

# Cape Hatteras Lighthouse Repair and Landscape Improvement Project

## Public Scoping Letter September 17, 2021

Cape Hatteras National Seashore is requesting public input for the development of an Environmental Assessment (EA) for a project to repair the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse and improve the surrounding landscape.

### Background

Construction of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, the tallest brick lighthouse in the United States, was completed in 1870. It served to guide mariners for 151 years around the hazards surrounding navigation off Hatteras Island, including the shallow and shifting sands of the Diamond Shoals. In 1937 the light station was transferred from ownership by the U.S. Coast Guard to the National Park Service. In 1978, the Cape Hatteras Light Station was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Light Station was one of the first and one of the most important links in the lighthouse chain along the Eastern seaboard and the Lighthouse was the primary navigational aid for mariners rounding the treacherous Diamond Shoals. As an additional level of historic recognition, in 1998, the Lighthouse, Principal Keeper's Quarters, Double Keeper's Quarters, and Oil House were listed as contributing to the National Historic Landmark (NHL)-listed Cape Hatteras Light Station. According to the significance statement in the NHL, the construction of the Light Station is directly associated with federal government efforts to provide an integrated system of navigational aids and to provide for safe marine transportation from the late 1800's through the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The lighthouse and surrounding landscape features originally embodied certain architectural features – termed “character-defining elements”, such as pediments above the lighthouse windows, fences around the Lighthouse and Keepers' Quarters, and a Fresnel lens. These, along with other historic features that convey the Light Station's association with the past (including structures and circulation patterns), have been lost or removed over time. In 1949, the historic Fresnel lens was removed from the lighthouse after it was vandalized and is now on loan from the Seashore to the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum. The harsh coastal environment has led to deteriorated materials within the lighthouse and the addition of modern elements no longer reflects the Lighthouse's historic integrity.

In 1999, the lighthouse was moved 2,900 feet southwest from its original location, due to shoreline erosion. The route used during this transition is known as the “move corridor.” The Seashore is responsible for maintaining the historic lighthouse tower, while the US Coast Guard owns and operates the modern automated lighthouse beacon, which continues to serve as an active aid to navigation.

## Project Objectives

The objective of this project is to rehabilitate and restore interior and exterior elements of the National Historic Landmark lighthouse and its character-defining features. This restoration and rehabilitation include repairing or replacing deteriorated materials and finishes, and selectively removing modern, non-sympathetic treatments (vinyl fencing, grates over windows, exposed utility conduit) added after the historically significant period following the lighthouse's construction (1870-1936), known as the "period of significance." Additionally, the project purpose includes providing a more immersive visitor experience by improving circulation and opportunities for visitor education around the light station landscape and buildings while considering ways to improve the resiliency of the Light Station and grounds.

Examples of missing character defining features and nonconforming modifications to the lighthouse include:

- the original first order Fresnel lens and pedestal are missing from the Lighthouse lantern room
- there are missing pediments above windows
- the original decorative cast iron fence around the Lighthouse has been replaced with a vinyl fence
- interior wooden doors are missing from the Lighthouse
- there is no longer a fence around the Keepers' Quarters
- modern metal grates have been installed over some windows

Heavy visitation to the site in combination with limited formal pedestrian walkways has resulted in visitors walking across the landscape surrounding the lighthouse, trampling vegetation to the point of wearing down to the soil in the lawn and along the edges of the single paved walkway. Visitors arriving at the site are not provided a clear circulation route along which to visit the site, which results in visitors walking off the established path and perhaps not understanding the role of the principal and double keeper's quarter, the function of the entire light station, and the opportunities afforded by visiting the Museum of the Sea.

## Key Issues

This project is being initiated to help resolve the following key issues at the lighthouse and adjacent landscape:

- Metalwork, paint, masonry, mortar, stone flooring, steel, and windows have degraded over time and need repair or replacement. Additionally, the current light beacon is a modern feature and does not utilize the original historic Fresnel lens.
- The existing circulation patterns are not well-defined and result in visitors wandering across the landscape, which causes patches of bare soil in the lawn. There is also limited shade in the open landscape and a shade structure is needed to accommodate waiting lighthouse climbing groups.

## Preliminary Alternatives

The NPS has developed three preliminary alternatives for rehabilitation and restoration of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse and associated landscape improvements.

### Alternative A: No Action

No changes would be made to the Lighthouse, site circulation, or landscape elements/vegetation. The existing rotating light beacon would remain (and may be replaced by the US Coast Guard with an updated LED modern beacon in the foreseeable future), and the historic Fresnel lens would remain on display at the museum.

### Elements Common to all Action Alternatives

- Restoring and rehabilitating the Lighthouse and Oil House to remove non-historic features and replace historic elements. Other proposed actions include:
  - repairing, repointing, or repainting damaged masonry,
  - repairing or replacing marble floor tile,
  - removing corroding metal and refabricating metalwork,
  - removing degraded paint and re-painting,
  - restoring missing doors and window pediments,
  - removing the shade canopy on the Oil House, and
  - stabilizing and restoring the Oil House.
- Adding replica stockade fencing around the Keepers' Quarters to mimic the landscape of the early historic period and restore historical integrity.
- Adding interpretive elements, such as educational displays around the landscape, to describe the story of the lighthouse move and other significant historic, cultural, or natural resources within the project area.

### Alternative B: Improvements to Landscape and Lighthouse Lens

Under this alternative, lighthouse rehabilitation actions would include the elements referenced above and circulation improvements would be added to the landscape. Key elements include:

- new pedestrian paths that connect site features,
- plantings and landscape restoration towards a more natural landscape, and
- reproduction and installation of the original Fresnel lens and replacing the existing modern beacon (the original Fresnel lens would continue to be preserved by the Seashore as a museum object).

### Alternative C: Comprehensive Improvements

Under this alternative, lighthouse rehabilitation actions would include the elements referenced above and circulation improvements would be comprehensive. Key elements include:

- creating a new pedestrian circulation loop throughout the site to connect site features and circulate visitors throughout the site from a new northern path,
- adding a shade pavilion, positioned outside the primary landscape, to accommodate waiting lighthouse climbing groups,
- sculpting gently raised berms to restore the natural landscape, and
- partially or completely restoring the original Fresnel lens and reinstalling with a new modern light source.

Please provide us with your thoughts on the issues and preliminary alternatives and let us know if there are other actions we should consider.

## Meeting Information

As part of the public scoping process, the NPS will host two meetings: one in-person meeting and one virtual meeting via webinar. The public is invited to attend these meetings to learn more about the project scope, issues, and alternatives; ask NPS representatives questions; and provide comments. Public scoping comments will be considered during development of the EA under the National Environmental Policy Act and an Assessment of Effect under the National Historic Preservation Act. Please see below for additional meeting information:

### Meeting 1 (in-person)

- September 28, 2021 from 6-7pm.
- Auditorium, Cape Hatteras Secondary School
- For everyone's safety, the following COVID-19 mitigations will be implemented:
  - In-person attendance is limited to the first 50 persons. Seating available on first-come, first-served basis. Please RSVP to secure seating by sending an email to [caha\\_public\\_affairs@nps.gov](mailto:caha_public_affairs@nps.gov). In the email, provide your first name, last name and how many guests will attend with you.
  - Masks must be worn inside the building.
  - Seating will be six feet apart.

### Meeting 2 (virtual)

- September 29, 2021
- 6-7pm
- Please tap or click the link to join the webinar: <https://bit.ly/cape-hatteras-light-station-virtual-meeting> (note: *all lowercase*, if typing)
- Or if you are having issues with link above, head to <https://zoom.us/join> and enter  
*Meeting ID: 850 3201 0917*  
*Participant ID: 743130*
- If you prefer to call into the meeting, dial: (301) 715-8592 and use  
*Meeting ID: 850 3201 0917*

## How to Comment

There are three ways to submit comments:

- **In person.** Attend the meeting on September 28, 2021 and submit your comments via comment card.
- **Electronically.** Submit your comments via the NPS's Planning, Environment & Public Comment (PEPC) website at [https://parkplanning.nps.gov/caha\\_lighthouse](https://parkplanning.nps.gov/caha_lighthouse)
- **By mail.** Mail or hand-deliver written comments to park headquarters at:  
Superintendent  
Cape Hatteras National Seashore  
1401 National Park Drive  
Manteo, NC 27954

All written comments must be postmarked, and all electronic comments must be submitted no later than October 17, 2021. The deadline for submitting comments will be posted on the project website.

*Comments will not be accepted by fax, e-mail, or any other way than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.*

If you would like more information or have questions related to this project, please contact Mark Dowdle at [mark\\_dowdle@nps.gov](mailto:mark_dowdle@nps.gov) or (252) 475-9031. Thank you for your interest in shaping the future of the Cape Hatteras Light Station!