

1601-45th Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20007
June 20, 2011

The Honorable Anthony Hood
Chairman, District of Columbia Zoning Commission
441-4th Street, N. W., Room 220 South
Washington, D. C. 20001

Subject: Opinion Piece in the *Washington Post* on June 17, 2011, urging protection for Federal parkland in the District of Columbia, including Glover Archbold Park in connection with Georgetown University's 2010 campus plan, Zoning Commission case number 10-32

Dear Chairman Hood:

Please include the attached opinion piece, "How Neighbors Put the Squeeze on D.C.'s National Parks" by Neal Fitzpatrick and Kent Slowinski from the June 17, 2011 issue of the *Washington Post* in the administrative record of the case.

Sincerely,



Ann Haas

Enclosure

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 10-32
EXHIBIT NO. 328

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-neighbors-put-the-squeeze-on-dcs-national-parks/2011/06/08/AGtyOQZH_story.html

Opinions

How neighbors put the squeeze on D.C.'s national parks

By Neal Fitzpatrick and Kent Slowinski, Published: June 17, 2011

When we speak of natural places in Washington — havens for wildlife, sanctuaries of ecological integrity, destinations for people seeking a calm retreat — we are usually referring to our national parklands. Rock Creek Park, the C&O Canal and Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens are among the cherished places that generations of Washingtonians have visited to enjoy nature and find relief from noise and concrete. While the city does have numerous additional neighborhood parks, most of them are maintained by the D.C. government for recreation and other high-intensity uses.

But encroachment on the national parks' corridors of land and water is an ever-present danger in an urban setting like Washington. Institutions, commercial interests and homeowners all contribute to a steady loss of land and diminishment of these parks' integrity. To make matters worse, an understaffed National Park Service can't adequately police and defend these properties.

The latest threat comes from a plan by Georgetown University to run shuttle buses along the steep, western boundary of its campus abutting Glover Archbold Park, which is an arm of Rock Creek Park. The university projects running 233 buses daily, Monday through Friday, which could bring the vehicles along the park about 20 times an hour — a bus every 21 / 2 minutes. So much for peace and tranquillity in Glover Archbold.

With this plan, Georgetown is insisting on using a service road that twice has collapsed into the park because of faulty engineering, dumping sediment into Foundry Branch and the Potomac River. The road is showing signs of failing again, but university officials say an alternate internal loop road that would better serve the student community or a bus turnaround near the Lombardi Cancer Center will not work. The National Park Service, while unhappy, isn't contesting Georgetown's proposal.

The significance of Glover Archbold is well-known to naturalists. It was the site of a long-term bird breeding census spearheaded by environmentalist Rachel Carson while she was a resident of the Washington area.

But Glover Archbold is just the latest example. Other national parklands already have been seriously compromised. About 10 years ago, a developer began work on a nine-story apartment complex at the corner of Connecticut Avenue and Tilden Street, bordering the Melvin Hazen tributary of Rock Creek Park. Despite this highly visual imposition, and the disturbance of the stream's headwaters, the D.C. government required nothing from this developer to compensate for the damage done.

The past decade also has seen the spread of cellphone towers into Washington's national parks. This blight on the skyline and danger to birds is an unfortunate federal mandate that can't be overturned without an unlikely congressional policy reversal. Another threat from a federal initiative lies in the planned expansion of the Department of Homeland Security on Nebraska Avenue, next to headwaters of Foundry Branch in national parkland.

In all, Rock Creek Park officials estimate that there have been 90 instances of encroachment, big and small, throughout the properties in the 2,000 acres these

officials oversee. These include homeowners “borrowing” parkland for swimming pools or home additions — not to mention the constant dumping of trash and yard waste into stream valley ravines. Federal and city officials had to go to court in 2009 to get one homeowner to remove a 400-foot-long wall on the edge of Battery Kemble Park, another Park Service property.

In another boundary dispute, negotiations continue about a particularly invasive plan that would have cut down 60 mature trees, and destroyed breeding pools for amphibians to build 11 houses by Rock Creek Park, on the Montgomery County line near East-West Highway. Though the original clear-cut proposal has been headed off by a residents group and the Park Service, the property owners haven’t publicly abandoned their goal of building on the edge of the park.

The public should keep these cases in mind as Georgetown University prepares its “in your face” bus loop abutting Glover Archbold Park, and recall that the university also wants to muscle its way into C&O Canal National Historical Park by building a giant boathouse on the Capital Crescent Trail, just west of Key Bridge. That’s also National Park Service property.

On Monday night, the D.C. zoning commission will hold its final hearing on Georgetown University’s plan. The National Park Service must be more vigilant and work with concerned neighbors and elected officials to defend our national park sanctuaries in the District.

Neal Fitzpatrick is executive director of the Audubon Naturalist Society. Kent Slowinski is the advisory neighborhood commissioner for Wesley Heights.