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FDR MEMORIAL LEGACY COMMITTEE

Submission from Mary E. Dolan, Co-Founder and Executive Director, FDR Memorial Legacy Committee re: Tidal Basin Development Concept Plan

March 5, 2025

Madam Chair and Commissioners:

The FDR Memorial Legacy Committee is the friends group for the FDR Memorial and is a consulting party to this project. As Co-Founder and Executive Director, I attended the February 19, 2025 virtual public scoping meeting about this project. I am thankful for the opportunity to be here in person to share comments from my organization and I applaud NCPC for allowing for an in person option.

NCPC, in its staff report of September 2023, asked NPS to coordinate with the FDR Memorial Legacy Committee on its work on the comprehensive plan for the Tidal Basin. The notice in February for the public scoping was the first I heard that there was a plan.

I understand that this Concept Plan under review cannot exist without another Tidal Basin seawall plan, which would be another very expensive plan to elevate the seawalls around the Tidal Basin, and would require another process of planning and approvals including from NCPC. A clear understanding of sequencing and integration of the Concept Plan and all of its alternatives with other plans is paramount at this stage for all of us to provide the consultation that this process calls for.

As this Concept Plan assumes elevated seawalls, what is the proposed height around the Tidal Basin? What is the projection for the chosen elevation to provide protection for the new trees from heat, storm surge, sea rise and voluminous rain? Are there projections for the assumed height for protecting the FDR Memorial and for how long? All impacts, from subtle to major, must be considered and presented.

As it relates to the Comprehensive/Master Plan, the September 2023 NCPC staff report “Requests that NPS evaluate several alternatives to address sea level rise in the Comprehensive Plan including raising the sea wall, using the existing Tidal

Basin gates or installing new gates, and other possible solutions such as nature-based approaches.” The FDR Committee respectfully requests a status report on those consultations and asks NPS for an update from the Army Corps on their work on the Tidal Gates.

The FDR Committee supports replacing and adding cherry trees and improving visitor circulation routes. We want more people visiting the FDR Memorial and doing so safely, however, we have a few comments on the Concept Plan:

1. The FDR Memorial must remain as it was designed to be - an outdoor sacred space. The possible encroachment of ball fields and the activity it may create cannot disrupt the sacred space i.e. shouting, errant balls. The same applies to the bike lanes. While the Memorial is largely closed off due to the granite design, and a planted berm, there is an opening - a purposeful opening - in Room 2 to ensure views of the Potomac. This needs to be considered carefully so as to maintain the choreography of the FDR Memorial.
2. Regarding security, we understand the desire to keep our national treasures safe and jersey walls are an eyesore. However, is there a security consideration that should be extended as well to the FDR and MLK Memorials and throughout the Tidal Basin? Is there a security assessment for the Tidal Basin area that includes these Memorials? Is there one planned?
3. It is not clear in the plan how the grove of Canadian trees near the FDR Memorial entrance are treated. We hope they are maintained.
4. In the public scoping it was revealed that a set of stairs leading to the FDR Memorial from the seawall are to be removed. That is not in any drawing that we have seen. We have a concern that this will prevent access to the Memorial and impede the goal of improved circulation. Are there drawings showing that possible change and other changes to the Tidal Basin edge?
5. Page 30 of the Concept Plan shows tiered seating. We call for the embrace of universal design principles and maximizing inclusive design.
6. It is difficult to identify some of the details in the Plan drawings, however, there appears to be trees added within the FDR Memorial. That should not occur without consideration of appropriate species for the Memorial and original design.

As much as we appreciate and understand all of the hard work NPS and its contracted companies put into the public scoping presentation, I want to share a few words about that process. These comments will be in the FDR Committee’s public comment to NPS, but I share today with NCPC as the regulatory agency, in hopes to gain support for enhancing the public engagement process. When the public scoping was announced, no materials were available for review. I was told that information would be posted only

after the scoping meeting. That changed, and the materials were then posted approximately 2 hours prior to the meeting. Maybe there is no mandate for information to be shared in advance of a NPS public consultation, but why not? In the spirit of collaboration and partnership, we ask that materials for future scoping meetings be made available using the same time frame that NCPC uses for posting its information to the public. This will invite more meaningful review and engagement. In addition, I hope that future scoping meetings have an in person option that will invite a real dialogue and opportunities for clarifying answers.

Thank Madam Chair and Commissioners for your time. We are eager for a long term solution to provide protection of the FDR Memorial from sea rise, increased rain events and storm surge and look forward to a renewed landscape that will continue to invite millions from around the world to the great Tidal Basin and all of the Memorials.