

**Rock Creek Park**  
**Upper Beach Drive**  
**Management Plan / Environmental Assessment**  
**PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENT REPORT**

**July-August 2021 comments**

**Public Comment Period**

As part of the NEPA process, the NPS involved the public in project scoping by holding a 45-day public comment period from July 8, 2021 through August 22, 2021. The scoping period and virtual meeting were announced by sending a scoping letter and email blast to agencies, stakeholders, and other potentially interested parties from a mailing list established for the Project. Scoping flyers were also distributed to 29 residences close to the Project site. Project materials were posted on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website included the virtual public meeting presentation and a video recording of the July 8<sup>th</sup> public meeting. Written comments could be submitted via the PEPC website or mail.

**Description of Scoping Meeting**

A virtual public scoping meeting was held on July 8, 2021 to present a range of alternatives for potential changes to northern Beach Drive NW, including an alternative for no change. The public meeting was held from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. via Microsoft Teams. Approximately 250 attendees, including NPS staff, participated in the virtual meeting ([link](#) to video recording).

The public meeting included a formal presentation given by NPS followed by a discussion where meeting attendees were provided an opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback on the proposed Plan, and share issues, concerns, and ideas. The presentation addressed the following:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Meeting Purpose
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)
- Project Background
- Proposed Concepts
- Schedule
- How to Comment

## Summary of Comments

A total of 2,421 pieces of correspondence were received from the public, organizations, and other interested parties. A piece of correspondence is considered the entire document received from a commenter. This includes letters, e-mails, comments entered directly into PEPC, voicemails, and any other written comments provided by postal mail. Within the 2,421 pieces of correspondence, a total of 4,147 individual comments were identified. Those comments were reviewed and grouped by topic or category centered on a common subject. A summary of comments received is presented below.

Commenters provided comments in several general topic areas related to the impact of the proposal and alternatives on visitor use, physical or mental health, wildlife and wildlife habitat, and park management and operations. Issue areas included visitor use or experience, cultural and natural resources, transportation management, and safety. While there was many who expressed support for Concept 2: Full Closure for Recreation, others raised concerns about access, visitor experience and traffic issues that could result from a full closure.

### *Visitor Use*

Visitor use comments ranged from considerations for visitors with mobility impairments, access for all, number of users by user group, impact of COVID-19 on work schedules, and the many types/frequencies of activities visitors enjoy in the park. Many commenters questioned the appropriate use of parkland. The comments covered the following general themes:

- Flat ground allows those with mobility devices, wheelchairs or strollers to use the closed portion safely and in a way that natural trails can't accommodate
- Permanent closure would limit access for those with mobility impairments or those without stamina
- Post-pandemic work schedules will allow for more telecommuting, less commuting, and more opportunity to enjoy midday weekday recreation
- People returning to work means less people use it on the weekdays
- The road is already empty of recreational users during the weekday commute times
- The number of drivers outweigh the number of recreational users
- Weekend/holiday recreation use is an appropriate compromise
- Road users are commuters as well as residents driving for childcare, medical appointments, etc.
- Driving through the park is an important park use
- Driving Beach Drive is a wonderful activity and a fun time for out-of-town visitors
- Parks should be for people, not cars
- People of all ages, races, and abilities recreate on Beach Drive every day
- Walkers and bikers have the existing trails, so they don't need Beach Drive for weekday use
- Beach Drive rehab was for cars, huge taxpayer investment for vehicle usage
- Accessibility and access for people with disabilities is important
- Continued closure will benefit a small number of users and discriminate against those who are elderly or disabled
- If the park is for the enjoyment of all, not everyone owns a bike. Not everyone can walk or run.
- The closure combines healthful exercise with scenic beauty

### *Health*

Both motorized and non-motorized users commented about the mental health benefits of traversing through the scenic parkland. Other commenters noted the physical benefits of utilizing the closed section.

- Safe outdoor recreation provides opportunities for physical activity and improves mental health
- Concept 2 supports human, wildlife and environmental health
- Space to spread out to recreate is beneficial for families with children who cannot be vaccinated yet
- Taking a peaceful drive is good for mental health

### *Resources: Cultural and Natural (including Wildlife)*

Commenters noted environmental benefits of the closure, such as allowing animals a more natural habitat experience, while others noted that air pollution is removed from the park but moved to other areas of the city.

- The closure allows for the natural experience of seeing deer, hearing the bubbling creek and rustling trees
- The closure has increased the number of animals that can freely live in their habitat and increased safety for them
- The closure encourages use of alternative transportation and supports climate change goals
- Noise and air pollution is improved within the park due to the closure
- The benefits to the environment, wildlife, and community recreation far outweigh the traffic impact.
- Air pollution is worse in the neighborhoods because of the gridlock the closed road creates

### *Traffic*

Commenters mentioned impacts of Concept 2 on the surrounding neighborhood streets, main arterial roads and the resulting safety implications. Concept impacts on emergency response were also noted. Many commenters mentioned the uncertainty of a post-COVID world on work schedules and commuting patterns.

- Closing Beach Drive permanently will negatively impact surrounding neighborhoods when vehicular traffic is diverted to local streets
- Cut through traffic impacts safe neighborhood access to school bus stops
- The current closure with car access limited to local access works well
- Traffic impacts of closing Beach Drive will be compounded with the ending of reversible lanes on Connecticut Avenue
- The road is closed currently, and traffic is not a problem so a permanent closure would not result in bad traffic
- Cross traffic and picnic area access is most important for cars, through traffic isn't needed
- Beach Drive is an essential artery and opening the road will reduce traffic on neighborhood streets
- Gridlock impacts emergency response times so Beach Drive should be reopened

- Traffic studies should be conducted post-implementation of 16<sup>th</sup> Street dedicated bus lane
- Changes should not be made until there is better understanding of post-covid traffic patterns
- If the road stays closed, there will be a safety problem on Blagden as traffic will increase

### *Safety*

Many commenters recognized the increased safety benefits the closure had on recreational users, allowing for differing skill levels to utilize the park, while others noted unsafe conditions.

- Heavy car traffic on Beach Drive precludes safe bike riding on the shared facility
- With the road closed, young and/or new recreational participants have ample space to learn without fear of cars
- With the closure, visitors use Beach Drive to bike places safely, instead of driving
- Cars have multiple north-south options, bicyclists do not have many safe options
- Large groups recreating together create an unsafe situation for other users

### *Other Proposed Concepts*

Many commenters provided suggested options beyond Concept 1 and Concept 2.

- Open the road to vehicles only during the weekday, morning & afternoon rush hours
- Close one lane for recreation permanent and reverse one lane each way. Towards DC in the morning and away from DC in the evening.
- Close the road in the midday for recreation
- Add a parallel trail or bike lane for recreation
- Open the road to vehicles seasonally, e.g., October – April when it is too dark to recreate
- Expand closure to allow for recreation 3-4 days/week
- Expand the closure for recreation to include Monday/Friday
- Continue to close Ross Drive
- Include DC holidays in recreational closure, in addition to federal holidays
- Allow carpool access only

### *Park Management and Operations*

Commenters noted the park's mission to protect resources and provide recreational opportunities while raising the issue of enforcement.

- It is counter to the park's mission to have a commuter route running through it
- The Park should focus on park issues and leave traffic management to the District of Columbia and other public streets
- If the road is reopened, there should be increased enforcement of vehicle speed, safe passing distance and no commercial vehicles
- Concept 2 is consistent with historic plans and management of the park