

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR
PROPOSED PASSENGER CENTER, FERRY TERMINAL,
AND PARK HEADQUARTERS BUILDING,
RENOVATION OF THE PMF MAINTENANCE BUILDING AND
REPLACEMENT OF NPS PATCHOGUE RIVER BULKHEADING**



**FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE
PATCHOGUE, LONG ISLAND, NY**

JANUARY 2002

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1. INTRODUCTION

This environmental assessment describes and analyzes five proposed National Park Service (NPS) construction projects for Fire Island National Seashore. These projects are:

- (1) a new passenger orientation center;
- (2) a new ferry terminal;
- (3) a new headquarters;
- (4) a renovated and raised Patchogue Maintenance Facility (PMF) maintenance building;
- (5) replacement of bulkheading along the Patchogue River.

Park staff believes that there are compelling reasons for each of these projects. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires the National Park Service and other federal agencies to conduct a formal environmental review process on proposed projects prior to decisions on their implementation. This process is designed to disclose and analyze the purposes of and needs for a project, the potential alternatives to and impacts from the project, and provide for public involvement. The benefits of this process are greater public understanding of proposed projects combined with better implementation decisions. This is because the process helps identify less damaging alternatives and methods to avoid, reduce, or mitigate adverse impacts that may be integrated into the decision.

Under NEPA law and related NPS policies, different proposed projects that are “closely related” or have “similar” geography, timing, or purposes should be captured together and receive combined environmental review. The five projects summarized above fall within both categories. They are closely related and similar in terms of their location, timing, and purposes. Therefore, this environmental assessment is intended to provide NEPA review for all five projects, and it enables alternatives to be analyzed that combine or differentiate projects and purposes in a manner that would not be possible through separate reviews.

According to federal law (16 USC 459e), “The boundaries of the national seashore shall extend from ... and, in addition, mainland terminal and headquarters sites, not to exceed a total of twelve acres, on the Patchogue River within Suffolk County, New York, all as delineated on a map identified as “Fire Island National Seashore”, numbered OGP-0004, dated May 1978.” According to the 1978 Fire Island National Seashore General Management Plan (GMP), “Following the study of 24 potential mainland sites along the Great South Bay and reevaluation of the minimum acreage needed for a headquarters/terminal site, the Park Service is proposing the establishment of permanent seashore headquarters and ferry terminal on a 10-acre site located at the head of the Patchogue River. The site was chosen due to its excellent location adjacent to major arteries, close proximity to the Patchogue Station of the Long Island Railroad, accessibility of the Patchogue River for park boat operations, and availability of land.” The GMP further states that this facility could “serve as a stimulus for redevelopment along the Patchogue River.” The combination of this legal requirement and still binding GMP recommendation essentially “set the stage” for this environmental assessment.

2. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

2.1 NEED FOR ACTION

The National Park Service, Fire Island National Seashore, Patchogue Ferry Terminal Site is an important gateway to a natural and cultural resource of national significance. The park currently attracts over 600,000 recreational visits per year; the majority of these visitors utilize the parking lots at either end of Fire Island. The Ferry Terminal Site is adjacent to public transportation and provides the best means of access to the central section of Fire Island. It is clearly an underused resource and is capable of serving a much larger audience. The site has always lacked appropriate basic visitor amenities, interpretive, administrative and educational facilities. These have been in the National Seashore's General Management Plan for over 20 years but have yet to be acted on.

The 1986 Development Plan for the Patchogue Ferry Terminal Site declared:

"The existing conditions fail to: provide sufficient support facilities to existing and potential ferry operations; provide adequate operational buildings for a central maintenance, warehouse or resource management facility; or contribute to coastal zone riverfront revitalization. The absence of year round visitor facilities continues to undermine efficient and effective park management. Without appropriate facility development, existing and future management objectives for visitors, park service and local interests will not be achieved."

There are a number of problems that have to be addressed by any proposal for this site:

- The existing terminal building is inadequate for the current ferry operation. The terminal was initially constructed as a temporary solution to the problem and has remained in place for almost 20 years. The building has no inside waiting area, is not handicapped accessible, is not heated, has no information or orientation capabilities, and is unsafe.
- The National Park Service plans to expand ferry services from Patchogue to other points on Fire Island. The present arrangement is inadequate for this purpose.
- There are currently no interpretive or educational facilities at the site. The park has three contact stations on the island that are open only five days a week, July 1 – Labor Day. There are no mainland visitor information facilities. Because visitation to the park is by private boat or ferry, visitors currently have no way to get information prior to paying for ferry tickets and traveling to the island.
- The park headquarters are currently housed in a converted residential property located approximately 1/3 mile from the existing ferry terminal and maintenance operations. The building is in a residential neighborhood, is rendered inaccessible by river flooding an average of five times per year, is not handicapped accessible, is structurally incapable of handling office furnishings, and is too small to hold all staff. Staff is now dispersed in three buildings in two locations.
- The park handles numerous zoning and driving permits for island residents in addition to visitor needs such as National Park Passports and Golden Age Passports. A facility is needed that will provide the public a single location from which they can obtain necessary services from the NPS.
- Park staff and operations are water-dependent and administration operations must be located on the water. All staff and supplies travel to and from the island by boat. The fact that the ferry terminal must be on the water is self-evident.

2.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTION

- Provide a new ferry terminal, capable of adequately coping not only with current ferry traffic, but also with the proposed future expansion of the ferry service to other destinations on Fire Island. The terminal and dock must be handicapped accessible and not prone to annual flooding.
- Provide an appropriate facility to greet visitors to the National Seashore, transfer them to the ferries in season, and interpret the story of Fire Island throughout the year. Provide visitors with basic safety information, orientation to the island, and park recreation opportunities and regulations.
- Provide educational opportunities on the site for both local schools and higher education institutes. Provide a location for hosting public meetings conducted by the NPS, an average of 10-15 meetings on an annual basis.
- Provide a new park headquarters consolidated in one location in proximity to the water, existing maintenance facilities, and the new ferry terminal. Headquarters must be able to house all staff, be handicapped accessible, not prone to annual flooding, and accessible by both train and ferry.
- Improve the visual environment between the site and the railway station and village commercial center.

2.3 OBJECTIVES DESCRIBED IN MISSION STATEMENT AND ENABLING LEGISLATION

These objectives are consistent with the aims stated in the National Park Service's Fire Island National Seashore Mission Statement:

"The National Park Service is committed to preserving Fire Island National Seashore's cultural and natural resources, its values of maritime and American history, barrier island dynamics and ecology, biodiversity, museum collection objects, and wilderness. The National Park Service is committed to providing access and recreational and educational opportunities to Fire Island National Seashore visitors in this natural and cultural setting close to densely populated urban and suburban areas, and to maintaining and exemplifying the policies of the National Park Service."

The following relevant objectives are also described in National Park Service enabling legislation and management documents:

To administer mainland ferry terminal and headquarter sites not to exceed 12 acres on the Patchogue River.

To provide for public access, use and enjoyment.

To work with the communities within the park to mutually achieve the goals of both the park and the residents.

2.4 CONTEXT

The Ferry Terminal Site is located in the Village of Patchogue on the south shore of Long Island, between the Patchogue River and West Avenue, with direct access to Fire Island National Seashore – refer to figure 1. The Ferry Terminal Site is the primary operational and transportation center on Long Island for Fire Island National Seashore, and is located approximately 1 mile along the Patchogue River from Great South Bay – refer to figure 2.

The site is approximately 50 miles east of New York City. It is easily accessed by car via the Montauk Highway, the Sunrise Highway and the Long Island Expressway. Buses travel along the Montauk Highway, which becomes Main Street in Patchogue, less than a half mile from the site. The Site is also linked to New York City via the Long Island Railroad. The Patchogue Station is diagonally across from the Site, less than ¼ mile from the Ferry Terminal.

The Ferry provides the most direct connection across Great South Bay to Fire Island National Seashore, depositing passengers in the middle of Fire Island. The Site is 7.5 miles across the water from Sunken Forest and 4.5 miles from both Talisman / Barrett Beach and Watch Hill.

2.5 CURRENT LAND HOLDINGS

The National Park Service currently holds several parcels of land in the immediate vicinity of the Ferry Terminal Site.

The predominant holding is a 6.66-acre parcel, which contains the existing Ferry Terminal, its associated parking lot and retention pond.

Immediately adjacent and to the south of this parcel are 2 further parcels totaling 1.54 acres which contain the bulk of National Park Service functions related to the supervision and maintenance of Fire Island National Seashore, including some staff offices, a maintenance/trans-shipment facility serving Fire Island, 2 large multi-boat slips, and a small office building known as the “deli” because it used to house a delicatessen. The boat slips are irreplaceable, as current environmental laws do not allow the construction of new boat slips on the river. Therefore the maintenance facility cannot be relocated.

The final parcel of 0.78 acres includes the existing headquarters building, a converted two-story private residence, located approximately 1/3 mile south of the ferry terminal.

The enabling legislation for the park limits land holdings in Patchogue to a total of 12 acres.

2.6 LONG ISLAND SOUTH SHORE ESTUARY RESERVE

The Long Island South Shore Estuary Reserve contains the entire Fire Island National Seashore. Its Comprehensive Management Plan outlines a number of complementary objectives to those described earlier in this section. The objectives outlined in the plan are:

- Improve and maintain water quality
- Protect and restore living resources of the reserve
- Expand public use and enjoyment of the estuary
- Sustain and expand estuary-related economy
- Increase education, outreach and stewardship

The management plan lists a number of implementation actions, which are directly related to the proposed alternatives. Among the most relevant actions are:

- Expanding public access and recreation facilities at existing sites
- Creating new public access and recreation opportunities
- Expansion of existing interpretive centers and development of new ones
- Provision of adequate infrastructure to support existing and new water-dependent uses
- Planning for local waterfront development



Figure 1 – Regional Map

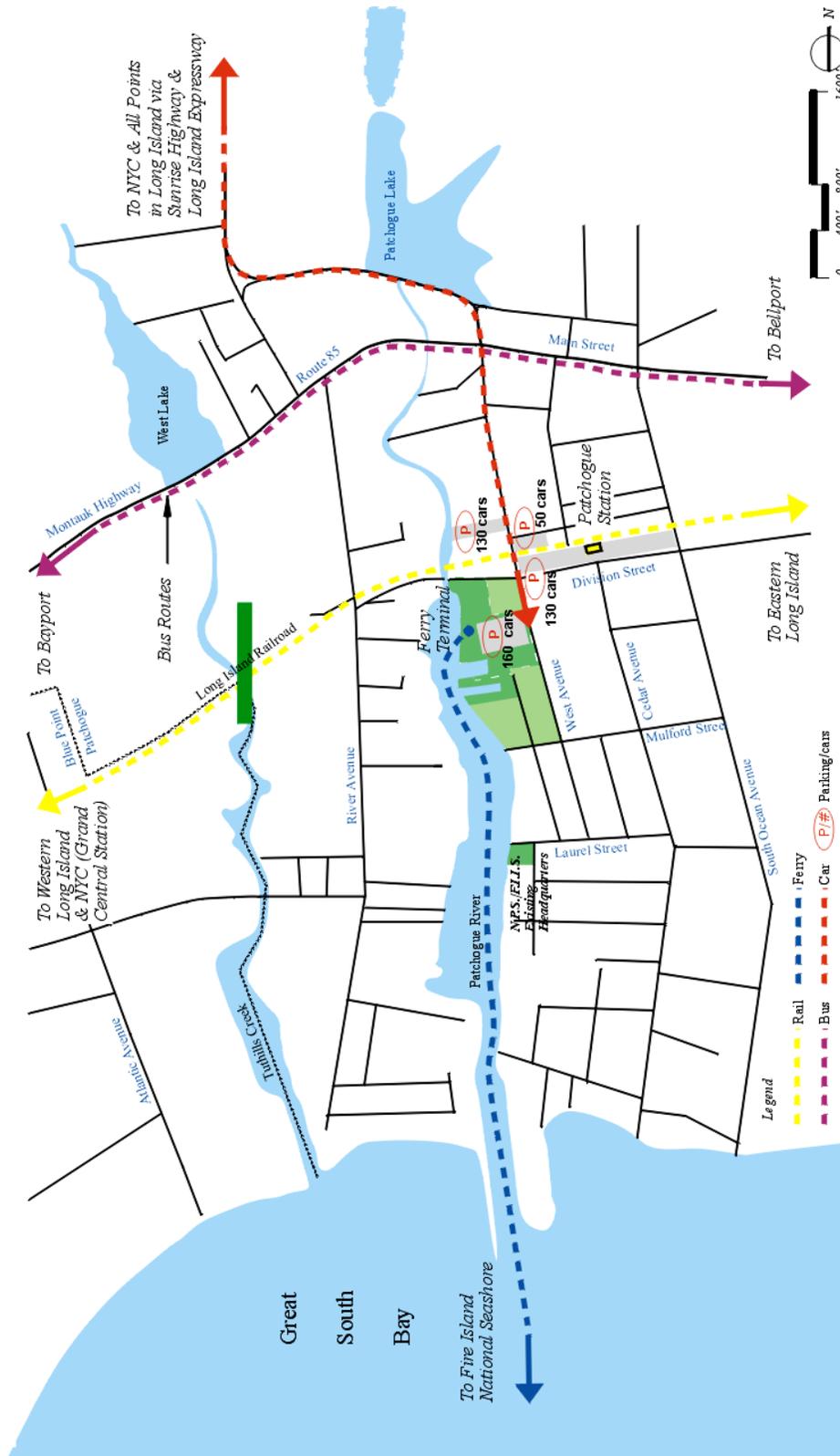


Figure 2 – Local Map

3. ALTERNATIVES

- 3.1 **The “no action” alternative** – this assumes that all facilities will remain as currently existing. There will be no development of the site – refer to figure 3.
- 3.2 **The “preferred” alternative** – the existing Ferry Terminal structure will be demolished; the “deli” building facing on to West Avenue will also be demolished. The new Ferry Terminal and Passenger Center will be built in the vicinity of the existing ferry terminal. The new Headquarters building will be built in the vicinity of the current “deli” building adjacent to the maintenance facility. The maintenance / trans-shipment facility remains in its current location in all the alternatives, as the existing slipways must be maintained. These are irreplaceable, as current environmental laws do not allow the construction of new boat slips on the Patchogue River. The maintenance building will be rehabilitated under all alternatives except the “no action” alternative. There will also be repairs to the bulkhead system on the river frontage and also in the boat slips. The existing headquarters facility will be leased out to provide a revenue stream for the Park – refer to figure 4.
- 3.3 **The “single building” alternative** – this is similar to the “preferred” alternative, with the exception that the Ferry Terminal and Passenger Center will be combined with the Headquarters building in a single larger structure, located in the vicinity of the existing Ferry Terminal. The “deli” building will not be demolished in this alternative but will be refurbished to accommodate some of the maintenance facilities. The existing headquarters facility will again be leased out to provide a revenue stream for the Park – refer to figure 5.
- 3.4 **The “bowling alley” alternative** – the adjacent bowling alley site is acquired, and the existing building is demolished. The Ferry Terminal is built in the vicinity of the existing terminal and the headquarters building is built on land currently occupied by the bowling alley. A large proportion of this site is also to be landscaped to provide increased visibility from Patchogue railway station and the center of the village – refer to figure 6.

A number of other alternatives were considered but rejected for various reasons of cost or impracticality. A number of these involved the relocation of the maintenance facility, which were ruled out due to the inability to construct new boat slips on the Patchogue River. Others involved moving the headquarters, passenger center, and/or ferry terminal functions to distant locations closer to the western or eastern ends of Fire Island. These were also ruled out because of the high cost of acquiring new NPS lands, the inefficiencies of further fragmenting park functions and facilities, and (if on Fire Island) the risk of putting key permanent structures on an inherently unstable barrier island subject to hurricanes, storms, flooding, and erosion.

Figure 3 – “No Action” Alternative

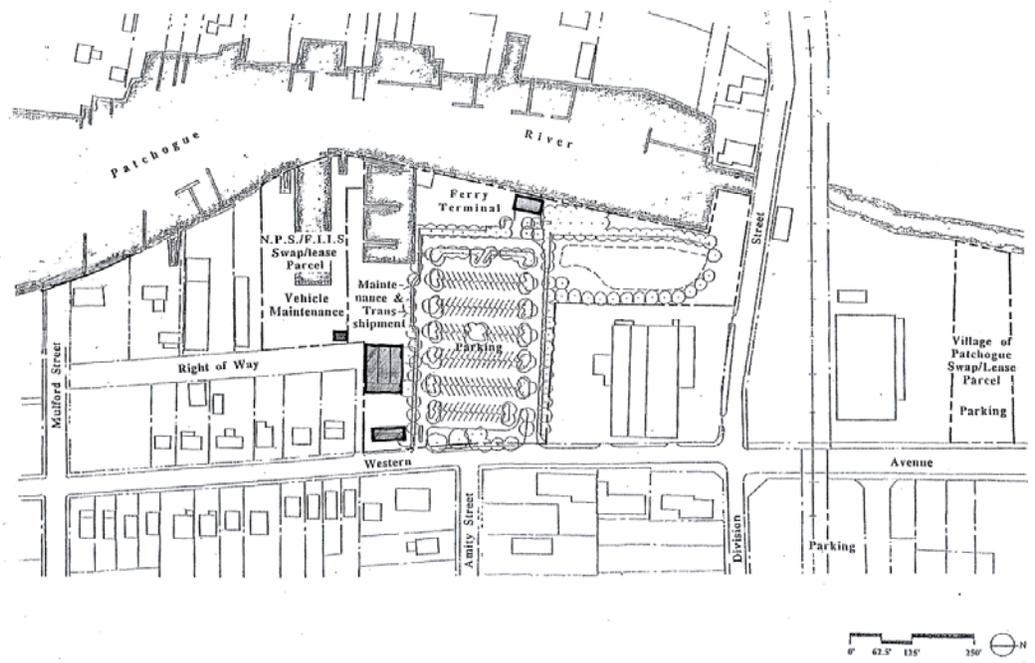


Figure 4 – “Preferred” Alternative

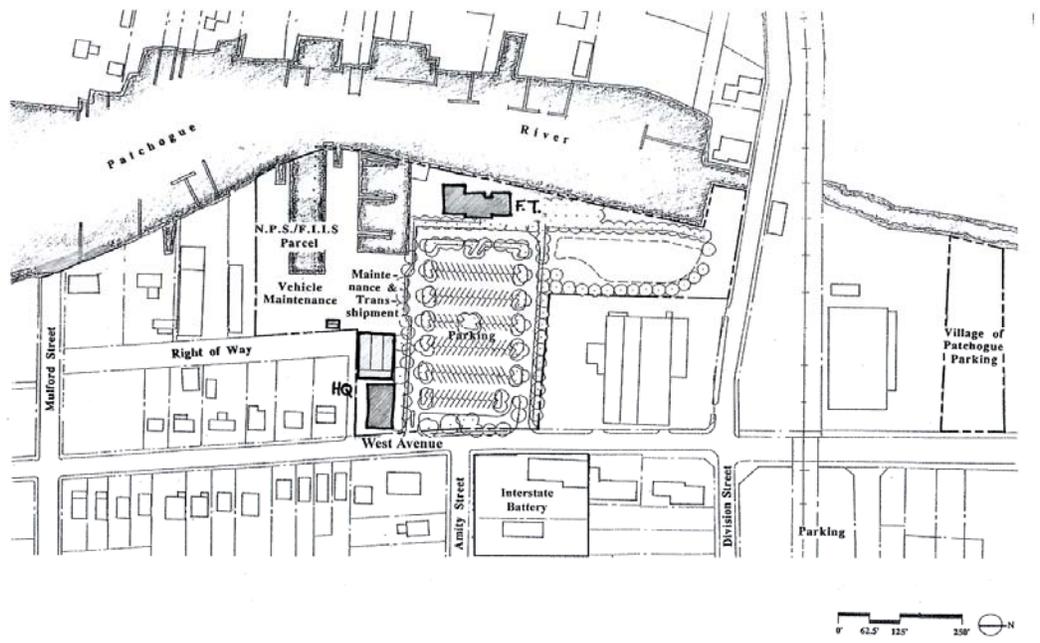


Figure 5 – “Single Building” Alternative

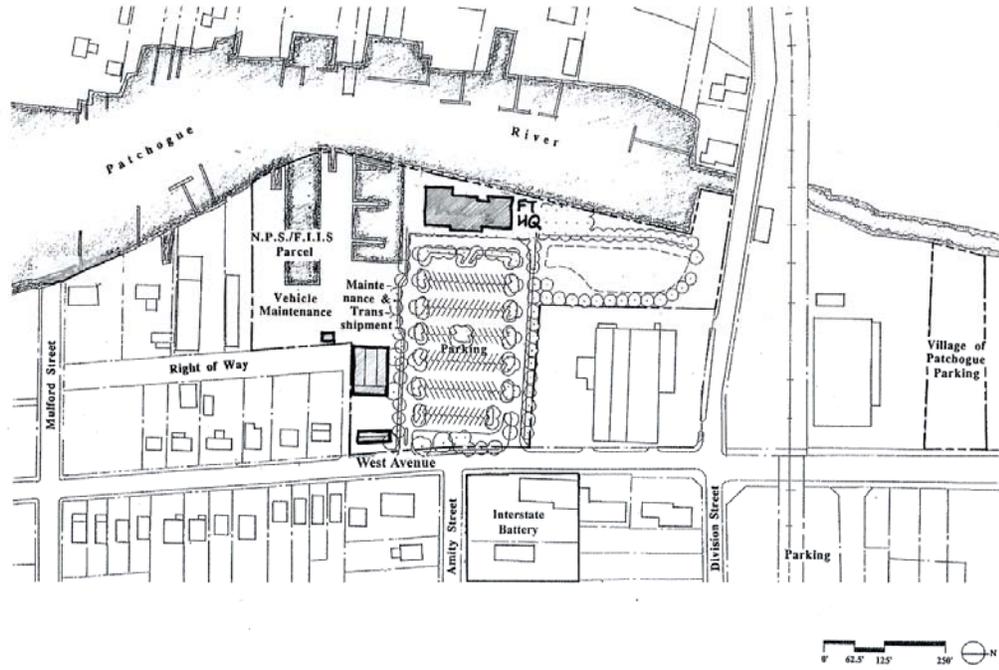
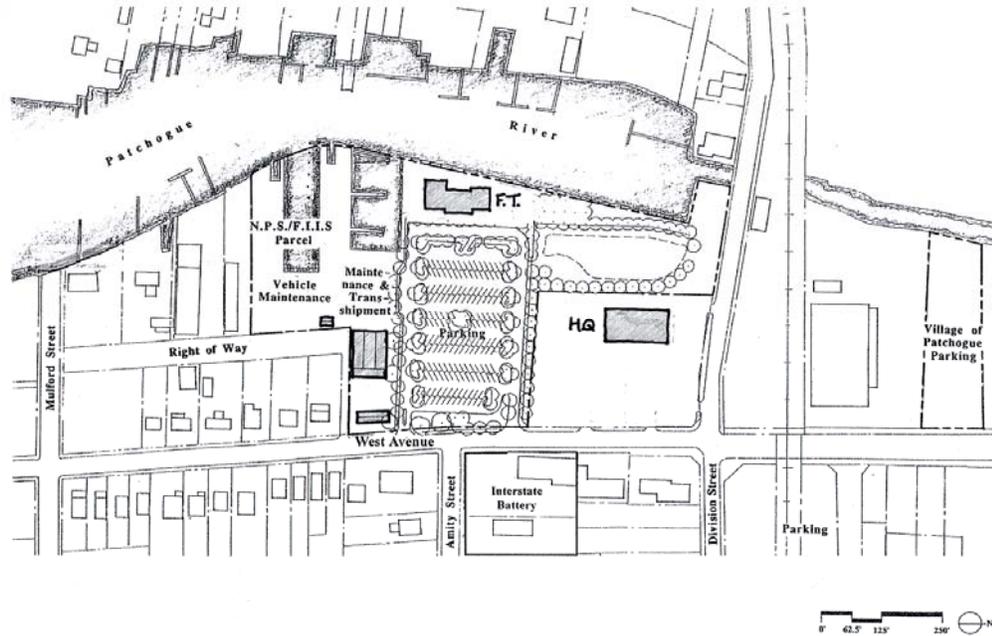


Figure 6 – “Bowling Alley” Alternative



4 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENTS

The Ferry Terminal site is a predominantly urban environment, adjacent to the Patchogue River. The land immediately adjacent is zoned as industrial or residential. The majority of the affected site consists of a large parking lot, with the capacity for approximately 190 cars, associated water retention area, and the existing ferry terminal building. The affected environments are therefore primarily man-made with very little naturally occurring environments. There will be little or no effect on important wildlife, marine or vegetation habitats by any of the development alternatives. There are no affected properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Likewise, none of the affected areas are listed on the National Register of Natural Landmarks. The major categories of affected environments are:

- 4.1 **Geological resources** – any disruption to soils, bedrock, streambeds, etc. caused by development of the various alternatives under consideration. The effects on these resources will be limited to those areas affected by the demolition of existing structures, the construction of new facilities, and the supply of underground utilities.
- 4.2 **Air quality, traffic, and noise** – any adverse effects to the surrounding environment caused by development of the site, and the effects of the consequences of that development. The extent of this influence is not limited to the actual development site, but should also include approach roads and adjacent properties.
- 4.3 **Water quality and quantity** – any disruption to existing water resources caused by operations on the development site, both during construction and following the completion of the project. This affected environment is not restricted to the Patchogue River immediately adjacent to the site, but must also include those downstream areas that may be affected by the disruption.
- 4.4 **Land use** – any changes to the use of the various parts of the development site, including occupation, ownership and type of use, caused by the alternatives under consideration. The extent of the affected area is limited to the actual parcels of land owned by the National Park Service, and those parcels that may be purchased or leased under any of the alternatives.
- 4.5 **Socioeconomic environment** – the effects of any proposed development on employment, occupation, economic infrastructure, etc. The extent of these effects is not limited to the actual site, but must include adjacent and nearby businesses which may be affected by any of the alternatives. If the development causes increases in surrounding property values, this may in turn increase real property taxes, local tax revenues, and perhaps rental payments in the neighborhood.
- 4.6 **Recreation resources** – any effects on both the provision of recreational activities on site and access to recreational facilities. The affected environment in this case is not only the site itself, but also those recreational facilities on Fire Island that the site enables access to.
- 4.7 **Visitor experience** – the effects of the development alternatives on the aesthetic experience of visitors using or passing through the site. These effects are not limited to those parts of the development alternatives that are accessible to members of the general public, but should also include any areas that are visible during their experience.

- 4.8 **Educational resources** – the effects on educational resources available within the site as a result of carrying out any of the proposed alternatives. This affected environment is limited to those parts of the site that are accessible to members of the general public.
- 4.9 **Urban quality** – the effects on the quality of the built urban environment of constructing any of the proposed alternatives. The extent of this affected environment is not limited to the actual site, but must include the surrounding area of which the site forms an integral part.
- 4.10 **Parking availability** – any increase or decrease in the availability of car parking as a result of carrying out the alternatives under consideration. The directly affected resource is the available parking on the site, but there are indirect effects on nearby parking facilities that can be used as overspill parking for the site, such as the parking lot adjacent to the railway station.
- 4.11 **Universal accessibility** - the effects of the development alternatives on the accessibility of handicapped persons using or passing through the site. These effects are limited to those parts of the site that are accessible to the general public, and the areas occupied by those members of staff whose duties can be carried out by handicapped persons.
- 4.12 **Waterfront accessibility** – the ability of members of the public to access the riverfront for recreational purposes under any of the proposed alternatives. This affected environment is restricted to the site immediately adjacent to the Patchogue River.
- 4.13 **Public health** – the effects of the development alternatives on any health or safety issues affecting the general public. The relevant areas are limited to the development site.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

5.1 GEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

5.1.1 Alternative 1- no action
No effect.

5.1.2 Alternative 2 – preferred
There will be a loss of landscaping adjacent to the Patchogue River as the proposed Ferry Terminal / Passenger Center will be considerably larger than the existing building. A similar situation will also apply at the new headquarters building, which will have a larger footprint than the “deli” building it will be replacing. There will be possible disruption to the bedrock and / or the underlying soil structure depending on the foundation design chosen for the buildings. The supply of underground utilities to the new buildings will also cause some temporary disruption to the existing geological resources. It is not anticipated that the disruption caused will be any greater than for the construction of other buildings in the immediate vicinity.

5.1.3 Alternative 3 - single building
The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above. The extent of the impact may be slightly reduced, as there will be a single construction site instead of two separately affected areas.

5.1.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley
The impact of this alternative will again be similar to the preferred alternative above. The extent of the impact will differ in that the headquarters building will be constructed in the location of the current bowling alley. The footprint of the bowling alley is larger than that of the proposed building, which will allow some land reclamation, primarily in the form of landscaping with the possibility of some additional car parking. Foundation and underground utility supply impacts will be as in the preferred alternative.

5.2 AIR QUALITY, TRAFFIC AND NOISE

5.2.1 Alternative 1 - no action
No effect.

5.2.2 Alternative 2 – preferred
During construction there will be some minor adverse effects to air quality, but no worse than with regular construction operations. One of the objectives of this project is to increase the number of visitors using the facility. Inevitably, if this is successful it will mean an increase in the number of vehicles visiting the site. This will have an adverse effect on both the air quality and environmental noise at the site and on the approach roads.

5.2.3 Alternative 3 - single building
The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above. The extent of construction noise and disturbance will be slightly reduced because there will be a single site instead of two separate affected areas.

5.2.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley
The impact of this alternative will again be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.3 WATER QUALITY

5.3.1 Alternative 1 - no action
No effect.

5.3.2 Alternative 2 – preferred
One element of the related operations proposed, is necessary repairs to the bulkheads. This activity may cause some minor, temporary disruption to the adjacent water quality, due to river bottom pollutants, which could be disturbed. There may also be some minor short-term effects during the construction of the Ferry Terminal / Passenger Center, the extent of which will be dependent on the structural system chosen for the foundation design. The separate headquarters building should have no effect on water quality. The existing headquarters buildings are on septic systems; the new buildings will be tied in to the town sewer system. This will obviously have a beneficial effect on water quality.

5.3.3 Alternative 3 - single building
The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.3.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley
The impact of this alternative will also be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.4 LAND USE

5.4.1 Alternative 1 - no action
No effect.

5.4.2 Alternative 2 – preferred
The changes to land use categories in this alternative are; change of use for the existing headquarters building, which will remain in Park ownership, but will be leased out to a commercial entity to provide a revenue stream for the Park. There will be a loss of open land due to the increased size of both the Ferry Terminal / Passenger Center and the new headquarters building over the structures they will replace.

5.4.3 Alternative 3 - single building
The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above. The loss of open land will be considerably more, as the “deli” building will not be demolished.

5.4.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley
The impact of this alternative will again be similar to the preferred alternative above, with the addition of the change of the bowling alley site from a commercial use to a business use for the park headquarters. There will be a change of use of some of the bowling alley site from commercial to open landscaping and car parking.

5.5 SOCIOECONOMICS

5.5.1 Alternative 1 - no action

By taking no action, there will be no positive effect on the socioeconomic environment, with the likelihood that the economy of the immediate area of Patchogue will continue to deteriorate.

5.5.2 Alternative 2 – preferred

At present the Ferry Terminal is open only from May to October and therefore attracts no visitors outside these months. The construction of a new all year round Passenger Center is expected to bring more visitors to the site and the village of Patchogue. This will provide more potential customers for local businesses. The additional facilities being provided at the new buildings will also be a source of employment opportunities for the local community. New development will also increase the desirability of the location, with a subsequent enhancement of the commercial environment of the surrounding area.

5.5.3 Alternative 3 - single building

The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.5.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley

The impact of this alternative will again be similar to the preferred alternative above. There will however be an adverse economic effect initially with the loss of the bowling alley and its associated jobs. These may be offset by the relocation of the bowling alley to another site in the vicinity.

5.6 RECREATION RESOURCES

5.6.1 Alternative 1 - no action

There are no recreational facilities on the site at the present. The current Ferry Terminal offers no amenity other than ticketing. The site does however provide access to the many recreation resources on Fire Island itself.

5.6.2 Alternative 2 – preferred

The new Passenger Center will provide new recreational resources, in the form of a gift shop and exhibition area, which will be developed by the National Park Service and private partners. This exhibition is planned to include sections on the geological history of Fire Island, habitats of both Fire Island and Great South Bay, and the human influence on the environment of the area. The closer proximity of the headquarters building will enable those members of the park staff with responsibility for recreation resources to be more accessible to the public.

5.6.3 Alternative 3 - single building

The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.6.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley

The impact of this alternative will also be similar to the preferred alternative above. There will be a loss of the bowling alley in the area as a recreational facility unless it can be relocated to another site in the vicinity.

5.7 VISITOR EXPERIENCE

5.7.1 Alternative 1 - no action

The present visitor experience is disappointing. The approach to the ferry terminal if arriving by public transportation, is to pass an aged bowling alley, then cross the parking lot, before arriving at a deteriorating ferry terminal which is little more than a ticket office with no other amenities for the visitor. There is no direct visual link from the station to the terminal. As the condition of the terminal building worsens, the sense of arriving at a valuable national resource becomes ever more remote.

5.7.2 Alternative 2 – preferred

The aesthetic experience of the visitor will be much improved by this alternative. In place of a run-down ticket office, the visitor will be faced with a new building providing a range of amenities, including ticket and permit sales, rest rooms, gift store, exhibition areas, and park information. These will give the visitor the experience of arriving at a destination in itself, rather than simply a place to board the ferry. The building will provide a facility where visitors can experience NPS interpretive programs. It will also act as a gathering area in times of inclement weather, improving the experience of the visitor in these conditions. The development of the site will also allow a safer environment for visitor, and present a more positive public image of the park. The objective is to make the new facility an appropriate gateway to the Park.

5.7.3 Alternative 3 - single building

The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above. The visitor may feel that the river is more remote because of the increased bulk of the building, parts of which may be up to 3 stories in height.

5.7.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley

The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.8 EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

5.8.1 Alternative 1 - no action

The existing facility has no educational resource available to either the public or to local educational institutes. Members of the park staff who have educational roles have nowhere to meet with interested groups.

5.8.2 Alternative 2 – preferred

The new Passenger Orientation Center will provide a range of educational facilities for both local schools and higher education institutions. A 150 person capacity multi-purpose room, capable of being sub-divided, will be provided for the use of educational institutions, and special events for the public. This room also provides a place for park interpretive programs to take place. The proximity of the new headquarters building will enable those staff members with educational responsibilities to be more accessible to the public.

5.8.3 Alternative 3 - single building

The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.8.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley

The impact of this alternative will also be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.9 URBAN QUALITY

5.9.1 Alternative 1 - no action

The existing ferry terminal is in poor condition. It was built in 1980 as a temporary structure until a more permanent building could be provided. Taking no action would give no improvement to the quality of the urban environment, with the likelihood that the existing building would continue to deteriorate over time, either naturally or by acts of vandalism.

5.9.2 Alternative 2 – preferred

The Ferry Terminal / Passenger Center will serve as the gateway to Fire Island National Seashore. A larger building will be much more visible across the parking lot and would not be overwhelmed by it as at present. The proposal is to have the building appear as a collection of smaller pavilions rather than a larger single structure. The headquarters building will provide a face to both the parking lot and the main street and will help to delineate the site more clearly.

5.9.3 Alternative 3 - single building

The single building will be up to 3 stories in height and will be considerably larger than any of the surrounding structures. This could seem overwhelming in the context of the riverfront and will be out of scale with the adjacent buildings. The proposed program will make it virtually impossible to recreate the “pavilion” approach outlined in the preferred alternative. The absence of any new building at the street face will also detract from the urban quality.

5.9.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley

There will be a visual improvement of approaches to the Ferry Terminal / Passenger Center, by removing the existing bowling alley which opens up the sightlines from Patchogue railway station. Improved landscaping and street furniture will help to connect the site more closely to the commercial center of the village.

5.10 PARKING AVAILABILITY

5.10.1 Alternative 1 - no action

The existing parking lot adjacent to the ferry terminal has capacity for 191 cars with 6 handicapped spaces. There is also a small amount of on and off street parking available at the headquarters building.

5.10.2 Alternative 2 – preferred

The existing parking availability on site will be unaffected by this alternative. The development of the site will cause a shortage of parking spaces at peak periods. There are additional parking facilities within walking distance of the site at the Patchogue railway station, and also at a further site beyond the railway line on West Avenue. The relocation of the headquarters building will lead to heavier parking demand during the working week, but this will be reduced at the peak weekend and holiday periods, when public parking demand is at its greatest. Due to the location of the headquarters, any additional staff parking will occur at those areas of the parking lot furthest from the Ferry terminal.

5.10.3 Alternative 3 - single building

The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above. The major exception is that, because the Ferry Terminal and the Headquarters are combined in a single building, the staff parking area will coincide with the most used public parking.

5.10.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley

The impact of this alternative will again be similar to the preferred alternative above. However, the additional area available due to the smaller footprint of the headquarters building, will allow staff parking to be provided with no loss of public parking in the existing lot.

5.11 UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY

5.11.1 Alternative 1 - no action

The existing ferry terminal is currently inaccessible to handicapped persons. This alternative would continue this situation, which is contrary to current ADA law. The converted buildings that comprise the current park headquarters are also inaccessible to the handicapped

5.11.2 Alternative 2 – preferred

The new facilities will be designed to be fully compliant with all federal accessibility laws. The new Ferry Terminal / Passenger Center will be on a single level with ramped access to the lower deck boardwalk. The new headquarters building will be a two-story structure with elevator access to the upper floor.

5.11.3 Alternative 3 - single building

The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above, although it is likely that the headquarters will be located above the Ferry Terminal / Passenger Center with elevator access to the upper floors.

5.11.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley

The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.12 WATERFRONT ACCESSIBILITY

5.12.1 Alternative 1 - no action

There would be no change to the current situation. The waterfront would continue to be accessible for the public at the existing terminal site, and for the National Park Service at both the maintenance facility and the current park headquarters. The condition of the bulkhead system continues to cause concern regarding safety.

5.12.2 Alternative 2 – preferred

Construction of the new headquarters building would provide more potential river viewing opportunities at the Patchogue River at the site of the existing headquarters, although this will be dependent on the use to which this facility is put. The access to the river at the terminal would remain open to pedestrian traffic only, although the available boardwalk area would be increased. The maintenance facility will remain out of bounds for the public. The bulkhead repairs will improve the safety of the waterfront.

5.12.3 Alternative 3 - single building

The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above, although the increased size of the building will reduce the accessible waterfront area.

5.12.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley

The impact of this alternative will again be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.13 PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

5.13.1 Alternative 1 - no action

The current situation is unsatisfactory. Graffiti and other acts of vandalism occur regularly at the ferry terminal. There have been numerous instances of damage and theft to both cars and boats in the area, including boat sinkings. If nothing is done then this situation can only deteriorate to the point where it becomes a danger to public health. In particular the erosion of the bulkheads will soon become a particular concern with regard to safety at the waters edge.

5.13.2 Alternative 2 – preferred

Providing a facility that is open year round will increase supervision of the site and will reduce the incidences of vandalism. Improved lighting to the parking lot will also increase feelings of visitor security outwith daylight hours. Repairs to the bulkhead system will provide additional safety for ferry passengers at the river edge.

5.13.3 Alternative 3 - single building

The impact of this alternative will be similar to the preferred alternative above.

5.13.4 Alternative 4 – bowling alley

The impact of this alternative will again be similar to the preferred alternative above.

6. ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Under NPS policy, the alternative analyzed that would be most beneficial for the environment or have the least adverse impacts should be identified. Of these four alternatives, Park staff believes that Alternative 2, the preferred alternative, is also the environmentally preferred alternative. This is because the single building alternative would be more visually intrusive and not as aesthetically compatible with the riverfront; the no action alternative would allow existing flooding, polluted run-off, septic, and other problems to continue; and the bowling alley alternative would cause the largest cumulative amount of surface disturbance. Of course, the levels of parking, noise, night lighting, energy consumption, construction, run-off, and other potential impacts would be very similar among each of the action alternatives. Likewise, the socioeconomic effects would be comparable among the action alternatives.

7. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Under NEPA law and NPS policy, potential cumulative impacts should be described. For purposes of these four alternatives, these may be divided between those in the surrounding urban area on the south shore of Long Island and those out on Fire Island. On Long Island, Park staff believe that all of the action alternatives would have similar net beneficial socioeconomic impacts in terms of improving community businesses, creating new jobs, contributing to revitalization of the Patchogue River, and perhaps increasing local property values and tax revenues. On the negative side, there may be increases in local rents, traffic, noise, night lighting, and energy consumption. Some of these impacts can be mitigated by using alternative energy sources, generous building insulation, passive solar design, minimal down-facing night lighting, and other efficiencies and by urging visitors to use mass transit. Out on Fire Island, while the projects are not designed to increase visitation there per se, implementation of any of the action alternatives could improve Park facilities in a manner that will generate more interest in, and hence visitation to, Fire Island. If this occurs, increased visitation could in turn increase the need for Park resource management, interpretation, and enforcement services. Because new construction projects are not tied to staff levels, improving Park facilities poses benefits as well as risks. The benefits are better public education, enhanced uses, and more services. The risks are that increased needs cannot be met due to insufficient staffing. Of course, there may be a sort of "Catch 22" involved, because it is difficult to determine some of the cumulative effects until after any new facilities are operational.

8. NON-IMPAIRMENT

Under the NPS Organic Act of 1916, current Policies and Director's Orders, Fire Island National Seashore and other units of the National Park System are to be managed to preserve their scenic, natural and cultural resource values by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. This establishes a "non-impairment" standard that prohibits NPS officials from allowing any project or use that would impair park resources and values, as deemed significant in the park's legislative enactment, focused on in the park's mission statement and addressed in the park's General Management Plan. The determination of impairment rests with the professional judgment of the given park's manager, consistent with the park's legislation, purpose and mission, NPS Policies and Orders, as well as the park's management plan.

The present management of Fire Island National Seashore believes that none of action alternatives considered in this environmental assessment would cause impairment to park resource values. The alternatives are consistent with relevant federal laws and the park's current General Management Plan. Any of the alternatives would be accomplished on the mainland of Long Island, and therefore would not directly impact or affect scenic, natural or cultural resource values out on the barrier island designated as Fire Island National Seashore. Construction of an adequate center visitor arrival, vehicle parking and ferry transport to Fire Island, and for National Seashore headquarters at this Patchogue River location, has been a longstanding goal. Such improved facilities would enhance the visitor's experience by the opportunity to be properly oriented to barrier island resource values they have come to enjoy, as well as understand the preservation mission and protective purpose and rules to leave the resource values unimpaired for future generations, before they reach the barrier island.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Under NPS policies, the environmental review of proposed projects should include consideration of "environmental justice" issues. These are issues that relate to whether the project would harm or disproportionately affect socioeconomically disadvantaged groups of people. These issues generally arise where a project may cause undesirable or harmful impacts that would not be politically feasible to impose in a wealthy or influential community.

In terms of this review, the action alternatives are well in line with the local community's plans for business development and riverfront revitalization. The overall cumulative socioeconomic effects should be positive in terms of improved local businesses, new jobs, and perhaps increased property values and tax revenues. Of course, there may be those on limited or low incomes who are adversely affected. They may not be able to afford increased property taxes or rents. Under the bowling alley alternative, they might also lose their jobs when that business is terminated. Hence, there may be some unavoidable impacts on socioeconomically disadvantaged people.

10. SUSTAINABLE “GREEN” BUILDING DESIGN, MATERIALS, AND CONSTRUCTION

Park staff and consultants hope to integrate the best available and financially feasible “sustainable” or “green” building designs and materials in any new or renovated buildings. Design components may include glazing of south-facing windows for passive solar, “salt box” headquarters, reclaiming heat, and roofs with photovoltaic and/or wind generation capabilities. Materials components may include super insulation, recycled metal for roofing, and recycled materials such as gypsum board, plastic decking, and carpet. During construction activities, the best management practices to avoid erosion and potentially harmful run-off will be used to prevent impacts on water quality and aquatic resources in the Patchogue River.

11. NEW YORK COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

New York has an approved Coastal Management Program (CMP). Initial discussions with the Department of State, which administers the CMP, indicated that there are five applicable Coastal Management Program Policies. The following summary analysis of the consistency of the proposals with the CMP is based on the information contained in this Environmental Assessment and the applicable CMP policies.

Development Policies: Water-dependent Uses

Policy 2 - Facilitate the siting of water-dependent uses and facilities on or adjacent to coastal waters

The preferred development alternative involves public water-dependent uses and facilities: ferry access, loading docks, bulkheads. These have all been located as near to the Patchogue River as is practicable. The only major program element that is not water-dependent is the park headquarters. This has been located away from the water's edge to provide for more appropriate water-dependent uses and facilities.

The policy 2 guidelines apply as follows:

1. Competition for space: all parcels of land affected by the preferred alternative are in National Park Service ownership. The proposed operations do not differ from those currently in use. The proposed development will greatly enhance the available facilities and will have a beneficial effect on adjacent water-dependent development.
2. In-place facilities and services: the proposed development utilizes the existing parking lot, and upgrades existing utility supplies. The Long Island Railroad is less than a half-mile from the site and is an important alternative transportation resource.
3. Access to navigational channels: the site has immediate access to the Patchogue River, which is navigable up to this location.
4. Compatibility with adjacent uses and the protection of other coastal resources: the Patchogue River is heavily developed with boat yards, marinas and other related uses. The proposed development is compatible with the adjacent environment. The existing park headquarters are located approximately a half-mile away, in a predominantly residential area. By relocating to the proposed site, this allows the existing building to be converted to other compatible uses.
5. Preference to underutilized sites: the site is currently used only from May to October. The addition of the interpretive center will permit the site to be used by the public on a year-round basis.
6. Providing for expansion: the present ferry service only accesses a single location on Fire Island. The new terminal has been designed to allow expansion of the service to alternative destinations, not only Watch Hill, but also Talisman / Barrett Beach.

Given the preceding information, the proposed activity would be consistent with, and advance, this policy.

Development Policies: Public Services

Policy 5 - Encourage the location of development in areas where public services and facilities essential to such development are adequate

The preferred development is an enhancement of existing facilities and utilizes and upgrades the infrastructure currently in place. Existing public services and other infrastructure essential to the proposal are adequate.

Therefore, the proposed activity would be consistent with this policy.

Fish and Wildlife Policies: Recreational Resources

Policy 9 - Expand recreational use of fish and wildlife resources in coastal areas by increasing access to existing resources, supplementing existing stocks, and developing new resources

The proposed development will provide increased general public access to recreational uses of coastal fish and wildlife resources in the Seashore. These uses include, in addition to general access for recreational fishing and shellfishing, non-consumptive uses such as wildlife photography, bird watching and nature study. The provision of the interpretive program for ferry passengers will increase public awareness of the resources and the need for the protection of the habitats.

Therefore, the proposed activity would be consistent with, and would advance, this policy.

Public Access Policies: Water-related Recreation Resources

Policy 19 - Protect, maintain, and increase the level and types of access to public water-related recreation resources and facilities

Access to the waterfront from adjacent or proximate public lands will not be reduced by the proposed activity. Access to the water-related resource (Fire Island National Seashore) is open to all members of the public. The new ferry terminal will be fully compliant with all ADA legislation. The proposed activity involves increasing general public access to, and use of, public water-related recreation resources and facilities in the FINS.

Therefore, the proposed activity would be consistent with, and would advance, this policy.

Public Access Policies: Public Foreshore

Policy 20 - Access to the publicly owned foreshore and to lands immediately adjacent to the foreshore or the water's edge that are publicly owned shall be provided in a manner compatible with adjoining uses

Existing access to the water's edge will not be impaired by the proposed development, and there are no restrictions on public access to the resources. The maintenance facility adjacent to the ferry terminal is not accessible to the public due to nature of the operations being carried out therein. The ferry terminal, on publicly owned property, provides a means of access to the FINS barrier island resources, in a manner compatible with existing and future uses of the Seashore. The proposed activity will not conflict with adjoining or adjacent uses of the Patchogue River area or the Seashore.

Therefore, the proposed activity would be consistent with, and would advance, this policy.

Conclusion

Given the information contained elsewhere in this Environmental Assessment and the preceding summary analysis, the proposed activity would be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with, and would advance the applicable policies of, the New York Coastal Management Program.

12. COMPLIANCE / PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

In addition to the National Environmental Policy Act, there are other federal, state, and local laws and permit requirements that must be fulfilled before one or more of the five projects may be implemented. Depending upon which alternative is chosen and funded, these may include the following:

National Historic Preservation Act – Section 106 relating to historic resources (NPS No Effects determination and NY SHPO concurrence)

Clean Water Act - Sections 401 and 404 relating to water quality and wetlands (Corps permit; NY DEC certification)

Endangered Species Act – Section 7 relating to project consultations (FWS no jeopardy or no effect determination)

Rivers and Harbors Act – Section 10 relating to navigable waters (Corps permit)

Coastal Zone Management Act relating to consistency with NY coastal plan (NPS determination; NY DOS concurrence)

Executive Orders on floodplains and wetlands (NPS findings prior to building within floodplain)

State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit – not required if construction disturbance is less than five acres

State Environmental Quality Act – submittal of an environmental assessment form

Sewer and Water Connection Permits from Village of Patchogue

Waterfront Planning Review from Village of Patchogue

Because this environmental review is occurring well in advance of project approval and funding, it may not be timely to apply for permits until approximately within one year of the anticipated start date for construction. Needless to say, all required permits will be obtained prior to initiation of construction, and all permit conditions will be followed.

13. COORDINATION AND CONSULTATION

The conceptualization and development of the five proposed features occurred over many years and involved many NPS staff, other governmental officials, and consultants. Indeed, the origin of some of these proposals goes back to when this Park was initially established and the general management plan was subsequently discussed and ultimately adopted. Further coordination and consultation continues on this development. Of course, when a specific alternative is chosen and funded, more in-depth consultations will be possible in the ensuing process of finalizing details, submitting permit applications, and preparing for contract works.

The Regional Director of the National Park Service reviewed this environmental assessment and approved its distribution for public comment. A news release was sent to Long Island media contacts announcing the availability of this environmental assessment. Copies of this environmental assessment were sent to relevant federal, state, and local officials, local libraries, and a list of over a hundred people who have expressed a strong interest in issues affecting Fire Island National Seashore. Upon request, copies will be sent to other interested people. A public meeting will be scheduled during the comment period to explain this assessment, discuss impacts and alternatives, answer questions, and receive public input. This assessment will also be an informational or base reference to specific requests for action concurrences under the National Historic Preservation Act, and Coastal Zone Management Act as indicated in the preceding Section 12. This assessment may also be referred to in the submittal of a State Environmental Quality Act if necessary. All comments received on this assessment will be carefully reviewed. After this review, the Regional Director has two choices: to approve a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and end the NEPA compliance process, or to find that one or more significant impacts may occur and therefore an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must be prepared and distributed for public comment. Prior to preparing a FONSI (or Record of Decision (ROD) in the event of processing an EIS) a Statement of Findings on Floodplain Management and Wetland Protection will be prepared to accompany the FONSI or ROD for comparable signature of approval by the Regional Director.

14. PREPARERS

The preparers of this document were:

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15. REFERENCES

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