



## *Washington Canoe Club*

3700 WATER STREET, NW  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20007

5/16/2003

Mr. John Parsons  
Associate Regional Director  
Land, Resources and Planning

RE: Your letter of May 7, 2003 – RE: Georgetown University Boathouse

Dear John;

Thank you for the letter of May 7<sup>th</sup> regarding the Georgetown University Boathouse. In the past, I have noted your tireless efforts, and would like to thank you for them again. Unfortunately, your letter raised many additional concerns regarding the structure proposed.

We've long been aware of the land that Georgetown University (GU) owns upstream. Further, we've finally seen a map showing the land. Frankly, I'm amazed at the land swap as it's proposed. I do not believe that this is in the public interest. I had been assured that GU actually had land that was usable as a site for a boathouse. While not a specific concern to the Washington Canoe Club, I am surprised that the National Park Service would take seriously the claim by Georgetown University that it intends to build on the upstream land. The impediments that NPS could easily place in the way of such a project (if NPS decided to protect the Potomac River Gorge) are such that the project could never be built.

### **Construction Effects:**

In your efforts to address the effects of construction on our building you raise some interesting points. I can well imagine that there will be no deep excavation. There will probably be a couple of hundred piles that will probably be driven into the mud with a 50-ton pile-driving hammer. It is this driving of the piles that may cause vibrations in the mud that have the possibility of causing grave structural damage to the historic WCC facility. Is GU aware of any studies that would indicate the amount of vibrational transfer to the WCC Boathouse? You then indicate that an Auger is to be used. I would expect that Caissons are more appropriate than augered pilings. What study of the soil and structural analysis is GU relying on to make vibrational transference calculations from the construction, or are these just assumptions? Why are the piles only 32' deep? I would have expected much deeper, given the size of the facility. In any event, it is clear from your letter that GU is still unsure as to the actual construction technique that will be used to stabilize the concrete slab. I do not believe that the zoning should be approved until these serious construction issues are resolved.

I'm very aware of the work done by Whiting –Turner, having many friends who work, or worked for Whiting-Turner. Moreover, I'm familiar with the Lab School of Washington effort. There are actually two buildings at Lab School of Washington, which are old, but neither is on the historic registry (as is WCC). Additionally, one of the two was damaged during construction. I'm not surprised you weren't aware of this, as most construction companies (the ones still in business) don't like to talk about damage. In other words, I would expect any construction manager to claim that great care will be taken. Unfortunately, WCC is not in a position to take them at their word. Additionally, as a building on the historic registry, the care during construction should be held to the highest possible standards.

The Zoning Commission documentation indicates that approximately 25,000 ft<sup>3</sup> of fill will be required. This is over one hundred dump truck loads of fill. That coupled with the 1000's of yards of concrete and other building materials required means literally thousands trips by heavy machinery in extremely close proximity to the Boathouse. I'm surprised that Whiting-Turner didn't propose a matted roadway, as that provides the least potential of damage to WCC. During construction a gravel road would be a disaster for WCC. Further, if this project proceeds, WCC will insist on the right of approval on the independent inspector and desires to hold discussions with him/her prior to his/her selection.

### **On the Water Concerns:**

Our point is that given the close proximity and traditional river routes that paddlers and oarsmen take (for well established reasons) the placement will cause disruptions regardless of the amount of planning and goodwill. Georgetown's eights and other shells will launch in an upstream direction and will return to dock from the downstream, necessarily cutting across our docks where we launch. This will be untenable. If a sailing program is added there, as indicated in the zoning documentation there is no telling how much disruption will occur.

It is interesting that you were told that is it about 100 meters from our dock to the nearest edge of the "rowing" lane. That, of course, is inaccurate. Mr. Johnson did meet to show me a drawing, unfortunately it was hand drawn and with number of unknowns regarding size and scale. To my knowledge, Mr. Johnson has not accurately surveyed the Potomac and determined exactly where the "rowing" lane is. I can, however, believe that GU would say, and promise anything at this point. Unfortunately, if it's not in the written exchange agreement, I don't believe it will stand the test of time.

### **Environmental Concerns:**

WCC has a large number of environmental concerns. I strongly request that a supplement be done to the Environmental Assessment due to the significant change in the project since the 1995 Environmental Assessment. While the assessment states that a boathouse will be built on the site, there is no indication of the size and scale of the structure. For the record, the proposed GU Boathouse is seven times the size of WCC (volumetrically). I don't believe that a reasonable person would have expected a structure of such a size, and thus a supplemental is warranted.

Moreover, at the December 2002 meeting with GU and NPS WCC requested the following:

- a hydrological study regarding the flow of the river at flood and the impact of the new structure on the ability of WCC to withstand a flood - which heretofore has withstood floods because of the Parkland upstream from the club,
- an assessment of the possibly damaging increase in sedimentation of the river given the 240' length and 25' width of the proposed docks.

At that meeting you agreed that GU should perform the hydrological study, and GU agreed. I'm still very interested in this study. I have not seen the FEMA study, and certainly FEMA did not contact WCC. I find it hard to believe that FEMA could perform such a study without a site survey of the potentially impacted structure. Was the FEMA study performed after the December meeting?

### **Size and Visual Impact:**

Regardless of the trimmings, this building is out of proportion to the other boathouses near Key Bridge. The GU "Fact Sheet" states:

"For Georgetown alumni, or anyone that appreciates the University skyline, how wonderful it will be to have a University Boathouse aligned with the towers of the Healy Building. It will be a memorable, identifiable landmark. A lasting image."

Obviously, GU is very concerned about augmenting the University skyline. I believe that is the best explanation for the size of the structure. And as you know, the drawings submitted to the commissions and boards offered a perspective that made the new and old buildings appear roughly equal in size. Further, you state that every attempt has been made to control the scale. This did set me back with the question: just how big did GU originally want it? A review of the Zoning Commission documents shows that the proposed Boathouse is as large as can possibly be built in the W-0 zone. You indicate the 100-year flood plain set the height of the building. Yet the building height ranges from slightly over 40' to over 55'. I'd like to quote precise numbers, but unfortunately GU refused our request (that you agreed to) for a complete set of drawings, as was agreed to at the December meeting. While this has made it difficult, I believe I'm close when I quote sizes and dimensions. Finally what is the 100-year flood level at the proposed site? What government requirements demand that the building be twice as long as WCC and three times as long as PBC? With only 6,000 undergraduates just how many crews is GU going to field in collegiate rowing? As far as meeting programmatic "requirements," that is a simply ludicrous statement. PBC has fielded Olympic teams with much, much less. As have a number of great Universities.

Finally, I'm well aware of the National Park Service's ability to encumber development, when it finds such encumbrances are in the public interest. If NPS had wanted to restrict the visual impact of the structure on the C&O National Historic Park, and WCC it could have easily done so.

#### **Post Construction:**

Obviously we are still very concerned about the use of the facility post construction. The NPS has the ability to encumber the building with restrictions. Those encumbrances about future usage are the only way to ensure that GU's current statements about the facility and its future use will be followed. A discussion with Mr. Johnson made it clear that GU was uninterested in such a codicil to the exchange agreement.

VR & thank you very much,

/s/

Lawrence C. Schuette  
President, WCC  
PO BOX 25449  
Washington, DC 20375