

STAFF RECOMMENDATION



NCPC File No. 5853

E. BARRETT PRETTYMAN U.S. COURTHOUSE ANNEX
ROTUNDA PERIMETER SECURITY
333 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC

Submitted by the General Services Administration

October 28, 2004

Abstract

The General Services Administration has submitted two alternative proposals for perimeter security elements at the E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse Annex rotunda along Constitution Avenue, NW to control vehicular access and to provide a vehicular stand-off for the courthouse annex. Staff is recommending one of the two proposals as most consistent with the Commission's September action; however, both proposals are represented within for the Commission's consideration at the applicant's request.

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 perimeter security at the E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse Annex rotunda in northwest Washington, DC **depicted in Alternative Proposal 1, except for the bollards at the west end of the project site and the bollards at the corner of 3rd Street NW and Constitution Avenue, NW**, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.24(38.00)-41432.

Commends the General Services Administration for incorporating bollard-reinforced planters that also serve as seating for pedestrians into the perimeter security design.

Requires the General Services Administration to incorporate a raised landscape planter into the existing landscaping at the west end of the project site in lieu of the proposed bollards; and to utilize the bollard arrangement depicted in Alternative Proposal 2 for the corner of 3rd Street, NW and Constitution Avenue, NW.

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Site Description

The project is located at the northwest corner of the intersection of 3rd Street, NW with Constitution Avenue, NW. The project site is adjacent to the newly-constructed E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse Annex. To the east, across 3rd Street is the U.S. Department of Labor headquarters. To the south are Constitution and Pennsylvania Avenues, and to the north across C Street is the District of Columbia Municipal Building. The site is urban in character.

Background

October 2001

The Commission approved the design of the E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse annex on October 10, 2001, but excepted approval of the proposed perimeter security concept, which consisted of a continuous line of bollards surrounding the perimeter of the building. The Commission expressed concern over the use of long lines of bollards in general, and cited the fact that NCPC's Urban Design and Security Plan (UDSP) was just getting underway. The Commission directed the applicant to resubmit its perimeter security plan in accordance with the guidelines established by the UDSP upon the plan's completion.

January 2004

The General Services Administration (GSA) resubmitted the perimeter security plan to staff in December of 2003 for the January 2004 meeting. The new submission differed only slightly from the design rejected by the Commission in October of 2001, and staff advised GSA to withdraw the project until February so that NCPC and GSA could work together to improve the perimeter security design. Over the next several months, staff worked with the applicant in an attempt to incorporate other streetscape elements into the design in accordance with the UDSP. We were not able to develop a satisfactory solution in time to meet deadlines for the February meeting, and the applicant withdrew the project once again.

March 2004

In March of 2004, the applicant submitted a revised design to the Commission for approval. The design included not only bollards, but also post and rail fence elements in front of each of the street trees along 3rd Street. Two different types of bollards were used to visually break up the perimeter. The Commission approved the portion of the design along 3rd Street, NW and C Street, NW, but not that portion of the design around the building's rotunda, and directed the applicant to return with a design for the rotunda area that better incorporated the perimeter into the building architecture. The Commission directed the applicant to specifically consider a landscaped plinth wall at the rotunda.



March 2004 approved scheme along 3rd Street, NW facing northeast

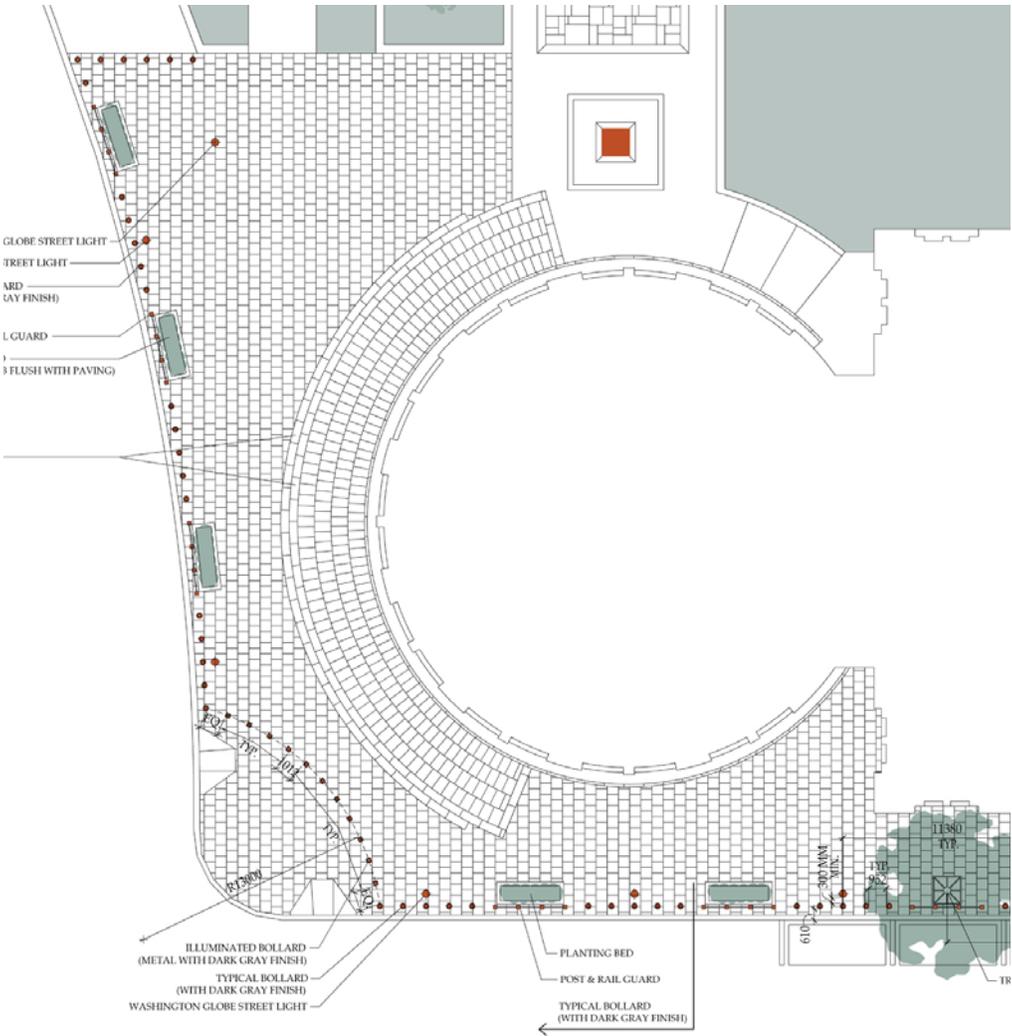
March 2004-September 2004

Following the March 2004 submission, the applicant met several times with NCPC staff to consider solutions for the rotunda area of the courthouse annex. During this time period, GSA also met with the U.S. Marshals and with the Department of Homeland Security to further refine the threat assessment for the entire Prettyman Courthouse complex. Through this process, the Department of Homeland Security raised the threat assessment for the complex to a higher level and recommended that the secure perimeter at the rotunda be moved outward to the curb to provide an increased standoff distance. This decision invalidated the use of a landscaped plinth wall, because such a plinth wall would be impossible to achieve at the curb line. GSA and NCPC staff set out to consider other solutions that would blend more appropriately into the urban landscape. These included the use of raised planters, planter and bollard combinations, bollards, and bollard/post and rail solutions.

September 2004

After careful examination, staff recommended that the applicant design this portion of the perimeter to blend with the solution approved by the Commission along 3rd Street, NW, using a combination of bollards, post and rail elements and landscaping. The applicant objected to the use of street trees in front of the rotunda because it would visually intrude on the architectural expression of the building along the Pennsylvania Avenue vista, citing the fact that the rotunda was designed specifically to respond to the U.S. Capitol, the Ronald Reagan Building, and other prominent buildings located along the Avenue. Staff visited the site and determined that the stretch of Constitution Avenue at the Courthouse did not incorporate street trees and concluded that street trees were not required at this location. Instead staff asked the applicant to incorporate

planters flush with the sidewalk that would contain plantings similar to those to be used at the adjacent existing courthouse building. The Commission of Fine Arts requested that the bollards and post and rail elements be designed in a single color, rather than repeat the alternating colors used for these elements along 3rd Street, NW. At its September 2004 meeting, the Commission approved relocating the perimeter security line at the Prettyman Annex rotunda to a position within 24 inches of the curb line, but instructed the applicant to revise the design solution to include street trees and to reduce the overall number of bollards.



September 2004 proposal

November 2004-Current Submission

The applicant has chosen to submit two alternative proposals for the Commission's consideration.

Alternative proposal 1 retains the perimeter near the curb line as approved by the Commission in September 2004. It also incorporates street trees into the design, and adds planters in order to reduce the number of bollards. The planters incorporate bollards hidden within the planters; street trees are protected at the curb line with post-and-rail elements interspersed with both bollards and planters. At staff's request, the applicant has designed the planters so that they also serve as seating elements along the sidewalk. Although the west end of this solution, where it abuts the temporary security line of the main Prettyman Courthouse does not represent an ideal design, staff considers this portion of the perimeter to be temporary and advises the applicant to redesign it to incorporate it in a more comprehensive manner into the final design solution for the main courthouse's secure perimeter.

Alternative proposal 2 also incorporates planters and street trees into the design. This alternative relocates the perimeter security line back toward the building to follow the footprint of the rotunda. While planters are incorporated into the perimeter security line at the centerline of the rotunda, the streetscape elements placed along the curb line of Constitution Avenue do not serve a security function. Planters serve as seating elements in similar fashion to alternative proposal 1. This alternative alters the arrangement of bollards near the pedestrian/wheelchair user crossing points at the corner of Constitution Avenue and 3rd Street to increase the stand-off distance at this location while better accommodating pedestrian/wheelchair user movement.

Comparison Criteria	Alternative Proposal 1	Alternative Proposal 2
Street Trees Added	Yes	Yes
Planter Boxes Added	Yes	Yes
Reduces Number of Bollards	Yes	Yes
Maximizes Pedestrian Space	Yes	No
Meets applicants threat assessment	Yes	No

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that alternative proposal 1 is the most responsive to the Commission's September 2004 action. It retains the secure perimeter along the curb line as approved by the Commission after the applicant stressed the need to move the security line outward due to a recently revised threat assessment for the building. Additionally, alternative proposal 1 intrudes less upon the sidewalk along Constitution Avenue, improving pedestrian movement. The scheme incorporates street trees and mixes planters with bollards. Planters incorporate seating areas for pedestrians.

Staff is confused by the need for additional bollards along the west side of the site in alternative 1 as compared to alternative 2. Alternative 1 should be modified at the west end to incorporate a raised landscape planter terminus, similar to that depicted in alternative 2.

While the applicant's architect more strongly recommends alternative proposal 2 as more responsive to the building architecture and points out that the alternative utilizes fewer bollards

overall than alternative 1, the bollards are more intrusive upon the pedestrian realm. Additionally, alternative 2 places bollards in a fashion similar to an earlier proposal that was rejected by the Commission. Finally, staff is perplexed by the applicant's proposal in alternative 2 to move the perimeter security line back toward the building again after the Commission accepted the applicant's argument in September that a revised threat assessment required the perimeter to be moved to the curb line.

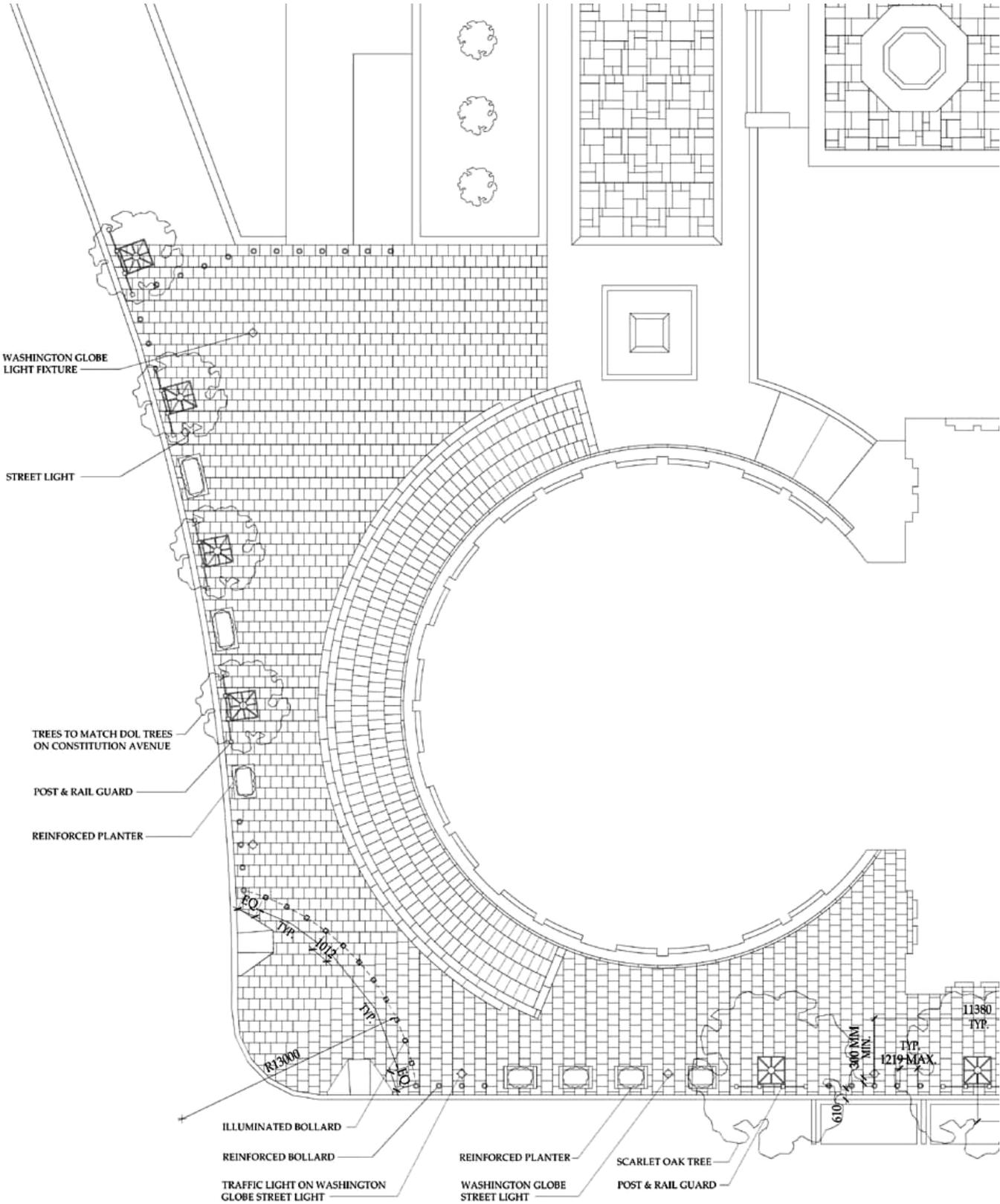
While alternative 2 might look more integrated into the design when seen in plan view, pedestrians will experience it at eye level, where it will create more of an obstacle to pedestrian movement. Staff does consider the condition at the corner of 3rd Street and Constitution Avenue in alternative 2 an improvement because it appears to provide more room for pedestrians and wheelchair users near the corner. For these reasons, **staff is recommending that alternative proposal 1 is most responsive to past commission actions and direction, with the incorporation of the corner condition shown in alternative 2. Staff also recommends that the western terminus of the alternative 1 proposal be modified to incorporate a raised planter section similar to that depicted in alternative proposal 2.**

National Environmental Policy Act

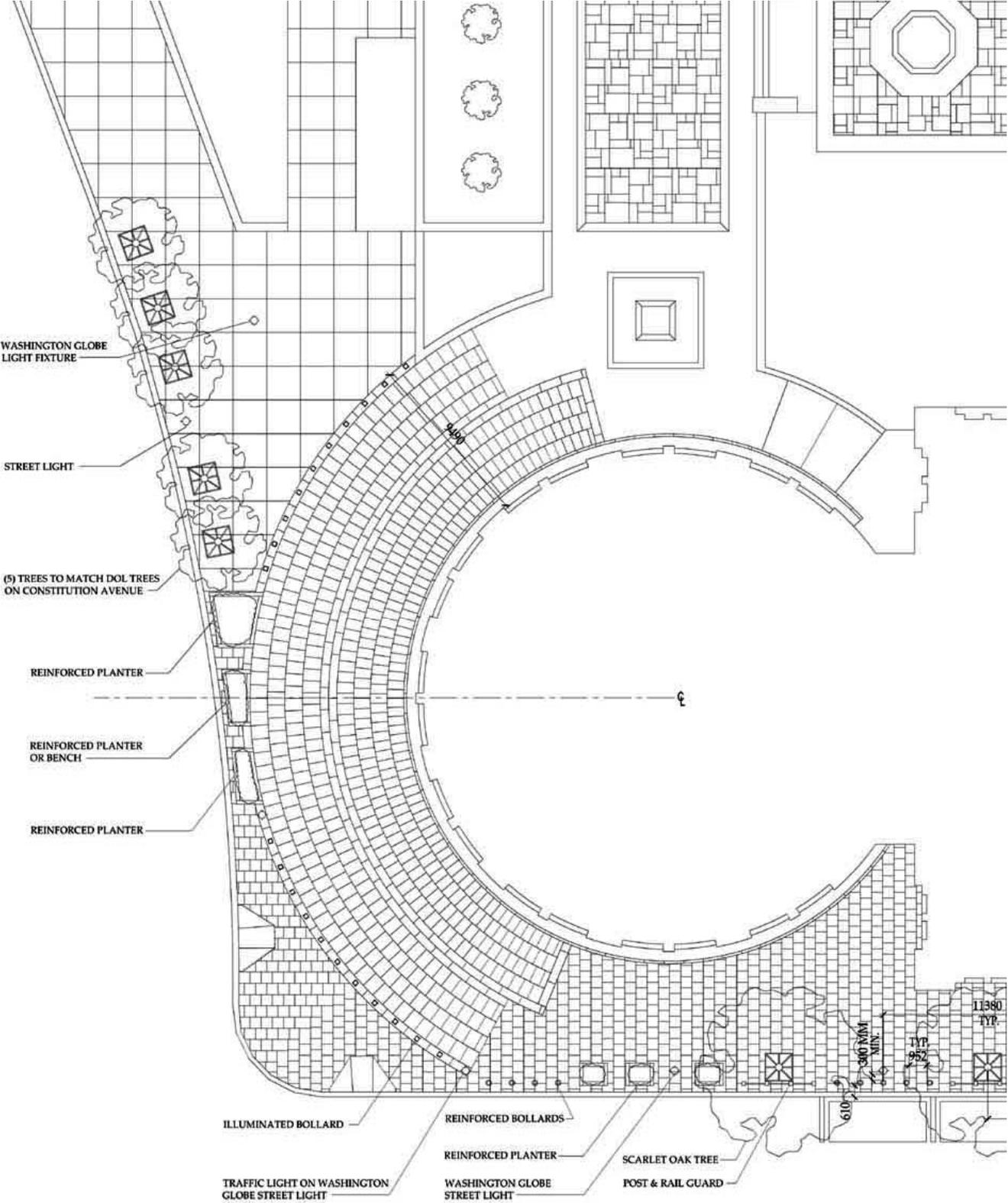
GSA has determined that the project qualifies as a categorical exclusion under its National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance procedures at GSA Order PBS 1095.4C and the GSA NEPA Compliance Guide.

National Historic Preservation Act

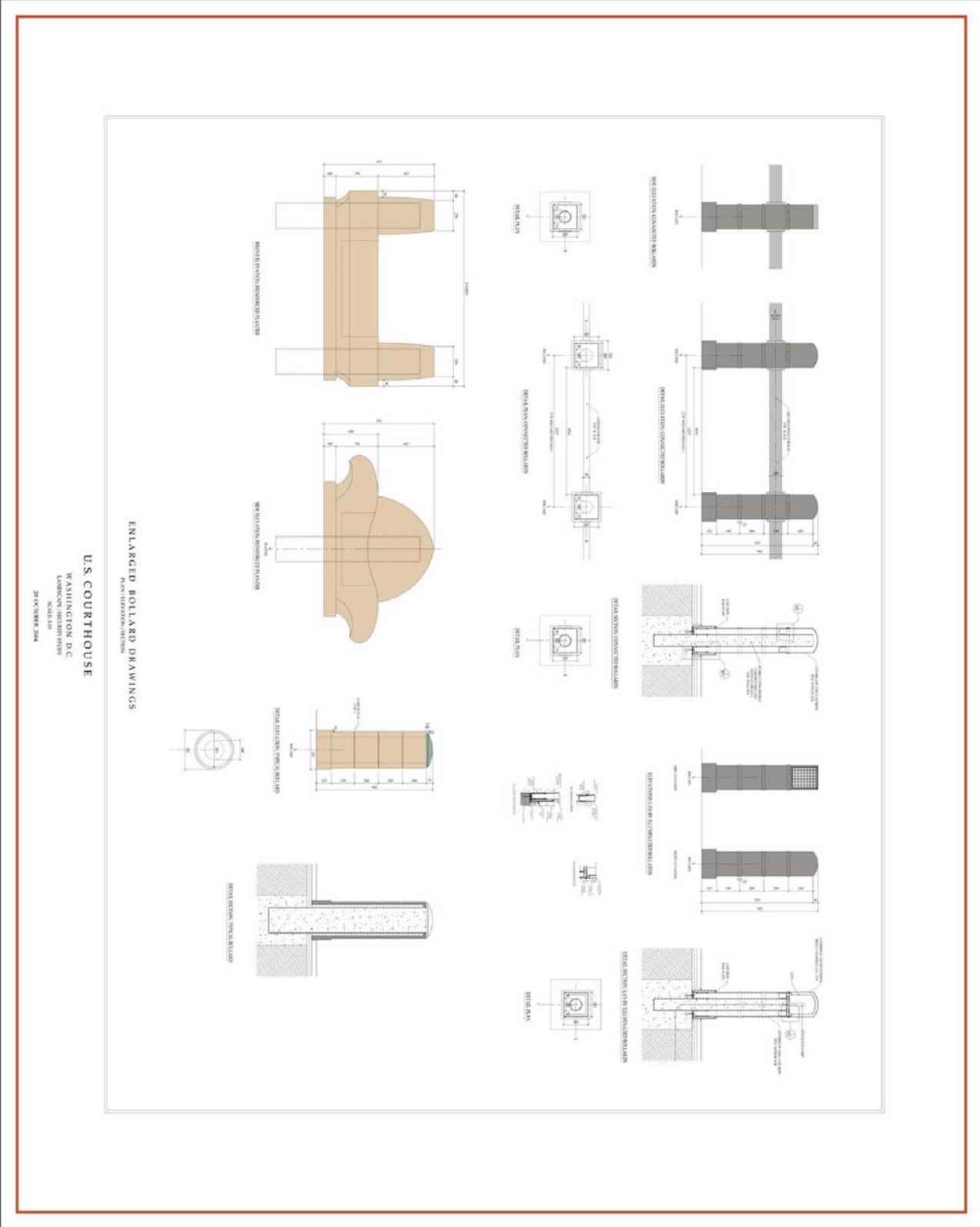
The General Services Administration (GSA) consulted with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation from 1998 through 2001 on the design of the Prettyman Courthouse. The bollard line was shown on the final set of drawings on which the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was based. The consultation and the stipulations of the MOA focused primarily on the proposed interior alterations to the historic courthouse, the opening of the east wall of the building, the design and footprint of the addition, and the alterations to the setting. GSA has completed its Section 106 responsibilities.



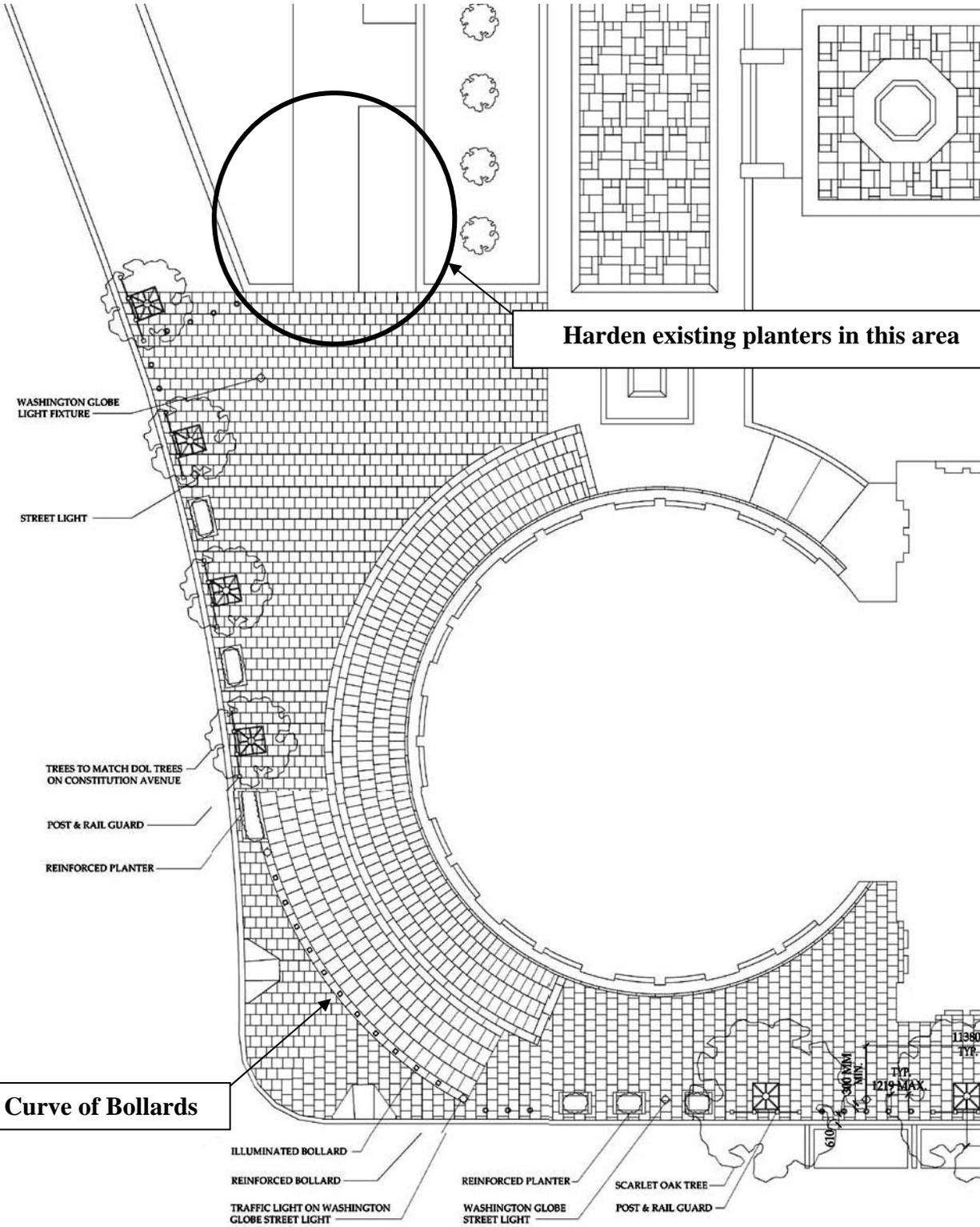
Alternative Proposal 1



Alternative Proposal 2



Details Common to both alternative proposals



Modified Alternative Proposal 1 per Executive Director's Recommendation