

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 6418



U.S. NATIONAL ARBORETUM
INSTALLATION OF SECURITY FENCE
3501 New York Avenue, NE

Submitted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture

July 1, 2004

Abstract

The Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, has submitted preliminary and final site development plans for a chain link perimeter security fence at the National Arboretum's eastern boundary. The submitted 2000-foot section of fence separates the Arboretum and the National Park Service Reservation 343 property that is directly adjacent to the Anacostia River. The fence was constructed in December 2003 without review and approval by the Commission.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary and final site development plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1)).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary and final site development plans for the Arboretum Security Fence, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 43.20(38.00)-41378, **as a temporary improvement** which shall be removed by the Arboretum management and replaced with a fence designed to be compatible with the Anacostia Riverwalk when that pathway is constructed at the river near the Arboretum.

Requires that the currently installed barbed-wire fence extension be removed and that all current posts and fence fabric be painted black.

Recommends the Director of the National Arboretum coordinate the operation of the service vehicle gate with the Superintendent of the National Capital Parks-East, 1900 Anacostia Drive, SE, to assure a feasible access arrangement to the adjacent NPS property, which would not deter required NPS activity, and that an agreement copy be provided to the Commission no later than three months after the date of this approval.

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Site Description

The preliminary and final site development plans detail installing an eight-foot high chain link perimeter security fence at the National Arboretum's eastern boundary. The entire location of the fence alignment is at the base of the sloping hills within the Arboretum.

The submitted 2000-foot section of fence separates the Arboretum property and the National Park Service Reservation 343, which is land directly adjacent to the Anacostia River. The fence is situated two feet inside the Arboretum property and includes barbed-wire deterrent stranding, at the top of the fence, which matches existing perimeter fencing at the south perimeter of the property.

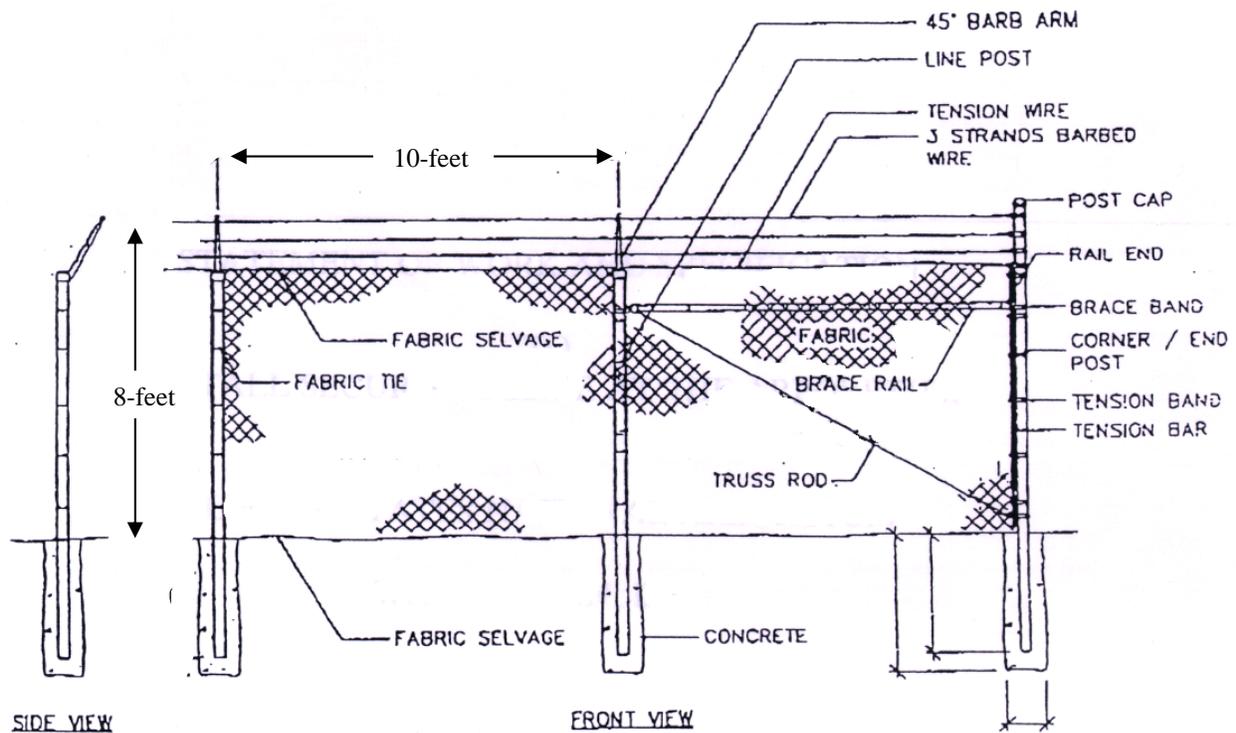
Background

The purpose of the new fence line is to complete the existing perimeter fence that is present at the north, west and south boundaries of the Arboretum property. The east boundary of the Arboretum is parallel to the Anacostia River. Much of the line of the new fence lies within a wooded area at the bottom of a steep slope and as such will be minimally visible in the context of the Arboretum. The fence was recommended in a security assessment conducted by the USDA in May 2002.



Proposal

The fence design, as submitted, reflects the constructed fence installed in December 2003. It is a chain link fence that matches the existing south perimeter fence near Langston Golf Course. The submitted fence includes two gates, one a vehicle service gate between the Arboretum and Park Service land, and one a pedestrian gate located on the gravel pathway that leads to the Arboretum.



CHAIN LINK PERIMETER FENCE ELEVATION

area known as China Valley. The pedestrian access point will be opened to the public during regular Arboretum operational hours. All gates would be secured during evening and night-time periods, and also would be closed during federal security alert status "orange" and "red".

Development Program

- Applicant: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service
- Architect: Agricultural Research Service, Facilities Management and Operations Division
- Cost: Approximately \$200,000 including fencing to replace damaged existing sections at south perimeter.
- Schedule: Replacement of existing damaged fence sections and proposed new fence section was completed in mid-December 2003

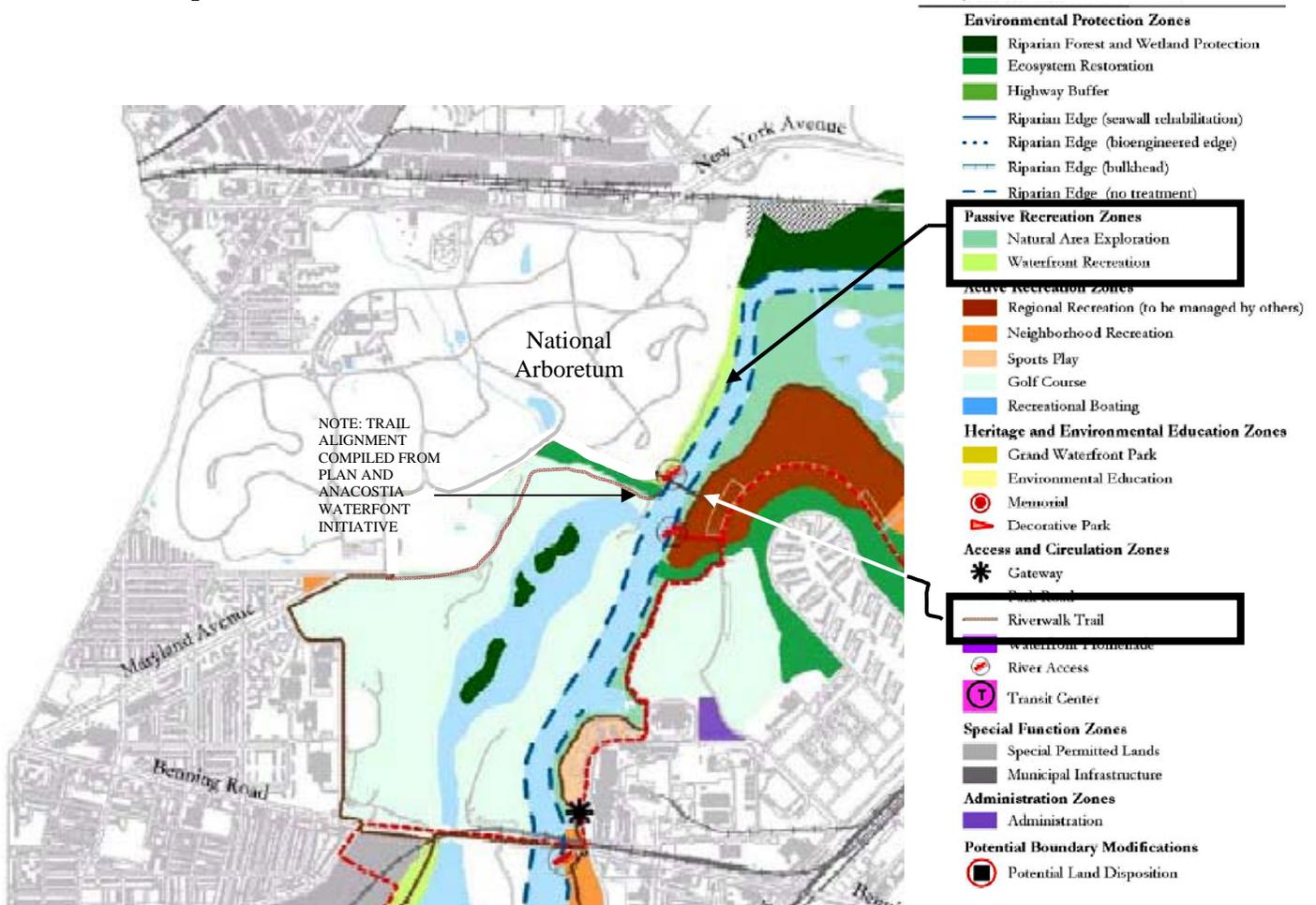
PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Staff **recommends approval** of the preliminary and final site development plans for the security fence **as a temporary improvement, with conditions**. NCPC staff analysis concludes the new fence is a minor addition to the existing perimeter fence line of the Arboretum and provides for pedestrian access to the Anacostia shoreline. However, its physical features are not in conformance with the Arboretum master plan design initiatives. Moreover, the installed fence's natural metal appearance is not appropriate as a background to the river shore.

Review of the installed fence has been accomplished with consideration of other important adjacent facility plans. In 2002, NPS met with interested parties and citizens to discuss its plans to prepare the first General Management Plan for Anacostia Park (NPS Reservation 343). This plan will direct management of Anacostia Park, identifying the opportunities for visitors that will be available in the future. A portion of the plan indicates access along the Anacostia River adjacent to the Arboretum and identifies the NPS area near the fence as a passive waterfront recreation area.

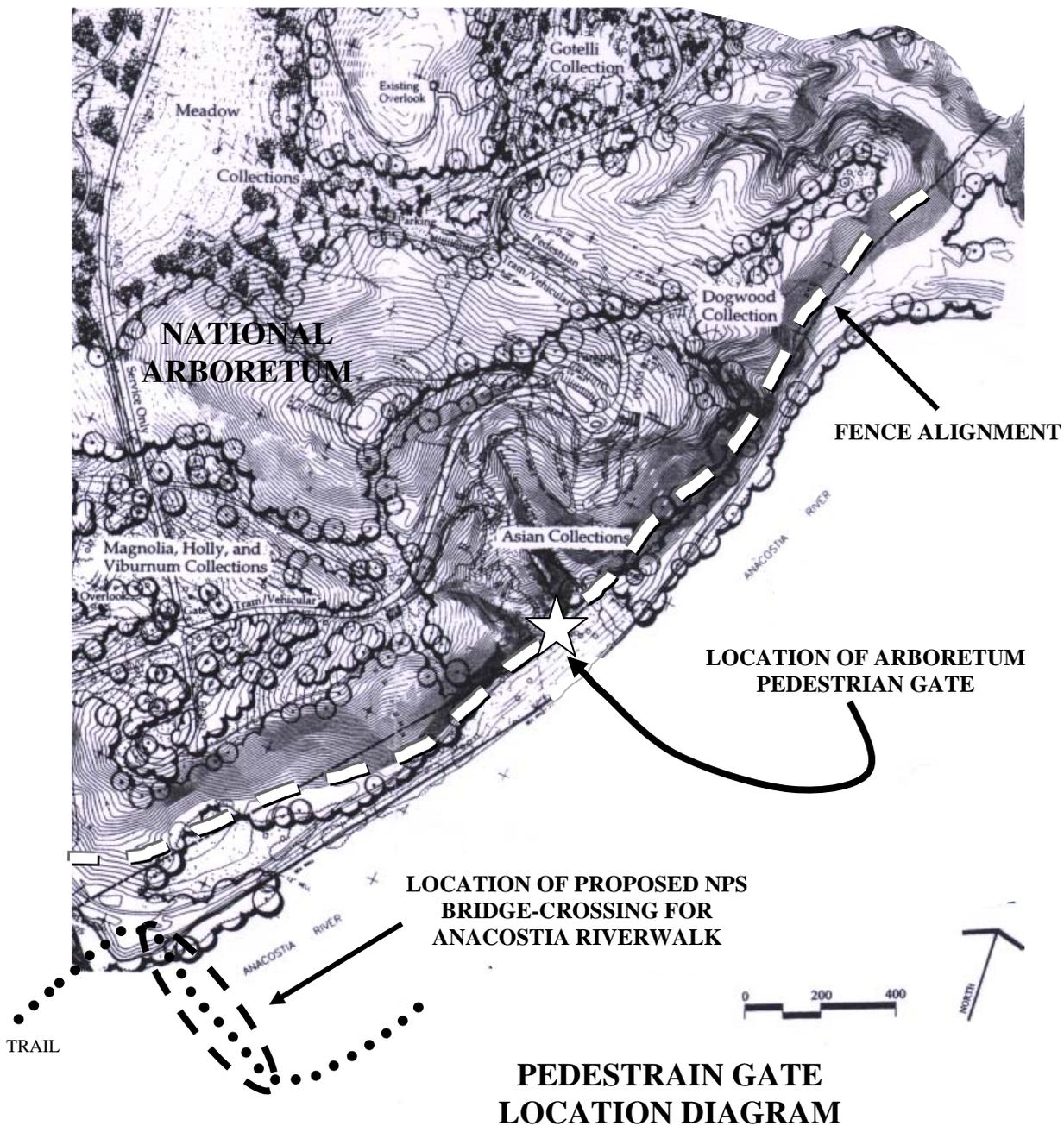
GENERAL
MANAGEMENT
PLAN



BASE MAP AND LEGEND OBTAINED FROM NATIONAL CAPITAL PARKS-EAST, NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION WEBSITE ON ANACOSTIA RIVER PARK - <http://www.nps.gov/nace/anacostia.htm>

The proposed Anacostia River waterfront pedestrian/bike pathway provides a bridged river crossing southeast of the Arboretum fence at Hickey Run, at a distance of over 120 feet from the fence and over 1000 feet from the pedestrian gate. The river pedestrian/bike pathway is not precluded or interfered with by the fence location in any way. NPS parkland is situated at Hickey Run's confluence with the Anacostia, and the river shore exhibits a width in excess of 110 feet on the west at the proposed crossing point. The future pathway then continues south along the west shoreline towards the Langston Golf Course.

Because the submitted fence design is located entirely within the Arboretum and would not impact any proposed riverwalk pathway situated within the adjacent NPS property, staff



recommends temporary approval of the Arboretum security fence, with a specified time limit connected to the implementation of the Riverwalk at this reach of the river, and other modifications. Staff endorses maintaining the installed fence given that the location of the fence alignment is at the base of the sloping hills within the Arboretum, and is located in or adjacent to wooded slopes rendering the fence minimal in visual appearance from inside the Arboretum.

Nevertheless, staff finds the Arboretum decision to complete the design, its natural metal galvanized appearance, and installation of the fence prior to Commission review extremely regrettable and in violation of federal requirements for Department projects in the District of Columbia. Also, the presence of the barbed-wire extension at the top of the fence adds little in actual deterrence effect but appears very incongruous with the river shore environment, as perceived by the public, due to its proximity to the river and the natural environment and public views enjoyed at that park location. Moreover, because the Director of the Arboretum has acknowledged the intent for revising the perimeter fence design when the Anacostia Riverwalk trail is implemented, staff concludes the barbed wire should be removed from the fence design. If the barbed section removal is problematic to the Department, staff recommends the fence height be extended two feet; similar to fence extensions that have occurred at Metrorail right-of-way locations. The applicants offer to change the color of the fence posts and chain link to reduce its visibility is also fully endorsed by staff. As a further note to the endeavor, staff also recommends that the Director of the Arboretum coordinate the operation of the service vehicle



Photo Courtesy of The Earth Conservation Corps

INSTALLED PERIMETER FENCE AS SEEN FROM ANACOSTIA EAST SHORE

gate with the Superintendent of the National Capital Parks-East, 1900 Anacostia Drive, SE, to assure feasible Park Service staff access to the adjacent NPS property.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The proposal affects an important open space facility within the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. The Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element of the Plan designates the installation as a distinct feature to the Capital's environs and states:

The importance of Washington as a national tourist attraction allows for the presentation of unique facilities such as the National Arboretum, the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, and the National Zoo. These open air displays are important, both visually and educationally, and should be continued and carefully maintained as part of the National Capital Open Space system.

The proposal, as submitted, would adversely impact offsite views toward the Arboretum in a discernible and long-term context in comparison to the former views afforded from the shoreline of the Anacostia River. However, staff does note that the other cardinal property boundaries of the Arboretum are currently fenced with a combination of both metal picket and chain-link enclosures. Consequently, the precedent for perimeter barriers at the Arboretum already exists and has been maintained in the context of the adjacent west and south neighborhoods for many years.

A security assessment by the U.S. Department of Agriculture substantiates a potential weakness in federal management operation of the Arboretum regarding continuation of the unsecured boundary at the east perimeter. Review of the fence location finds that the alignment is at the base of the sloping hills within the Arboretum results in minimal visual intrusion at the Arboretum and does not impact the educational mission of the facility.

Given the most important impact of the proposal is on offsite views, staff recommends the Director of the Arboretum revisit the fence design once the more defined characteristics, design, and location of the Anacostia Riverwalk are established. The objective of the Arboretum management should be to maintain the importance of the National Arboretum as a unique visual and educational federal facility by ensuring its appropriate appearance within the National Capital Open Space system that will include the Anacostia Riverwalk.

Urban Design and Security Plan (UDSP)

The proposed perimeter fencing is the last segment of an enclosure that already exists at the Arboretum at its north, south, and west boundaries.

On November 1, 2001, the National Capital Planning Commission adopted a report of the Interagency Security Task Force entitled *Designing for Security in the Nation's Capital*. The

report recommended specific urban design strategies to improve mobility and aesthetic conditions through a coordinated prepared plan. The Plan approved by the Commission in October 2002 focuses exclusively on perimeter building security designed to protect employees, visitors, and federal functions and property from threats generated by unauthorized vehicles approaching or entering sensitive building areas. It does not address other kinds of security measures, such as building hardening, or operational procedures. One aspect of the Plan, however, includes the process and recommendation for specific preparation of a security risk assessment at each federal facility.

Although the Arboretum is outside the central monumental core that is the focus of the UDSP, the U.S. Department of Agriculture did undertake a risk assessment of the Arboretum property. After a May 2002 security assessment by a 12-member U.S. Department of Agriculture Headquarters team, the Arboretum was directed to implement various additional security measures that include:

- Replacement of old existing perimeter fence to secure open and damaged sections of the existing fence.
- Enforcement of identification measures for staff including badges and uniforms.
- Proper photo identification for volunteers and contract employees
- Installation of secure entry systems for doors and non-public areas
- Adoption of a visitor pass system for non-public areas
- Preparation of a revised security manual
- Increase in the number of security personnel during high-security alert conditions

The security analysis by USDA headquarters indicated the facility is vulnerable to bioterrorist and ecoterrorist threats because of its plant research and primary mission statement of research and education of the American people as it pertains to flora, and particularly to plant species development for a variety of cultural purposes. The analysis highlighted instances of plant genetic research destroyed by small organized groups within the United States, and which is similar to research conducted at the Arboretum.

Master Plan Compliance

NCPC staff analysis concludes the new fence is a minor addition to the existing perimeter fence line of the Arboretum and provides for pedestrian access to the Anacostia shoreline in accordance with the Arboretum Master Plan of November 2000. The specific provision for a pedestrian access gate at the east perimeter of the facility was a concern outlined in the Master Plan review at that time and which was further endorsed by the Commission in its approval of the Plan in 2000. The specific type or location of a fence was not described by the Master Plan.

In the context of the Master Plan and adjacent Park Service property, the Plan indicated the width of U.S. Reservation 343 (NPS property) from the Anacostia River shoreline to the Arboretum property line, at the river's closest point, is approximately 65 feet. Average distance from the Arboretum to the river shoreline is approximately 100 feet or more.

Anacostia Waterfront Initiative Plan

A major proposal of the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative is the establishment of a continuous Anacostia Riverwalk and Trail along the east and west banks of the Anacostia River. The proposed Riverwalk is both a recreational amenity and a potential transportation alternative for Washington-area commuters. The Riverwalk and its loops will provide 20 miles of interconnected greenway trails, pedestrian-friendly river crossings, and cycling lanes on streets connecting waterfront recreational areas to neighborhoods and cultural sites along the Anacostia River. The proposed Riverwalk begins at the Route 50 overpass near the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and continues downriver along both sides of the Anacostia to the Southwest Waterfront, the Tidal Basin and the National Mall. Four trail types relate to general alignment and include the Primary Riverwalk, Trail Loops, the Blue Plains Rail-to-Trail and Connector Trails. The west shoreline Riverwalk trail near the Arboretum is identified as a future trail loop known as the Langston Loop.

The General Development Plan by NPS for Anacostia Park is the next step to the realization of the Riverwalk and Trail. As noted in the evaluation above the current fence is not in conflict with the proposed location of the Riverwalk and Trail.

Federal Capital Improvements Program

The proposed chain link fence is not included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program, Fiscal Years 2003-2008 adopted by the Commission on July 11, 2002, or any succeeding program. The 2004-2009 FCIP was adopted September 4, 2003 and this project was not submitted in that program.

National Environmental Policy Act

In conformance with its NEPA compliance procedures, the Department completed an environmental assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact in October 2000 which encompassed the establishment of a perimeter fence as a portion of the Master Plan. Pursuant to the NCPC Environmental Procedures, Section 8, the submitted plans are categorically excluded as a federal action.

National Historic Preservation Act

The Department coordinated the project's review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act with the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) and on March 30, 2004 the DCHPO determined that the installed fence would have no adverse effect to historic resources. As part of the determination, stipulation that the fence is considered a temporary improvement only was highlighted along with other conditions by the DC SHPO. (See attached letter).

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on December 10, 2003, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating, except the District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP), whose representative requested additional time to resolve outstanding issues.

The participating agencies were NCPC, the Department of Housing and Community Development; the District Department of Transportation, the National Park Service and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. Although not in attendance the representative for the General Services Administration concurred in the coordination of this project.

On January 13, 2004, DCOP permanently withdrew its coordination for this project and strongly objected to the fence construction that transpired before the review and approval process was completed. DCOP further emphasized that mitigation measures for the constructed fence are essential. DCOP requested the U.S. Arboretum consider a redesign of the pedestrian gate at a future date (See attached letter dated April 6, 2004).

The Arboretum Director has indicated he will address the concerns of the Office of Planning as the river corridor planning efforts are further established in the future, and will work with both the District of Columbia and the Park Service to identify alternative design solutions for gate and fence selections that meet objectives of DCOP. Furthermore, the Arboretum Director in a letter to the Commission's Executive Director dated May 7, 2004, indicates the USDA will screen the existing fence with additional vegetation. Finally, the Arboretum has committed to further conceptual plan development of the Arboretum property facing the river in an effort to establish a long range plan that will be compatible with the Anacostia Riverwalk and Trail along the east and west banks of the river.

Commission of Fine Arts

At the April 15, 2004 meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts, a review of the fence was accomplished by that body and was approved as a temporary improvement only. The Commission of Fine Arts further requested the USDA re-evaluate the installed fence when the Anacostia River Waterfront Trail, adjacent to the Arboretum, is developed.