

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NWitherell

NCPC File No. 6436



**WASHINGTON MONUMENT GROUNDS
TEMPORARY CONCESSION FACILITY
PRELIMINARY AND FINAL SITE AND BUILDING PLANS
15th Street, NW and Madison Drive
WASHINGTON, DC**

Submission by the National Park Service

February 26, 2004

Abstract

The National Park Service has submitted plans for a temporary concession facility on the Washington Monument Grounds. The facility would consist of two concession trailers and associated improvements, including a handicapped ramp and tables and chairs for visitors, and the installation of a tent measuring 50 feet by 80 feet to cover the trailers and the seating and storage areas. Interlocking plastic mats would be used on the ground under the tent. The previous concession facility in the Washington Monument Lodge was closed in September 2003 for the construction of the security project at the Washington Monument. According to the National Park Service, the interim facility would be used until late 2005, when permanent concession facilities on the Washington Monument Grounds would be completed. The National Park Service plans to begin site and building designs for the permanent facilities during spring 2004.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

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

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves, for a period not to exceed two years, preliminary and final site and building plans for the temporary concession facility, consisting of two trailers and associated visitor service features, covered by a tent, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.42(38.00)41318.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The National Park Service (NPS) has submitted a proposal for the short term installation of a concession facility at the northeast corner of the intersection of 15th Street, NW and Madison Drive. The site is on the Washington Monument Grounds, which is bounded by 14th and 17th Streets, NW, and Constitution Avenue, NW and the Tidal Basin. The previous concession facility in the Monument Lodge was closed to the public in September 2003 and is currently inside the construction perimeter at the monument.

The concession facility will include:

- A light blue, vinyl tent, measuring 50 feet by 80 feet in area and 28 feet in height, covering the concession features
- Two trailers, measuring 12 feet by 40 feet and 10 feet by 30 feet, covered with siding and painted gray
- Sixteen tables with four chairs each, and two food service counters
- Plastic mats covering the ground
- Aluminum handicapped ramp and railing for the retail trailer
- Trash and storage containers behind the two trailers, inaccessible to the public and hidden from view by a solid wall inside the northeast corner of the tent.

NPS proposes the tent in order to cover the two trailers and the trash and storage area from view and to keep the ground as dry as possible, since it will not be paved as the other Mall kiosk seating areas are. The tent has a peak ventilation system, so that air and smoke leave the tent through the peak. Heaters will be provided during the winter. Temporary electric and water lines will be installed. A prefabricated aluminum access ramp, with hand and guard rails, will be installed. The trailers will be covered with T-111 siding extending to the ground and painted gray. All service equipment, trash storage, golf carts, water tanks, and storage facilities will be located in the northeast corner of the tent behind the two trailers. The storage yard will be enclosed within solid tent walls and will not be visible to the public. Plastic flooring will be laid on the ground under the tent and a short pathway of the plastic matting will be laid to connect the tent area and the Madison Drive sidewalk. Tables and chairs from Smith and Hawken will be used, as they are at the other kiosks.

During installation and removal of the facility, temporary tree protection fencing will be used five feet beyond the drip line of the trees. Following removal of the trailers and other furnishings and equipment, the site will be returned to its current or a better condition. NPS states that the approved Olin landscape plan for this area (site trees and new sidewalks) will be implemented after the trailers are removed.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

The location for the facility is generally one of the two locations described in NPS's Development Concept Plan (DCP) for the Washington Monument Grounds for permanent concession facilities. The DCP was approved by the Commission in 1993. The DCP includes many elements, some of which have been implemented and some of which are under construction now. The DCP calls for Tourmobile stops along Jefferson and Madison Drives with associated concession kiosks. The Revised DCP, including some security features, was approved by the Commission in January 2003.

The Landscape Plan for the Washington Monument Grounds, approved by the Commission at its May 2003 meeting, includes some tree plantings in the area of the proposed temporary concession facility. NPS states that it will undertake the landscape plan in this immediate area after the trailers and tent are removed.

EVALUATION

The staff supports the function of the proposed facility for the comfort of visitors to the Mall and the Washington Monument Grounds. The location is a sensitive one, within the viewshed of the monumental east-west axis. However, the facility's location is reasonable, given NPS's identification of that location for a permanent facility. Further, its duration will be no longer than two years, during which the site and design of the permanent facilities will be studied and, if approved, executed.

The staff has concluded that the proposed tent is an acceptable feature of the temporary concession facility. Possible alternatives would be a smaller tent covering the work area behind the trailers, a smaller tent covering the trailers, or no tent. NPS states that it would like to disguise the appearance of the two trailers to the extent possible and refers, for a prototype, to the Discovery tent on the Washington Monument Grounds used for NPS interpretation during the renovation of the monument in 1999-2000. Further, similar blue tents are currently in use on the Ellipse in President's Park to cover the bleachers.

For practical reasons, NPS would like to protect the ground around the trailers from becoming muddy during rainy weather and to extend the drip line of a tent beyond the area where visitors would stand in line at the trailers. At the permanent kiosks on the Mall, the seating is in open areas, but the ground is paved. The ground under the temporary facility would not be paved, but would instead be covered with interlocking plastic mats. The tent would also help to hide from public view the trash and storage area behind the two trailers. A solid wall would be installed well inside the northeast corner of the tent to hide the storage yard in that corner. Moving this solid wall inside the perimeter of the tent was one of the suggestions made during the public historic preservation consultation meeting. Another suggestion was to shorten the retail trailer so that it did not extend all the way to the eastern edge of the tent. NPS was successful in shortening the trailer by ten feet so that the trailer's end will be less visible under the tent, and in making several additional modest design changes to the trailers, all of which will improve the appearance of the facility. Staff also concludes that the light blue color is an acceptable, neutral color.

The approved landscape plan by Laurie Olin includes shade trees in the proposed area of the temporary facility. Staff notes that the NPS submission states that the proposed trees in the Olin 2003 plan are to be planted after the demolition of the temporary trailers and “while construction of the new kiosk is almost complete.”

NPS has informed staff that it will begin planning the site and building design for permanent concession facilities this spring. Staff looks forward to early consultation with NPS on the design and planning processes for these facilities. The staff’s recommendation for approval of the temporary facility does not indicate any suggested direction for the site planning or design of the permanent facilities. NPS has not informed staff of the future programming of the Monument Lodge, except that it will not be used for concessions.

NPS states that the temporary facility will be needed until late 2005. For that reason, and to allow NPS and the Commission to revisit the continued appropriateness of the facility in case of delay, the staff recommends that the temporary facility be approved for a period not to exceed two years.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on February 11, 2004 and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project had been coordinated with all agencies participating except the D.C. Office of Planning. The representative for the Office of Planning withheld coordination pending 106 consultation. The participating agencies were: NCPC; the District Department of Transportation; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. Subsequent to this meeting, the D.C. Office of Planning concurred in the coordination of this project.

Commission of Fine Arts

NPS will submit the temporary concession facility to CFA for its review in March 2004.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

An applicable policy from the Parks, Open Space, and Natural Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan is:

The great cross-axes of the Mall Complex, from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial, are a unique national space—they are a summary of democratic ideals and achievement that must be protected from inappropriate development. The Mall should be considered complete, and any improvements necessary in this area should be limited in scope and sensitively designed to reinforce the integrity of the Mall Complex.

The staff concludes that the temporary facility is limited in scope and appropriately designed to meet the short term needs of the NPS in providing visitor services at the Washington Monument Grounds.

National Environmental Policy Act

NPS has categorically excluded the action from further analysis under NEPA, pursuant to Section 3.4A (10) of National Park Service Director's Order 12 (DO-12).

National Historic Preservation Act

NPS initiated consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO) on this project on February 10, 2004, stating that the project would be considered under the requirements of the Programmatic Agreement (PA) for the Washington Monument Grounds. NPS distributed the project plans to the consulting parties for their review and held a meeting with the parties on February 24, 2004. Suggestions for design and location modifications were made. Following the meeting, NPS summarized and responded to the suggestions, stating which ones it would undertake. These included shortening the length of one of the trailers, improving the appearance of the window and door trim on the trailers, and using a thin, tube railing on the handicapped ramp. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation staff also disseminated notes on the content of the meeting. These summaries and NPS's determination of how the proposed project met the terms of the Programmatic Agreement and the Secretary's Standards (both during the construction on the Washington Monument Grounds and subsequently) were forwarded to the DC SHPO. Recognizing the nature of the facility and after reviewing NPS's responses to the comments received from the consulting parties, the DC SHPO concurred with NPS's determination, writing that "temporary placement of this facility, with the modifications agreed to in [its] written response, will have no adverse effect on the Washington Monument or on the Mall."