



## Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: July 7, 2016

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<b>PROJECT</b> <b>Kennedy Center Expansion Connection Project</b> Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts 2700 F Street, NW Washington, DC	<b>NCPC FILE NUMBER</b> 7763
<b>SUBMITTED BY</b> Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts	<b>NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER</b> 23.00(38.00)44371
<b>REVIEW AUTHORITY</b> Federal Projects in the District per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)	<b>APPLICANT'S REQUEST</b> Preliminary and final approval of site and building plans
	<b>PROPOSED ACTION</b> Approve as requested
	<b>ACTION ITEM TYPE</b> Staff Presentation

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### PROJECT SUMMARY

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Kennedy Center) submitted preliminary and final designs for the Expansion Connection Project to provide a safe pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Kennedy Center, in particular the new expansion, and the Rock Creek paved recreation trail. The Kennedy Center, one of the country's preeminent cultural institutions and a major feature in the city's urban design framework, is constrained on several sides by transportation infrastructure, with limited pedestrian access from several critical points. A key project goal is to link the Kennedy Center, the National Mall and Memorial Parks, the Potomac River waterfront, and the surrounding vicinity.

The proposed Expansion Connection Project is linked to the Kennedy Center's broader expansion, currently under construction, which adds approximately 72,000 square feet of space to the existing building and grounds. The Kennedy Center states that the expansion will allow it to provide opportunities for enhanced public engagement and interaction with the arts while simultaneously increasing rehearsal, education, and public access areas in the decades to come.

### KEY INFORMATION

- Edward Durell Stone designed the Kennedy Center in 1959, and the building was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2012.
- The Commission approved the Kennedy Center Expansion project in July 2015 with the expectation that the Kennedy Center would propose a connection to the Potomac riverfront in the near future. Since that time the connection project design has continued to evolve, resulting in multiple alternatives that were analyzed in the environmental assessment.
- The Monumental Core Framework Plan (2009) envisioned a connection from the Kennedy Center to the riverfront and explored linking federal facilities and cultural institutions to

adjacent communities. The Kennedy Center Expansion Project (July 2015) provides an opportunity for such a connection, including pedestrian and bicycle circulation.

- The proposed Expansion Connection Project will require a land transfer from the National Park Service (NPS) to the Kennedy Center. The land transfer is before the Commission as a separate action.
- NCPC and NPS are co-leads under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NPS issued its finding of no significant impact (FONSI) on June 17, 2016, and NCPC issued its FONSI on June 21, 2016.
- The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts reviewed the concept at its May 19, 2016 meeting and supported the bridge and ramp connection, which used the Kennedy Center Expansion design palette and noted a few changes, including: the need to make the connections to the trail larger, possibly widening the ramp, and using frosted glass railing.
- The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts approved the final project design at its June 16, 2016 meeting.
- The DC State Historic Preservation Office submitted a letter dated March 23, 2016 in response to the draft Kennedy Center Connection Project Assessment of Effects Report that requested the new bridge with ramp and stair design be as minimally visible as possible and "...potential minimization options include eliminating the north stair; substituting cable railing for the proposed frosted glass; and ensuring that lighting focuses on the floor of the bridge rather than any vertical elements."

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## RECOMMENDATION

The Commission:

**Finds** that the Kennedy Center has addressed the Commission's April 7, 2016 comments during concept review regarding the bridge character and circulation.

**Approves** the preliminary and final site and building plans for the Kennedy Center Expansion Connection Project, which is an important link to the regional trail network improving access between the Kennedy Center, the Potomac waterfront and the National Mall.

## PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

<b>Previous actions</b>	<b>July 2015</b> – Approved final site and building plans for the Kennedy Center Expansion project. <b>April 2016</b> – Approval of comments on concept design for the connection project.
<b>Remaining actions</b> (anticipated)	<b>July 2016</b> – Land transfer approval

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## PROJECT ANALYSIS

### Executive Summary

The Kennedy Center has proposed preliminary and final design for a connection project to improve public access to the new expansion project that the Commission approved in July 2015. Staff supports creating a connection between the Kennedy Center and the Potomac riverfront to increase public accessibility to this prominent cultural resource. Improving public access to the Kennedy Center is an important proposal envisioned in both the Extending the Legacy Plan (1996) and in the Monumental Core Framework Plan (2010). Staff used these documents, the draft Assessment of Effects report under Section 106, and the recently updated Comprehensive Plan (2016) to evaluate this project.

The Commission expressed support for a connection between the Kennedy Center Expansion and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway during the concept review in April 2016. The Commission also raised several concerns at that time regarding the bridge's character, circulation, and design details. Staff finds that the Kennedy Center has addressed these concerns and therefore recommends that the Commission **approve the preliminary and final site and building plans for the Kennedy Center Expansion Connection Project which is an important link to the regional trail network improving access between the Kennedy Center, the Potomac waterfront and the National Mall.**

### Analysis

The Kennedy Center's responses to the Commission's April 7, 2016 comments during concept review are listed below as are staff comments.

#### Bridge Character

**Commission Action:** Requested that the character of the Expansion Connection be further evaluated from an urban design and historic preservation perspective as it relates to both the Kennedy Center expansion as well as the Parkway. For example, evaluate (1) whether it may be perceived as an independent infrastructure element or as an architectural extension of the Kennedy Center expansion; and (2) how it will address the Parkway, which includes park and transportation purposes.

**Kennedy Center Response:** *The Kennedy Center design team, Steven Holl Architects (SHA), maintains its support for a proposed bridge and ramp design that responds to the Kennedy Center building and not the parkway. This decision is based on the unique structure that SHA is proposing – no other pedestrian-only bridge crosses over the parkway. In addition, the other parkway bridges, which carry vehicles and pedestrians require a much more substantial structure in order to carry the vehicular loads and span the parkway. As the proposed bridge has a very different purpose, allowing pedestrians to*

*traverse the parkway safely, and it is connecting to the Kennedy Center Expansion - a more modern architectural style - SHA chose to use a modern style for this bridge.*

*The Kennedy Center also has now replaced the frosted glass railing with cable railing. This decision is as a result of Section 106 discussions with the DC State Historic Preservation Office during the consulting party meetings.*

**Staff Comments:** Staff agrees that this is a unique structure along the parkway. In addition, this segment of the parkway is unique in that it is by bounded the west terrace of the Kennedy Center to the north and the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge (I-66) to the south. As such, staff supports a bridge design that takes guidance from the character and context provided by the Kennedy Center and the new expansion project. In addition, staff notes the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) at its meeting in May 2016, reviewed the concept design and supported the design as an extension of the Kennedy Center and the expansion project and "...commended the project team for an elegant and well-detailed bridge connecting to the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway...". CFA approved the final design at its meeting on June 16, 2016. Staff is satisfied with this response.

Staff would also note that in its response to the Kennedy Center Connection Project Assessment of Effects Report, the DC State Historic Preservation Office submitted a letter dated March 23, 2016 that noted the following regarding how to minimize impacts of the preferred alternative, Alternative C, Bridge with Ramp and Stairs:

"...The adverse effects of the pedestrian connection can also be minimized by refining the designs so that all of the new structures will be as minimally visible as possible. As discussed during the most recent consulting parties meeting, potential minimization options include eliminating the north stair; substituting cable railing for the proposed frosted glass; and ensuring that lighting focuses on the floor of the bridge rather than any vertical elements."

This direction from the DC SHPO was supported by the National Park Service and others during Section 106 consultations and created the guidance the Kennedy Center used as it further developed the bridge design.

### Bridge Circulation

**Commission Action:** The Kennedy Center provide a circulation map, renderings and detailed plans that clearly delineate the various elements, including ramps, stairs, landings and the bridge, as well as the route which connects to the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge trail. This next submittal should demonstrate that this facility is wide enough to handle the anticipated capacity and demonstrate how the ramps and landings will be oriented to ensure continued functionality of the paved recreation trail and improve sightlines for both trail users and visitors to the Kennedy Center.

**Kennedy Center Response:** *The Kennedy Center noted that the bridge connection to the Kennedy Center Expansion Project was placed at an important point - the intersection of the trail connection to the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge trail, the plaza connection to the River Pavilion, and a walkway connection up to the Kennedy Center itself. The bridge location is also influenced by a few factors, namely, the narrow strip of land where it connected to the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, the clearance height of the bridge for bus traffic and ADA accessibility purposes.*

*The Kennedy Center response regarding the proposed 9.5-foot bridge and ramp width is that it is controlled by the narrowness of the NPS land where the proposed ramp and stairs intersect with the existing Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. This land is sandwiched between the vehicular travel lanes of the parkway and the Rock Creek Paved Recreational Trail. This narrow strip of land creates a "bottleneck" that constricts the width of both the ramp and bridge. The Kennedy Center noted that it wanted to maintain at least a 6-foot separation between the ramp and the parkway travel lanes to maximize the sense of safety for bridge/ramp users in addition to providing at least a 12-foot trail width.*

*The Kennedy Center also noted that the bridge was intended to be minimal to reduce its visibility along the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, a historic resource, while simultaneously providing a meaningful connection. As noted earlier, the Kennedy Center states it was following the direction provided during the Section 106 consulting party process, which included the DC SHPO and the National Park Service, by designing a bridge that would have a narrower profile and therefore be less visually impactful. SHA also provided dimensioned drawings demonstrating how a pedestrian and someone walking their bicycle on the bridge could pass each other. Finally, the ramp width is also similar to the existing Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail which varies in size, but is as narrow as 8.5 feet.*

*SHA responded to the Commission's April 2016 concept design concern about the potential conflicts between trail users and Kennedy Center visitors. These conflicts were located at the two connection points where the proposed bridge project connected to the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. SHA's response was to move the switchback ramp to the south by extending the stairs which then allowed it to shift the ramp slightly to the east. This change now allows for a larger landing at the end of both the ramp and the stairs.*

**Staff Comments:** Staff understands that the bridge connection to the Expansion Project occurs at the intersection of several key movements and is influenced by significant site constraints. As noted by the applicant, the primary site constraint is the narrowness of the site where the ramps must land on NPS property, immediately west of the parkway travel lanes. At its narrowest point, the area is approximately 37 feet wide. The Rock Creek Paved Recreational Trail is 12 feet wide to allow for better sight lines in this section of the trail, and the ramps are 9.5-foot each for a total of 19 feet. This leaves approximately 6 feet for a setback from the travel lanes. Staff believes the Kennedy Center's ramp width is appropriate as it best balances impacts to the location and width of the existing trail, along with the placement of the ramps in relationship to the parkway. Staff also notes that the

ramp is similar to the existing Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail width along this section of the trail which varies in size, but is as narrow as 8.5 feet.

In addition, staff finds that this separate landing for the ramp and stairs allows for people to move out of the way of the pedestrian flow on the trail. In shifting the trail to the south and slightly east, the ramp and stair landings appear to be more substantial as well as more clearly differentiated from the existing trail. Staff believes this is safer for both the trail users and the Kennedy Center visitors as it will provide more space and greater visibility for improved safety. In addition, the trail width will be increased in this area, up to a total of 12 feet, that will provide sufficient space for trail users to safely pass by this area. Staff is satisfied with this response and the design revision.

### Design Details

**Commission Action:** The Kennedy Center should provide detailed sections, plans and renderings demonstrating the character and configuration of the overlooks on the western side of the bridge and along the middle of the ramp as well as locating any proposed seating on the new structure so it does not impede user movements along the ramp or bridge.

**Kennedy Center response:** *The Kennedy Center provided dimensioned drawings with figures in scale to demonstrate that the overlooks were sized appropriately for several people to stand and look west toward the Potomac River without interfering with people using the bridge or ramp. The overlook at the top of the ramp is larger than what was presented at concept design. In addition, the Kennedy Center relocated the bench at the landing near the stairs approximately 1.5 feet to the east along with the wall so the bench is not obstructing the ramp.*

**Staff comments:** As this is not a bicycle path, staff finds that the bridge/ramp size is sufficient to provide an adequate connection between the Kennedy Center and the trail. Staff determined that these overlooks are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible and provide for sufficient space for people to stand without obstructing pedestrian movements along the ramp. In addition, relocating the bench at the landing near the stairs to the east moves it out of the pedestrian circulation and it will not act as an obstruction. Staff is satisfied with this response.

## **CONFORMANCE TO EXISTING PLANS, POLICIES AND RELATED GUIDANCE**

### **Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital**

Staff has determined this project is consistent with several policies in the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements (2016), in particular the Historic Preservation Element and the Parks and Open Space Elements.

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## **Monumental Core Framework Plan**

Staff notes that this project helps to support several strategies in the Monumental Core Framework Plan, including:

### Strengthen the Public Realm

- Provide multi-purpose spaces to accommodate events and recreation. With finite land resources and the need to increase capacity for active and passive recreation as well as to provide additional locations for public gatherings, the Framework Plan supports creating new places and improving access to existing venues that support multiple uses. Open areas can be flexibly configured with movable equipment to support formal tournaments, local sports leagues, and informal games of varying scale and intensity. Flexible spaces can be managed to allow more frequent rotation or longer regeneration time following heavy use. The ability to configure a space to meet a range of needs can reduce habitual wear and efficiently use the District of Columbia's valuable open-space resources.

### Advance Sustainability in the Urban Environment

- Invest in high-performance buildings and designed landscapes to reduce energy consumption and generate renewable energy; recycle wastewater, reduce stormwater runoff, and conserve potable water; reduce light pollution; and promote healthier working environments. All new site and building construction and modernization projects should incorporate principles of sustainable design and energy efficiency that meet or exceed existing standards. Green roofs can also be installed to reduce stormwater runoff, energy consumption, and the heat island effect.

In addition, this project will further several recommendations and improvements included within the Northwest Rectangle section of this project:

- Link the Kennedy Center with the Lincoln Memorial – while this project does not link these memorials with a boulevard, there is a pedestrian connection included now that provides safer access to the Rock Creek paved recreation trail.
- Construct a staircase from the Kennedy Center's west terrace down to the waterfront. – while this connection is not from the west terrace, there is a connection proposed under this project. The pedestrian connection from the Kennedy Center west terrace to the ground may be problematic because of adverse impacts to the building's historic fabric and impacts to the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway views.

## **National Historic Preservation Act**

NCPC and NPS are co-leads for Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, which was initiated with the DC State Historic Preservation Office on November 9, 2015, and with the Virginia SHPO on February 17, 2016. A joint NEPA/Section 106 public scoping meeting was held

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at the Kennedy Center on September 29, 2015, during which the consulting parties were introduced to the project, presented with a draft area of potential effects, and invited to comment on the proposal.

NCPC and NPS held a total of three consulting party meetings including the one on September 29, 2015, and the signatories submitted a draft Assessment of Effects report to the Virginia and DC State Historic Preservation Offices for review. The agencies have agreed that this project will result in an adverse effect determination for historic resources in the District, but not in Virginia. On June 17, 2016, the signatories executed a Memorandum of Agreement to minimize and mitigate the adverse effects. The minimization included reducing the width of the bridge structure, replacing the frosted glass railing with less visible cable railing and reduced the bridge light levels. Mitigation is for the Kennedy Center to provide up to \$45,000 to NPS for the development of a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) for the portion of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway between Constitution Avenue and Virginia Avenue.

### **National Environmental Policy Act**

NCPC and NPS are co-leading the environmental assessment (EA) in cooperation with the Kennedy Center to identify alternatives and assess the potential impacts of the project. There are four action alternatives and one no action alternative included in the EA. One alternative connects directly to the Kennedy Center building, while two connect directly with the expansion project. A fourth alternative is an at-grade connection adjacent to the southern parking garage entrance. We held a joint NEPA/Section 106 public scoping meeting at the Kennedy Center on September 29, 2015, during which we introduced the public to the project and invited the public to comment on the proposal.

The EA was available for public review and comment from March 23 through April 25, 2016. The EA is currently located on the NPS's Planning Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website and a press release was issued on the Kennedy Center, and NPS websites on March 23, 2016. The NPS issued its finding of no significant impact (FONSI) on June 16, 2016 and NCPC issued a FONSI on June 21, 2016.

## **CONSULTATION**

### **Coordinating Committee**

The Coordinating Committee meeting was held on June 15, 2016. The Committee forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that it has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were: NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District of Columbia Department of Transportation; the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

## **U.S. Commission of Fine Arts**

This project was reviewed by the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) at its May 2016 and June 2016 meetings. At its May 19, 2016 meeting CFA "...commended the project team for an elegant and well-detailed bridge connecting to the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway..." but also noted a few changes that needed to be addressed. These changes were as follows:

"...[CFA] recommended refining the configuration of the lower part of the main ramp, the stair landing, and the lowest ramp - perhaps by extending the main ramp to lower the landing or adjusting the angle of the lowest ramp--in order to create more space where the paths converge near the river's edge; special types of pavement at these intersections of stairs, ramps, and paths would provide a useful visual signal. They also suggested treating the lower"" segment of the main ramp as a solid abutment, rather than the proposed low span over a field' of rough gravel, to create a beautiful piece of constructed topography supporting the long ramp."

and "...the Commission members supported the elimination of the planting, strips along the walkways, but they continued to raise concern that the proposed nine-foot width may be too narrow to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists comfortably. They discouraged the use of cable railings on both sides of the bridge, finding the previous design proposal-with a translucent glass railing on one side of the bridge-to be a more elegant solution, and they questioned whether these translucent panels would substantially increase the bridge's visible impact on the visitor's experience of the parkway."

The Kennedy Center made revisions to the design and CFA approved the final design for the project at its June 16, 2016 meeting. CFA noted a few minor changes, namely widening the trail to 13 feet at this location and differentiating the paving material of the landings from the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail.

## **ONLINE REFERENCE**

The following supporting documents for this project are available online:

- Submission Documents
- Environmental Assessment/FONSI
- Assessment of Effects
- Memorandum of Agreement

Prepared by Carlton Hart  
06/30/2016

## **POWERPOINT (ATTACHED)**

**NCPC File #: 7763**  
**Kennedy Center Expansion Connection Project**

1800 E Street, NW  
Washington, DC

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**Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts**

**Preliminary and Final Review**

**Commission meeting date:** July 7, 2016

**NCPC review authority:** 40 USC § 8722 (b)(1) and (d)

**Applicant request:** preliminary and final approval

**Delegated / consent / open / executive session:** open

**NCPC Review Officer:** Hart

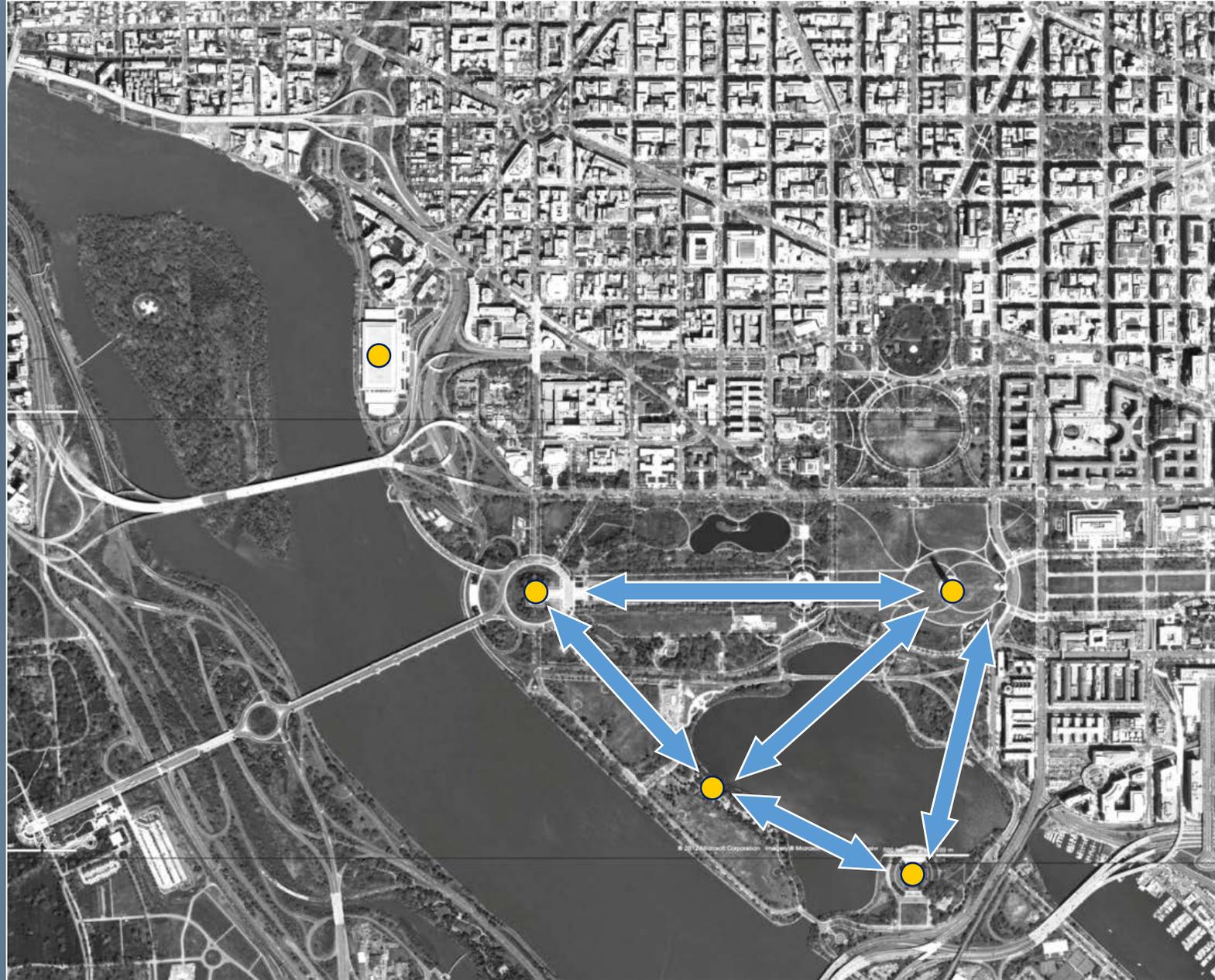
**NCPC File number:** 7763

### **Project summary:**

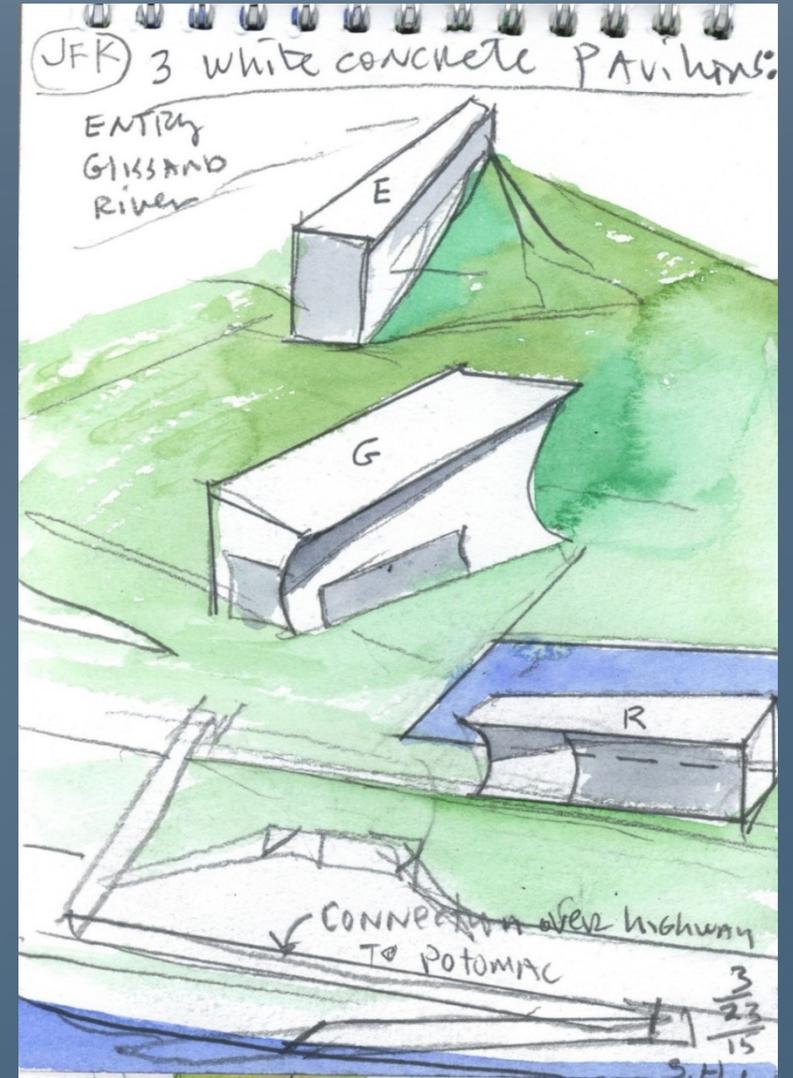
The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Kennedy Center) is proposing a direct pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Kennedy Center expansion and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. The project falls within the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway (RCPP), which is under the jurisdiction of National Mall and Memorial Parks (NAMA), a unit of the National Park Service (NPS).

The Kennedy Center is proposing this project because there is no direct access to and from the Kennedy Center to the east, or southeastward to Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, NAMA, and the Potomac River. The only pedestrian/bicycle access from the Potomac riverfront to the Kennedy Center is provided by a series of crosswalks across F Street NW and the RCPP, approximately 0.25 miles north of the south parking garage. This lack of a direct and convenient path not only limits visitors' access to both NPS and Kennedy Center amenities, but also creates a disconnect between the Kennedy Center, which is the United States' living memorial to President John F. Kennedy and those other presidential memorials found within the National Mall.

The Kennedy Center is exploring 4 alternatives under NEPA that include its preferred alternative before you today. This preferred alternative proposal consists of a bridge over RCPP, a ramp that has a switchback and a set of stairs at the southern end of the ramp. The bridge itself is 14 feet above the RCPP, is 9.5 feet wide and approximately 93 feet long. It is a metal girder that is connected to a 210 foot long ramp - lengthened from 195 ft proposed during concept design. At the southern end of the ramp there are a set of steps connecting the RCPP Trail to the bridge. After a switchback, a shorter ramp 91 feet long lands on the ground and connects to the RCPP Trail. This project will require a land transfer and an air rights transfer of jurisdiction.



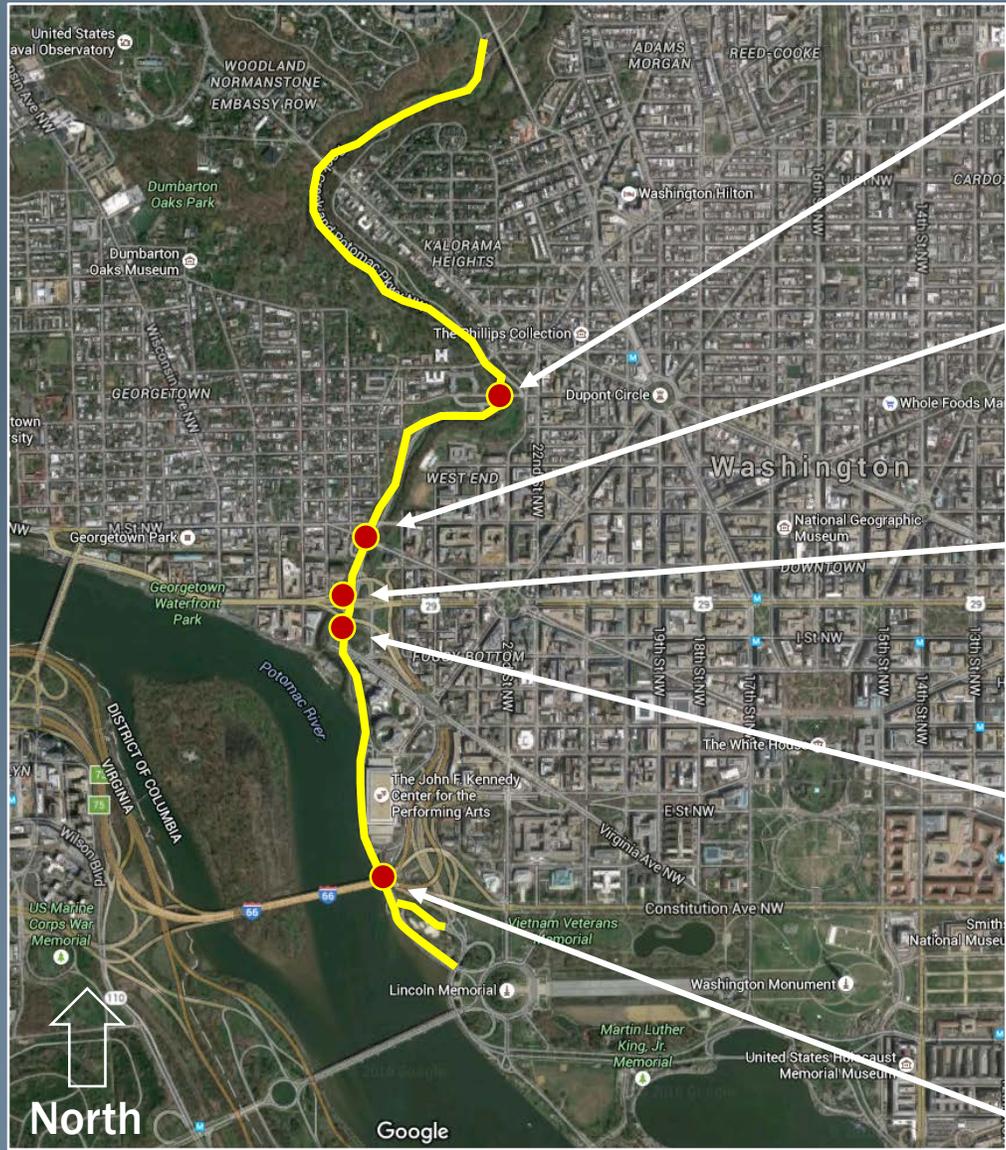




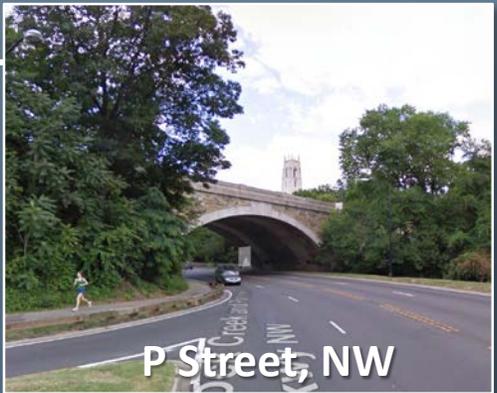
**Issues:**

- Architectural style – similar to parkway bridges or Kennedy Center Expansion?
- Connections
  - Nearby trails
  - RCPP Trail connection
    - Stairs landing
    - Ramp landing
- Design Details
  - Width
  - Railings
  - Benches
  - Overlooks

# Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Bridges



Pennsylvania Ave, NW



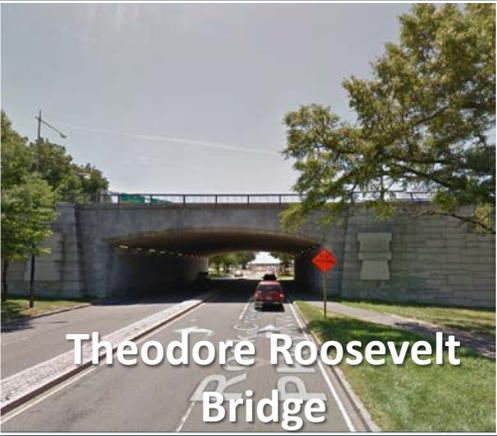
P Street, NW



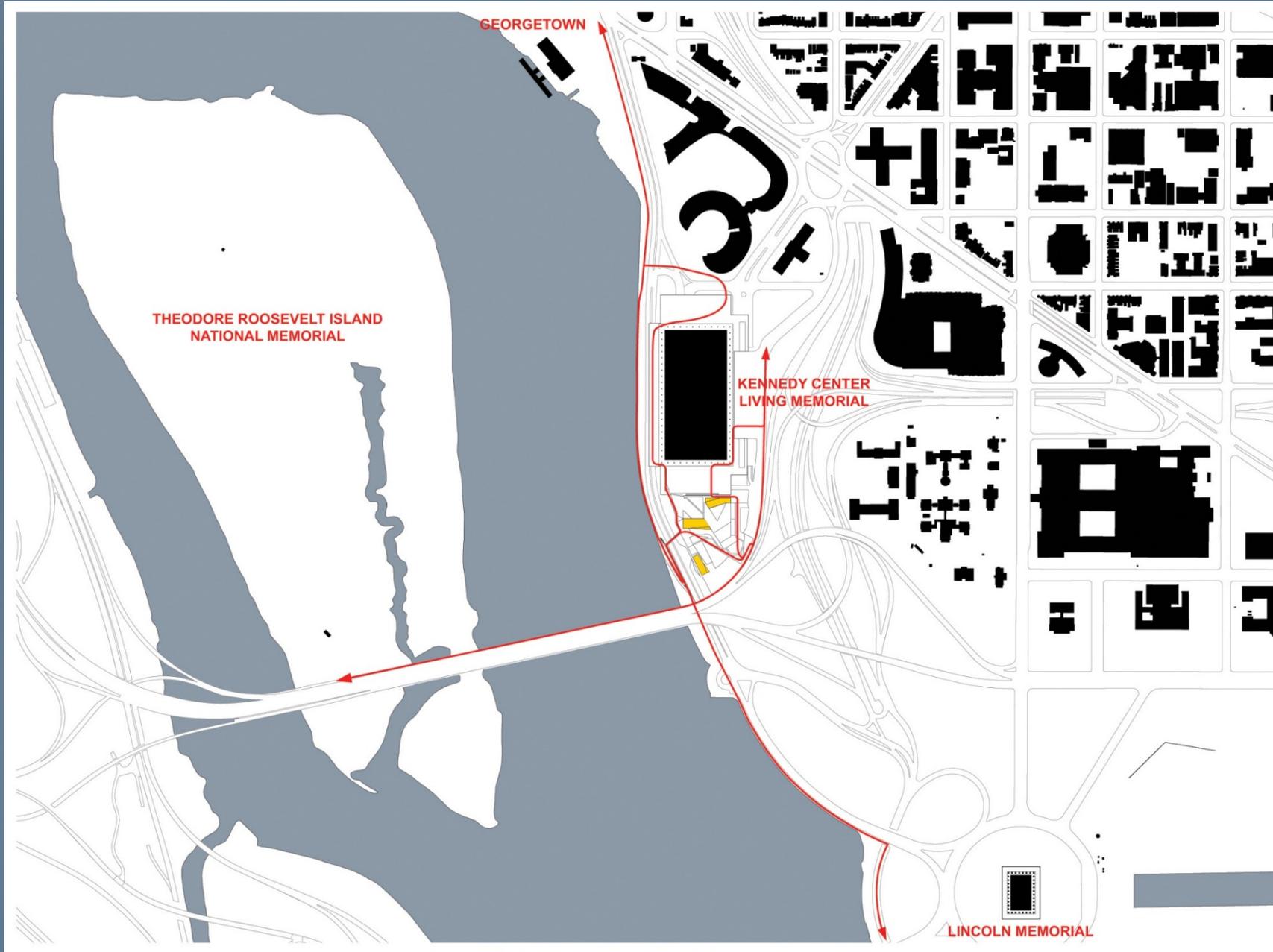
Whitehurst Freeway

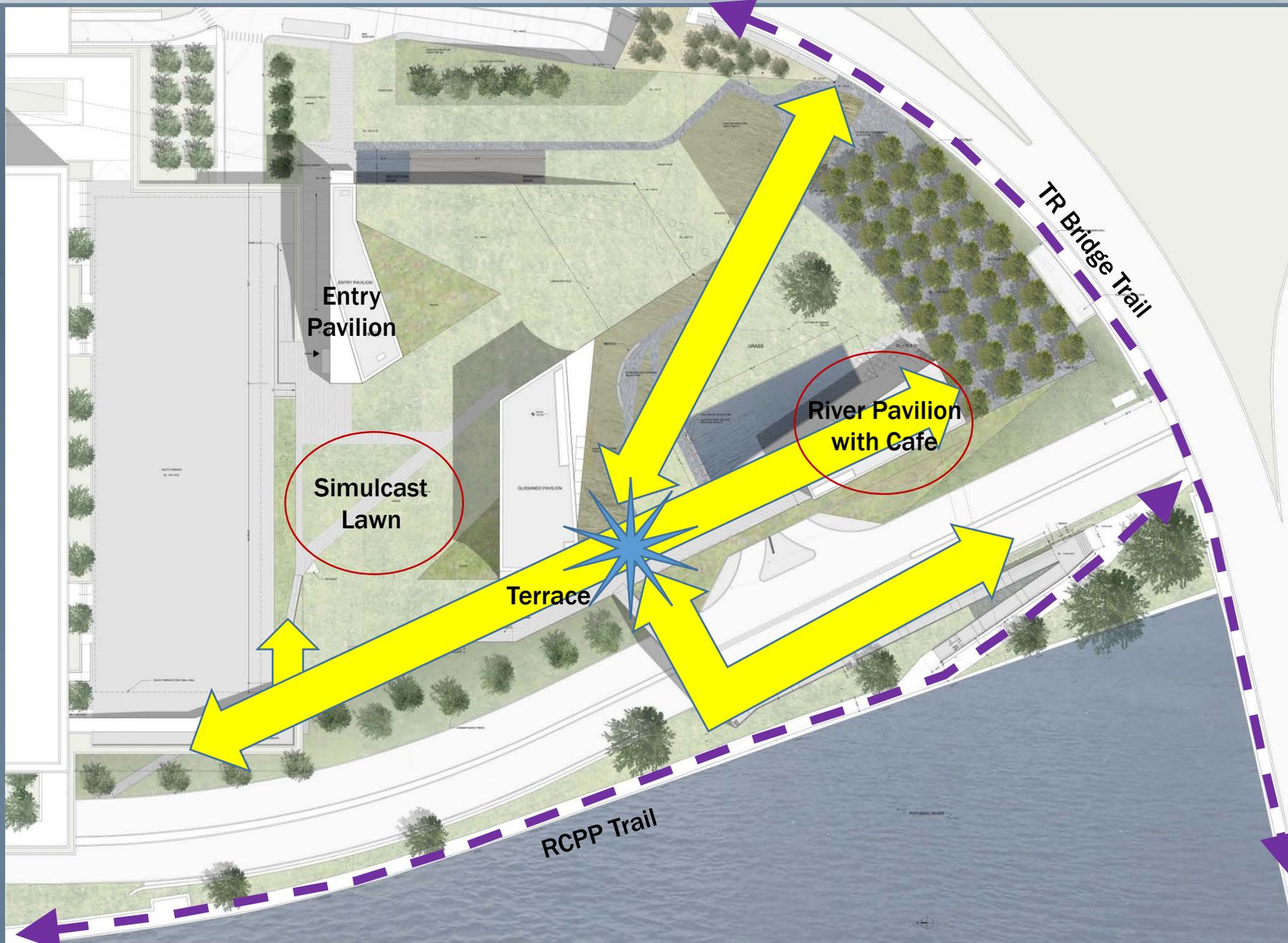


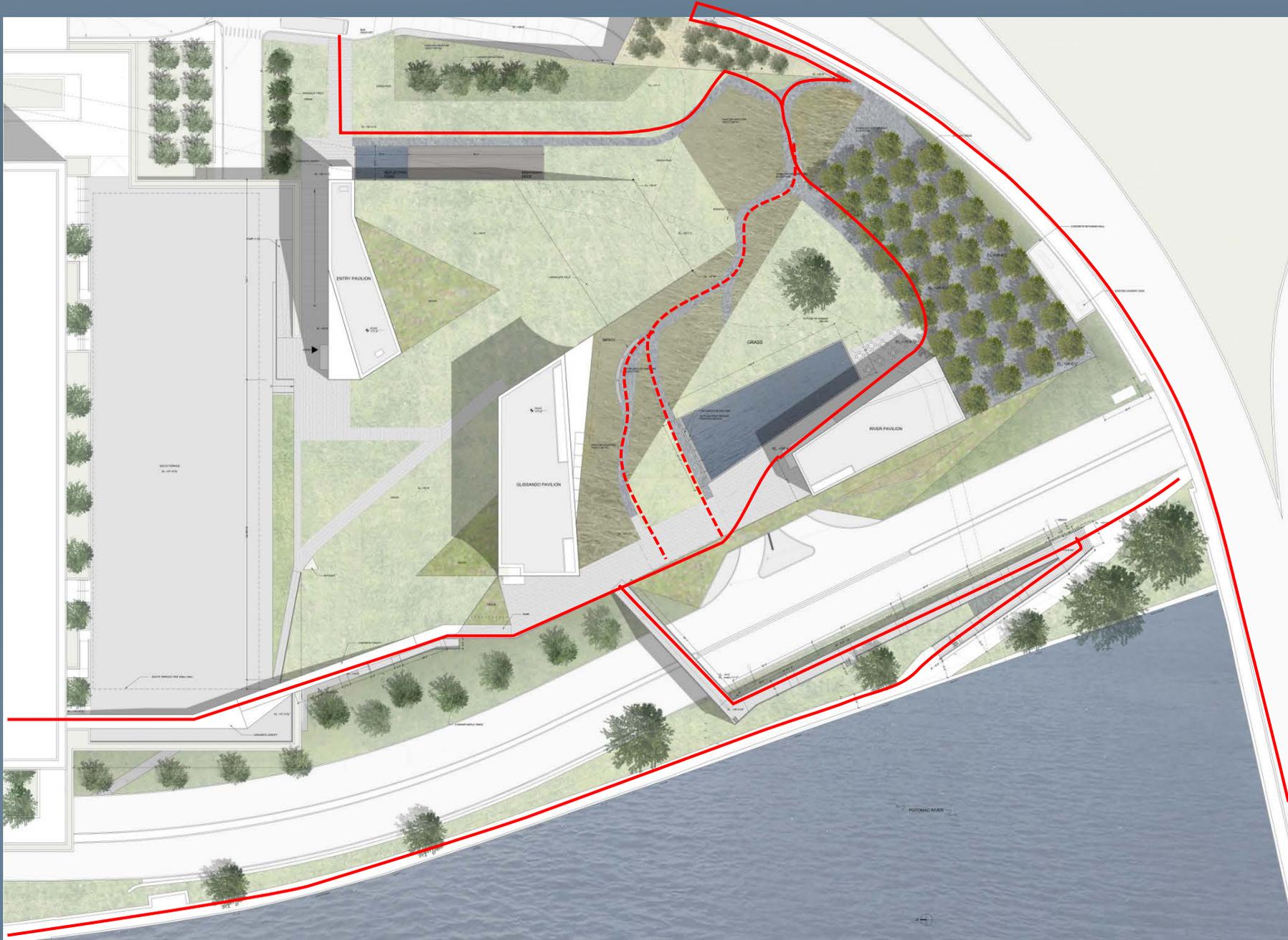
Whitehurst Access Ramp

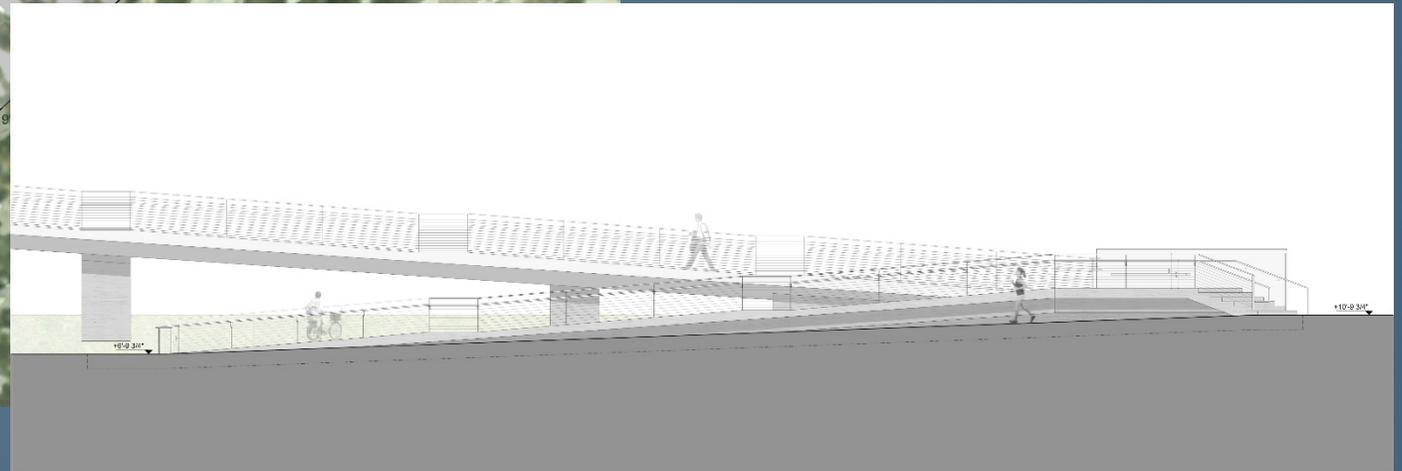
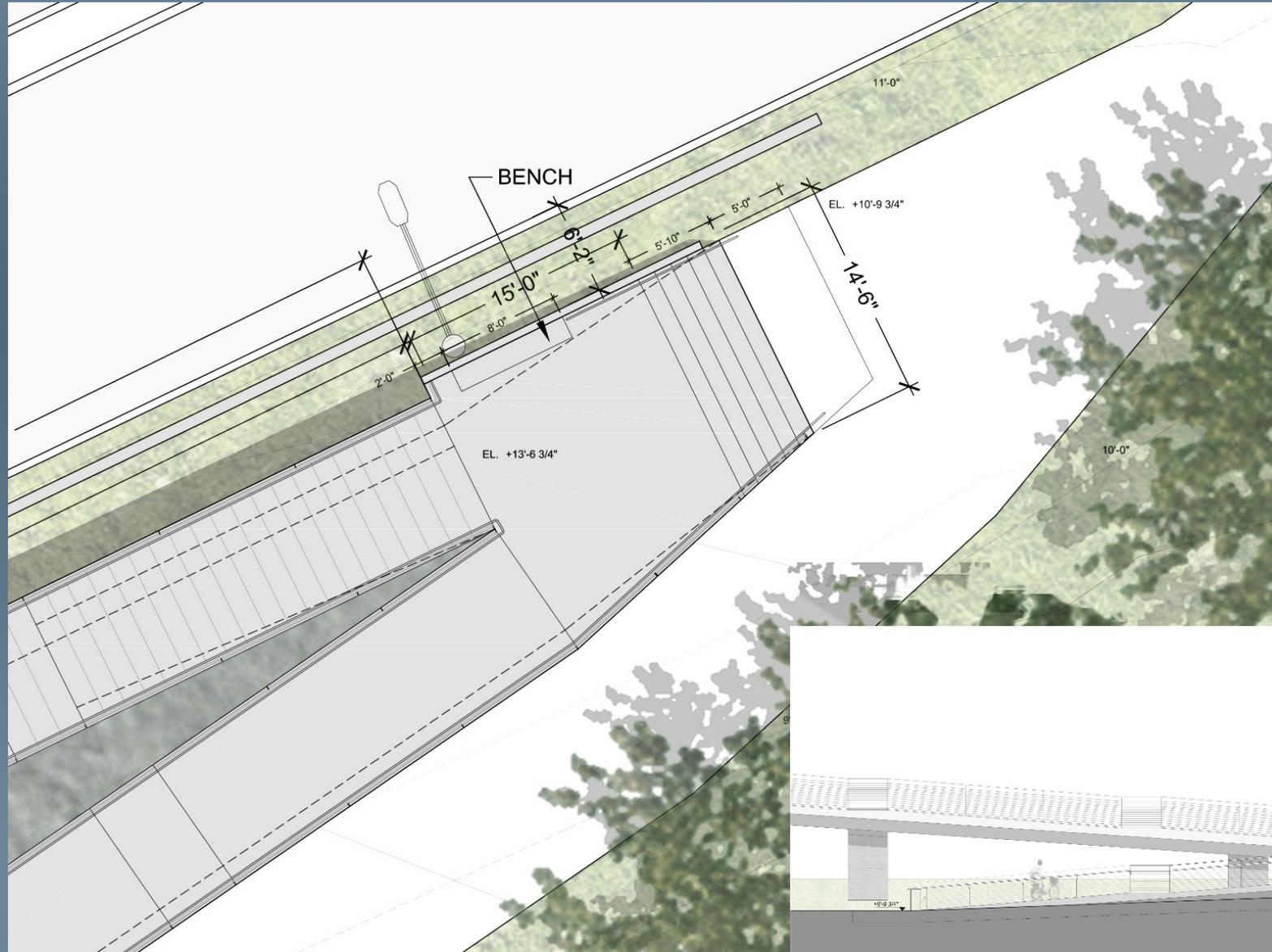


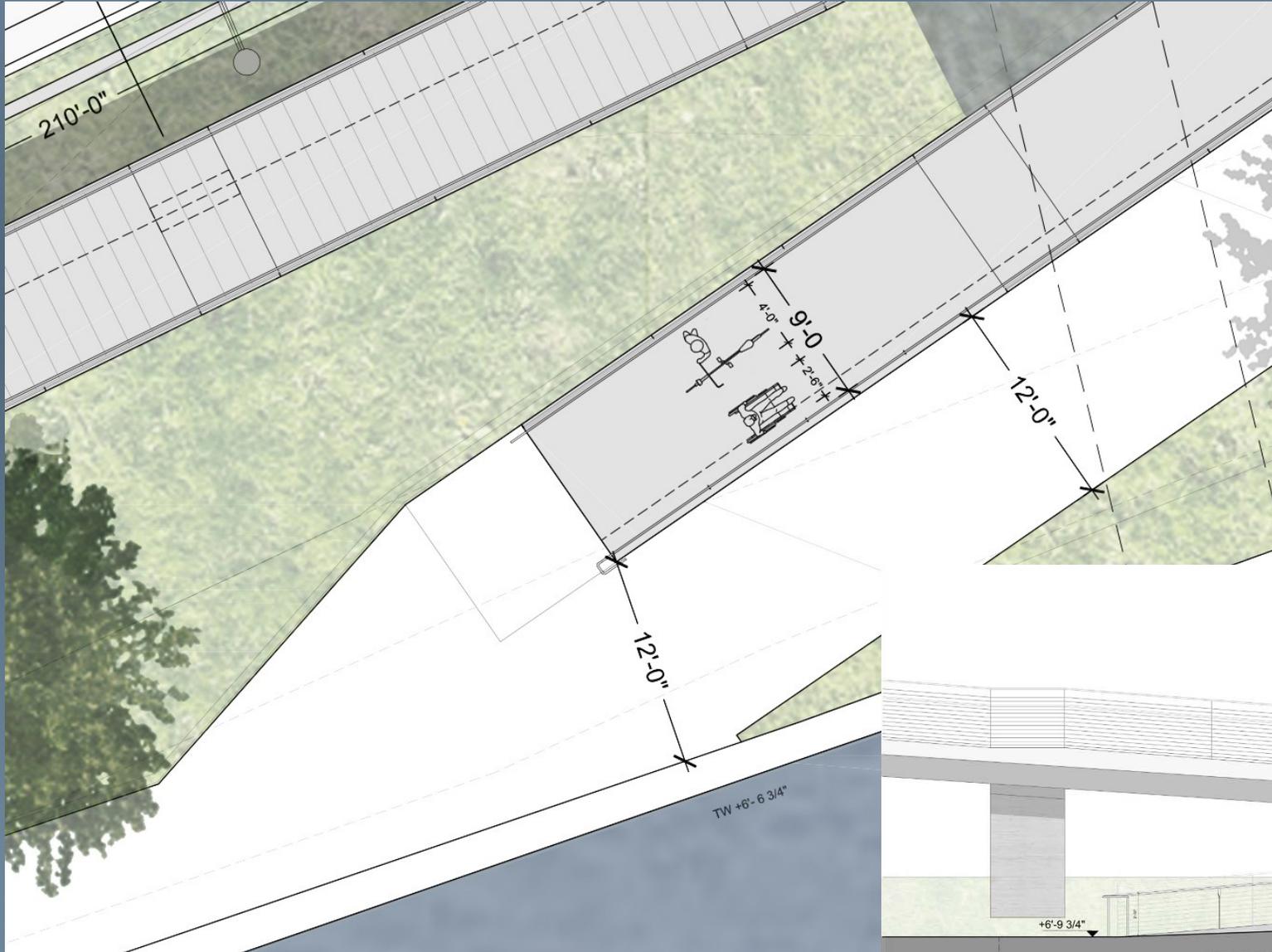
Theodore Roosevelt Bridge







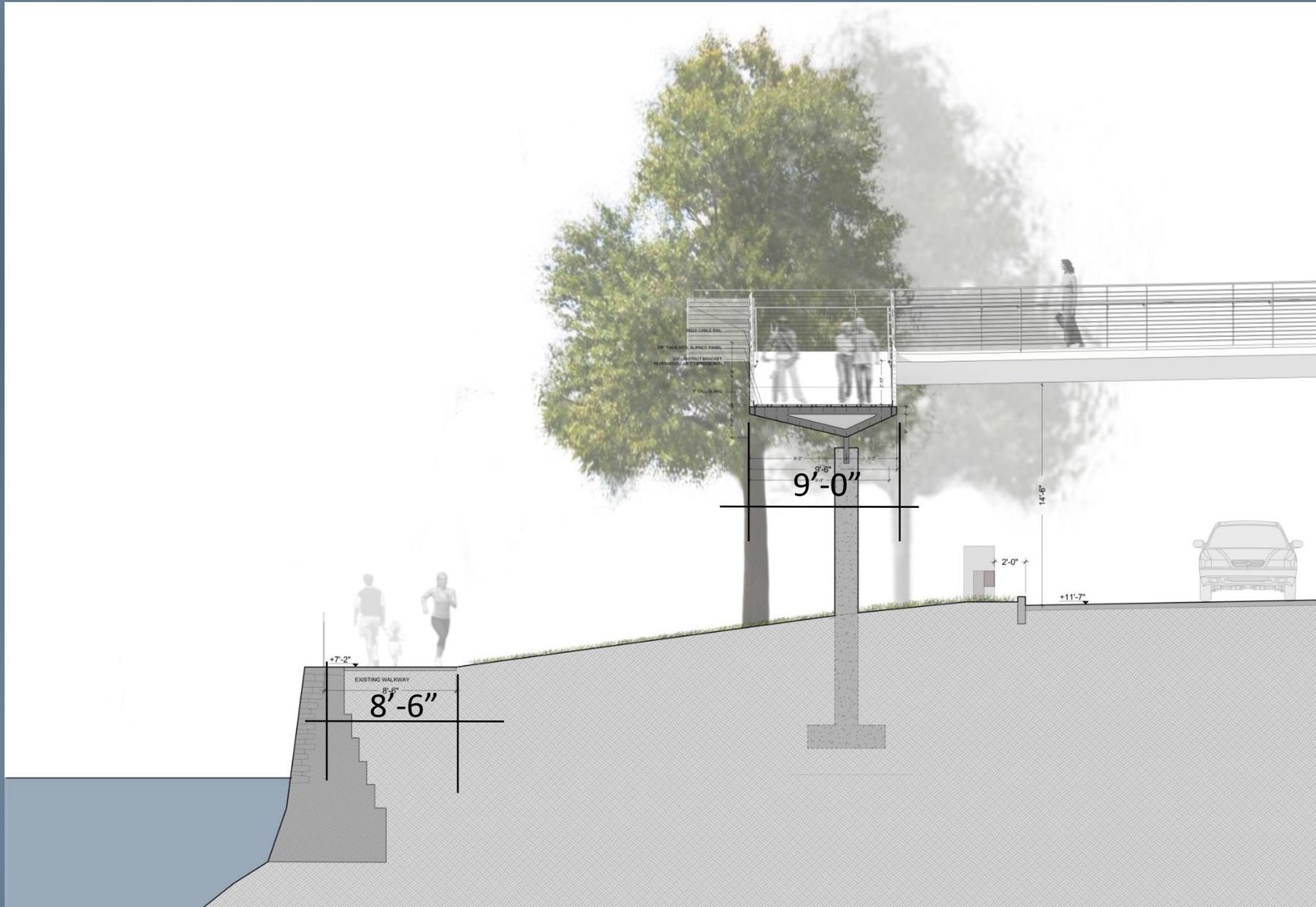




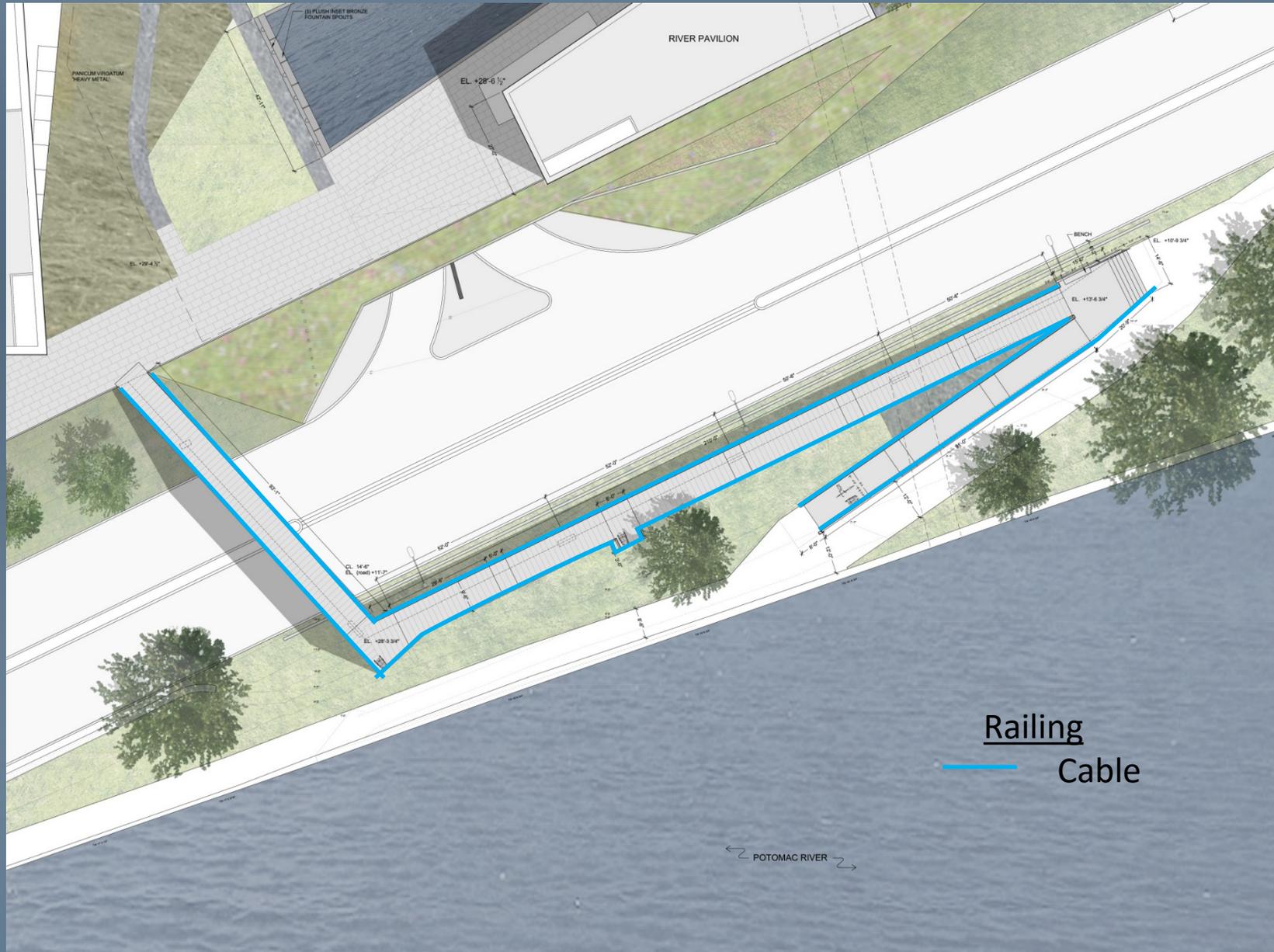
# Concept - Perspective Rendering Looking South along RCPP



















# Perspective Rendering Looking West from River Pavilion



I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHY IT IS THAT ALL OF US  
ARE SO COMMITTED TO THE SEA, EXCEPT I THINK  
IT IS BECAUSE IN ADDITION TO THE FACT THAT  
THE SEA CHANGES, AND SHIPS CHANGE, IT IS  
BECAUSE WE ALL CAME FROM THE SEA. AND IT IS  
AN INTERESTING BIOLOGICAL FACT THAT ALL OF  
US HAVE, IN OUR VEINS THE EXACT SAME

ANYONE WHO CAN SOLVE THE PROBLEM  
OF CLEAN WATER WILL BE WORTHY OF TWO NOBEL PRIZES,  
ONE FOR PEACE AND ONE FOR SCIENCE

