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NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION
801 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W. SUITE 301
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20576

NCPC File No. 5494

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE -
EXCHANGE OF LANDS WITHIN POTOMAC PALISADES PARKWAY AND CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO CANAL NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK (SITE ADJACENT TO WASHINGTON CANOE CLUB ALONG THE GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT) WITH GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY (SITE APPROXIMATELY ONE MILE WEST OF KEY BRIDGE BETWEEN THE CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL AND POTOMAC SHORELINE)

Clerk
ADOPTED 9/7
AS WRITTEN

Report to the National Park Service

September 7, 1995

The Commission approves, effective upon completion of the Section 106 review process, the National Park Service's exchange of lands within the Potomac Palisades Parkway and Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historic Park (site adjacent to Washington Canoe Club along the Georgetown Waterfront) with Georgetown University (site approximately one mile west of Key Bridge between the Capital Crescent Trail and the Potomac Shoreline), as shown on NCPC Map File No. 7.00(63.00)-40137

* * *

BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

Description of Proposal

The National Park Service (NPS), pursuant to Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952, as amended, has submitted a proposed land exchange between NPS and Georgetown University involving two parcels of land within the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historic Park. Section 5 of the Planning Act requires each Federal agency prior to proceeding with construction plans to submit its plans to the Commission for review. The Commission's review covers all aspects of the project, including planning and design.

As a result of the exchange of lands, the Park Service would acquire a key tract of land along the Potomac Palisades thereby assuring the preservation of this portion of the Palisades in a natural state.

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District of Columbia
Case 02-30
Exhibit 179

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.02-30
EXHIBIT NO.179

Conversely, Georgetown University would take possession of a parcel along the more developed portion of the Georgetown waterfront for the purpose of constructing a collegiate boathouse.

Both parcels, as noted above, are located within the boundaries of the C&O Canal National Historic Park. The National Park Service land, Tract 102-114, is approximately 1.0 acre in size. It is located just west of the Washington Canoe Club facility which is between the Capital Crescent Trail (a hiker/biker trail running from Georgetown to the District of Columbia line) and the river at about 37th Street extended. This eastern portion of the parcel is primarily paved and is presently used for boating-related activities; the western section is vegetated.

The 47,796-square foot (1.1 acre) parcel which Georgetown University proposes to exchange for Tract 102-114 is referred to as Tract 102-109. It is a marshy area located 4,000 feet upriver of the Park Service property in an area along the shoreline. The parcel, which is in an area between the Capital Crescent Trail and the Potomac River, is former CSX railroad property which was conveyed to Georgetown University in the mid-1980's prior to the Park Service acquiring the rest of the railroad's property for development of the Capital Crescent Trail. In addition to the University's 1.1 acre tract (which would have been used for the purpose of building a boating facility), the school also has access rights along a 15-foot right-of-way over the Capital Crescent Trail from a point at the north end of K Street to its property.

The exchange would transfer to the Park Service Georgetown University's 1.1 acre property which the Park Service would retain in its natural state. Vehicular access rights along the Capital Crescent Trail, now owned by the University, would convey to the Park Service. Georgetown University, on the other hand, would develop the Park Service's former property next to the Washington Canoe Club as a non-motorized boathouse for use by Georgetown University. According to the Park Service, additional terms are to be established as a condition of the exchange regarding activities which could occur on the site next to the Canoe Club. These conditions are not finalized but are expected to involve limits on the size and design of the new boathouse. Since the University currently rents a portion of the Thompson's Boat House for storage of its boats, construction of its new facility would free-up these storage bays for other users.

Conformance with Comprehensive Plan

Several policies from the Parks, Open Space and Natural Features element apply to the proposed land exchange and are identified as follows:

> As a great natural area, the Potomac Palisades ... should reflect the nature which controlled early settlement in the Region. Conspicuous man-made forms should be avoided upstream from Key Bridge.

> The green landscape and parklike character provided by trees, grass and other abundant plant materials...should be kept particularly evident in relation to the rivers....

Protection of Tract 102-109 and its access easement would be consistent with these policies.

> The C&O Canal National Historical Park should be preserved as a legacy of inland waterway development. It should also serve as a recreational area for non-motorized uses, such as bicycling, jogging, hiking and boating, though preservation of the park's historic resources should take precedence over the provision of recreational activities. Adjacent development should be kept at a low density, except east of Key Bridge.

The proposed action would promote boating by facilitating establishment of a new boathouse, and would also protect bicycling, jogging, and hiking along the C&O Canal path by eliminating the possibility of vehicular use of the trail as an access road. The proposed development of the boathouse, although slightly west of Key Bridge, would be at a low density.

> The shorelines and waterfronts of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers within the District of Columbia should be publicly-owned, except at planned waterfront locations in Georgetown ... where controlled private development could be permitted. Public access along the waterfront should be accommodated throughout. ... In non-public waterfront areas, access by the public should be arranged by easements or other binding agreements.

The proposed action would remove Tract 102-114 from public ownership. The maps accompanying this element indicate that this parcel is approximately on the border between the Palisades area, designated as "Natural Parks," and the planned waterfront area of Georgetown. In exchange, however, Tract 102-109 will change from private to public ownership, completing the National Park Service's control of the Palisades area. Overall, the proposed action appears to further this goal. Appropriate easements should be obtained to assure continued public access along the waterfront within Tract 102-114

> All lands within 150 to 200 feet of the water's edge ... should be managed in a manner that will encourage the enjoyment and recreational use of water resources, while protecting the scenic values of the waterways.

Both parcels fall entirely within 150 feet of the water's edge. The proposed action encourages recreational use as well as protecting the scenic quality of the Palisades.

> Federal Agencies should expand their Open Space areas around the Region's natural features when possible, particularly the shorelines along the Potomac River, to protect these features from adverse impacts and provide for their use, access, and enjoyment by the public. The use of scenic easements (and) land exchanges...should be considered in addition to land acquisition.

The proposed land exchange has a neutral effect on overall ownership of shoreline lands, but serves to protect the Palisades.

Overall, the proposed action would further the implementation of these policies and is generally consistent with the Parks, Open Space and Natural Features element.

The Georgetown waterfront is also designated a Special Place in the Preservation and Historic Features element. The designated area extends slightly upstream of Key Bridge and ends approximately at Tract 102-114. Development of this site with a boathouse would cause it to be perceived as part of the Georgetown waterfront. The following policies would apply:

> Special Places should be embellished with...distinctive buildings....
>
> Parking areas, driveways or service areas [within Special Places] should be carefully controlled, located, and designed to avoid adverse [visual] impact.

Any future boathouse and related access should be designed to be consistent with these policies.

Conformance with Master Plan

This proposal is consistent with the Concept Plan for the Georgetown Waterfront Park, Palisades Park and C&O Canal National Historical Park, from Foundry Branch to Rock Creek, approved by the Commission on June 26, 1986, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 71.10(38.00)-29781.

Coordinating Committee

The proposal was reviewed by the Coordinating Committee on August 10, 1995. The Committee forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies represented. Attending the meeting were representatives of NCPC, the District of Columbia's Office of Planning, Fire Department, and Department of Public Works, the National Park Service, General Services Administration, and Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Historic Preservation

NPS initiated Section 106 with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) on August 8, 1995, determining that the land transfer would have no adverse effect on the historic character of the Park. The DC SHPO will schedule the case for an open hearing before the Historic Preservation Review Board at its upcoming meeting on September 28 and will determine its response following that meeting.

Both sites are within the C & O Canal National Historical Park. The land transfer itself appears to further the goals of the C & O Canal National Historical Park legislation (1971), which calls for the preservation and interpretation of the historic and scenic features of the canal and the development of public recreation along the canal.

Environmental Impact

Pursuant to P.L. 91-190, NPS has determined that an environmental impact statement is not required for the exchange In lieu thereof, the Park Service has provided an environmental assessment (EA).

Through the land exchange, NPS seeks to preserve the mature trees and native vegetation of the Potomac Palisades, retain unimpeded access to the adjacent public parkland, and satisfy the public's demands for increased boating facilities. The land which NPS wants to acquire contains mature trees. NPS's present landholding consists primarily of a parking area and nonnative, edge-type habitat, and a small wetland. Both properties appear to be within the 100-year floodplain of the Potomac River.

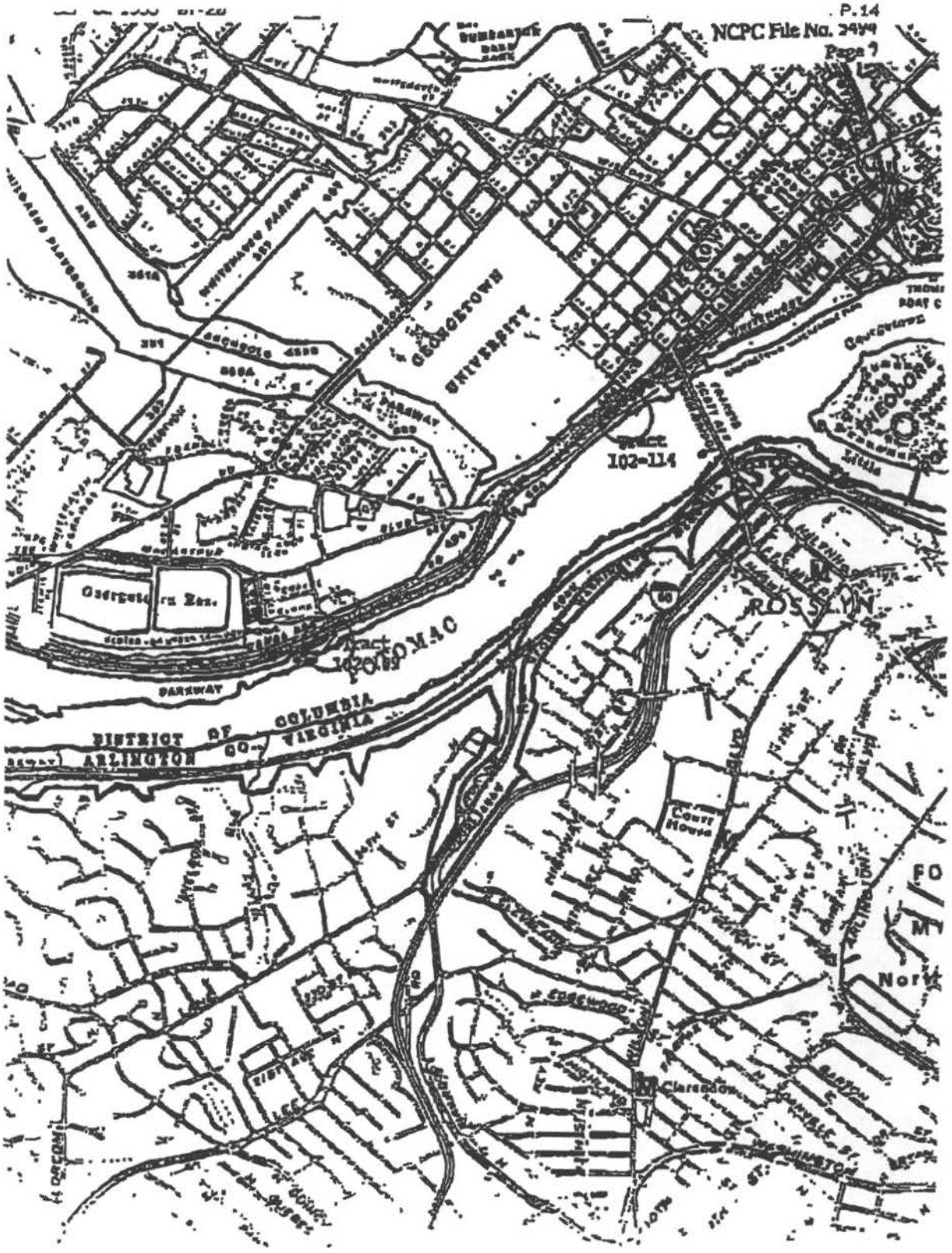
Based on the background in the EA, the proposed land exchange will not generate significant adverse impacts Since NPS does not intend to develop Tract 102-109, its acquisition of the site would positively affect the Potomac Palisades by preserving the existing mature vegetation. Since no land disturbance is proposed, minimal impact on soil erosion and sedimentation is expected. Georgetown University's use of Tract 102-114 for non-motorized boating would not significantly affect that property. Non-motorized boating activity should have minor effects on the floodplain. The Army Corps of Engineers and NPS will coordinate any necessary wetland mitigation.

Evaluation

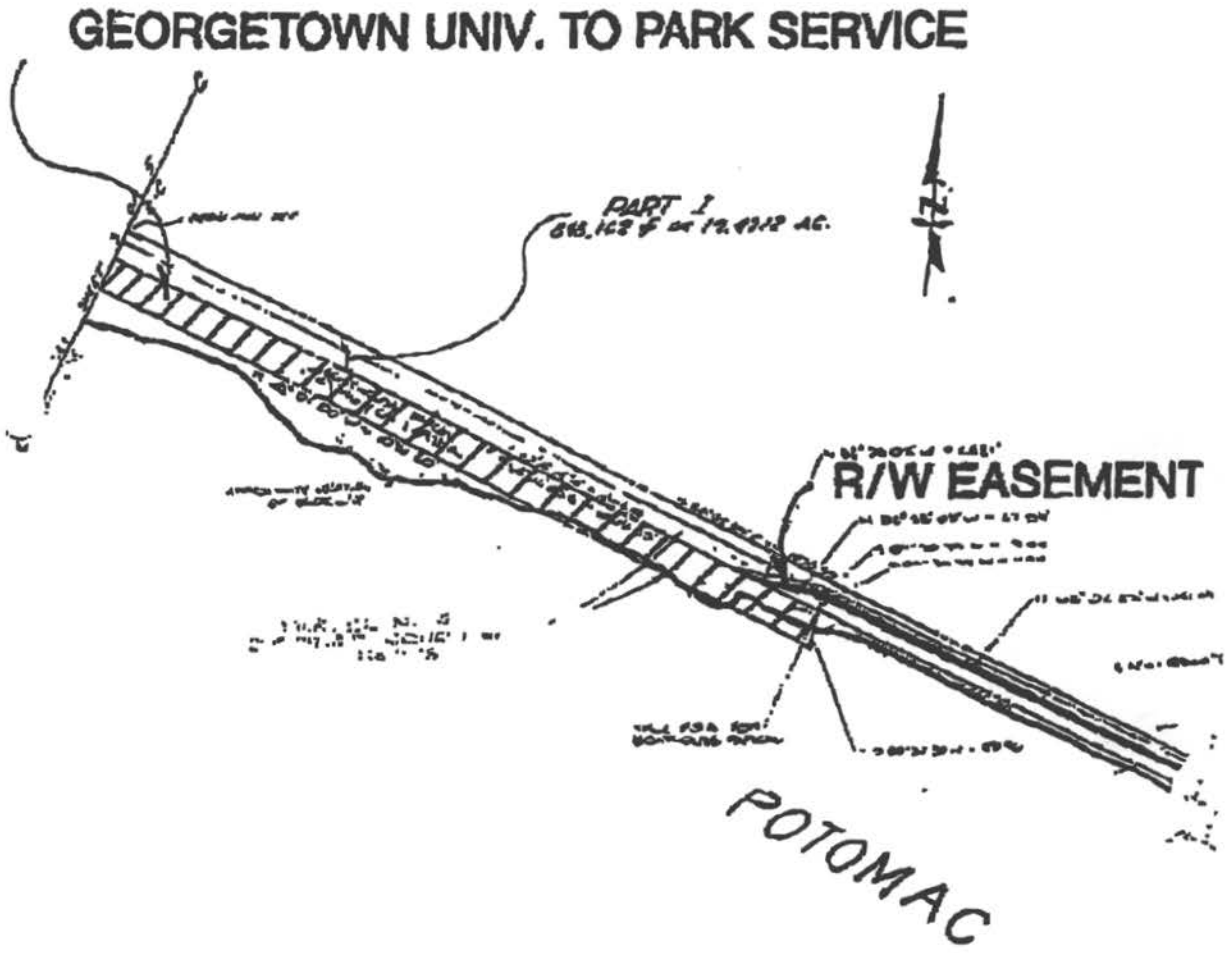
We recommend the Commission approve the proposed exchange of lands between NPS and Georgetown University A 1985 study prepared by NPS indicates a strong demand for increased public access to recreational facilities along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, and in particular to non-motorized boating facilities Development of a non-motorized boathouse facility next to the Washington Canoe Club would contribute to satisfying these demands in addition to being consistent with the park plan for the Potomac Palisades Park which the Commission approved in June of 1986.

That plan, Georgetown Waterfront Park, Palisades Park and C&O Canal National Historic Park from Foundry Branch to Rock Creek, designated an area along the shoreline east of Key Bridge, to approximately 1,100 feet upstream of Key Bridge, for non-motorized boathouse use. Georgetown University's new boathouse would be located at the northern edge of the area designated in the plan for boathouse use.

Further, placing Georgetown University's new boathouse immediately upstream of the Canoe Club, as proposed, would result in minimal encroachment into the undeveloped portions of Potomac Palisades Park. Transferring the University's title and access rights to its property (Tract 102-109) to the Park Service will help protect and preserve the natural conditions of the Palisades, which is in accord with policies in the Comprehensive Plan. Care should be taken however in the design of the facility to assure that any measures designed to stabilize the shoreline retain the natural character of the area, that the building itself enhances the appearance of the waterfront; and that environmental impacts which could result from construction of the boathouse and the resultant increased boating activity in this portion of the park are minimized.

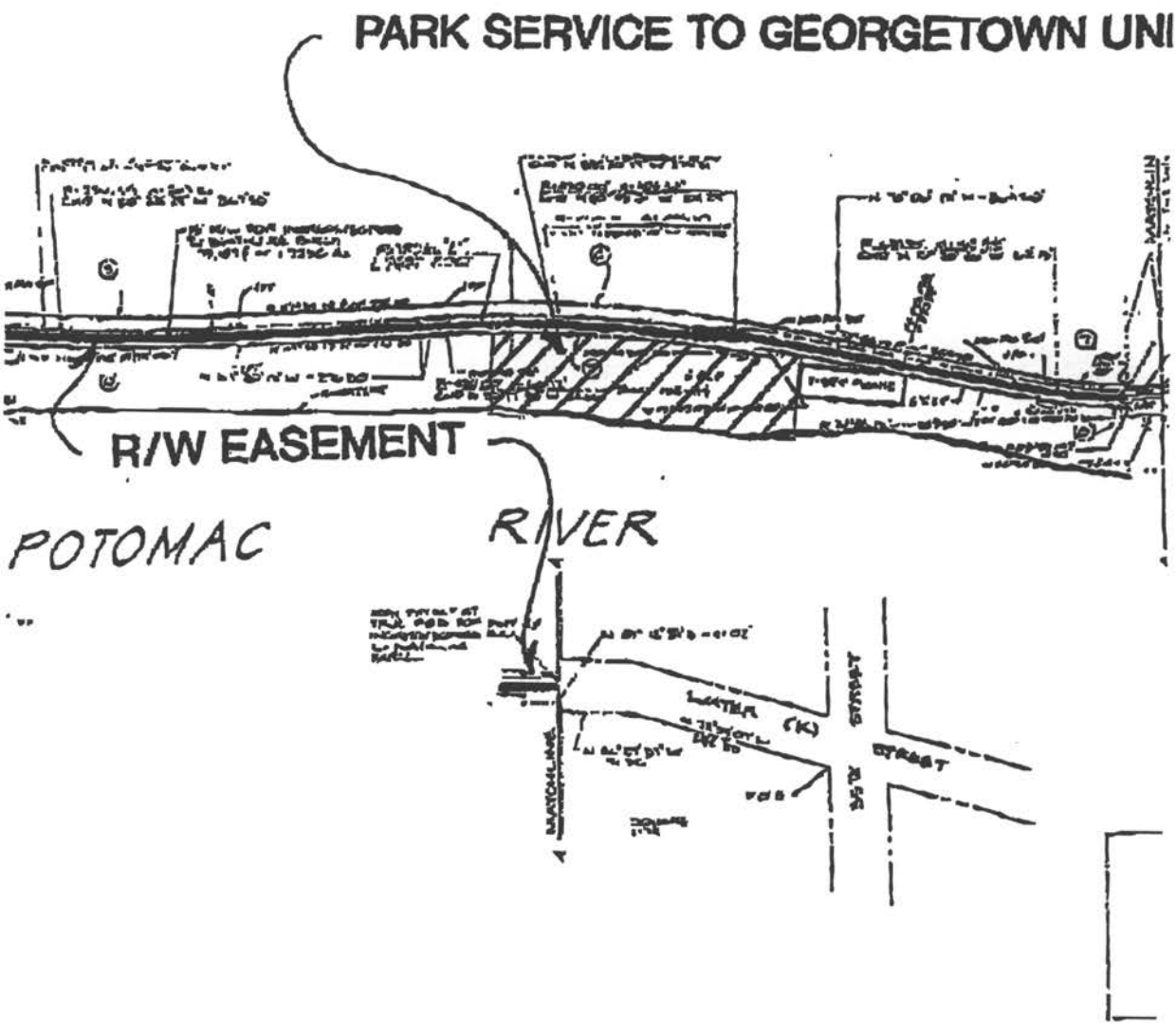

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
Tract 102-114
POTOMAC
PARKWAY
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
VIRGINIA
ARLINGTON
Court House
Clarendon

TRACT 102-109



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TRACT 102-114



ARNOLD & PORTER

202.942.5000
202.942.5999 Fax

555 Twelfth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20004-1206

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MESSAGE

Please place in the record I.
case 02-30, Georgetown
Boathouse map amendment.

ITP