

Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Historical Park
South Carolina



Visitor Use Management Plan | Winter 2023–2024 Newsletter

Introduction

The National Park Service is seeking public input to better understand issues and opportunities to improve the visitor experience at Fort Sumter, Liberty Square, the Fort Moultrie Military Reservation, and the US Coast Guard Historic District. The plan is in the early stages of development, and the National Park Service needs your help identifying key issues and potential management strategies.

About the National Park Service

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The National Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world. The National Park Service is a bureau within the Department of the Interior and manages more than 400 park units that comprise the national park system. Administration of park units occurs in many ways, from traditional units that are federally managed to non-traditional units that rely on partnerships and may have little, if any, federal landownership.

Park Overview

Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park managers are moving forward with a Visitor Use Management plan that will shape the visitor experience and management direction of the park in the future. The park is located southeast of Charleston, South Carolina, near the entrance of Charleston Harbor.

The park consists of four geographically separate areas: (1) Fort Sumter, an island fort situated at the entrance of Charleston Harbor; (2) Liberty Square, an urban greenspace in downtown Charleston that is home to the Fort Sumter Visitor Center and the primary park owned tour boat facility for trips to Fort Sumter; (3) Fort Moultrie Military Reservation (including Fort Moultrie, the Fort Moultrie Visitor Center, other points of interest, and park headquarters), located 11 miles from Liberty Square on Sullivan's Island; and (4) the US Coast Guard Historic District, including Charleston Light (also known as the Sullivan's Island Lighthouse) and the park's maintenance facility.

The purpose of the plan is as follows:

- improve visitor experience and universal access at Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park;
- provide general planning direction for the US Coast Guard Historic District;
- and ensure that park resources and values remain protected.

The impact of climate change on resources and visitor use patterns will also be addressed, given the park's especially sensitive coastal location, and ways to reduce the vulnerability of resources to climate change impacts will be explored. The plan will help ensure that visitors of every background can see themselves in the stories preserved and interpreted. The plan will also guide the creation of high-quality visitor experiences at all stages of the park visit, including in pre-arrival resources, at ferry departure location(s), and onsite at Fort Sumter, Fort Moultrie Military Reservation, and the US Coast Guard Historic District.

Finally, the plan will support operational decisions to ensure that all sites are open and sufficiently staffed to support visitor use.

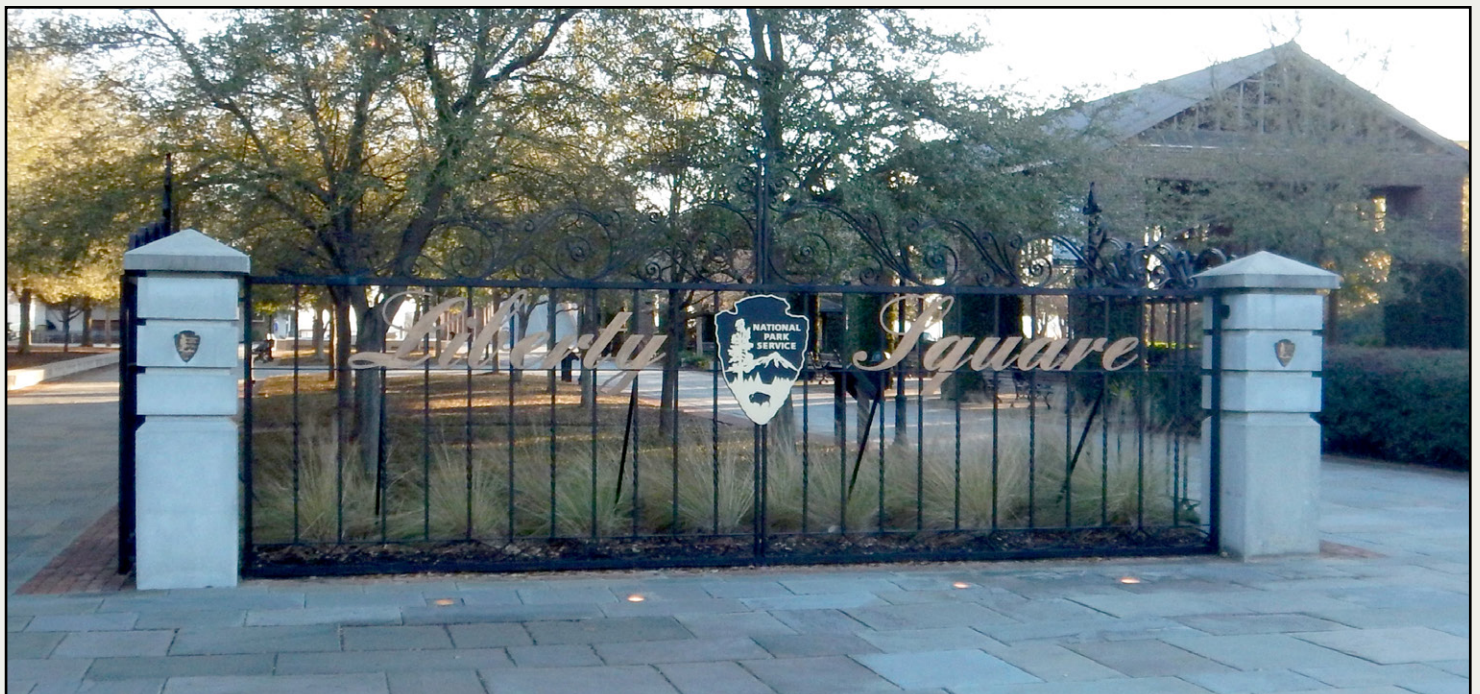
This plan is needed to provide visitors with meaningful and informed experiences, protect natural and cultural resources, and supply future planning and management guidance to sites within the park.



The plan will also help inform the development of a prospectus for a concession contract that provides access to Fort Sumter, as the current contract expires in 2029.

The park is in the early stages of this planning process and engaged in developing key issues and potential management strategies for this plan. The plan will align with guidance from the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council to develop desired conditions, establish indicators and thresholds, and identify visitor capacity to meet the legal requirement of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978. An environmental assessment is being considered per the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970.

The final plan and compliance document will take approximately 2.5 years to complete and is planned to be released in fall 2025.



The park's primary comprehensive planning guidance comes from its 1998 general management plan and a 2003 amendment. These documents provide important guidance regarding resource protection, managing visitor use, and commercial services. This plan will build on and complement this past guidance and provide additional direction and strategies specific to the key issues presented below.

This plan seeks to address issues and improve conditions in three key topic areas:

- **Visitor Access, Opportunities, and Experiences at Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie**

In the past, visitor use has been heavier at Fort Sumter than at the Fort Moultrie Military Reservation. Visitors are less aware of opportunities at Fort Moultrie Military Reservation to go to the visitor center, tour and enjoy the fort and Battery Jasper, and experience the surrounding area. The current ferry operations at two departure points and lack of NPS presence at one departure point result in an incomparable interpretive experience between departure points. Overall, these constraints result in a degraded visitor experience. Further, during the summer, high temperatures, humidity, and limited shade and water access threaten visitor comfort and safety while at Fort Sumter.



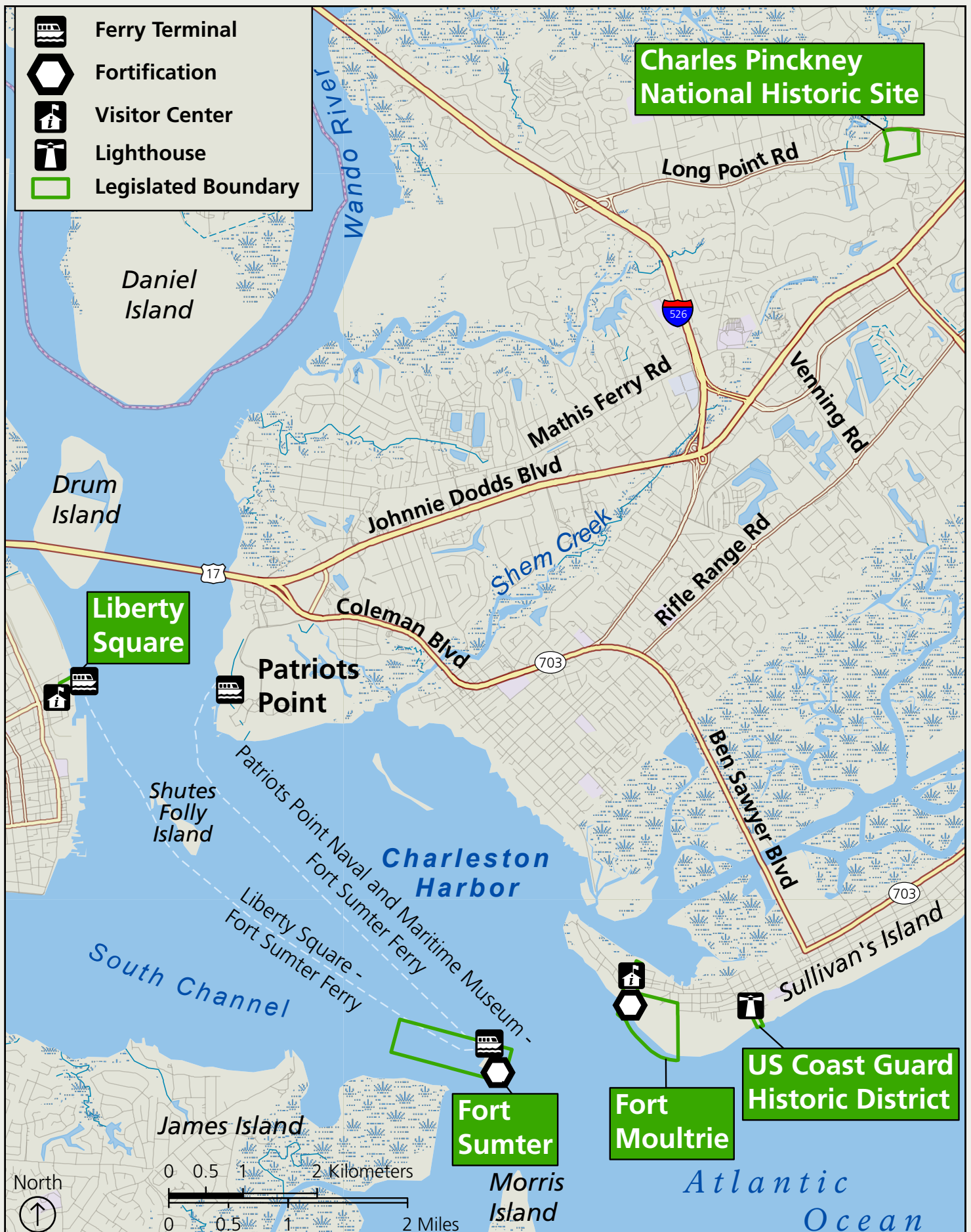
- **Management Direction and Strategies for the US Coast Guard Historic District**

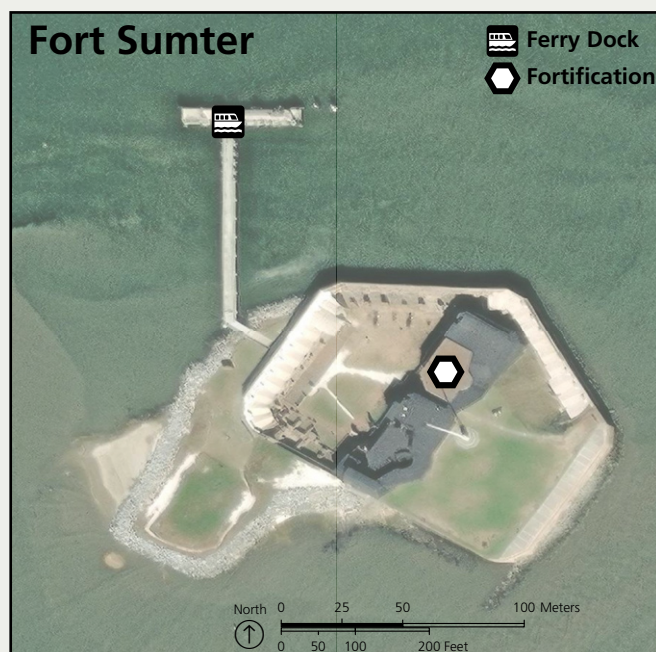
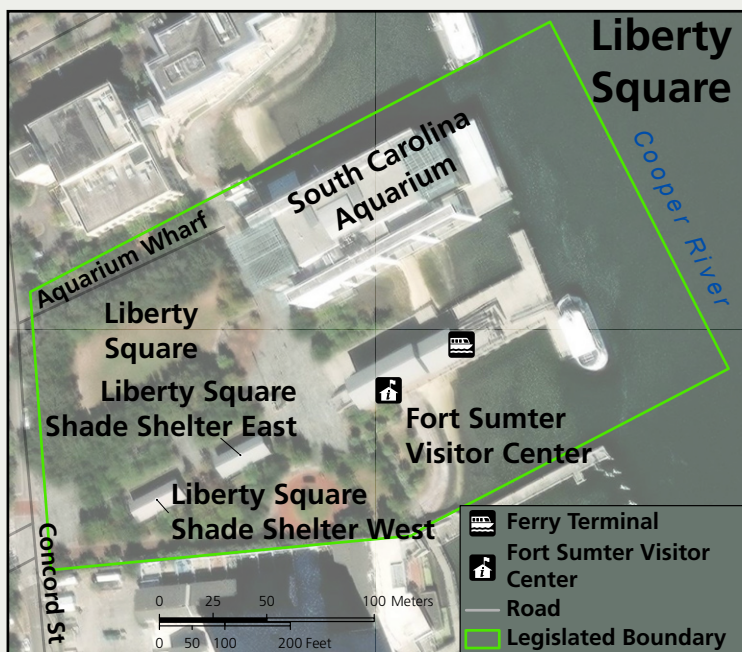
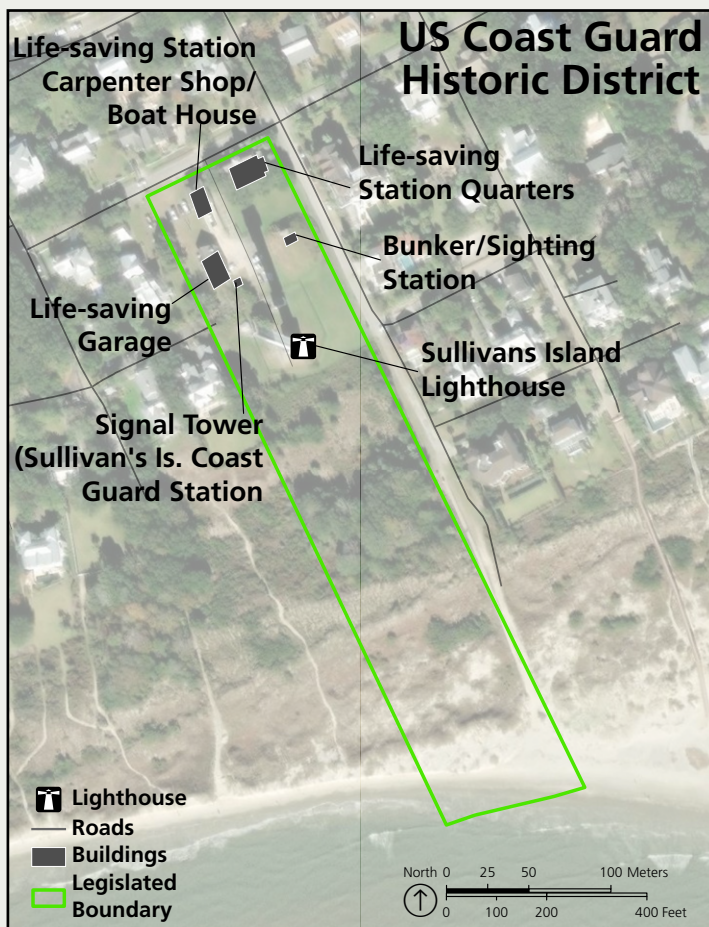
No planning guidance currently exists for the US Coast Guard Historic District, which includes four historic buildings and the Charleston Light. The lighthouse, a historically popular attraction and the only lighthouse with an elevator in the National Park Service system, is in poor condition and closed to public access. There is minimal park presence in the district and no visitor services.

- **Cultural and Natural Resource Protection, Climate Change, and Universal Accessibility**

Preserving and protecting the history and fundamental resources within the site is key to the park's legislative mandate. Impacts on these resources must be considered in all potential management actions, particularly those related to visitor access and climate change conditions for resource protection and visitor use patterns. This plan is needed to address resource protection issues, develop monitoring protocols for visitor impacts and climate change, and implement treatment recommendations to preserve the park's resources.

Finally, many park resources and experiences lack accessibility for people with varying abilities. While not able to address all issues related to accessibility, this plan will prioritize improving accessibility to visitor experiences throughout proposed strategies and actions. Additionally, Charleston Light is believed to be the only US lighthouse equipped with an elevator. While the lighthouse elevator is currently inoperable, park staff are seeking funding for rehabilitation. This planning effort provides an opportunity to identify goals for universal access within the lighthouse, a unique opportunity to provide a universally accessible experience for visitors.





The planning team has identified initial management strategies that would address the purpose and need for the plan, as well as the key issues described above. The following management strategies (shown in table 1) are presented by key location and would be

implemented regardless of which preliminary concept (from the selection shown in table 2) park staff select for implementation. The concepts illustrate various ways in which park staff can package strategies together for implementation.

Table 1: Potential strategies under consideration that would be implemented in conjunction with any of the preliminary concepts (A, B, and C) on page 7 of this newsletter.

Location	Initial Management Strategies Being Considered	
Parkwide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a toolbox of management strategies to address visitor safety and resource threats from sea level rise, as well as increased frequency and intensity of storm events. Create universally accessible interpretive opportunities at site locations, such as including closed captioning on all multimedia, providing American Sign Language interpretation, adding Braille code where possible, and exploring new types of tours for visitors with different abilities. Explore an alternative fee structure for Fort Sumter, Fort Moultrie Military Reservation, and Charles Pinckney National Historic Site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve connectivity between site locations by working with tourism partners and improving marketing strategies across the park sites and Charles Pinckney National Historic Site, which is administratively connected to Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park. Evaluate opportunities to provide transportation between the Fort Sumter Visitor Center and Liberty Square, Fort Moultrie Military Reservation, and the historic district.
Fort Sumter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revisit the number of ferry departure locations and ensure a consistent experience for visitors. Reconsider the timing of ferry departures and arrivals, as well as the Fort Sumter visit duration for visitor safety, visitor experience, interpretive programming, and resource protection. Reevaluate gift shop locations to support efficient operations in a way that reflects or complements NPS values and policies. Consider alternative access options, such as seasonal access only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-envision the Fort Sumter museum exhibit space by removing artifacts at risk of damage or destruction from climate change impacts and severe weather events, updating exhibits to align with contemporary standards and audiences, and exploring opportunities to improve visitor safety, comfort, and education by installing seating areas and providing interpretive programs.
US Coast Guard Historic District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the US Coast Guard Historic District for visitation and rehabilitate the Charleston Light. Work with the Town of Sullivan's Island to develop a multiuse trail connecting Fort Moultrie Military Reservation to this historic district. Provide passive interpretation (e.g., waysides and brochures) of the site and park ranger or volunteer presence as able to open certain buildings and structures for active interpretation, tours, and programming. Retain park maintenance operations and periodically provide interpretation of the preservation work that occurs at this location. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete reports and plans that would guide opportunities for installing exhibits in the lighthouse, opening the lighthouse to the public, and working with the US Coast Guard for ongoing maintenance of the light. Complete a site plan for the district with development to support visitation and interpretive goals for the site. Include information about the historic district at the Fort Sumter Visitor Center and Fort Moultrie Visitor Center.
Fort Moultrie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete a facility planning effort to decide how to rehabilitate or reconstruct and better utilize the visitor center. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve accessibility of the whole site for visitors with limited mobility.

To explore the options that would address the need for the plan, the National Park Service has begun to group the potential management strategies into distinct, reasonable, and feasible preliminary concepts. During grouping, three different themes emerged specifically regarding the management of Fort Sumter.

These three different themes informed the creation of three preliminary management concepts. While the management strategies listed in table 1 would be implemented across all preliminary concepts, the following table provides details on the three preliminary concepts that would specifically inform the management of Fort Sumter.

Table 2: Preliminary concepts under consideration to address the issues identified and accomplish the plan’s purpose and need. These may be further developed and refined pending feedback received during this comment period.

Location	Preliminary Concept A	Preliminary Concept B	Preliminary Concept C
Ferry Departure Points	Offer one year-round ferry departure point at the Fort Sumter Visitor Center at Liberty Square.	Offer two year-round ferry departure points: one at the Fort Sumter Visitor Center at Liberty Square, and the second location to be determined.	Offer two ferry departure points. Year-round departure point would be at the Fort Sumter Visitor Center at Liberty Square. Second location, to be determined, would operate seasonally.
Ferry Schedule	Increase the frequency of ferries traveling between the Fort Sumter Visitor Center at Liberty Square and Fort Sumter. Frequency and timing of boats may vary by season.	Retain the frequency of ferries traveling between ferry departure points and Fort Sumter (approximately every hour) year-round.	Offer a seasonal variety of trip lengths and types from the Fort Sumter Visitor Center at Liberty Square and the second departure point to Fort Sumter.
Fort Sumter Visitor Center (Liberty Square)	Remove the gift shop at Fort Sumter and retain the gift shop at Fort Sumter Visitor Center at Liberty Square.	Remove the gift shop at Fort Sumter and add a National Park Service gift shop with a cooperating agency at a second departure point.	Retain the gift shop at Fort Sumter in current location or move the gift shop to the re-envisioned museum area.



From January 16, 2024, to February 15, 2024, please provide your feedback on the key issues, potential management strategies, and preliminary concepts found in this newsletter. Please consider the following questions when responding:

1. What issues most interfere with your ability to access and experience the park? Are there issues that have not been identified that the planning team should address in this plan?
2. How would a change in the number of departure points impact your visit to Fort Sumter?
3. How would these ideas (changes in year-round access, location of departure points, change in services offered, etc.) influence your visit to Fort Sumter?
4. Are there other strategies not already presented that you would like the park to consider in order to address the identified issues?

We will be seeking public review and comments on the potential management strategies and preliminary concepts from January 16, 2024, to February 15, 2024. Submit comments to and check for project updates on the project website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FortSumterVUM>. Comments must be submitted to the project website to be considered.

If you would like to be added to our email contact list, please contact Brett Spaulding, Chief of Interpretation, at brett_spaulding@nps.gov or 843-732-5006.

Please join us at a virtual public meeting! Two identical meetings will be held at the following times:

February 1, 2024, at 3:00-4:30pm

February 1, 2024, at 6:00-7:30pm

Links to the meeting may be found on the project website listed above and by scanning the QR code.



Planning Process and Timeline

The National Park Service is in the second phase of a three-phase planning process. The anticipated schedule for project milestones and opportunities for public input are as follows:

Phase 1 (Spring 2023–Fall 2023)

- Define purpose and need for the project
- Develop key issues and potential management strategies

We are here

Phase 2 (Winter 2023–Summer 2024)

- Request public input to inform plan development
- Explore potential strategies based on public and stakeholder feedback
- Develop indicators and thresholds and visitor capacity analyses

Phase 3 (Summer 2024–Fall 2025)

- Refine strategies and draft plan
- Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act
- Public review of draft plan
- Finalize plan

Thank you for your interest in the Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park Visitor Use Management Plan!