

September 27, 2005

Ms. Fran P. Mainella
National Park Service Director
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re. Georgetown Waterfront Park

Dear Ms. Mainella:

The purpose of this letter is to urge a delay in the commencement of the demolition of the parking lot in the proposed Georgetown Waterfront Park. The reasons for this request follow.

1. The National Park Service is currently conducting an Environmental Assessment (EA) to determine the environmental impacts that would result in the construction by Georgetown University of a private boathouse about 300 ft. in length, 85 ft. in depth and 51 ft in height within the C&O Canal National Historical Park at the gateway to the Capital Crescent Trail near Key Bridge. Although EDAW, the consulting firm, transmitted a draft of its report to the Park Service in May, the EA has not as yet been released to the public for comment. Parenthetically, although the Park Service is EDAW's nominal client, Georgetown University is paying for the study. While I understand this arrangement is customary in these situations, I am sure you can understand my concern for the possibility of a conflict of interest, or at least the appearance of such a conflict.

2. So that there can be no misunderstanding of my position, I support a boathouse for Georgetown University on the Potomac River, but not at a location within the C&O Canal National Historical Park at the gateway to the Capital Crescent Trail near Key Bridge. Any structure, and especially the enormous boathouse proposed by the university at this site, would have an adverse environmental impact and adversely impact the public's use and enjoyment of this treasured area. In these circumstances, the university and the Park Service should seek an alternative site.

3. As part of its responsibility in conducting an EA, the Park Service must consider alternative sites for the location of the university's boathouse. In my opinion, an opinion shared by many with expertise in these matters, the ideal place for Georgetown University's boathouse would be immediately downstream and adjacent to George Washington University's assigned location. This would result in a small intrusion into what has been designated the Georgetown Waterfront Park. Georgetown University and George Washington could share access roads and docks thereby reducing the environmental impact on the area. Incidentally, I recommended this location for Georgetown University's boathouse in a letter to Joe Lawler, dated January 21, 2005. I

also enclose for your consideration an article I wrote for the Northwest Current on July 13, 2005, "GU Boathouse Ought to Shift Downriver."

4. The Georgetown Waterfront Park should not be treated by the National Park Service as the private preserve of a small self-appointed non-representative group of Georgetown residents calling themselves by the grand name "The Georgetown Waterfront Commission." Obviously, this so-called Commission has no authority whatsoever. While I do not question the interest and devotion of these residents, I do question the somewhat narrow focus of their perception of the design and contents for this park. For reasons which I do not understand, they appear to be adamantly opposed to a boathouse in this urban park. As federal parkland, the Georgetown Waterfront Park belongs not to a small group of residents of Georgetown but to the larger public.

5. At present, the non-motorized boathouse zone extends from 34th and Water Sts. to a point within the C&O Canal Park variously described by the Park Service as somewhere between 1,000 and 1,250 ft upriver from Key Bridge. This ambiguity as to the boundary occurs because, as a representative of the Park Service stated to the DC Council at a hearing on June 22, there is no "hard line in the woods" but just a "general guideline." The so-called non-motorized boathouse zone was established, if "established" is the right description, in the 1980s. Now, nearly 20 years later, the needs of the public for not only access to the river but use of the river is different, and land use planning of the entire waterfront should reflect these differences. Water sports, and especially rowing and crew, have expanded enormously over this period of time. The currently designated non-motorized boathouse zone is simply strangling this expansion of the recreational use of the river.

In consultation with a colleague with whom I discussed the contents of this letter, it was suggested that I be brief. To the extent that I have ignored this suggestion, I apologize. However, I could see no other way than to try to communicate to you what I have been saying to the Park Service for the last year or so.

Thank you for your kind consideration of my request to delay work on the Georgetown Waterfront Park.

Respectfully,

Robert B. Norris