

February 02, 2005

Subject: Georgetown University Boathouse Editorial

Dear Mr. Griffith,

I wanted to correct a fairly serious error in your recent editorial endorsing the GU boathouse, and also try to clarify a couple of other items. First off I'd like to point out that the correct name for the organization I Chair is the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail (CCCT), and we have been in operation since 1986 - some 7 years before the first railroad ties were removed, and the first section of the CCT was paved. It has been our mission to get the CCT built from Georgetown to Silver Spring, and we are very proud of the Trail's popularity with so many outdoor enthusiasts who live in, or travel to, our area. Your editorial is incorrect in naming our organization as part of the suit brought by the Washington Canoe Club and the C&O Canal Association. While the CCCT chose not to join those two groups in their lawsuit, it seems clear that without that lawsuit NPS would have been happy to skip any assessment of the environmental impact the proposed boathouse would have on that area. Given the problems the C&O Canal embankment has had in recent years, the fact that the CCT will be squeezed between that embankment and the boathouse, the effect such an enormous structure could have on water flow during the Potomac's not infrequent flooding in that area, and its clear impacts on historic views, wouldn't you agree that the protectors of our National Parks should have called for an unbiased study without someone having to sue them? Finally, I should point out that the "boathouse zone" was established in the 1987 (not 1997) Georgetown Waterfront Master Plan, and that plan called for an upper limit on the boathouse zone of 1000' upstream from Key Bridge (the proposed site extends to 1250' upriver from Key Bridge). That plan also showed a 4000 Sq. ft. footprint for a boathouse on this site, as opposed to the currently proposed footprint of 19,000 sq. ft. In addition, in April 1996, the head of the C&O Canal National Historic Park, insisted that language be added to the exchange agreement (which was formalized in 1998) limiting the height of a boathouse built on the proposed site to that of the adjacent WCC boathouse. While the CCCT believes that any objective observer, looking at the Waterfront Park as a whole, would have to agree that the best sites for collegiate rowing facilities are in the area around 34th & Water Streets, we have not opposed a boathouse on the proposed site, so long as it is much more in line with what has been planned for in that area, can be shown to not have serious negative impacts on the environment, and does not negatively impact the public's ever increasing use of the Capital Crescent Trail. Your editorial seemed to write off the opposition to the proposed boathouse as simply a battle over turf. I can assure you it is much more about protecting the public's interest, and ensuring that our National Parks get the protection they deserve.

Ernie Brooks

Chair, Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail

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