June 19, 2003

Carol Mitten, Chair
D.C. Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Zoning Commission Case No. 02-30
Georgetown University Boathouse – Map Amendment/Special Exception

Dear Ms. Mitten and Members of the Commission:

We received a copy of Georgetown's Summary Statements dated June 16th, 2003. We respectfully request that you review their letter side by side with our response, which is attached to this letter. Due to time constraints, we were not able to assemble for your review all of the documentation in support of our positions. However, we would be happy to provide same upon request.

Please contact the undersigned with any questions you may have. I may be reached during the day at (202) 767-6814, and in the evening at (703) 356-8267.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Lawrence C. Schuette,
President, Washington Canoe Club

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
Case 02-30
Exhibit 359

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.02-30
EXHIBIT NO.359

Opponents of the Georgetown University Boathouse

Map Amendment and Special Exception
Zoning Commission Case 02-30
June 19, 2003

Response to Summary Statements Submitted June 16, 2003

Planning – Waterfront Park and Boathouse Row

- The boat house, as proposed, extends outside of the Georgetown Waterfront Park into the C&O Canal National Park. It is also important to note that no structure of this size was mentioned or hinted in the Georgetown Waterfront Park Plan. No dimensions were made available to us for this specific boathouse until December 2002, and then, only after repeated requests. Early drawings provided distorted its true size.

- The proposed boathouse extends outside of the approved boathouse zone and encroaches on the C&O Canal Historic Park.

- If the goal is "to create green space and preserve natural wild open space in the Potomac Palisades," this boathouse should be built on the downriver side of Key Bridge where there currently exists an asphalt parking lot. The green space and natural wild open space as currently exists where the boathouse is planned will be destroyed by the proposed structure. We disagree that the building, as proposed, compliments Potomac Boat Club and the Washington Canoe Club. In fact, we believe it overshadows and overwhelms the Washington Canoe Club and the view.

- The GU boathouse will free up only 25 racks at Thompson's Boathouse for use by high school rowing teams. Per our understanding, it will not free up space for individuals renting boats. A building a third the size of the one proposed would free the same number of spaces. The boathouse zone was intended to resemble Boathouse Row in Philadelphia. This building would not fit into Boathouse Row in Philadelphia.

- We agree that it is important to continue in creating the Georgetown Waterfront Park as proposed. However, it should not include out-of -proportion buildings for private institutions on formerly public land.

- The land swap may be for the same net acreage. However, due to location, neighborhood, accessibility, (elongated) shape and other factors, this is an inequitable trade. We would like independent appraisals to be performed as to the value of each tract. We do not believe the two parcels are of comparable value.

- The exchange may be environmentally preferable to building on the upriver site. However, the ability to build there is questionable. It certainly could be done if enough money was spent. However, as evidenced by GU's testimony that they cannot scale back on the currently proposed site without "a major impact" on their program, they could not achieve their goals there. This goes to the relative value of the two parcels.

- The site may well be in fact "buildable and usable," but certainly not for the scale of boathouse that is proposed on the current site.

- The proposed boathouse would not put "our city on par with Boston and Philadelphia" as is claimed. It would do something entirely different. Since the creation of the Capital Crescent Trail, there is a great degree of "life and added interest" on our city's waterfront - as evidenced by the difficulty traveling under Whitehurst Freeway on any given weekend morning. Between the cars, bikers, rollerbladers and joggers, it does become congested. A boathouse proportional to others near Key Bridge would not detract in any way from "putting us on par." This boathouse will exceed the size of all existing boathouses in the Eastern Association of Rowing Colleges other than Princeton, which also houses the 50-70 member US National Team.

- University students could walk or bike to the old Dempsey's site or any other site in the "Boathouse Zone."

- While spectators have traditionally congregated in the vicinity of Thompson's during regattas, we at Washington have often allowed spectators inside our gate to watch those same regattas. Spectators will naturally gather wherever a boathouse is. The idea that parents, friends and classmates would not gather in significant numbers at the new boathouse is implausible.

Design, Scale, Setbacks

- "The building's size is minimized by minimizing the number of shell storage spaces." There probably is not a more indefensible statement in Georgetown's Statement. How is it possible that currently, 15 of the 16 schools in the EARC have smaller boathouses? And the only larger one also houses the US National Team? Georgetown's current crew utilizes only 25 racks at Thompson's and, per Tony Johnson, GU only plans to increase the number of boats by about 20%. Georgetown's claims about leaving "out specialized areas that often add space to boathouses" are ludicrous. If that were so, this boathouse would not be the largest single user boathouse in the EARC. There is nothing more specialized than a rowing tank. Stating that "our great room is devoted to rowing machines" is also hard to swallow. Rowing machines are easily broken down into two and moved. Even if claims match intentions, intentions and reality can be a world apart. We cannot imagine GU not using such a room for multiple social events. In fact, they have appealed to donors on their web site stating as much. Have they deceived their own donors or the Commission?

- "Spaces are multi-use where feasible." Would social events in the great room be such a use? Per GU's web site (at least until last week,) it appears so. Will the public have access to the great room with its "amazing views?" The same views that the public currently has and would be blocked from the canal and other places by the roof of this building?

- There is no way to prove or disprove the assertion that older boathouses on the Potomac "would be larger if built today." It is an opinion. We disagree. We believe more, smaller boathouses would serve the boating community as well or better.

- "The site is relatively narrow." But it is more than double the width of the upstream site. Further, although the side wings are lower that the 54 foot high roofline, they are each significantly larger and 5 feet higher than the 29 foot high Washington Canoe Club, which was assured early on in the process that it would not be "overwhelmed in any way." Stating that "the east wing relates to the scale of the Washington Canoe Club" is misleading.

- There are many "national-class, university boathouses" that exist without the "certain dimensional requirements" proposed by Georgetown. Georgetown has cherry-picked some universities for comparison. Wisconsin has not been built, only proposed. Information from the internet tells us they have had some community concerns similar to Georgetown's. For instance, they scaled back from their original plans due to concerns for the natural environment. Their plan is an expansion upward of their existing site. Further, their building is not proposed to be use exclusively for the rowing program. Princeton is 33,500 square feet, not 34,000, and it houses the US National Team. Two bays are used exclusively for the US team's 50-70 members. Harvard does not have one 41,000 square foot boathouse. It has two boathouses on opposite sides of the river. Together, they house both the Harvard crew and another university's crew. Thompson's, while a much smaller building, currently houses two universities and ten high schools.

Questions have been raised as to whether the boathouse could be any smaller:

- "Minor reductions in size would have a major impact on the GU program while not appreciably reducing the size of the building." We have seen no correlation between boathouse size and success of programs in either canoeing or rowing. If such a correlation exists, we would ask GU to provide it. Further, it seems odd that 15 of 16 universities have successful programs in the EARC with much smaller boathouses.

- If the architectural design review agencies for this site did not "question the scale", what kind of review did they in fact perform? The scale of any architectural project would seem to be very important. It would be interesting to know if they had actual dimensions. As was demonstrated at the second hearing before this commission, until the night before that meeting, DC Planning did not even know how far back the setback would be from the second floor. Thus the change from 15 feet to 7.

- Per Georgetown "it is not uncommon for new buildings to be larger than nearby historic buildings." While we have not attempted to verify this, even if true, Georgetown repeatedly assured us that we "would not be overwhelmed" and that the building would be "proportional."

- Per Georgetown, "there is no reason to overly minimize the building, as it will be pleasing for the public to look at." One reason would be to keep their word. Another is not to set a precedent for enormous buildings, and thus reduce the available area for other boathouses. The suggestion that it will be more pleasing to look at their roof than trees and the river is rather stunning and telling of their regard for the park and their future neighbors.

- We have no argument about the materials to be used. We believe the design is a poor fit for the proposed site and that currently pleasing views will be lost.

- The Commission of Fine Arts did not question the scale. Why not? They should have. They did not ask many questions at all per their October 2001 minutes. The only question asked was, "It's all shingle?" Further, the public currently enjoys "the views of shells and other non-motorized activity on the river."

Should the height be lowered?

- "The two side wings are significantly lower than the central section. The east end of the east wing is the same height as the WCC building." In fact, it is higher and the end is very short in the drawings provided. The statement is misleading.

- "The **only way** to lower the roof of the central section is to reduce the roof pitch (and only by a minor amount), or go to a less attractive flat roof." With all due respect, if those are the only ways, perhaps GU should consult with additional architects.

- It would seem possible to put mechanical equipment elsewhere rather than on the roof. Especially if the second floor rooms did not have exceptionally high ceilings. The smaller the building, the smaller that equipment would be.

Suggestions to relocate the rowing tanks:

- Yale, Boston, Cornell, to name a few, have top programs without the benefit of rowing tanks in their boathouses. All have tanks on campus, a short distance away.

- "Coach can't be in two places at once." True. They can't be in a chase boat on the river and inside a rowing tank at the same time either. And GU has coaches and assistant coaches for each program, heavyweight men, lightweight men and women.

- Per conversations with many rowers, while rowing tanks are useful year-round, they have been utilized for the most part in northern climates due to frozen bodies of water. Almost any competitive athlete will agree that time in the boat is the most critical factor. The Potomac schools have made do without tanks to date and many, very successfully. While tanks would be useful, they would be equally useful outside the flood plain. Perhaps more so. GU could train during floods. Many schools that GU competes with have tanks on campus.

- Thompson's and Potomac Boat Club do not have a nearby campus available in which they could have exercise equipment. The US Naval Academy has Erg training in the boat bays of their facility. Further, Thompson's and PBC are both smaller yet serve far more boaters.

- If the rowing tank were relocated, this building could be much smaller. The Washington Canoe Club, as an example, has 160 six-foot tall lockers above its ground floor and only a 29 foot roofline.

- Regarding Title IX, equal space could, very easily, be equally smaller space.

- "The setback from the CCT is ample." Perhaps if a retaining wall was built, but behind the Washington Canoe Club it is not "ample."

- "The boathouse cannot be setback farther from the riverfront without impinging to a degree on the (above) setbacks from the bike trail." This seems to contradict the earlier statement that GU could build on the 45 foot wide site. And how would "use of the bike trail" not "be affected" if the trail was moved. Certainly it would be affected during construction.

- "The setback from the riverfront of 15 at ground level provides a more than adequate space from the river." It seems odd then that the variance standard exception is 20 feet. Certainly Washington Canoe Club will lose much of its view of its traditional race course. Again, GU stated they could build on a 45 foot wide parcel.

- Despite what GU asserts, the beginning of the Crescent Trail is not an urban setting where buildings are normal. It is the start of an area away from the urban setting and where buildings are no longer normal. The Trail and Canal are where people from the city go to *get away* from buildings. Historically, this area accommodated a number of smaller buildings.

- We would like to know when all the organizations and agencies listed were given the actual dimensions of the building. Further, were they given the side by side views that the Washington Canoe Club requested? We believe the original representations we were given were distorted and misleading as to the size of the building.

Boathouses – Operation and Access

- We are happy to learn that there will be no sailing from the boathouse. We hope this can be codified.

- We do not believe that Georgetown will be able to control parking on crowded weekends. Further, we are hopeful that additional people and vehicles will not impede the flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic in an already cramped space. To this end, we suggest that in an effort to ensure parking and other traffic related concerns are addressed, DC will codify appropriate restrictions to ensure:

    - Parking for spectators, team members, athletes and competing schools is off site.
    - Trailers and shuttle busses will not block Water Street or the Trail for any significant period of time.

- In our decades of experience attending and hosting regattas, we have found that spectators tend to congregate at boathouses and not necessarily at the finish line.

- We believe that traffic will be disrupted to some extent on busy weekends, and as a result we respectfully request a DOT study.

- We respectfully request a copy of the DOT approval.

- We are pleased that emergency vehicles will have access.

- Regarding the discussions of paddling lanes, we are confused by the suggestion that it was "the previous president of WCC who said there had been no discussion." Mr. Rhodes, the previous president, never stated that there were no discussions; he did however state that the (proposed) docks could interfere with the course. We stand by his assessment. Further, we agree that "with cooperation" such things could be worked out. However, given the extent to which we have been misled to date we have reservations concerning good faith representations made to us in the future by Georgetown.

- We agree that "the cooperative use of the river is entirely workable". However, there are some situations that can create a natural conflict and safety concerns. We believe that the current proposal will create such conflicts, as eights and other large and less maneuverable craft will return to their docks through the area where beginners in very instable craft will be circling.

- While we approve of the replacement of the existing launches with wakeless ones, the need to store these behind the docks will push the docks farther into the river especially at low tide.

- Tony Johnson testified that GU competes in "three or four regattas in the course of the fall." This seems to contradict the assertion that "Georgetown's crew program is not active" in the summer and fall, which is WCC's peak racing season. Further, GU has asserted in the same letter that its boathouse will be used "year round".

- When asked about social functions, GU fails to provide a direct response. They talk about the design. We have heard they have no "plans or desires" to use the boathouse for such things. Plans and desire change. Rooms can be used for more than one designed purpose. It seems odd that the great room, which is "designed" for exercise, needs such high ceilings. Many commercial gyms have rows of rowing machines and nine or ten foot ceilings. We would like a restriction codified if indeed GU has no intention of using the boathouse for social functions.

- We could not begin to tell you how many tuxedo and gown clad couples have wandered into the Washington Canoe Club looking for a local event. The statement that evening events at the boathouse would be problematic due to location, inferring such use will be discouraged, is absurd. Boathouse Row in Philadelphia regularly rents out for social affairs and is off the main strip.

Regarding the issue of wakes

- We agree that all prefer flat water.

- We have never encountered a wake from a shell that disturbed us.

- The Harbor Patrol does a great job. Their efforts are to be applauded. Unfortunately they cannot be everywhere all the time. Sometimes overloaded launches create problems.

- While we approve of the replacement of the existing launches with wakeless ones, the need to store these behind the docks will push the docks farther into the river, especially at low tide.