edited for time limit

ROBERT D. WESTGATE

Testimony before the D.C. Planning Commission, Thurs., June 19, 2002

My name is Bob Westgate. I'm 73, have been a D.C. resident since 1965, and have been a member of the Washington Canoe Club for more than 35 years. I'm also a retired journalist, and numerous well-known reporters and editors— fellow members of the National Press Club— have been my guests at the WCC. Several of them have also joined the WCC.

The WCC's headquarters is in an historic building in a historic district at 3700 K (Water) St. NW, and will be celebrating its 100th Anniversary next year. Club paddlers introduced competetive flat-water canoeing in the 1924 Paris Olympics, and it had a team in 17 Olympics since then, plus it helps train young paddlers to improve their competetive skills so they might eventually qualify for future olympics. I've found the club to be one of the best "stress relievers" possible— much better than any tranquilizer. One of my most memorable times there was when I helped build a kayak with my son.

I've listened to several evenings of testimony by the supporters of the enormous new Georgetown University boathouse just upstream from the WCC, and am very concerned about several issues:

1. SIZE: The proposed boathouse is so large that it sets a precedent that will make it easier for George Washington, Catholic and American universities, and other local schools, to build equally-large boathouses along the river, if they choose.

2. LOCATION: Besides its size, the main problem with the proposed GT boathouse is its location. Perhaps I missed them, but I haven't heard any valid arguments why GT can't build downstream from the Key Bridge— rather than upstream— except that GT and the NPS want it to be upstream. Why can't the GT boathouse be included in a "boathouse row" between 34th & 36th streets downstrean, where the NPS wants to put other boathouses, including a concession-operated boathouse(like the Thompson Boat Center),which would be built by the NPS for private shells, canoes and kayaks, next to Jack's Boat Rental?

3. RIVER FLOW: The Corps of Engineers hasn't made an environmental assessment study of the possible effects that the T-shaped boathouse dock might have on the river flow. As designed, it juts 70-feet out into the river and runs 240-feet parallel to the bank. Boats headed upstream from the WCC would be forced out into a more rapid-river flow to get upstream along the shore. If my memory is correct, one of the chief reasons that a proposed Clyde's Restaurant on-a-barge was turned down, was because of the effects the barge might have on the normal flow of the river. (Con't on p.2)

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4. C&O CANAL: It is ludicrous to claim that the project won't impact the canal, its bank, the Capital Crescent Trail or the WCC-- especially during the estimated 2-year construction period. The bank is very tender, isn't lined between the canal & the WCC, and constantly leaks water into and under the WCC. The bank downstream next to the new condo building under construction at 3333 K St NW required extensive strengthening before the canal was refilled this spring. Further cutting of the canal bank behind the WCC to accomodate an access road for the GT boathouse would further weaken the bank, causing it to collapse and create a flood which might wash out the trail and push the fragile WCC boathouse into the river. A check of NPS records would show the environmental damage caused by canal breaks in the past.

5. PARKING: GT and the NPS haven't adequately addressed the parking issue. The Crescent Trail has become so popular with hikers, bikers, roller bladers, and parents with strollers that the legal metered parking spaces along K Street are now filled by 8 a.m. weekends. Weekdays the spots are filled by commuters. "Car People" don't like to walk. They'll park anywhere there's an open spot-- even if it's directly in front of a "No Parking" sign. A tentative 100-meter parking lot somewhere along K Street won't be enough. Drivers will illegally park and block the WCC entrance, in the turn around just upstream of the stone aqueduct and along the access road/Crescent Trail, once they enter to make deliveries or deliver boats on trailers. How will access road traffic be separated from encrouching on the Crescent Trail or WCC/NPS adjacent property?

6. SOCIAL EVENTS: GT claims no social functions will ever be held in its boathouse. Even after races? Who are they kidding? At least remove the kitchen.

7. SEWER LINE: I've heard no testimony as how the sewer line will be protected during and after construction. The concrete patio above the sewer pipe in front the WCC is only 2-3 inches thick and rests atop the pipe. Because the ground has settled on either side of the pipe, and heavy construction traffic after the line was built, the patio is badly cracked and slopes downward on either side of the pipe.

8. MEETINGS: Much has been said why the WCC allegedly hasn't attended any meetings of the Georgetown Waterfront Commission on plans for the park expansion along the river. As far as I know, the WCC was never officially invited to attend.

10. CONCLUSIONS: The NPS won't be building the proposed boathouse in a turn-key operation. Since GT will be constructing the project, it should be ordered to make a thorough environmental ~~effect study~~ impact statement (EIS) of how the construction and use will affect the wetlands on which it will sit, the canal and its bank, towpath and Crescent Trail, the sewer line, shoreline, and river flow BEFORE a permit is issued.

GT has promised to do many things, and said it would not do others, if only permission would be given to build an enormously large boathouse and an oversized dock upstream from the WCC.

(Con't on p. 3)

Even if these promises are included in the permit as a condition of construction and use, who will enforce them once the permit is issued? The WCC is a small, under-funded organization that doesn't have GT's missions to hire expensive lawyers to take the university to court to fight permit violations.

I fear that if the proposed boathouse is built as now described, it will reenforce the local expression, "What Georgetown Wants, Georgetown Gets!".

I hope that before the Commission makes a ruling on the application, it will make a tour of the area to enable its members to see and discuss the site and its problems first hand.

Respectfully submitted.

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