



Commission Action

June 6, 2019

PROJECT**Georgetown Canal Plan**

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal
National Historical Park
The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal between
28th and 36th Streets, NW
Washington, DC

SUBMITTED BY

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

REVIEW AUTHORITY

Approval
per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)

NCPC FILE NUMBER

8078

NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER

00:00(00.00)44939

APPLICANT'S REQUEST

Approval of comments on concept
plans

ACTION TAKEN

Approved comments on concept
plans

The Commission:

Supports the National Park Service (NPS) goals for improving the canal's safety, accessibility, connections to the surrounding community, visitor experience, and educational and interpretive programming, along a one-mile stretch from Mile Marker 0 to the Alexandria Aqueduct.

Notes that over the years piecemeal modifications were made to the canal towpath and adjacent properties to address deficiencies; however, years of heavy use and aging infrastructure warrant improvements.

Finds that the goals for recreation, tourism, and public gathering need to be balanced with historic preservation and maintaining the canal's natural and industrial character which make it a unique and intimate experience.

Notes that staff's analysis of the alternatives is organized around proposed improvements to the towpath, access to the towpath, and specific interventions at seven locations along this stretch of the canal.

Improvements to the Towpath

Supports the NPS goals for improving the canal's safety, accessibility, and connections to the surrounding community. NPS recognizes that the proposed improvements will make the park more user-friendly and enjoyable thereby attracting more visitors to the park.

Notes that today the majority of the towpath is crushed gravel with a vegetated edge along both the canal prism (the open channel which forms the canal waterway) and the retaining walls. The current towpath ranges from 2 to 10 feet in width. The existing condition contributes to its authenticity and informal character but also poses challenges for people with limited mobility.

Notes that in this one-mile stretch, the towpath runs continuously on the north (berm) side of the canal and is discontinuous on the south (river) side.

Notes the towpath retains historic integrity of location from 29th to 34th Streets NW (on the north or berm side of the canal). The towpath retains historic integrity of material (brick) at Lock No. 3 between 30th and Thomas Jefferson Streets. The canal prism retains integrity of historic location and design (dimensions) despite some changes to the prism wall materials which are intermixed with patchwork repairs of dressed stone, brick, and rubble stone.

Finds that there is a way to provide for universally accessible (ABAAS-compliant) routes and new programming (i.e. interpretive mule-drawn boat rides) while maintaining the historic integrity of the site.

Notes that the applicant is proposing two options for towpath improvements. Option A levels the towpath and removes the vegetation. Option B levels the towpath, removes the vegetation, and cantilevers the towpath over the canal prism wall in locations to be determined, as needed.

Notes that the applicant is proposing universally accessible (ABAAS-compliant) ramps that connect to existing pedestrian bridges that cross over the canal.

Recommends that the applicant consider applying a hybrid of the two options which would help to maintain the towpath's existing character while creating a universally accessible (ABAAS-compliant) route. Specifically:

- If possible, alternate between the north and south towpaths, depending on which side is wider, to achieve the ABAAS-compliant route through the historical park.
- Preserve the existing towpath character in areas where the ABAAS-compliant route is not designated.
- Apply towpath Option B in limited locations that are not highly visible such as under bridges to create laybys; places where a person with limited mobility could wait for a mule and guide to pass by.

Requests additional documentation on the following at Preliminary Review:

- Existing and proposed circulation diagrams showing pedestrian, bicycle, guided mules, and universally accessible route(s).
- Details of a hybrid approach to the towpath; showing where towpath Options A and B would be applied along the canal's length, as well as proposed materials and dimensions.

Access to the Towpath

Notes that the canal and towpath comprise a narrow open space situated on a steep slope confined between buildings and retaining walls, which results in challenging grade changes and connections from streets, bridges, and plazas to the canal towpath.

Finds that elevators are needed to make universally accessible (ABAAS-compliant) connections from surrounding streets, bridges, and plazas to the canal towpath.

Supports the proposed elevators and recommends locating them in an inobtrusive manner, such as within or adjacent to existing buildings or screened behind vegetation.

Supports the proposed ramp locations as they improve universal accessibility and have minimal impact on the historic fabric.

Requests additional information regarding the elevator proposed at the western end of the site, near the Key Bridge.

Interventions at Seven Locations

Notes that NPS has proposed changes at seven locations along the one-mile stretch of the canal which include from east to west: 1) *Mile Marker Zero*, 2) *The Rock Creek Confluence*, 3) *The Locks*, 4) *The Wisconsin Avenue Cutout*, 5) *The Market Plazas*, 6) *The Stone Yard*, and 7) *The Aqueduct*. There are two options for each location (with the exception of the Rock Creek Confluence which only has one option). Option A is minimal change and Option B is more significant change.

Provides the following comments for *Mile Marker Zero*:

- **Notes** that this currently underutilized area contains the zero-mile marker for the entire 184.5-mile C&O Canal trail.
- **Notes** that contributing resources here include the Waste Gate ruins, the Tide Lock, the Mole (earthen peninsula), and the Rock Creek Basin.
- **Finds** that this area can support more significant change, as shown in Option B, and has less potential to impact historic character.
- **Finds** that the addition of the K Street Bridge, as shown in Option B, enhances bicycle connections between the K Street cycle track and Rock Creek Park Trail.

Provides the following comments for the *Rock Creek Confluence*:

- **Notes** that this area joins the Georgetown Level of the canal with Rock Creek.
- **Notes** that contributing resources here include the Rock Creek Basin, the Canal Prism, the Towpath, Lock 1, Boat Basin 1, and the 29th Street Bridge.
- **Finds** that this area can support minimal change, as shown in Option A, and has more potential to impact historic character.

Provides the following comments for the *Locks*:

- **Notes** that this area is the location of the NPS C&O Canal Visitor Center and that the lock and canal walls were recently restored.
- **Notes** that contributing resources here include the Towpath, Lock 3, Boat Basin 2, Boat Basin 3, 30th Street Bridge, Thomas Jefferson Street Bridge, Lock 4, and the Retaining Walls (mile 0.51 to 0.61) and (mile 0.67 to 1.07).
- **Finds** that this area can support more significant change, as shown in Option B, to meet NPS Visitor and Education Center space and program needs.

Provides the following comments for the *Wisconsin Avenue Cutout*:

- **Notes** there is a large grade separation between Wisconsin Avenue and the canal towpath.
- **Notes** that contributing resources here include the Towpath, the Canal Prism, the Water Intake, High Street Bridge (Wisconsin Avenue Bridge), Commemorative Obelisk (including its location), and the Retaining Walls (mile 0.51 to 0.61 and mile 0.67 to 1.07).
- **Finds** that this area can support minimal change, as shown in Option A, and has more potential to impact historic character.
- **Recommends** that the applicant consider relocating the elevator to a less visible location that does not impact the historic location of the Commemorative Obelisk, as shown in Option A.
- **Finds** that the Stone Archway and Seating Steps do not create a welcoming place for pedestrians to linger.
- **Recommends** the applicant evaluate the usage and need for the Stone Archway and Seating Steps and consider options without these elements while providing ample circulation for elevator and stair egress.

Provides the following comments for the *Market Plazas*:

- **Notes** that this area is a spatially constrained section of the canal, tightly framed by buildings three to eight stories tall. The Market House Plaza to the north and the Fish Market Square to the south provide open plaza areas for gatherings and activities.
- **Notes** that contributing resources here include the Towpath, the Canal Prism, the Potomac Street Bridge, the Water Intake Ruins, and the Retaining Walls (mile 0.51 to 0.61 and mile 0.67 to 1.07).
- **Supports** the location for the proposed elevator at the Market House Plaza adjacent to Georgetown Park building turret.
- **Finds** that Options A and B for the Market House Plaza have strengths and weaknesses:
 - Option A protects the historic character, particularly the north retaining wall framing the canal, and maintains level plaza area for outdoor programming and events. However, it does not provide a strong north-south visual and spatial connection between the plazas.
 - Option B provides a north-south visual and spatial connection between the two plazas as well as additional seating space for pedestrians. However, it has more potential to impact historic character, particularly the north retaining wall framing the canal. Option B also impacts circulation and service routes on Potomac Street NW which provides access to adjacent buildings and businesses.
- **Requests** additional documentation on the following to help determine a preferred approach:
 - The feasibility of constructing Option B's terraced seating steps and related improvements (access reconfigurations for the Georgetown Market House and surrounding buildings and regrading along Potomac Street NW).
 - How visitors will use and experience Options A and B.
 - Visualizations of the proposed designs for Options A and B.
- **Finds** that the proposed Fish Market Canopy at Fish Market Square overwhelms the intimate space that exists today.
- **Recommends** the use of temporary canopy structures when needed.

Provides the following comments for the *Stone Yard*:

- **Notes** that this area has a wide towpath and adjacent vegetated open space south of the canal prism (riverside).
- **Notes** that contributing resources here include the Towpath, the Canal Prism, the Frederick Street Bridge (34th Street Bridge), Dual Water Intake, and the Retaining Walls (mile 0.51 to 0.61 and mile 0.67 to 1.07).
- **Finds** that this area can support minimal change, as shown in Option A, and has more potential to impact historic character.
- **Recommends** that the applicant consider relocating the kayak boat launch from the Stone Yard to the Aqueduct area to avoid potential conflicts between the floating dock and its associated recreational programming and the interpretive mule-drawn boat circulation.

Provides the following comments for the *Aqueduct*:

- **Notes** that this area begins a transition from the canal's urban condition on the east to a more naturalized condition on the west, more typical of the majority of the C&O Canal.
- **Notes** that contributing resources at the Aqueduct include the Towpath, the Canal Prism, the Alexandria Aqueduct Abutments, the Washington Canoe Club, and the Retaining Walls (mile 0.51 to 0.61 and mile 0.67 to 1.07).
- **Finds** that this area can support minimal change, as shown in Option A, and has more potential to impact historic character.

General Comments

Requests that as plans are further developed, the applicant provide details to include:

- Material selection
- Lighting design
- Location and design of wayfinding signage
- Stormwater management
- Location of tree removal and plantings

Julia A. Koster
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission

