Testimony – **Defenders of Potomac River Parkland**

DC Zoning Commission, Public Hearing, June 5, 2003, Cases 02-30 and 02-31

My name is Sally Strain and I have been a resident of the District of Columbia for forty years. My neighborhood, the Palisades, borders on the Capital Crescent Trail, the Canal Towpath and the Potomac River near Chain Bridge, at the western end of the beautiful three-mile DC section of the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

I am pleased to be here this evening, to represent the views of the Defenders of Potomac River Parkland, whose point of view has been endorsed by the following groups: DC Chapter of the Sierra Club, Audubon Naturalist Society, American Canoe Association, C&O Canal Association, Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail, Washington Canoe Club, League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia, the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia, Potomac Pedalers Touring Club, National Parks Conservation Association, and the American Whitewater Association. The alliance was formed only two months ago and is growing every day.

The Defenders are dedicated to the protection and preservation of public space, especially the undeveloped shoreline and riparian zone between Key Bridge and Chain Bridge. We believe that wild park land belongs to everyone and should not be taken out of the public domain and diverted to private development interests.

Because of these views, the Defenders are opposed to the construction of a boathouse at the "Gateway" to the C&O Canal Park, and we urge you to reject the application that is before you for the following reasons:

1. The size of the structure is enormous and inappropriate for the site. The height, length, depth, width and bulk of the structure, in addition to the new access road, dock and proximity of the building to the CCT, Towpath, Canal bank and river, would all have a negative environmental and visual impact on the recreational opportunities offered along the waterfront – all year long, for everyone, not just in the winter.

2. The risks and difficulties of building, servicing, maintaining and using an enormous building on the site -- a narrow section of flood plain over a corroding sewer line -- are considerable. They include potential runoff into the river from rain or flooding of up to 25,000 cubic feet of fill required to establish a level grade during construction, as well as unknown safety considerations and potential damage to a leaking Canal bank. Traffic and parking needs during and after construction are unknown and unpredictable, and no traffic study has been done or reviewed by the public.

3. The public environmental and historic review process for the project was flawed. Although the concept of the boathouse was reviewed by various groups, the detailed architectural design in relation to its surroundings was not. The EA done in 1995, for

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the land exchange, did not include a review of the boathouse building plans. Two of the communities bordering the DC section of the C&O Canal Park, including my own, did not participate in a review of the proposal.

4. The application excludes high school programs and other public boating activities, unlike Thompson's Boat Center, on the waterfront, which has shared space with all boating communities.

5. A better location – with both environmental and practical advantages – is available downstream of Key Bridge, on degraded land needing redevelopment.

Recommendations:

The Defenders do not have all the answers, but we do have many questions about the proposal, as well as good ideas about how to improve the process and the end product. We know this is a unique opportunity to help improve the city, the waterfront, the university and high school programs, and to serve the general public as well.

It is not too late to reject this application. Assembled in this room tonight is a group of very talented people-- creative architects, distinguished university and recreational leaders, respected legal authorities, dedicated environmentalists, energetic high school rowers and parents, and concerned citizens. Instead of talking here about zoning regulations, we should all be gathered by the river to exchange ideas about how to make our city and waterfront truly better for everyone. This can be done by saving a park and building a boathouse, too.

Dismiss this hearing, Madame Chair, send us home, reject the application, and tell us to return after we have improved the proposal. And please consider joining us one day along the river -- as interested citizens -- to see for yourselves where you would build the first new boathouse in many years on the Georgetown waterfront.

Thank you for this opportunity to address this group tonight.

NOTE: See attachments A&B to see where you would build a boathouse:

Attachment A is Tract 102-114, the "Gateway" to the Park and entrance to the CCT (where GU wants to build a large, private boathouse)

Attachment B is a degraded, paved section of waterfront downstream of Key Bridge (begging for redevelopment)

Attachment A – Tract 102-114 (red dot to left of CCT) at "Gateway" to the C&O Canal National Historical Park, and Entrance to the Capital Crescent Trail, upstream of Key Bridge



(This is where Georgetown University wants to build a large, private boathouse.)

Attachment B – Degraded, paved land, downstream of Key Bridge, slated for development as part of Georgetown Waterfront project.



(This degraded land is a good location for new development, including boathouses.)