

Only the National Park Service Could Build the Largest Collegiate Boathouse on the East Coast in the C&O Canal NHP

Georgetown University Boathouse: A Bad Deal for the Public!



I. What Is The Issue? The Public Will Permanently Lose C&O Canal National Historical Park Property To A Private Entity

- The development sets a precedent for loss of other publicly owned sites and parkland to a private entity.
- The boathouse will be the first structure to be built in the C&O Canal National Historical Park (C&O NHP) since the founding of the park. The land is being swapped for unbuildable “bottomland” upstream.
- The land at this location forms part of a busy and narrow public recreational corridor of the C&O NHP, the Potomac Gorge and the Capital Crescent Trail, valued by hikers, bikers, boaters, historians and others.

2. Georgetown University Boathouse Impacts Views In The Historic Setting

The massive size of the proposed structure is totally inappropriate for the site. The height, length, depth, width and bulk of the building, combined with the new access road and 70-foot dock, will have a profound negative visual impact on the surrounding areas used for recreational purposes, such as the river shoreline, the C&O NHP, the Capital Crescent Trail, the American Discovery Trail, the National Heritage Trail and the Towpath. In addition, the project will also affect views from the GW Parkway, Canal Road and Key Bridge. **Indeed, the NPS got initial approval for a boathouse on the site by calling for a 4,000 square foot structure. However, the Georgetown University (GU) Boathouse as now proposed is 23,000 square feet. Why the Bloat?**

How Big is 23,000 square feet? Let’s put its Enormous Size into perspective! It is:

- **Twice** the size of the adjacent Washington Canoe Club and Potomac Boat Club **combined!!**.
- **Five times larger than what was originally proposed.**
- **Two-thirds larger and one-third taller than the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA),** signed by GU and NPS in 1998. **(But NPS and GU said it was an “average” size. In fact, it is the largest boathouse** on the East Coast and the largest structure ever built in the C&O NHP.)

- The length of a football field.
- Twenty-one feet above the canal, seven feet above Canal Road.

Does the University “need” a Boathouse this big? Absolutely NOT!

- The adjacent Potomac Boat Club can hold double the number of boating shells in a boathouse that is one-third the square footage and one-sixth the volume.
- The rowing tank can be located on campus. No other university has a tank this large in a boathouse. Most are on campus if they have one.
- GU’s rowing program is similar in size to schools with facilities one-third the size.

But surely everyone agrees to the size? NO! The following Commissions Oppose the Size!

- Size and scale were unanimously opposed by the C&O NHP Presidential Advisory Commission.
- National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) stated that the project must comply with MOA between GU and National Park Service (NPS). (NPS now proposes to modify the MOA after the NCPC review, thereby violating the intent of the NCPC guidance.)
- Dozens of national, regional and local groups have joined to oppose the structure once the true size and impact were known. **NPS worked hard to hide the true size and scale.**

Does the boathouse “need” to be there? NO! Excellent Alternatives Exist!

- Anacostia River is ripe for development – away from the 220 year old C&O NHP.
- Other Potomac River sites that won’t impact the C&O Canal are available. These include sites recommended by NPS in the 1987 Georgetown Waterfront Plan.

3. Physical Impacts to Washington Canoe Club (WCC) and C&O NHP

No National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) study exists to analyze the impacts of this building. An outdated 1995 environmental assessment (EA) only discussed the land swap. (“Splitting” an EA is against federal regulations.) To date there has been no engineering analysis showing the impact (or lack thereof) of damage to either the C&O Canal or WCC from the construction. The **potential for extensive destruction is great.** Likewise, GU and NPS reneged on their promise to conduct a hydrologic study of the building’s impact on the Canal and the Washington Canoe Club (WCC) – both historic structures -- at flood stage. **Will the US taxpayer be left holding the bag to pay for the eventual damage and massive cleanup?**

Hydrologic Impacts

- The proposed GU boathouse accommodates flooding with a flow-through design. WCC, located immediately downstream of the site, expresses concern that water that previously accumulated in the adjacent wetland will “flow-through” to exacerbate flooding at WCC. What effects will this design have on WCC and the Canal?
- Devastation will occur to the C&O Canal and WCC if the fragile Canal breaks due to undercutting of the embankment. GU will move the Capital Crescent Trail to accommodate a new road for the GU boathouse. Measurements show that the Canal will require a retaining wall to maintain structural integrity of the bank. Neither GU nor NPS acknowledges the need to alter the Canal bank to accommodate the new road. No study exists to assess the impact of the 200 auger piles that will be placed just 25 feet from the Canal embankment.
- The seventy-foot dock will cause river silt to accumulate and severely impact the shoreline, used by WCC and other boaters. (See EA for proposed Potomac River floating restaurant project for reference to similar concerns.)
- *How much of the proposed 25,000 cubic yards of fill to be used in construction will end up downstream in WCC boathouse as a result of flooding?*

Impacts During Boathouse Construction

- WCC and the Canal need provisions to protect their historic properties during and after construction. The access road to the new boathouse would be immediately adjacent to the

boathouse. What is the setback between the new road and WCC building? Will GU post a bond to assure that no damage occurs? Will GU be required to barge concrete and heavy materials to the site, similar to construction of Wilson Bridge?

- WCC has concerns regarding the effects of auger piles and the injection of high-pressure grout into the ground. These piles could easily alter the C&O Canal embankment and cause it to collapse. Such a collapse would wipe out the historic Washington Canoe Club. Certainly there is no engineering evidence to counter this possibility. How far will NPS allow this project to proceed without sound engineering analysis? **What else is the NPS hiding?**

4. Bikers And Hikers Traveling the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT) Will Face Serious Safety Hazards And Diminished Usage Of The Trail. The University Will Take A Portion Of The CCT To Construct An Access Road For Its Boathouse

The CCT provides a major recreational and commuter link through the city for hikers, walkers and bikers. In fact, the trail is currently almost half the width it should be to handle the 600 users per hour who crowd the trail during peak times in the afternoon and weekend. This is especially true in the section near Georgetown. Yet, GU would effectively reduce the width of the CCT by 30 per cent, forcing users to navigate between a road barricade on one side and Canal embankment on the other. The relocated CCT would still have a paved width of ten feet, but the GU plan removes any shoulder or safety "breakdown area" along the side. This reduces the effective width to approximately seven feet.

5. Who Opposes The Current Location And Size For The GU Boathouse?

Defenders of Potomac River Parkland Includes:

American Canoe Association, American Whitewater Association, Audubon Naturalist Society, Canoe Cruisers Association, C&O Canal Association, Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail, DC Chapter of the Sierra Club, League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia, National Parks Conservation Association, Potomac Pedalers Touring Club, Washington Canoe Club, area citizens and residents of communities adjoining the Park (Georgetown, Palisades, and Foxhall Village).

6. What Can You Do?

Write to your Congressional Representative and Senators: www.house.gov, and www.senate.gov (Suggested individuals: US Senate - Honorable Susan Collins, Barbara Mikulski, James Jeffords, Craig Thomas; House of Representatives - Honorable Roscoe Bartlett, Tom Davis, Jim Moran, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Richard W. Pombo, Charles Taylor, Chris Van Hollen)

Contact the National Capital Planning Commission, info@ncpc.gov

Contact the Director of the National Park Service, Fran Mainella (Fran_Mainella@nps.gov, 202 208 4621)

Contact the Archdiocese of Washington: Bishop Kevin Farrell, chancery@adw.org

Ask them to please stop the transfer of C&O Canal NHP land to Georgetown University for the construction of a private boathouse.