

Testimony before the Public Oversight Roundtable, Committee on Public Works and the Environment, District of Columbia Council, by Edmund (Ned) Preston, 6306 Swords Way, Bethesda, Md. 20817, June 22, 2005.

I am a member of the C&O Canal Association and of other organizations concerned about the proposed Georgetown University boathouse, but I am testifying today as a private citizen and a resident of the National Capital Area. First, I wish to thank the committee and its chair for holding this roundtable. The boathouse question needs far more public attention than it has so far received.

The issue is vital because it involves the future of one of Washington's most important natural and cultural assets, a highly-visible portion of the C&O Canal National Historical Park. The proposed building would greatly alter a place that is valued and appreciated by local residents and by visitors from all over the country. A proposal of this significance deserves careful scrutiny by the broad public and by responsible officials at all levels of government. At the least, it requires preparation of a full Environmental Impact Statement rather than the Environmental Assessment that is currently under way.

I believe that careful and unbiased consideration will show that the university's proposal is extremely unsound. The plan reverses a long-standing policy aimed at enhancing the continuity of the historic C&O Canal towpath and the unspoiled nature of the adjacent river shore. It is based on an unequal exchange of land – and I ask anyone who doubts this point to visit the upstream property that the University wishes to trade for the proposed building site.

Construction of the boathouse would intrude on the view shed of the canal towpath and convert a section of the Capital Crescent Trail into a narrow, congested alleyway. The size of the boathouse is far out of scale with its surroundings and with any reasonable need. Yet even if the size were reduced, the proposal would still be unacceptable. Why? Because land that has been rightly set aside for the enjoyment of the whole nation should not be given to a private institution for the exclusive use of its members.

Unlike other major cities, Washington is blessed with an unspoiled river shoreline that reaches into the urban area. This is no accident, but reflects the forethought of those who worked hard to create and preserve the canal park. This priceless heritage can easily be whittled away by yielding to pressure for development. Approval of a new private boathouse within the canal park would be a destructive act and a disastrous precedent for the future. I hope that citizens and their representatives in government will reject this misguided proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.