

The Committee of 100

on the Federal City



TESTIMONY

Shelly Repp, Chair
Committee of 100 on the Federal City

The National Capital Planning Commission
February 1, 2024

RE: Anacostia Riverwalk Trail Expansion and National Arboretum Access Bridge

Chair Goodman and Commission members, thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding the proposed **Anacostia Riverwalk Trail and National Arboretum Access Bridge**. First though, let me congratulate you on your Centennial. The National Capital Planning Commission has played an important role in enhancing and maintaining the beauty and livability of Washington, DC. As you know, the Committee of 100 on the Federal City celebrated our 100th anniversary last year.

The Committee of 100 has reviewed the very cogent comments of the Anacostia Watershed Community Advisory Committee (AWCAC) and is impressed by the points they raise. They represent the community closest to the resource and while, as discussed below, we would like to see the trails connected and new access provided to the Arboretum, this should not be to the exclusion of other uses.

This project is noteworthy because it would add a new bicycle and walking trail section, a new bicycle/footbridge across the Anacostia, and new access and visibility to the National Arboretum. As you may have noted in our October 25, 2023 letter to the Commission, we have suggested that the city's riverfront trails and recreation segments be connected (filling existing gaps and clarifying the route) and "branded" or understood as a totality from border to border, not trail-by-trail or site-by-site as they are currently. Much work has been done and most of the trails along the two rivers are comprised of popular and finished (or planned) elements: Georgetown Waterfront Trail, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Trail, and the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail among others. What we are proposing is filling the relatively small gaps and making people aware of this potentially amazing recreational resource. The three agencies involved in the project currently under review (the DC Department of Transportation, the National Park Service's National Capital Regional Office, and the DC Department of Parks and Recreation) are probably the ones that would most need to be involved (both individually and cooperatively) in this final effort. In addition to filling the gaps, it would likely involve improved signage and possibly unified "branding" of those segments with new identification

such as the **Washington Waterfront Walk** so the public could better understand the continuous nature of the trail.

This idea would not necessarily require renaming any extant trail nor changing ownership or management – much of which is under the stewardship of the National Park Service. What this would do would provide a unified identity which can better serve citizen awareness and appreciation not currently realized on a piecemeal basis. By recognizing the District’s river shores as a unitary resource, greater protection, management, and advocacy would be afforded. Signage, maps, budget initiatives, friends’ groups, and interpretive and educational programs letting the public know that such a continuous trail exists are all possibilities. Continued outreach to all stakeholders is needed, such as the Potomac and Anacostia Riverkeepers, the Anacostia Watershed Society, Washington Walks, Washington Area Bicycle Association, among many others including residents and visitors.

We note that the AWCAC states that the trail and bridge as proposed would prevent recreational use of the Anacostia for the entire 2-mile waterfront in Ward 7, thus preventing the opportunity for safe river access by residents. This deficiency needs to be addressed.

Of course, understanding and “seeing” the riverbanks as a unitary resource is not a new policy interest. In fact, in your own 1997 report – “Extending the Legacy” – a similar concept was emphasized for the benefit of residents and visitors alike:

“Extending the Legacy” aspires to recapture that earlier vision and to offer Washington residents the same intimate connection to their rivers as Londoners and Parisians enjoy. 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. [p. 14]

In 2003, the DC Office of Planning released “The Anacostia Waterfront Framework Plan”. The plan, prepared in collaboration with 20 District and Federal agencies, including the National Capital Planning Commission, outlined a comprehensive approach to restoring and enhancing the area along and near the Anacostia River in Washington, DC.

By filling in the gaps and “branding” all the District’s shorelines as a unified resource, the concept would raise awareness of the totality of the river shores resource throughout the District. It would help citizens and visitors better value the rivers’ shores in the Nation’s Capital – both in protection and enjoyment. This is a particularly critical notion given the Army Corps of Engineers prediction of climate-change caused river rise throughout the city in the not-too-distant future.

The Committee of 100 can think of no better or more appropriate body to champion the “completion” of this continuous trail and this overall concept than the National Capital Planning Commission. And there is no better time than your centennial observations in 2024 to make it happen.

The **Washington Waterfront Walk** is, we argue, a concept whose time has come. What an extraordinary asset for local communities and visitors and to the character of the Nation's Capital.

Again, congratulations on your 100th Anniversary. We hope the National Capital Planning Commission will consider adopting the Washington Waterfront Walk as one of its Centennial Initiatives.

Thank you.

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