

Dear National Park Service:

Re. Comments on Georgetown University boathouse proposed for C&O Canal National Historical Park

When I first became aware, on reading a letter to the 'Current' in mid-2004, that the National Park Service (NPS) was not protecting the C&O Canal National Historical Park (C&OCNHP) from a proposed Georgetown University (GU) boathouse, I was shocked, and my shock, disappointment and outrage have not abated. I submitted comments in January '05, summer '06, and now in January '08.

At the EIS scoping meeting in December 2007, I felt a greater sense of comity and cooperation from representatives of GU than at the January 2005 scoping meeting, as if GU boathouse proponents realize that many alternatives for siting a GU boathouse exist besides the site proposed within the C&OCNHP.

I urge the NPS to include an expanded range of alternative sites in the EIS: a 'universal' boathouse of shared facilities for GU, Geo. Washington U. (GWU), high school rowing teams, and the public; expansion of Thompson Boat Center; building adjacent GU and GWU boathouses near 34th & K Sts.; and building boathouses on the Anacostia River or the Virginia side of the Potomac. Siting boathouses on degraded land protects the floodplain within the park's entrance as well as the narrow access to the Capital Crescent Trail, one of the most heavily used commuter and recreation trails in the nation.

The NPS and GU have never explained how a GU boathouse in the C&OCNHP would be in the public interest. The EIS should provide an explicit discussion of why the NPS would allow GU to occupy a premier national park site and deny access to the American people. The C&OCNHP should retain its integrity as a national park and not accommodate private use.

The C&OCNHP entrance above the Key Bridge exiting Georgetown should be a gateway introducing the historic towpath and canal that stretch into a 200-mile-long region, not confronting national park visitors with a huge private boathouse serving an elite. The impropriety of the NPS entertaining private development in the national park and GU's uncivic gesture of appropriating national parkland for its sole use undermine public regard and trust, at the least.

I join D.C. and metropolitan residents who urge the NPS and GU to site a GU boathouse away from the C&OCNHP. The EIS should rigorously examine an expanded array of alternative sites and investigate such critical concerns as:

-- destruction of a section of wooded tidal floodplain from the construction of a private boathouse at the narrow, fragile entrance to the C&OCNHP and Capital Crescent Trail and Potomac Gorge, setting a precedent for future development in the Park;

- congestion, safety and traffic at the busy gateway site and surrounding area during construction, maintenance and servicing of a huge private boathouse;
- hydrological impacts to the area during floods;
- direct and indirect impacts on natural resources, fish, wildlife, floodplains and wetlands, as well as denying access to hikers, birdwatchers, kayakers and canoeists; and
- potential impacts on public health during and after construction of a boathouse if the corroding 84-inch diameter sewer line which runs underground is ruptured.

The EIS should expedite a resolution that makes possible boathouse facilities for collegiate, high school, and public rowing activity without touching the C&OCNHP.

Thank you for considering my comments on the EIS.

Sally Sherman  
2475 Virginia Ave., N.W. #312  
Washington, D.C. 20037  
202-338-7698