



Washington Canoe Club

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

Lawrence C. Schuette, President

Madam Chairwoman, I am here today representing the Washington Canoe Club. The Washington Canoe Club was founded in 1904 and is internationally recognized as the organization that started the Olympic Sport of Canoe and Kayak. We provide opportunities for athletes as young as 8 and as old as 80 to pursue their dreams - whether those dreams are Olympic, or of getting out of the city for a day. We are very proud of our heritage and of our outreach. While we are a private club, we are open to all who are interested in the sports of Canoeing and Kayaking.

I firmly believe that I would not be here today if the National Park Service were living up to its responsibility to protect and preserve the National Parks for the public and future generations. We first became aware of an interest to place more boathouses on the Potomac in the mid 1980s. We welcomed the idea - promoting the use of the river comes naturally to those who love the water. The plans that were approved showed a series of Boathouses that are similar in size to the Washington Canoe Club and Potomac Boat Club. It appeared that the Park Service was providing good stewardship and was acting in the public's interest. Hopefully it is not too late for your direct intervention to impact the proposed Boathouse.

These plans were approved by various approving committees and officials and all agreed they were good. In the mid 1990s an Environmental Assessment was performed on the swapping of land with GU. We said nothing - even as they proposed taking part of the land first leased by the club from the railroad and more recently from the Park Service. The Board felt that the NPS would look out for the public's interests. Indeed we were told by NPS officials that the new Boathouse would be "scale and proportional to WCC".

In November of 2002, however, a malignancy within the NPS became apparent. A series of renderings (Figure 1) commissioned by the University showing the Boathouse were provided to us. These renderings were used to "Sell" the Boathouse. We were informed that the Environmental Assessment performed in 1995 covered the construction and that "everyone" approved of the boathouse - including among others, the C&O Canal National Historic Park Advisory Commission. Because of the perspective in the drawings, we asked for an additional picture - one with a straight shot from across the river that showed the new boathouse and the Washington Canoe Club. That view was devastating. It showed the true extent of the GU Boathouse - twice as tall, twice as long and twice as wide as the Washington Canoe Club. We were informed by the NPS at June 2004 meeting that the Boathouse "would be no where near the height of Canal Road". Subsequent measurements proved NPS wrong. It's so large that as planned it is 13 feet above Canal Road! The photo eventually led to a systematic unraveling of the "facts" provided by NPS and GU. See Figures 3 and 4 for what the proposed structure will look like from Canal Road. Obviously it's even bigger from the Canal or the Capital Crescent Trail.

Madam Chairwoman, I attended the hearing several weeks ago where you called for a Department of the Environment. This proposed Boathouse is a poster child of why the city needs and the City residents deserve such an organization. NPS and GU used the acceptance of a 4,000 to 8,000 Square Foot Boathouse (similar in size to Washington Canoe Club or Potomac Boat Club) to create a structure with a footprint of 19,000 Square Feet. Protests from GU and NPS notwithstanding the rendering we provide below (Figure 2) is faithful to the size and impact on the scenic views. NPS and

GU protested that "we made their boathouse too large". We respectfully disagree, it is apparent that they made the boathouse too large. So large that in July of 2004 NPS and GU had to revise their figures of the height of the C&O Canal. It's 5 to 7 feet lower than they "thought".

We are led to believe that building acceptance by using prior approvals, misleading information and incorrect data is apparently a time honored technique to get controversial projects through the system. Unless this boathouse is stopped or dramatically scaled back (to the original approved size) the Public will one day wake up to a nightmare on the Potomac.

Some facts that were found to not be true:

1) The GU Boathouse has not been approved by the C&O Canal NHP Advisory Commission. How much impact did that fact have on the DC Zoning Commission? A Commission incidentally that has as one of it's two federal members the Director of Land Use/National Capital Region/National Park Service. The same person who has been pushing the boathouse through the process (The same Director of Land Use sits on the National Capital Planning Commission - where are the "checks and balances"?)

2) Nor is the GU Boathouse planned approved in the "Georgetown Waterfront Park, Non Motorized Boathouse Zone study". What is approved is a 4,000 to 8,000 Square foot boathouse. Would you want a neighbor building a house that was 4 to 8 times larger than was agreed to? Would you want the Federal Government trying to slip it past the City?

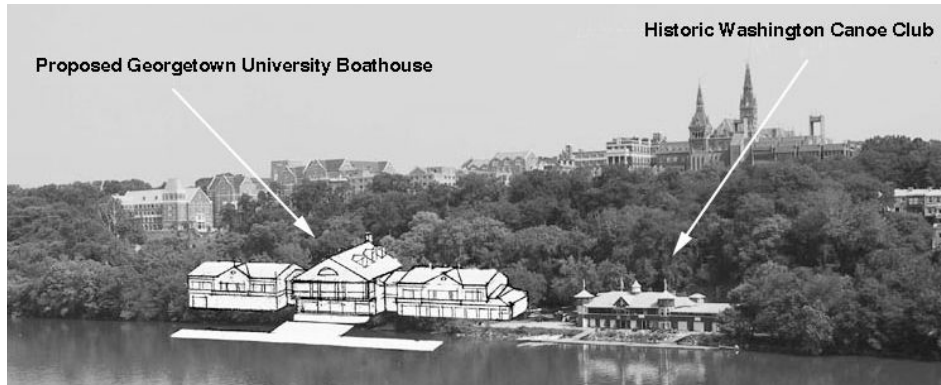
2) The GU Boathouse planned was not approved by the National Capital Planning Commission.

3) Importantly, the environmental assessment performed in 1995 only considered the landswap. References to a boathouse talked about one that was limited in size to 4-8,000 SF and some 200 feet closer to Key Bridge. In other words the EA was for a much smaller structure with less extent into the Potomac Gorge. An EA can be a serious study. NPS did not see the need to coordinate with the DC Bureau of Environmental Quality. In the future, the DEP needs to take a strong lead on the National Park Service. "Splitting" the EA into segments is against the regulations and the NPS must be aware of this (the responsibility of the NPS is to protect and preserve). Only a lawsuit for an Environmental Impact Study (a much stronger and through study than an EA) caused the NPS to charter an EA. The EA is being paid for by Georgetown University and managed by the same office that performed the EA in 1995. A cynical person would say that the answer is pre-ordained. A strong city DEP would stop such nonsense. By all accounts the interests of the City are being co-opted by NPS.

In closing, what are the City interests that are served by a GU Boathouse? In addition to providing the University with a physical focal point for their rowing efforts it will free up 2,000 Square Feet at Thompson's. This space is highly sought after by the High School Rowers. GU houses 19 shells at Thompson's. Thus what the City students gain is space for an additional 19 shells. What does the City loose? The City loses all the things the Park Service was supposed to protect - the scenic views from the Canal and of the River, increased congestion on the Capital Crescent trail, the potential for environmental damage from ill-designed Docks and the real potential for damage to the Canal embankment. Much of the problems associated with the design should have been negotiated away by the Park Service - requiring a low roof line, sticking to a small boathouse for example. Both of these would have saved the views, the canal and the river AND provided the HS rowers with additional space. NPS didn't bother to look out for the City residents - SHAME on the Federal Government for once again taking advantage of the City residents.

The City could and should stop NPS and GU in it's tracks. The entire Nonmotorized Boathouse Zone, and the Whitehurst Freeway should be included into a single Environmental Impact Study. We ask

that you call on the Department of Interior and Director of the National Park Service to stop the madness and start protecting the people's park.



Washington Canoe Club viewed from Canal Road



Roofline viewed from Canal Road