

31 Jan 2006
NWCcurrent

Dear Sir or Madam:

In your last issue, two especially interesting items appeared side by side. One was an editorial entitled "Scenic Treasures," which called attention to the fact that the District government is applying to have the Canal Road corridor recognized as a federal Scenic Byway. The other was a letter concerning Georgetown University's proposal to build a large private boathouse within the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

The juxtaposition of these two items highlights an ongoing clash in attitudes toward the lower part of the Potomac River gorge. The District is seeking recognition for the outstanding scenic assets long protected by the Canal Park, which lies between Canal Road and the river. Meanwhile, the University continues to advance its plan for a structure that will intrude upon that same natural vista, blocking a view of the river and towering over the Capital Crescent Trail.

The District's draft plan for the Scenic Byway does not address the issue of the University boathouse, but it includes much that is relevant. The plan extols a "natural remnant" through which visitors "can sense the authentic feel of the City of Washington in its earliest years..." I believe that it is vital to preserve that exciting experience of natural beauty seen in a meaningful historical context. Georgetown University need not give up plans for a new boathouse, but should redirect its attention to the suitable sites that exist outside of the Canal Park. Such a decision would be applauded as a far-sighted act of civic responsibility.

Sincerely,

Ned Preston