

**Letter to Nancy Goldenberg, Chair Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Commission :  
Temple Boathouse**

JANUARY 31 2013

Dear Nancy and Fellow Commissioners,

You have heard from many concerned citizens already about the proposed Temple Boathouse. Much of the advocacy has centered on the importance of respecting the good work that went into creating the Ordinance. That is very important, but with due respect, the issues that will most impact the most Philadelphians have been the least mentioned. They are issues of design, and the Design Advocacy Group would like to join with you in a discussion of those issues.

THE SITE

Strawberry Mansion is a beautiful bridge. Its steel arches and struts give a glimpse of the industrial past of the Schuylkill. It is now possible for hundreds of people a day to experience the grandeur of the bridge as they pass below it, stopping to rest at a picnic table, running the trail, rowing or driving. If a boathouse is built wedged up against the bridge supports, as proposed, that experience will be lost to all but the rowers. How could a building on that site not degrade the experience of the bridge? Even the promotional drawings show a building that overhangs the boundaries of the lot. There is no back to this site, so anyone approaching by the trail or Kelly Drive - as they are about to see the beauties of our mighty river - would be greeted by the back of a building that fronts on the river, the parking lot and the drive.

PLANNING

A master plan is needed to accommodate not only Temple, but other proposed boathouses like the one for community rowing that is being discussed. Boathouses belong on our river and we should take the long view, as befits our grand rowing tradition. Rowers are out at hours when sensible souls are still in bed, thus making the riverbanks safer. Plus, boats are fun. But any new building should benefit the public and the whole rowing community.

The proposed building would seriously squeeze the logistics of regatta organizing by taking up the current grassy area and reducing the size of the parking lot upriver from the Canoe House.

## A BETTER SITE?

Consider the site just downriver from St. Joseph's Gillen Boathouse. This is a barren piece of land made worse by its adjacency to the bleak back side of Gillen. With a 50' wide shared yard between the buildings, the site would still not reach to the existing public dock downstream. The adjacency of the two buildings would call to mind the density of Boathouse Row. The proposed bridge site, on the other hand, is lovely, and not the wasteland described in Temple's documents.

## ARCHITECTURE

Wherever new boathouses are built, we ask you, Commissioners, to insist that they measure up to their forbears from previous centuries. How is it possible that a building that resembles nothing so much as a low-budget suburban CVS got built on our river? Gillen Boathouse is there to stay, but a beautiful piece of architecture next door would do much to elevate its presence. And let those new buildings express their modernism, just as the ones of the 19th and early 20th century expressed theirs. Sites chosen for these buildings should allow for that level of outstanding design.

## POLICY

If a new boathouse is to be built anywhere near the Canoe House, and if no new riverfront parkland is provided, Temple should offer to pay up with funds sufficient to start simultaneously on the restoration of the treasured East Park Canoe House. Think of the confused and negative message it would send to the public if a private facility were to be built on previously public parkland while the public building next door were left to crumble.

DAG would be happy to continue discussions with you about this project and about a master plan for future boathouse locations. We thank you all for the time you volunteer to steward our parks and we wish you well with all the challenges ahead.



Yours very truly,

Kiki Bolender

Chair, Design Advocacy Group