

July 6, 2005

The Honorable Carol Schwartz
Chair, Committee on Public Works and the Environment
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20004

Re. Georgetown University Boathouse Proposal

Dear Chairperson Schwartz and Members of the Committee:

I was not able to attend the roundtable June 22, 2005. However, I would like to express and document my thoughts about the Georgetown University (GU) Boathouse Proposal. This letter is to express opposition to the current GU boathouse proposal, the subject of the Public Oversight Roundtable, Committee on Public Works and the Environment.

As a former George Washington University (GWU) Division I collegiate rower, I understand the need for a new Potomac River boathouse facility. I want to support the needs of rowers and other Potomac River users; I protect and enjoy our backyard river daily, mostly from the seat of a whitewater kayak. I do not, however, support private development on public land at the expense of the public.

As resident of Montgomery County and regular bike commuter on the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT), I use the CCT daily-- on foot, rollerblade or bike-- for both exercise and transportation. I regularly commute and train on the trail, and can see from my bike seat a number of reasons why the proposed location for the GU Boathouse is inappropriate. The current proposed location is: (1) a private development on public land, (2) within a National Park and Trail, with recognized historical significance, (3) near an already a high-use, dangerous intersection of multiple public and private uses, (4) within an aesthetically pleasing natural "refuge" for the public, relatively close to an urban environment, and finally, (5) subject to flooding and erosion. Not only do I *not* want private development within our public lands, but I fear the closure and degradation of a highly valuable, highly used public resource. The trail, as it is today, carries tremendous value that contributes to the physical and psychological health and well-being of our nation's capital's residents and visitors. On the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail's website, the CCT is described as:

"the most-used rail-trail in the nation, transporting one million walkers and bicyclists a year to destinations as varied as suburban Bethesda Row, a trendy restaurant hotspot, and Fletcher's Boathouse, an angler's hangout. A green oasis in the midst of traffic-clogged suburbia, the Capital Crescent trail connects suburban Maryland to the Potomac waterfront with many natural and historic destinations in between."

This valuable public resource—the CCT— must be protected for its cultural, aesthetic, social, historical, psychological, spiritual, philosophical, and economic values. As much as I would like to see a new boathouse, the proposed location on public lands is inappropriate. In an alternate location, outside of the Park, I would like to see the first large boathouse in this area serving the needs of the general public and high schools, as well as private universities. The development of a private boathouse that serves only private needs **should not significantly negatively affect** the general public, *especially* if the development occurs on public land. I request an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this and any proposed construction within our public lands, as well as consideration of the needs of the entire community that any Federal development is mandated by law.

As a Montgomery County resident, regular bike commuter on the CCT, GWU Alumni, former GWU Division I collegiate rower, and member of Defenders of Potomac River Parkland, I am writing to suggest that the DC Council request the National Park Service to do three things related to the GU boathouse proposal:

- 1. Conduct a programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) of the Georgetown waterfront, including the non-motorized boathouse zone from 34th to 37th Sts.),** to ensure that preservation of environmental, historical, and public resources are addressed in the planning of three new boathouses (two private collegiate facilities and a public one), and that alternative sites, sizes and uses for the facilities are considered. According to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, an EIS is prepared "when a proposed action has the potential for significant impact on the natural or human environment or significant public controversy."
- 2. Protect and preserve the C&O Canal National Historical Park (Park) for public use, not develop it for private facilities.** The Park is a national, regional and local treasure which extends 185 miles along the Potomac River shoreline into West Virginia. Less than four miles of the Park lie within the boundary of the District of Columbia -- from Key Bridge to Chain Bridge -- providing an extraordinary historic, cultural and recreational corridor to residents and visitors to the District of Columbia. The CCT, the Canal Towpath and the Potomac Gorge, all part of the DC-section of the Park, are enjoyed by thousands of hikers, bikers, boaters, naturalists and others on an annual basis. To lose even one acre of green, Open Space at the Gateway to the Park, for the construction of an enormous private boathouse, would be a loss to everyone, even Georgetown University.
- 3. Build private boathouses outside the Park.** A better boathouse plan is possible. One of many alternative plans worth considering with environmental, technical and practical advantages over the outdated 1989 waterfront plan would be to build a Georgetown "Universal" Boathouse outside the Park. Instead of constructing three separate boathouses (two private collegiate ones and one public facility), as proposed by NPS, build only one public-private facility, between 34th St. and Key Bridge, and open it to university, high school and public boating programs, like Thompson's Boat Center at

the south end of Georgetown. I would support other creative and sustainable solutions that could both protect the Park and provide boating opportunities for everyone.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

S.J.
Chevy Chase, MD