

January 24, 2005
The Editor
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Re. Georgetown University Boathouse Proposal

Dear Sir:

On January 12, I participated with 15 other persons interested in the Georgetown University (GU) boathouse proposal in a site visit to the waterfront area including the upriver property owned by GU. GU's parcel, which the University would like to exchange with the National Park Service (NPS) for parkland near Key Bridge, is located within the C&O Canal National Historical Park about a mile upriver from Key Bridge. This property, which lies about 15 feet below the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT) and runs parallel to it, is a narrow rectangular strip of land approximately 1070 feet by 45 feet, of which only one third actually has river frontage.

Because of the 15-foot steep cliff along the CCT side of the tract, there is a protective fence for the safety of users of the Trail. The University also has a 15-foot wide easement from the entrance of the CCT near Key Bridge to GU's upriver parcel, over which there has been superimposed a 10-foot wide paved surface for bicycle and pedestrian use. To connect GU's upriver strip of land with the easement, the University would have to build a driveway down the 15-foot precipice to the property and then run it along its length reducing the usable width of the property to about 30 feet.

Our inspection of GU's upriver land confirmed that this parcel, because of its topography and marginal access, is unbuildable. The site inspection also revealed that there was insufficient room for a turnabout for emergency vehicles as well as boat trailers which are designed to transport 8-oar shells that are 60 feet long. Because of the 15-foot width of the easement, access to this parcel is at best marginal. Obviously, there are many places along this easement where vehicles could not pass each other in opposite directions.

Even GU concedes that its upriver parcel is unusable for the construction of a rowing boathouse. When GU acquired this property, the University actually considered locating its boathouse at this site. In this connection, the University's architect made some sketches of a possible boathouse at this location and explored running power and utility lines under the easement. However, GU concluded that this site for a boathouse wouldn't work and gave up the project.

In 1999, NPS selected an appraiser to assess the two sites considered for the proposed land exchange. This NPS-retained appraiser concluded that GU's upriver parcel was unbuildable because of its topography and marginal access. He determined that the property's highest and best use is for incorporation into the C&O Canal National Historical Park, within which it is already located. This appraisal was not approved by

NPS staff because, in the words of the staff, the "appraiser's determination of the property's highest and best use was based solely on his opinion." Of course, an appraisal is but an opinion based on the appraiser's education, training and expertise. This appraisal was rejected by NPS and the contract with the appraiser terminated. Based on our inspection of this parcel on January 12, I believe NPS staff rejected this appraisal because it simply didn't like the conclusions reached by the appraiser. In other words, if you don't like the message, kill the messenger.

As a site for a boathouse, the upriver parcel is of no value to GU. For that reason, the public will get nothing from this so-called land exchange. Based on the facts set forth above, I submit that it is disingenuous for officials of NPS to continue to push the proposition that if this proposed land exchange is not consummated, GU will build its boathouse on its upriver land. Thus, rather than continuing to argue for a discredited position, NPS should seek another alternative.

Sincerely,

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