

## **Tearing Down the Whitehurst: A Result Worth the Consequences?**

Although I agree that the Whitehurst is a disfiguring, panoramic scar that darkens K Street, I do not think it should be torn down for the following reasons:

The Whitehurst Won't Be Coming Down Anytime Soon: The study by DDOT consultants never considered how several projects will impact the Whitehurst and K Street. The city will spend about \$500 million between 2010 and 2025 to remedy ongoing pollution of the Potomac by Georgetown sewers, and spend a similar amount rebuilding and widening the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge. The bridge will be done in 2014, and Key Bridge and the Whitehurst will surely be an alternate interim route for some TR bridge users.

Big rainstorms gush raw sewage into the Potomac and very big rainstorms result in sewage sloshing through the streets of lower Georgetown, onto sidewalks, and into parking garages. K Street will be dug up for many months as these sewage and runoff problems are corrected. The scale of the project is huge: one element is a storage tunnel 8 million cubic feet in size. What folly to tear down the Whitehurst, convert K Street into a thoroughfare, and then dig it all up.

Costs And Taxes: The study's preliminary cost estimates are low, perhaps absurdly so. For comparison, the District intends spending \$3.5 million next year to "rehabilitate" the Thomas Jefferson St. bridge over the C&O Canal – which is a *small* bridge.

The cost of tearing down the Whitehurst is important because leading deconstruction advocates believe Georgetown taxpayers will solely pay the cost. Property owners near the Whitehurst might see their taxes rise by 300 to 500 percent to pay for some alternatives. Such a burden can produce a perverse calculus: taxes so high that property depreciates in value.

Traffic Woes, More or Less? Most alternatives cut the number of highway lanes over Rock Creek Parkway from 19 to 13. Common sense argues this will likely increase congestion. Similarly, a K Street gauntlet of six new traffic lights will delay through traffic during most of the week. The DDOT study does not address several key factors: the potential traffic effect on streets north of M Street; flow and speed estimates for non rush-hour traffic; additional clogging from parking garage portals and loading docks on K Street; number of lost on-street parking spaces; and the cost and site of a large ventilation building(s) for the tunnels. Regrettably the study acknowledges that a slice of the new Waterfront Park would be taken and that the current evening rush hour jam on Canal Road and the Whitehurst would remain unfixed, and that some Virginia drivers would avoid Georgetown altogether. Hardly a data set that assures that traveling in Georgetown would become easier and quicker for most people.

- Walter Groszyk