

BEACH DRIVE BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

Rock Creek Stream Valley Park
Kensington, Maryland

April 5, 2018

Finding of No Significant Impact

Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR, Parts 1500-1508) and National Capital Planning Commission Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, I have evaluated the Beach Drive Bridge Replacement project in the Rock Creek Stream Valley Park in Kensington, Maryland, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 76.23.03(48.00)44721. On behalf of the Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission – Montgomery County, the Montgomery County Department of Transportation prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) study and submitted the study report for review by the National Capital Planning Commission. In addition, the Federal Highway Administration has made a “de minimis” impact finding to satisfy its use of a programmatic Categorical Exclusion for the project. Based on the submission materials, I have determined that the Action Alternative (Bridge Replacement and other site improvements) will not have a significant impact on the human or natural environment.

Purpose and Need

The existing bridge has been identified as “structurally deficient” by the Maryland State Highway Administration and the south-side bridge parapet is damaged. As such, the Beach Drive bridge will need replacement to maintain a safe vehicular crossing over Silver Creek. In addition, other nearby site improvements have been identified that will improve park access, character, and condition as well.

Proposed Action

The proposed action includes replacement of the existing, structurally deficient, damaged, arch bridge with a new single-span bridge along Beach Drive, in addition to other nearby park improvements including:

- Separating the existing hiker/biker trail crossing from the Beach Drive bridge to a separate bridged crossing over Silver Creek, approximately 90 feet north of the Beach Drive bridge. The new pedestrian/bicyclist bridge will be a pre-fabricated truss bridge with a design that is similar to other pedestrian/bicycle bridges within the park.
- Removing a southbound right-turn only lane (along Kensington Parkway) at the nearby Beach Drive/Kensington Parkway intersection, which would create a single combined

southbound approach for left-turn, thru, and right-turning traffic. The right-turn lane removal will eliminate 5,476 square feet of impervious surface area.

- Constructing a paved, six-space, visitor parking lot along the north-side of Beach Drive (east of the Silver Creek bridge) to provide easier access to the Rock Creek Trail and nearby fitness station. In conjunction, the existing informal gravel parking area (4,130 square feet) along the south-side of Beach Drive will be re-sodded, and an existing roadway guard rail extended by approximately 100-feet to prevent further parking in the re-sodded area.
- Stabilizing/restoring 250-feet of Silver Creek (125-feet to the north and south of the Beach Drive bridge replacement) to improve water conveyance and strengthen the stream banks.

The new Beach Drive bridge will be a single-span design (rather than the current design with a three, nine-foot wide arches) with a stone façade. The new bridge will reuse the existing bridge stone façade as much as possible, and supplemented with similar stone as needed.

Action Alternative (Preferred Alternative): The existing Beach Drive bridge (over Silver Creek) would be replaced and other site improvements made to improve park access, character, and condition on State property under the jurisdiction of the Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) within Rock Creek Stream Valley Park. The project is described in more detail in the previous Proposed Action section. M-NCPPC selected this alternative since the bridge replacement (and other area improvements) would best satisfy the study's Purpose and Need of maintaining safe vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle crossings over Silver Creek with the least amount of impact to adjacent parkland and other various elements of the human and natural environment.

Other Alternatives Evaluated

In addition to evaluating the selected Action Alternative, the Environmental Assessment study evaluated a No Action Alternative for base-line comparison purposes as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

No Action Alternative: The structurally deficient bridge would not be replaced and its condition would continue to worsen, and other nearby park improvements (re-sodding, asphalt removal, new parking lot, and separate pedestrian/bicycle bridge) would not be made. The No Action Alternative does not meet the identified Purpose and Need of the proposed action to maintain a safe vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle crossings over Silver Creek.

Standard for Evaluation

Under NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, and NCPC Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, an Environmental Assessment is deemed sufficient (and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is determined to be unnecessary) if the study supports the finding that the mitigated federal action will not significantly affect the human or natural environment. The EA for this project was prepared in accordance with this standard.

Potential Impacts

The Environmental Assessment uses the following “impact” topic areas to assess the Action Alternative: Geology and Soils, Water Quality, Floodplains, Wildlife, Air Quality, Visual Resources, Cultural Resources, Land Use and Zoning, Socioeconomics, Traffic and Transportation, Park Access, Pedestrian/Bicycle Connectivity/Safety, and Noise. The following summaries briefly describe the associated beneficial and adverse impacts for the project, with impacts used to determine whether impacts are sufficiently assessed through the EA study or whether a more detailed EIS is warranted.

Geology and Soils: The project would disturb soils in each of the improvement locations (Beach Drive bridge replacement, new bicycle/pedestrian bridge, pavement removal, new parking lot), resulting in short-term adverse impacts during the construction phase. Minor soil loss would occur directly from disturbance or indirectly via wind or water.

- Mitigation: To minimize soil loss, the contractor would implement Best Management Practices (BMPs), such as developing and implementing an erosion and sedimentation control plan, using silt fences or hay bales, revegetating disturbed soils, and maintaining site soil stockpiles, to prevent soils from eroding and dispersing off-site.

Water Quality: The project may slightly degrade local water quality in Silver Creek during construction of the new bridges, resulting in short-term adverse impacts; however, stream restoration efforts would improve long-term water quality through sedimentation reduction with stream bank stabilization and slower stormwater velocities. In addition, the project would remove asphalt from an unnecessary nearby turn lane (southbound Kensington Parkway), reducing impervious area near Silver Creek. The project would also improve local water quality by restoring the existing compacted gravel parking area (along the southside of Beach Drive) to grass, thereby increasing pervious area for rainwater absorption as well.

- Mitigation: Construction measures would minimize water quality impacts to Silver Creek, which could include restricting the contractor’s access to the stream, protecting the stream by using sand bag diversion dikes during the subsequent placement of the new abutments and riprap for scour protection, and restricting construction during environmentally sensitive times (March 31 to June 15).

Floodplains: The project resides primarily within the 2013 regulated 100-year floodplain and 2-year floodplain. The stream is often flooded as Rock Creek backs up into this creek. The project would alleviate some flooding of the roadway by increasing the hydraulic opening, thereby resulting in long-term beneficial impacts. The project would affect 1.97 acres of Silver Creek floodplain from grading, clearing/grubbing, and structure replacement, in addition to 105 square feet of permanent stream impacts and 7,419 square feet of temporary steam impacts from the placement of riprap for scour protection. The 100-year floodplain area will remain unchanged, both during and after project completion.

Wildlife: Consultation with the Wildlife and Heritage Service of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) revealed that the Potomac Stygobromid (*Stygobromus tenuis potomacus*) has been documented in close proximity to the project site. While not currently

receiving legal protection, this tiny aquatic invertebrate is on a species watch-list for Maryland due to its classification as a globally rare species. No anadromous fish have been documented near the project site, and there are no federally proposed or listed endangered or threatened species known to exist within the project area. The project would result in temporary disturbance (adverse short-term impacts) to wildlife habitat and forest area through vegetation removal and noise from construction activities. However, upon completion of the project, the noise level would return to normal and the newly planted trees would mature into potential future places for wildlife use.

- Mitigation: Based on current designs plans, no alteration of the groundwater hydrology or water quality is anticipated, which might affect the Potomac Stygobromid. In addition, the following measures would avoid any aquatic wildlife impacts: no in-stream work permitted from March 1 through June 15; avoiding contact of stream water with curing concrete to prevent significant pH spikes in the stream; and preserving passage opportunities for aquatic life after project completion.

Air Quality: The project would generate some additional localized emissions by construction equipment as short-term adverse impacts. Post-construction, the sources of emissions (construction equipment) would cease, and there would be no increases in traffic volumes and/or site usage, which could result in long-term adverse impacts to air quality.

- Mitigation: Construction may cease on days that are designated Code Red or Code Orange by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. These designations indicate that air quality is poor and may affect sensitive groups and/or general public.

Visual Resources: The project would result in short-term adverse impacts to the park's visual quality and character through the presence of construction equipment and concrete barriers. However, upon completion of the project, the equipment and barriers would be removed. The new Beach Drive bridge would improve the park setting (long-term beneficial impact) compared to the current damaged bridge, which is currently lined with concrete barriers along the bridge's south-side parapet. Although the new design, with its single span, may be considered less attractive than the existing bridge (with three nine-foot wide arches) by some park users, thereby resulting in long-term adverse impacts to general visual quality. Thirty-one trees would require removal to realign the Rock Creek Trail through the area and construct the new pedestrian/bicycle bridge across Silver Creek, also resulting in adverse short-term impacts to the area's visual quality. Lastly, the new Silver Creek pedestrian/bicycle crossing would require removal of existing vegetation, which includes various invasive species of vines, resulting in a beneficial impact to the local visual quality of the park.

- Mitigation: The new Beach Drive bridge would be constructed on an expedited schedule to minimize the short-term adverse impact of construction activities on the local park setting. In addition, the new bridge would reuse stone from the existing bridge (and supplement with similar stone where needed) to minimize the potential long-term adverse visual impact of the new design. The State would plant nine new shade trees in the area to help mitigate the tree loss, as well as contribute to the State's tree replenishment program at a rate of \$250 per tree removed, based on a 3:1 replacement ratio as mitigation. The new pedestrian/bicycle bridge design would adhere to M-NCPPC standards to maintain consistency with other park infrastructure.

Cultural Resources: The Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) concurred that further archaeological investigations would not be warranted for the project, nor any historic properties would be affected.

- Mitigation: Appropriate procedures would be put-in-place per County requirements regarding how to handle unintentional archeological finds during construction activities related to the project.

Land Use and Zoning: The project would be a permitted use within the stream valley park. No specific mitigation is required.

Socioeconomics: The project would not result in any changes to land use, employment rates, housing, population or usage of community services or facilities. No specific mitigation is required.

Traffic and Transportation: The project would require temporary closure of Beach Drive to vehicular traffic from mid-June through late August 2019 (when Montgomery County public schools are not in session), resulting in temporary adverse impacts to local traffic patterns/area vehicular connectivity during the construction phase.

- Mitigation: The Montgomery County Department of Transportation developed a temporary traffic detour plan, which has been reviewed and approved by Montgomery County Fire and Rescue, Montgomery County Public Schools, and Montgomery County Police Department. The new bridge would be constructed on an expedited schedule during the summer (when traffic volumes tend to be lighter) to enable normal traffic use of Beach Drive at the start of the local school year to minimize traffic disruptions.

Park Access: The project would result in a long-term beneficial impacts to park access by relocating existing parking from its current location on the south-side of Beach Drive (informal gravel area) to the north-side of Beach Drive, adjacent to the Rock Creek Trail and an exercise station. Construction activities may adversely affect access in the short-term if vehicular parking is temporarily closed or relocated. Long-term pedestrian/bicycle access would be improved (beneficial impact) with the realigned Rock Creek Trail and separate bridge crossing over Silver Creek.

- Mitigation: Pedestrian/bicycle access will be maintained along the existing trail alignment and over the Beach Drive bridge during construction of the new trail section and Silver Creek bridge crossing, and then access will be shifted to the new trail alignment and bridge prior to the closure of Beach Drive.

Pedestrian/Bicycle Connectivity/Safety: The project would result in long-term beneficial impacts to pedestrian/bicycle connectivity/safety in the park with the following improvements: 1) eliminating the need for pedestrians/bicyclists to use the same Beach Drive bridge as vehicular traffic by constructing a separate bridge crossing to the north; 2) relocating vehicular parking from its current location (along the south-side of Beach Drive) to the north-side of Beach Drive, adjacent to the Rock Creek Trail; and 3) removing the southbound, right turn-only lane (ramp) along

Kensington Parkway. Relocating the parking area would eliminate the need for pedestrians/bicyclists to cross Beach Drive to access the Rock Creek Trail and removing the Kensington Parkway turn lane would reduce the roadway crossing distance, thereby reducing the potential for dangerous conflicts.

- Mitigation: Pedestrian/bicycle access will be maintained along the existing trail alignment and over the Beach Drive bridge during construction of the new trail section and Silver Creek bridge crossing, and then access will be shifted to the new trail alignment and bridge prior to the closure of Beach Drive.

Noise: This project qualifies as a Type III project under Federal Highway Administration/State Highway Administration noise policy and guidance, and would not require a noise study since the project would not increase traffic capacity along Beach Drive.

- Mitigation: Pursuant to County regulations, construction activities may occur during daylight hours only (7:00 AM to 5:00 PM) to minimize disturbance to all nearby residential communities.

Determination and Finding

Under NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, and NCPC Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, an Environmental Assessment is sufficient if the study supports the finding that the mitigated federal action will not significantly affect the human or natural environment. Based on NCPC staff review of the study report, “de minimis” impact documentation, and no public comments received during the project’s seven-day review period on NCPC’s website, I have determined that Action Alternative (Preferred Alternative) will not have a significant impact on the human or natural environment. Therefore, the EA study is sufficient to satisfy NCPC’s environmental review responsibility for the bridge replacement project under NEPA policies, and an EIS is not warranted.

//original signed// 04/09/18

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