Testimony before the District of Columbia Zoning Administration, May 19, 2003, on the Proposed Re-zoning of NPS Land along the Potomac River North of the Washington Canoe Club and South of Foundry Branch (Case No. 02-30)
by The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia

I am William Brown, the president of the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia. Founded on December 7, 1865, the AOI is the District's oldest, continuously active civic association. It was founded immediately following the Civil War by 31 prominent citizens and businessmen in an effort to restore the capital's dignity and to keep alive the reminiscences of the past history of our city and, more importantly, to emphasize respect for local government authority and national patriotism above the sectional differences which existed after the Civil War. And it is our quest for local government authority and pride in our natural environment that has compelled us to comment this evening on this issue.

In his photo-essay, "Along the Potomac," AOI's immediate past president Dr. Philip W. Ogilvie, who passed away last September, remarks, "In the...60-years [since the formation of the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin] the river has recovered much of its biological potential as pollution has been reduced and land practices have been improved." I can attest to this personally, as the C&O Canal and Potomac River banks – my playgrounds as a child – have improved to the extent that one is no longer disgusted by the stench that once befouled it's recreational potential. Now much improved, the river and its environs are today threatened by visual pollution and access limited only to those able to pay for it.

The proposal to develop the eastern shoreline of the Potomac above the Washington Canoe Club should not be allowed to proceed. The D.C. Zoning Commission must act to maintain this property as ***unzoned with no new construction***. The Potomac Palisades must be protected and maintained as close to its natural state as possible. The District must not follow the lead of Arlington and Fairfax Counties and permit the monstrosities which now clutter the Virginia shoreline of our river. The proposed boathouse would not only contribute to the visual clutter of the shoreline from the Virginia side of the river, but – worse – block views of the Potomac, the Key Bridge, Roosevelt Island and the Alexandria Aqueduct remains from both the C&O Canal Towpath and the Capital Crescent Trail. Hikers, bikers and joggers have grown accustomed to these views as they approach Georgetown and it would be a crime to deprive park and trail visitors of these scenes in perpetuity.

The AOI fully supports the use of the Potomac River for recreational boating and aquatic sports – with the exception of personal water craft, e.g., jet-skis – for all visitors to enjoy. We object to the private, exclusive nature of the proposed boathouse and its party rooms which will be available only to those who can afford to pay for it. Let Georgetown University propose a boat house down stream from the existing boathouses or, better yet, partner with the National Park Service to expand and improve Thompson's Boat House to better suit the needs of their students and the boating public at large.

The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia strongly recommends that the Commission move to maintain this parcel as ***unzoned with no new construction.***

Thank you for your consideration of our position on this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

William N. Brown, President

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
Case No. 02-30
Exhibit 303

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EXHIBIT NO.303