

Boathouse construction could cause flooding, erosion

Re: "A raw deal: Georgetown's monster on the waterfront," June 23

Considering the number of issues involved, Harry Jaffe's column on the proposed Georgetown University boathouse is commendably insightful. Jaffe managed to highlight many of the environmental problems associated with this audacious National Park Service plan to promote a privately owned boathouse with no public benefit.

However, he didn't mention one of the most significant problems — the likely disaster to the C&O Canal embankment from the flooding that routinely occurs in this part of the Potomac.

Consider what would happen if the proposed football field length boathouse were to be constructed on the chosen site. Already swift floodwater velocities would sharply increase through the narrow channel between the boathouse wall and the canal bank, almost certainly causing strong erosion for sustained periods. One can only imagine the devastation that would result.

The Park Service gave lip service to this potential destruction by a very slight analysis and a brush-off conclusion in its Environmental Assessment. It's particularly unfortunate that this agency — whose job is to protect federal parks, including the C&O Canal — has refused to carry out a true Environmental Impact Statement, as requested over and over in public comments.

Jaffe performed a public service by inquiring about "the way the Park Service has handled the process." Indeed, this could be the most newsworthy aspect of the whole affair. Answers as to why the Park Service even considered trading properties of such obviously differing values should be sought, as well as why a few Georgetown citizens were included in the planning of the new waterfront park, but not the wider community in the area.

And especially how this collusion resulted in a place for the Georgetown University boathouse in the C&O National Historic Park, rather than in the degraded area below Key Bridge.

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