

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 6725



JOHN MARSHALL MEMORIAL PARK

Pennsylvania Avenue and 4th Street, NW
Washington, D.C.

Submitted By the National Park Service

January 25, 2007

Abstract

The National Park Service, on behalf of the John Marshall Memorial Foundation, has submitted a concept design for the modification and rehabilitation of John Marshall Memorial Park in northwest Washington, D.C. The proposed design has incorporated changes to the existing park, to reposition the John Marshall Statue and to enhance the landscape and interpretive opportunities of the site. The concept retains the three-tiered park layout, but transforms the central green to an ellipse and adds a Constitutional Pillar and four “interpretive rooms” that will contain inscriptions and interpretive information relating to the life of John Marshall and his pivotal role in shaping the judicial branch of the United States government. The north plaza will be rehabilitated by restoring the existing fountains, replacing trees, and providing new tables and chairs. The lower plaza at the south end of the park will also be rehabilitated with a bosque of American Elm trees and other plantings, granite paving, and seating. New site and accent lighting, currently in early design stages, will also be incorporated into the design. The memorial statue was authorized by Congress in 1882 and the park was originally created by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation in 1981.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept design pursuant to 40 U.S.C. §8722 (b)(1)(d) and 40 U.S.C. § 6702(d).

Executive Director’s Recommendation

The Commission:

Comments favorably on the design concept for the John Marshall Memorial Park as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.24(73.10)42168.

Recommends that in the preparation of preliminary site development plans, the applicant consider:

- Reducing the quantity and detail of text, instead placing more inspirational and broad concepts and facts in a way that is more integral (or even secondary) to the overall landscape design.

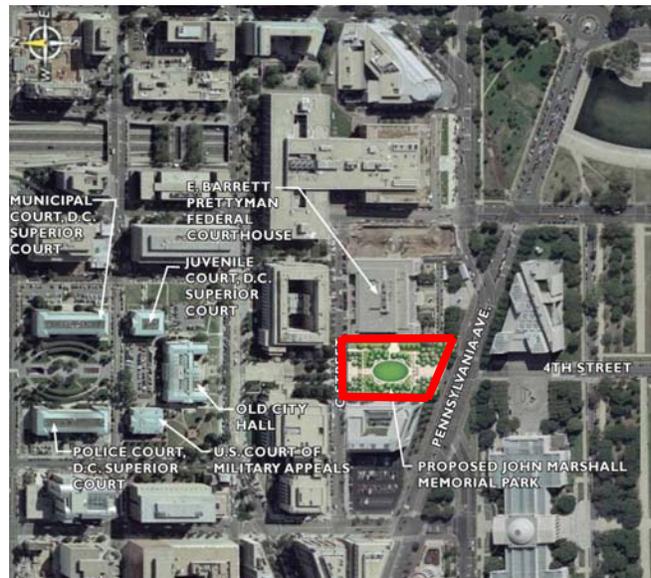
- Simplifying the design of the Constitutional Pillar, to place stronger emphasis on the three branches of the United States government.
- Designing fountains for year-round use and/or appearance, if appropriate.
- Taking into consideration the heavily trafficked environment around the park, security of the adjacent institutional buildings, and the presence of utility lines that run under the site when selecting trees and other plantings.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background

The creation of a statue of Chief Justice John Marshall and its placement “in a suitable public reservation” was authorized by Congress in 1882. The memorial park was developed by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC), and final plans approved by the Commission, in 1981. Public Law 104-134, enacted April 26, 1996, mandated that the Park be managed by the National Park Service as part of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Park and also required that future (re)development be in accord with the PADC Plan of 1974.



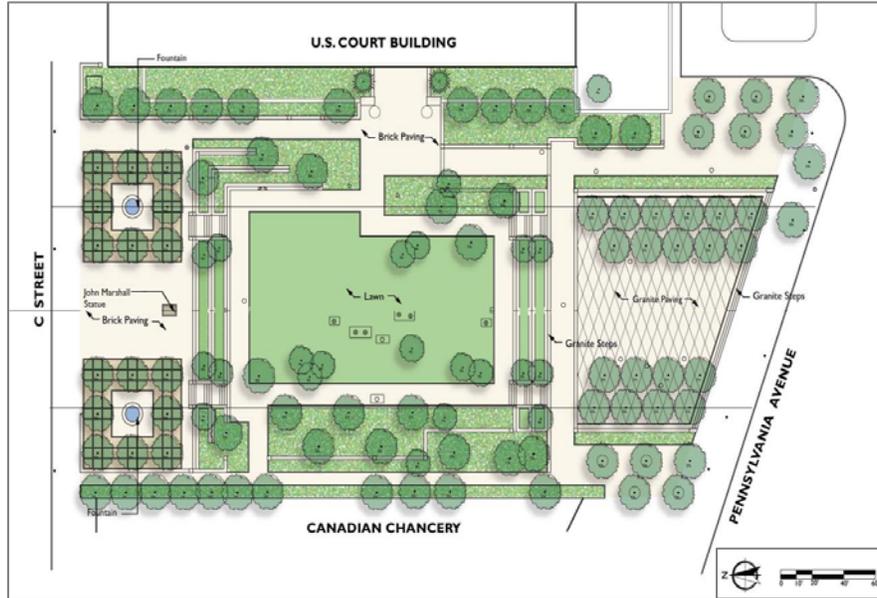
PROJECT LOCATION

The park is currently in poor repair and in need of many repairs and upgrades. The John Marshall Memorial Park Foundation (Foundation) has agreed to sponsor the park’s redesign, using the original designer of the park, Carol Johnson Associates, and pay for the design, construction, and perpetual maintenance of the site. The Foundation was founded in 1987 with the purpose of supporting and promoting the legacy of Chief Justice John Marshall.

Site

The John Marshall Memorial Park is located on a rectangular site in northwest Washington, D.C. on axis with 4th Street and bounded on the north by C Street, NW on the South by Pennsylvania Avenue, by the Canadian Chancery on the west, and the Prettyman Federal Courthouse on the east. In addition to the adjacent institutional buildings, several other federal facilities are in the immediate vicinity: several court buildings are located directly north of the site, the National Gallery of Art is located across Pennsylvania Avenue to the south, and the Capitol Grounds and Mall are also located nearby.

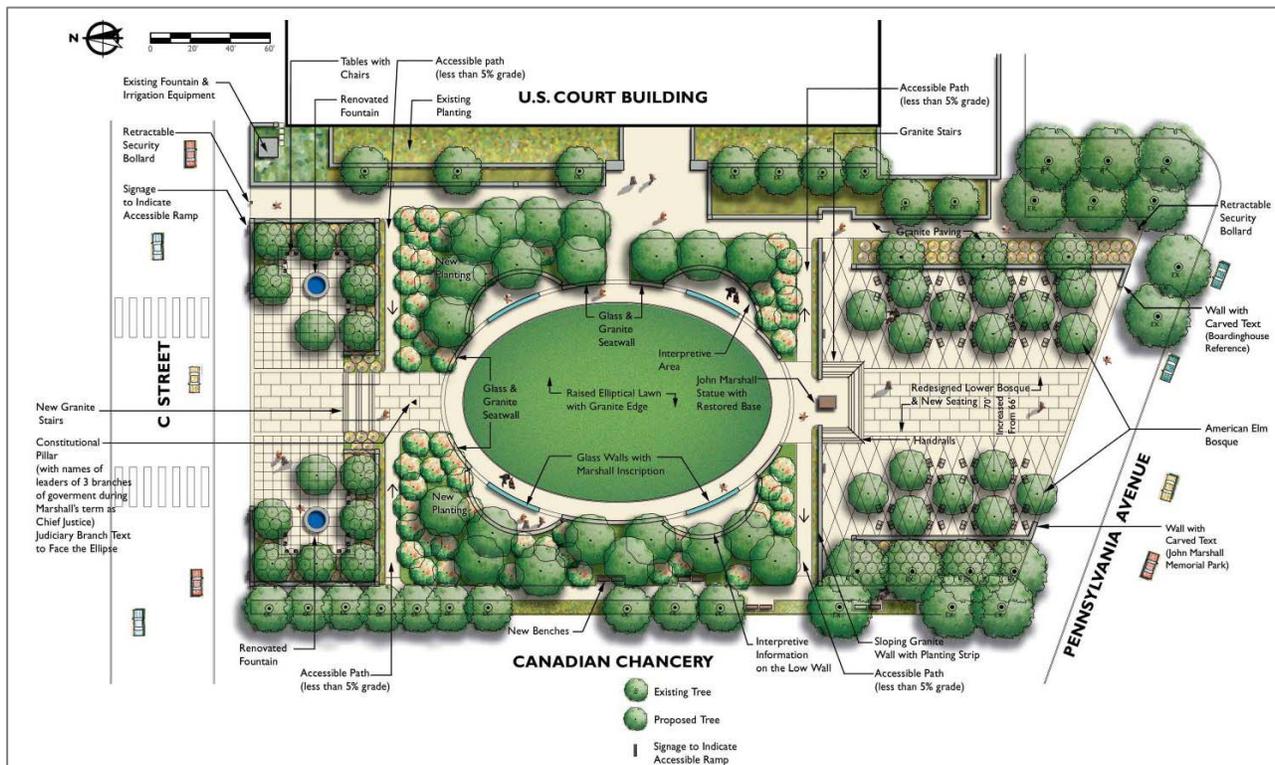
The site slopes down moderately from north to south, with a grade change of approximately ten to twelve feet. The current design of the park accommodates the grade change with three tiers, connecting each with steps and ramps.



EXISTING SITE PLAN

Proposal

The National Park Service (NPS) has proposed major changes to the John Marshall Memorial Park, in order to make a more attractive public space, create a fully accessible park, replace deteriorated plantings, reposition the John Marshall Statue, and enhance the interpretive opportunities of the site. Overall, the design retains the three-tiered site layout and adds several major design elements not included in the original (existing) design.



PROPOSED SITE PLAN

The following elements are being proposed as part of the concept design:

- A central elliptical lawn will replace the existing rectangular lawn. The area will be raised and edged with granite. A glass and granite seatwall will surround the lawn, further defining a paved walkway that surrounds the ellipse.
- New granite paving, stairs, ramps, and walkways will be provided throughout the park, and will serve to direct visitors as well as to provide fully accessible pathways and ramps to all areas and levels of the Park. Walkways along the east and west edges of the parks, which allow for direct passage to/from C Street and Pennsylvania Avenue will be retained and re-paved.
- New trees and plantings will be provided, in part to replace trees that have not performed well under the current environmental conditions. Trees at the mid-level plaza surrounding the central ellipse are intended to serve as a backdrop for interpretive areas. Existing trees and plantings along the east and west edges will be retained.
- The lower south plaza will be updated with a bosque of American Elms and new benches, as well as diagonal-pattern paving that will relate to the alignment of Pennsylvania Avenue. Low granite walls will front on Pennsylvania Avenue and will have carved text to identify the park and to reference to the boardinghouse formerly on the site.
- The John Marshall statue will be placed on a new base and relocated to lower plaza.
- Four (4) interpretive rooms with etched glass walls and interpretive exhibits will be placed at the periphery of the central ellipse.
- A Constitutional Pillar will be placed at the north end of the mid-level plaza.
- The fountains at the north (C Street) plaza will be rehabilitated and new tables/chairs will be provided for use by visitors.
- New lighting and signage will be located throughout the park.

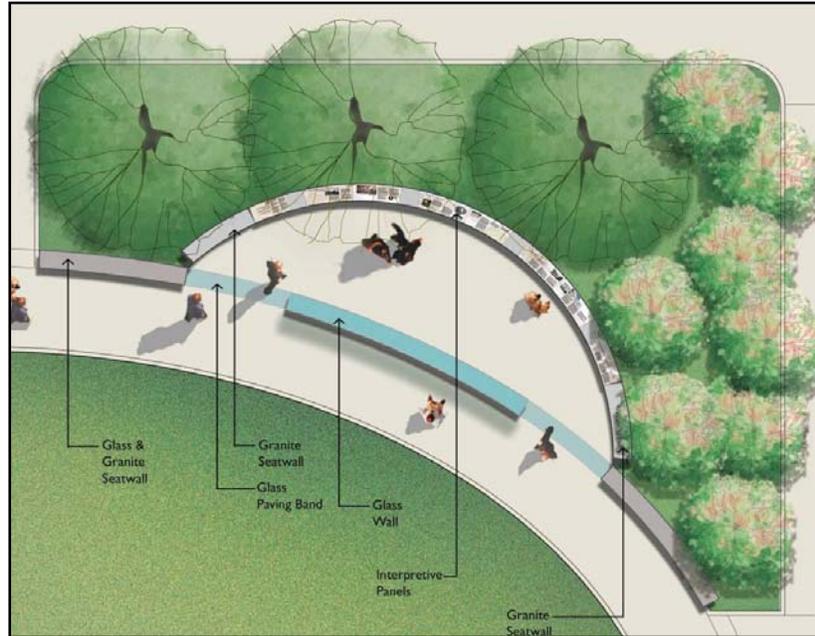


STATUE

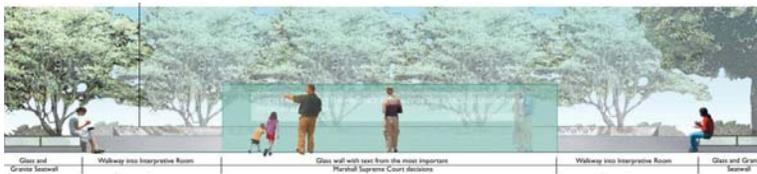
The John Marshall statue will be relocated to the lower plaza, closer to Pennsylvania Avenue and to the Capitol and Supreme Court buildings. The base will be replicated based on images and physical remnants of the original marble base. The placement of the statue on axis with the Old City Hall, as well as the vista approximately fifty feet in width, will be maintained. The statue will be elevated above the plaza by placing it at the top landing of the steps leading from the plaza to the mid-level terrace.



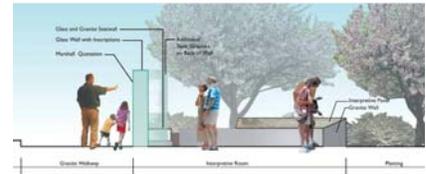
ELEVATION – VIEW NORTH FROM PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE



PROPOSED INTERPRETIVE ROOM



ELEVATION



SECTION

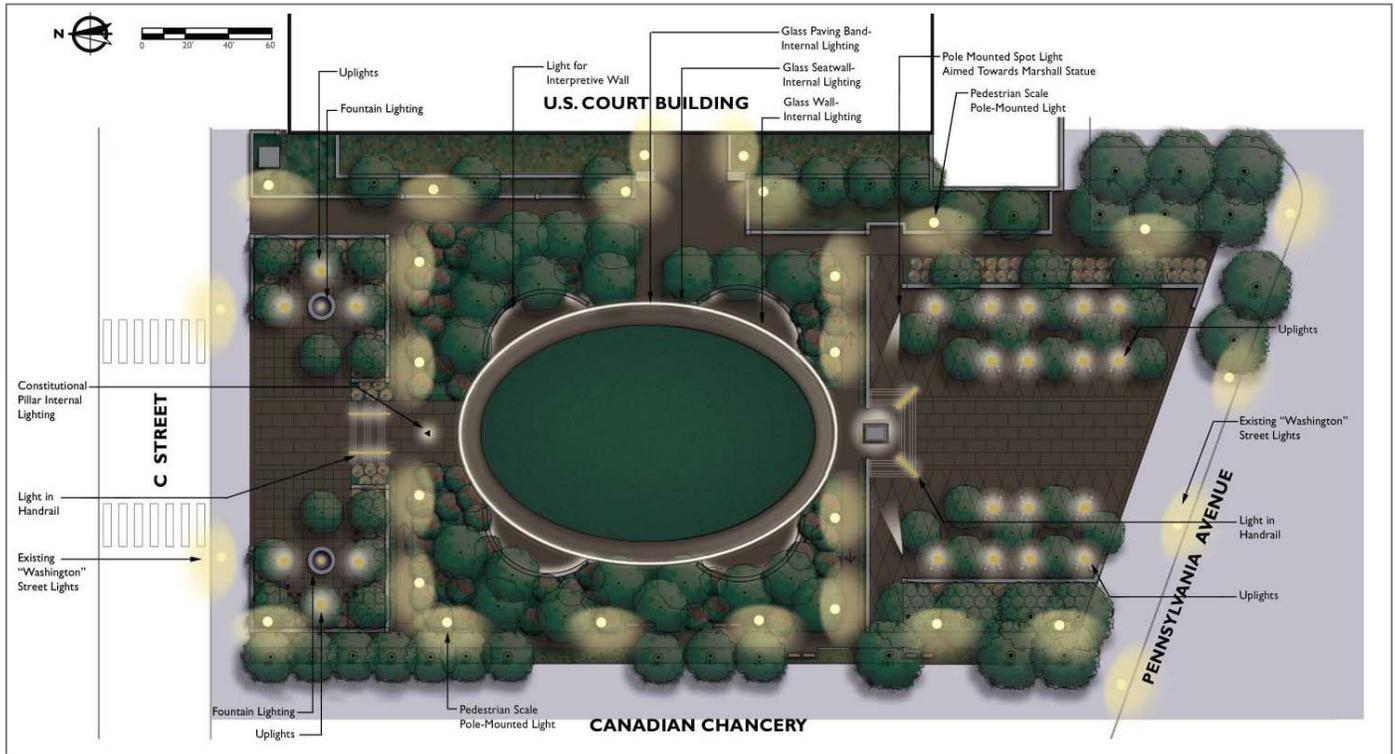
Four interpretive alcoves, located at the periphery of the central lawn, will be used to convey the history of John Marshall’s life and accomplishments. Each room will have a theme relating to the Chief Justice: “Protecting Private Rights,” “Judicial Review,” “Federalism and States’ Rights,” and the “Life of John Marshall.” A glass wall inscribed with a Marshall quotation will front the elliptical lawn and the curving granite wall behind will serve as a base for a series of enamel interpretive text panels.

A Constitutional Pillar will be added to the mid-level plaza. Triangular in plan, the three-sided base will be representative of the three branches of the United States government; each side will have an illuminated glass panel inscribed with the seal of the branch, text from the Constitution, and the names of the leaders during Marshall’s term as Chief Justice. A granite eagle and scroll sculpture will top the pillar, symbolizing the people and the Constitution.



CONSTITUTIONAL PILLAR

The proposed design calls for a variety of lighting, including glass paving band lighting, seatwall and interpretive wall lighting, pole mounted lighting at edges, handrail lighting at plazas, fountain lighting, and other accent lighting to illuminate landscaped areas and the John Marshall Statue.



PROPOSED LIGHTING – SITE PLAN



PROPOSED LIGHTING - INTERPRETIVE ROOM

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff supports the overall concept design, including three-tiered plan, central ellipse, relocation of the John Marshall Statue, re-design of trees and planting, and restoration of fountains and plaza elements at the north and south ends of the park. There are a several items, however, that staff recommends the design team explore further when preparing preliminary and final site development plans. Staff advocates that refinements to the design respect the original intent of the park and place primary emphasis on the prominence of the John Marshall statue as the main interpretive element, as well as the overall landscape design.

- While staff supports the goal of informing the public of John Marshall's legacy, the interpretive panels are extensive and contain an amount of interpretive text unprecedented at similar sites in D.C.; the effect is the creation of an outdoor museum. Staff recommends reducing the quantity and detail of text, instead placing more inspirational and broad concepts and facts in a way that is more integral (or even secondary) to the overall landscape design.
- The Constitutional Pillar has several design elements, and staff finds the large number of symbolic elements detract from the central message of the pillar. Staff recommends simplifying the design of the pillar to retain the important message of the three-sided pillar, representative of the three branches of the United States government, but believes that the sculptural eagle and scroll elements, as well as the internal lighting, will diminish the effect of this feature.
- Water fountains are representative of the site's historic location of the first water supply for the District, and staff supports their rehabilitation. If appropriate, fountains should be designed/engineered for year-round use; if water is to be turned off during cold months, aesthetic modifications (i.e., temporary plantings) should be considered.
- Tree and planting selection require careful consideration due to the heavily trafficked environment around the park, security of the adjacent institutional buildings, and the presence of utility lines that run under the site. Hearty plants that can withstand urban environments (shallow planting beds, pollution, limited maintenance, etc.) are preferable, as are plants that do not create dense walls or barriers to limit views through the site.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS

At its October 1981 meeting, the Commission approved the final site development plan for the John Marshall Memorial Park, as currently exists, with the exception of street furniture and decorative lighting fixtures. At its prior July 1981 meeting, the Commission also recommended that trees in the bosques be planted to maintain an open vista of at least 44 feet in width along the axis with the Old City Hall.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The overall design concept for the park is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. One of the goals of the Preservation and Historic Features Element is to "Preserve and enhance the urban spaces, circles, squares, and plazas generated by the L'Enfant Plan and McMillan Plan and the unique views and vistas of the National Capital." The extent of interpretive elements, however, is inconsistent with the Parks and Open Space Federal Element, Policy #2, which states that the Government should "Maintain small urban parks primarily as historic parks and designed landscapes with fountains, monuments, memorials, tree cover, and other features of civic art."

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The applicant finds that the project is an enhancement of an existing landscape project and is therefore categorically excluded from NEPA under their regulations. At this stage, NCPC staff finds no major significant modification of environmental effect issues.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The applicant finds that the proposed work will neither adversely affect the historic qualities of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Park nor will it affect the quality and intent of the 1974 design for Pennsylvania Avenue. NCPC staff concurs with this determination at this time. Review and/or concurrence by the D.C. SHPO should be submitted at the preliminary design phase.

Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) Guidelines

There are no specific PADC guidelines for this site.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee at its January 10, 2007 meeting reviewed the proposal and forwarded it to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies represented. The participating agencies were NCPC, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the National Park Service and the General Services Administration.

Commission of Fine Arts

At its meeting on January 18, 2007, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) approved the concept design, subject to revision of information/interpretive components. Staff concurs with CFA's opposition to the extensive display panels, and also agrees that the creation of an outdoor museum is inappropriate for this civic landscape.