

Wilmington, Delaware
April 15, 2021

#0056

Sponsor:

**Council
Member
Cabrera**

Co-Sponsors:

**Council
President
Congo**

**Council
Members
Walsh
Spadola
B. Fields
Darby
Oliver**

WHEREAS, neighborhoods in the city of Wilmington were negatively impacted by the construction of Interstate 95 during the early 1960s through its completion in 1968. Several neighborhoods saw new physical barriers and divisions to their neighborhoods as a result of the construction of the new federal highway. Hundreds of residents were displaced. Businesses, theatres and houses of worship were also displaced. The new physical divides in some ways mirrored the racial, social and economic divides growing in the city during a period of great tumult and unrest; and

WHEREAS, the city of Wilmington was home to the longest occupation of the National Guard following the short lived riots after the death of Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. In response to the destruction taking place in Wilmington in April 1968, then-Governor Terry mobilized Delaware's entire 2,800 National Guard to secure and patrol Wilmington. The violence and its destruction were quelled within a month and by late May, all other U.S. cities patrolled by similar forces were called off. Wilmington remained occupied with nightly patrols of armed troops driving through the streets of Wilmington. The occupation was the longest in the country and lasted until the election of a new Governor, who recalled the troops and ended the occupation in 1969; and

WHEREAS, a large infrastructure project is underway on Interstate 95. The Delaware Department of Transportation's Restore the Corridor Wilmington rehabilitation project began in March 2021 and is estimated to take two years to complete. It encompasses numerous bridges including the mile-long Wilmington Viaduct which spans the Riverfront area, arterial and local streets. This work presents a unique opportunity for Wilmington to reunite its city and establish an urban National Park. The Delaware Department of Transportation has expressed its willingness to explore the feasibility of the proposed project; and

WHEREAS, only one National Park exists in Delaware. Following many years of strong advocacy by U.S. Senator Tom Carper, then-President Barack Obama

authorized the establishment of the First State National Historical Park in 2013. It consists of seven sites spread throughout the state. Included in the seven sites are the Mature Forest north of Wilmington to the oldest standing house in Delaware located in Lewes; and

WHEREAS, the city of Philadelphia experienced similar impact in the division of its city due to the original creation of Interstate 95. In 2014, the city of Philadelphia commissioned a feasibility study that went on to win an excellence award from the American Society of Landscape Architects. The study found that a cap could be constructed to host a 4-acre park to be built over a highway. The work is in progress at an estimated cost of \$225 million and the park is due in 2024; and

WHEREAS, West Wilmington neighborhoods were significantly impacted by the construction of Interstate 95. The construction of a cap for an urban National Park in Wilmington could reconnect Quaker Hill, Trinity Vicinity, Hilltop, Tilton Park and West Center City and help restore these neighborhoods and reunite Wilmington; and

WHEREAS, several Members of Delaware’s General Assembly have been actively soliciting support for a new urban National Park in Wilmington. The magnitude of the project will require a mix of funding sources. Rep. Dorsey Walker, Rep. Brady, Rep. Chukwuocha, Sen. Brown, Sen. Lockman, and Sen. McBride have requested funding support from the U.S. Department of Transportation. Delaware Department of Transportation is willing to explore the feasibility of creating a cap on Wilmington’s Interstate 95 by funding a study in FY22. President Biden recently released the \$2 trillion American Jobs Plan, which includes significant new funding for infrastructure spending. The bill has not yet been heard in Congress. There may be unique opportunities for federal funding in the coming months as a result of stimulus spending in response to the pandemic and economic crises still facing our country; and

WHEREAS, parks are important for myriad reasons. A new National Park can help Wilmington and Delaware strongly and positively impact: community revitalization, community engagement, economic development, creating safer

neighborhoods, green infrastructure, improving public health, arts and cultural programs, tourism, smart growth, and climate change management.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WILMINGTON that Wilmington City Council strongly encourages the Delaware General Assembly to develop and support legislation and funding to create a cap on Interstate 95 in Wilmington to host a new urban National Park.

Passed by City Council,

Attest: _____
City Clerk

SYNOPSIS: This Resolution is to support the building of a national park in Wilmington to reconnect and restore neighborhoods divided by the installation of Interstate 95.