

STAFF RECOMMENDATION



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NCPC File No. 3083/7148

JONES POINT PARK PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Alexandria, Virginia

Submitted by the National Park Service

August 26, 2010

Abstract

The National Park Service has submitted final site and building plans for improvements to Jones Point Park in Alexandria, Virginia. These improvements include the addition of: an athletic field, two basketball courts, a kayak and canoe launch pier, a comfort station, a tot lot, parking spaces, a fishing pier, way finding and interpretive signage, an access road, and an additional community garden. The improvements will also restore and add fire safety to the Jones Point Lighthouse, restore the DC cornerstone, and the shipway and finishing pier.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of final site and building plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the final site and building plans for the improvements to Jones Point Park, in Alexandria, Virginia, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 2501.10(38.00)43131.

Commends the National Park Service for a park design that will be a great asset to the adjacent neighborhood and the region and for the high quality of the proposed interpretative signage both in content and design.

Encourages the National Park Service to review the signage to ensure that it reflects the most current project information and to evaluate alternative uses for the secured parking area under the bridge during times when the area is not being used for parking.

Notes that the Virginia Department of Transportation, the party responsible for the construction of the proposed project, has changed the construction phasing plan to allow access to portions of the park during construction in response to community concerns.

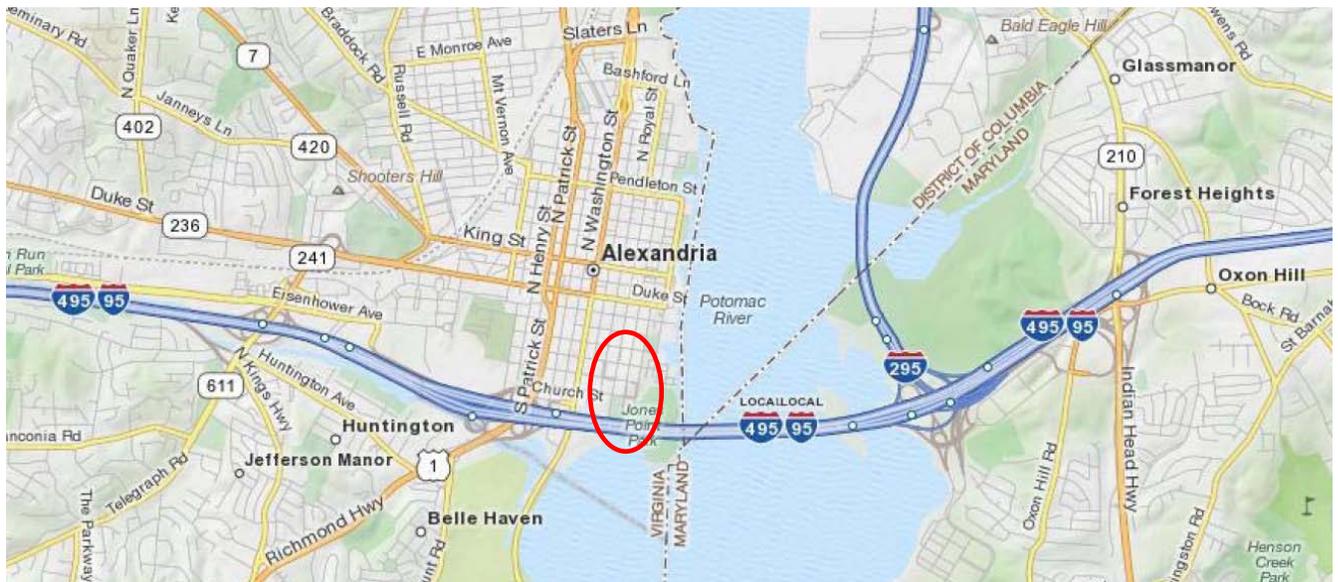
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

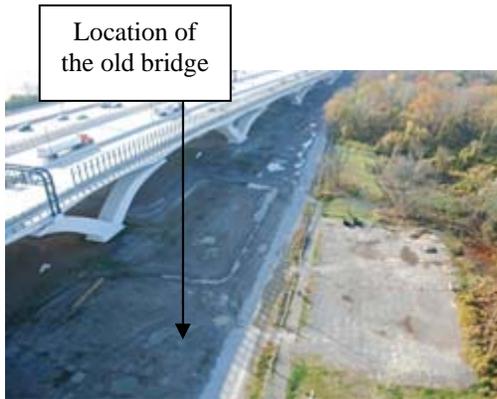
Jones Point Park is located in southeast Alexandria, Virginia. It is bounded by the Potomac River on the east and south sides and South Royal Street to the west. To the north of the Park are residential uses. An elevated section of Interstate 495, part of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, traverses the middle of the Park.

Regional Location



Jones Point Park is a 65-acre park with natural and recreational areas. Located within the park are a fishing pier, natural trails, multiple picnic tables, and a recreational field. The Mount Vernon Trail traverses the site from Washington Street to Jefferson Street. Also located within the park are the Jones Point Lighthouse and the DC Cornerstone.

Jones Point Lighthouse and DC Cornerstone



Location of the old bridge

Current Condition of the Park



Nature Trails through the Park

Background

Jones Point Park History

In July 1790, the United States Congress passed the Residence Act. The Act gave President Washington authority to choose the location and purchase the land for the National Capital; the land was to be located along the Potomac River. On January 24, 1791, Washington announced the site he had selected, which included the cities of Alexandria and Georgetown. The beginning point of the survey would be at Jones Point, along Hunting Creek, according to Washington's orders. On April 15, 1791, the first stone, the South Cornerstone, was laid at Jones Point.

Now found within the seawall of Jones Point Park, the DC Cornerstone is hard to located and in deteriorating condition.

DC Cornerstone



An icon for the park is the Jones Point Lighthouse. The lighthouse was built in 1855 and is the oldest surviving inland lighthouse in the United States. The lighthouse is a small wooden one-story structure with a “Fresnel” lens, which is a common design for lighthouses along the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The lighthouse was operational until 1926, when a new, taller light structure was built further east. The lighthouse was conveyed to the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) in 1926. In 1964, the DAR transferred the lighthouse to the National Park Service. In 1980, the lighthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places along with the DC cornerstone.



Jones Point Lighthouse

Currently, the interior of the lighthouse can not be accessed by the public and lacks the fire safety need to protect the lighthouse from damage.

Also located on the site was the Virginia Shipbuilding Corporation. Archaeological investigations of the Virginia Shipbuilding Corporation (VSC) site uncovered many of the foundations of the buildings that once stood within Jones Point, including the massive shipways used to build, launch, and repair the 9400-ton steel cargo ships constructed there during World War I.

When World War I began, the United States was in desperate need of ships. The Virginia Shipbuilding Corporation shipyard in Alexandria was one of 111 yards constructed between 1917 and 1918, and possessed all the necessities of a WWI era shipyard - a fabrication shop with upstairs mold loft, blacksmith shop, boiler shop, crane ways, shipways, and rail lines.

The shipbuilding site at Jones Point was constructed in 85 days. The keel of the first ship, the Gunston Hall, was laid on May 30, 1918, and was launched from the shipyard February 27, 1919. President Woodrow Wilson attended the ceremony of the laying of the first keel and received the honor of driving the first rivet.



**Ship docked at
Jones Point Park in 1919**

Commission Actions

The Commission has reviewed the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement project, for which this project is a part of, at several stages. These actions included the following reviews at the date specified:

April 8, 1999: The Commission approved design concepts for the replacement Woodrow Wilson Bridge project.

August 3, 2000: The Commission approved preliminary site and building plans and final foundation and Phase I dredging plans for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement.

March 1, 2001: The Commission:

- Commended the FHWA for the high quality of the preliminary design featured in the plans for the urban deck at Washington Street, Jones Point Park, and the Potomac River Waterfront Community Park as part of the Wilson Bridge Replacement. The Commission encouraged FHWA to ensure that the harmonious designs it has developed are carried through to their completion.
- Approved the preliminary site and building plans for the urban deck overpass at Washington Street and improvements to Jones Point Park in Alexandria, Virginia, and development of the new Potomac River Waterfront Community Park at Rosalie Island in Prince George's County, Maryland, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 2501.00(38.00)-40893. Excepted from the approval were the gateway sentinel elements at Potomac River

Waterfront Community Park, and the restroom/maintenance buildings at Jones Point Park and Potomac River Waterfront Community Park, which were approved in concept only.

- Requested that, in the preparation of subsequent plan submissions for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement project, the FHWA:
 - Provide, as the Commission earlier requested, complete details on the Wilson Bridge project noise barriers as they relate to the three amenity areas.
 - Present more design information on the visual graphics and signage that is to be utilized at both the urban deck and Potomac River Community Park as a “gateway announcement” at each end of the Wilson Bridge.
 - In the development of the three amenity areas (the urban deck, Jones Point Park, and Potomac River Waterfront Community Park), ensure a high standard of design for light fixtures and signage.

Preliminary Park Improvements Design (2001)



August 2, 2001: The Commission commended the FHWA for the high quality of the final bridge design and approved the final building plans for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 3206.00(48.20)-40932.

Additionally, the Commission requested that, in the preparation of subsequent plan submissions for ancillary elements of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Replacement project, the FHWA:

- Present design information on the visual graphics and signage that is to be utilized at both the urban deck and Potomac River Community Park as a “gateway announcement” at each end of the Wilson Bridge.
- In the development of the three project amenity areas (the urban deck, Jones Point Park, and Potomac River Waterfront Community Park), ensure a high standard of design for all light fixtures, structures, and signage.

November 1, 2001: The Commission approved the revised preliminary and final site and building plans for the urban deck overpass at Washington Street in Alexandria, Virginia, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 2501.00(48.20)-40956.

April 4, 2002: The Commission approved the preliminary and final site development plans for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Memorial Medallions, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 3206.00(38.00)-41000.



April 3, 2003: The Commission approved the preliminary and final site development plans for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge noise barrier, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 2510(05.17)-41155.



Noise Barriers as Seen from Jones Point Park

August 2004: The Commission approved the preliminary and final site development plans for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Potomac River Waterfront Community Park, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 2510(05.17)-41411.



Potomac River Waterfront Community Park

Proposal

In accordance with the conceptual mitigation plan articulated in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the signed Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project, the proposed improvements to Jones Point Park will transform the site into an active recreational facility with historic interpretations, and park and shoreline improvements. The following describes the items included as part of the final design plan submission for the park. They include:

- Vehicle access to the park would occur from Royal Street, which will end in a turn-around. A new access road connects a proposed parking lot of 110 parking space to Royal Street. All public vehicle access and parking areas under the old bridge site will be removed and the area beneath the new bridge will be paved. Access to the recycling center would be maintained and relocated to the new end of Royal Street.
- A guardhouse/gate is proposed to be located in the vicinity of Royal Street to ensure that, during special events, vehicles can be monitored entering and exiting within 80 feet of the bridge.
- The Mount Vernon Trail that enters the park at the north, is routed eastward and southward along the riverside promenade, then proceeds west crossing under the bridge and is further located west to link with the urban deck level at the south side of I-95. The Mt. Vernon Trail will remain a paved surface and connect to the new end of Royal Street. All other trails at this site would be paved or gravel pathways.
- The South Park Area includes the existing wetlands along Hunting Creek, a central lawn for special event programs, a new multi-use field, and the existing woodland grove along the Potomac River. The lawn is the focus of the passive interpretive area and is circled by a walkway that incorporates historic and archeological interpretation features, such as the original District of Columbia Boundary Line and the Rope Walk. At the south edge of this area are the Jones Point Lighthouse and the historic District of Columbia Cornerstone. To the northeast, Virginia Ship Building Company slipways will be interpreted and preserved in a limited fashion by cleaning, clearing, and preservation of exposed surfaces.
 - The D.C. South Cornerstone would be stabilized in accordance with the MOA. The concrete vault enclosure surrounding the cornerstone would be redesigned and replaced to keep water out of the vault and to protect the cornerstone while improving its visibility from the lighthouse yard above. Also, the retaining wall surrounding the cornerstone and lighthouse yard would be stabilized and rebuilt so that the wall and its historic appearance are restored and the lighthouse and cornerstone are provided improved long-term protection from invasive water. Limited elements of the historic beach would be rebuilt to improve interpretation of the entire site. Efforts will be made to re-establish native wetlands within the inner zone between the rocky bulkhead and the historic stone retaining wall. All

- work would be performed to minimize potential impacts to archeological resources.
- In accordance with the MOA, the Jones Point Lighthouse would undergo rehabilitation of its exterior façade, including replacement of missing exterior features, repair of the exposed structural system within its interior, and the correction of earlier projects that were previously undertaken without adherence to appropriate historic preservation standards. All work would be performed to minimize potential impacts to archeological resources.
- A Waterfront Area located north of the bridge that includes a wide pedestrian promenade with space for the Mount Vernon Bike Trail. The area would include the historic Virginia Ship Building Company ship finishing pier location and connect to the active recreation area, lawn terrace, children's tot lot, restrooms, a maintenance facility, and the proposed parking lot.
 - The current finishing pier would be changed to a promenade/boardwalk. Although the potential conversion of the finishing pier to a promenade/boardwalk would not prevent its use for fishing activities, two fishing piers would be provided within 200 feet of the existing fishing area, along the southeastern edge of the park. Access to fishing opportunities would be improved as the pedestrian paths and fishing piers would be designed to comply with current ADA regulations.
 - The Active Recreation area includes one multi-purpose grass field with run-out areas and buffer areas for teams and spectators. At the south edge of the fields is a major east-west path that serves to connect the waterfront, parking areas, and park entrance and includes the Mount Vernon Trail.
 - The Area Beneath the Bridge is comprised of special event parking of a total of 250 parking spaces along two separate aisles. The parking lies directly east of Royal Street under the bridge. Further east beneath the bridge is the Mount Vernon Trail, while at the water's edge lies a hard court sports area, a kayak and canoe put-in/take-out dock, and a comfort station.

Final Park Improvements Design



The project proposal also includes an extensive sign program. This program includes: 17 interpretative signs, one car entry sign, two pedestrian entry sign, one orientation sign, and one “hub” sign which is a sign that has three interpretative sign panels. The interpretative signage discusses the historical timeline and significance of Jones Point Park as well as cultural and natural elements of the park such as: “Potomac Fisheries,” and “Birdlife of the Marsh.” Most of the interpretative signage has a granite base with a porcelain enamel sign.

Interpretative Sign # 8: The Nation’s Capital



Car Entry Sign

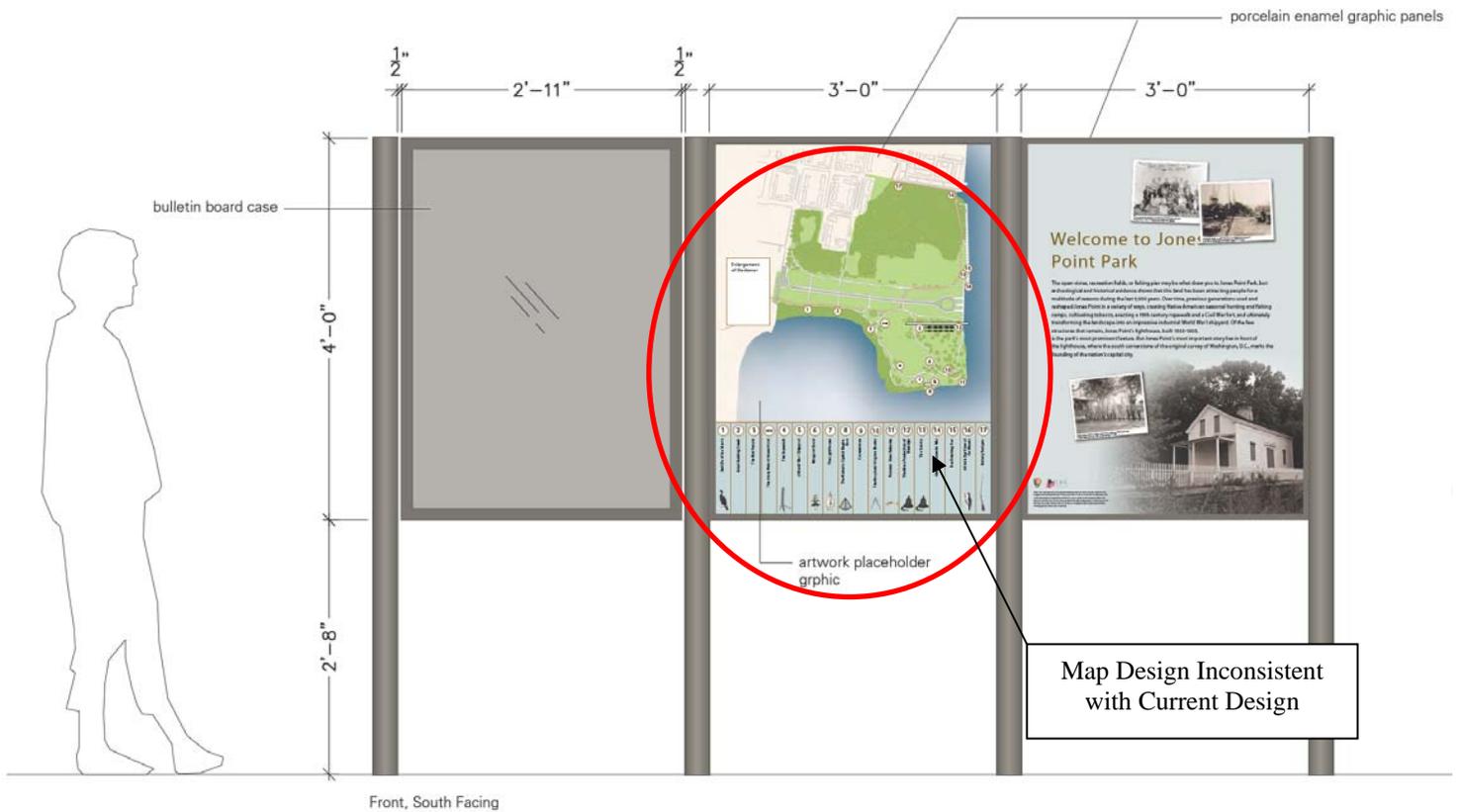


PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff strongly supports the proposed improvements to Jones Point Park and recommends to the Commission that it approve the final site and building plans for the improvements to Jones Point Park. The proposed park design will be a great asset to the adjacent neighborhood and the region.

While staff commends NPS for the high quality of the proposed interpretative signage both in the extensive research that was conducted for the sign content and the appearance of the signs, we encourage NPS to carefully evaluate the sign content so that they reflect the most current project information prior to sign printing. The orientation sign and pedestrian sign submitted to NCPC for review included the previous site designs that have since changed.

Orientation Sign



Community Meeting

Staff attended a community meeting on July 13, 2010 for the proposed project. The meeting was hosted by the Virginia Department of Transportation and the National Park Service and moderated by Congressman Jim Moran. Also in attendance were the Alexandria City Mayor, and multiple City Council members and city staff. Three main issues were raised at the meeting: construction staging, bamboo plant removal, and proposed parking. The community expressed concerns about not having access to the park during the construction period, roughly 14 months. In response to the community’s concern, the Virginia Department of Transportation has submitted a revised construction staging plan. The proposed staging plan will allow access to the playing field during the first stage of construction.

Proposed Construction Staging



The community also expressed concerns about the removal of bamboo from the northwest section of the park adjacent to residential uses, which currently provides privacy screening and noise reduction. NPS stated that the bamboo would be removed because it is an invasive species and it will be replaced with native plantings intended to provide screening and noise protection intended to provide screening and noise protection. Staff supports NPS’s decision to remove

bamboo from Jones Point Park as it is an invasive species that is difficult to control and will cause increased maintenance to ensure it does not spread to additional areas in the park.

Congressman Moran also expressed a concern about proposed parking. In 2001, the preliminary design for Jones Point Park places the parking below the bridge. In August 2003, the Transportation Security Administration performed a vulnerability assessment and recommended the removal of all parking from below the bridge. As a result, NPS now proposes to build a 150 space parking lot north of the bridge; parking under the bridge will be allowed for large events where vehicles will be prescreened prior to entering the lot. While staff understands the need for the area under the bridge to be secure, we do encourage NPS to evaluate alternative uses for the secured parking area below the bridge during times when the area is not being used for parking.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The proposed park developments would affect the Potomac shoreline and floodplain, and wetlands. The project complies with the following policies in the Federal Environment Element of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Avoid destruction of or damage to wetlands
- Encourage only compatible land uses adjacent to wetlands
- Preserve existing vegetation, especially large stands of trees
- Maintain and preserve woodlands and vegetated areas on steep slopes and adjacent to waterways, especially to aid in the control of erosion and sediment
- Encourage the use of native plant species, where appropriate

Policies contained in the Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element apply to shoreline protection and the preservation and enhancement of river views involved with the developments. The project complies with the following policies in this element:

- Enhance parks and preserve open green space for future generations
- Maintain and conserve federal open space as a means of shaping and enhancing urban areas
- Preserve open space that is crucial to the long-term quality of life of a neighborhood or the region
- Promote public access along the regions waterfronts, including waterfronts on military and other properties when security considerations will permit
- Establish and preserve historic parks as important legacies of national, historic, architectural, and landscape significance
- Protect the scenic and ecological values of waterways and stream valleys
- Protect, restore, and enhance the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers as great open space resource and as recreational amenities, including shorelines and water front areas along rivers

- Manage all lands along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers in a manner that encourages the enjoyment and recreational use of water resources, while protecting the scenic and ecological values of the waterways
- Encourage swimming, boating, and fishing facilities, as well as water-oriented tourist activities, on the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers
- Maintain and improve trail quality for a variety of users, as appropriate

The proposed project complies with policies within in the Preservation and Historic Features Element:

- Recognize that historic federal properties are sometimes important for local history and ensure that locally significant characteristics or qualities are maintained
- Identify and protect historic properties and disseminate information about their significance to the public
- Preserve in place the extant boundary stones marking the original survey of the District of Columbia

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Pursuant to the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the FHWA prepared a Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) and Record of Decision for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Project. These documents were prepared in April and June 2000, respectively. The FSEIS included the proposed improvements to Jones Point Park.

On June 16, 2000, NCPC issued its own FEIS which adopted the FHWA FSEIS relating to NCPC's authority for review and approval of this proposed action. The purpose of the FEIS was to identify potential environmental impacts, as defined by CEQ regulations, resulting from the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Project. The FEIS examined alternatives to the proposed action and the impacts of those alternatives. The FEIS also addressed mitigation of adverse resulting effects from the alternatives. NCPC elected to adopt the existing April 2000 FSEIS pursuant to Section 1506.3 of the CEQ regulations. This adoption was accomplished through staff review and approval of the FHWA document. The adopted FEIS was available to the public for review more than thirty days before Commission action.

Due to the Transportation Security Administration's recommendation to removal all parking from below the bridge additional environmental analysis was need to reassess the parking, access, and security components of the park design. Therefore, NPS completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed project in 2006 and 2007 and signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on December 3, 2007. The proposed design is Alternative 4A in the EA.

While NCPC was approval over the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project, the Jones Point Park project is located entirely within Virginia and as a result NCPC does not have independent NEPA responsibility for the project. Therefore, it is not necessary for NCPC neither to be a cooperating agency on the EA nor to issue its own FONSI.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge replacement, including this project, was signed in October and November of 1997. The signatories were FHWA (the lead agency), NPS, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the State Historic Preservation Offices for Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

FHWA and NPS determined that the bridge project would have an adverse effect on the Alexandria Historic District, Jones Point Lighthouse, the District of Columbia South Cornerstone, and two terrestrial archaeological resources within Jones Point Park. In addition, the bridge project was determined to have an effect on the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway/George Washington Memorial Parkway. The signatories also agreed that the project might have an effect on the Freedmen's (Contraband) Cemetery in Alexandria.

The MOA contains numerous stipulations on the documentation and treatment of known and of potential historic or archaeological resources during the construction of the bridge. The signatories also agreed to certain goals during the design and review of the project. In addition, the bridge design and other project elements are to take into account the historic plan of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway and NPS's General Management Plan for the facility; the agreement between NPS and the City of Alexandria for the management of Jones Point Park and its resources; the agreement with the Daughters of the American Revolution for the management of Jones Point Lighthouse; and effects on archaeological resources.

Specifically for Jones Point Park, the signatories developed goals for the treatment of the seawall, the D.C. Cornerstone, the slipway, and for interpretation of the historic features of the park.

While NCPC had an approval role over the Wilson Bridge due to its partial location within the District of Columbia boundary, Jones Point Park is located within Virginia and therefore, NCPC has an advisory role and does not have independent Section 106 responsibility.