02-30

1330 35th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007

June 23, 2003

Carol Mitten, Chair
Washington, DC Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 210 South
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Madam Chairperson and Members of the DC Zoning Commission:

I am writing this letter to you because it has come to my attention that a proposal regarding the zoning of the land for a new boathouse for Georgetown University is soon to be ruled upon. As a student of the University and a rower, I realize that my perspective on this situation is not going to come as a surprise to anyone, nor am I likely to bring up any issues on the subject that you are not already well aware of, especially at this stage in the process. In addition, I have little knowledge of zoning rules or procedures and am not qualified to argue about those matters. On the other hand, I also know that there are strong feelings on each side of this case, and it seems as important for one side to be heard as the other. Clearly opponents of the proposal are not allowing repetitiveness to silence *them*, and I do not desire that those who constantly complain should appear to be the more convincing group simply because they are louder. Nonetheless, I apologize in advance for any redundancies that you may encounter in this letter, and I thank you for your attention in reading it.

There is obviously no easy solution to the problem that you now have before you. On one side, you have a group of people who wish to see things stay just as they are now. This view does not seem to have anything really to do with any particular endangered animal or stretch of scenic land; these people will and have opposed a boathouse however it is proposed, and whoever proposes it. Some of this is certainly born out of genuine concern that we will become one of those cities lined with ugly, characterless buildings and smoke stacks—something no one wants to see happen. But Washington DC is not like Philadelphia or Baltimore, supported by industry and already littered with unsightly buildings. A boathouse like this one will add to the beauty of the scenery as well as allow more people to enjoy it.

In a way, I cannot help but understand the perspectives of local residents—particularly of Foxhall and areas in close proximity to the University—which cause them to oppose anything that it does. Having lived in University-owned housing off campus this past year, and as a present Georgetown Resident living two blocks from the front gates, I am more than familiar with the frustration of not being able to sleep at three o'clock in the morning because some drunken college student felt that they should inform everyone within a five block radius that they were "the king of the world." It is likely that the new dorm opening in the fall will do much to help this problem, but the memory is still there, and probably will be for some time. That said, most of my team members do not even stay up late, let alone drink (yet another positive effect of the sport); it simply interferes with one's ability to function at six in the morning.

All the same, this kind of bitterness falls completely out of the scope of an argument about an athletic facility. It would be a travesty to allow a few irresponsible students to prevent our college and high school teams from reaching their full potential. The only possible disruption that I can think of residents experiencing from the construction of a boathouse in the proposed location is the occasional regatta, which would only cause a minor inconvenience near the site a few weekends a year—notably, far less than all of the road construction that is a way of life in the District. There would be rowers walking to practice every morning, of course, but the reduced danger to the athletes—who now cross busy roads and pass homeless men (who assured me, though I did not ask, that they "would not hurt me") in the dark on the benches by the waterfront seems a bit more compelling, to me, than the fear that a 130-pound woman's footfalls might disturb someone who is probably asleep anyway. Likewise, I cannot begin to comprehend the unqualified stinginess of the Washington Canoe Club in their refusal to share the waterfront.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
Case 02-30
Exhibit 368

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.02-30
EXHIBIT NO.368

Since I attended the zoning meeting on June 5, I am above all else interested in responding to some of the claims that members of the Canoe Club have made about how a decision in favor of the University would affect their ability to operate, including the claim that our facility will cause irreparable harm to their paddlers' abilities to train for major events like the Olympics. I would also like to address some of the questions that have been posed about the necessity of some of the amenities contained within the boathouse. My suggestion to the commission, on this point, is to formulate this same argument using the rower's perspective. What facilities, you should ask yourselves, are needed to make a collegiate rowing team competitive today? Let us not ignore, also, what it takes for a high school to run a successful program, for it is clear that whatever decision you make will greatly affect the fates of high school rowers. Granted, a competitive high school program at this point does not require nearly such specialized facilities as does a collegiate program, but racks for their boats seem, to me, somewhat helpful.

One of the athletes who spoke on behalf of the Canoe Club earlier this month displayed an impressive amount of enthusiasm for his sport. He showed a desire to not only be good at it, but to be the very best. I want to be sure that you realize that this attitude is not only *present* in Georgetown's rowing program but prevalent, and it is growing against all odds. When one considers that this spirit is present both at the Washington Canoe Club and at Georgetown, it seems painfully selfish that, knowing what it is to want to succeed, they would refuse to share the opportunity to do that with anybody else, including local high schools, Georgetown University, and George Washington University, to name only a few. In addition, their claims that our coaches "wake them" out and swamp their boats are ludicrous. The only ones that I have ever seen do such a thing are either people with very large motorboats who seem to have no regard for anyone and effect the crews as much as the paddlers, or the police themselves! There seldom seems to be any reason for them to speed back and forth, either; they don't appear to be after anyone, least of all our coaches. I would also point out that the endowment for our boathouse is also supposed to include the purchase of "wake-free" launches, so the Canoe Club has no need to worry about any more of a disturbance around their docks than usual, in that regard; less once they get out on open water.

Before this past fall, I had neither an awareness of nor a stake in the rowing community; in fact, I had never set foot in a boathouse. Since transferring to Georgetown and joining its lightweight program, however, all of that has changed starting with my very first row and culminating in a victory for my boat at Big East and at EAWRC Sprints, arguably the most successful season ever for lightweight women's rowing at Georgetown. I have constantly been impressed, inspired, and humbled by my teammates' drive and tenacity even though they know what they are up against trying to compete with teams that have every advantage that they do not.

This attitude has taken our program further than many would expect, but it can only do so much. Several of us have tried out or would like to try out for the US National Team, but at this point we are still just barely falling short. The Canoe Club has been where it is and had the advantage of adequate facilities for over 100 years, and they are just now worrying that someone will interfere with their Olympic dreams. Ours have been interfered with for decades, and continue to be thwarted. In spite of this, we have worked with what we have, and I feel that we have earned the chance to take a step forward. Our own state-of-the-art facility is precisely what we need to do so, and with that advantage I firmly believe that we could have the very best lightweight program in the country in just a few years, and heavyweight programs that are regarded as equal to or better than Brown, Princeton, or Harvard.

It is useful, if we want to see what goes into a rowing program of this caliber, for us first to look at some of the most successful ones in the country. Take, for example, Brown, Harvard, Princeton, and the University of Wisconsin. If you look at these four outstanding programs, you will notice one thing before anything else: ALL of them have their own boathouses, and all of those boathouses have rowing tanks on site. Yale, Stanford, Boston University, and U Penn all possess tanks as well, though BU and U Penn's are off-site (one may argue that this is reflected in their rankings, since the programs with the on-site tanks tend overwhelmingly to be the higher-ranked ones). As a rower, this comes as no surprise to me, for rowing is as much a mental game as a physical one. When one walks into the Princeton boathouse, she can sense that this is a sanctuary for its athletes; more than just a place to train, it is a place to develop team and school spirit. It is *theirs*. When one spends as much time at a place as collegiate rowers do at a boathouse—more time than most students spend at their part-time jobs—it becomes almost like a second home; it goes a great deal towards team solidarity and overall focus if it also *feels* that way.

Beyond mere atmosphere and aesthetics, though, these fine programs have a tremendous opportunity that Georgetown does not: a rowing tank. Anyone who knows rowing will be quick to tell you that good technique matters at least as much as an individual rower's strength, if not more. Even if you can pull harder on an oar than

any other member of your team, you are worth little to them if you cannot follow the athlete in front of you and make the most of each stroke—eight people as one. All of these top rowing programs have the benefit of practicing this aspect of their training all year round, whereas Georgetown can only do so for the fall and spring, and then only when conditions permit. No matter how hard we work, how much drive and determination we put into our training, we can never quite make up for this. Until we have a tank of our own, our rivals will always have a tremendous advantage; one that we have never yet been able to overcome. We may have good years and bad years, but our program can never be consistently excellent until our facilities match our will to excel.

Even when one realizes that rowing tanks are necessary, though, she may still make the point that they do not need to be in the same building, or even the same neighborhood as the boathouse. Likewise with the training room that would be in the proposed facility. After all, the whole idea behind the rowing tanks is to allow the rowers to practice and train when they are not going to be on the river, so it should not need to be anywhere near the river, right? Well, yes and no. I can recall for you countless occasions when we have made the 15 minute walk down to the boathouse only to discover our coach sitting on one of the benches, looking pensively out towards the water—or what would be the water if she could see it.

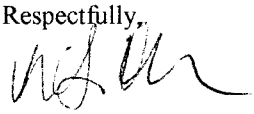
Fog often makes it simply dangerous to go out in the morning. Add to this list rain, flooding, strong currents, and wind, which can make it hazardous to steer the large shells. This past fall I watched as one of the GW novice boats was lost due to some of these factors. If that were not enough, our novice coaches must, in the early stages of the fall, contend with the fact that several of their rowers may decide not to get out of bed that morning—or may quit without notice—and they may not have enough people to fill a boat. On any given day, a rower may be sick or unable to come for practice for whatever reason, and the remaining people in her boat cannot go on the water. In any of these cases, it is necessary for some or all of the rowers to practice indoors that day. If our alternative training facilities were on campus rather than on the boathouse grounds, the coach and all of the rowers would have to trek all the way back to campus (an estimated 10 to fifteen minute walk from the new facility's site), losing valuable training time and focus. This is even more inconvenient for the coaches, who must be sure that all of the equipment is in order before a row. Assuming that the whole squad arrived in time, and assuming that the coach waited the usual fifteen minutes before deciding that the fog would not lift in time, the team has already lost nearly a half hour of its valuable practice time. This year the docks were not even put in until the week before our first race because of the weather. We lost several of our first races when we should have won, and I cannot help but wonder what impact rowing tanks might have had on those outcomes, especially when you consider that we won both of our most competitive races later in the season.

While it is entirely true that our team will benefit simply with the establishment of our own facility, it is equally notable that we need more than a place to put more boats, for this alone will not allow us to hold our own with the likes of Brown, Princeton, or Wisconsin. We already have a place to put boats. What we do not have are locker rooms to keep a dry change of clothes after a rainy, windy workout in November; I caught several colds because of being chilled on the way home from the boathouse this year. We do not have a comfortable, clean place to sit if an intense workout during the six weeks of indoor training in the winter leaves us feeling a bit overwhelmed, as often happens. If we decide to go for a row on our own and are not sure which equipment to use, we do not have offices on site where we can readily consult one of our coaches about the problem, and also have someone there to watch for us and be sure we return safely. We have no recourse for working on technique if spring should decide to wait until May instead of March to show its face.

Let us also note, at this point, that we have something of a unique situation at GU where space in concerned. When one visits the campus of a school like the University of Virginia or Princeton, there is ample green space and room to expand. For Georgetown, however, every little bit of green space that we have should be preserved, when possible. In my opinion, the University really provides an invaluable service in this regard; Healy lawn offers one of the loveliest park-like settings in the city, and it is totally accessible to outsiders. Where, specifically, would the Canoe Club like us to put our rowing tanks? Perhaps in front of Lauinger Library, or on the lawn by the observatory, which is at least as important a landmark as the Canoe Club itself? The only spaces on campus where it would not be a tragic waste of green space to place athletic facilities, in fact, are those places already set aside for academic endeavors, and that would be equally unacceptable if Georgetown is to maintain its status as a top university—an end that benefits the district as a whole, whether or not residents of Foxhall care to acknowledge it.

In closing, let me just say that I have taken the time to write this only because rowing has, over the past nine months, become one of the most influential experiences of my life. Before I came to Georgetown I was in poor physical condition, and had a myriad of minor health problems. I can now say without hesitation that I am in better shape than I ever thought possible. I have a seemingly unending supply of energy in spite of the fact that I work out at least two or three hours a day, and I feel totally confident in my body knowing that it looks its best; something that I am sure you know is rare in college women. I have so much more self-discipline and drive than I ever had before, and have been made amply aware of the importance of teamwork. The only thing I really regret about joining crew, actually, is the fact that I did not have to opportunity to do so either in high school, or at least at my previous college. There are some students in the area now who do have this great opportunity, and it may soon by denied if something is not done about boathouse space. The reasons that have been provided against building the boathouse just do not seem compelling enough to deny thousands of rowers and future rowers what could be the experience of their lives.

Respectfully,



Kristen Leigh Hollar