Potomac River Sports Foundation

Washington, DC

2003 MAY 14 P 2:57
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

May 14, 2003

Ms. Carol Mitten
Chair,
Washington, DC Zoning Commission
441 Fourth Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Reference Case # 02-30, Georgetown University Boathouse

Dear Ms. Mitten,

On behalf of the Potomac River Sports Foundation, a non-profit charitable corporation organized and operated under the laws of the District of Columbia with a mission in supporting and promoting non-motorized water sports on the Potomac, I am pleased to offer the following comments with respect to the request from the National Park Service on behalf of Georgetown University for zoning a parcel of land in the Georgetown section of Washington, DC along the Potomac River for a rowing boathouse. The Potomac River Sports Foundation supports the location of a boathouse in this area and believes that the plans for the Georgetown facility are consistent with historical and current uses in the area.. A rowing boathouse is an appropriate, water dependent shoreline use, and the location of this facility immediately adjacent to the University's campus eliminates the need for parking or frequent vehicular access. We urge the Commission to approve the applicant's request for W-1 or W-O zoning with the appropriate adjustments requested.

For more than 135 years, this stretch of the Potomac River has been used for recreational purposes for by rowers and scullers. Dating back to the late 1800's, Georgetown University, in fact, was one of the early institutions to have a boathouse in the area. From this Potomac River base, the University became one of four university founders of the Intercollegiate Regatta Association, the premiere intercollegiate rowing championship today. The property described in Ref. Case #02-30 is located within the boathouse zone defined by the National Park Service in its 1987 plan for redeveloping the old post-industrial Georgetown waterfront into a functional park area for residents and visitors in a manner that paid its respects to its historical and continuing role in providing access to the River for DC-area rowing and paddling enthusiasts as detailed in a follow-up 1989 National Park Service study and report on non-motorized recreational boating

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
Case 02-30
Exhibit 157

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CASE NO.02-30
EXHIBIT NO.157

use and access . The current NPS boathouse zone extends along the Georgetown shoreline from a point 1,100 feet west (upstream) of Key Bridge to a point below the Bridge. The zone currently encompasses the Potomac Boat Club, Washington Canoe Club and Jack's Boats (a canoe and kayak livery).

Despite the popularity of water sports generally and rowing in particular, no new facilities have been built for more than 40 years. The last new boathouse, Harry T. Thompson' Boat Center, was constructed in 1960 by the National Park Service and is run as a Park Service concession by a private contractor. This facility's capacity has been temporarily extended via an outdoor, fenced storage area that accommodates approximately a dozen high school rowing programs. The number of rowing shells stored outside are equal or greater than the number stored within the facility. However, the planned Swedish Embassy would eliminate the temporary outdoor storage area in the very near future. The construction of the Georgetown Boathouse will facilitate the accomplishment of the Service's current plan to move shells from outdoor storage into Thompson's. Unless space becomes available in Thompson's, that is, unless Georgetown can relocate its shells to a new boathouse, many of these programs might be forced to close down.

By grouping the Georgetown Boathouse with existing boathouses, the National Park Service intends to define a limited and permanent zone for this popular form of water recreation. A land exchange between the University and the Service involves a property currently owned by the University approximately one mile upriver and an easement along the former CSX railroad bed (now accommodating the Capitol Crescent Rail Trail). The parties concurred that an exchange that would locate the University's desired boathouse within the NPS defined boathouse zone and vacate most of the mile long trail easement would be a far preferable alternative. The Foundation concurs in this assessment of the desirability of the land exchange.

The applicant's site sits astride the Dulles Interceptor Sewer, a 96 inch sewer main that runs through this site and in front of the Washington Canoe Club to the east. The fast land on which the sewer sits and the proposed Boathouse would rest is primarily manmade. Through land filling and leveling connected to the construction of the C & O Canal and railroad in the 1800's to the construction of the sewer in the 20th century and the partially initiated and halted construction of an intra city freeway connecting to a Three Sisters Bridge in 1970, this area has undergone radical transformation through human modification. Placing a water dependent and non-polluting use such as the proposed rowing boathouse would appropriately and permanently settle the use of this location for a use respectful of both the dominant natural environment of the River and adjacent parkland and also of historic Georgetown. Visual and physical access will be created or preserved to the River, a desirable objective in the view of the Foundation which seeks to encourage the appropriate recreational use of the Nation's River.

The Foundation believes that this proposed boathouse is an especially appropriate location for Georgetown University. It would be immediately adjacent to and accessible by the students on foot or by bicycle. Minimal vehicular traffic would be involved, and therefore the dedicated parking typically associated with marinas or similar recreational facilities would be both unnecessary as well as inappropriate to this shoreline location. We further understand that

the Park Service is seeking to eliminate more parking in the immediate shoreline zone throughout the new Georgetown Waterfront Park and C&O Canal National Historic Park areas so that this project would be one of very few uses consistent with those plans.

In summary, we are pleased to support the proposal to build the first new rowing boathouse facility on the Potomac River in nearly a half century. We urge the Zoning Commission to assign the applicant the desired zoning with appropriate adjustments to accommodate its purpose. And we commend the National Park Service, Georgetown University and other agencies and parties involved in shaping this proposal so effectively and openly to accommodate the myriad of considerations raised by interested parties and affected stakeholders.

Sincerely,

Erik J. Meyers
President,
Potomac River Sports Foundation
c/o 2002 North Lincoln Street
Arlington, VA 22207