

12/21/05 "Current"

GU boathouse ought to get alternate site

VIEWPOINT

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The National Park Service is taking another look at the draft environmental assessment for the proposed Georgetown University boathouse, presumably including a consideration of alternative sites for the university's boathouse. Since the proposed site within the C&O Canal National Historical Park is clearly a mistake, this is welcome news to those who have sought to protect the integrity of that park as well as the entrance to the Capital Crescent Trail from the adverse environmental impact that construction of a boathouse would have in this area.

As far as I can tell, there are only two possible alternative sites for Georgetown University's boathouse.

The first is the old Dempsey site between the aqueduct and the Washington Canoe Club. While I believe a boathouse might be shoehorned into the Dempsey site, the space appears to be too restrictive for a collegiate boathouse. Also, any sizeable structure at that location would obstruct the view of the historic aqueduct.

The other site is the one that I, along with many others, have recommended since last January: immediately downstream and adjacent to the site for George Washington University's boathouse.

A few recommendations and observations follow:

- Eliminate any further consideration of the proposed site in the C&O Canal National Historical Park for Georgetown University's boathouse.
- Treat the entire waterfront from Washington Harbour to the Washington Canoe Club as one integrated area for land-use planning purposes. While many might prefer the Georgetown Waterfront Park to be entirely passive, I see no reason for this type of park to consume the entire 10 acres, the approximate size of the park. The arbitrary and artificial boundary separating the Georgetown Waterfront Park from the non-motorized boathouse zone should be redrawn to address the changing needs of the public. This boundary, drawn nearly 20 years ago, is outdated and in many ways irrelevant to the realities of 2005. It fails to recognize the growing demand for access to and use of the river.
- Since the Georgetown Waterfront Park is approximately 10 acres, locating Georgetown University's boathouse on a site at the far western edge of the park adjacent to George Washington University's site would amount to just a small intrusion in a por-

tion of that park planned as a buffer of grass and trees. Most of the currently approved design for the park would remain in place. A boathouse at this site would not restrict views to the park and river along street corridors perpendicular to Water Street.

- Georgetown University and George Washington University could share access roads and docks, thereby reducing the environmental impact. With the ever-expanding public interest in water-related activities, a boathouse at this site would be a reminder of the early history of Georgetown as a port. Nothing could be more magnificent as an anchor to the Georgetown Waterfront Park than two elegant collegiate boathouses side by side at the western end of the park.

- The Park Service should end its policy precluding George Washington University from proceeding toward the realization of its own boathouse until Georgetown University's boathouse situation is resolved. This policy is unfair and unreasonable. If George Washington's boathouse site is subject to an environmental assessment, then its site should be reviewed and considered along with the renewed document pertaining to Georgetown University. This is especially appropriate if the site ultimately selected for Georgetown University is contiguous with the George Washington site, as so many interested parties have recommended.

- The recommended alternative site for Georgetown University's boathouse adjacent to the George Washington site raises few, if any, National Environmental Policy Act issues. For this reason, the environmental assessment for both facilities should be concluded within a reasonably short period of time. The sooner both universities are able to move into their own boathouses, the better for the high school rowing programs, as much-needed space will become available at the Thompson Boat Center.

The adoption of these recommendations could result in a quickly approved environmental assessment. The cases currently pending in the U.S. District Court and the D.C. Court of Appeals would evaporate, thereby avoiding costly and protracted litigation.

I can see both universities breaking ground for their boathouses in the spring. The public's interest in the preservation and protection of the C&O Canal National Historical Park and the Capital Crescent Trail would be secured. And the Park Service would obtain Georgetown University's upstream parcel and the easement thereto for incorporation into the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

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