

National Park Service Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Delegate Norton- National Park Service Town Hall

November 16, 2022

HAINS POINTS SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS FOR PEDESTRIANS, CYCLISTS, AND MOTORISTS

To improve pedestrian, cyclist and motorist safety in East Potomac Park, the National Park Service (NPS) will replace one vehicle travel lane on Ohio Drive from the East Potomac Golf Course to Hains Point and back to Buckeye Drive with a new, dedicated bicycle and pedestrian lane. The work is expected to begin in December in partnership with the District Department of Transportation. When completed, the left lane of the 2.5-mile drive around Hains Point will be for motor vehicles, and the right lane will become a bi-directional shared-use path for cyclists and pedestrians.

In addition to the shared-use path, this project includes the following design elements:

- Angled parking on Ohio Drive at Hains Point will be replaced with parallel parking. The shared use path will be protected behind parked cars.
- All bus traffic, including motorcoaches and school buses, will be prohibited on Ohio Drive past the East Potomac Golf Course.
- The “no parking” zone on Ohio Drive between the 14th Street Bridge and Long Bridge will be replaced with two, six-foot-wide bike lanes.
- The intersection of East Basin Drive and Ohio Drive at Inlet Bridge will become a three-way stop with a left-turn pocket added for eastbound bicyclists on Ohio Drive to the George Mason Memorial, connecting to the 15th Street cycle track and Mount Vernon Trail.

TIDAL BASIN AND WEST POTOMAC PARK SEAWALL REPAIR

In Fall 2024, the NPS will begin the first phase of repairs to the Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park seawalls. The project will address the Tidal Basin seawall north and south of the inlet bridge, as well as part of the West Potomac Park seawall. Future projects will address subsequent phases of seawall repair.

In the years since their construction, the Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park seawalls have settled significantly, leading to overtopping of the seawalls and water pooling on ground surfaces and park walkways. Some sections flood twice a day during normal tidal conditions.

The sidewalk on top of the seawall along the Tidal Basin will be replaced and regraded to provide smoother, more accessible connections to other pathways. New, stronger foundations will be able to support height extensions of the wall if it is needed due to future rising sea levels or increasing storm surge elevations.

KENILWORTH PARK LANDFILL

The NPS is close to finalizing a plan to address environmental contamination at the Kenilworth Park Landfill Site. In consultation with the District of Columbia Department of Energy and Environment, the NPS has investigated hazardous substance contamination at the site, assessed the associated risks to human health and the environment and evaluated alternatives to address those risks using authorities under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act.

The NPS Record of Decision (ROD) on the preferred alternative is moving through the Department of Interior for signature. We anticipate that the ROD will be signed by the end of the year.

CLOSURE OF UPPER BEACH DRIVE

After careful consideration, the NPS decided to keep the upper portion of Beach Drive closed to motorized vehicles year-round. This decision prioritizes park access for recreational use including walkers, runners, cyclists and others seeking respite in natural areas. In selecting the year-round closure over the previously proposed seasonal closure, the NPS recognizes that the closure has allowed outdoor recreation in the park to flourish and has provided enormous mental and physical health benefits to those who have used the upper portion of Beach Drive for recreation since its initial closure in April 2020.

This was not a decision that we made lightly; it was based on analysis presented in the EA, carefully reviewing and considering comments from the public, and internal deliberation and analysis.

The full-time closure of this section of Beach Drive will provide safer park experiences year-round by reducing conflicts between people who walk, bicycle and drive. It also expands access for visitors with disabilities to areas of the park that lack separated pathways and accessible trails.

The NPS worked closely with the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to analyze the potential impacts to traffic of a permanent closure to vehicles.

The upper portion of Beach Drive is a minor road that carries a small amount of traffic relative to nearby roadways. The DDOT traffic studies concluded that a full closure to motorized vehicles would result in minimal impact to traffic during peak commute times.

The NPS plans to coordinate with DDOT to install a new traffic signal, adjust traffic signal timing and implement safety improvements and traffic calming inside and adjacent to Rock Creek Park. We also plan to make improvements to the gates to ease access for emergency response.

FORT TOTTEN PEDESTRIAN TRAIL PROJECT

The NPS stopped work on this project for a second time after uncovering a portion of the Metrorail's green line tunnel during trail construction. After a thorough review and subsequent discussions with engineers and additional engagement with WMATA, the National Park Service has determined that we will need to redesign the trail with a new alignment. It is our intent to issue a contract for this redesign in early 2023. If this can be done, we should have design completed in mid-2023.

When funding is available, we will proceed with construction, but that may take some time, as we won't know the costs of construction until we have a design completed. In the meantime, we will update the public on a regular basis as we proceed with the design.

The first pause in construction occurred after workers uncovered an empty, unused World War One ordnance. This discovery required the NPS to search for other unexploded ordnances and to test the soil for contaminants. No contamination and no other shells were found.

We look forward to completing this trail and appreciate the public engagement we've received on this project.

BUZZARD POINT MARINA

The NPS is anticipating \$1.2 million from the District of Columbia (District) to move the concept plans for Buzzard Point into design and construction drawings. Once the District transfers these funds to the NPS, we will contract for the design work.

CARTER BARRON AMPHITHEATER

The Carter Barron Amphitheater closed after a 2017 inspection found that the stage's substructure was not strong enough to handle the weight of performers and equipment onstage. The NPS initially planned to repair only the stage. However, during the preliminary design phase, we determined that the stage structure needed to be rebuilt, which would also require rehabilitating all the dressing rooms, restrooms and backstage infrastructure located below the stage to bring them up to current codes, including the incorporation of universal accessibility and other 21st century needs.

More recently, the NPS expanded the preliminary design effort to include the front-of-house spaces as well, such as public restrooms, the box office, and other public areas. Once the preliminary design is fully complete, the NPS will have a better idea of the anticipated costs and a potential timeline for the total project. The NPS is working to secure funding for the remaining design and rehabilitation of the amphitheater.

Currently, the Carter Barron Amphitheater remains closed.

ENCAMPMENTS OF UNSHELTERED INDIVIDUALS ON NPS LAND IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

During the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, the NPS temporarily suspended enforcement of its no camping regulation on park lands in alignment with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 recommendations and the District of Columbia's (District) practices. As we transition away from an emergency response to the pandemic, services and shelters serving people experiencing homelessness in the District have resumed and expanded and offer available alternative housing options to encampments. The availability of vaccines has also bolstered social service responses supporting unsheltered individuals.

The NPS closes encampments when it determines that a site poses a significant, continuing, security, health or safety risk. The NPS evaluates each park individually and makes operational decisions based on what we find. Prior to taking any action that would affect people living in encampments we give individuals ample notice, except in cases of immediately hazardous conditions.

The NPS has begun a gradual enforcement of its no-camping regulation (36 CFR § 7.96) with the goal of full enforcement across all national park lands in the District by the end of 2023. We are currently enforcing the no-camping regulation on national park lands located within the District that **do not** have encampments. Over the course of the next year and in close collaboration and coordination with the District and their social service providers, we will gradually expand this enforcement to include closures of encampments on other park lands. As has been done in previous encampment closures, the NPS is taking a social services-first approach and will continue to work closely with the District to coordinate social services for unsheltered individuals on park lands.

Now that winter is arriving, we are especially committed to working with District Department of Human Services and community partners to connect people experiencing homelessness with resources and housing.