



Potomac Park Levee Project FACT SHEET

Project Description

The Potomac Park levee structure is located at the east end of Constitution Gardens parallel to the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. The levee crosses 17th street to connect with the Monument Grounds. During a storm event, this levee provides protection during a flood event by using a combination of sandbags and soil (i.e. an earthen dike) to create a closure wall along 17th Street.

Background

FEMA began a nation-wide map modernization program to update and digitize floodplains. Areas that were preliminarily identified as being located with flood-prone areas include:

- the Federal Triangle Area of downtown
- portions of the National Mall area and numerous museums that line the Mall area between 4th and 7th Streets
- Other public and private facilities that extend into Southwest, DC along 3rd Street, SW
- Many private residences in the community of Capital Park and others southward along 3rd Street to the intersection of P and Canal Street, SW

Recent changes in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidelines require a more reliable closure alternative in this location to provide flood protection solution for a storm event.

Current Status

The District of Columbia requested FEMA consider a delay in issuing the new floodplain maps in March, 2008 in order to perform the necessary engineering analysis that may either substantially reduce the unprotected area, or more importantly, provide an interim solution with the necessary protection during a storm event. FEMA agreed to delay the implementation of the final issuance of the maps until November 2009, when construction of the interim levee solution would be completed. Part of this agreement requires the District and the affected federal agencies to meet several interim deadlines and demonstrate adequate progress in designing and constructing a viable flood protection solution.

Interagency Coordination

The following agencies are working together on the Potomac Park Levee Improvement Project:

For the District of Columbia:

Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development
Office of Planning
State Historic Preservation Office
District Department of the Environment
DC Water and Sewer Authority
Washington Area Metropolitan Transit Authority

For the federal government:

United States Army Corps of Engineers
National Park Service
National Capital Planning Commission
General Services Administration
Commission of Fine Arts

Known Challenges:

A. Multiple Jurisdictions: The responsibilities and jurisdiction for addressing flooding in the District are complex, especially related to the National Mall and the Downtown area. The federal government is the largest developer, tenant and property owner in downtown DC. The National Park Service maintains the Potomac Park Levee and is the land manager of the National Mall. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has design and construction responsibility for the Flood Protection system and annual inspection authority over federally authorized levee projects, of which the Potomac Park Levee is one.

B. Local Impacts to Community: Without a reliable flood protection solution in place, every building/property owner located within the mapped area is at risk for flooding. There are approximately 110 single-family homes, 116 multi-family buildings and 2.3 million square feet of potentially unusable ground floor commercial space at risk for flooding. The financial impact to private property owners located in the flood risk area will be realized through additional insurance requirements and upgraded building standards.

C. Federal Interest Impacts: FEMA's proposed floodplain maps include a large portion of the monumental core. The impacts to federal interests are substantial. The two primary requirements of federal facilities constructed within a floodplain are: a) compliance with Executive Order 11988 to avoid floodplain impacts, and b) adherence to more stringent building codes. Both of these requirements would result in substantial costs to upgrade existing facilities by relocating power and air handling systems above the base flood elevation. There are a number of building modernization projects currently in development that would be affected by the new floodplain maps. The federal areas at risk for flooding include essential executive and legislative functions critical to national security. Unless a reliable levee system is in-place, these government operations are at risk.

The NPS will (in the interim of more reliable interim or permanent solutions) erect the designed closure structure that has been part of the levee system design for 70 years.

D. Engineering Alternatives: Potential engineering solutions to correcting the levee closure deficiency that have been used in other municipalities include increasing the height or grade of the levee, raising the height of the roadway, post and panel structures, and a combination of sandbags/jersey barriers. During the development of the engineering alternatives, the design will consider the feasibility of maintaining the centerline of the existing levee. The development of the interim flood protection solution will inform the permanent solution, which would be designed and constructed when federal appropriations are received to complete the project.