

THE NORTHWEST CURRENT

City agency finishes study of Klinge trail

■ **Transportation:** Project to include full creek restoration

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The D.C. Department of Transportation has settled on a path forward to convert a controversial section of Klinge Road into a 10-foot-wide hike/bike trail with lighting and a newly built connection to the nearby Rock Creek Trail.

The project will also restore and stabilize about 1,600 feet of Klinge Creek.

The options selected from a menu presented to the public last summer will total about \$6.8 million to convert the 0.7-mile section of road and restore the creek, according to a final environmental assessment released last week.

Although the options did not include restoration of the long-blocked roadway — which, when open, funneled drivers across Rock Creek Park — the release of the department's final assessment has sparked advocates of both road and trail to take up battle stations once again.

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The decision to convert the road into a trail “doesn’t reflect the needs of one city,” said Laurie Collins of the Coalition to Repair and Reopen Klinge Road, referencing Mayor Vincent Gray’s campaign slogan. And the price tag “makes the \$400,000 dog parks look like a bargain,” she added.

Though Collins and others, including Ward 1 D.C. Council member Jim Graham, fought long and hard to reopen the road, first blocked in 1991 due to severe deterioration, the D.C. Council passed a law in 2008 to turn the road into a hike/bike path.

But the new trail will still be a road, according to a correction contained in the Transportation Department’s final assessment. For federal-funding purposes, the path will be considered a trail, but the city will still define it internally as a public street open to emergency vehicles and more. That definition marks a reversal from last summer’s proposal to remove Klinge from the city’s street network.

Threading the needle in that way appears to allow the District to retain confident ownership over the section of Klinge Valley it received in an 1885 easement requiring the city to build a road.

With the option of restoring vehicle access off the table, discus-

sion over the summer revolved around the width, surface material and lighting options for the new path. That path, when finished, will connect to the Rock Creek Trail below Porter Street via a new 6- to 8-foot-wide spur to be built south of Klinge.

The trail will be made of a permeable material. Officials from the District Department of the Environment had previously criticized options that included a permeable surface, charging that the surface material alone would not be enough to stem runoff. Transportation Department planners then added bioswales — shallow trenches designed to hold and treat storm-water runoff — to the permeable-surface options.

The city environmental agency, in a letter included in the final assessment, said the Transportation Department’s solution had adequately responded to its concerns.

Environmentalists had also opposed the proposal to include lighting along the trail — paths in Rock Creek Park aren’t lit, they noted, and late-night lighting can disturb nocturnal wildlife.

But the modification the Transportation Department has suggested seems to be a “reasonable compromise,” said the Sierra Club’s Jim Dougherty.

Pole lights will illuminate the path for walkers and bikers during commuting hours but will be shut off at night.