

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

E. Keller

NCPC File Nos. 6383



GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK
REVISED CONCEPT FOR WISCONSIN AVENUE TERMINUS,
31st Street, NW,
Washington, DC

Submission by the National Park Service

July 1, 2004

Abstract

The National Park Service (NPS) has submitted a revision to the previously approved concept plan for the Georgetown Waterfront Park (GWP), endorsed by the Commission in September 2003. The submitted plan modifies the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus portion of the park which would be the first phase of the Park to be implemented.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of a revised design concept pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1))

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

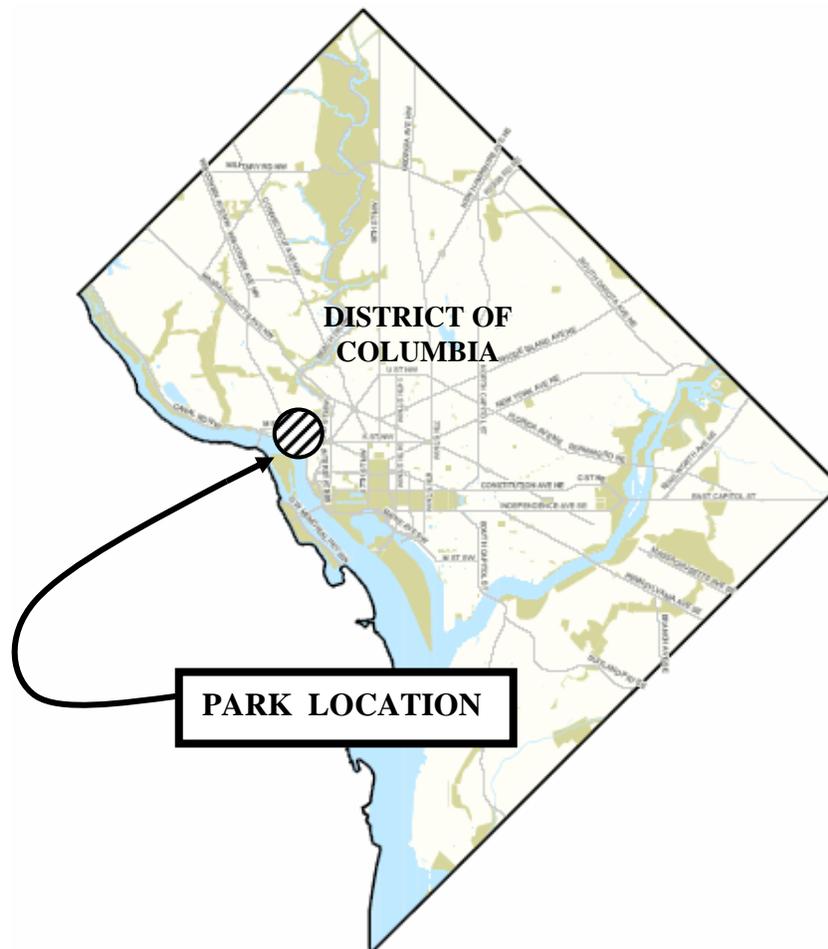
Approves the revised design concept for Georgetown Waterfront Park at the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus, as illustrated and described in the report titled: *Georgetown Waterfront Park-Wisconsin Avenue Plaza*, dated June 2004.

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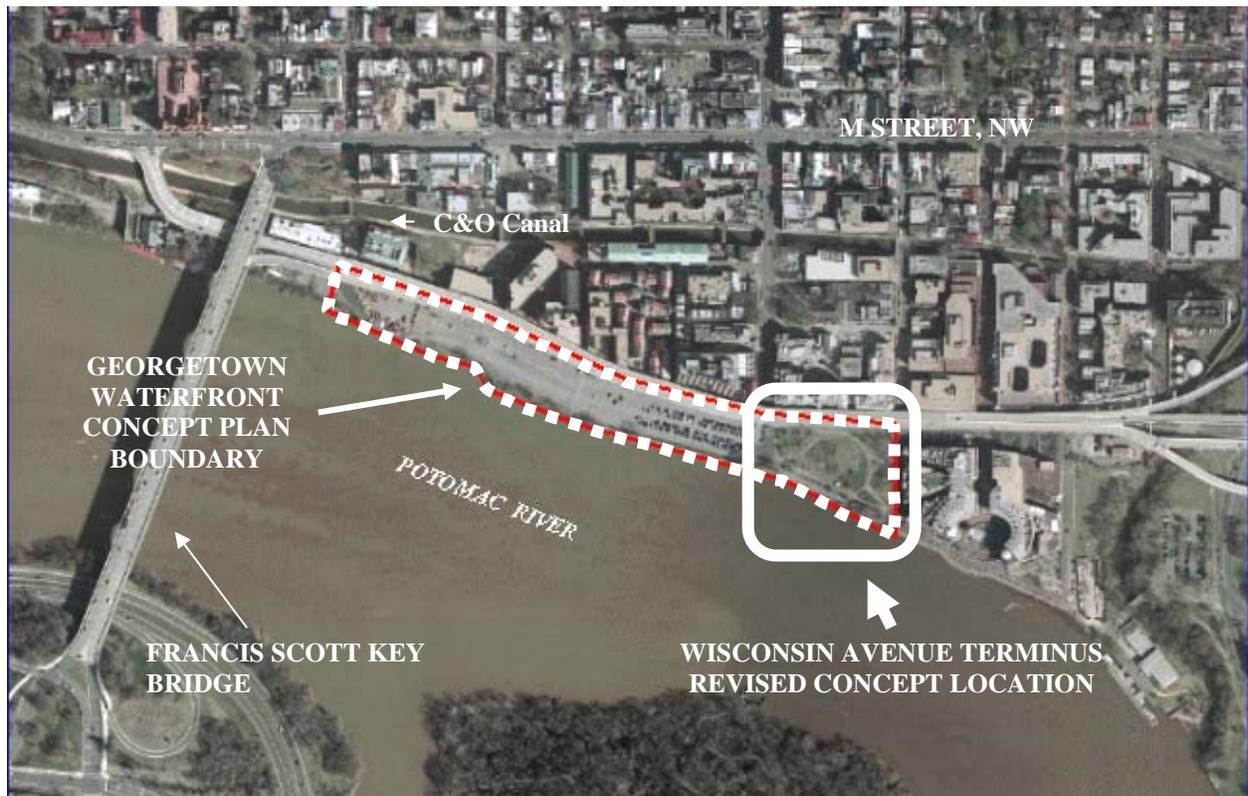
PROJECT SUMMARY

Site Description

The National Park Service's revised concept plan involves only a limited portion of the overall waterfront in the vicinity of the Wisconsin Avenue entry terminus. This area of the Park contains approximately 2.3 acres and is the most eastern section of the Park. The design takes in an area that extends back from the shoreline approximately 185 feet to K Street, NW, and essentially under the Whitehurst elevated Expressway. The Whitehurst Expressway, above K Street, defines the length of the northern edge of the site and creates a visual barrier between Georgetown and the planned park. However, the Wisconsin Avenue view-corridor leads directly into the park and is oriented north/south under the elevated road. The preservation of the vista from Wisconsin Avenue to the Potomac River and a pedestrian connection along the river's edge at this area of the Park that links the shoreline from Rock Creek are major attributes established by the revised concept plan.



VICINITY LOCATION OF GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK



BOUNDARY OF OVERALL GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK CONCEPT

Background

The Commission last reviewed aspects of the Georgetown Waterfront Park in September 2003. At that time the Commission took the following action:

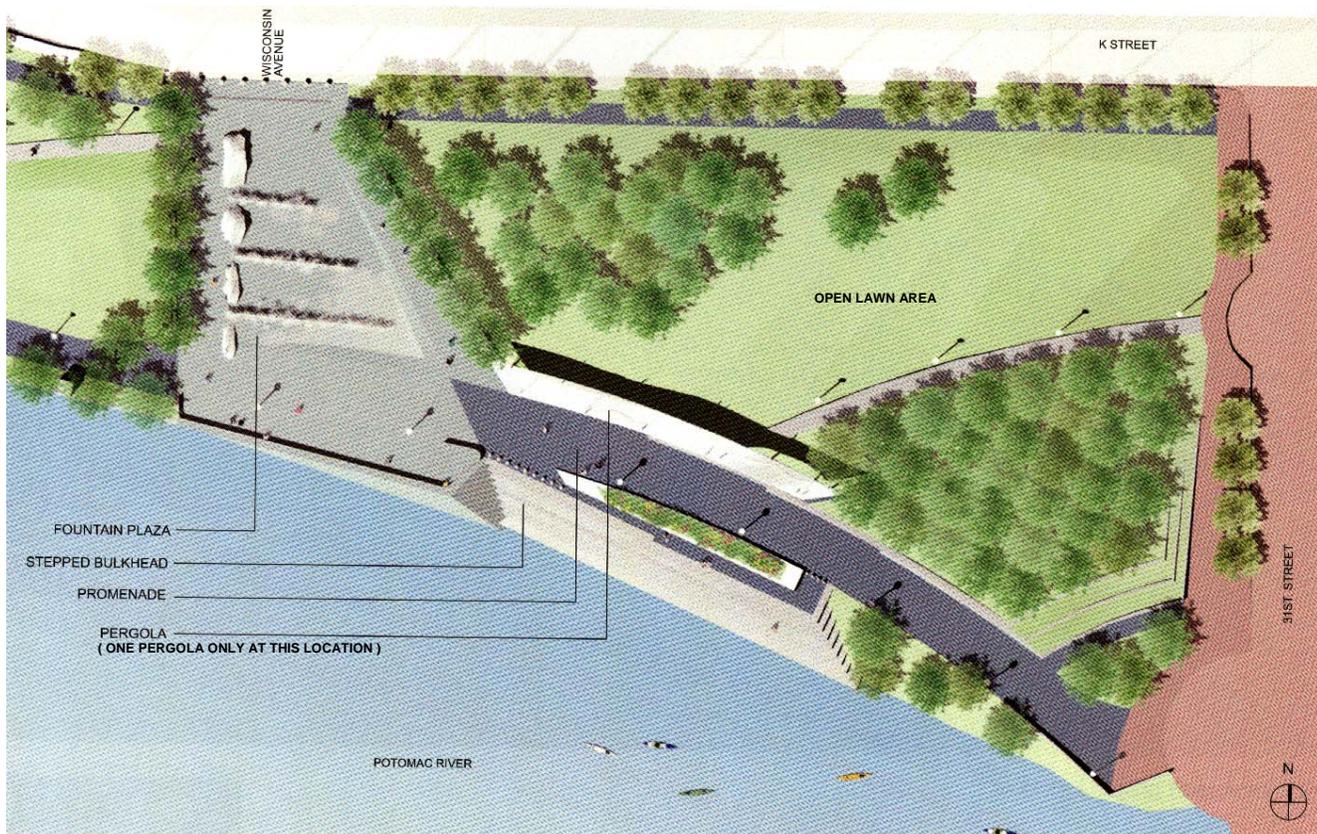
- Approved the revised design concept for the Georgetown Waterfront Park, from 31st Street west to 34th Street, NW, as illustrated and described in the report titled: *Final Schematic Design, Georgetown Waterfront Park*, dated March 31, 2003.
- Requested that the NPS, in the preparation of preliminary site and building plans, explore and consider the following issues and present a review, determination, and design, in the submission of the preliminary park design for:
 - Better integration of the central water feature area with the stepped shoreline terminal focal point at the base of Wisconsin Avenue.
 - Increased height of the vertical elements of the overlooks (and possible increased horizontal projection of the overlook deck) at their locations on the shoreline.
 - Introduction of a floating boat dock for temporary docking at the concrete stepped shoreline area.

Proposal

The revised Wisconsin Terminus concept plan includes the following activity areas:

- A promenade paralleling the river's edge.
- Opportunities for interpretive displays and interpretation.
- Alignment of a regional trail component (Crescent Bike Trail) at the section's north edge.
- Open lawn areas for passive recreation.
- A shelter/pavilion for shade, sitting and viewing.
- A primary plaza space at the foot of Wisconsin Avenue as the major gathering space of the park.
- An interactive water feature with no standing water pool.
- Opportunities to be in proximity to the water.

The submitted revised concept plan responds to the Commission's request to simplify the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus. The pergola at the intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and K Street has been eliminated. The park pavement has been altered to provide granite pavers as a consistent treatment of the ground plane.



REVISED WISCONSIN AVENUE TERMINUS CONCEPT PLAN

Moreover, the revised plan maintains an interactive water feature that has been relocated toward the entrance of the park and consists of vertical jets approximately 3-4 feet high that are arranged in three lines that represent the most significant shoreline changes along Water Street (K Street) during the evolution of the Georgetown waterfront. The jets are generated from a subsurface fountain through openings in the granite and splash onto the plaza. A slight depression in the paving collects the water. Pedestrians can either walk through the fountain or around it toward the river stairs or the shoreline promenade.



**ENLARGEMENT OF THE PREVIOUS
SEPTEMBER 2003 WISCONSIN TERMINUS
AREA**

Other elements of the adjusted concept plan include:

- Revised grading and contouring of the riverbank shoreline to better accommodate variations of water levels and maintenance of a vegetated soil bioengineering system in the concept design plan at this location.
- Shortening of the river stairs (stepped bulkhead) for better maintenance and effective containment at the water's edge during fluctuating river levels.
- Realignment of the promenade so that it passes through the plaza between the fountain and the river.
- Enlargement of the plaza at the river's edge that permits pedestrians to view the river directly from a railing. All walking surfaces are completely accessible.
- Adapting design standards and elements, such as bollards and large planters, to make the pedestrian spaces handicapped accessible and preclude wheelchairs from accidentally going over the bulkhead edges. Neither the bollards nor the railings, as depicted, reflect a final design—they are only place-holders to convey the concept.

The landscape concept for the revised park area has been simplified to better transition and refine elements of the whole composition. One of the originally proposed diagonal paths has been eliminated and trees have now been grouped into groves of high-canopy trees with grass beneath them. Additional trees have been added at the southeast corner.

Development Program

Applicant: The National Park Service

Architect: Wallace, Roberts and Todd, LLC, landscape architects

Jody Pinto Studios, landscape sculpture structures
Parson, Brinckerhoff, Quade, and Douglas, site engineering
With support of Robbin B. Sotir & Assoc., Delon Hampton & Assoc.,
Grenald Waldron Assoc. and Oehrlein Assoc.

Square Footage: 2.3± Acres

Estimated Cost: Not available at this time

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Staff **recommends approval of the revised concept design** for the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus as defined by the submitted report titled: *Georgetown Waterfront Park-Wisconsin Avenue Plaza*, dated June 2004.

The revised concept incorporates the Commission's direction to the NPS regarding the following concerns:

- Better integration of the central water feature area with the Wisconsin Avenue terminal focal point.
- Improved transition between the water features of the park area and the open spaces of the promenade and descending steps.

The newly submitted Wisconsin Avenue Terminus concept plan also continues to provide the contrast, view arrangement, and openness sought by the Commission's earlier review in 2003. The Plan's improvements maintain the Crescent Trail alignment through the park at K Street, providing the start of the connectivity to the wider regional trail network, and the provision of the main focal overlook at the immediate river shoreline. Staff commends the NPS for its revisions and the resulting proposal. Staff recognizes the careful and balanced consideration achieved by the design team and NPS in the development of the issues of recreational interaction at the river's edge.

Staff further notes that the NPS submission has responded to the issue of considering a limited-scale floating boat dock (for boat mooring only) at the stepped bulkhead area. NPS has determined, based on its original studies and continued recent public input, that there remains considerable unmet demand for non-motorized boating facilities along the Georgetown Waterfront. Moreover, it is the Park Service's belief that waterfront park boating facilities could be provided either privately, or through a National Park Service concession operation, with boathouses on land and docking space at those locations only. This approach resolves significant concerns due to the various sizes of boats, their methods of propulsion, and the conflicts such differences present at this portion of the river. The immense popularity of and congestion at Washington Harbor docks (including major tour boats from Alexandria and Washington

Channel) present a major safety problem from the Park Service' perspective for small boats docking in the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus section of the Georgetown Waterfront Park.

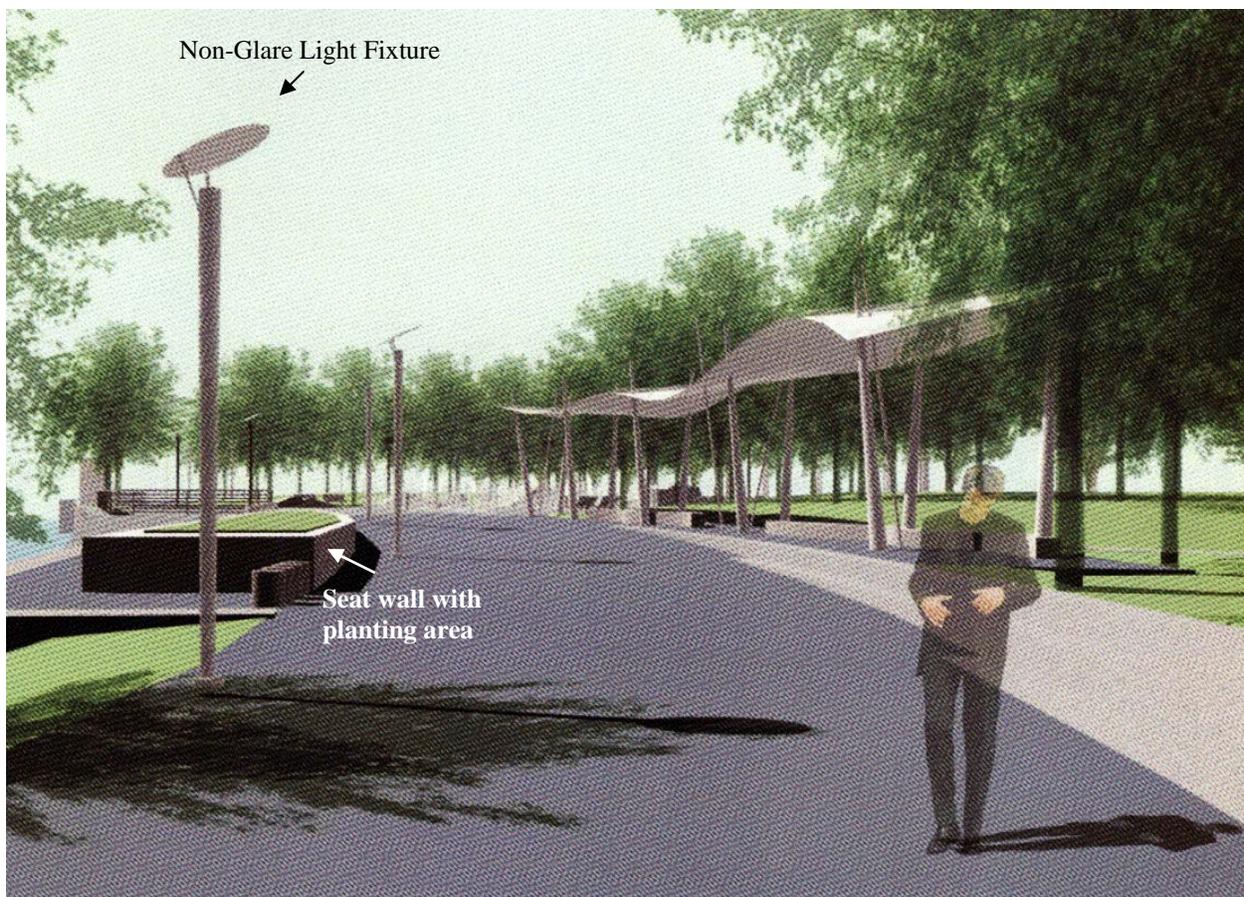
PROJECT CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposal for the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus section of the Georgetown Waterfront Park is consistent with policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. The Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element designate river and waterfront settings of the Nation's Capital. The Comprehensive Plan policies state:

Policies for Rivers and Waterways

- The entire Anacostia and Potomac Rivers system should be a constant source of enjoyment, urban orientation, and visual delight. Its major features should be retained



**SIMULATION OF VIEW WEST TOWARD THE PERGOLA
ALONG THE PROMENADE**



**SIMULATION OF VIEW NORTHWEST, AT THE STEPPED BULKHEAD, TOWARD
THE WATER JET FOUNTAIN AND WADING AREA**

and enhanced as great open space resources and as recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, and water quality restored.

- Efforts should be continued to improve the quality of water in the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers to allow for both restored natural habitats and increased recreational use and to help meet the goals of the Chesapeake Bay 2000 agreement.
- As the water quality improves, swimming, boating, and fishing facilities, as well as water-oriented tourist activities should be encouraged, while protecting the integrity and health of the shoreline eco-system.

Policies for Shorelines and Waterfronts

- The shoreline of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers in the National Capital Region should be preserved, restored, and enhanced as a matter of federal interest.

- In urban waterfront areas that are determined appropriate for development, the following guidelines should be applied:
 - a. Construction in environmentally sensitive areas should be avoided.
 - b. Degraded areas of shorelines should be restored, stabilized, and/or improved and landscaped.
 - c. Development along or near the shoreline should be limited and integrated with the generally low and continuous line of river embankments...In areas characterized as urban waterfronts, such as the Georgetown Waterfront, the Southwest Waterfront, and areas of Southeast near the Southeast Federal Center/Washington Navy Yard, there may be defined areas where building heights may be expected to be higher. Shoreline areas where higher building heights could be focused include L'Enfant vistas such as South Capitol Street, New Jersey and Potomac Avenues, M Street, SE, K Street, NW, and others that may be appropriate.
 - d. Long, unbroken stretches of buildings or walls along the waterfronts should be avoided. Development along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers should be designed to allow residents and visitors maximum visual and physical access to the waterfront. This should also apply to all construction, including new roads and freeways, as well as concentrated governmental or institutional land uses that create barriers to waterfront access.
 - e. Development within 200 feet of the shoreline should include the use of Best Management Practices to limit the amount of impervious surface. Such practices could include green roofs, rain gardens, porous pavers and native plant landscaping.
- The shorelines and waterfronts of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers within the District of Columbia should be publicly owned, except at planned waterfront locations in Georgetown, portions of the Southwest Waterfront along the Washington Channel, and Buzzard Point where controlled private development could be permitted.
- Within the District of Columbia, the character of publicly-owned waterfront areas should reflect great variety, ranging from a more developed shoreline in Georgetown, the Southwest Waterfront, and the Southeast Federal Center and Washington Navy Yard areas, for example, to a more natural treatment along the shorelines of the Upper Anacostia...
- The location of waterfront development, especially within the District of Columbia, such as boat docks and houses, plazas, water taxis, piers, docking areas, or appropriate waterfront buildings, should be consistent with the waterfront objectives contained in *Extending the Legacy* and Commission-approved plans for waterfront improvements. Proposed waterfront development on public land should be coordinated with the Commission in accordance with applicable laws and requirements.
- All lands within 150 to 200 feet of the water's edge along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers should be managed in a manner that will encourage the enjoyment and recreational use of water resources, while protecting the scenic and ecological values of the waterways.



**SKETCH VIEW FROM WISCONSIN AND K STREET, NW, AT WISCONSIN AVENUE
PLAZA WITH JET FOUNTAIN AND PEDESTRIAN SEATING AREAS IN MID-
FOREGROUND
(KENNEDY CENTER AND RIVER IN BACKGROUND)**

National Historic Preservation Act

The Park Service has completed its Section 106 responsibilities for the revised concept plan, determining that the implementation of the concept would have no adverse effect on the historic or architectural character of the waterfront area.

The D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) determined that the 1986 concept plan for the Georgetown Waterfront Park would have no adverse effect on the National Register qualities of the Georgetown Historic District or the C&O Canal National Historical Park. The project was also reviewed by the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board at that time. The effect determination was reached with two conditions: that each request for demolition be considered individually, and that the location and design of future boathouses be reviewed. The

level of archaeological assessment was commended, as was the “sensitive landscape design, which avoids archaeological resources.”

The current proposal does not extend nor significantly deviate from the area of that reviewed design. Most of the park can be installed without digging beneath the disturbed top layer. For tree plantings and some other features, archaeological monitoring will take place during construction to ensure that artifacts remain *in situ* and are not disturbed. The landscape design was developed to avoid disturbance.

NPS conferred again with the DC SHPO about the concept plan in Summer 2003. The current revised concept is a variation of that submission. The 1986 determination of no adverse effect is still considered valid, given the similarity of the plans, as well as the review protection for any demolitions and the archaeological monitoring. As the design to be implemented is developed beyond the concept stage, further consultation may be warranted.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation also commented on the concept plan in 1986, stating that the implementation of the plan would improve the appearance of the waterfront and enhance the public’s enjoyment of the river as a major recreation area.

National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Park Service and the Commission arrived at a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) through the completion of an Environmental Assessment in June 1984.

Staff has reviewed the current revised design plans and finds them fully consistent with the analysis and conclusions found in the original evaluation. Staff has reviewed the action for extraordinary circumstances as sanctioned by NEPA and determined the FONSI remains valid in accordance with the Commission’s procedures.

Federal Capital Improvements Program

In the Commission’s recent FCIP report, fiscal years 2003-2008, the Commission recommended the project for future programming and it is anticipated that NPS will be providing a more detailed budget proposal in a future FCIP review cycle.

A portion of the Georgetown Waterfront Park project is included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program (FCIP) fiscal years 2001 – 2005, adopted by the Commission on August 3, 2000. The costs associated with restoration of canal and seawall areas are estimated at approximately \$1.7 million. The need for funding of the overall Park has been identified by the Commission since 1981.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the concept design revisions for the park at its meeting on August 13, 2003 and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The current submission does not deviate from that concept or its essential elements that were reviewed and approved. The participating agencies of the review were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; Fire Department; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.