

District Waterways Advisory Commission Meeting #1

Date: March 19, 2026

Time: 2:00 – 4:00 PM EST

Location: DC Water HQ Boardroom

- **Call Meeting to Order & Swearing In**
- **Opening Remarks**
- **Agenda & Introductions**
 - *Commission - one word description of what the waterways mean to you:* home, life, heart and soul of the region, community access and opportunity, fruitful, beauty, surprise (based on how many people see the Anacostia and are surprised by its beauty), exciting, recreation, underappreciated, precious, connection/connector, foundation of our communities, calming, row-able, could be more accessible, fun, connector, improving, lively, recreational/fun, fish on, freedom, organic growth, historical
 - *Public - words that the commission missed:* community, nurturing (without the water we wouldn't be here), home
- **Advisory Plan Overview**
- **Process & Timeline**
- **Initial Stakeholder Feedback**
- **Discussion**
 - ***Prompted question: What is one priority that needs to be addressed in the Waterways Advisory Plan?***
 - **Group 1:** They discussed utilizing rivers for transit while ensuring it does not cut off communities. One member spoke about sea level rise and getting ahead of what that means for communities, as well as the dangers of above-water toxic sites going underwater as water rises. Another member's concern was about safety. There is only a limited amount of stored water if an issue breaks out. We need to make sure we have enough supply of clean water to get through a crisis.
 - **Group 2:** They talked about projects poised to start on the water: 11th Bridge Park, Potomac River Tunnel, etc. They discussed access, including that people who are accessing the water already are in groups like boating clubs or the Wharf residents. They talked about how they can get people outside of these groups on the river.
 - **Group 3:** They talked about shared use and governance. Group members live in the Southwest waterfront area. One member used to always focus on land, as well as the government, but the water was ignored. They asked the following questions:
 - If we keep expanding the use recreationally and developmentally, who is in charge and accountable for the waterways?

- If someone says the word swim, you're going to have all these people jumping in the water – so who do you call and who is accountable for that?
- **Group 4:** They discussed security at JBAB given the open shoreline and easy ways to access it. They also discussed concerns about equitable access to the river. It would be great to see more rowing programs at high schools in Ward 6 & 7.
 - People don't know about things they can't see. You want to create that next generation of people who care about the river, and that starts with establishing access and equity with younger people.
- **Group 5:** They discussed equitable and safe access. They also asked the questions:
 - What is the strategic plan of this group and what is it based off?
 - How do you plan to address all of that to enhance and ensure equitable access?
 - How do you continue to fortify the interagency collaboration on this strategic plan? Information often stalls or disappears with turnover, so maintaining symmetry of information is pivotal.
- **Group 6:** They talked about water access from three perspectives around security and safety. They started with discussing examples from other cities, such as the boat shuttle from Logan Airport, fishing piers in Chicago, etc. They also noted that access is dependent on water quality. Additionally, they were thinking about access and fishing new Gravelly Point. For example, fishing increases birds, which increases bird strikes coming into National Airport.
- **Group 7:** This group discussed how there need to be agreements that can be enforced, and that there need to be recommendations that can be acted on because we have the right people in the right jurisdictions. And, with access, it's important to make sure access is integrated with transit safety so kayakers and fishers can recreate safely while they're not right next to a water taxi, for example.
- **Group 8:** They talked about access in one way or another. One member brought up access to rowing and boating to ensure it is safe and accessible, including dredging. Another member talked about access to getting onto riverwalks and access adjacent to the river, as well as who oversees resourcing these amenities. A final member talked about using waterways to reduce traffic on the roadways in a way that is environmentally responsible and safe.
- **Group 9:** They discussed the need for streamlined and centralized communication around the waterways for those that want to recreate, travel, and commute on the river. There is no platform that centralizes all that information where people can see information that day regarding safety, water quality, etc.

- **Group 10:** One member was talking about coupling equitable access with greater education for recreational uses at a young age (elementary and middle school). How do we ensure the public schools have programs that ensure the kids can use these resources safely at a young age. Another member was focused on opening greater lines of communication between commercial users and other recreational/stakeholders that end up on the river at the same time. This communication does not currently exist but having it would help deconflict the waterways.
- **Group 11:** They discussed the need to ensure the waterways have clear roles and responsibilities for every agency. People need to be aware of who to contact. For example, who do you contact if there is a navigation hazard?
- **Public Group 1:** They had same themes of equitable access. One member did not hear any commission member say “swimmable”, noting that the rivers are swimmable most days. But there is a lack of accessible swimming spots that are safe and public.
- **Public Group 2 (Georgetown BID):** They discussed many safety concerns. There are safety concerns with people falling off the Georgetown shoreline into the aqueduct. Additionally, they stated that this advisory is a tremendous opportunity to reclaim local lands, with the RFK transfer as precedent. They stated that until DC has local ownership, the National Park Service does not have an interest in local needs. The commission should think very seriously about making that a primary outcome of this advisory panel.
- **Public Group 3:** They stated that the commission should put the new stadium (RFK) on the agenda. People will want to be able to walk to the stadium. It needs to be considered in terms of volume: when folks understand they can walk from downtown or Navy Yard to the stadium, that’s going to impact the area adjacent to the waterways.
- ***Prompted question: What is one question you believe needs to be answered in the Waterways Advisory Plan? What is one opportunity or barrier that the plan can address?***
 - **Group 1:** One member noted that they hope that this commission can create a safety framework that users can adopt whether it be swimmers, recreational boaters, sailing schools, rowers, etc. And, assuming that framework is established, how can we be sure it’s implemented and communicated? There will need to be a self-enforcement mechanism to ensure everyone is on the same page with safe usage
 - **Group 2:** One member brought up the following question: what is the span of control and possibility of this group? Given that much of the adjacent land and water are federally controlled, what do we have power over? Another member is interested in how the commission is defining equitable access, and further, how the commission is defining access? They discussed that access “to” an amenity begins long before someone is wading into the water,

so how will the commission think about a plan larger than just entrance into the water?

- **Group 3:** They talked about different authorities and what agencies/organizations are on the hook for what things. One member brought up questions about what assumptions the commission is working on regarding the strategic plan. Are we looking at “blue sky scenario”, “world is our oyster”, or “black sky scenario” for the plan? Identifying this approach will help the commission navigate differences in strategies and tasks.
- **Group 4:** They focused on the process to determine priorities. Specifically, recreational use, water access, the airport, etc. Additionally, what type of recreation would be utilized for our waterways. For example, are we branching out piers on the Anacostia.
- **Group 5:** They asked questions about what information is needed to do this work. Who has jurisdiction on the land and water? Who is responsible for roles? What rules and laws apply? Who will implement recommendations?
- **Group 6:** They asked who is the coordinating decision making authorities, especially when actions of one entity impact others? How do you sort out how to approach this coordination? Another member also added that there needs to be focus on contingency planning. For example, no one had a page in their book ready for the Potomac Interceptor event. Finally, there is a drastic need to rebalance existing processes, as some are ad hoc processes that are 20-30 years out of date.
- **Group 7:** What is the commission’s research capability? What is going to be the commission’s capability to reach back and to get some of the answers that will be raised by these questions?
- **Group 8:** They talked about the barriers again. They touched on the swim ban, transfer of properties and what that looks like, and if they were able to come up with an actionable item, how would it be implemented? Would it be through this commission, would it be through an agency later? What would it look like to identify a way to go forward on one of the barriers?
- **Group 9:** They discussed that they hope the plan can come up with an overall vision of what the waterway can be or look like, which begs the question - what is the overall intent of the plan? Regarding coordination, one member mentioned the example of the seawall/levy: interagency-wise and holistically, there are different agencies that are working on their part of the seawall. But they don’t understand holistically how all of the work will combine in the future. Regarding information they could use, what are the waterway development plans that are set for the next 20-30 years? Those recommendations could help inform this group, as they may already address some of these topics.
- **Group 10:** They also discussed agencies and responsibilities. How many different agencies or private properties need to be engaged for a project? Each stakeholder has their own regulations, priorities, etc. so how does a

plan address this dynamic when not all owners have the same vision in mind?

- **Public Group 1:** The commission hit it. Funding is a question that will need to be solved. In areas that are between local and federal, we will have to figure out the funding aspect.
- **Public Group 2:** We've heard a lot about the multijurisdictional problem. There is opportunity to look off the waterways where that has been done successfully. One good example is Franklin Park. The District, NPS, downtown BID, and others in the community reimaged and redefined the park. There was a lot of sausage making in getting done, but the space is alive, it's vibrant, and there's all kinds of things to do.
- *Prompted question: "What does safety on our waterways look/feel like?"*
 - **Nate Handy (City cruises):** safety = education. There is a huge opportunity to get everyone on the same page, have an awareness of other uses, and the limitations and needs of others.
 - **Trey Sherad:** There are two broad ones for boatable and swimmable. One is to get rid of seawalls wherever we can. At high tide, they are slippery and sharp. We also need to talk about deliberate beaches and wade-in areas. Additionally, swimming education should be free and easily accessible. Finally, there are conflicts for boaters, especially new river crossings that may not be necessary that pose less of an issue to human safety.
 - **Unknown:** One idea that comes with safety is making sure there are resources and funding available to first responders so they can access waterway users. Also, overall, if the District is going to invest money and resources into developing areas along the waterfront, it needs to ensure the areas are safe for people who want to access them.
 - **Unknown:** It is necessary to be able to maintain the waterfront: the seawalls and constant maintenance for cleanliness, keeping foliage down, etc. However, that is a lot of money. The Downtown DC BID does an amazing job maintaining Franklin Park and raising money for it.
- **Meeting Schedule and Next Step**
- **Adjourn**