

The Committee of 100

on the Federal City



August 22, 2022

Jeffrey P. Reinbold ,Superintendent, National Mall and Memorial Parks
Attn: Rehabilitate Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park Seawalls EA
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Subject: Scoping comments on Rehabilitate Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park Seawall Environmental Assessment

Dear Superintendent Reinbold:

This letter provides preliminary comments of The Committee of 100 on the Federal City (C100) on the proposed scope of work for the Environmental Assessment and Section 106 process for the Rehabilitation of Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park Seawalls. We are very pleased to see this needed work move forward. We understand that there will be future opportunities to comment and look forward to further consultation and comment as the project moves forward.

Comments

The 6,800 feet of seawalls in the project area (portions of the Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park, as shown in the project area map) have deteriorated and settled, causing flooding (daily and during storm events), soil erosion, damage to cherry trees and other vegetation, and risk to the public.

Constructed or modified between 1884 and 1957, most were built on riprap, with stacked Potomac River stone facing – some with a concrete cap.

A combination of sea level rise and deterioration has reduced the walls' effective height to the point that they can no longer prevent water from

overtopping the walls and flooding the park. Areas in Tidal Basin East and Tidal Basin West flood 1.77 feet daily (nuisance flooding); 3.30 feet at a one-month interval; 4.00 feet at six-month interval; and 5.20 feet at a five-year return period.

The seawalls were originally designed to be six feet higher than mean low tide that is higher now and will be still higher in the future because of rising sea levels. To compound the problem, the seawalls have settled. In this proposal, NPS does not seek to prevent all flooding. Based on data from NOAA, raising the seawalls by 4.75 to 5.5 feet will prevent most, but not all flooding: limiting flooding to 15 hours or less at 3.75 feet.

The seawalls need to be stabilized to prevent further settling, restore their functional height, and provide some flood protection. NPS goals are:

- Rebuild and increase height of the seawalls along their historic alignment to “re-establish the historic functional height of the walls.” (increasing height to 4.75 or 5.5 feet).
- Extend the lifecycle of the seawalls and prevent future settlement. NPS plans to support the seawalls with pile foundations into bedrock 90 feet below the surface.
- Ensure that the seawall can be extended in the future if necessary to accommodate climate changes.
- Replace the existing sidewalk on top of the seawalls, possibly with multi-use paths.

As you doubtless know, the existing sidewalk in the project area is an important section of what the C100 has called the "Washington Waterfront Walk." We have used the "Washington Waterfront Walk" as a name for the planning concept that was outlined by the National Capital Planning Commission in their 1997 report, *Extending the Legacy: Planning America's Capital for the 21st Century*. This concept was summarized on page 14 of that report: "With this new plan, the city's waterfront – most of which is publicly owned – will become a continuous band of open space from Georgetown to the National Arboretum. Some stretches will be quiet and pastoral, perfect for walks or picnics, while others will support festivals, concerts, and other urban activities."

Over the past 25 years there has been considerable progress in improving some sections of the waterfront walk, especially sections of the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail. However, much remains to be done.

The section of the existing trail from the Arlington Memorial Bridge to the Tidal Basin, then curving up south of the Jefferson Memorial and turning southwest to continue down Maine Avenue, is a very important part of the Washington Waterfront Walk (see attached map). It is important that when this section of the existing trail along the Potomac River waterfront is rebuilt, it has adequate width for walkers and bicyclists. It appears that the proposed walkway at plus or minus 18 feet at Tidal Basin East and West will be adequate, as will the transition to grade at West Potomac Park North and South.

The estimated cost to Rehabilitate the Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park Seawall is \$100 million or higher, to be funded under the Great American Outdoors Act.

Questions:

1. How was the metric of 15 hours of flooding determined?
2. What is the source for data on future water levels and future rare storm events?
3. In the future, what additional height can be accommodated on the rebuilt seawalls supported by pilings?

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this important and much-needed project proposal. We look forward to seeing more detailed iterations in the future and to continuing this dialogue. If you have any questions or require additional information, do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Kirby Vining, Chair

Committee of 100 on the Federal City

Cc: <https://Parkplanning.nps.gov/SeawallRehabilitation>

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Project area (in yellow) and proposed Washington Waterfront Walk, hand-drawn (in red) Note: WWW would actually be along the Potomac River, within the Project Area, which is in yellow.

