

## STAFF REPORT

PLEASE REFER TO DRCC # WHEN SUBMITTING  
ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS



**DRCC #:** 25-1858H

**DATE:** April 30, 2025

**PROJECT NAME:** Washington Crossing State Park -- Johnson Ferry House Exterior  
Restoration

**Latest Submission Received:** March 5, 2025

**Applicant:**

Larry Tutela  
NJ Department of Environmental Protection  
Division of Parks, Forests & Historic Sites  
Office of Resource Development  
275 Freehold Englishtown Road  
Englishtown, NJ 07728  
[larry.tutela@dep.nj.gov](mailto:larry.tutela@dep.nj.gov)

**Architect:**

Kurt Leasure  
HMR Architects  
821 Alexander Road, Suite 115  
Princeton, NJ 08540  
[leasure@hmr-architects.com](mailto:leasure@hmr-architects.com)

**Project Location:**

Road	Municipality	County	Block(s)	Lot(s)
465 Washington Crossing-Pennington Road (Mercer County Route No. 546)	Hopewell Township	Mercer	121	3

**Jurisdictional Determination:**

Zone A	Minor	Governmental
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PO BOX 539

STOCKTON, NJ 08559

609-397-2000

[www.nj.gov/dep/drcc/](http://www.nj.gov/dep/drcc/)

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**Subject to Review for:**

Drainage	Visual	Traffic	Stream Corridors
	X		

**THIS STAFF REPORT IS ISSUED AS A GUIDE TO APPLICANTS IN COMPLYING WITH DRCC REGULATIONS. IT IS NOT AN APPROVAL. NO CONSTRUCTION SHALL BEGIN UNTIL A CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL HAS BEEN ISSUED.**

**Documents Received:** Architectural Drawings (19 sheets) dated September 27, 2024; Site Photographs (9 pages); Project Location Map (1 page); Bid Specifications dated September 27, 2024; prepared by HMR Architects.

Staff comments continued below.

**The application is complete and shall be presented to the Commission for their action with a staff recommendation of approval at the May 21, 2025, meeting based upon the following analysis:**

**Existing Conditions:** The project area is a 233-acre lot located in Hopewell Township, Mercer County, approximately 120 feet from the Delaware and Raritan Canal and within Commission Review Zone A. The project area is located within the southwestern portion of the larger Washington Crossing State Park, a 3,575-acre park administered by the DEP Division of Parks, Forests & Historic Sites. The site is located east of the Delaware River, and is generally bounded to the north by Church Road, to the south by Washington Crossing-Pennington Road, and to the west by New Jersey State Highway Route No. 29 (River Road/Route 29).

In addition to areas of active and passive recreation, the project area is part of the Washington Crossing National Historic Landmark area, designated in 1961 and added to the National Register of Historic Places based upon its significance in the Revolutionary War, and features historic lands and several historic buildings, including the Johnson Ferry House, a stone barn and other farm buildings, a tavern, and the site of Washington's "Crossing of the Delaware" at Johnson's Ferry. The site also contains a park visitor center which was constructed in 1976 to commemorate the national Bicentennial, a scenic overlook, and a stone barn presently used as a public restroom.

The Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park bisects the Washington Crossing State Park west of River Road (Block 136, Lot 2) generally parallel to River Road. The project is located within the boundaries of the Delaware and Raritan Canal Historic District, which encompasses the canal bed and all structures within 300 feet of the centerline of the canal.

The Commission has approved several projects at the site, including the construction of a new park visitor center (DRCC #23-1858B), a general permit to renovate the restroom building located at the Greene Grove Day Use Area (DRCC #24-1858C), the demolition

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of a toll house building (DRCC #25-1858D), and a general permit to conduct in-kind repairs at the stone barn public restroom (DRCC #25-1858F).

**Proposed Project:** The applicant proposes several exterior renovations to the historic Johnson Ferry House located in the park. Specifically, the applicant proposes the following:

- Installation of a new barrier-free path from the parking lot to the side door of the house and around the rear and west side to the front of the house. Another non-barrier free path will continue from the east side of the house around the southeast corner;
- Reconstruction of the steps at the north and south elevations;
- Construction of a new barrier-free ramp with handrails at the east entrance;
- Preparation and painting of the shingle and clapboard siding;
- Stripping and restoration of door and window trim;
- Stripping and restoration of window sashes;
- Restoration of exterior doors and hardware, including installation of new reproduction locks at the east and north doors to accommodate barrier-free and emergency egress requirements;
- Renovation of the existing privy structure;
- Stripping and restoration of the shutters, including the in-kind replacement of one set; and
- Replacement of the existing woodshed with a new period appropriate woodshed.

The exterior renovations to the Johnson Ferry House would result in an increase in impervious surface coverage of 467 square feet. However, the applicant simultaneously proposes the demolition of the existing 6,000 square-foot park visitor center on the project area lot, which would be graded, treated with topsoil, and seeded to be maintained as lawn. Therefore, the project would result in an overall decrease of 5,533 square feet (0.13 acre) of impervious surface coverage onsite. The project would also result in the disturbance of 4,958 square feet (0.11 acre) of land.

**Stream Corridor:** The project site is located within the Alexauken Creek/Moores Creek/Jacobs Creek Watershed Area and within the Central Delaware Watershed Management Area. As noted above, an unnamed tributary to the Delaware and Raritan Canal is situated approximately 300 feet south of the proposed limits of disturbance. Based on the distance of the subject regulated waters from the limits of disturbance and based on the topographic difference in elevations between the stream location and limit of disturbance, it can be concluded that a stream corridor does not exist within the proposed limits of disturbance, and that the project is not subject to a stream corridor impact review pursuant to N.J.A.C. 7:45-9.1(a).

**Stormwater Runoff and Water Quantity:** As noted above, the project would result in an overall decrease in impervious surface coverage of 5,533 square feet (0.13 acre) of impervious surface coverage in the proposed condition. Therefore, the project is not subject to stormwater runoff and water quality impact review pursuant to N.J.A.C. 7:45-8.

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**Visual, Historic & Natural Quality Impact:** N.J.A.C. 7:45-10 directs that the Commission shall review all projects in Zone A to determine if the project is in accord with the goals for the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park as defined in the park Master Plan. The visual, historic, and natural quality impact review is intended to assure that development within Zone A is not harmful to the character of the environmental types identified in the Master Plan as comprising the park. The environmental types are based upon the character of the section of the park and its adjoining corridor.

The proposed project is located in a “Transportation” canal environment, which is defined at N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.2(a)5 as an area in which the canal park is squeezed between roads, railroads, and river or stream. The Master Plan at Page 14 and the Delaware and Raritan Canal Historic and Recreational Development Plan at Page 97 recognize that the well-developed recreational and historic resources of Washington Crossing State Park complement the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park. Nothing with respect to the proposed renovation project conflicts with the proposed recommendations set forth in the Master Plan for this section of the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park. Accordingly, the project is in compliance with this requirement.

The provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.3(a), which direct that major projects are discouraged from those portions of Zone A that comprise the Transportation canal environment of the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park, are inapplicable to the proposed project, which is a minor project.

The provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.3(b) discourage minor projects in certain canal environments and authorize the Commission to require mitigation for their adverse impacts. Commission staff observes that the proposed project arguably meets two of the compensatory criteria set forth in this section of the regulations. First, the project proposes an improvement to an area adjoining the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park. Secondly, the proposed exterior renovation enhances the public’s ability to interpret a historic structure. Therefore, the project is in compliance with this requirement.

N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(a) directs that projects in Zone A shall be set back from the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park sufficiently far so that the winter visual and natural quality of the park are not adversely affected. In the Transportation environment, all structures shall be located 200 feet or more from the park unless the Commission approves an alternative. The Johnson Ferry House is located approximately 160 feet from the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park, and the proposed renovations do not alter this setback distance. Therefore, the project is in compliance with this requirement.

N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(b) directs that projects in Zone A shall maintain a reasonable height and scale relationship to nearby structures or vegetation. In the Transportation canal environment, structures shall be limited to a height of 40 feet above existing grade where existing vegetation does not provide adequate winter screening. The proposed exterior renovation project does not alter the height of the existing Johnson Ferry House. Therefore, the project is in compliance with this requirement.

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N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(c) directs that for projects in Zone A, the exterior appearances of a project shall be in keeping with the character of the Delaware and Raritan Canal Park's individual environments. Specifically, colors used shall harmonize with the man-made or natural surroundings of the project and shall be typical of colors found in the park environment. Building materials and textures shall harmonize with the surrounding man-made and natural materials.

The submitted architectural plans indicate that the exterior renovation work would be conducted using natural wood for the millwork, siding, and framing repairs and barrier-free ramps and railings. Replacement shutters would be made from wood with copper drip caps. The proposed new gutters would be a half-round design and also made from copper. The privy cedar shingle roof would be replaced in-kind, as would the door. The proposed new woodshed would be composed of wood with a standing seam metal roof and would rest on brick piers. The stile and rail doors would be period correct with reproduction T-hinges, strap hinges with arrow and ball ends, and H-L hinges.

With respect to colors, the pale matte yellow body with dark matte red trim exterior of the Johnson Ferry House would remain unchanged. The applicant has indicated that new paint colors will match the existing color scheme, and that the contractor will be required to devise a standard color that matches or provide a custom color.

Commission staff determines, based upon the foregoing, that the proposed building materials and textures harmonize with the surrounding man-made and natural materials of both Washington Crossing State Park and the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park, and that the colors are typical of colors found in the park environment. Therefore, the project is in compliance with this requirement.

N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(d)1 directs that any electric, telephone, cable television, and other such lines and equipment shall be underground or otherwise not visible from the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park. The applicant's submission indicates that a proposed telephone/data service line already exists to the building and that it would be connected into the foundation, rather than through a basement window. The Commission may grant a waiver for aboveground terminals, transformers, and similar facilities, and for the extension of service in an existing development. Commission staff recommends the issuance of a waiver for this project.

The provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(d)2 direct that exposed storage areas, outbuildings, exposed machinery service areas, parking lots, loading areas, utility buildings, and similar ancillary areas and structures shall either be completely concealed from view from the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park or designed to minimize their visual impact on the park, are inapplicable to the proposed project.

The provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(d)3 and 4, respectively, which regulate the dimensions and location of commercial signage and outdoor advertising structures, are inapplicable to the proposed project, which proposes no commercial signage.

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The provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(d)5, which direct that wherever possible, natural terrains, soils, stones, and vegetation should be preserved, and that new vegetation, stones, and soils should be native to the environment in which they are placed, are inapplicable to the proposed project, which proposes no landscaping.

N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(d)6 directs that projects that are located in any officially designated Federal, State or local historic district or site shall be assessed for their impact upon that district or site. Recommendations to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate the impacts of a project on a listed property shall be made in consultation with the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and based upon the United States Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings. As noted hereinabove, the project is located within the boundaries of the Delaware and Raritan Canal Historic District, the Washington Crossing National Historic Landmark Area, and the Washington Crossing State Park Historic District and includes several historic buildings.

With respect to impacts to the Delaware and Raritan Canal Historic District, the applicant's submission indicates that the current view presented by the Johnson Ferry House would remain unchanged, and that the visual impact upon the canal park's multiuse trail would be non-existent to minimal. With respect to the Washington Crossing Historic District, the SHPO issued an authorization on September 23, 2024, which indicated that they reviewed the submitted archaeological monitoring workplan for the project site and found it to be acceptable. Accordingly, the SHPO determined that the proposed plans met the Secretary of Interior's Standards and did not constitute an encroachment on the Washington Crossing State Park Historic District.

Given the foregoing, Commission staff determines that the project is in compliance with this requirement, and that further consultation with the SHPO is not warranted in this case.

Historical Background: The Johnson Ferry House is one of the oldest buildings in Hopewell Township and is the only surviving building on the New Jersey side of Washington's crossing of the Delaware River. Prior to its association with one of the pivotal events of the American Revolution, the Washington Crossing area was a small riverside settlement that served as a minor transportation hub during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The house was originally constructed by Rutger Jansen around 1740. Jansen, raised in a Dutch family at Flatbush, Long Island, purchased 490 acres of land on the Delaware River from Daniel Coxe in the late 1600s. Garret Johnson (his son) anglicized the family name and began the ferry operations across the river in addition to his agricultural work. Garret and Judith Johnson raised 12 children in the ferry house. Garret expanded the ferry business in 1761 when he opened a tavern in the ferry house. He had two landings; one being located at the site of the present day bridge over the Delaware River. Garret Johnson is thought to have enlarged the ferry house before he died in 1766, and this may have been the time when the gambrel roof was added.

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Rutger Johnson, son of Garret, then inherited the ferry business. However, he only operated the business for one year because the family had to sell Garret's holdings to provide a dowry for one of his daughters. The family advertised the house and farmland for sale in the Pennsylvania Gazette on September 25, 1769, describing the house as "a large frame house with five rooms on a floor, with a cellar underneath, and a large stone kitchen, which is now occupied and has been for some years past as a tavern and ferry." The land as a whole included a barn, stables, a stone shop and kitchen, fruit orchards, grain fields, meadows, and timbered land. Unable to sell the property, the Johnsons rented it to tenants who farmed the land and operated the ferry. During the American Revolution, James Slack served as the ferry operator (1768-1778). Abraham Harvey of Bucks County purchased the ferry business in 1770; James and Richard Slack continued to operate the ferry business. Harvey apparently moved to the ferry house around 1786 and took charge of the ferry and tavern operations. Harvey died around 1788, and his son Moses Harvey sold the ferry property to Samuel Tomlinson in 1801.

The house was the site of some critical events of the American Revolution. Hessian troops based in Trenton patrolled the east bank of the Delaware River in late 1776, passing the ferry house many times. On Christmas Eve 1776, 30 Continental scouts skirmished with 50 Hessian jaegers nearby. The next day, Washington crossed the Delaware River with 2,400 troops. American troops -- and possibly Washington himself -- stopped at the ferry house that night before embarking for the surprise attack on the Hessians at Trenton.

Following James Slack and Richard Slack, the ferry business devolved upon the Tomlinson family, who were primarily farmers, suggesting that the ferry business was declining in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1817, the heirs of Joseph Tomlinson divided the farm, separating the ferry house/tavern from the ferry business. The house, tavern, and the farmland to the west became the property of Joseph B. and Charles Tomlinson, and the ferry business and the farmland to the east became the property of Abner Tomlinson (a tavern owner). The Moore family lived in the house throughout much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, being indicated on the 1849, 1875, and 1903 maps.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. Isidore Strittmater, a prominent physician from Philadelphia recognized the historic importance of the property and purchased it to preserve it. He also purchased the separate property owned by Abner Tomlinson. The State of New Jersey began to purchase property in the area for the creation of a park, and it purchased the Strittmater family property in 1923. In the early 1930s, the State worked with the federal Works Progress Administration to replace the shaped wooden shingles covering the house, resulting in its current appearance.

Architectural Background: The Johnson Ferry House is a small frame Dutch Colonial house constructed circa 1740 along with the associated barn and springhouse located on the westerly side of Route 29. The house is significant for its Dutch construction and was apparently constructed in three phases, as shown by the framing system in the basement: the circa 1740 core (present-day kitchen), a circa 1761 addition (west of the kitchen), and a circa 1770 north addition consisting of three rooms. These three building phases resulted in a rectangular, gambrel-roofed one-and-a-half story building four bays long and two bays wide.

The house faces south, where two doors open into the two southern rooms. The gambrel roof has a flared lower slope (where the gabled roof dormers are located) and is clad with wood shingles. The walls are clad with shaped wood shingles on the sides and wide clapboards on the ends. The building was re-sided in the 1930s, likely in anticipation of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of George Washington's birth. The doors and windows are old (if not original) and are arranged asymmetrically. Key architectural characteristics include its flared gambrel roof, large T-shaped centered chimney, window and door size and placement, and wood shingled walls.



(circa 1890)



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(1926)

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(1945)



(present day)

**Staff Recommendation:** Staff recommends approval.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Hutchison", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Hutchison  
Executive Director

- c. Hopewell Township Planning Board  
Mercer County Planning Board  
Inga Gabliks, Acting Superintendent, Washington Crossing State Park  
Jesse West-Rosenthal, Ph.D., Program Specialist 3, CIER SHPO