Executive Director's Recommendation
Commission Meeting: July 12, 2018

PROJECT
Rock Creek Park Trail Access and Safety Improvements, and Rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway
Washington, DC

NCPC FILE NUMBER
7998

NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER
23.00(38.00)44778

APPLICANT'S REQUEST
Approval of comments on concept design

PROPOSED ACTION
Approve comments on concept design

ACTION ITEM TYPE
Staff Presentation

PROJECT SUMMARY
The National Park Service (NPS) has submitted for Commission review a concept design for access and safety improvements to Rock Creek Park Trail and rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway in Washington, DC. The NPS, in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration—Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division, is planning to implement shared-use trail, roadway, and site improvements, most notably including redesign of the old Constitution Avenue, NW turnaround (the Belvedere), reroute of the trail under the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge (TR Bridge), and trail widening and improvements along the John F. Kennedy Center waterfront. Other work includes trail widening and resurfacing, accessibility and safety improvements, wayfinding signage, landscape improvements, and rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.

Because the Belvedere no longer serves a traffic need, the proposed design will realign the Rock Creek Park Trail around the outside of the site, and provide landscape improvements in preparation for a future memorial (designated a “prime candidate site” in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan). The project will convert much of the existing asphalt paving to grass lawn, but will preserve the footprint of the original turnaround. Other plantings will be provided, and existing trees will be preserved. To enhance safety and access in this location, the existing trail that provides access to the Belvedere under TR Bridge will be rerouted from its current under-arch alignment (6’ wide) to a pedestrian tunnel that would be constructed through the bridge abutment (14’ wide). There are two potential alignments for the tunnel approach, and two potential designs for the tunnel entry—an arched or rectangular option. To further enhance the trail along the waterfront in this location, the existing benches that limit the trail width to six feet will be removed and replaced to widen the trail to 14 feet. The benches and seating areas will be retained at a reduced depth, and trees will be replaced.
KEY INFORMATION

- The NPS, in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration—Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division, is planning to implement shared-use trail, roadway, and site improvements.
- Rock Creek Park Trail will be widened to meet shared-use trail standards, and resurfaced with porous pavement to meet stormwater requirements.
- The Belvedere at the old Constitution Avenue, NW turnaround will be redesigned, including the replacement of asphalt with grass lawn, daffodil planting, and the realignment of the trail along the outside of the site. These changes will create a parklike setting that is appropriate for commemoration and contemplation—consistent with the intended use of the site as a future memorial.
- A new 14-foot-wide tunnel will be constructed through TR Bridge just north of the Belvedere, which will replace the existing six-foot-wide sidewalk in this area that is adjacent to the roadway and vehicular traffic.
- Two alignment options are proposed for the tunnel entry. One is centered on the bridge abutment that would affect the bridge structure and require reinforcement. The second is slightly off-center to avoid the bridge structural support.
- In addition to the two alignment options, the proposal also includes two options for the shape of the tunnel entry—including an arched option with stone detailing and a rectangular option.
- The portion of trail along the John F. Kennedy Center waterfront would be widened from a variable six-foot width to a consistent 14 feet, which will require the relocation of adjacent benches and removal and replacement of trees.
- The project also includes rehabilitation/mill and overlay on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, which is general maintenance work outside of the purview of NCPC.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commission:

Comments favorably on the proposal to improve Rock Creek Trail, including the enhancement of the Belvedere, widening and resurfacing of the trail, and improvements to accessibility and safety.

Finds that site improvements and landscaping proposed at the Belvedere will help formalize this location as the site for a potential future memorial, as is described in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan.

Supports trail alignment 2 with the arched tunnel entryway because it would avoid impacts to major structural elements of the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, allow for clear lines of sight through the tunnel for pedestrians and bicycles, and complement the existing bridge design.
Notes that several trees will need to be removed to widen and realign the trail segment along the Potomac waterfront near the Kennedy Center.

Requests that the applicant provide a narrative that describes the tree replacement strategy for the project, as well as how it will prevent a net loss of tree canopy in accordance with the policies related to Tree Canopy and Vegetation in the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

Requests additional information regarding the extent and location of any proposed wayfinding signage for the final submission.

### PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

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<td>– Preliminary and final approval of Rock Creek Park Trail Access and Safety Improvements, and Rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway</td>
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### PROJECT ANALYSIS

#### Executive Summary

Staff has evaluated the submitted concept design and finds that the project would greatly improve access, safety, and navigation along Rock Creek Park Trail, and that improvements and landscaping proposed for the Belvedere would formalize this as a location for a future memorial. The project would also improve stormwater management at this sensitive location along the Potomac River. While largely outside of the purview of NCPC review, the proposed rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway in this area will serve to improve roadway safety and navigability. Accordingly, staff recommends that the Commission **comments favorably on the proposal to improve Rock Creek Trail, including the enhancement of the Belvedere, widening and resurfacing of the trail, and improvements to accessibility and safety.**

#### Analysis

The Rock Creek Park Trail Access and Safety Improvements, and Rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway project proposes trail and roadway improvements throughout the corridor that stretches from Virginia Avenue, NW to Ohio Drive, SW near the Tidal Basin. The project consists of rehabilitation work to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, much of which is general maintenance outside of the purview of NCPC, as well as various improvements to the Rock Creek Park Trail, which are the focus of Commission review. In general, the major work can be organized into the following categories, which will each be analyzed below: 1) Rock Creek Park Trail widening and resurfacing, 2) Redesign of the old Constitution Avenue, NW turnaround (the
Belvedere), 3) Rock Creek Park Trail tunnel under Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge (TR Bridge), and 4) John F. Kennedy Center waterfront improvements.

The project also includes the rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway from Virginia Avenue, NW to the Belvedere, including asphalt mill and overlay of the existing travel lanes and full-depth patching repairs, repair of the cobblestone median, and replacement of existing LED cobrahead lighting with LED “twin-20” light poles and luminaries. Much of this work is repair or replacement in-kind, which is typically outside of the review purview of NCPC. While staff is supportive of these improvements, they will not be analyzed in detail as part of this report. Staff, however, notes that the use of “twin-20” light poles at this location is more consistent with the character of the parkway and surrounding landscape than the cobrahead light poles.

**Rock Creek Park Trail Widening and Resurfacing**

The applicant has noted that the trail will be widened to meet or exceed current standards for shared-use paths per the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). The trail widths are inadequate in many locations—generally ranging from eight feet to ten feet throughout this portion of the Rock Creek Park Trail. The project contemplates the widening of the trail from Virginia Avenue, NW to Ohio Drive, SW to 14 feet in most locations, with a width of 10 feet in locations constrained by important trees or other landscape features. It will also be resurfaced with a consistent porous asphalt pavement along its length, much of which currently surfaced with variable materials, including asphalt pavers. The portion of trail from the John Ericsson National Memorial, just south of the Lincoln Memorial, to the Tidal Basin bridge will not be widened, but will also be resurfaced with porous pavement. The use of porous pavement will help meet stormwater regulations, and serve to reduce runoff into the adjacent Potomac River.

**Redesign of the Belvedere**

The applicant has noted in its submission that the old Constitution Avenue, NW turnaround, or Belvedere, was used prior to the construction of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. While the paved turnaround still exists in its original configuration, it no longer serves a traffic need. However, the area provides an uninterrupted view of the Potomac River along the Rock Creek Park Trail, which jogs to the outside of the Belvedere and off of its primary alignment in this location. The Belvedere is also identified as a “prime candidate site” for a future memorial in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan, and has been identified as a potential location for the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial (NCPC File #7745). The proposal for this location includes the replacement of the existing asphalt with grass lawn, daffodil plantings, realignment of the trail along the outside of the Belvedere, and the relocation of the crosswalk to allow for more direct access to the trail segment through the volleyball courts. The footprint of the original turnaround will be retained, slightly mounded, and planted.

Staff believes that these improvements will greatly improve safety and navigation for pedestrians and bicycles in this location, and the removal of asphalt will reduce stormwater runoff into the Potomac River. The proposed landscaping will also serve to create a parklike setting that is more appropriate for commemoration and contemplation, which would support its potential future use
as a memorial site. Accordingly, staff recommends that the Commission finds that site improvements and landscaping proposed at the Belvedere will help formalize this location as the site for a potential future memorial, as is described in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan.

Rock Creek Park Trail Tunnel under TR Bridge

Among the major proposed improvements are the creation of a new tunnel just north of the Belvedere location, adjacent to the Kennedy Center and the future pedestrian bridge that will provide access across Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Pedestrians and cyclists in this location currently travel along a six-foot-wide sidewalk that runs through an existing tunnel shared with vehicular traffic. The sidewalk is well under the minimum AASHTO standard width for shared-use pathways of ten feet, and does not currently have any protective infrastructure such as guardrails or guardwalls. The potential for bicycle/pedestrian/vehicle conflict in this location is high. To improve safety conditions, the NPS is planning to construct a new trail tunnel through the non-historic TR Bridge abutment, which would accommodate a 14-foot-wide trail with 12-foot vertical clearance.

Two alignment alternatives are proposed to achieve this connection, both of which avoid impacts to existing sculpture blocks that flank the vehicular tunnel. Alignment 1 is centered on the abutment, but would impact an existing counterfort, which supports the free-standing façade wall. Consequently, this alignment would require more comprehensive structural reinforcement of the wall. Alignment 2 would avoid impacts to the existing counterforts, but would be slightly off-center. Either alignment would connect to the Kennedy Center pedestrian bridge landing and ramp, and would require the removal of an existing willow oak that is in poor health. In addition to the two alignment options, the proposal also includes two options for the shape of the tunnel entry—including an arched option with stone detailing and a rectangular option.

Staff supports efforts to create a dedicated tunnel in this location, which would allow for a wider trail and greatly improve safety for trail users. While trail alignment 1 would be centered on the abutment, the plans indicate that the trail would need to be curved to achieve the appropriate angle moving into the tunnel. Staff believes that this would reduce visibility to and through the tunnel, and could pose a safety concern. Alignment 2 would have a more direct alignment, which would allow for greater visibility, and would also avoid the counterforts that would necessitate structural reinforcement. Regarding the shape of the tunnel entry, staff finds that the arched option is more architecturally interesting, and would be consistent with the arched entry of the existing vehicular tunnel and the arch spans that cross the Potomac River. Accordingly, staff recommends that the Commission supports trail alignment 2 with the arched tunnel entryway because it would avoid impacts to major structural elements of the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, allow for clear lines of sight through the tunnel for pedestrians and bicycles, and complement the existing bridge design.

John F. Kennedy Center Waterfront Improvements
The last major improvement proposed as part of this project is the widening of the segment of Rock Creek Park Trail along the Kennedy Center waterfront. The trail in this location is generally 10 feet wide, positioned between a handrail along the river, and a series of built-in seating areas and benches that line the trail—constraining the functional trail width to six feet. The proposal would widen the trail to a 14-foot width, which would require the removal and replacement of trees and benches. The depth of the seating areas along this segment would be reduced to accommodate this change, but would still provide functional seating and respite for trail users. While the materials indicate that trees removed as part of this effort would be replaced, many of which are in fair to poor health, more information is needed to understand the extent of mitigation and compliance with tree replacement policies in the Comprehensive Plan. Accordingly, staff recommends that the Commission requests that the applicant provide a narrative that describes the tree replacement strategy for the project, as well as how it will prevent a net loss of tree canopy in accordance with the policies related to Tree Canopy and Vegetation in the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

Other Improvements

In addition to the more significant changes outlined above, the submission also notes that a segment of sidewalk along the north side of Virginia Avenue will be removed. The sidewalk in this location is a confusing condition for pedestrians, as it does not connect to crosswalks that would provide access across either Virginia Avenue or Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Its removal will improve navigation for pedestrians and cyclists. The submission also notes that signage will be provided throughout the project area to further improve wayfinding. Staff supports the need for additional signage, but needs more information to analyze the scope and scale of its placement. Accordingly, staff recommends that the Commission requests additional information regarding the extent and location of any proposed wayfinding signage for the final submission.

CONFORMANCE TO EXISTING PLANS, POLICIES AND RELATED GUIDANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

As noted in the analysis above, NCPC staff has reviewed this proposal for compliance with relevant guidance and has determined that it is not inconsistent with the policies established in the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. In particular, the project is supported by policies in the Federal Environment, Parks and Open Space, and Visitors and Commemoration Elements.

National Historic Preservation Act

The National Park Service has indicated that National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) review for this project will be streamlined in accordance with a nationwide programmatic agreement (PA), which the DC State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has confirmed. The PA allows the NPS to streamline many maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, or other activities that are not anticipated
to have impacts on historic properties, and are completed in accordance with a treatment plan. Because it has approval authority in review of this project, NCPC has its own responsibility to comply with NHPA. NCPC is designating the National Park Service the lead agency for compliance with NHPA. Because this is a concept review, further documentation is not required at this time.

**National Environmental Policy Act**

The National Park Service has indicated that it anticipates a categorical exclusion from National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis under its agency regulations. Because this is a concept review, further documentation is not required at this time. To meet its own NEPA obligation, NCPC is able to apply a categorical exclusion for the proposed project (§601.12 [2]), which allows for “approval of the installation or restoration of minor site elements, such as but not limited to identification signs, sidewalks, patios, fences, curbs, retaining walls, landscaping, and trail or stream improvements.” Staff does not anticipate any outstanding concerns that would preclude application of a categorical exclusion.

**CONSULTATION**

**Coordinating Committee**

Without objection, the Committee forwarded the proposed preliminary and final site development plans to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The District Department of Energy and Environment notes that they are waiting for formal submission to initiate stormwater review. The SHPO notes their understanding the NPS streamlined this review under the nationwide programmatic agreement, and therefore, the SHPO is coordinating. The District Department of Transportation requested that the applicant provide a project update to the bicycle and pedestrian staff contact.

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

The Rock Creek Park Trail and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway project will be reviewed at the July 2018 meeting of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.

**ONLINE REFERENCE**

The following supporting documents for this project are available online:

- Project Synopsis
- Submission Materials
POWERPOINT (ATTACHED)
NCPC File #: 7998
Rock Creek Park Trail Access and Safety Improvements, and Rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway

Washington, DC

National Park Service

Site Development Plans
Project summary:
The National Park Service (NPS) has submitted for Commission review site development plans for Kennedy Center Pedestrian/Bicycle Trail Access and Safety Improvements, and Rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway in Washington, DC. The NPS, in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration—Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division, is planning to implement shared-use trail, roadway, and site improvements, most notably including redesign of the Old Constitution Avenue NW turnaround (the Belvedere), reroute of the trail under the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge (TR Bridge), and trail widening and improvements along the John F Kennedy Center waterfront. Other work includes trail widening and resurfacing, accessibility and safety improvements, wayfinding signage, landscape improvements, and rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.

Because the Belvedere no longer serves a traffic need, the proposed design will realign the Rock Creek shared-use trail around the outside of the site, and provide a site redesign in preparation for a future memorial (designated “prime candidate site” in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan). The project will convert much of the existing asphalt paving to grass lawn, but will preserve the footprint of the original turnaround. Other plantings will be provided, and existing trees will be preserved. To enhance safety and access in this location, the existing trail that provides access to the Belvedere under TR Bridge will be rerouted from its current under-arch alignment (6’ wide) to a pedestrian tunnel that would be constructed through the bridge abutment (14’ wide). There are two potential alignments for the tunnel approach, and two potential designs for the tunnel entry—an arched or rectangular option. To further enhance the trail along the waterfront in this location, the existing benches that limit the trail width to six feet will be removed and replaced to widen the trail to 14 feet. The benches and seating areas will be retained at a reduced depth, and trees will be replaced.
Project Location

District of Columbia

Constitution Ave
Independence Ave
Virginia Ave
Ohio Dr
Independence Ave
Site Plans
Site Plans

Site 3074+17
Begin OVERLAY

Existing Edge of Road

Rock Creek Park Trail

Potomac River

Edge of Water

Legend

OVERLAY

Plan
Ohio Drive SW
(Rock Creek Park Trail)

NATIONAL MALL & MEMORIAL PARKS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
TECHNICAL SUPPORT CENTER
EASTERN REGIONAL CENTER
NATIONAL MALL, WASHINGTON, DC 20590

Scale 1" = 200'
Renderings – Belvedere

Existing

Proposed
Renderings – Trail Realignment – Option A (Looking South)

Existing

Proposed – Alignment 1, Option A (arched entry)

Proposed – Alignment 2, Option A (arched entry)
Renderings – Trail Realignment – Option B (Looking South)

Existing

Proposed – Alignment 1, Option A (rectangular entry)

Proposed – Alignment 2, Option A (rectangular entry)
Renderings – Trail Realignment (Looking North)

Existing

Proposed – Option A (arched entry)

Proposed – Option B (rectangular entry)
Renderings – Kennedy Center Waterfront

Existing

Proposed