



United States Department of the Interior

National Capital Parks-East
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Interior Region 1- National Capital Area
1900 Anacostia Drive, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20020

IN REPLY REFER TO:
4.A. (NCA-NACE)

April 7, 2020

Ms. Marian Dombroski
Vice Chair, Anacostia Watershed Community Advisory Committee
Via email – No Hard Copy to Follow
mdombros@gmail.com

RE: Formal Complaint Seeking Correction of Information Disseminated by The National Park Service Concerning NCPC 7936 Arboretum Bridge

Dear Ms. Dombroski:

On February 7, 2020, the National Park Service (NPS) received your email containing a formal complaint pertaining to Director's Order 11B regarding NCPC 7956 Arboretum Bridge. Your request was forwarded to National Capital Parks-East for response.

The Anacostia Watershed Community Advisory Committee asserted that inaccurate, misleading and incomplete information has been distributed by the project team, and formally requested that the information be corrected and distributed. While this has been a lengthy planning effort and with time gaps between efforts, the coordination and engagement with the public has been thorough and transparent. The NPS has reviewed the materials distributed to the public, which can be found on the project website under "documents" at <https://www.anacostiawaterfront.org/arboretumtrail> as well as the compliance documents, which can be accessed at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=25872> and has determined that all of the information provided is complete and accurate.

The NPS has responded to each of the individual concerns below:

- 1. The Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project is incomplete. It must be updated to include remediation projects in progress which are essential to the restoration of the Anacostia River. The EA must also include coordination with plans for future use of the River and adjacent park land.**

The NPS National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Handbook addresses the scenario of old and outdated analyses by recommending that the agency complete a memo to file "when an NPS NEPA review was previously completed for a specific proposal, but its implementation was

delayed because of unavailability of funds or other reasons.” This memo to file is meant to “document the adequacy of the existing NEPA review” by considering a number of questions, including “Are the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts associated with the action as currently proposed the same or essentially the same as those described in the existing NEPA document and associated decision document?” The NPS reviewed this project with special consideration to these questions and does not believe that there have been any changes in the current conditions of the site nor of designs that would warrant the need to produce a new Environmental Assessment. A memo to file was prepared indicating that the previous analysis remains consistent with current conditions and design. This document has been posted to the NPS Planning, Environment & Public Comment (PEPC) website: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=25872>

Public scoping for this EA began February 3, 2011 and concluded March 4, 2011. Notice of the public scoping period was posted on the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment website (PEPC), and the NPS sent a press release and emailed notices of the meeting to individuals and organizations. Anacostia Watershed Citizens Advisory Committee as well as the Sierra Club, Capital Rowing Club, Audubon Naturalist Society, and Living Classrooms were among the many organizations that received information about the EA throughout the process. Following the scoping period, the comments were used in the preparation of the alternatives for the EA.

The EA was made available for public review and comment on December 20, 2011 through January 31, 2012. The EA was also placed on the NPS PEPC website. During the public comment period, the NPS received 13 pieces of correspondence mostly in favor of the proposed action. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was prepared and executed on June 29, 2012.

In the development of the 2011 EA, locations for the proposed Anacostia River Trail (ART) Pedestrian Bridge were discussed and its current location was selected because it met the purpose and need more efficiently and with the fewest adverse impacts to surrounding wetlands, potentially contaminated areas located in the southern portion of Kenilworth Park, and potential archeological sites. The current location has fewer trees than areas upstream and could be built perpendicular to both shorelines, which shortens the span. The location also connects with an existing gravel service road that joins the National Arboretum with NPS property and is currently used occasionally by maintenance vehicles. Locating the ART Bridge any farther downstream would prevent this direct connection to the National Arboretum’s boundary and adjacent communities. Furthermore, the site of the ART Bridge is approximately one mile upstream from the Benning Road Bridge and will provide pedestrian and bicycle access between the ART and the National Arboretum so that trail users can enjoy the arboretum’s unique gardens, landscapes, and amenities.

While the various projects located in and around Anacostia Park are extremely important to the health of the Anacostia River and the vitality of the community, they are not dependent on, nor will they be affected by the construction of the ART pedestrian bridge to the National Arboretum. Construction of the ART pedestrian bridge will be coordinated with other work taking place in the area and with future projects as they are developed.

2. The environmental assessment mentions the probable presence of historical and cultural artifacts on the site. This would be a very significant finding which should be investigated prior to design of this project, otherwise this important history will be erased from the site.

While the NEPA compliance has been completed, compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (Section 106) is still ongoing. The NPS began coordination with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO) regarding the ART Pedestrian Bridge in 2010. In a letter dated June 21, 2012 and in follow-up email dated June 27, 2012, the DC SHPO concurred with a “no adverse effects” determination to historic resources within the project area, with the condition that a future geo-archeological survey occur along the western side of the river, adjacent to the National Arboretum prior to any construction work.

A geo-archeological survey is in the process of being scheduled, and the findings will be shared with the DC SHPO’s office prior to any construction. In addition, as detailed in the EA and Section 106 assessment of effect, mitigation measures will be implemented during construction to ensure minimal impacts to the seawall. The design of the ART Bridge will be completed in consultation with the DC SHPO and will undergo review by the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission, ensuring the ART Bridge design will minimize any impacts to historic resources within and adjacent to the project area.

3. Presentation materials contain inaccurate and misleading information.

The presentations provided at public meetings and reported on by the media were graphical illustrations of the proposed bridge in order to provide the public with a better understanding of the general bridge appearance and was not intended to depict existing conditions. Each slide is clearly noted to indicate the original proposed bridge configuration as well as the new bridge configuration that was developed in coordination with the rowing community.

4. This proposal does not provide safe or natural Anacostia River Experience.

The ART Pedestrian bridge layout options were evaluated against several factors outlined in a matrix. Among factors such as pier footprint, constructability, and bridge profile, the river user experience factor (i.e. safety) was a key consideration in the decision process. Based on feedback received from the rowing community on the evaluation, the original bridge design was revised. The recommended design now includes two approximately 132-foot-long spans between piers that can accommodate river users. One of these spans provides the 80-foot navigable channel as required by the U.S. Coast Guard. To accommodate these larger spans, the bridge piers have been aligned to avoid primary rowing lanes as recommended by the rowing community. The revised design has essentially one bridge pier in the river if it is assumed that the pier closest to the National Arboretum is placed in shallow and generally unnavigable waters (as expressed by the rowing community) and the east pier is integrated with the sea wall. The bridge will also include navigation lighting as required by the U.S. Coast Guard.

5. Safety of river users was not considered a selection criterion to evaluate design options and the bridge design does not provide adequate lanes for navigation.

Safety of river users was a key consideration in developing the bridge design. The planning team held two meetings with the rowing community during the design of the bridge. During these meetings, notes were taken and circulated to ensure that the planning team was accurately capturing the needs of the rowing community. As shown in Appendix A, a slide is provided from an August 14, 2018 meeting where the rowing community presented their safety requirements to the planning team that indicated the need for specific lane configurations, which the planning team subsequently used to develop the revised pier alignments.

In addition, during the public meetings, slide 26 (see Appendix B) of the presentation indicated that river user safety was an additional consideration and that the planning team adjusted the piers to allow for five, 45-foot rowing lanes (two upstream, two downstream, and one traffic separation-/stationary instruction) as requested from the rowing community. The full presentation is available on the project website listed above.

6. The proposed design *does not create a connection between the east and west trail networks.*

The ART continues to be developed in segments. As an example, the trail terminated at Benning Road for several years while the next section went through the required planning and development phases before it was finally constructed. On the east side of the river, the ART Bridge will provide direct connection to Phase I of the existing ART and in the future will also provide a connection to the Phase II realignment of the ART. On the west side of the river, connecting the trail through the Arboretum is another segment in the MoveDC plan. Funding is available to develop this segment, and it is currently in the planning stages. The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) has met with NPS, the National Arboretum, and others to develop this segment that will connect the trail to Maryland Avenue NE and allow access regardless of the Arboretum's hours. The NPS land along the west bank of the Anacostia River, in the area of the proposed ART Pedestrian bridge location, will remain accessible during regular park operating times. The project also includes an additional 1,000 feet of paved trail construction on the western bank of the river in order to join to an existing gravel service road between the National Arboretum and NPS property. It should be also noted that Kenilworth Park and associated trails within it are currently closed after dark. Furthermore, the National Arboretum is a research institution managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is not a park, although it welcomes visitors during operating hours. Any decision to extend these hours are at the discretion of National Arboretum. The DDOT is also evaluating a New York Avenue NE Streetscape and Trail Concept, which will improve pedestrian facilities, bicycle accommodations, and safety along New York Avenue NE between Florida Avenue NE and Bladensburg Road NE, connecting with the Metropolitan Branch Trail at NoMa-Gallaudet Metro Station and the Arboretum. Additionally, the Lincoln Connector Trail project is in the planning stages. This section of trail will provide a trail from Bladensburg Road NE, through the Fort Lincoln neighborhood, and cross the Anacostia River to connect with the ART in the vicinity of the New York Avenue NE/US-50 bridge.

7. The proposal *does not* create a place for river users.

A dock and kayak launch were planned for and included as part of the design work for the bridge. However, based on the concerns from the rowing community and other stakeholders that a dock and kayak launch in this particular location would create additional user conflicts and be duplicative with other planned boat launches/docks along the Anacostia River, it was determined that these elements would be removed from this location at this time. Yet, this does not prohibit the installation of a small dock or kayak launch in the future if the need arises. Finally, the proposed ART Pedestrian bridge will provide individuals who do not have access to a boat/canoe/kayak the opportunity to experience the river in a different manner.

8. This proposal *does not* extend educational programs for the US National Arboretum.

While there is currently no formal programming at this point, there are educational and/or interpretive opportunities that can be created by this project for individuals visiting Kenilworth Park, Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and the National Arboretum. The National Arboretum is fully supportive of this project and the opportunities to share and mutually inspire visitors.

9. The impact of this project will be extensive and permanent. While connection of the east and west trail segments and provision of access to the US National Arboretum are necessary, this design will not achieve these goals in a safe and responsible manner, respective of the resources, both cultural and natural.

As documented in the NEPA, the NPS has determined that while the ART Bridge will have both adverse and beneficial impacts to the surrounding resources, the project can be carried forward without significant adverse effects, as defined in 40 CFR § 1508.27.

10. This design detracts from the natural beauty of one of the most iconic and beautiful locations on the Anacostia River - the last unobstructed vista. It detracts from the importance of the US National Arboretum by providing a utilitarian bridge which drops off visitors at a nondescript location.

As previously stated in the development of the 2011 EA, locations for the proposed ART pedestrian bridge were discussed and its current location was selected because it met the purpose and need more efficiently and with the fewest impacts to surrounding wetlands, potentially contaminated land in the southern portion of Kenilworth Park, and potential archeological sites. Furthermore, it provided the most direct connection to the National Arboretum and greatest opportunity to connect with adjacent communities.

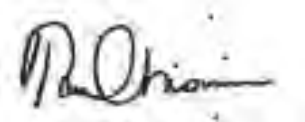
Conclusion

The NPS has conducted an open, transparent, and inclusive planning and design process. In addition to the public engagement around the EA, the planning team has held two public meetings in Wards 5 and 7 to present the design and to solicit comments from the public and other stakeholders. The meeting for Ward 5 was Tuesday, May 21, 2019 from 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. at the National Arboretum located at 3501 New York Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.

The meeting for Ward 7 was Wednesday, May 22, 2019 from 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. at Department of Employment Services located at 4058 Minnesota Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20019. There was an extended comment period that lasted until July 31, 2019. The comments received during this time period will be used to further refine the design and these comments and materials are reflected in a very detailed public meeting report, which is posted on the project website. All materials distributed by the planning team have been complete and accurate and available to all on the project website provided herein.

We look forward to continuing our coordination with your organization and other stakeholders as work on the bridge design progresses. If you have any questions or further concerns, please reach out to Mike Commisso, Chief of Resource Management, at (202) 494-6905 or via email at michael_commisso@nps.gov.

Sincerely,

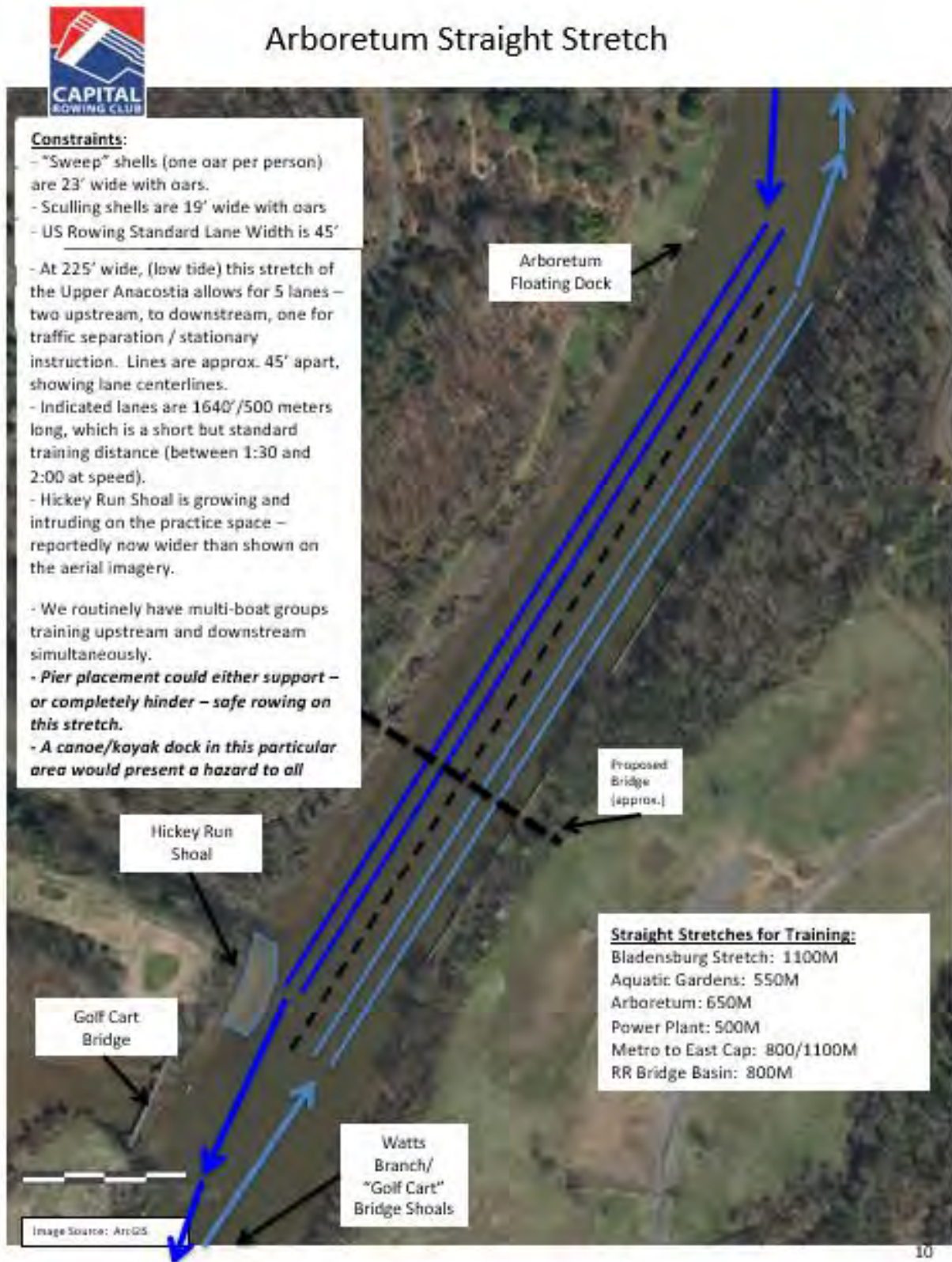
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tara Morrison", is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Tara D. Morrison
Superintendent

Enclosures

cc:

Senator Chris Van Hollen, U.S. Senate, State of Maryland
Dr. Richard Olsen, National Arboretum
Mr. Bryan Barnett-Woods, MNCPPC
Mr. Joseph P Gill, Prince George's County DOE
Mr. Tom Wells, DOEE
Mr. Michael Alvino, DDOT
Ms. Tammy Stidham, NPS
Mr. Michael Commisso, NPS
Mr. Daniel Schaible, NPS
Mr. Matthew Flis, NCPC
Ms. Julia Koster, NCPC



Additional Considerations

River User Safety:

At 225' wide, (low tide) this stretch of the Upper Anacostia allows for 5 lanes – two upstream, two downstream, one for traffic separation / stationary instruction.

Lanes are 45' wide each

