

District Waterways Advisory Commission - Meeting #2

Meeting Minutes

Date: April 22, 2026
Time: 2:00 - 4:00 PM
Location: Virtual

- **Call Meeting to Order**

- Quorum reached at 2:04
- Meeting called to order by Chairman Madden
- Approval of meeting minutes of the March 19 Commission meeting
 - Motioned by Comm. Melissa Bird
 - Motion seconded by Comm. Ted Jutras
 - Approved by majority (voice vote)
- Approval of the Commission Bylaws
 - Motioned by Comm. Diane Groomes
 - Motion seconded by Comm. Trey Sherard
 - Approved by majority (voice vote)

- **Commission Logistics**

- **Review Meeting Objectives**

- **Overarching Themes and Considerations**

- *Waterfront Governance*
 - Discussed how the Commission can collaborate with the federal government on waterways and land use.
 - Commissioner Trey Sherard (Anacostia Riverkeeper) suggested slides be updated to reflect and National Park Service (NPS) ownership of the riverbeds.
- *Waterways Governance*
 - Commissioner Darryl Madden (Chair) proposed revising the governance slide to place the regional entities in a separate row.
 - Commissioner Matt Reis (DC Water) suggested an update to the DC Water box to include management of shoreline at DC Water HQ and Blue Plains (they do not “own” the land).
- *Boating and Swimming*
 - An overview was given of the various types of recreations uses of the waterways included where they typically occur, safety considerations, and related commercial potential
 - **Comm. Melissa Bird** requested a map of various water depths across the waterways.
 - **Comm. Trey Sherard (Anacostia Riverkeeper)** proposed:
 - a revision of the recreational uses slide, believing it was oversimplified and drawing distinctions in use areas where they do not exist.
 - that fishing was an important recreational activity that needed to be considered in the context of other uses of the waterways as it can sometimes conflict with other uses (swimming or boating).
 - Jon Meyers (HR&A) agreed regarding the importance of fishing as an activity, indicating that the initial idea was that include that as part of subsequent water quality discussions.

- Additional consideration was given to what other elements impact recreation uses including environmental condition (bacteria levels, currents), infrastructure conditions (access points, seawall condition), and conflicting uses by other uses (what is allowed and where).

Topic Area Focus

- Boating and Recreation Topic
 - An overview was presented of various entities which govern use of waterways for boating and recreation
 - Reports and interviews with stakeholders indicate an upward trend in waterways usage over recent years.
 - **Comm. Gretchen Mikeska** (DOEE) proposed revision to the contents of the slide to add “sailing” in addition to rowing and boating.
 - **Comm. Melissa Bird** sought clarification on the “opportunities” being highlighted for recreations uses: if they were general concepts for the District to consider or should be considered as part of the District Waterways Advisory Plan. **Austin Amandolia** (HR&A) clarified that these “opportunities” are meant to spark ideas for hypothetical goals for later inclusion in the plan.
 - **Comm. Melissa Bird** sought additional clarification if HR&A would be conducting work to document current usage capacity (access points, marina capacity) / considering future capacity needs to inform the goals/strategies in the Advisory Plan.
 - **Sharon Carney** (HR&A) clarified that HR&A would be conducting limited amounts of analysis around future potential drivers of waterways use.
 - **Comm. Kristina Noell** (Anacostia BID) asked if new waterfront development (11th St Bridge Park, Poplar Point) could result additional growth in waterways usage beyond that seen in recent years.
 - **Jon Meyers** (HR&A) suggested this could be the case with new waterside infrastructure but that growth rates would be variable.
 - **Commissioners Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper) suggested that direct and indirect river usage will continue to grow in real terms
 - An overview of regulations pertaining to swimming in District waterways was presented, including the existing swim ban, trends in water quality, and policy options to improve conditions (increased testing, legislation, swim facilities, etc)
 - **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper) sought clarification on the legal status of swimming from vessels. Clarification was Noted that there is no cut-out for swimming from boats in the District or federal law.
- *Boating & Recreation Question 1: Do these issues and opportunities resonate with you? Why or why not?*
 - **Comm. Rachel Clark:** The slides did not consider possibilities of unmet demand. It is How can the District expand access to these types of activities to increase demand?
- *Boating & Recreation Question 2: What ideas do you have and are excited to explore?*
 - **Comm. Ted Jutras** (Navy Yard BID): exploring interactions between boating/transit and recreational uses of the waterways
 - **Comm. Melissa Bird:** Increasing capacity / access and the new facilities at Poplar Point and RFK
 - **Comm. Darryl Madden** (Chair): Safety of navigation by recreational boaters and safe access to swimming
 - **Comm. Riley Piva** (DPR): Rentable kayak/paddleboard at District parks, related infrastructure, is a priority as well as potential river pools

- **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper): improving boating access along the river (rentable racks for personal paddlecraft, public "Kayakshare") as well as dredging to remove hazards.
 - Considering the future population of the waterways is a worthwhile exercise, as DC has the largest liveaboard community on the East Coast.
 - DPR has already started to workshop several of these ideas in their planning, specifically related to increasing environmental education, increasing access to the water, building boardwalks, and creating more non-motorized boat launching opportunities.
- *Boating and Recreation - Initial Goals*
 - **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper) sought clarification on the status of a recent Federal Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) which authorized a study to be conducted on swimming in District Waterways
 - **Comm. Gretch Mikeska** (DOEE) clarified that the WRDA did authorize a swim study but did not provide funding.
 - **Comm. Gretch Mikeska** (DOEE) noted that lifting the swim ban is difficult because the waterways must have consistently safe water quality results. There are significant regulatory hurdles, even if water quality is better than it is now.
 - **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper) noted that the District is the only jurisdiction with a swim ban and that given the lack of precedent perhaps the regulatory hurdles aren't as large as imagined and a worthy topic for the Commission to explore.
- *Environmental Topic*
 - An overview of the relevant governing authorities over environmental conditions in the District's waterways
 - **Comm. Nate Handy (City Cruises)** Proposed adding USCG to the governance table as it implements the Vessel General Permit (with EPA) which regulates incidental discharges from commercial vessels over 79'.
 - An overview of recent water quality and ecological condition trends in the Anacostia & Potomac was presented as well as a map of restoration projects that have been completed in recent years.
- *Environmental Question 1: Do these issues and opportunities resonate with you?
Environmental Question 2: What ideas do you have and are excited about?*
 - **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper):
 - The primary opportunity for trash reduction is to pass a "bottle bill" law to cut trash pollution in half.
 - The modern CSO system is largely fine near the Anacostia, but other nearby jurisdictions have aging systems that impact District water quality.
 - Sea level rise is a threat to environmental health, which the Commission should consider. Future waterfront development should prioritize wetlands along shorelines to accommodate future conditions
 - District funding for bacterial water quality testing should be restored
 - **Comm. Gretch Mikeska** (DOEE) The Commission needs to discuss how to navigate tradeoffs, as the Anacostia River is such a small space that requires choices. (e.g. navigational dredging is necessary to improve recreational access, but can impact submerged aquatic vegetation)
- *Environmental Initial Goals*
 - Discussed that "resilience" is too broad of a term and needs rewording.

- **Breakout Discussions**

- *Boating and Recreation*

- Constraints, assumptions, unknowns and risks
 - Should assess these for each goal to better understand opportunities
 - The Commission needs to think about how they tailor strategies to address capacity. E.g. current available capacity for boat slips; degree to which dredging is needed to improve navigability for boats
 - Safety
 - Should add “safe” to goals 1 and 3
 - MPD Harbor Police have limited capacity to enforce laws on the waterways.
 - There was support for a centralized repository on safety standards, guidelines on best practices that go out to users, and rules of the road for how individuals interact. The group discussed two recent close calls.
 - There is a predictable pattern to commercial traffic, and to considerable extent power boat traffic, in the federally maintained buoy system.
 - Communication
 - Communication goes hand in hand with safety
 - There are consistently people in the Washington Channel using kayaks and there’s uncertainty around the type of instruction they are receiving. Rental and commercial operators – may need rental companies to better adhere to standards
 - There needs to be additional clarity of regulatory oversight and of what that looks like and how people understand it. For example, who has authority and where? And then who should be responsible for communicating what?

- *Environmental*

- Feedback on Goal 1: Reducing bacterial contamination of the waterways
 - Proposed change from “bacterial” to “reducing pollution” to encompass things like trash and sediment. There are four categories of pollution: sediment, bacterial, toxics, and plastics/litter.
 - Within bacterial contamination, identify that the purpose for reduction is to allow for swimming/fishing.
 - There has been substantial amounts of money that have been allocated over many years. The Commission will need a baseline amount of information to understand this dynamic and the resulting impacts.
 - Swimming and fishing are two activities the Commission could identify as more specific goals to hit their benchmarks.
 - The group requested additional details on what the framework of goals and strategies would be for the final output of the Commission.
 - *Feedback on Goal 2: Improving resilience along the waterways*
 - Consensus that the word “resilience” is too broad. Interpretations of resilience could include sea level rise, flood management, and stormwater, as well as dredging.
 - The District and federal agencies are not adequately planning for sea level rise.
 - There were questions about whether the goal defined resilience as maintaining the status quo or improving beyond it. If it is about improving the status quo, the follow-on questions are about what needs to be improved.
 - *Feedback on Goal 3: Restore aquatic vegetation, wetlands, and native fish and shellfish populations*
 - General agreement around this goal

- **Open Discussion**

- Expressed desire for expanded deployment of Natural Capital Solutions to improve river health and/or lessen the impact of the city and rivers users on the river itself was encouraged.

- There was discussion about the recent American Rivers Potomac River report and how to best respond. Commission members planned to discuss it offline.
- **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper): offered the use of his organization's boat after the May Commission meeting if it is near the area. The boat is free until 2:00 PM and could hold up to twenty people.
- **Adjourn**
 - Motion to adjourn by Trey Sherard
 - Motion seconded by Kristina Noell
 - Adjourned at 4:02pm