

Statement presented by Frances Gemmill for the D.C. League of Women Voters before the Public Oversight Roundtable on the Quality of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers and the Chesapeake Bay, and the proposed construction of a new Georgetown University Boathouse, On Wednesday, June 22, 2005 in the Council Chamber

Mrs. Schwartz and Council members, I will begin by expressing the League's appreciation to you for directing the attention of the Council and the rest of us to these important environmental issues. The League of Women Voters of the United States and most state, local, and regional Leagues throughout the country have long advocated for and supported such environmental goals as clean air and clean water.

The D.C. League has worked seriously for environmental issues in the past, and, in fact participated in organizing and leading a group encompassing Maryland and Virginia Leagues called the "Potomac Basin Inter-League Committee, which eventually coordinated efforts to bring jurisdictions together to clean up the Potomac, so that boaters who fall in the Potomac are no longer risking their lives, as they were some 40-50 years ago.

The District is required by the Home Rule Act to develop a Comprehensive Plan. The Plan contains Federal Elements, prepared by the National Capital Planning Commission, to guide development of Federal facilities, and District elements, to guide development for DC's neighborhood and business districts.

The Plan is currently undergoing a complete public review. The most recent Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1984 and 1985, and it has been updated periodically, most recently in 1998 and 1999. In 2002, Mayor Anthony Williams and the DC Council asked the Office of Planning to explore options for the format, content, and usefulness of the Plan. A 29-member Task Force of community and business leaders concluded that the Comprehensive Plan should undergo a complete revision, an effort which is now underway. The new Plan is still undergoing community discussion, and Final adoption of changes require approval by the DC Council planned for June 2006. It is to support a vision including "creating successful neighborhoods, increasing access to education and jobs, and connecting the whole city."

Against this background, it is appropriate that the Comprehensive Plan recognize the need for study of projects that will have a major impact on the rivers and their use. The proposed boathouse on the Potomac is a prime example. The DC League has repeatedly urged that this major project be included in a programmatic environmental impact statement (EIS) since May 2003, and we now repeat that recommendation by recommending that such an EIS be made part of the Comprehensive Plan. That study would include consideration of the possibilities for both public and private use – serving the needs of the general public and high school crews as well as those of private universities. Again, thank you for your attention to these environmental issues.