

IGU Loses Accreditation and Tax-Exempt Status

Future use of the Property is in Question

BY PETER WALDRON

The International Graduate University, located at 13th & D St. SE, has lost both its accreditation as a “university” and its tax exempt status. The latter, effective May 26, was confirmed via email by the DC Office of Tax and Revenue.

The 92,899 square foot property, sold as part of the disposition of surplus school properties under the Congressionally-appointed Control Board, was purchased by Dr Walter Boek in the late ‘90s for \$1.5 million. The property was recently assessed at \$10.5 million by the District’s Real Property Division. Without Boek’s non-profit status, taxes on this property would ordinarily be charged at the commercial rate of \$1.85 per \$100.00 a square foot or just under \$200,000 annually. In addition, Dr. Boek secured tax exempt status for his residence in Northwest by claiming it as the University president’s home. Boek’s residence is currently assessed at \$1,895,240, so the loss of tax-exempt status will mean property taxes of close to \$20,000.

As for the institutions accreditation, IGU lost its ability to continue to be an educational institution when the Educational Licensing Commission denied its application in December 2009. Among its 11 carefully worded charges were that IGU failed to operate as an educational institution in the period for which it had a conditional license, did not have qualified faculty nor even the rudiments of a library.

IGU has operated with mixed success and sporadic licensing since its purchase. Neighbors have reported only intermittent signs of classroom instruction. The IGU website lists masters programs in Management Science, Human Services and Constitutional Democracy. The website claims that IGU has enrolled over 40,00 students.

According to Sharon Ambrose, former Ward Six Councilmember who chaired the Regulatory Affairs Committee which is responsible for educational licensing oversight, IGU was never a degree granting school because it is not a chartered university. It is classified as a “proprietary” school much like a barber college or secretarial school.

Controversial High School Rejected

Faced with the loss of its accreditation, IGU became embroiled in controversy this winter when its proposed newest tenant, University High, presented an application to the DC Public Charter School Board for a high school for at-risk teenagers. The community galvanized in opposition with 350 parents of the adjacent Watkins Elementary School signing a petition expressing their concern at having primary grade children sharing playground space in proximity with struggling teenagers. Other issues raised at University High’s hearing were the discovery that its application contained curriculum descriptions which were virtually identical in wording to those of nearby Gonzaga H.S.

Rob Bergman, a ten-year neighbor of IGU, scoffs at any suggestion that Boek genuinely consults with the community. Bergman says that Boek pretends to be involved in the community until he no longer “needs us and then he goes silent.”

Ward Six Council member Tommy Wells wrote a letter opposing the application of University High as a charter school, citing among other reasons the apparent plagiarism and a worrisome linkage between members of the boards of both IGU and University High: “There is a clear governance and management relationship between the two,” he said. “The relationship is of concern because the IGU has no track record of working with the community.”

In addition, the charter application listed the Community College of the District of Columbia as a partner. Julie Johnson, Deputy Director of CCDC, in turn has made clear that no relationship exists nor were there any plans for a future relationship. The application was subsequently rejected.

When reached, Dr Boek said that he could not comment but that there would be “a news release going to go out tomorrow. I am not ready to make a comment today. But we will continue to do the things we have been doing,” adding that a program for “addiction counselors” would be going forward. ★