 09 July 1954, Series 2, Box 27A, Folder 2. RG0002 Office of the President Records, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University Libraries, Washington, DC.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Letter to All Members of the Executive Committee, 28 October 1946, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 45. RG0001 Board of Trustees Records, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University Libraries, Washington, DC.

decades.<sup>9</sup> The Special Committee did not find evidence in the historical record regarding any contrition on the part of Marvin, much less “deep and consistent contrition expressed by namesake and accepted by affected parties.”<sup>10</sup> Nor did the Special Committee find evidence of particular efforts undertaken by Marvin to rectify the decades of racial exclusion practiced by the university under his charge.

The Special Committee acknowledges that while racial segregation was, in many ways, “consistent with the conventions of the time” in Washington, DC, Marvin held on to racial segregationist policies even after other universities in the Nation’s Capital had desegregated. In fact, George Washington University was the last of the major universities in the city to maintain its segregationist policies – well after American University, Catholic University, and Georgetown University had integrated.<sup>11</sup> Further, the Special Committee takes note that Marvin was born in Ohio, studied at Stanford, University of Southern California, and Harvard, and had extensive experience in cosmopolitan circles on both coasts. His life experience was sufficiently varied such that he presumably had ample opportunity and ability to interrogate the odious values underpinning the policy of racial segregation he permitted to fester at George Washington University for 27 years of his presidency. Additionally, in the estimation of the Special Committee, despite the norms and conventions of the era in which Marvin served, the leader of an academic institution is and should be held to a higher standard than most others on issues such as resisting the impulse to foment racial segregation and exclusion.

The final mitigating factor counsels the Special Committee to consider whether “despite the behavior in question, other aspects of the namesake’s life and work are especially laudable.” Marvin’s tenure undeniably had a transformative impact on the development of George Washington University. Growth in the university’s enrollment, physical footprint, and academic standing during Marvin’s presidency are well-documented, and his legacy deserves to reflect that.<sup>12</sup> That said, the historical

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<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Cloyd Marvin, Admissions Office, Negroes, undated. Series 2, Box 27A, Folder 2. RG0002 Office of the President Records, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University Libraries, Washington, DC. Available online at: <https://gwu.box.com/s/sbgqn43gwiqcnqws5df5nfctfekgn3nl>; “One third of a Century Under Strong-Willed Cloyd Heck Marvin,” *The Hatchet* Vol. 67 No. 31 (Feb. 11, 1971): page 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, after the Board of Trustees and faculty voted to lift the bar on African American students at George Washington University, Marvin predicted that the university would not have to be concerned about a critical mass of African Americans on campus. See Letter to unknown person from President Marvin, 09 July 1954, Series 2, Box 27A, Folder 2. RG0002 Office of the President Records, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University Libraries, Washington, DC (“I think our standards of admission and the high expectancy of our classroom work will deter many.”).

<sup>11</sup> See “GW Rules Out All Race Bans for Next Term,” *Evening Star*, July 8, 1954; “GWU Lifts Race Bar on Admissions—Announcement Ends Last Ban in Major D.C. Schools of Higher Learning,” (*paper unknown*) July 9, 1954; <https://gwu.box.com/s/yzba725oyn5fuem4fenys5owncdjljz>

<sup>12</sup> A significant number of comments in the feedback received by the Special Committee noted the tremendous impact Marvin’s presidency had on the growth and reputation of the university.

record also demonstrates that Marvin’s tenure was marked by controversial attempts to diminish faculty governance and burden academic freedom, as well as *ad hominem* attacks on protesting students, members of the media, and dissenting faculty members.<sup>13</sup> Although the assessment of Marvin’s presidency is subject to reasonable debate, the Special Committee agrees that his legacy as a university leader and public citizen is mixed, and does not necessarily meet the standard of “especially laudable” – even setting aside his support for racial segregation and the exclusion of African Americans from university life.

The Special Committee thus concludes that the first Renaming Consideration – the prevalence and persistence of the namesake’s repugnant behavior – strongly supports the case for renaming.

## **Renaming Consideration #2**

### **The harm caused by the namesake’s behavior.**

The Renaming Framework directs the Special Committee to consider the harm caused by the namesake’s behavior. As the Renaming Framework states:

The case for renaming is most compelling when the behavior in question is directly contrary to the mission and values of the university and the overarching role of higher education institutions to promote knowledge and education among the citizenry. As such, the case for renaming is further strengthened where a name undermines the ability of a significant number of students, faculty, or staff of a particular gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin or other characteristic protected by federal law or university policy, to engage in, or feel a sense of belonging to, the university community.

The Special Committee agrees that Marvin’s repugnant behavior, described above, is directly contrary to the mission and values of the university and the overarching role of higher education institutions to promote knowledge and education among the citizenry. Although there was no formal mission statement in place during Marvin’s tenure, the current mission of the university “is to educate individuals in liberal arts, languages, sciences, learned professions, and other courses and subjects of study, and to conduct scholarly research and publish the findings of such research.” By excluding

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Letter from Cloyd H. Marvin to S.A. Shelton, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, February 18, 1935; [Letter from Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Ballston Klan #6 to Cloyd Heck Marvin](#), February 1935, Series 2, Subseries 5, Box 46, Folder 4. RG0002 Office of the President Records, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University Libraries, Washington, DC; Bob Bialek, “Students as Citizens,” *The Hatchet* Vol. 43 No. 23 (April 15, 1947): page 2; [“Can George Washington Become a “Genuine Fortress of Democracy?”](#) *The Hatchet* Vol. 34, No. 14 (Jan. 4, 1938): page 1-2.

countless individuals from university on the basis of their race, Marvin's aforementioned behavior contravenes both the letter and spirit of the university's current stated mission.

Furthermore, the Special Committee recognizes that the enduring harm to the lives of those whose life opportunities were curtailed because of Marvin's segregationist policies cannot be quantified. One can only imagine how many African American alumni legacy children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren might have graced the GW campus and enriched the university's culture and legacy over the past 60 years had their forebears not been excluded on the basis of their race during Marvin's tenure. How many aspiring African American professionals in the District of Columbia were never permitted to realize their dreams through education and training at GW because of Marvin's steadfast support of the policy of racial exclusion? And how many African American families were deprived of the opportunity to have a college-educated parent who could ensure economic security, build generational wealth, and transmit the values of education to descendants? By countenancing and furthering the exclusion of individuals from the university because of the color of their skin, Marvin undoubtedly frustrated the promotion of knowledge and education throughout the citizenry.

It is also the view of the Special Committee that the Marvin Center name undermines the ability of a significant number of students, faculty, or staff of a particular gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin or other characteristic protected by federal law or university policy, to engage in, or feel a sense of belonging to, the university community. The contemporary impact Marvin's support for racial segregation and exclusion has on students, staff, and faculty at George Washington University today is significant. As the Special Committee learned from many who offered feedback, the Marvin Center name is a visible and stark daily reminder to African American and other students who would have been excluded or marginalized under Marvin's tenure that they are not full and valued members of the university community.

The Special Committee also received community feedback conveying deep concern with having the university student center – a communal space at the heart of campus life – bear the name of a university president who would have been dismayed at the sight of a substantial portion of the student body in that building and enrolled in classes on campus. As numerous community members shared with the Special Committee, the Marvin Center is not just *any* building at GW, but perhaps the single most notable facility on campus.

Student centers are closely linked to an institution's ideals and mission.<sup>14</sup> These facilities represent spaces in which community members, particularly students, are provided opportunities to grow and learn.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Boris Bell, the Director of the then-named "University Center" stated in 1969 that "[t]hrough the use of the Center and participation in its operations, there is the opportunity for students to come together in large numbers. These opportunities offer valuable experience in general citizenship growth – understanding of and cooperation with people."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Lane, T., & Perozzi, B. (2014). Student engagement and college unions. *New Directions for Student Services*, 145, 27-37. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20077>

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Knell, P., & Latta, S. (2006). *College union dynamic: Flexible solutions for successful facilities*. Bloomington, IN: ACUI.

<sup>16</sup> Boris C. Bell, "A Greater Pride in the University," *The Hatchet*, Vol. 66, No. 18 (Nov. 24, 1969).

Those offering feedback during the listening sessions similarly characterized the Marvin Center as being “the heart of campus” or GW’s “living room.” The Marvin Center is the first campus building many prospective students enter when exploring the GW campus with their families. New student, staff, and faculty orientation sessions often begin at the Marvin Center. It is where one buys a GW t-shirt, has a club meeting, or grabs a bite to eat with friends in between classes. Students enter the Marvin Center to explore their study abroad experiences, to grapple with mental health issues, and to get their university identification.

The role of the Marvin Center as a student union building, communal space, and the center of student life on campus is an important consideration in the case for renaming. As one of GW’s most important physical spaces, the messages the Marvin Center communicates to the community and the values which it embodies must be in alignment with the mission of the institution.<sup>17</sup> A legacy of exclusion undermines that messaging and works counter to that mission.

The Special Committee thus concludes that the second Renaming Consideration – the harm caused by the namesake’s behavior – strongly supports the case for renaming.

### **Renaming Consideration #3**

#### **Strength and clarity of the historical evidence.**

The Renaming Framework directs the Special Committee to consider the “[s]trength and clarity of the historical evidence.” As the Renaming Framework states:

The case for renaming is most compelling where the historical record of the subject’s questioned behavior is substantial and unambiguous; and is least compelling where the record is limited or debatable. Any decision should be based on research that uses all publicly-available sources to ascertain the historical context and naming decision holistically.

The Special Committee believes that the relevant historical evidence is strong and clear. As mentioned above, the Special Committee has been assisted in its work by the University Archivist,<sup>18</sup> who has made available an abundance of primary sources, including Marvin’s internal office memoranda, notes related to the Board of Trustees, private correspondence to and from Marvin and his senior staff, and memoranda of Marvin’s thoughts and positions on relevant issues. In addition, contemporaneous press clippings from both *The Hatchet* and large-market newspapers have provided the committee with additional context.

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Rullman, L., & Harrington, K. (2014). College unions, learning, and community building. *New Directions for Student Services*, 145, 39-47. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20078>

<sup>18</sup> A special debt of gratitude is owed to Brigette Kamsler, University Archivist, Libraries and Academic Innovation, who provided invaluable assistance to the Special Committee.

Furthermore, the Special Committee has been aided by a number of useful secondary historical sources, including some produced pursuant to an archival project sponsored by former President Knapp.<sup>19</sup> In particular, the extensive scholarly work of Andrew Novak has proven particularly helpful in elucidating the life and legacy of Cloyd Heck Marvin.<sup>20</sup> Given the volume and quality of the historical evidence on Marvin’s beliefs and role in maintaining policies of racial exclusion and segregation at George Washington University, the Special Committee believes that the historical record is “substantial and unambiguous” and is in no way “limited or debatable.”

The Special Committee thus concludes that the third Renaming Consideration – the strength and clarity of the historical evidence – strongly supports the case for renaming.

#### **Renaming Consideration #4**

##### **The namesake’s relationship to the university.**

The Renaming Framework directs the Special Committee to consider the “[t]he namesake’s relationship to the university.” As the Renaming Framework states:

The case for renaming is subject to greater scrutiny when the namesake has had an objectively significant and noteworthy role in the history of the university. It follows, then, that the argument for a name change becomes especially compelling when the namesake does not have a significant connection to the university. In addition, consideration should be given to legal or other commitments the university has made to any donors (and their heirs) in connection with the name in question and the legal and financial implications thereof.<sup>21</sup>

The Special Committee believes that Marvin certainly “has had an objectively significant and noteworthy role in the history of the university.” As previously noted, Marvin enjoyed a lengthy tenure as President – a tenure marked by objectively impressive developments in the university’s enrollment, physical footprint, and academic standing. Pretermittting his record on faculty governance, academic freedom, and tolerance of dissent, and his support of racial segregation, it cannot reasonably be disputed that Marvin played a “significant and noteworthy role in the history of the university.”

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<sup>19</sup> See GW President’s Archival Research Project, <https://library.gwu.edu/scrc/projects>; Avery Anapol, “Faculty ask Knapp to Sign off on GW Slavery Research,” *The Hatchet* Vol. 113, No. 21 (Feb. 13, 2017): pages 1, 6.

<sup>20</sup> See Andrew Novak, “The Desegregation of George Washington University and the District of Columbia in Transition, 1946-1954,” *Washington History* Vol. 24, No. 1 (2012). A special debt of gratitude is owed to Mr. Novak, who reached out to the Special Committee and made sure we were aware of the exhaustive research he has done on the life and work of Cloyd Heck Marvin.

<sup>21</sup> The Renaming Framework cautions, in connection with this Renaming Consideration, that “[w]hen considering the namesake’s relationship to the university, any members of the special committee or Board of Trustees with a conflict of interest must recuse themselves from deliberations.” No members of the Special Committee concluded that they have a conflict of interest.

Not only did he have “a significant connection to the university” – given his leadership style and the inability or unwillingness of the faculty or the Board of Trustees to rein him in, Marvin, in many ways, embodied the university during most of his tenure. Given this, the Special Committee recognizes that the case for renaming in this context – always something that “should be a rare undertaking, pursued only in extraordinary circumstances” – is subject to even greater scrutiny under the Renaming Framework.<sup>22</sup>

The Special Committee, as is prescribed in the Renaming Framework, also considered the legal and financial implications of legal commitments the university has made to any donors and their heirs in connection with the Marvin Center name.<sup>23</sup> Although the Special Committee, understandably, was not made privy to privileged information about potential legal claims, it was informed about the experiences of other institutions to have renamed buildings originally named pursuant to a gift. Based upon that discussion, the Special Committee determined that the cost of renaming the Marvin Center, were the Board of Trustees to decide to do so, would not be insubstantial. There may be costs related to potential legal claims based on a renaming, and the Office of the General Counsel is prepared to advise the Board on this issue. In addition, senior members of the university leadership have estimated that costs of re-branding and associated legal fees, marketing, and physical implementation of the name change (including the removal and replacement of lettering on the building itself, new signage, and new printed materials bearing the existing Marvin Center name) could range anywhere from \$310,000 to \$820,000.

Although not specified in the Renaming Framework guidance for this Renaming Consideration, another potential financial implication of the renaming extends to the relationship with university donors more generally. The Special Committee did receive feedback from some GW community members – largely alumni – conveying a resolve to cease financial support of the university if the Board of Trustees were to rename the Marvin Center as a result of this process. However, the Special Committee also heard from GW community members – alumni and students – who expressed enthusiasm for the possibility of renaming the Marvin Center and who, presumably, would be more inclined to support the university financially now and in the future, if the renaming were to come to pass. In addition, a renaming of the building would give rise to a new naming opportunity, the proceeds of which could mitigate or outweigh any costs associated with the renaming. In sum, it is difficult for the Special Committee to state with certainty what the legal or financial implications of a renaming might be.

The Special Committee thus concludes that the fourth Renaming Consideration – the namesake’s relationship to the university – does not weigh in favor of, or against, the case for renaming.

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<sup>22</sup> The Special Committee notes that despite Marvin’s long association with the university, the naming of the Marvin Center was a donor-driven decision, prompted by a gift from Marvin’s widow, Dorothy Betts Marvin. It should be noted that a separate and severable gift amount was donated by Dorothy Betts Marvin for the naming of the Dorothy Betts Marvin Theater which is located within the Marvin Center. The naming of the Betts Theater is beyond the scope of this Special Committee’s charge.

<sup>23</sup> Special thanks go to Anne Dean, Managing Director, Research and Relationship Management, Development and Alumni Relations, for her assistance in providing the Special Committee access to relevant donor materials.

## Renaming Consideration #5

### The university's earlier consideration of the appropriateness of the name.

The Renaming Framework directs the Special Committee to consider “[t]he university’s earlier consideration of the appropriateness of the name.”<sup>24</sup> As the Renaming Framework states:

The case for renaming is considerably more compelling where the conduct in question became widely known after the initial naming decision, or where the university has not previously examined the issue with reasonable rigor, as determined by members of the special committee. The case for renaming is less compelling, and names more appropriately left to stand, where the university was aware of the namesake’s behavior and, based on reasonable diligence and research, nonetheless decided to confer the honor; or where the university has previously examined and rejected another request to change the name. While decisions following previous reconsideration of a name should be shown some deference, such decisions should receive less deferential treatment where decision-makers ignored, or were not aware of, history of the behavior in question.

The Special Committee was unable to find evidence that the conduct in question was not widely known at the time of the initial naming decision.<sup>25</sup> To the contrary, the naming gift was made in 1970, a mere 16 years after the Board of Trustees voted to overturn the policy of racial segregation at the university, and only 11 years after Marvin’s tenure came to an end. The announcement of the intention to name the new building after Marvin was met with significant outcry, as some students on campus voiced their opposition to the naming – citing Marvin’s support for segregationist policies on campus.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Special Committee would like to point out that it is unclear in the Renaming Consideration guidance what is encompassed by the reference here to “university.” The university leadership are distinct from the faculty, student body, alumni, and staff. The Special Committee assumes that “university” is meant to refer to the university’s most senior leadership, including the President and the Board of Trustees.

<sup>25</sup> Of course, the donative documents already may have been signed by the time the GW community had been made aware of the naming and before the ensuing protests could have any effect on decision-making.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., “[Statement of Student Group Opposed to Center’s Renaming](#),” *The Hatchet* Vol. 67, No. 32 (Feb. 15, 1971): page 3 (stating that “[t]he dedication of the University Center in the name of Cloyd Heck Marvin is a clear example of the present ethics of our University. It seems entirely appropriate that GW has decided to memorialize its racist heritage”); Dick Polman, “[Walkout Mars Ceremony](#),” *The Hatchet* Vol. 67, No. 33 (Feb. 18, 1971): page 1, 9 (describing large student protest during dedication of Marvin Center).

The Special Committee did not find any evidence that the university previously examined and rejected an earlier request to change the name, or that the university previously considered the naming issue with any rigor. As mentioned above, the naming decision was prompted by a gift by Dorothy Betts Marvin scarcely a decade after the end of Marvin’s tenure. There is no evidence that university leadership at the time conducted a rigorous analysis of whether the Marvin name was appropriately attached to the student center. It is the belief of the Special Committee that this process under the Renaming Framework is the first formal university consideration of a proposal to rename the Marvin Center.

The Special Committee thus concludes that the fifth Renaming Consideration – the university’s earlier consideration of the appropriateness of the name – weighs in favor of the case for renaming.

## **Renaming Consideration #6**

### **Opportunity for education.**

The Renaming Framework directs the Special Committee to consider “[o]ppportunity for education.” As the Renaming Framework states:

In considering a name change, appropriate weight should be given to the potential educational value to the GW community of contextualizing and confronting the namesake’s legacy. Where there are strong arguments for and against a name change, the university will be best served by exploring appropriate opportunities to address the history in a deliberate and visible manner, it being all the more important to do so where a name change is made.

The Special Committee believes strongly that there is a tremendous opportunity for education of the GW community through contextualization and confrontation of Marvin’s legacy. The Special Committee notes that many valuable conversations have begun already – in student spaces, faculty and staff lounges, and in alumni cohorts. In this time of national racial reckoning, GW community engagement about Marvin’s legacy has particular relevance and impact.

The Special Committee envisions this process serving as the catalyst for a number of distinct opportunities for education. First, this process can create a space for learning around issues of racial justice and reconciliation of the university’s past. The issue of Marvin’s legacy addressed in this process can serve as the cornerstone for a university-wide, cross-disciplinary set of conversations, and opportunities for academic talks, reading groups, seminars, and courses about the university’s role in the maintenance of racial injustice.

In addition, this process – having been marked by careful thought, community input and participation, and fidelity to guiding principles and considerations – can serve as a model for future community-centered deliberation that is sensitive to differing points of view and, thus, insulated from accusations of “cancel culture.” Finally, this process can serve as an example of values-driven leadership and has the potential to inform other areas of discourse and decision-making at the university.

The Special Committee thus concludes that the sixth Renaming Consideration – the opportunity for education – weighs in favor of the case for renaming.

### III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Under the Renaming Framework, the charge of this Special Committee is to research and evaluate the merits of the request for reconsideration of the Marvin Center name, and to determine whether there is a compelling case for renaming. Central to the Special Committee's task was extensive engagement with community stakeholders, including students, alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of GW. The resulting feedback from the university's constituents animated our work and consideration of the criteria under the Renaming Framework and its Guiding Principles.

Based upon our application of the six Renaming Considerations to the information and historical evidence available to us, five of the six renaming considerations weigh in favor of renaming, and one weighs neither for nor against renaming. The Special Committee concludes that there is a compelling case for renaming under the Renaming Framework.

To be sure, although our Special Committee reached consensus, broader community opinion was not monolithic. The hundreds of pieces of feedback received by the Special Committee represented a range of views. Although few comments were directed toward the specific criteria and Renaming Considerations set forth in the Renaming Framework, nearly all of the comments sincerely and thoughtfully contributed valuable perspectives on the larger question of whether the Marvin Center should be renamed.

There were community members on both sides of the issue who expressed anger and frustration. Some who are against the renaming queried whether the exercise was an example of "cancel culture" or the application of modern standards to individuals who lived in a different era. Some who favor renaming expressed outrage that the university has been slow to respond to the efforts of some students and alumni over the years to have the naming of the Marvin Center reconsidered in light of Marvin's discriminatory and exclusionary views and policies and the burden of that legacy on diversity and inclusion at GW today. Some community members on both sides of the issue have indicated in their feedback that the outcome of this process will inform whether they will support the university going forward.

The members of the Special Committee endorse the sense of the GW Board of Trustees "that reconsideration of the name of a building or memorial of any sort should be a rare undertaking, pursued only in extraordinary circumstances." However, for our part, we believe that these circumstances are extraordinary. This is a significant moment of opportunity for GW to demonstrate our institutional willingness to make change when needed, to stand upon values of a pluralistic and welcoming community, and to refine and re-establish our commitment to inclusion. Although it is not within our purview to make the ultimate decision on renaming, the Special Committee members do hope that university leadership – whatever they decide – will use this as an opportunity for community building, education, and healing.

## *Appendix A*

### *Special Committee Membership*

Chanell Autrey, Esq., GW Law '12  
Committee Member

Howard Brookins III, GWSB '21  
Committee Member

Nancy Broyhill, ESIA '65 & Trustee Emerita  
Committee Member

Imani M. Cheers  
Associate Director and Associate Professor  
School of Media and Public Affairs  
Committee Member

Roger A. Fairfax, Jr.  
Patricia Roberts Harris Research Professor  
Law School  
Committee Chair

Ari Feuer, Milken Institute SPH '22  
Committee Member

Anne Graham  
Director of Student Involvement & Leadership  
Division for Student Affairs  
Committee Member

Harita Iswara, ESIA '22  
Panhellenic Chair of Diversity & Inclusion Bd.  
Committee Member

Adena Kirstein  
Executive Director  
GW Hillel  
Committee Member

Gail Rosseau  
Clinical Professor of Neurosurgery  
School of Medicine and Health Sciences  
Committee Member

Anne Dean  
Managing Director, Research and Relationship Mgmt.  
Development and Alumni Relations  
Committee Advisor

Brigette Kamsler  
University Archivist  
Libraries and Academic Innovation  
Committee Advisor