1806 N Wayne St
Arlington, VA 22201

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

30 April 2003

Dear Ms Mitten,

I am writing to voice my concerns over the proposed Georgetown University / National Park Service proposal to rezone the riverfront parcel to support the proposed boathouse.

The Potomac River directly above Key Bridge is renowned for being one of the most "green" waterways so close in to the center of any city in the country. As a kayaker on the Potomac, a bike rider on the riverside trails, and someone who enjoys the stroll over the bridge into Georgetown, I have to say that it is one of the most enticing parts of living in this area, and a draw for Virginians and others. Development of the river above Key Bridge would become a serious disincentive to come into the District for recreation.

The proposed boathouse and docks concern me, as boaters using this section of the river will be pushed out into deep water to compete with a large number of motor craft. Perceived, if not real, safety concerns of casual boaters will drive away the recreational opportunities on this section of the river. Similarly, C&O Canal towpath is a big draw for bikers from the Virginia side, although it is already somewhat awkward to get to the bike-trail for them. Additional obstruction during construction and road traffic afterward will certainly reduce the attraction to go into the District.

Environmentally, I would like to point out the potential for exacerbating the flooding that occasionally hits around the base of the bridge. Currently, in time of flood, the trees on the lot serve to slow the water and catch debris. Without the trees, erosion and damage from the debris would be expected. With a large building, the water would be forced to flow around it with significantly higher force, seriously increasing the erosion of the bank and canal foundation, and damaging the neighboring structures.

I am secondarily worried about a lack of straightforwardness in the plans for the proposed boathouse. I have not seen any drawings intended for the public that show straight-on views or maps revealing relative size to the nearby historic structures or clear affect to the bike trail and canal. Such lack of clarity in the physical appearance of the boathouse makes me very skeptical of GU/NPS statements of how it will really affect its surroundings and how it will be used.

All told, I consider the biggest issue to be setting a precedent for developing the waterfront above Key Bridge. One can only expect an unending flow of requests for similar rezoning for similar projects. This precedent is what will irreparably damage the aesthetic value, recreational safety, and environmental security of the Potomac in the District.

Although I am now a resident of Arlington, I live only a mile from Key Bridge and my interests in the District are very strong. Having graduated from Georgetown University and having lived in the city for 14 years, and I am attracted into the city regularly.

Based on the issues above, I strongly urge you to deny the request to rezone the GU/NPS property for a boathouse of that size.

Sincerely,

Eric Powell

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