A Citizen's Remarks about the Proposed GU Boathouse

Submitted by David Winer, Bethesda, Maryland, June 19, 2003
—not as an affiliated member of an organization, but as a typical user of the Potomac, the Capital Crescent Trail, and the C&O Canal.

It is astonishing that organizations that are the stewards of the land proposed for a private boathouse would consider placing it on public parkland. It is even more astonishing that the proposed project is so invasive and ill-suited for the particular piece of land.

1. The users of the downtown Potomac, the Capital Crescent Trail, and the C&O Canal are going to be shocked and dismayed by this project once its size and location become known. I have looked for evidence of the plan in the newspapers and on television, but have not found anything to date. I am reminded of the once started bridge that was to cross the river at Three Sisters Islands just above this disputed boathouse property—somehow citizen involvement got that ill-founded scheme canceled even after the ironwork was started.

2. The scale of the proposed boathouse is far too enormous to be placed in such a prominent and highly used public property. This is not a typical boathouse, but rather a *palace* of a boathouse. What dreams of grandeur have caused the University to devote such resources to a minor sport? If a boathouse should be built along this stretch of the river, it should be in scale with other facilities, and especially, it does not need to be placed on undeveloped parkland.

3. There is simply not enough space on and besides the trail to incorporate the roadway necessary to service this huge facility. Where will the trucks, trailers, buses, and autos go when the facility is used for races and social events? The canal is perched immediately above the trail on an almost vertical embankment—no room for a roadway there. Between the trail and the river, where the boathouse is planned, there is no room for such a large structure and its associated loading spaces for all the vehicles that would be coming and going and, yes, parking illegally. This physical situation would inevitably cause the trail users to have to share this last section of the trail with these incompatible vehicles. Why should the public have to endure this impact at all, much less when there is space for a boathouse just downstream (the site of the old Dempsey boathouse) or elsewhere, alongside a public street?

4. The needs of the public seem to be understood poorly. This is not a little used piece of park. The traffic along here is intense at times, so much so, that the various recreational and commuting users of the Capital Crescent Trail frequently interfere with each other. On weekends especially, there are hoards of hikers, bicyclists, roller bladers, dog walkers, baby strollers, and bird watchers who literally swarm along the trail from Georgetown to Bethesda. Furthermore, this trail is part of a system of trails throughout the metropolitan area, used extensively. (I recently encountered a group of a dozen cyclists who had come to the area on vacation all the way from Tennessee to take advantage of our wonderful trail system.)

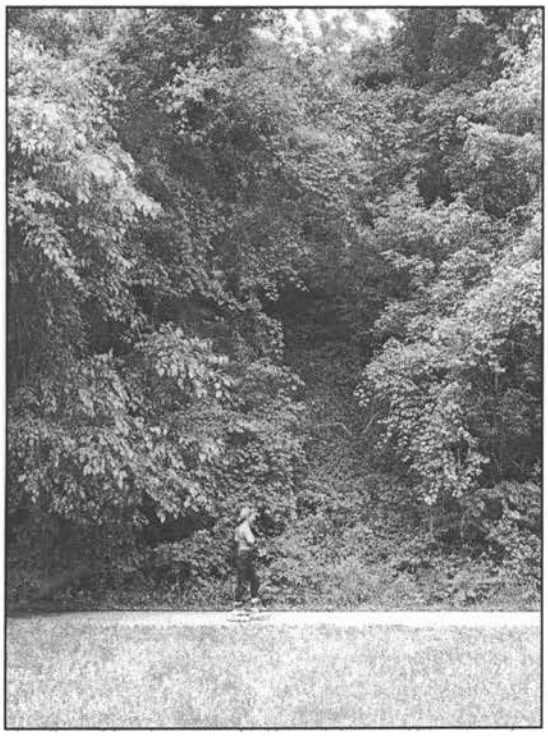
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(continued)



A photo of the existing Washington Canoe Club placed over a photo of the land behind the proposed GU boathouse. The GU boathouse is an artist's rendering to scale.

The departure from the norm is obvious. The wall beside Canal Road (above the C&O Canal) is at the same level as the top of the left roofline and is below the roof of the center section. *This is a huge boathouse!*



The near-vertical embankment between the trail and the canal. No place to put a roadway.



At the site of the proposed boathouse. River in view to the rear, Capital Crescent Trail in the front. Hardly enough room for the proposed boathouse, but no room for a road and parking facilities for the service vehicles that would be needed.