



IN REPLY REFER TO

United States Department of the Interior**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

C&O Canal National Historical Park

1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100

Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Kempthorne:

In its advisory and consultative role regarding general policies and specific matters related to the administration and development of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, the C & O Canal (Commission) wishes to advise you against approving the proposal by Georgetown University to build a boathouse along the Potomac River on public land (Tract 102-114) within the park.

The proposal requires an exchange of land (Tract 102-109) between the National Park Service and the Georgetown University for the sole purpose of developing a private facility on public land which Congress has set aside for an entirely different purpose, namely to preserve and interpret the historic and scenic features of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and to develop the potential of the C&O Canal for public recreation. The proposal does neither.

Prior to the availability of the Environmental Assessment (EA), the Commission made its objections to the Georgetown University proposal and the land exchange known to the Regional Director of the National Capital Region and to the Director of the National Park Service. Since then, the Commission has studied the contents of the EA and has found nothing within the document to diminish its concerns or justify the University's proposal and the land exchange.

The Commission therefore remains unanimous in its advice to you to reject Georgetown University's proposal as well as the requisite land exchange. The exchange would set a precedent for allowing additional development on privately owned sites currently within the park, including the expansion of intrusive private enclaves acquired prior to 1971. The provisions of the land exchange also would have the precedent-setting effect of reducing the benefits the National Park Service should be expected to require in any land exchange involving the C&O Canal National Historical Park or other public areas entrusted to its stewardship.

In addition to recasting the ground rules for land exchanges, the proposal voids the public's rightful access to the scenic and physical amenities of the park at the proposed boathouse site and it encumbers public use of the Capital Crescent Trail within the proposed development area.

After careful consideration, the Commission is unable to find any real benefit to the park, the public or the National Park Service in Georgetown University's proposal. Moreover the Commission does not find in the legislation that created the park any obligation or expectation on the part of the National Park Service to provide for needs of Georgetown University's athletic program.

The Commission is available to you should you have questions or desire additional information regarding its advice on this matter.

On behalf of the Commission,

Sincerely,



Sheila R. Weidenfeld, Chairperson

Enclosure

cc. Director, National Park Service
cc. Regional Director, National Capital Region
cc. Superintendent, C&O Canal NHP

Chesapeake & Ohio National Historical Park Commission Position on the Georgetown University Boathouse Environmental Assessment.

On studying the Georgetown University Boathouse Environmental Assessment, the C&O National Historical Park Commission believes the exchange of public land for private use violates Public Law 91-664 and the charge to the National Park Service to preserve and interpret the historic and scenic features of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and to develop the potential of the canal for public recreation. The Commission finds the EA to be deficient in assessing numerous aspects of the Georgetown University proposal including but not limited to the following:

- * The highest and best use of parcel 102-114 for public benefit.
- * Hydrological impacts on the canal embankment and the towpath of the EA-predicted 40% to 100% increase in water velocity during flood to be caused by the proposed structure.
- * Potential impacts on public health during and after construction of the boathouse, particularly should the corroding 84-inch diameter sewer line, which runs under the site, rupture.
- * The impact of this boathouse on other users of the river and the waterfront including the Capital Crescent Trail.
- * The actual possibility of building on site 102-109, considering the error in drawing the easement lines across the Capital Crescent Trail and the misunderstanding that this easement permits construction and grading rather than simply "ingress and egress" as stated.
- * The actual value of the two parcels determined by an impartial appraisal.
- * Provisions for monitoring the site and maintaining public safety and the cost to NPS for enforcing the terms of any agreement with Georgetown University.
- * A critical assessment of Georgetown University's actual boathouse needs, including the need for twice the number of boats they now have and the need to accommodate ergometers, rowing tanks and other non-boat-storage uses on the same site.
- * Meaningful consideration of all potential sites along the Georgetown Waterfront, both inside and outside the boathouse zone in as much as the proposed location of this boathouse extends beyond the zone.
- * The future effect of this precedent-setting proposal. The park has granted leases to other entities but never given up land.

The Commission believe an in depth, unbiased and more professional study of these issues will lead to a far better and fairer solution, allow the public full enjoyment of the C&O Canal National Historical Park and still provide boathouse space for Georgetown University and other institutions.

The Commission believes that the appropriate option of those considered by the EA is option D,

the no-build option. In the event that Georgetown University proposal is accepted, the Commission strongly recommends that an Environmental Impact Statement be prepared for the entire Georgetown waterfront and that deficiencies in the EA be addressed in the FIS.