
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Designation Case No. 14-19

The Rock Creek Valley Historic District

Federal Reservations 308A, 339, 356, 402, 432, 433, 545, 563, 630 and 635

Meeting Date: November 20, 2014
Applicant: National Park Service (owner)

Affected ANCs: 1D, 3C, 3F, 3G, 4A, 4C¹
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Rock Creek Valley Historic District amendment to be entered in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites. The HPO further recommends that the Board approve the National Park Service’s forwarding of the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places with a Period of Significance from 1791 to 1972, and with additional Periods of Significance for archeological resources from 3000 to 600 B.C.E. and from 1740 to 1800 C.E.

Background

The Rock Creek Park Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1991 under National Register Criteria A, B, and C, with a period of significance from 1791 to 1941. This nomination—the Rock Creek Valley Historic District—is an amendment to the Rock Creek Park Historic District and proposes an increase in the historic district boundaries, an expanded Period of Significance, and the inclusion of National Register Criterion D.

As described in the 1991 registration form, the core of the Rock Creek Park Historic District is the creek itself and the picturesque scenery surrounding it. As defined in the nomination, the historic district boundaries conform to the boundaries of Public Reservation 339, including approximately 1,429 acres of natural forest growth and 310 acres of developed areas, namely recreational facilities, roads, trails, structures, and sites. Public Reservation 339 consists of the original tract of land set aside as Rock Creek Park by Congress in 1890, along with the addition of Piney Branch Parkway. The boundaries of the historic district are roughly defined as 16th Street to the east, Oregon Avenue and Broad Branch Road to the west, Klinge Road to the south, and the District line and Parkline Drive to the north.

The Rock Creek Valley Historic District amendment expands the existing historic district boundaries to capture nine connector reservations that are part of Rock Creek Park today. Each of the connector reservations is adjacent to (both contiguous and non-contiguous) and leads into Reservation 339. These tributary park extensions follow natural and constructed features, including stream valleys and roads, providing natural buffers leading into Rock Creek Park.

¹ These are the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions that border on or include the areas proposed for designation and amendment.

These connector pieces were added to Rock Creek Park between ca. 1913 and 1950 as park planners sought to protect the park's natural scenery, improve access, add resources such as circulation networks and trails, and protect the environmental quality of the park. In particular, during the 1920s as officials began to fear that development in Rock Creek Valley would degrade the watershed and the park itself, the acquisition of parkland became a major objective. As such, these connector reservations are integral to the history of Rock Creek Park and support the Park's significance as a historic cultural landscape.

The connector pieces included within this amended nomination are: Reservation 356 (Klinge Valley Parkway); Reservation 402 (Soapstone Creek Valley); Reservation 432 (Beach Parkway); Reservation 433 (Blair Portal); Reservation 308A (Parcel containing Peirce Springhouse); Reservation 545 (Pinehurst Parkway); Reservation 635 (Woodley Park); Reservation 630 (Melvin Hazen Park); Reservation 563 (Portion of the north side of the Zoological Park.)

In 1976, an administrative reorganization formed under several planning bodies including the National Capital Park Commission, later renamed the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission brought these bordering reservations into the Rock Creek Division of the National Park Service's (NPS) National Capital Parks.

One anomaly in the 1991 Rock Creek Park Historic District involves Reservation 308A. The nomination included Reservation 308A (land upon which the Peirce Springhouse sits) within its boundaries, erroneously listing it as part of Reservation 339. The amendment nomination includes Reservation 308A under its proper designation and thus corrects that mistake.

The amended nomination also expands the district's Period of Significance. The nomination includes archeological sites with a period of significance of 3000 to 600 B.C.E. and C.E. 1740 to 1800 and it expands the park's existing (1791 to 1941) period of significance to 1972. The new periods of significance represent the contribution of Rock Creek Park's archeological sites in understanding prehistoric settlement, colonial tenant farming, Civil War battlefields and sites, and African-American tenants. Further, the expansion of the existing period of significance reflects the inclusion of the park's continued development as a historic cultural landscape, including improvements made following World War II and under the federally sponsored Mission 66 and Parkscape U.S.A. programs of the NPS from 1956 to 1972.

In terms of designation criteria, the 1991 registration form described the historic district as architecturally and historically significant under National Register Criteria A, B, and C with architectural and historic qualities and associations related to nine Areas of Significance. This amended nomination expands the discussion of five of these nine Areas of Significance: *community planning and development, conservation, landscape architecture, architecture, and entertainment/recreation*. The additional information has been added primarily to acknowledge Rock Creek Park's importance as an evolving cultural landscape.

This narrative recognizes Rock Creek Park as significant under Criterion D for *archeology*. Rock Creek Park contains evidence of human interaction with the environment from pre-history through the present day. An archeological survey of Rock Creek Park conducted between 2003 and 2007 identified 51 archeological sites, including quarries, Native American camp sites, colonial farmsteads and mills, 19th-century dwellings and Civil War sites.

Evaluation

The Historic Preservation Office concurs with the findings of the National Park Service that the Rock Creek Valley Historic District amendment meets National Register Criteria A, B, C, and D for the established Periods of Significance for the reasons stated above. In addition, the nomination meets D.C. Designation Criteria A (Events), B (History), D (Architecture and Urbanism), F (Creative Masters), and G (Archeology) for those same reasons.

The Period of Significance of the Rock Creek Valley Historic District amendment extends from 1791 to 1972, with two additional Periods of Significance for archeological resources from 3000 to 600 B.C.E. and 1740 to 1800 C.E. The 1972 end date corresponds with the creation and evolution of bridle and foot trails, and the construction of the Park Road Tennis Courts, developed as part of the Mission 66 program to improve the park's recreational resources.

The Rock Creek Park Valley Historic District retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and sufficient time has elapsed to allow for an appropriate historic perspective.