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Zoning Commission
Carol Mitten, Chair
441 4th St, NW
Washington, DC 2001

Re: Case #02-30, Georgetown University Boathouse

Dear Commission Members:.

I write to urge approval of the zoning for Georgetown University's boathouse for its rowing program.

To identify myself, I serve as Vice President of the regional high school crew rowing association (National Capital Area Scholastic Rowing Association), which comprising some 40 schools in the metropolitan area is the largest in the nation and as Chair of the Potomac River high school boathouse coalition, comprising 13 high schools. I am an active masters rower and member of the Board of Governors of the Potomac Boat Club. And, I have served on the Georgetown Waterfront Commission and its boathouse committee since 1997.

The interests of all rowing programs are intertwined. The realization of the University's boathouse is crucial to the health of the high school rowing programs. The high school rowing teams desperately need permanent space for storage, to replace temporary storage near Thompson Boat Center which will soon be eliminated. When the University leaves Thompson's significant space will be opened up for the shells now in temporary storage.

Georgetown University's success in creating a wonderful new boathouse on the river will be important to all rowing programs on this part of the Potomac River.

The University's boathouse planning has been exposed to much public scrutiny and full discussion. Every month for five years, public discussion was had about many subjects concerning the much-desired GW Park. Issues of the building of boathouses were interlaced through all of these discussions. The 1989 designation of a boathouse zone, including the site for the new Georgetown University boathouse was frequently discussed. That site throughout was treated as a viable and appropriate location for a new boathouse. I served on the boathouse committee which at the outset had active participation from the Canoe Club as well as other participants interested in boathouses. Unfortunately, the Canoe Club ceased to participate early on.

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The sport of rowing has expanded enormously since the 1989 plans were developed, and even since the Waterfront Commission began its work. At present, there are four collegiate programs and 13 high school programs as well as hundreds of adults rowing as individuals or with clubs at Thompson Boat Center and at the Potomac Boat Club. A conservative estimate of the number of athletes participating directly in rowing activities on the Potomac is 1500-2000 – there are more than 800 high school students alone.

At Thompson Boat Center, some 60 rowing shells, mostly 8-person craft measuring 60 feet in length, are stored in an outside fenced-in compound. Most of these boats are the ones used by the high school crews. Even this make-shift home will become history when the structure for the Swedish Embassy is constructed in the next couple of years.

The current plan, endorsed by the Georgetown Waterfront Commission, the National Park Service and the Georgetown ANC, is for construction of the Georgetown University boathouse first, and another for George Washington University and finally one for smaller craft (single and double shells) adjacent to rental of canoes and kayaks at Jack's Canoes. Finally, then, the Thompson Boat Center is to be renovated to accommodate eight-person shells throughout, absorbing at last the boats currently stored in the temporary compound. The largest occupant by far of the renovated Thompson's will be the high school crews.

The proposed new boathouse facilities occupy three of the four the sites that since 1989 have been designated for boathouses, in the Georgetown Waterfront Park's planned "boathouse zone".

Because this information has been published and publicly debated over so many years, it is most unfortunate that objections are raised at the eleventh hour. The Georgetown Waterfront Park has been decades in the making and many, many citizens, not just the rowing community want to see momentum developed and progress made on the Park. Rowing is an integral part of that park and progress must be made on that aspect as well.

Sincerely yours,

Gretchen Gayle Ellsworth

Vice President, National Capital Area Scholastic Rowing Association
Chair, Scholastic Boathouse Coalition
Member of the Board of Governors, Potomac Boat Club