

## "On the Potomac" - Public Benefits? Think Again!

The Current's editorial of 1/26, "On the Potomac," stated that there would be "a host of public benefits" from the construction of a private Georgetown University boathouse in the C&O Canal National Historical Park, and then listed only two: indirect benefits to high school rowers from GU vacating space at Thompson's Boat Center (15 boats), and direct benefits to just one group of athletes -- the rowers of Georgetown University (whose proposed facility could accommodate up to 50 boats, leaving 55 high school boats still in need of shelter at the public boathouse).

But the editorial failed to include the many losses to the public from a GU boathouse in the C&O Canal National Historical Park, such as:

- The private development project would set a precedent for future private development in the national park;
- The natural setting at the gateway to the national park, the Potomac Gorge and the Capital Crescent Trail would be compromised;
- GU's 75-foot private dock would extend out into the Potomac River, blocking established boating routes along the shoreline;
- Safety to trail users along the busy, narrow and fragile recreational corridor in the national park, during and after construction of the boathouse, would be at risk;
- The viewshed, traffic patterns, and floodplain at the entrance to the national park would be changed forever.

The editorial also failed to mention the benefits to the public -- technical, practical and environmental -- from an alternative plan, such as GU's facility at a different location, or a "universal" boathouse outside the national park and open to everyone. A public-private boathouse, with a 21st century, state-of-the-art design, shared by university, high school and other programs, with a public viewing stand and cafe on the roof, a great room for training, trophy presentations and social gatherings, and a promenade in front of the building could be one of several new boathouses along the waterfront. Such a plan would truly animate the waterfront, respond to the needs of everyone, provide an anchor for a "boathouse row" and protect the C&O Canal National Historical Park all at the same time!

After reviewing the issues further, the editorial board may wish to rethink its position on the GU boathouse proposal, and join in a dialogue with its neighbors (including high school rowers) to develop a better boathouse plan for the Georgetown waterfront.

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