



East Potomac Park can be a beautiful extension of the National Mall for residents, workers, and visitors to enjoy active recreation, leisure, commemoration, and peaceful solitude.

East Potomac Park



Aerial view of East Potomac Park

Objectives and Strategies

East Potomac Park Objective:

Establish East Potomac Park as an easily accessible destination in Washington's iconic landscape with expanded opportunities for recreation, active play, leisure, commemoration, and celebration in a setting of scenic beauty that showcases environmental stewardship.

Primary Strategies

- Establish multiple connections between the city and East Potomac Park to improve access for visitors arriving by foot, bicycle, boat, and car.
- Establish East Potomac Park as a premier destination offering areas for passive and active recreation, leisure, commemoration, and celebration.
- Eliminate infrastructure barriers that impede access and consume valuable park land.

RISING FROM THE MUD FLATS

East Potomac Park is a relatively recent addition to the Washington landscape; in the early years of the city it was an area of tidal marshes. As upstream forests were cut and agricultural activity increased, the Potomac River deposited greater amounts of silt around the developing city, soon making parts of the river impassable to boat traffic. Eventually the stagnant mud flats, “the Potomac Flats”, became a breeding ground for disease-bearing mosquitoes and a significant barrier to maritime commerce.

In 1875, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers dredged the river, re-opening it to navigation and reclaiming two tracts of land totaling more than 600 acres. The southerly tract was the island of East Potomac Park, which was separated from the shoreline by a deep channel, and the northerly tract was West Potomac Park. Between these two tracts was a tidal basin with gates to separate the river and the channel and to regulate the fluctuating tides. Today approximately 80 percent of East Potomac Park lies within the 100-year floodplain.

In 1897 Congress dedicated East Potomac Park, ordering that it be “forever held and used as a park for the recreation and pleasure of the people.” Improvements to the park eventually followed: cherry trees were planted, a roadway around the island was constructed, and wild growth was cleared for a golf course. By 1925 the entire park was being used for recreation purposes.

Massive bridge construction took place between 1947 and 1970. Today, five bridges, carrying traffic between Arlington, Virginia, and Washington dominate the north end of East Potomac Park: three four-lane vehicular bridges, a Metrorail bridge, and a railroad bridge. The 25-acre National Park Service’s regional headquarters building and maintenance yard is also located in this area of the park, as well as the U.S. Park Police’s administrative unit, and the Tourmobile’s office and bus maintenance facilities.

Approximately 275 acres of the island are used for recreation. Three golf courses offer convenient, affordable play. The public swimming pool is widely used in the summer, and the tennis courts draw about 11,000 players annually. About 15 acres of open green space occupy the southern tip of the park. A walkway follows the entire perimeter of the park along the water. Ohio Drive, which parallels the wa k, provides vehicular access.

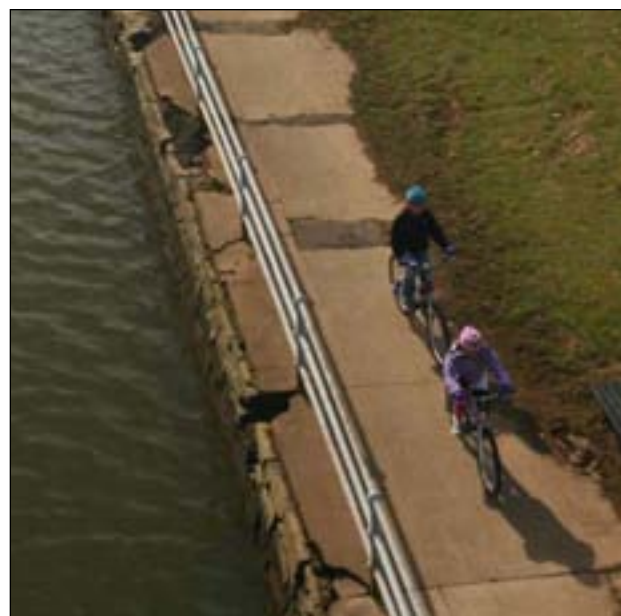
Congress strengthened its support for the park’s use as a place for recreation and leisure when it amended the Commemorative Works Act in 2003 to prohibit construction of museums in the park.



East Potomac Park is reclaimed land, a result of river dredging in the 1870s.



Courtesy DC Public Library at the Washington Post, Starr Collection



High tides, periodic flooding, and crumbling seawalls are an unsightly hazard.

AN UNDERVALUED ASSET

Located only a few minutes from the heart of the capital and offering over three miles of uninterrupted shoreline and unobstructed water vistas, East Potomac Park is an asset whose potential is under-realized.

Although the park is about 330 acres, approximately one quarter is consumed by bridges, roads, offices, parking lots, and maintenance yards. While the golf course occupies about 65%, less than a tenth of the island is available for active and leisure recreation. Use of the clubhouse-pool complex is limited and their public space poorly designed.

The maze of bridges that cross the island hems in the Jefferson Memorial, robbing it of the expansive setting it deserves. The tangled road network is confusing, making it difficult for pedestrians, cars, and bicyclists to reach the park, and there is no bus or train service.

Courtesy of the District of Columbia Government, copyright Pictometry International

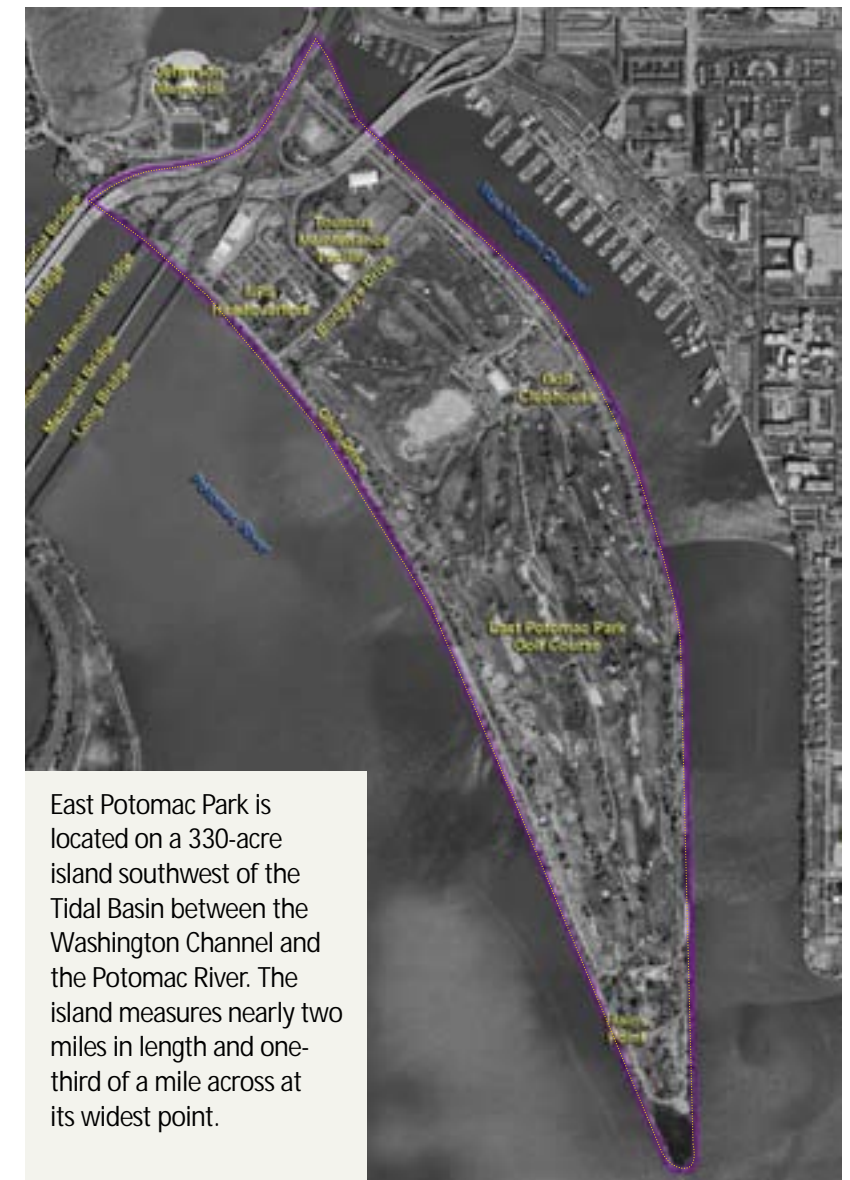


An expanse of roads and rail lines sever East Potomac Park from the National Mall.



Access is currently available only from the northern end of the park, an area choked by bridge and road infrastructure. Even boat movement around the park is problematic. Boats traveling from the head of the Washington Channel to Georgetown are required to slowly navigate through the no-wake zone, a trip that can take up to an hour.

Furthermore, as reclaimed land, East Potomac Park is slowly sinking and its seawalls are crumbling. A 1950s hydrology study found that the island had sunk three and a half feet since it was first created. Today, high tides and flooding frequently submerge the seawalls. Good stewardship calls for limited and sensitive development within the 100-floodplain.



East Potomac Park is located on a 330-acre island southwest of the Tidal Basin between the Washington Channel and the Potomac River. The island measures nearly two miles in length and one-third of a mile across at its widest point.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMEMORATION, CELEBRATION, AND RECREATION

Located at the edge of a dense urban center, East Potomac Park is a precious scenic landscape. The park offers untapped potential to relieve pressure on the historic and fragile open space of the National Mall that is increasingly overwhelmed with demands for large public gatherings, active sport fields, everyday recreation, and new memorials. East Potomac Park could become a new Washington destination that provides residents and visitors new opportunities for waterfront recreation and celebration in a setting that respects and preserves the scenic landscape.



Current view from East Potomac Park looking towards the Jefferson Memorial

East Potomac Park can be a new destination for national celebration.

MICHAEL MCCANN

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE CITY AND EAST POTOMAC PARK

A ceremonial canal, new pedestrian and vehicular bridges, and water taxis can significantly improve access to the park and could be designed as visitor attractions themselves. Eventually, a new Metro station near the Jefferson Memorial would vastly improve access to East and West Potomac Parks, and the Southwest Waterfront.

A New Canal: Linking the Southwest Waterfront to the Potomac River

A new canal, more than 200 feet in width, located in the vicinity of Buckeye Drive could connect the Washington Channel to the Potomac River, creating a signature feature in the landscape of the park and serving as a ceremonial maritime gateway to a reinvigorated Southwest waterfront. With this canal, boat traffic will no longer be required to navigate around Hains Point, significantly reducing travel time to and from the Georgetown waterfront. Water taxis, plying the channel and making use of the canal, could provide an important link between East Potomac Park, the Southwest Waterfront, the new baseball stadium, the National Harbor, Alexandria, Georgetown, and other destinations.

New Channel Crossings: Linking the City to East Potomac Park

Rerouting boat traffic from the channel to the new canal will allow improved connections to the park via three low-scale

bridges over the Washington Channel from the southern portion of the city. At 6th Street, SW, a small two-lane bridge with sidewalks would provide a vehicular and pedestrian connection to link the active area of the park to the urban activities of the Southwest Waterfront and M Street. At P Street, a new pedestrian bridge would provide an inviting connection to the quiet, bucolic portion of the park. At the south end of the park, a new boardwalk constructed across the water and at an appropriate distance from the shoreline around Fort McNair could connect Hains Point to the Anacostia Riverwalk. Not only could this connection increase the perimeter security for Fort McNair, it would also close the gap along the Riverwalk, providing a system of uninterrupted trails, boardwalks, and waterfront promenades now being developed between Georgetown and the U.S. National Arboretum.

Jefferson Memorial Metro Station

A new Metro station in the northern portion of East Potomac Park would serve multiple destinations in West and East Potomac Parks, including the Jefferson and FDR Memorials, recreational facilities, new commemorative and festival spaces, and the new Southwest Waterfront. To make this station possible, the elevated Metrorail bridge would be replaced with a tunnel under the Potomac River. Some of the infrastructure for such a tunnel is already in place, provided by the Washington Area Metropolitan Transit Authority when the system was constructed in anticipation of the potential replacement of the bridge. Placing the Metrorail's tracks below ground will also remove what is now a significant visual and physical intrusion into the scenic beauty of the park.

Aerial view of East Potomac Park



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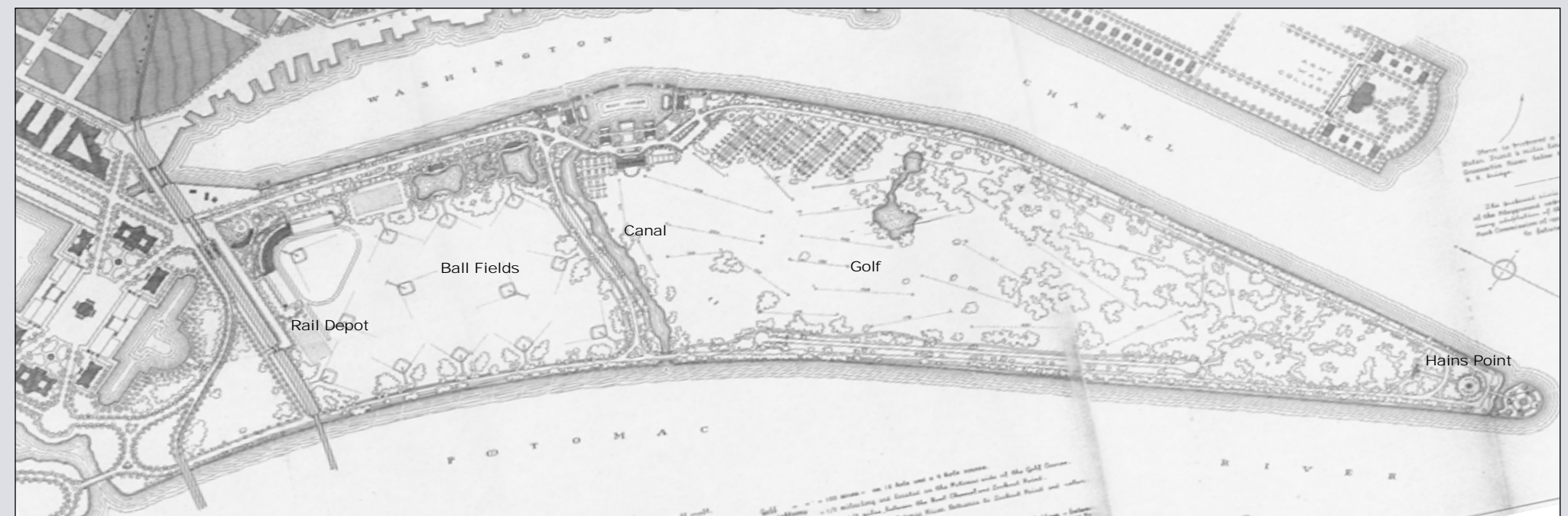
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A new Metro station, water taxis, and new pedestrian and vehicular bridges will make East Potomac Park more accessible

1916 East Potomac Park Plan

Improving access and recreation opportunities in East Potomac Park has been on the drawing board for nearly a century. Many of the ideas that appear in the National Capital Framework Plan are also found in a 1916 detailed plan prepared by Colonel William W. Harts, officer-in-charge of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. To improve access, the plan extended the city's streetcar lines into the north portion of the park, and a canal connected the Washington Channel with the Potomac River. Colonel Harts also saw the canal as a way of separating "the quiet from the noisy sports." Playing fields and courts of all types; a golf course, bathing pools, and a parade ground were proposed.

Like the Framework Plan, the 1916 plan includes a formal and dignified landscape at the extreme north end of the park, today the location of the Jefferson Memorial. It also treated Hains Point as a destination that takes advantage of its bucolic setting at the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers.





COURTESY OF HOFFMAN STRUEVER WATERFRONT, LLC.

A Vibrant Urban Waterfront for Southwest Washington

Across the Washington Channel from East Potomac Park the Southwest Waterfront is poised for a dramatic revitalization. Soon, a vibrant new neighborhood of homes, shops, restaurants, parks, and marinas will occupy the 47-acre waterfront site. The quieter recreational and natural waterfront of East Potomac Park will serve as a pleasant counterpoint to the animated, urban experience of the new Southwest Waterfront.

Overseeing the creation of this new community is the city's Deputy Mayor for Economic Development. Current plans call for approximately 540 market-rate residences and 230 affordable housing units; a 600-room hotel; 14 acres of parks and promenades; cultural and educational spaces; and neighborhood retail such as a gourmet grocery, restaurants, and shops.

Groundbreaking for the first projects along the Southwest Waterfront is expected in 2010. Phase 1A is scheduled for completion in 2013.

EAST POTOMAC PARK AS A PREMIER DESTINATION

East Potomac Park offers extraordinary opportunities as a re-imagined Washington destination: a prestigious location near the National Mall, extensive acreage, more than three miles of shoreline, sweeping vistas, and a unique setting for active recreation and peaceful solitude.

Potomac Harbor, a New Waterfront Destination

The Washington Channel can become a dynamic new destination. New low-scale, one to two story, development along a small segment of the park's northern shoreline would create a sense of entry into the park. It also would add interest, provide visitor services and indoor recreation, and complement the urban development planned for the Southwest Waterfront.

The city's recreational and visitor needs could be greatly enhanced by providing new water-oriented activities, indoor recreation facilities, outdoor cafes, and visitor services, while the city's plans for vibrant living, entertainment, shopping, and dining would be provided across the channel to the north.

This concentrated development area could potentially be constructed on piers along the edge of the park. A well-designed waterfront esplanade with new pedestrian bridges crossing the channel would create a continuous walkable loop and an exciting destination that offers a range of uses and amenities.



The lively urban waterfront on the north side of the Washington Channel will complement the quieter recreational spaces on the south side.

Potomac Park Esplanade

The sinking walkway that edges the perimeter of the park could be raised, widened, and redesigned to reduce the impacts of periodic flooding and to create a beautiful, elegant, and welcoming esplanade. The scenic beauty of the esplanade would be enjoyed by those choosing to stroll, fish, read, and picnic, as well as reflect on the meaning of a memorial. Bikers and skaters could also enjoy the views and breezes along a parallel path. Slightly realigning a portion of Ohio Drive along the Potomac River side of the park will allow a segment of the linear park to be expanded for more water-oriented open space and a location for restrooms and food service. Collectively, these uses along the esplanade would provide a memorable visitor experience.

To support the return and health of wildlife habitat and to manage water and pollutant runoff, the seawalls along the southern end of the Washington Channel could be removed entirely and a marshy riparian edge and wetland ecosystem could be reclaimed. This green, quiet space would be accessible by boardwalks and provide passive and interpretative experiences. This natural edge would offer visitors a welcome respite from the intense urbanization across the channel and the more formal edge along the Potomac River.



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Improved esplanade along the Potomac River

Wetlands boardwalk along the southern portion of the Channel



EDAW



Land bridge at north end of the Channel



EDAW



Aerial view of Hains Point

Memorials

With its sweeping open spaces and unparalleled water views, East Potomac Park could serve as a highly sought-after setting for several memorials ranging in scope and magnitude. Hains Point on the southerly tip of the park is only one of the island's striking commemorative sites. As proposed in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan, several other sites

punctuating important locations along the esplanade could offer locations for small-scale and medium-scale commemorative opportunities. When East Potomac Park is linked to the rest of the city by easy transit and pedestrian connections, with new visitor services, renewed park landscape, and its own unique identity established, memorial sponsors will find these commemorative sites desirable.



A: Section of East Potomac Park between Tidal Basin and the Washington Channel

When it's Time to Replace the Bridges: New Opportunities Abound

Today, as the three vehicular bridges leading into Washington approach the city, they merge and split into two bridges over the Washington Channel. The Metro line enters a tunnel in the park, and the railroad line passes over the park and peels off to the northeast along the right-of-way of Maryland Avenue toward the U.S. Capitol. Pedestrians can enter the park along the Tidal Basin walks or from a walkway across the I-395 Bridge.

At the end of the useful life of the existing bridges, when it makes more sense to replace them rather than continue to repair them, the bridges should be redesigned to respect this important gateway. Consolidating, tunneling and realigning the bridge infrastructure could have numerous benefits. It will eliminate the bottleneck at the north end of the island and improve pedestrian safety and access to the park. Most notably these bridge improvements will significantly enhance the setting for the Jefferson Memorial, create a new iconic festival space, and provide more multi-purpose recreation opportunities. Establishing a park-like land bridge between the Tidal Basin outlet and the Washington Channel would create a formal park entrance and a pleasant way for pedestrians to move seamlessly between the park, the National Mall and the new Southwest Waterfront development.

When it is time to replace the three existing bridges, the Arland Williams Bridge (14th Street Bridge), the Rochambeau Bridge and the George Mason Memorial Bridge, one new bridge could serve traffic destined for downtown. A second new bridge could serve traffic headed to other parts of the city and beyond.

The new alignment would require the driver approaching the city from the south to make a decision when on the Virginia side of the Potomac River to either take the new 14th Street Bridge or the new Interstate Bridge.

The local 14th Street Bridge would cross the river and land in East Potomac Park, becoming part of the local street grid. It could then tunnel under the Tidal Basin outlet near the Washington Channel, emerging at the foot of 14th Street, north of Maine Avenue. This alignment would allow cars to access Ohio Drive within East Potomac Park with a direct route to 15th Street, a new F Street and Maine Avenue, and to merge into the grid of the city north of the Washington Channel along 14th Street.



Potomac River crossings: bridges and tunnels

The I-395 Interstate bridge would enter a tunnel within East Potomac Park and travel under the Washington Channel. Its northbound lanes would connect to the existing 9th Street tunnel and the existing Southeast/Southwest Freeway (beneath the 10th Street Overlook). The existing 12th Street tunnel would feed into the bridge's south-bound lanes. These new connections would require the traffic flow along 9th and 12th Streets to be reversed from their present conditions.

A replacement passenger rail bridge would parallel the 14th Street Bridge, and be constructed over the park, entering the city at its existing location at the western terminus of Maryland Avenue.



Aerial view of Jefferson Memorial festival space

A Dramatic Setting for the Jefferson Memorial: A Festival Green

When the Potomac River crossings are tunneled and reconstructed, an appropriate setting for the Jefferson Memorial can be established, the beauty of the scenic landscape restored, and the recreation area to the south expanded. Most notably, the setting for the Jefferson Memorial would also serve as a national civic space suitable for public assembly, festivals, and celebrations. This 25- to 35-acre outdoor gathering area could become a new landmark in Washington's monumental landscape. With the Jefferson Memorial and Washington Monument as a dramatic backdrop, this ceremonial destination could become one of America's great iconic settings recognized throughout the world.

Expanding Recreation and Play: Golf, Throw Ball, Run and Climb!

Within the northern portion of East Potomac Park, the recreational opportunities and use of the park can be greatly expanded by realigning and consolidating the highway and rail bridges, relocating the National Park Service's regional offices and reapportioning a small part of the golf course.

The golf course could be redesigned to make the best use of valuable parkland and showcase state-of-the-art environmentally sustainable practices that could improve water management and runoff, provide habitat for local wildlife, and decrease the need for pesticides. Even with expanded space for additional recreational facilities in the park, an efficiently redesigned golf course could potentially accommodate one regulation 18-hole and one executive 18-hole (par 3) course. The club house and pool complex could be expanded to include recreational equipment rental and a new two-story community facility to house a dining hall or multi-use space for residents or visitors. This facility could be designed to take advantage of the bucolic views of the golf course and stunning setting of the Washington Monument in the distance.

In addition to the existing tennis courts, this 25- to 45-acre outdoor recreation area could be used for multi-purpose and regulation ball fields and possibly a skateboard park. Additional indoor recreation, such as rock climbing, a roller rink and other sports facilities could be accommodated in the proposed development along the park's northern shoreline.

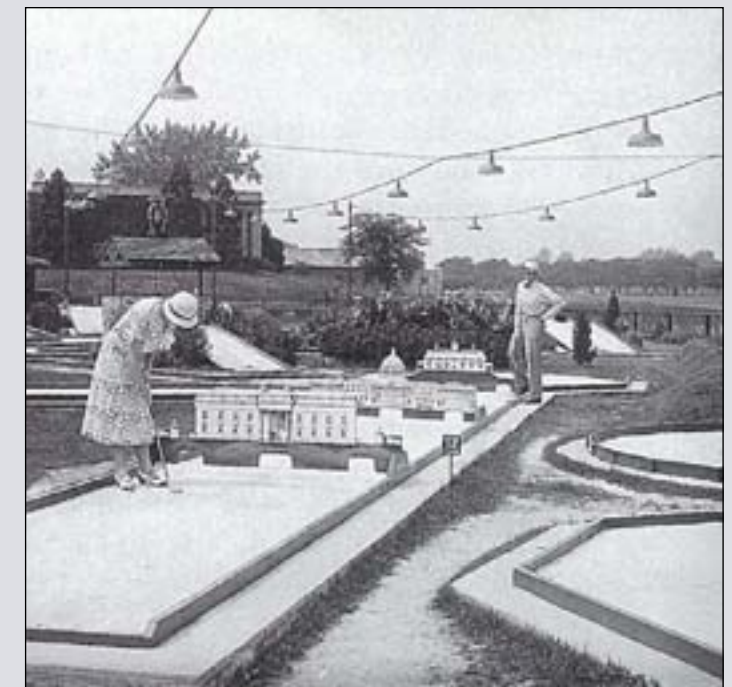
Relocation of the National Park Service's Regional headquarters to another part of the city, and relocation of the vehicle and maintenance facilities within the park, would be necessary to make room for the new festival and recreation space. The maintenance facilities could be accommodated between the newly aligned highway and rail bridges, in an area that can be adequately screened from view, yet easily accessible from the National Mall. These new permeable surfaces would also help improve stormwater runoff into the river.



View of new Jefferson Memorial festival space

"Puttering around" the Nation's Capital

What if the East Potomac Park miniature golf course was returned to its former glory? The course was constructed in 1931 by S. G. Leoffler, the managing concessioner. It is considered to be the longest continuously operating miniature golf course in the nation. It is a contributing historic site in the East and West Potomac Park Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The original decorative putting hazards (including three-dimensional models of the White House, U.S Capitol, and other attractions) are long gone, but the 18 holes are still played.



Kiplinger Washington Connection, Joe Roberts Photographer



Destinations and Connection Opportunities

Key East Potomac Park Improvements

- Establish multiple connections between the city and East Potomac Park to improve access for pedestrians and people visiting by bicycle, boat, and car.

- Construct a canal between the Washington Channel and the Potomac River.
- Construct a land bridge at the Tidal Basin outlet, a two-lane vehicular bridge at 6th Street, and pedestrian bridges at P Street and at Hains Point.
- Build a new Metro station in East Potomac Park.

- Establish East Potomac Park as a memorable destination offering passive and active areas for recreation, leisure, commemoration, and celebration.

- Develop a portion of the Washington Channel shoreline for visitor and recreation activities.
- Develop a beautiful waterfront esplanade and reclaim wetland habitat along portions of the park shoreline.
- Establish waterfront memorial sites, including a site for a pre-eminent memorial at Hains Point.
- Establish a magnificent setting for the Jefferson Memorial and a space for a range of public gatherings.
- Redesign the golf course and expand the club house and recreation opportunities south of the new canal.

- Eliminate infrastructure barriers that impede access and consume valuable parkland

- Consolidate, tunnel, and realign portions of the three vehicular bridges that cross the park.
- Reconstruct a new passenger rail line to parallel the vehicular bridge.
- Construct a Metrorail tunnel under the Potomac River to the new East Potomac Park Metro station.

