RICHARD M. HALL
ATTORNEY AT LAW

June 5, 2003

Carol Mitten, Chair
D.C. Zoning Commission
441 4th St., NW, Suite 210
Washington, D.C. 20001

Re: Georgetown University Boathouse – case number 02-03

Dear Ms. Mitten and members of the Zoning Commission:

I urge the Zoning Commission to approve the Georgetown University boathouse. I have been a resident of the District of Columbia since 1975. My wife teaches at Woodrow Wilson Senior High School. Three of my children have graduated from Wilson and my fourth is a rising senior there. She has rowed for the Wilson High School crew since her 9th grade at Alice Deal Junior High School. I have enjoyed using the Potomac River often. I have rowed from and competed for the Potomac Boat Club, have canoed with families and friends, have sailed, and have often walked and bird watched along the river. I have always found that the sight of rowers is a pleasing addition to the river.

The Potomac River is a great resource for DC, Maryland and Virginia. In the stretch we are addressing the Potomac is a wonderful mix of natural and urban. From my experience, the stretch from below Great Falls to Alexandria is a better mix of the natural and the urban with much more access and appropriate use than the Hudson River is to New York and the Seine is to Paris. In this stretch of the Potomac uses such as rowing and other non-motorized boating are ideal. We should therefore applaud rather than oppose the Georgetown University boathouse and the other related improvements to rowing.

The boathouse is a public benefit in its own right and as an integral part of planned improvements for rowing on the Potomac River. The Georgetown University boathouse will enhance an illustrious rowing program for the benefit of the rowers, the University and the many Washingtonians that enjoy watching the graceful sport of rowing that has been actively pursued on the Potomac River for more than 150 years. The complaints that the boathouse is an intrusion on the parkland and harm to wetlands are mistaken. The boathouse is proposed on land long planned for boathouse use. It will come to Georgetown for a swap of land with the National Park Service. Such swaps are a legal

3244 CHESTNUT STREET, NW, WASINGTON, DC 20015
PHONE: 202.419.1440 FAX 202.419.1447 • E-MAIL RHALL@CAAB.ORG

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.02-03
EXHIBIT NO.292

and common step for the National Park Service. The development of the land the University is giving up and the right of way to it along the Crescent Trail would be considerably more intrusive and has been called "unacceptable" by the NPS. Therefore, it seems to me clear that the swap is in the public interest. The wetlands involved have, I also understand, been determined to be unimportant by the Army Corps of Engineers. Of course, it might be better to ensure no impact on wetlands. However, boathouses by their nature must be directly on the water's edge and must therefore almost always produce some wetland impact. It is therefore not a criticism but a positive attribute of the Georgetown proposal that the impact will be insignificant.

It is also worth noting that the design of the Georgetown University boathouse allows it now and for the future to keep all elements of the rowing program inside an attractive building. Most, if not all, boathouses on the Potomac are now too small for the programs they try to operate, requiring outside storage of boats and equipment. This outside storage is often unsightly compared to a well-designed boathouse. Examples of unsightly outside storage are Thomson's boathouse that now uses a fenced compound to store many high school shells and, unfortunately, the canoe club whose members are now so strongly in opposition at this proceeding.

The approval and construction of the Georgetown University boathouse is also an important part of a larger plan to expand the capacity of the Potomac waterfront to support rowing and other non-motorized water sports such as canoeing, kayaking and sailing. All interested stakeholders and the public at large have been deeply involved in the planning of this expansion for many years. The plan involves a national park along the Georgetown waterfront, the construction on the Washington side of the river of boathouses by Georgetown University, by George Washington University, and by the National Park Service for small rowing shells, canoes and kayaks; and the refurbishment of Thomson's boathouse for high school rowers. On the Virginia side of the river a boathouse will be built for northern Virginia high schools. Each part of the plan is related to the other. If Georgetown University cannot build its boathouse, it cannot move out of Thomson's boathouse, and the high schools may soon have to curtail their existing rowing programs.

While I firmly believe that the approval of the Georgetown University boathouse is in the public interest, in making your decision it is important to keep in mind that the issues before the Zoning Commission are not the broad public interest issue, but several narrow and technical issues. On these issues it seems clear that both common sense and the goal of minimizing any adverse impact of a boathouse require the granting of the request.

Given what I believe is a strong case for granting the zoning variances and for constructing the boathouse, I wonder at the inflated rhetoric of many of the opponents. I speculate that what is driving it is a narrow and defensive view among some of the canoeing community that a rowing boathouse will disturb their tranquility and create conflicts between shells and canoes. I know that the rowing community has the highest regard for competitive and recreational canoeing in DC from the historic canoe club. The

DC canoe club has always fostered many nationally and internationally ranked competitive paddlers. Knowing Tony Johnson, the Georgetown University head rowing coach and Georgetown University, I am sure that any operational issues can and will be resolved amicably. After all on the Charles River in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, there are many more boathouses and shells and canoes close together, and the potential conflicts are handled responsibly. I do lament the not-in-my-backyard component of the opposition, however. It seems to me that element is saying "I have my canoe club -- the hell with anyone else." The Zoning Commission should ignore that message.

I urge the Zoning Commission to approve the application of Georgetown University for the zoning variances necessary to build its new boathouse as proposed.

Very truly yours,

Richard M. Hall

Richard M. Hall