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D.C. ZONING COMMISSION
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May 29, 2003

Zoning Commission
Carol Mitten, Chair
441 4th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Case 02-30, Georgetown University Boathouse

Dear Members of the Commission:

I am writing to support Georgetown University's request for a zoning determination that would permit them to build the boathouse that they have been planning along the Potomac River on Tract 102-114.

I am a member of the High School Boathouse Coalition, representing the 13 high schools that row on the Potomac River, and have been working on boathouse issues for over a year. I am going into my second year as President of the Sidwell Friends Crew Team, a parent-supported club sport at our school. Our daughter has been the varsity coxswain for the past 3 years. I, my husband, Harold Ickes, and our daughter, Charlotte, are homeowners in Georgetown. We have lived in Georgetown since 1994 when we moved to Washington and my husband joined the Clinton White House. Given the legacy of my father-in-law, Harold Ickes, who served as Secretary of the Interior under Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, we also consider ourselves strong environmentalists.

It is very clear that this zoning proposal is appropriate and in the public interest. The objections that have been raised are insubstantial, late in the process and not in the public interest.

(1) This zoning proposal is appropriate and in the public interest.

The Potomac waterfront has historically supported a variety of uses. At one time there were as many as six boathouses along the Georgetown stretch of the Potomac River. The sport of rowing has become very popular in the last two decades. High school participation along this stretch of the Potomac has more than quadrupled in this time, and college and adult participation has also grown dramatically. Men and women participate in nearly equal numbers at all these

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levels. It has been estimated that 1500-2000 people participate actively here. Rowing accounts for more people-hours of recreational river use per year in this location than any other activity. Obviously, the only place that you can put boathouses is along the river. Use of land for boathouses along the river is therefore both appropriate and in the public interest.

As the Commission is aware, members of the rowing community have worked for a number of years with each other and with various governmental bodies, such as the National Park Service, to develop a comprehensive plan for boathouse space that respects the many uses that the waterfront must serve. The Georgetown University boathouse is an integral part of the overall plan. Without the Georgetown University boathouse as it is envisioned, the rest of the plan will not hold together and the public interest would not be served. Not only would the entire rowing community (including the high schools) suffer but other members of the public would also be impacted if boathouse space must be relocated where it would be more intrusive on other waterfront uses.

(2) The objections that have been raised are poorly informed, insubstantial, late in the process and not in the public interest.

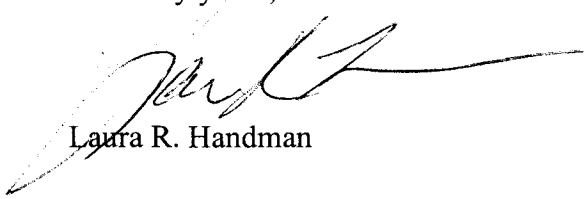
A small number of citizens have lately seized upon this zoning decision as an opportunity to oppose the Georgetown University boathouse without regard for the interests of the full range of park users. They have made arguments that are not sufficient to deny the request for zoning that would permit a boathouse on the currently planned tract. The boathouse that is envisioned would be of reasonable size (not "giant"), would be non-polluting, and would not create any regular vehicular traffic to the site (only occasional service vehicles). The dock would not be in the way of other river users. The planned site would preserve park space east of Key Bridge for other uses.

It is no coincidence that the plan for the Georgetown University Boathouse has these qualities. The details have been worked out in years of very public negotiations. Where were those who are now raising eleventh-hour objections? To give serious weight to their comments would not be in the public interest.

It is ironic for those protecting the environment to take a stance against rowing, a sport that not only does no harm to the environment but fosters a respect for the river. Before our daughter joined the crew team three years ago, she was indifferent to the outdoors. Now, she speaks of the beauty of the river at 5:30 in the morning and how she knows its rocks and currents. It is this intimate relationship with nature at an early age that will guarantee the beauty of our rivers for generations to come. Please understand that for high schoolers, the Georgetown waterfront is the only feasible site for rowing in the early morning hours and late afternoon after school lets out before the crush of homework. And the plan for high schoolers depends on creation of the Georgetown University boathouse. I urge the Commission to visit Philadelphia's Schuylkill River to observe how boathouses enhance the waterfront, not encumber it.

I urge the Commission to approve this request for rezoning to permit Georgetown University to build a boathouse according to the plan that they and many others have worked out.

Sincerely yours,



Laura R. Handman