
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Glover-Archbold Park/Foundry Branch Trestle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	4301 Canal Road, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	May 24, 2018	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
H.P.A. Number:	18-297	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
		<input type="checkbox"/> Conceptual Design

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) proposes to raze the historic streetcar bridge known as the Foundry Branch Trestle. This structure, which was constructed in 1896 and is the last remaining structure of its kind in the District of Columbia, is a contributing element of the Glover-Archbold Park Historic District, a district which listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places.

Glover-Archbold Park / Foundry Branch Trestle

Glover-Archbold Park consists of more than two hundred acres of “urban forest” that were donated to the public in the early 1920s by Charles Carroll Glover and Anne Archbold. The park falls under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service (NPS). According to the National Register nomination, the Foundry Branch Trestle is one of only four cultural resources in the park. This structure was constructed as part of Washington’s vast streetcar network, specifically for the Washington & Great Falls Electric Railway Company’s streetcar line that connected Georgetown to Cabin John, MD from approximately 1897 to 1962.

Background

The trestle appears to have been abandoned since streetcar service was terminated. WMATA acquired the trestle in 1997 as the result of a lawsuit against the previous owner, the former regional bus system known as D.C. Transit. In 2003, WMATA fenced off the ends of the trestle to deter trespassers but it does not appear that WMATA ever took any steps to stabilize the historic streetcar bridge.

Given its date of construction and ensuing decades of neglect, the trestle is understandably in poor condition. The DC Preservation League attempted to raise awareness of this fact by including the structure on its List of Most Endangered Places in 2008 and 2009. WMATA reports that it began efforts to identify a party to take ownership of the bridge at about that time, but to no avail.

In 2014, WMATA contacted HPO to indicate its intention to dismantle the trestle. It also commissioned a structural analysis which confirmed that the structure was in poor condition. HPO responded by confirming the trestle’s historic significance and encouraging WMATA to begin evaluating alternatives to dismantling the resource. No further information was received until 2016 when WMATA proposed to install fences to help ensure the safety of park users. This led HPO to host a series of meetings with NPS and DDOT to identify potential paths forward. WMATA participated in these meetings but has thus far agreed to only one course of action – transferring the property to another entity. However, DDOT considered potential options and ultimately agreed to accept the trestle and pay for its adaptive use as a pedestrian/bicycle trail if its forthcoming study determines it is feasible to do so. The DDOT study, which is scheduled to be underway by July and completed within a year, represents the most credible prospect for restoration of the trestle.

Section 106 Review

Federal preservation law (i.e. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act) does not directly apply to WMATA since it is not a federal agency. However, the requirements of Section 106 do apply to the proposed demolition because the trestle is on federally owned land and the NPS must issue a special use permit to allow the raze to occur.

Section 106 regulations require federal agencies and applicants for federal permits to develop and evaluate alternatives that could avoid “adverse effects” (e.g. demolition) on historic properties. DDOT’s proposal to acquire and adapt the trestle for pedestrian/bicycle use is such an alternative. NPS is continuing to consult with the various parties but has identified stabilization in place as its preferred action until DDOT completes its study.

Demolition/Raze Permit

WMATA proposes to raze the trestle and all associated infrastructure, including the concrete footers and the abutments at both ends. The stated motives for demolition include the structure’s poor condition and the fact that preservation of historic resources is outside of WMATA’s core mission. WMATA proposes to spend public funds to raze the structure and regrade and revegetate the site after the raze is complete.

WMATA’s proposal to demolish the trestle is partially based upon a late-2017 inspection which identified three of the twenty-two vertical supports as “severely compromised.” However, this inspection also suggests that the remaining nineteen supports could be repaired while the three most deteriorated elements could potentially be replaced in-kind. Similar approaches, possibly including augmentation with additional structural supports, could also be applied to the main truss and all other deteriorated elements.

Demolition has been deemed acceptable by the Mayor’s Agent when determined necessary to construct a project of “special merit.” The few examples where demolition of historic properties was found to be consistent with the Act usually involve properties so compromised that they no longer retain sufficient integrity to convey their historic significance. As previously indicated, the poor condition of the trestle is not disputed but the relatively simple structure still retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance. Adaptive use through in-kind repair, replacement and possible structural augmentation could be carried out in a manner that would enhance the trestle’s integrity.

Temporary stabilization, or at least postponement of the raze application until DDOT completes its study could ultimately result in a pedestrian/bike trail that provides both historic and transportation benefits. Such efforts on the part of WMATA would also help mitigate the significant damage done by more than two decades of neglect.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board find the proposed raze inconsistent with the purposes of the Act and refer the matter to the Mayor’s Agent.

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