

Commission Meeting #3 Notes | District Waterways Advisory Commission

- **Call Meeting to Order**
 - The meeting was called to order at 10:10am.
- **Commission Logistics**
 - Motion for the adoption of the 2nd Commission Meeting minutes was made by Comm. Diane Groomes.
 - The motion was seconded by Comm. Ted Jutras (Capital Riverfront BID)
 - The motion passed unanimously by the Commission
 - Chairman Darryl Madden provided remarks.
 - DOEE legal counsel informed Chairman Darryl Madden that the ANC positions on the Commission must be filled by the acting Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner.
 - There is no new information on budget information for the District Waterways Advisory Commission.
 - Nomination for Vice Chair
 - There were two nominations: Comm. Trey Sherard and Comm. Melissa Bird. Each was given the opportunity to provide a statement of their candidacy.
 - Chairman Madden explained the voting procedure for the Vice Chair.
 - Votes were collected by paper ballot. Results will be announced at the next meeting.
- **Review Meeting Objectives**
 - HR&A presented on meeting objectives and focus.
- **Topic Areas**
 - **Coordinated Economic Growth**
 - HR&A presented slides on the coordinated economic growth topic.
 - **Chairman Madden** asked whether DMPED is responsible for cross-coordination between the District's large development projects.
 - **Sharon Carney** (HR&A) noted that the District's budget development and capital planning process, centrally administered by the Office of the City Administrator and involving all deputy mayors and clusters, is one mechanism that supports coordination of major developments from a planning and resource allocation standpoint.
 - **Gilles Stucker** (DMPED) explained that DMPED works within a cluster of organizations that coordinate across projects by considering the comprehensive plan and existing conditions, and described the weekly RFK meetings held with partners across multiple departments

and offices to coordinate planning, regulatory, and community engagement tasks.

○ **Economic Growth Discussion**

- Commissioner discussed guiding questions in small groups; then individuals shared takeaways from small group discussions with the full group.
- **Comm. Thomas Skinner** (Redbrick LMD) identified the limited share of privately owned river frontage (roughly 10 percent) as a fundamental constraint on maximizing economic development. He urged renewed focus on Poplar Point, noting that 20 years have passed since the 2006 legislation and that Poplar Point presents the first major opportunity for two-sided river frontage in DC.
- **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper) cautioned that maximizing near-term build-out risks erasing the waterway's original draw and leaving buildings without activation or space for the people they were meant to attract. He noted that development in the District has not adequately considered environmental needs, including submerged aquatic vegetation, which exists in only limited areas of the river but is important for the river's long-term health. On regulations, he suggested that identifying where and why gaps exist would be one of the Commission's most valuable areas to explore.
- **Comm. Rachel Clark** (R. Clark Consulting) observed that the District's limited ability to directly regulate land or develop the waterfront contributes to a disjointed, disconnected feel along the rivers, unlike cities where rivers are integral to everyday life. She noted that DC is not promoted as a city of rivers, that this identity is not part of how visitors or residents experience the city, and that many DC residents never visit the river. She called for stronger connections between the city and its waterfront, and asked which regulations are inhibiting growth opportunities beyond the land the District cannot itself develop.
- **Comm. Ryan Washington** (MWAA) discussed the expected development along the Anacostia River, particularly as the RFK campus comes online, and emphasized the importance of including airports in conversations about mixed-use and hotel waterfront developments given the potential for impactful noise factors. He raised the question of how the Commission can incentivize riverfront communities to act as stewards of the Anacostia and help keep the water clean and unpolluted.
- **Comm. Diane Groomes** (District Wharf) focused on the resources available to the District and how DC coexists with Virginia and Maryland. She observed that the District consistently directs resources toward land rather than water, and asked why the waterway is not being considered as a transportation solution for sites such as RFK.
- **Comm. Ebony Payne** (ANC 7D05) highlighted plans to site an 8,000-car parking lot directly on the waterway at RFK and questioned how the District plans for that kind of development long term, including how it reconciles with

the Commission's goals of protecting the waterway and serving the community.

- **Comm. Diane Sullivan** (NCPC) expressed hope that the Commission will take up sea level rise and support a coordinated effort along the waterfront, noting the need for coordination between federal and District governments on sea walls and building up the river banks.
- **Comm. Hootan Kaboli** (Events DC) emphasized that sustainability and environmental protection require dedicated funding, and that any asset requiring maintenance needs an associated revenue source or dedicated fund. He framed the District as being at a pivotal point in defining the purpose of waterfront development, whether primarily community benefit, a balance of community and economic benefit, or otherwise, and how to sustain those investments over time. Drawing on his current experience taking down RFK Stadium, he warned that failing to maintain assets results in costly consequences decades later, whether through abatement or hazardous conditions.
- **Comm. Jason Kopp** (Gangplank Slipholders Assoc) identified several economic opportunities tied to the waterway: dredging the Anacostia to make it navigable and address the CSX bridge, increasing District control of waterfront assets and property, expanding discourse on waterway access, and reassessing no-wake zones. He called for overall coordination across large segments of the waterway, suggesting that with established priorities for the Washington Channel and Anacostia, the District could comprehensively assess how each development project advances those priorities as they arise.
- **Comm. Riley Piva** (DPR) raised two priorities. First, she raised the need to ensure affordable and equitable access to the nature around the waters, noting that the District's low barrier to entry for recreation is one of its strengths and one DPR feels strongly about preserving. Second, she flagged a gap in long-term maintenance programming for new waterfront investments, emphasizing that projects activating the waterfront or addressing sea rise must address early on who maintains the infrastructure, how often, and how it is funded, given that waterway infrastructure degrades faster than typical land-based infrastructure. She recommended that this be reflected in the Commission's goals.
- **Comm. Michael Puglisi** (DC Fire) raised public safety concerns tied to current and proposed infrastructure. He explained that the Long Railroad Bridge project will restrict boater access to the navigable channel for the next five years and make it difficult for public safety resources to reach Georgetown, and that a proposed pedestrian bridge below the Long Railroad Bridge has a low air draft height that would significantly increase Harbor Patrol and Fire response times. More broadly, he noted that public safety has been treated as an afterthought on the waterway despite rising usage and a corresponding increase in 911 calls, and that the centrally located public

safety facilities on the Washington Channel are not well positioned to serve the growth occurring at RFK and Georgetown.

- **Comm. Andrew Horos** (MPD) described the post-pandemic rise in illegal charter activity on the waterways, noting that these charters are regulated by the Coast Guard and violate federal regulations at marinas and docks rather than District code, which is a significant loophole in District regulation. He also flagged the absence of MPD authority to remove abandoned vessels: a process existed previously but was missed when DCMR transitioned to DC code, leaving DC police without a mechanism to remove these vessels, which is a particular issue on the Anacostia River.
- **Comm. Nate Handy** (City Cruises) cited NPS data showing sea level rise of 3.3 millimeters per year over the last 40 years in the Potomac River (roughly four inches over the last 30 years) and shared that his 18-foot-tall boat can no longer transit a key bridge as frequently as it could three decades ago, which has harmed his business. He urged that bridges, seawalls, and other infrastructure account for continued sea level rise, and emphasized that any water transportation infrastructure serving RFK will require dredging, since the area behind the stadium is essentially a mudflat not navigable for anything larger than a canoe. Lastly, he spoke to the need to improve coordination between various waterways users.
- **Comm. Patrick Campbell** (NPS) highlighted that the National Mall and the George Washington Memorial Parkway are among the top 10 most-visited national parks in the United States, attracting visitors from around the world. He described NPS as a major tourism driver offering free or affordable access to numerous activities, and argued that NPS should be included in the Commission's conversations given its role in drawing people to the District.
- **Comm. Jorge Galindo** (Anacostia Community Boathouse Assoc) pointed to the Dragon Boaters' weekend festival as an example of a water-based event that draws people to the District, and recommended that the Commission consider how to bring more events on the water as a way to attract visitors.
- **Comm. Ted Jutras** (Navy Yard BID) stressed the importance of infrastructure investments to support not only future development but also existing development. He mentioned that lack of places to affordably “dine and dock” a la cantina marina. He also noted that the Anacostia River Walk Trail would benefit from unified wayfinding and a more cohesive user experience. Some segments were built privately, some publicly and often are in various states of repair.
- **Comm. Thomas Skinner** (Redbrick LMD) identified the increased interest from the White House in the District as one of the biggest untapped opportunities to advance these projects.
- **Comm. Col. Angelique Nelson** (Joint Base Anacostia Bolling) (via WebEx chat) observed that while the District has strong waterfront nodes such as The Wharf and Navy Yard, the broader system remains fragmented, under-

connected, and under-programmed, and that DC's water taxi network is still limited. She suggested that mixed-use zones combining retail, recreation, and light commercial uses could increase foot traffic and revenue, and that seasonal markets, floating stages, rowing events, and heritage tours could drive year-round economic activity. On environmental needs, she recommended incentivizing private sector activity near the waterway to enhance compliance. On regulations, she noted that overlapping control of the shoreline by the District, NPS, USACE, and regional authorities slows permitting and discourages private investment.

- **Public Attendee [Anonymous]** (chat comment): Spoke on the need for recreation access opportunities and for thoughtful outreach to communities east of the Anacostia River in wards 7 & 8 to ensure recreation opportunities are distributed equitably.
- **Public Attendee Robert Schwartz** (chat comment): There should be short term goals – like addressing illegal charters – given that much of the discussion has focused on long-term goals.
- **Public Attendee Marian Dombrowski** (chat comment): **Undeveloped, natural land in the middle of city is a rare resource.** Given that much of the waterfront is public land, thought should be given the setting aside land in the upper Anacostia and being strategic about how Poplar Point is developed to ensure we maintain natural areas.
- **Infrastructure and Use of Public and Private Property Discussion**
 - HR&A presented slides on the topic of infrastructure and use of public and private property; then Commissioners discussed.
 - **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper) cautioned that FEMA's floodplain maps are based on historic trends rather than future projections of higher sea levels, and urged care to avoid building infrastructure that will cost the District in the future, noting that today's high tide mark will be permanently inundated by 2080.
 - **Comm. Gretchen Mikeska** (DOEE) shared that attendees at the Anacostia River Festival did not realize their DC water bill has funded major infrastructure investments such as the Anacostia Tunnel, and were unaware of what has been done or what is planned beyond RFK. She called for broader public education about existing and future infrastructure investments.
 - **Comm. Rachel Clark** (R. Clark Consulting) observed that investment has not been spread evenly across park spaces, and asked how the District can position parks as an economic driver.
 - **Comm. Thomas Skinner** (Redbrick LMD) emphasized the high cost of infrastructure and called for more thoughtful consideration of how to finance improvements, noting that the District cannot afford to do everything it wants and must be deliberate about identifying the beneficiaries of any investment.
 - **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper) noted that many cities are spending millions to restore floodplains and create greenways or blueways,

while the District is uniquely positioned with many miles of seemingly natural river. He pointed out that Maryland's section of the Anacostia River is designated as a State Scenic River and recommended that the District work with Maryland to pursue national scenic river recognition for the Anacostia. He also urged the District to protect the green space near the river as a major attraction and to promote it more actively to the public.

- **Comm. Gilles Stucker** (DMPED) recommended that the Commission's recommendations include measures of cost, timing, economic benefits, and environmental benefits so that decision-makers can weigh those factors and identify priorities. He emphasized the importance of a more comprehensive approach to executing action items.
- **Comm. Col. Angelique Nelson** (Joint Base Anacostia Bolling) (via WebEx chat) identified shoreline resilience, public access infrastructure, and stormwater and sewer modernization, particularly along the Anacostia, as the highest-value infrastructure priorities, along with modernized seawalls, docks and piers, trails, and riverfront connections. She described the Anacostia as having the most untapped potential, especially north of RFK and around federal land where access is limited. For the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens Corridor, she recommended adding small docks, boardwalks, and educational stations; for Poplar Point, she recommended improving pedestrian connections at the South Capitol Street corridor and creating new river overlooks.

○ **Goals Discussion**

- HR&A presented draft goals for both topics – economic growth and infrastructure/use of public and private property – and invited Commissioner feedback.
- **Chairman Darryl Madden** observed that the largest landholders along the waterfront are public entities, and questioned whether the Commission's focus should be framed as public/private or public/public. He asked whether the District could make greater use of the space it already owns rather than undertaking a wholesale review of the infrastructure itself.
- **Comm. Riley Piva** (DPR) flagged that parks are missing from the draft goals, noting that most waterfront space is park space in need of enhancement and expressing concern that, without explicit inclusion in the goals, park space risks being developed. She recommended that the Commission focus on enhancing existing parks, leveraging them for economic development, and protecting natural resources.
- **Comm. Jason Kopp** (Gangplank Slipholders Association) explained the importance of having the necessary equipment and vehicle to transport equipment in order to access and use public docks, and noted that this access is currently at a deficit in the City.
- **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper) suggested that providing steel storage racks is one of the best ways to reduce the need for people to bring a car to the waterfront, citing six-plus-month waiting lists at the two existing

rack locations on the Anacostia as evidence of guaranteed demand. He described racks as a low-cost solution that would also support a District market for watercraft sales and rentals, and noted that either the city or a private entity could manage them.

- **Comm. Gretchen Mikeska** (DOEE) emphasized the important role that “Friends Of” groups play.
- **Comm. Ebony Payne** (ANC 7D05) identified a tension between increasing tourism and serving communities, and emphasized the importance of communicating to District residents the reasoning behind development decisions and their associated economic costs.
- **Comm. Trey Sherard** (Anacostia Riverkeeper) warned that as sea level rises, currently dry sewer lines will become submerged, and because sewer lines often leak, they will contaminate the waterways. He recommended that the District relocate sewer lines uphill wherever possible.

- **Meeting Schedule & Next Steps**

- Next meeting will be virtual on June 25.
- There will be a field trip on May 28th hosted by FEMS / Harbor Patrol. Commissioners who would like to attend should contact DOEE.
- Chairman Darryl Madden reminded Commissioners to share the survey with their networks and to turn in their Vice Chair ballots.

- **Adjourn**

- Comm. Ebony Payne (ANC 7D05) motioned to adjourn the meeting.
- Comm. Jason Kopp seconded the motion to adjourn.
- The meeting was adjourned at 12:00pm.