

Jan. 23, 2005

To The Editor of *The Current Newspaper*:

Stop the Conversion of C&O Canal Park Land to Private Use!

Let us go to the heart of the Georgetown boathouse issue that has stirred a public outcry.

The Park Service plan to turn over to Georgetown property of the C&O Canal National Historical Park for a private boathouse, is indefensible on its face. A private boathouse in the park has nothing to do with the public uses and purposes of our unique canal park. It invades the corridor between canal and river that park policy has been at pains to keep in a natural state and free of intrusion. The park throughout the years has used its legal authority to “round out” boundaries and to close out private “in-holdings.” That policy flows from the legislation creating the park. A Georgetown boathouse, any boathouse, would be a total reversal of this basic policy of the C&O Canal National Historical Park. It would ignore the will and intention of Congress in the park legislation. The boathouse plan, if carried out, sets a precedent for other takeovers of park land. None of these outcomes should be allowed to occur.

It is apparent that Georgetown sees the national park as fair game and is bent on getting its way. What began as 4000 sq ft footprint has transmogrified into 19,000 sq ft. with some 33,000 sq ft of interior floor space. Along the way Georgetown scorned its MOA with the park service in drawing up its mammoth design. Ideal as a party house too, it will look marvelous on brochures showing the university rising above it. The site is not all that adaptable for a big boating program. Wedged between canal and river, access to the site is constricted. No attention was paid to the building’s blockage of the canal view shed.

The ballooning of the project has proceeded without a murmur from the NPS and without Georgetown showing any concern about the negative impression its conduct is creating among the public.

Since alternatives to this planned takeover exist one asks: “What prevents the park service from doing what is right and insisting on an alternative site?” If it were to do so, the honor of the NPS would be preserved as the protector, not despoiler, of the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

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