

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 6550



ANACOSTIA RIVERWALK MULTI-USE TRAIL Southeast Washington D.C.

Submitted by the District of Columbia Department of Transportation

December 22, 2004

Abstract

The proposed Anacostia Riverwalk is planned as a multi-use trail for bicycles and pedestrians. The trail would extend along the east and west sides of the Anacostia River from 11th Street to connect with the Bladensburg Waterfront Park in Bladensburg, Maryland. The project is the District of Columbia Department of Transportation's (DDOT) leading Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) project, and is being planned and designed in accordance with the framework plan contained in the AWI.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept site development plans pursuant to Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b) (1)).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

- **Approves** the concept site development plans for the Anacostia Riverwalk Multi-use Trail, Southeast Washington D.C., as shown on NCPC Map File No.00.00(70.00)41510.
- **Commends** the District of Columbia Department of Transportation for the extensive coordination and consultation efforts in developing federal and local partnerships in creating a unified vision for the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative and Anacostia Riverwalk Multi-use Trail.
- **Encourages** the National Park Service to use low impact construction techniques when constructing the Trail, particularly when constructing boardwalks over wetlands.

- **Reminds** the District of Columbia Office of Planning that the Commission is eagerly awaiting the submission of the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative prior to the submission of preliminary and final plans for the Anacostia Riverwalk Multi-Use Trail.

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DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

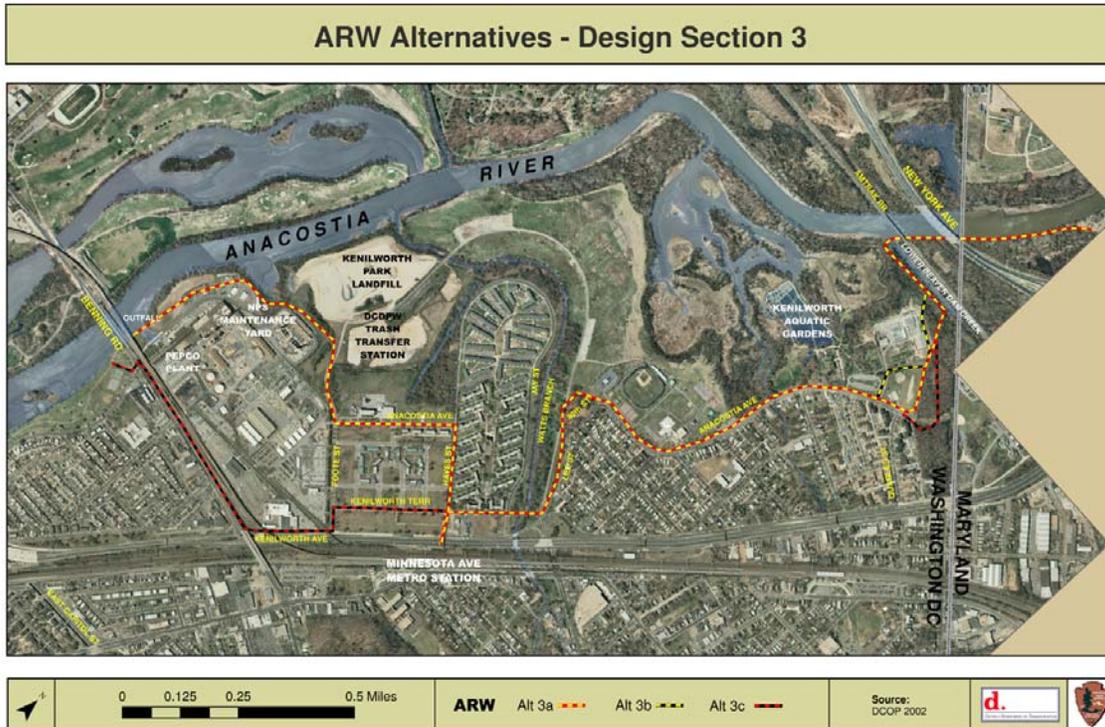
Site Description

The proposed Riverwalk Multi-use Trail (Trail) and its connecting points would extend along the east side of the Anacostia River from the Washington Navy Yard to Benning Road, and on the west side of the Anacostia River from the Anacostia Naval Station to the Bladensburg trail in Prince George’s County, Maryland. The overall Trail is divided into three design sections:

- *Section 1* – Includes all portions of the trail east of the Anacostia River from the Anacostia Naval Station at the south end to Benning Road at the north.



- *Section 3* – Includes all portions of the trail east of the Anacostia River from Benning Road to the Bladensburg Trail in Prince George’s County, Maryland



Background

The AWI was conceived in the Commission’s *Legacy Plan of 1997*. *Legacy* called for making greater use of the Anacostia River’s waterfronts and shorelines and connecting these areas to the adjacent surrounding communities and neighborhoods. The purpose of the project is to provide a safe and convenient means for park visitors to access the Anacostia waterfront and enjoy Anacostia Park. As such, it is intended that the proposed project consists of a trail system that would provide bicyclists and pedestrians with:

- Nearly continuous access to the east side of the river from South Capitol Street to the Bladensburg Trail in Maryland (seven miles)
- Continuous access to the west side of the river from 11th Street to Benning Road (three miles).
- Safe and convenient access points to enter the Park from the surrounding neighborhoods.

The proposed trail system is a key component of the AWI, which is the framework plan for revitalizing the District's waterfront areas. The AWI is the product of coordination between federal and local agencies to cooperatively develop a vision for the waterfront. Overall, the AWI would eventually provide a comprehensive 48-mile trail system that includes approximately 20 miles of trails along waterfront areas within the District of Columbia.

There are few trails along the Anacostia that allow park users to walk or ride from one area of the Anacostia Park to another. On a larger scale, multiple regional trails that include the Bladensburg Trail, the Potomac Heritage Scenic Trail, Rock Creek Trails, Mount Vernon Trail, Anacostia River Tributary Trails, Anacostia Greenway, Suitland Parkway Trail, and Fort Circle Trails surround and approach the Anacostia Park area. Although Anacostia Park's 1200 acres offer passive and active recreation, they do not offer extended biking and walking opportunities, nor is it fully accessible from the surrounding community.

Design Concept

The concept site development plan would connect many of the fragmented park trails and provide new trails that would connect the east and west sides of the Anacostia River. The preferred alternative of the design concept would confine the new Trail to National Park Service park land and DDOT's rights-of-way and routed primarily through Anacostia Park. The criteria for the new Trail would focus on a trail that would be environmentally sensitive and provide:

- Access to the Anacostia River and Anacostia Park.
- Desired viewsheds from the trail.
- Physical connectivity to local communities, transportation infrastructure, and local and regional trails.
- Proximity to the river.
- Improved access to important park features, including recreational facilities and areas of natural and cultural interest.

The preferred alternative for the three design sections mentioned earlier in this report would be different and tailored for each section:

- *Section 1 (Includes all portions of the trail east of the Anacostia River from the Anacostia Naval Station at the south end to Benning Road at the north).* In this area, Anacostia Drive would be shifted to the east and the trail would hold the existing western alignment of Anacostia Drive.
- *Section 2 (Includes all portions of the trail west of the Anacostia River from the Washington Navy Yard at the south to the Benning Road at the north).* In this area, the

Trail alignment would move away from Water Street and closely parallel the existing vegetation in the areas between Eastern Power Boat Club and the District Yacht Club, and between the District Yacht Club and the terminus of Water Street at M Street.

- *Section 3 (Includes all portions of the trail east of the Anacostia River from Benning Road to the Bladensburg Trail in Prince George's County, Maryland).* In this Section, the Trail would be routed around the north side of the PEPCO Plant and the District of Columbia Department of Public Works Trash Transfer Station. Benning Road would not be used as a trail connector to Anacostia Avenue because of the safety concerns associated with Benning Road, which is marginally acceptable for non-vehicular traffic.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff is pleased with the overall direction of the proposed concept site development plans for the Anacostia Riverwalk. The idea of increasing use of the Anacostia River and shoreline, providing better local and regional access to the shoreline, and connecting Anacostia Park to the larger Regional Park and trail system are all principles and policies contained in the Commission's *Legacy Plan*. The current planning effort for the Anacostia Riverwalk Multi-use Trail system is an extension of the *Legacy* framework planning efforts. *Legacy* defined this phase of planning as the "detailed planning phase."

The selection of environmentally sensitive alignments for the Trail, as indicated in the three design sections, would:

- Provide for an overall trail system that links with the larger trail system, continuing into Bladensburg, Maryland.
- Provide connectivity to local communities, transportation infrastructure, and local and regional trails.
- Minimize potential conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Emphasize and strengthen desired view sheds from the Trail.
- Provide closer proximity to the river.
- Provide improved access to important park features, including recreational facilities and areas of natural and cultural interests.

Staff supports the Anacostia Riverwalk project. Constructing this project will meet the goals established in the NCPC *Extending the Legacy Plan* as well as the AWI, in which NCPC is a partner. The environmentally preferred alternative for the three design sections would have the least impact on wetlands while providing the greatest amount of neighborhood connections. Because of the presence of designated wetlands within the preferred alternative's project area, we encourage the National Park Service to use low impact construction techniques when

constructing the Trail, particularly when constructing boardwalks over wetlands. Staff also reminds the District of Columbia's Office of Planning that the overall Anacostia Waterfront Framework Plan should be submitted to the Commission for review.

CONSULTATION

The proposed concept is being extensively coordinated with many federal and local agencies. NCPC is a partner with the District and a Memorandum of Understanding has been developed with the following agencies:

- General Services Administration
- The Government of the District of Columbia
- The Office of Management and Budget
- Naval District of Washington
- Military District of Washington
- Commanding Officer Marine Barracks Washington
- U. S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Department of Transportation
- National Park Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Environmental Protection Agency
- District of Columbia Housing Authority
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
- District of Columbia Sports and Entertainment Commission
- District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority
- National Arboretum of the United States Department of Agriculture
- U. S. Small Business Administration.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. The Parks and Open Space element states that:

- Promote public access along the waterfront, including waterfronts on military and other properties when security considerations will permit
- Plan, complete and maintain connection between public parks and open spaces.
- Plan for new parks as part of the park system of the region.
- Link open space along the waterfront to provide a continuous public open space system.

- Develop the banks of the Anacostia River as a high-quality urban park with a mix of active and passive recreational opportunities.
- Ensure that Anacostia Park functions as a regional recreational resource, emphasizing the park's special riverside, ecological, and scenic qualities and character.

The proposal is consistent with all of the above policies.

In addition to the design concept being consistent with policies of the federal Comprehensive Plan, it is also consistent with policies contained in other Master Plan documents relating to enhancing access to Anacostia Park, the Anacostia River, and providing a continuous trail system along the Anacostia River. They include:

- District of Columbia Comprehensive Plan.
- The Anacostia Park General Management Plan.
- Anacostia Waterfront Initiative Framework Plan.
- Priorities 2000: Metropolitan Washington Greenways.
- Extending the Legacy: Planning America's Capital for the 21st Century.
- East of the River Initiative.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on December 8, 2004. The Committee forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies represented. The participating agencies were: NCPC, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the General Services Administration, and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

National Environmental Policy Act

The current submission, as a concept design proposal, does not require the Commission to complete its NEPA determination at this stage of project review. Based on the initial information supplied by the District of Columbia, the National Park Service as the lead federal agency, will be undertaking preparation of an environmental assessment in accordance with Park Service requirements. The District agency is cautioned, however, that the environmental assessment preparation should be developed also in accordance with the Commission's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures. The Commission should be identified as a cooperating federal agency in the drafting of the environmental assessment to ensure timely and required adoption of the document by NCPC, as specified by the Commission's procedures and dictated by NEPA provisions for approval actions, which a portion of this enterprise will require.

In developing the submission of any future preliminary project plans to the Commission, the District agency and the Park Service should respond to any substantive comments on the

environmental assessment prior to the submission of the proposal for NCPC review. NCPC staff emphasizes that the National Park Service must determine the findings of its environmental review and develop a conclusion and mitigation of any adverse impacts from the planned action prior to submitting any phase of the project.

Historic Preservation Act

NPS is the lead agency for both NEPA and NHPA. NPS and its team have begun early consultation with the District of Columbia and Maryland State Historic Preservation Offices (DC SHPO and MD SHPO) on the identification of cultural resources—both historic structures and archaeological sites.

The EA study team reviewed NPS cultural resource survey reports, archaeological surveys, and other research materials related to land use and cultural history of the Anacostia Park area. After meeting with the DC SHPO, they jointly agreed that there were no historic structures in the Area of Potential Effect, which was defined as a 50-foot-wide area on either side of the center line of the trail. There are 22 archaeological sites within the area that encompasses Anacostia Park and its immediate environs. Seven of the sites are located within the Area of Potential Effect. The study team also met with the Maryland Historic Trust (MD SHPO), and it was determined that there were no archaeological sites within the Prince George's County segment. Archaeological sites are generally located on upper terraces along the Anacostia River, mostly at the mouths of tributary streams. Most known sites are situated on the east bank of the river rather than the west bank, which is marshy. Although both sides of the river have had extensive grading and filling, the west bank has been more extensively disturbed through efforts to reclaim the extensive marshlands. The EA also includes a Viewsheds Plan depicting important views in the study area. Several environments exist along the length of the proposed trail. The center portion of the trail is characterized by the riverbanks and surrounding parkland. Some parts of the park include manmade features. Neighborhoods surround the proposed trail in this area. The neighborhoods include late-19th century to mid-20th-century row houses and multi-unit dwellings in an urban context that also includes industry, retail, and roadways. The Anacostia Freeway separates the neighborhoods from the Park on the east side of the river, although the freeway views are mitigated by the tree line along the Park's eastern edge. On the west bank, the Park is separated from nearby neighborhoods by the Navy Yard and institutional buildings such as the DC Jail and RFK Stadium and parking lots.

NPS has studied the possible effect of the Trail on the known archaeological resources. Each of the alternatives follows the low Anacostia river terraces or is located within existing roadways on the upper terraces (where resources are more likely to be found) if possible, in order to reduce the potential for adverse effect. NPS identified 4 or possibly 5 known archaeological sites that would be impacted by construction activity. These sites are located on the east bank roughly between 11th Street, SE and Benning Road, SE.

NPS will continue consultation with the DC SHPO to determine the National Register eligibility of the sites and to determine the effects of the alternatives on the archaeological sites. NPS will seek to minimize effects to the sites by locating the trail within existing roadway alignments

where possible, avoiding the lower level terraces, and through the installation of a trail with a narrow construction footprint involving minimal, shallow earth movement and disturbance.