



Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: April 4, 2019

PROJECT Rock Creek Park Trail Access and Safety Improvements Washington, DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 7998
SUBMITTED BY United States Department of the Interior National Park Service	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 23.00(38.00)44894
REVIEW AUTHORITY Federal Projects in the District per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)	APPLICANT'S REQUEST Approval of preliminary and final site development plans
	PROPOSED ACTION Approve preliminary and final site development plans with comments
	ACTION ITEM TYPE Open Session

PROJECT SUMMARY

The National Park Service (NPS) has submitted for Commission review preliminary and final site development plans for access and safety improvements to Rock Creek Park Trail in Washington, DC, which the Commission reviewed as a concept design in July 2018. 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 a 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 vehicular 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*). Improvements include the conversion of the existing asphalt paving to grass lawn and new trees and plantings along the existing sidewalk. The footprint of the original turnaround will be delineated with a flush curb within the lawn for historic preservation purposes.

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 feet wide) to a pedestrian tunnel that would be constructed through the bridge abutment (14 feet wide). The applicant has selected an alignment option that provides clear lines of site through the tunnel for pedestrians and bicycles, and a square tunnel entry that contrasts with the arches on the existing bridge spans. 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 the trail will be widened to 14 feet. The

benches would be replaced to create seating areas with a reduced depth, and new trees would be planted at a one-to-one ratio.

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, additional trees and plantings, and the realignment of the Rock Creek Park 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 future use of the site to accommodate a 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.
- The applicant has selected a trail alignment through the TR Bridge that provides clear site lines through the tunnel and will serve to improve safety for bikes and pedestrians.
- The applicant has selected a chamfered rectangular tunnel entry for the trail tunnel that is consistent with the architectural features of the existing bridge arches.
- 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:

Approves the preliminary and final site development plans for access and safety improvements to Rock Creek Park Trail.

Notes that the applicant has submitted all information requested in review of the concept design including a narrative that describes the tree replacement strategy and additional information regarding the extent and location of any proposed wayfinding signage.

Notes that 13 trees will be removed as a result of the project, all of which are either in poor condition or directly impacted by the project construction. Guidance in the cultural landscape report for the site limit the number of trees that can be planted, so the project will still result in a

net loss of tree canopy, though all trees will be replaced with two-inch to two-and-a-half-inch caliper trees at a one-to-one ratio.

Notes that the applicant has selected a trail alignment that allows for clear sight lines through the new tunnel at the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, which is consistent with the Commission request in review of the concept design.

Notes that the applicant has selected a rectangular entry to the tunnel at the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge rather than the arched option that was supported by the Commission in review of the concept design. The details of the rectangular entry have been refined, including a chamfered opening with aligned joints that is consistent with the architectural details of the existing bridge arches.

PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

Previous actions	July 2018 – Approval of concept design for Rock Creek Park Trail Access and Safety Improvements
Remaining actions (anticipated)	None

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Staff has evaluated the submitted preliminary and final site development plans 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. Further, additional information provided regarding tree removal/replacement and wayfinding signage indicate that the project meets all applicable policies in the Federal Elements of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*. Accordingly, staff recommends that the Commission **approves the preliminary and final site development plans for access and safety improvements to Rock Creek Park Trail.**

Analysis

The Rock Creek Park Trail Access and Safety Improvements 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: 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. While the preliminary and final submission is largely similar to the concept design, minor refinements are proposed to the redesign of the Belvedere and the Rock Creek Park Trail tunnel under TR Bridge, which will be described in the relevant sections below.

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 porous asphalt in select locations, much of which is currently surfaced with variable materials, including asphalt pavers. The use of porous pavement will help meet stormwater regulations and serve to reduce runoff into the adjacent Potomac River. The portion of trail from the John Ericsson National Memorial, just south of the Lincoln Memorial, to the Tidal Basin bridge will be resurfaced in its current width.

Redesign of the Belvedere

The applicant has noted in its submission that the old Constitution Avenue, NW turnaround, or the Belvedere, was used by vehicles 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. 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 concept design had indicated that the footprint of the original turnaround would be retained, slightly mounded, and planted with daffodils. This revised submission still retains the turnaround

footprint, but a green lawn will be planted instead of the daffodils. To ensure the integrity of the historic landscape, the applicant will retain the circular granite curb to indicate the location of the original turnaround and will add a curb that delineates the outer edges of the automobile turnaround and the terminus of Constitution Avenue. Consistent with the concept design, plantings are also proposed along the existing pathway along the river, and several new trees are proposed in the area to create a bosque that defines the termination of old Constitution Avenue, NW, corridor. Staff believes that the proposed improvements will greatly improve safety and navigation for pedestrians and bicycles in this location while creating a parklike setting that is more appropriate for commemoration and contemplation, which would support its potential future use as a memorial site.

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 were proposed in the concept design to achieve this connection. Alignment 1 was centered on the abutment, but would impact an existing counterfort, which supports the free-standing façade wall. Consequently, this alignment would have required more comprehensive structural reinforcement of the wall. Alignment 2 would have avoided impacts to the existing counterforts but would be slightly off-center. Both alignments were intended to 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 review of the concept design, the Commission supported alignment 2, noting that alignment 1 would require a curve in the trail to achieve the appropriate angle moving into the tunnel, which would reduce visibility and could pose a safety concern. In accordance with Commission comments, the applicant has chosen alignment 2 as its preferred alternative in the revised submission.

In addition to the two alignment options, the concept design also includes two options for the shape of the tunnel entry, including an arched option with stone detailing and a rectangular option. In review of the concept design, the Commission supported the arched option, noting that it was 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. In its review of the proposed project, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts supported the rectangular option. To reconcile the conflicting comments, the applicant has decided to move forward with the rectangular option but has refined the details to better respond to NCPC concerns. Specifically, the applicant has refined the details of the rectangular entry to include a chamfered opening with aligned joints that is consistent with

the architectural details on the existing bridge arches, which largely addresses Commission concerns on the concept 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.

In response to Commission comments on the concept design, the applicant has provided more information on tree removal and replacement that would occur as a result of the trail widening. The applicant has indicated that 13 trees will be removed as a result of the project, all of which are either in poor condition or directly impacted by the project construction, and that all trees would be replaced with 2- to 2.5-caliper trees at a one-to-one ratio in accordance with the cultural landscape report for the site. Because many of the trees are larger and more mature, the replacement trees will not fully mitigate the loss of tree canopy. Despite the net loss of tree canopy, staff believes that the tree replacement strategy effectively balances preservation of the historic landscape with natural resource considerations.

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. In response to Commission request in review of the concept design, the revised submission also includes details on proposed wayfinding signage, which will be placed to improve bike and pedestrian navigation throughout the project area.

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

To meet its Section 106 requirement, NPS has included a letter from the DC State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) indicating a finding of “No Adverse Effect” for the project, contingent on several design conditions, including the retention of the circular curb at the Belvedere and an additional curb that delineates the outer edges of the automobile turnaround and the terminus of Constitution Avenue. 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.

National Environmental Policy Act

The NPS has issued a categorical exclusion for the project to meet its National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirement. To meet its independent NEPA responsibility, 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 believe there are 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 SHPO noted that the submitted plans did not include an additional curb that delineates the outer edges of the automobile turnaround and the terminus of Constitution Avenue, which was a condition on their finding of “No Adverse Effect” for the project. The NPS updated the submission to address this concern.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

The Rock Creek Park Trail project was reviewed at the July and October 2018 meetings of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and received final approval on the consent calendar in March 2019. Relevant letters are attached.

ONLINE REFERENCE

The following supporting documents for this project are available online at www.ncpc.gov:

- Submission Package
- NEPA Documentation
- NHPA Documentation

Prepared by John Gerbich
03/13/2019

ATTACHMENTS

- PowerPoint
- U.S. Commission of Fine Arts Review Letters

Rock Creek Park Trail Access and Safety Improvements

Washington, DC

Approval of Preliminary and Final Site Development Plans

United States Department of the Interior

Project Summary

Commission Meeting Date: April 4, 2019

NCPC Review Authority: 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)

Applicant Request: Approval of Preliminary and Final Site Development Plans

Session: Consent Calendar

NCPC Review Officer: John Gerbich

NCPC File Number: 7998

Project Summary:

The National Park Service (NPS) has submitted for Commission review preliminary and final site development plans for access and safety improvements to Rock Creek Park Trail and rehabilitation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway in Washington, DC, which the Commission reviewed as a concept design in July 2018. 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 a 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). Improvements include the conversion of the existing asphalt paving to grass lawn and new trees and plantings along the existing sidewalk. The footprint of the original turnaround will be delineated with a flush curb within the lawn for preservation purposes.

Project Summary

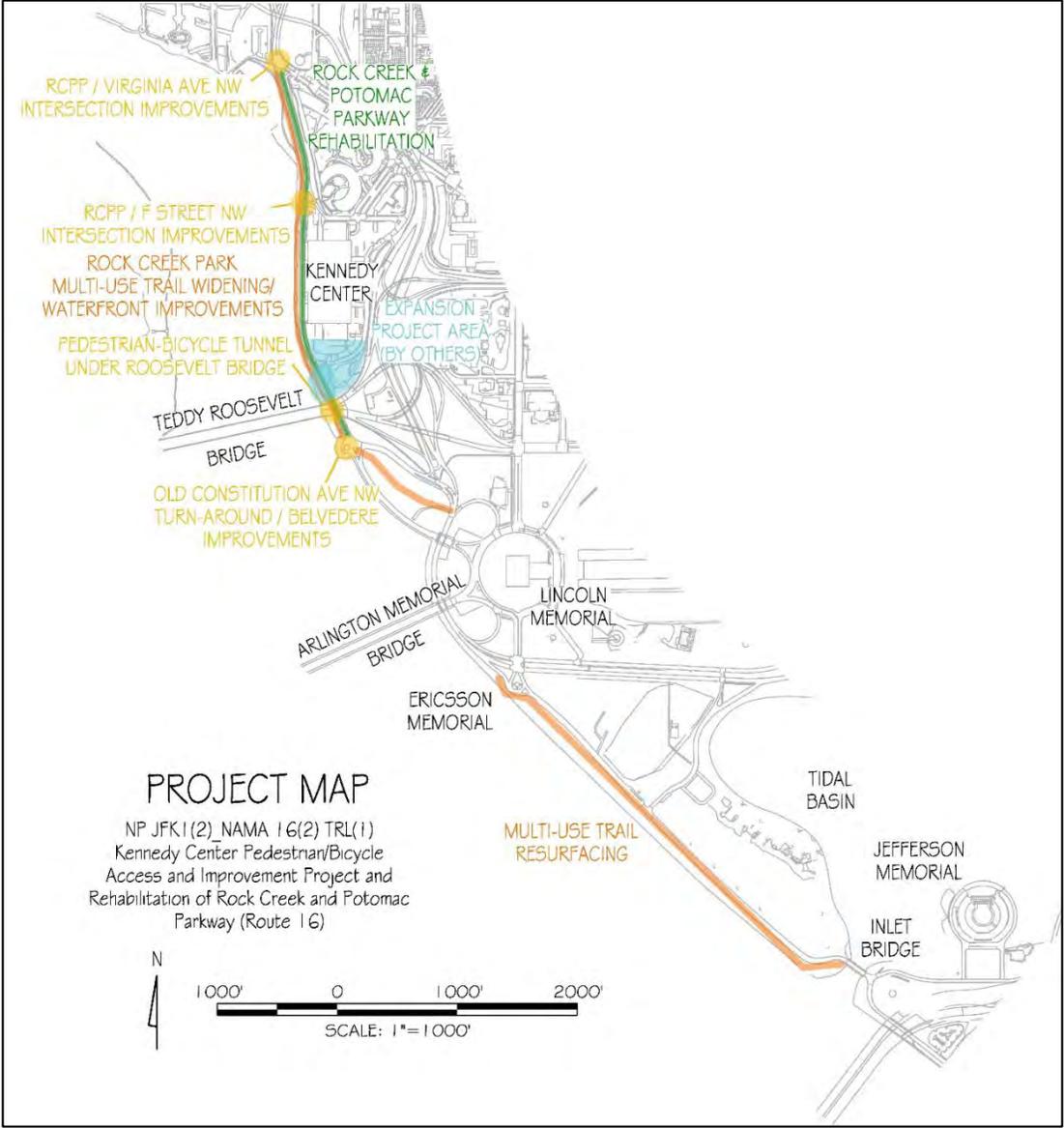
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Site Location



Location Map

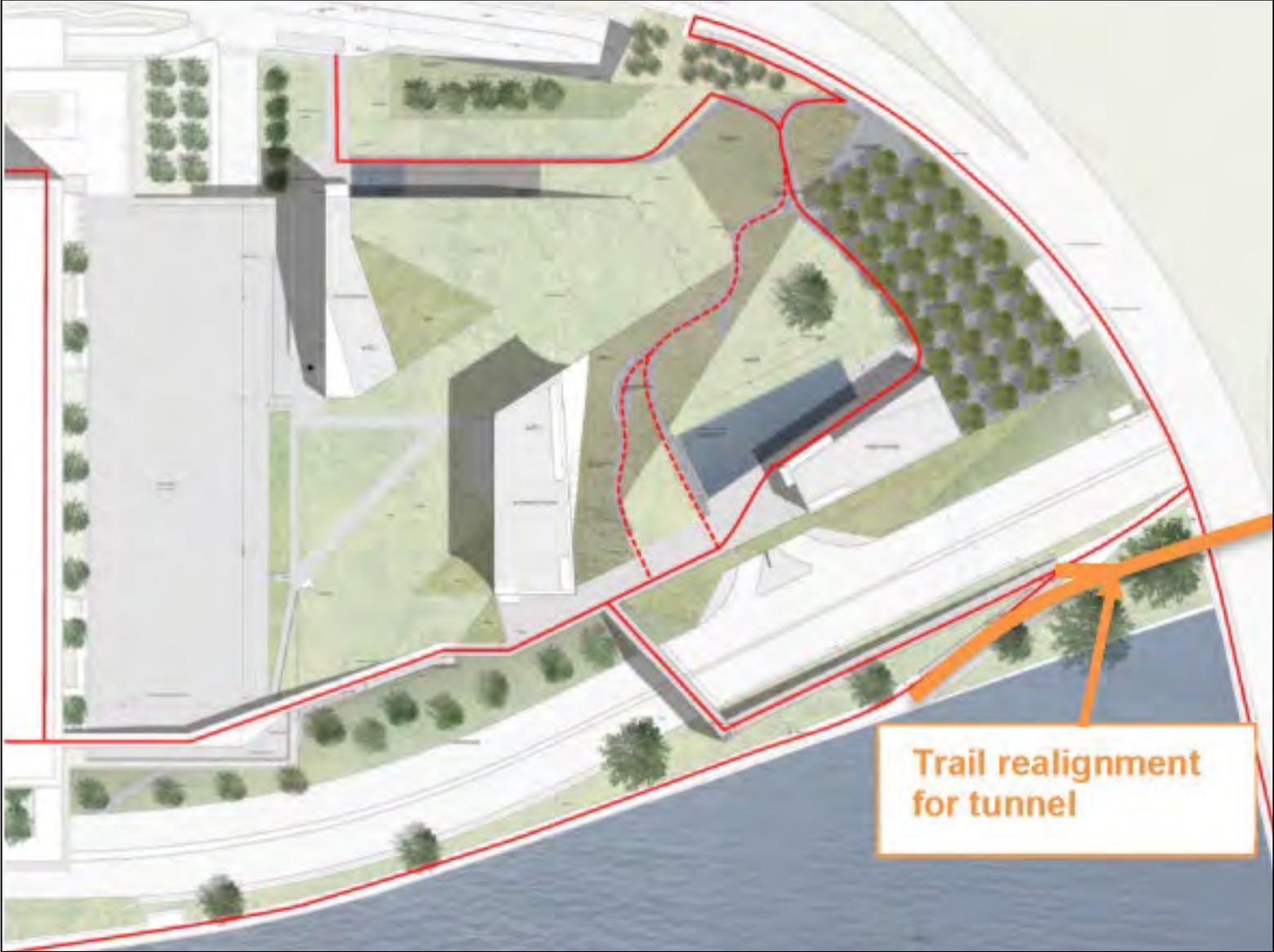
Project Overview



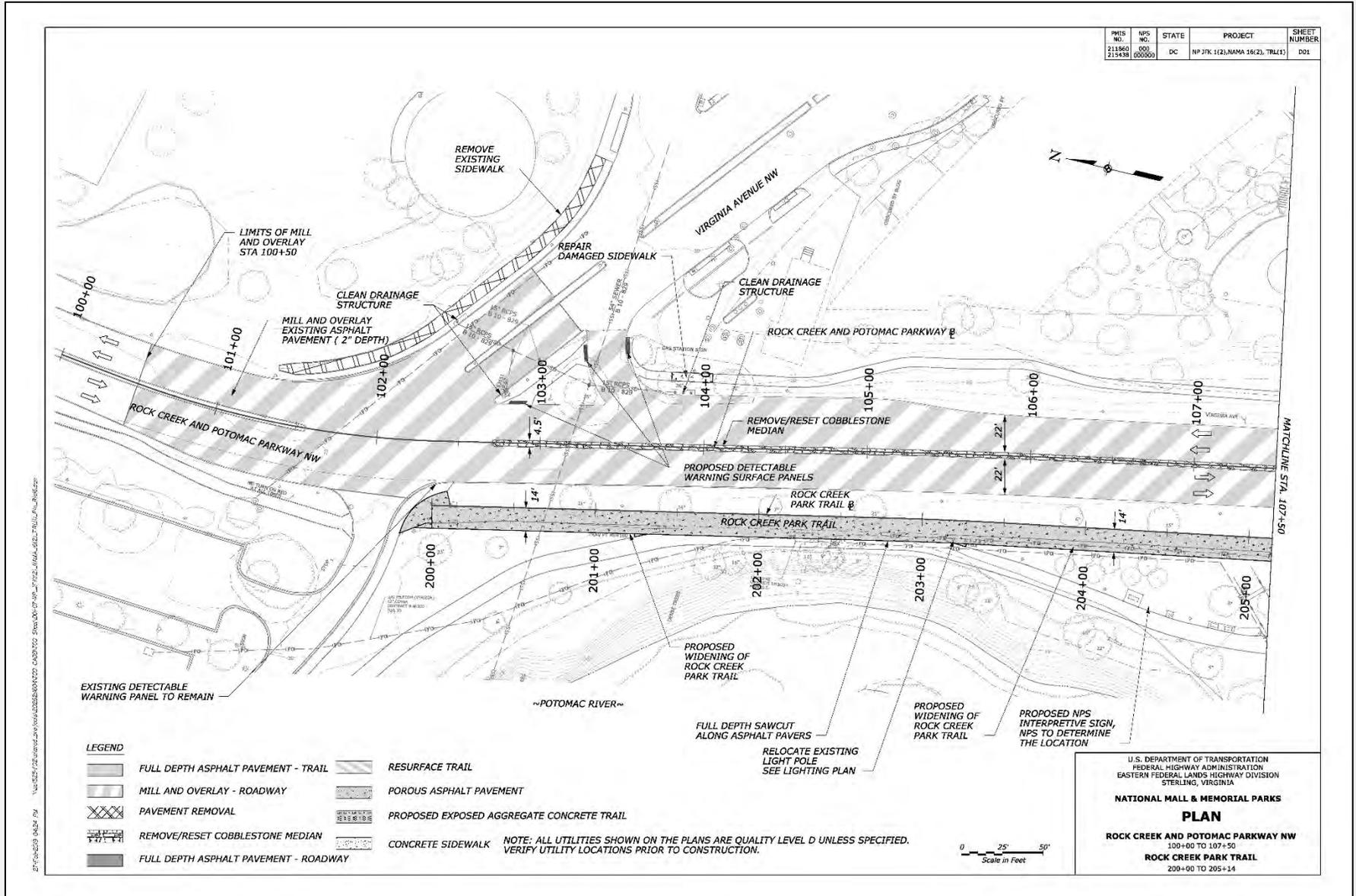
Existing Pedestrian/Bicycle Circulation



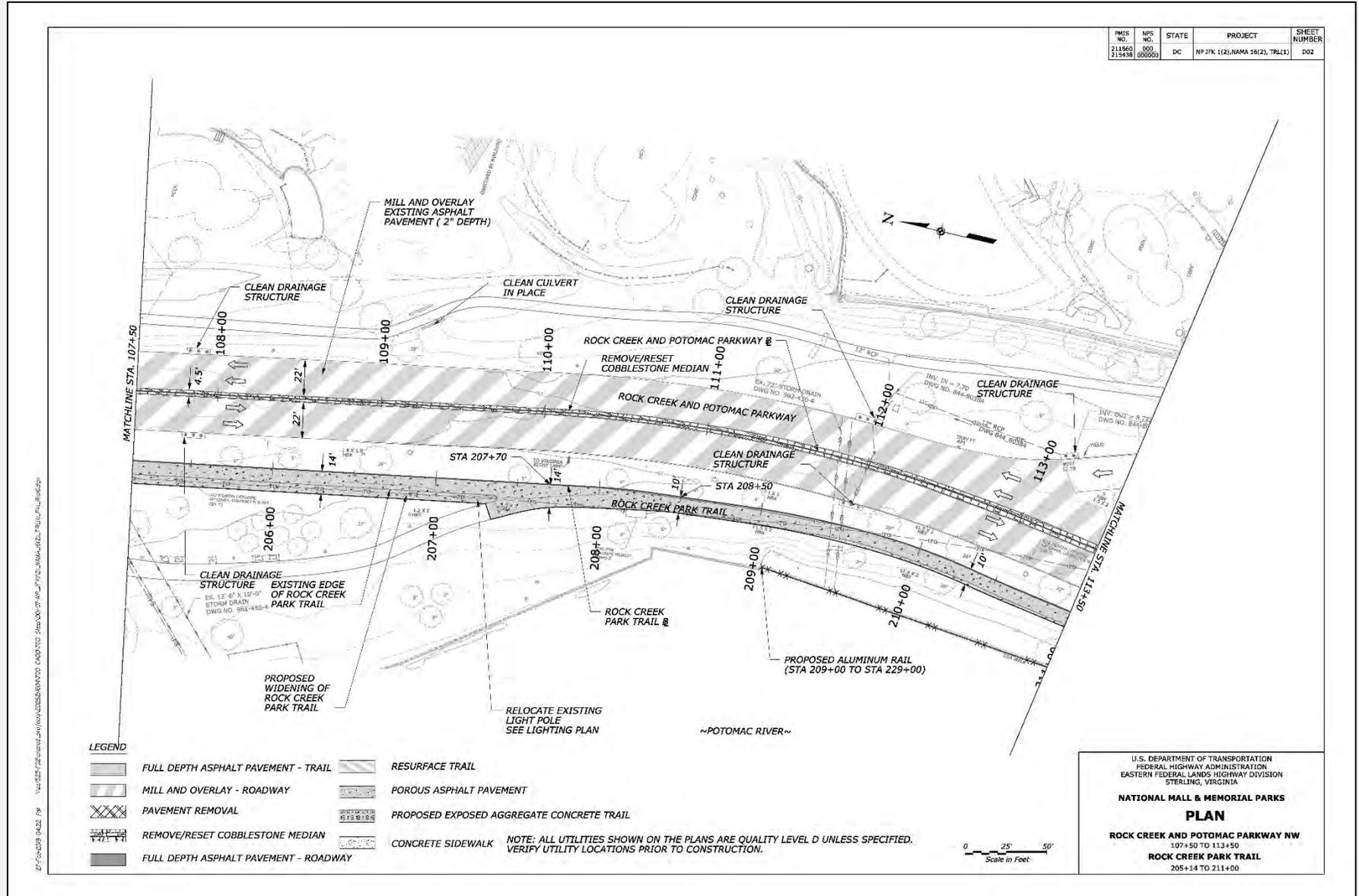
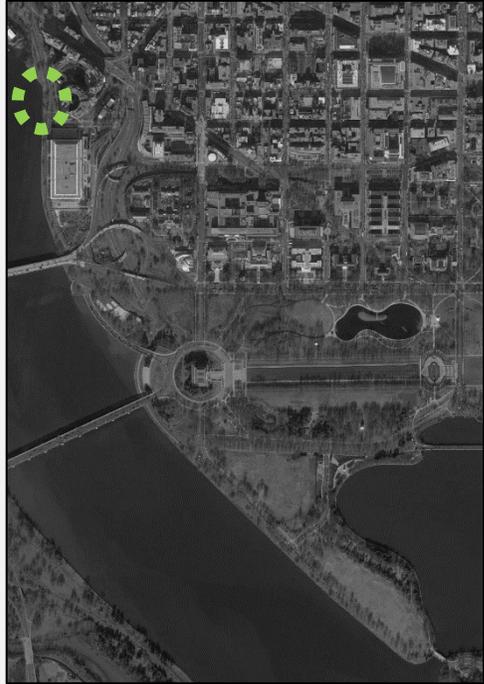
Future Pedestrian/Bicycle Circulation



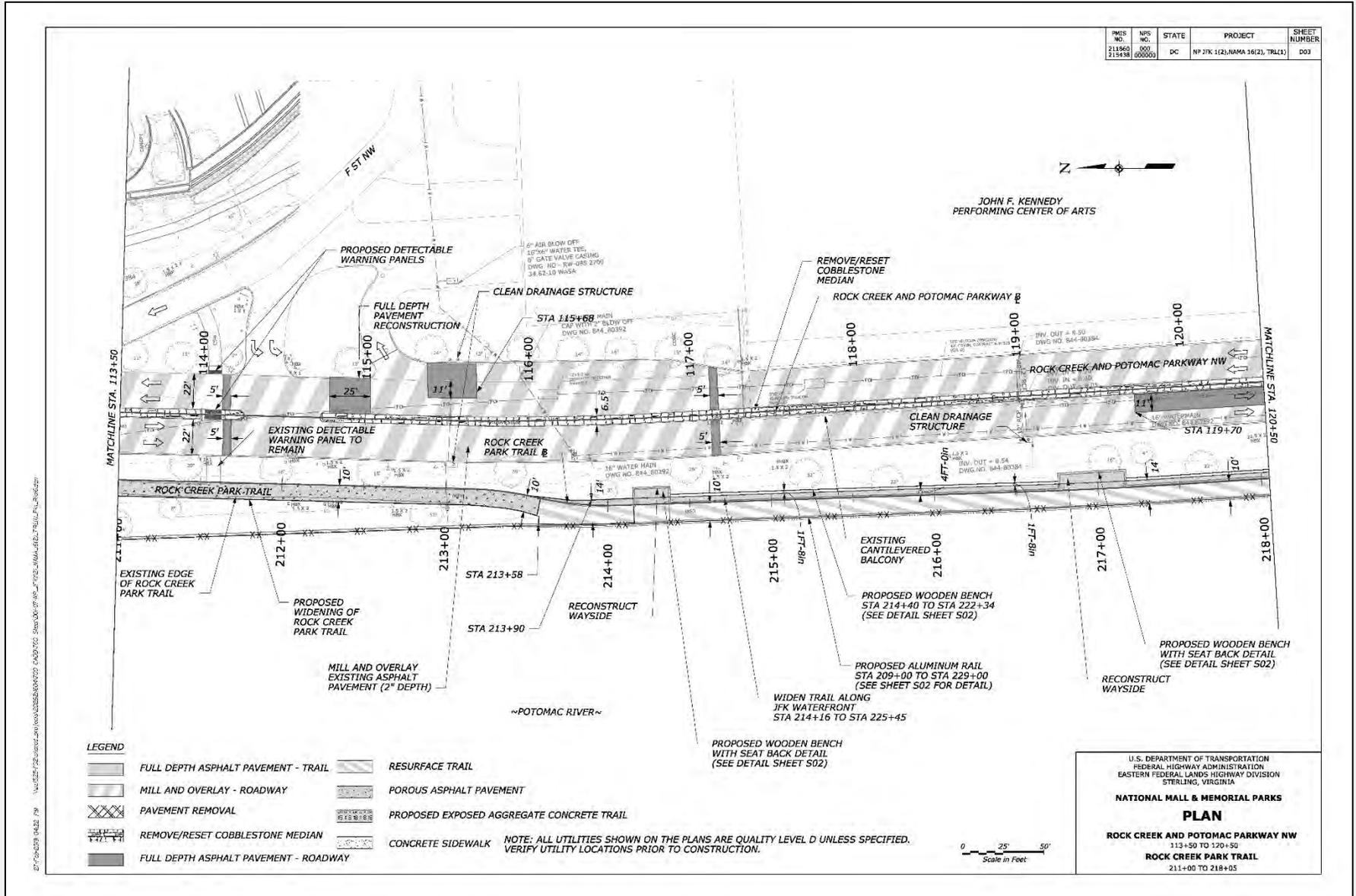
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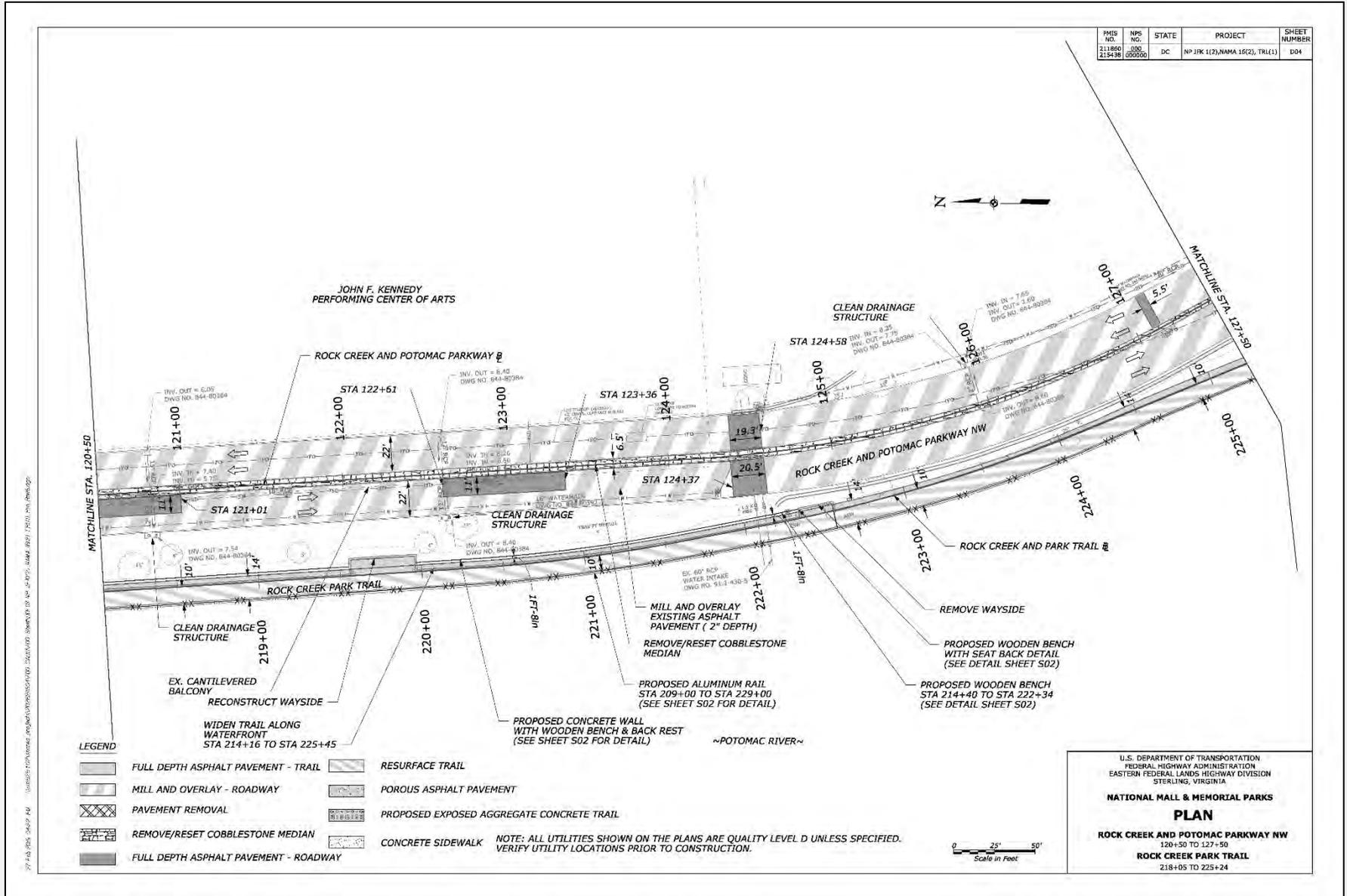
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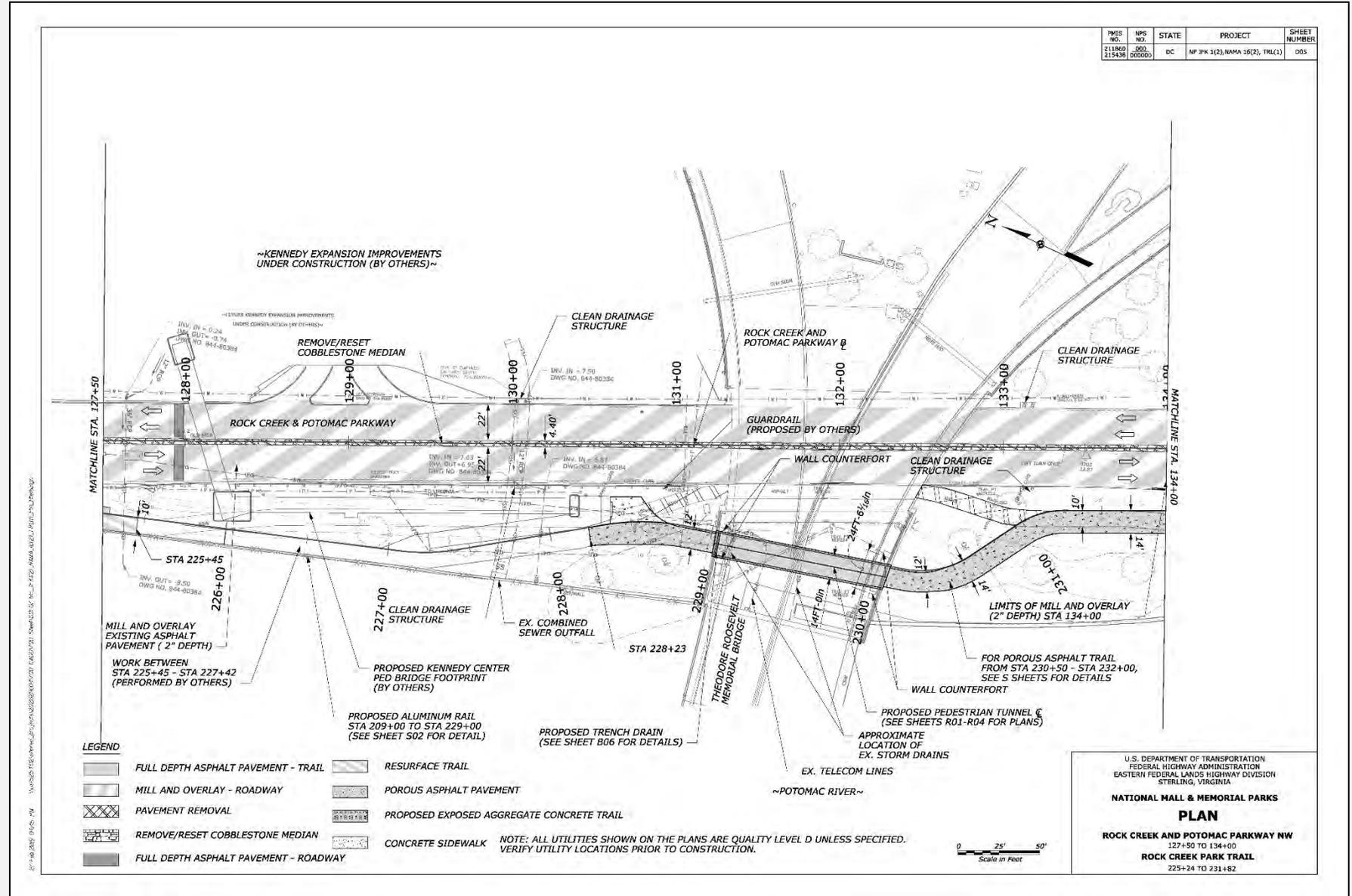
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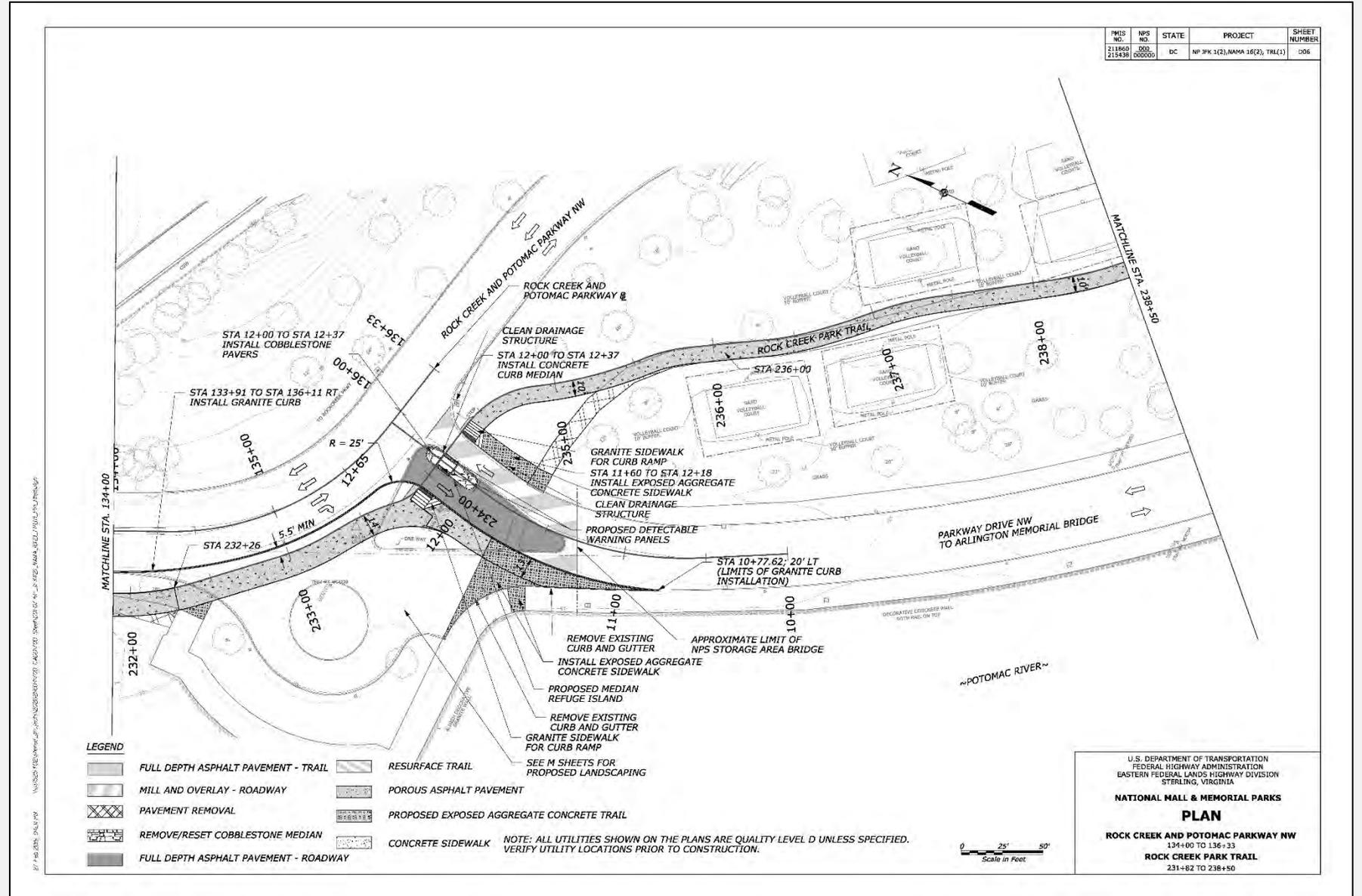
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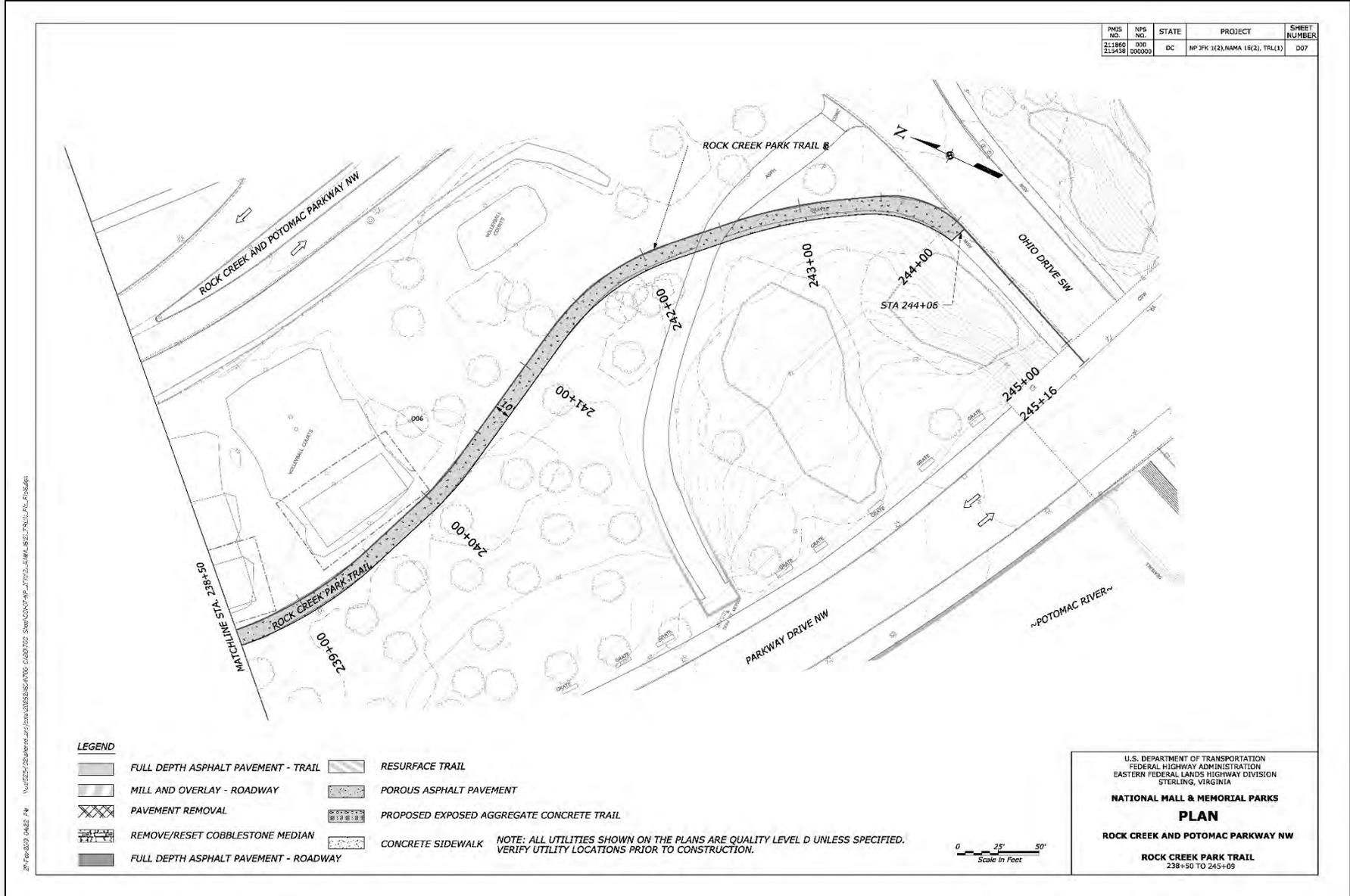
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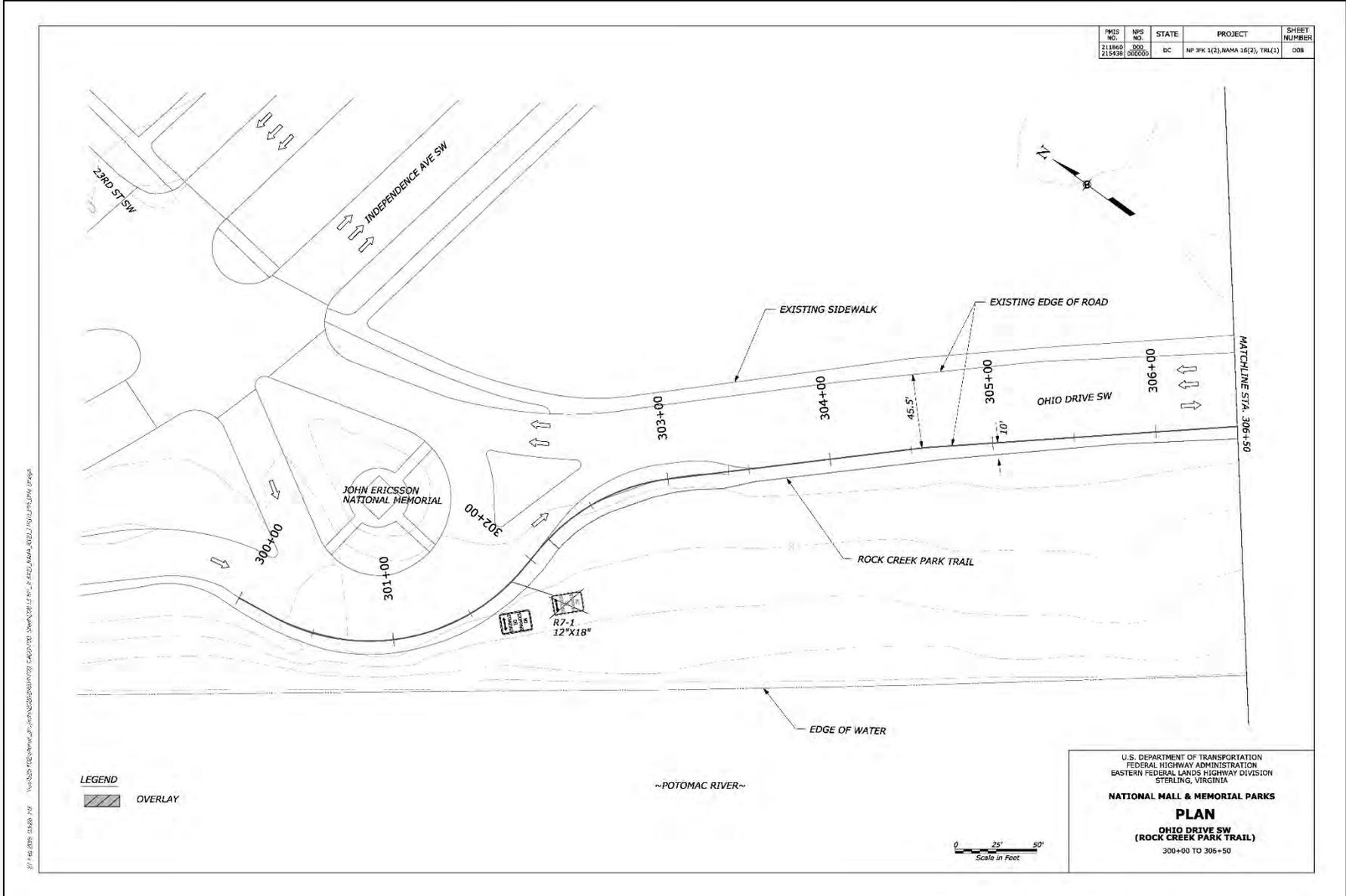
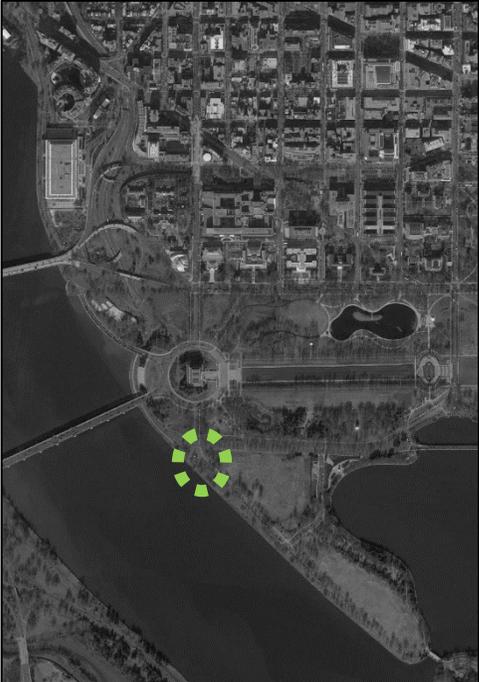
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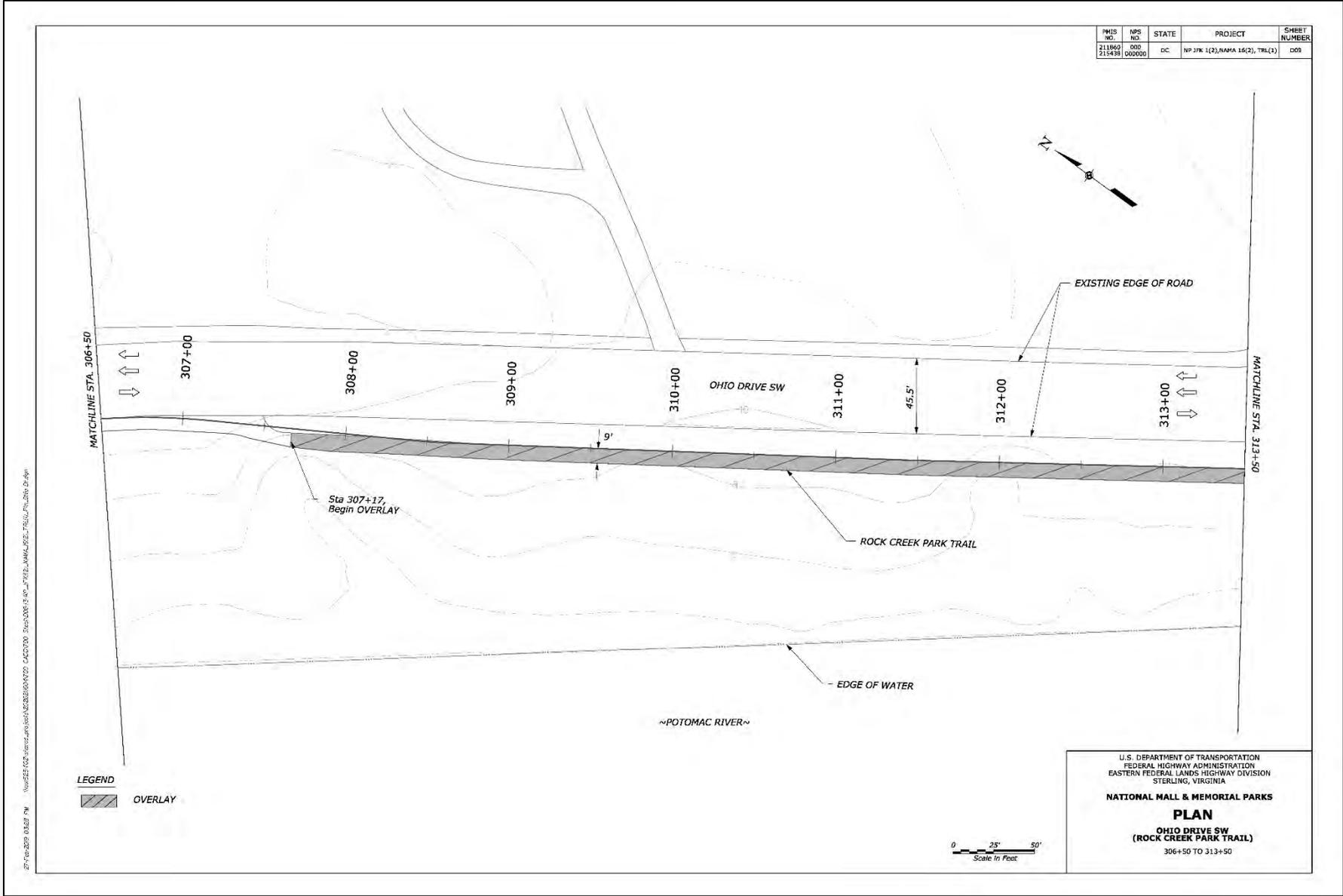
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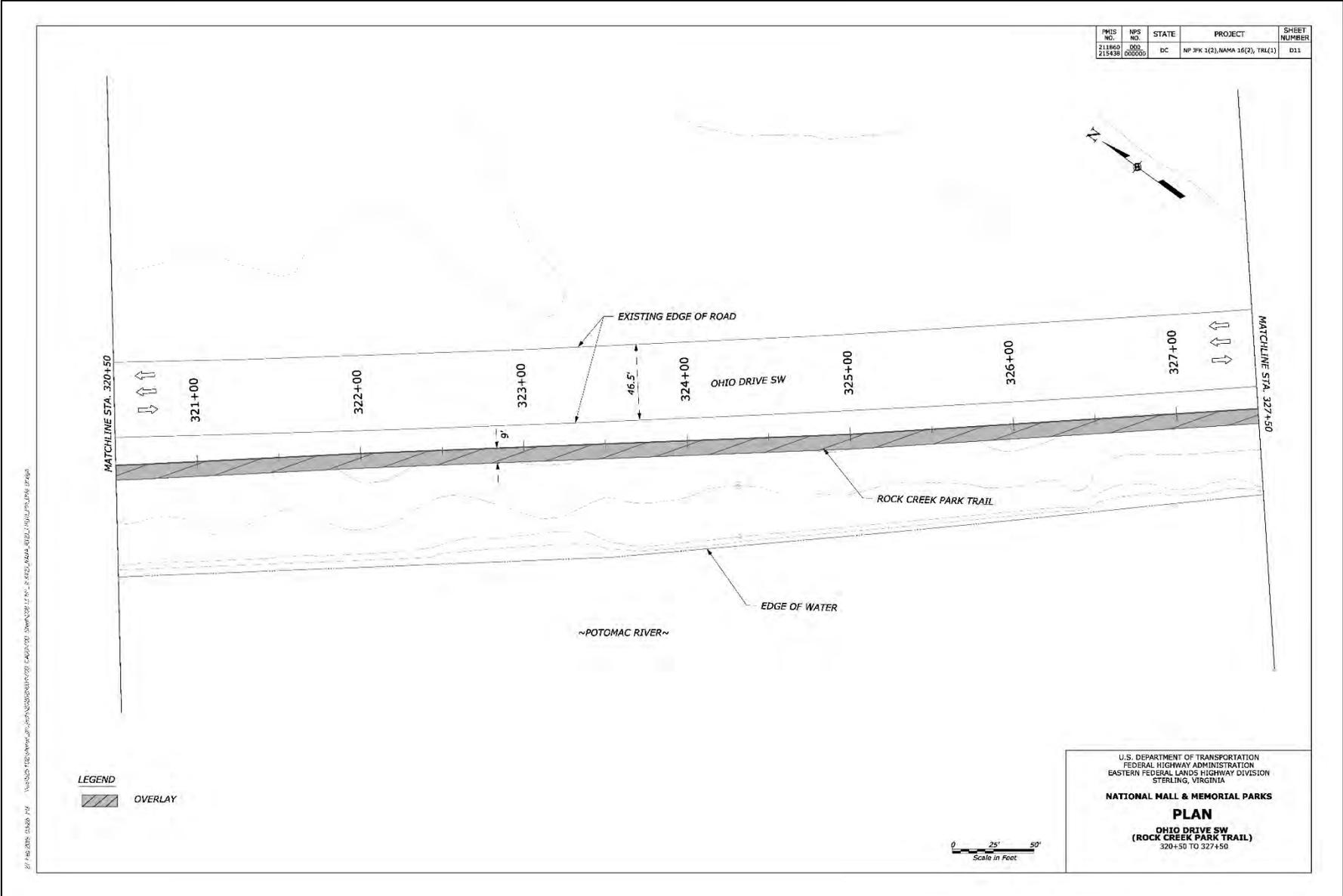
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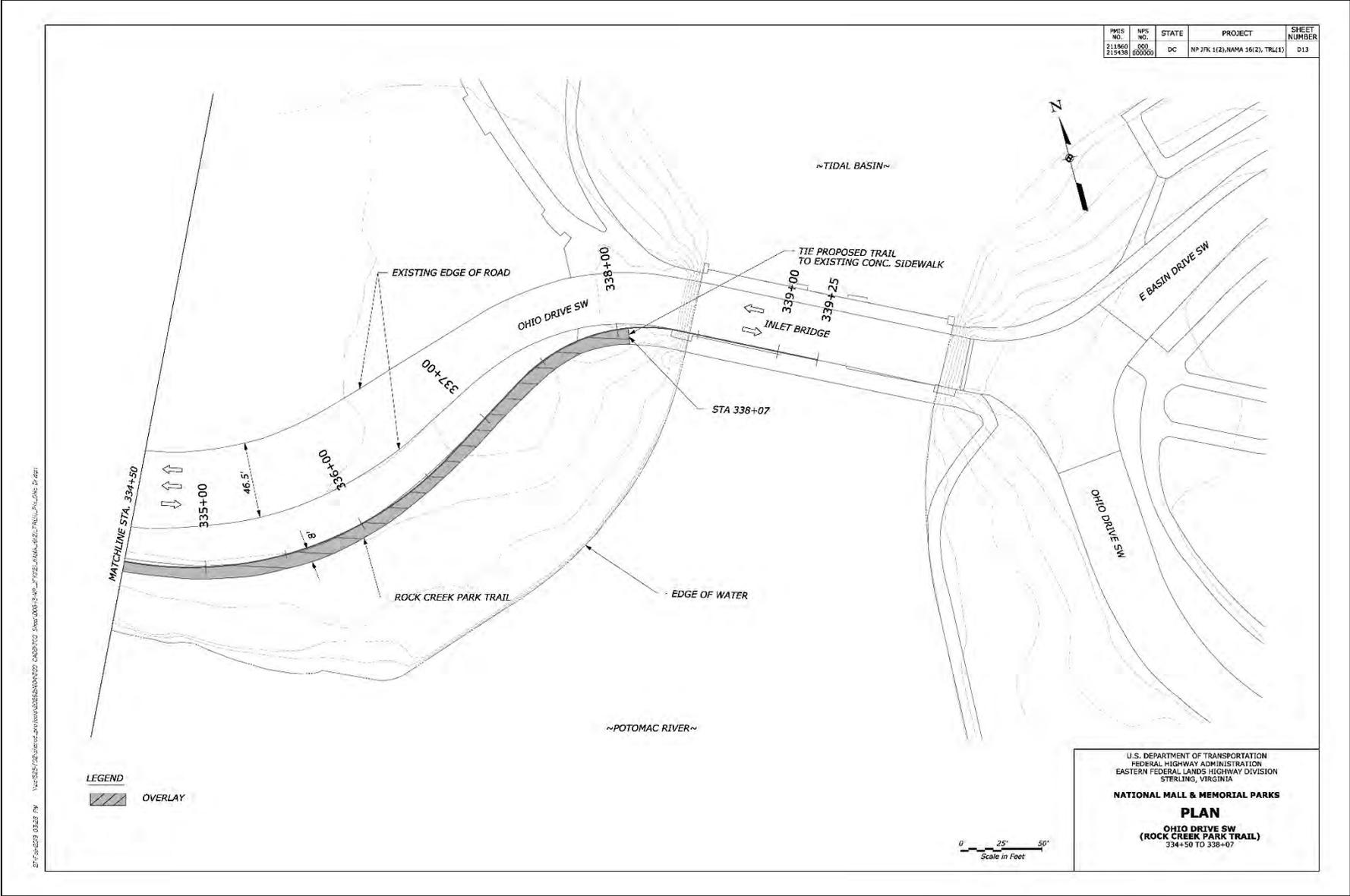
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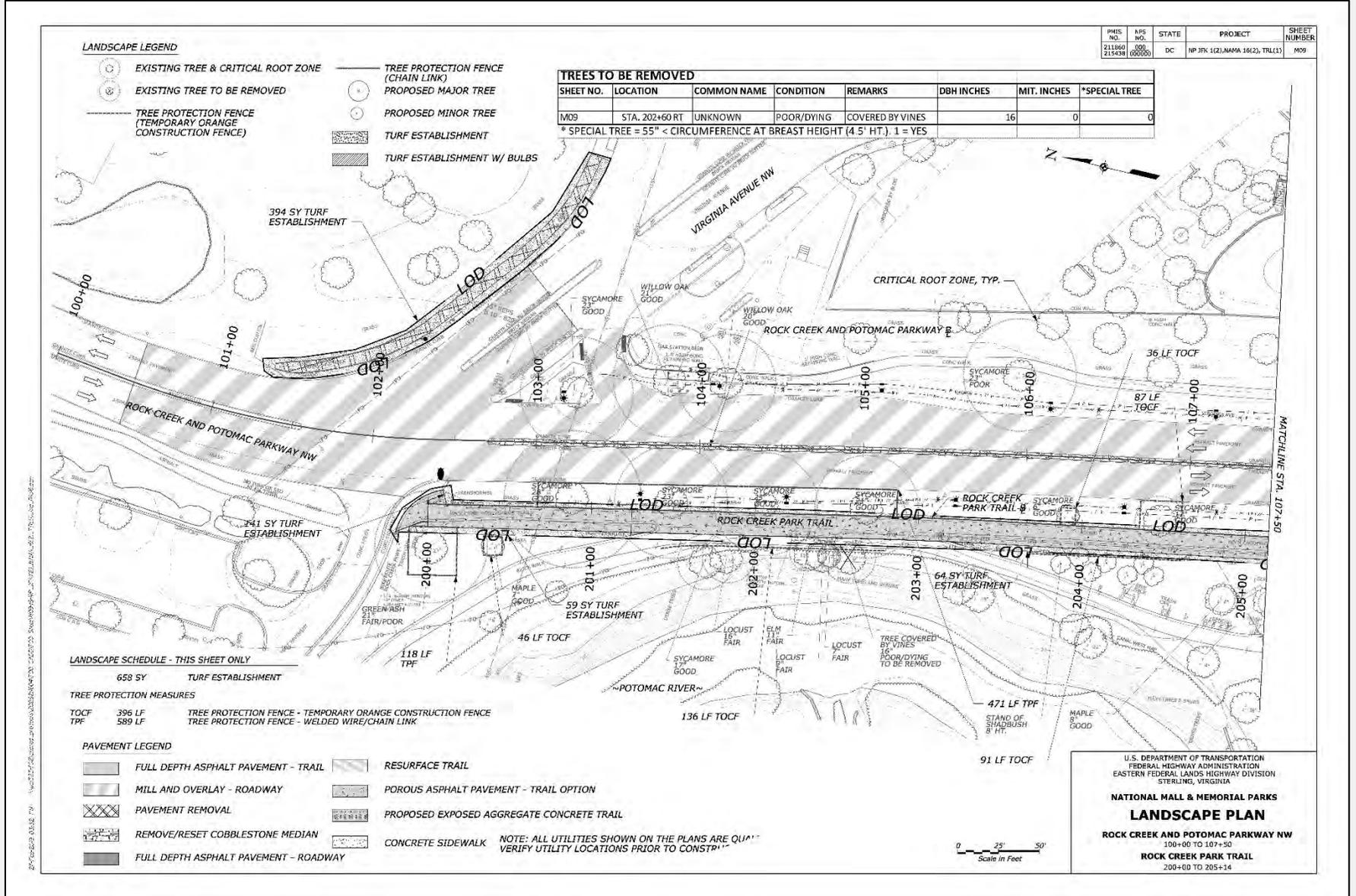
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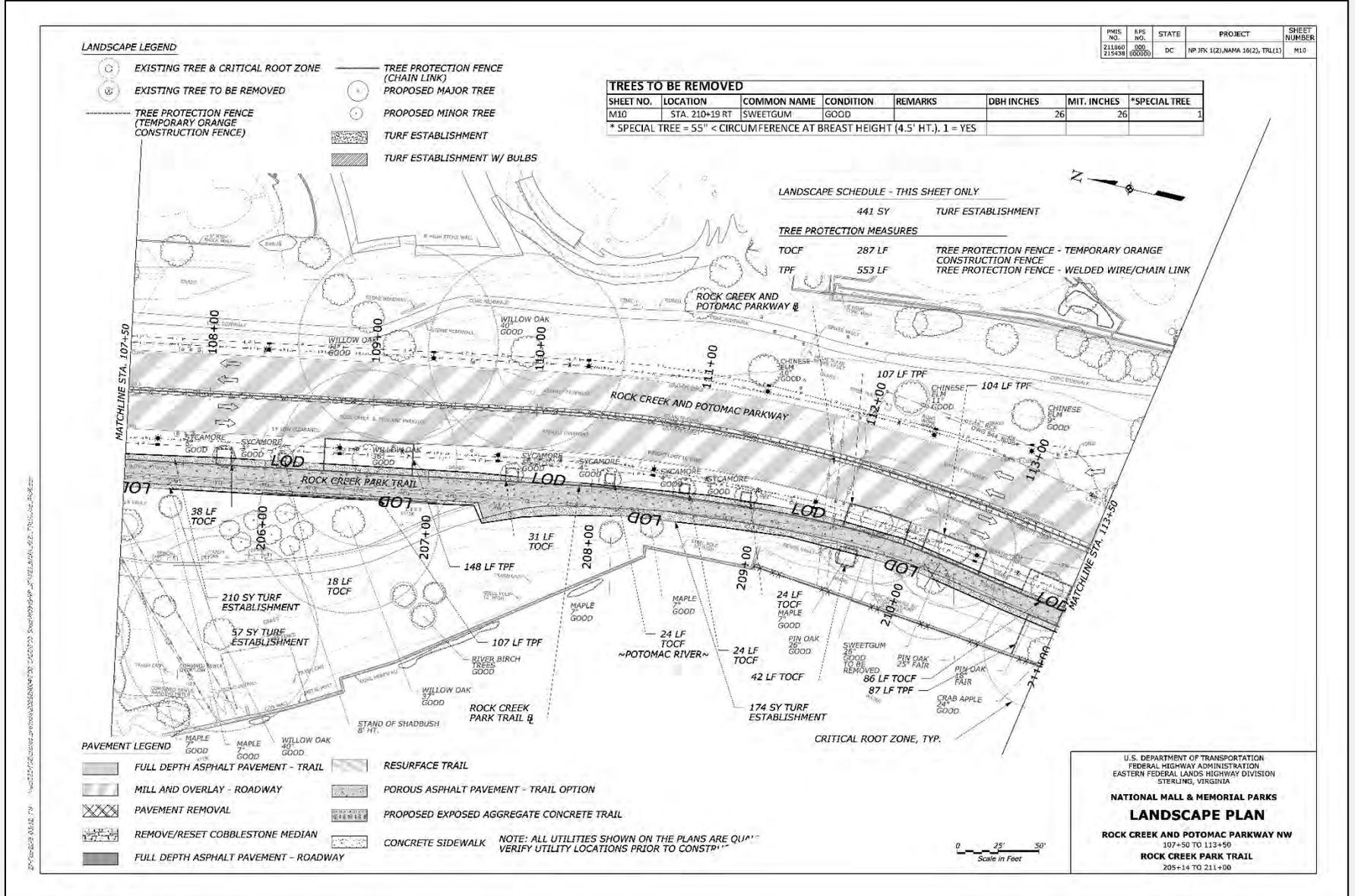
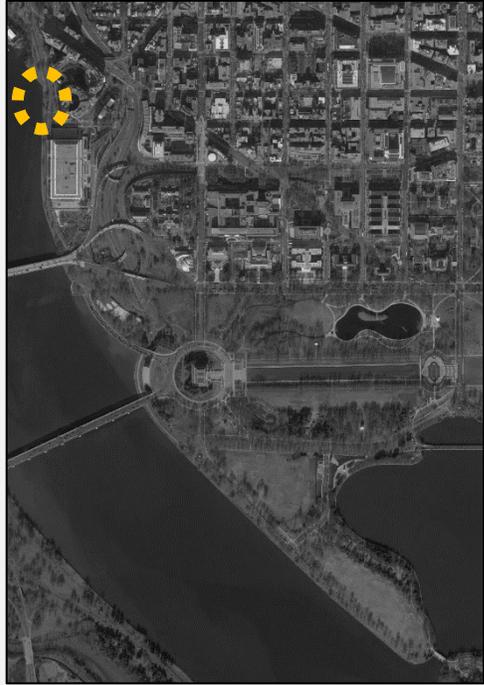
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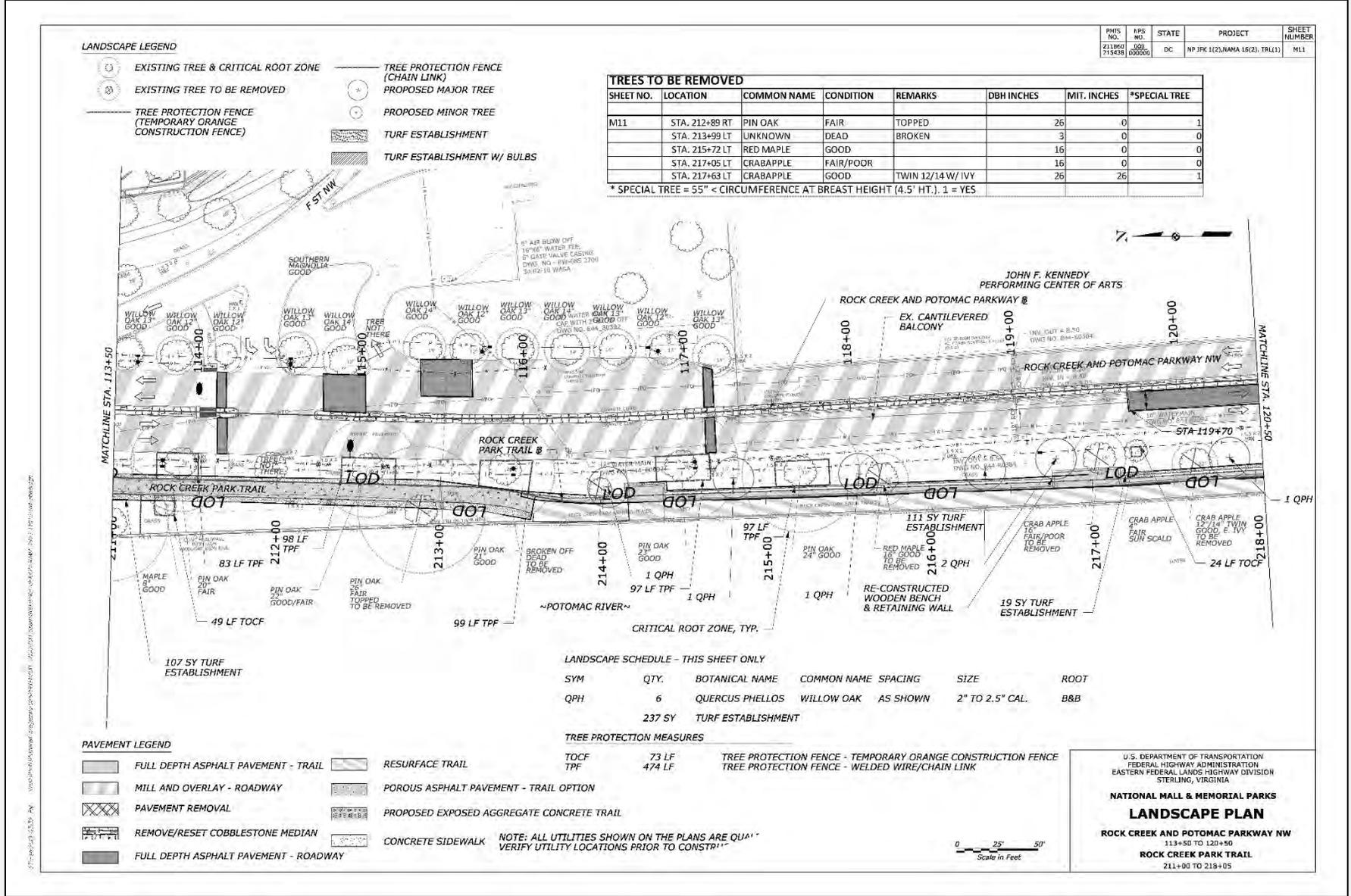
Tree Removal/Replacement



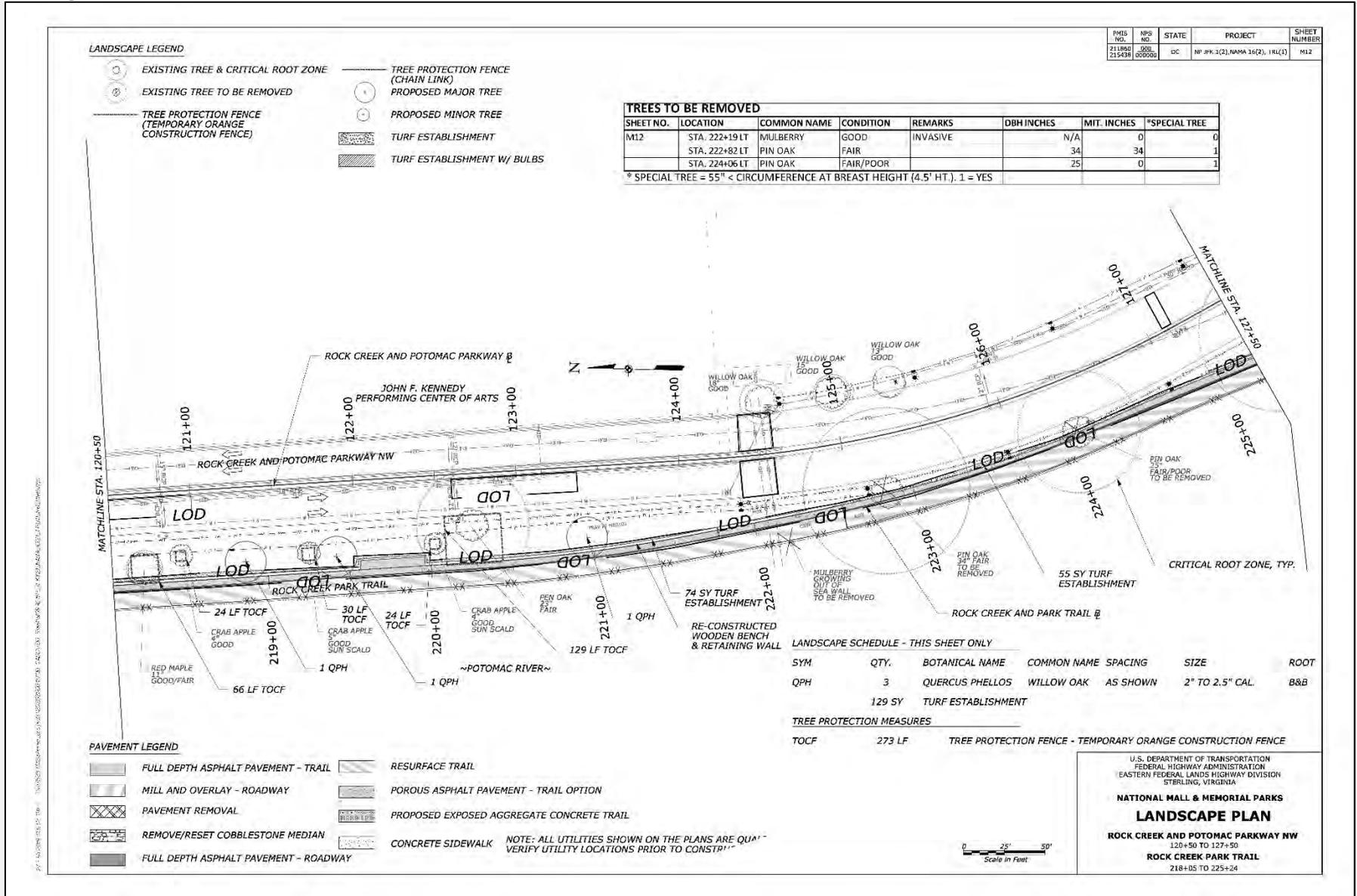
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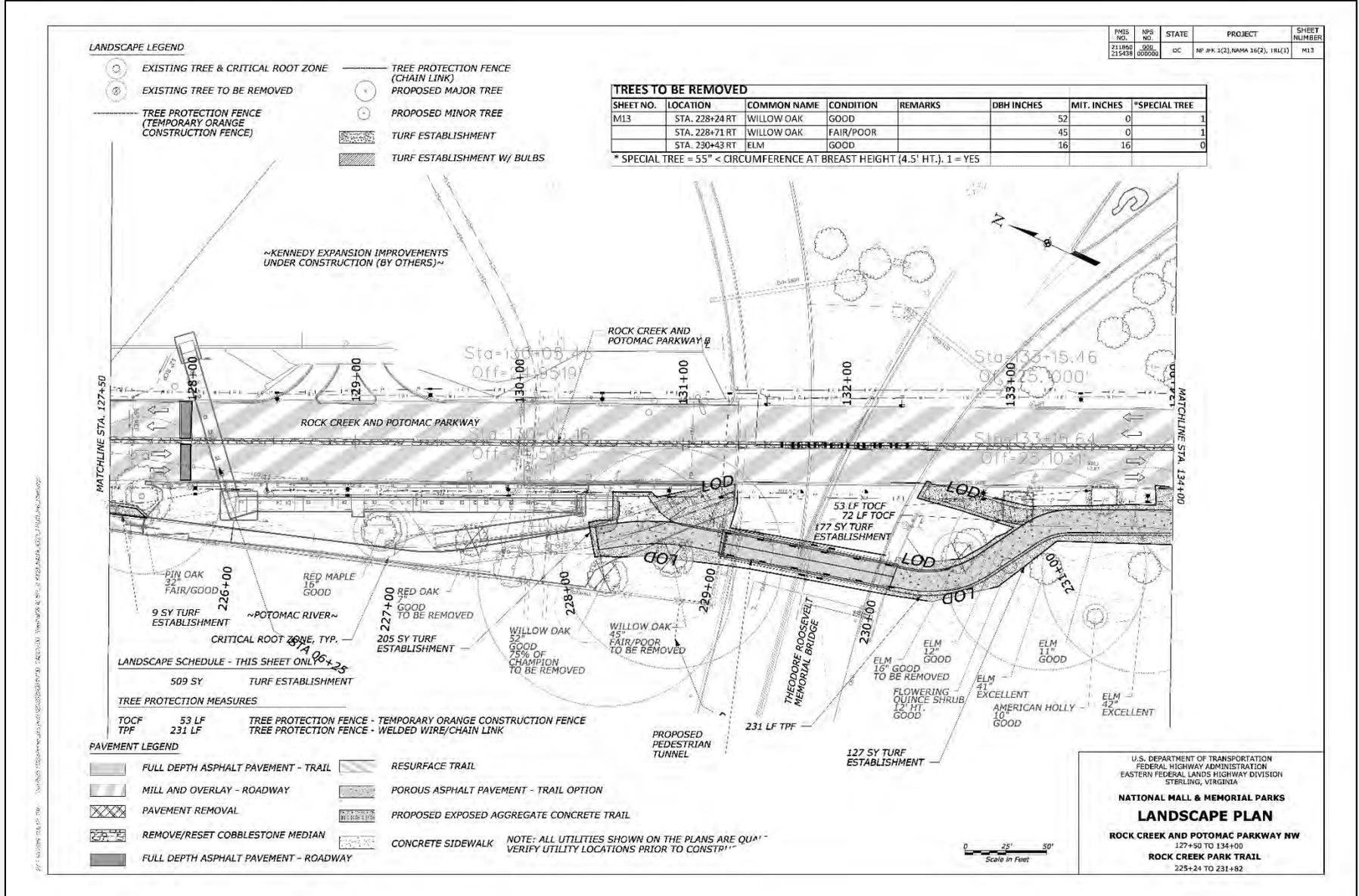
Tree Removal/Replacement



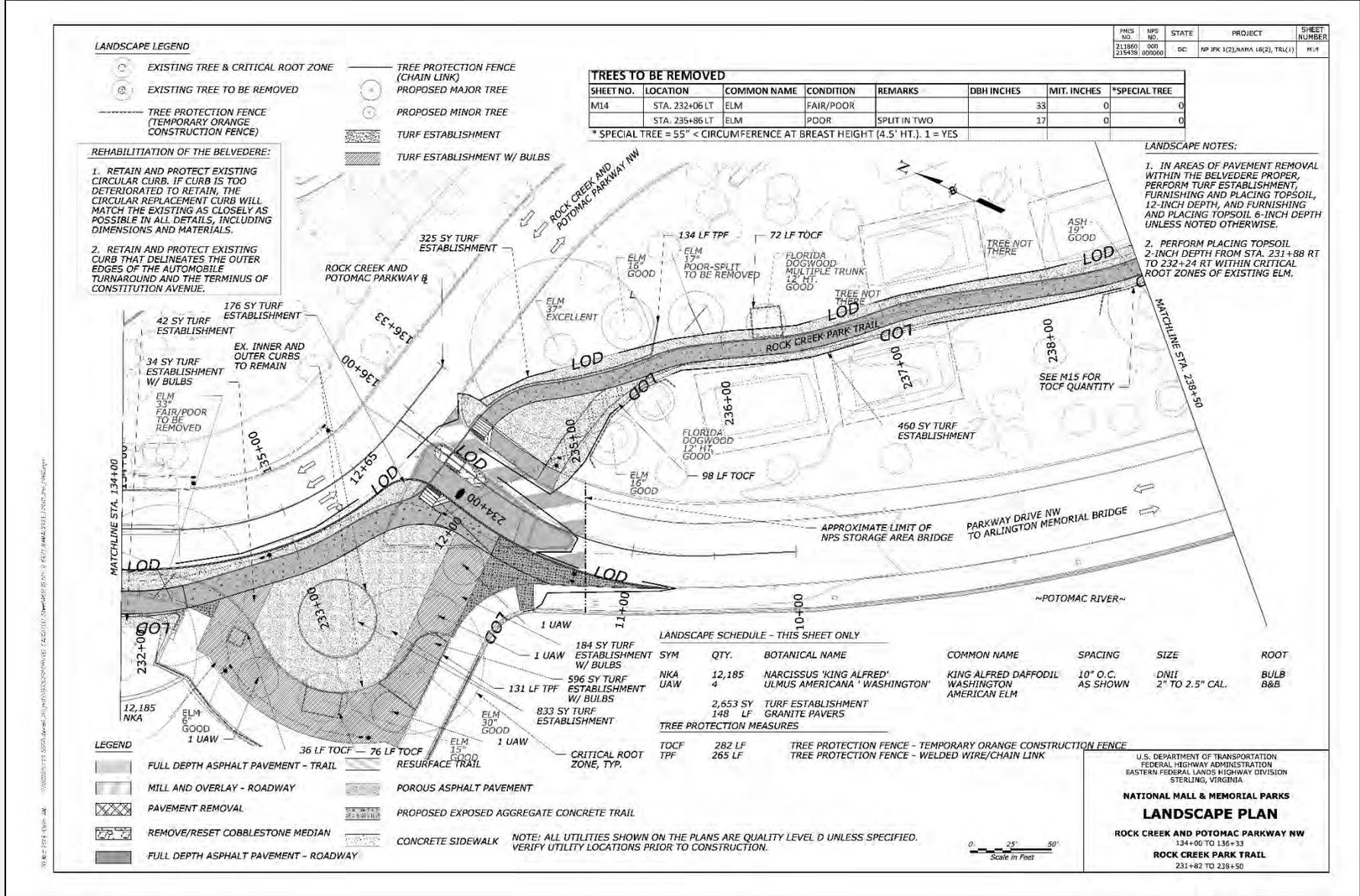
Tree Removal/Replacement



Tree Removal/Replacement



Tree Removal/Replacement



Renderings - Belvedere

Existing



Proposed



Renderings - Belvedere

Existing



Proposed

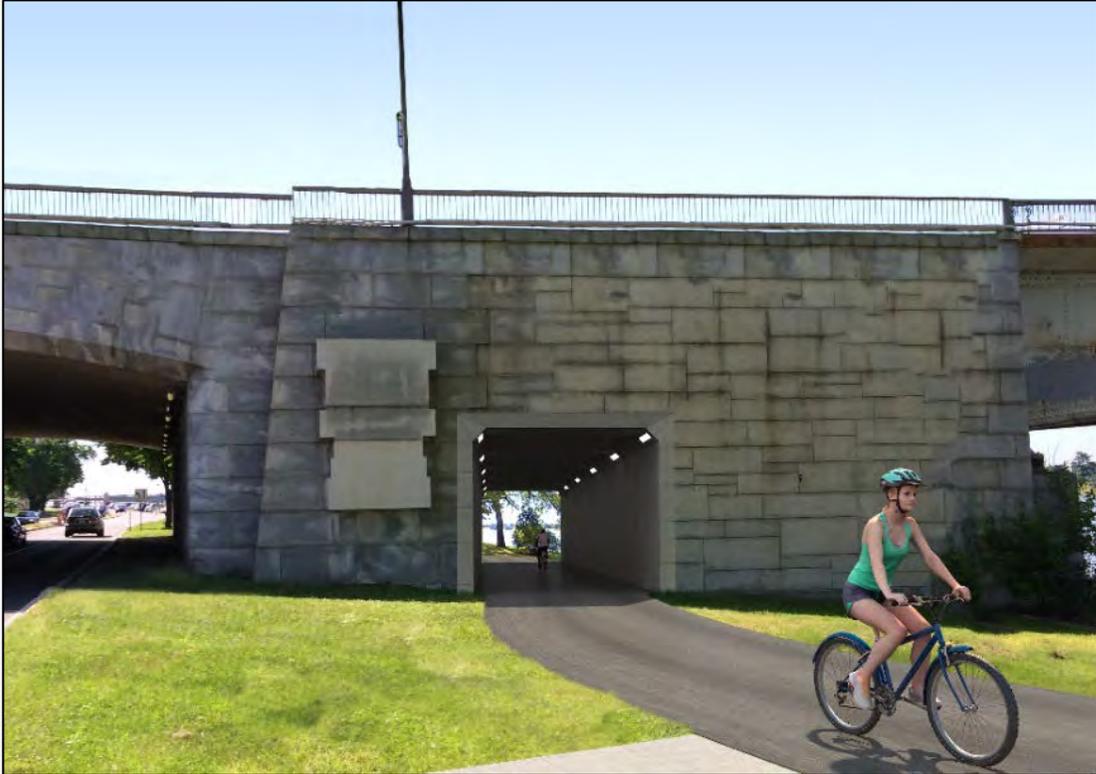


Renderings – Trail Realignment (Looking South)

Existing

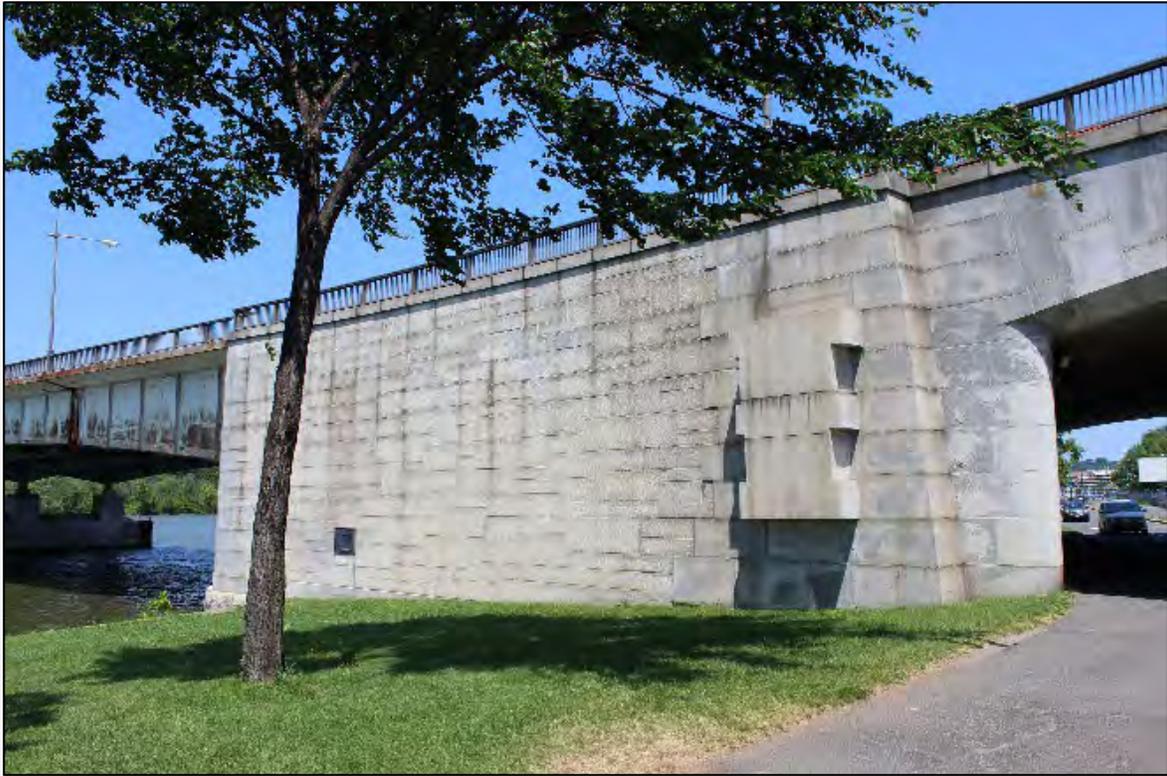


Proposed



Renderings – Trail Realignment (Looking North)

Existing



Proposed



Renderings – Kennedy Center Waterfront

Existing



Proposed



CFA 18/OCT/18-3

LOCATION:

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, NW, between Virginia Avenue and the Constitution Avenue Belvedere
Washington, DC

OWNER:

National Park Service

PROPERTY:

Kennedy Center Pedestrian/Bicycle Trail

DESCRIPTION:

Access and safety improvements, and roadway rehabilitation

REVIEW TYPE:

Final

PREVIOUS REVIEW:

[CFA 19/JUL/18-3](#)

Letter

25 October 2018

Dear Ms. Mendelson-Ielmini:

In its meeting of 18 October, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a final design submission for improvements to the Constitution Avenue Belvedere and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway pedestrian and bicycle trail in the vicinity of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The Commission approved the submission with the following comments.

The Commission members expressed support for the plantings and road configuration proposed for the Belvedere as shown in Option 1, which includes a narrow stone ring to mark the historic terminus of Constitution Avenue and leaves the site open for a future memorial. For the treatment of the portals of the new trail passage through the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge abutment, they expressed a preference for the chamfered opening and aligned joints of Alignment 2 of Option B4 shown in the presentation, consistent with elements of the abutment's larger vehicular portal; they also endorsed the use of recessed lighting fixtures within the new passage. To minimize conflicts on this busy pedestrian and cyclist trail, they continued to advise close coordination with the Kennedy Center to refine the intersections of the approaches to the new pedestrian bridge, now under construction, with the trail's new alignment.

Please coordinate with the Commission staff for the submission of final design drawings to complete the review of this important project.

Sincerely,

/s/Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Lisa Mendelson-Ielmini, Acting Regional Director
National Park Service, National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20242

cc: Steve Zeender, Stantec
Esther Olavarria, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

CFA 19/JUL/18-3

LOCATION:

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, NW, between Virginia Avenue and the Constitution Avenue Belvedere
Washington, DC

OWNER:

National Park Service

PROPERTY:

Kennedy Center pedestrian/bicycle trail

DESCRIPTION:

Access and safety improvements, and roadway rehabilitation

REVIEW TYPE:

Concept

Letter

27 July 2018

Dear Mr. Vogel:

In its meeting of 19 July, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a proposal for access and safety improvements to the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's pedestrian and bicycle trail in the vicinity of the Kennedy Center between Virginia Avenue, NW, and the Constitution Avenue Belvedere. The Commission approved the concept with the following comments.

The Commission members commended the design for its potential to improve this heavily used pedestrian and bicycle trail. For the area south of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge, they recommended considering the larger context of the Constitution Avenue corridor and treating the Belvedere as a space that reestablishes a connection with this historic axis, perhaps through the use of a bosque of trees, which would provide a vertical emphasis and recall the avenue's allées of trees. They recommended that the design accentuate the significant parts of the Belvedere, such as its distinctive perimeter stone balustrade and exposed aggregate concrete walk, instead of retaining lesser remnant elements such as the vestigial roadway curb and traffic circle, whose continued presence would create oddly shaped spaces that would be difficult to use. They recommended that the new paths along the realigned roadways be paved in asphalt for bicycle safety and to differentiate them from the historic perimeter walk. They also advised considering the appropriateness of the selected tree species and other plantings for the specific climatic conditions of this site. For the proposed trail passage through the Roosevelt Bridge abutment, the Commission members expressed support for Alignment 2 with Option B, featuring rectangular portals in a position that would allow a generally perpendicular approach to the abutment walls. To enhance safety for cyclists and pedestrians, they recommended making the passage wider than the trail itself; they also suggested further study of the exact location and detailing of the lintel condition above the portals within the stone walls of the abutments. For the area north of the bridge, they advised carefully designing the trail's connection to the pedestrian bridge landing of the Kennedy Center expansion project currently under construction; they urged close coordination with the Kennedy Center project team to resolve the design of this area.

The Commission supports the opportunity to improve access for cyclists and pedestrians along this significant riverfront trail and looks forward to further review of the project. As always, the staff is available to assist you with the next submission.

Sincerely,

/s/Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Robert Vogel, Regional Director
National Park Service, National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20242

cc: Steve Zeender, Stantec
Esther Olavarria, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts