

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Ellyn Goldkind

NCPC File No. 6690



RESERVATION 174: NORTHWEST PARK (OLD CONVENTION CENTER SITE)

New York Avenue and 10th, 11th, and I Streets, NW
Washington, D.C.

Submitted By the District of Columbia, Office of the Deputy Mayor
for Planning and Economic Development

April 26, 2007

Abstract

The Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development for the District of Columbia has submitted a concept design for the creation of a public park on Reservation 174 in northwest Washington, D.C. The site is at the northwest corner of the Old Convention Center site, and the park is one component of a master plan for mixed-use development at that site. The concept design respects the historic L'Enfant bow-tie reservation while creating a vibrant public urban space, and reopens the portions of 10th and I Streets that were closed at the time the old Convention Center was constructed. Memorandums of Agreement for both the DC Arena (currently the Verizon Center) and the new Convention Center require the District to restore these rights-of-way to the configuration that existed in 1979.

The park's concept design is comprised of several major elements, including a large triangle fountain, smaller entry fountain, fixed and moveable seating, reserved vendor spaces, and landscaping with street and flowering accent trees as well as other shrubbery. The south (I Street) edge of the park is notable in that the street paving between 10th and 11th Streets is raised to the curb level, and will provide opportunities for the site to be closed to accommodate up to 1000 people at special events and gatherings. New site and accent lighting, not yet designed, will also be incorporated into the site.

Reservation 174 is currently owned by the United States of America, but Public Law 109-359 has authorized transfer of ownership to the District of Columbia. Transfer of land is expected to occur later in 2007, but has not happened yet.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

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

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Comments favorably on the concept design for the Reservation 174: Northwest Park as shown on NCPC Map File No. 31.20(05.00)42220.

Commends the development team on a high-quality, durable, and sustainable design that respects the historic L'Enfant streets and reservations of the District of Columbia.

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

- The 10th and I Street rights-of-way are to be re-established, with street, sidewalk, and curb lines based on the 1965 Baist map. Street edges should be reinforced through the use of granite curbing, street trees and plantings, lighting and other treatments complying with the Downtown Streetscape Regulations (DDOT August 2000).
- The applicant should work cooperatively with the National Park Service and the District Department of Transportation towards a final design that better reflects the site's contribution to the historic plan of Washington, relates to the three other bow-tie pairs around Mt. Vernon Square, and also enhances views along New York Avenue towards Mount Vernon Square and the White House.

Recommends that the District of Columbia not lease, license, or otherwise transfer control of the Northwest Park to the development team, since such an agreement effects privatization of an historic L'Enfant reservation; and **instead recommends** that the District grant a long-term permit to the development team to execute an approved park design in conjunction with a long-term maintenance agreement.

* * *

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background

The Northwest Park is located on Reservation 174, which is part of a pair of historic L'Enfant "bow-tie" reservations that are transected by New York Avenue in downtown, Washington. The Reservation occupies the northwest corner of the old Convention Center site, and the proposed park project is just one component of a master plan for a large-scale, mixed-use development. Also part of the master plan objectives, the portions of 10th and I Streets that were closed at the time the old Convention



BAIST MAP (1965)

Center was constructed will be reopened; Memorandums of Agreement for both the DC Arena (currently the Verizon Center) and the new Convention Center require the District to restore these rights-of-way to the configuration that existed in 1979.

Reservation 174 is currently owned by the United States of America, but Public Law 109-359 has authorized transfer of ownership to the District of Columbia. Transfer of land is expected to occur later in 2007, but has not happened yet. The current review is under NCPC authority over federal plans and proposals. Once ownership is transferred, review will be under NCPC authority over District projects in the Central Area.

Site



LOCATION PLAN

Located a short distance to historic Mount Vernon Square, the triangular site is bounded by New York Avenue on the north, I street on the south, and 10th and 11th Streets on the east and west, respectively. Several federal facilities are in the immediate vicinity, including the former Carnegie Library at Mount Vernon Square and the National Archives, just a few blocks south on axis with 10th Street.

The site boundaries to the east and south reflect reestablishment of the 10th and I Streets rights-of-way; park edges will be defined with paving as well as street trees that align with existing trees on adjacent blocks.

Proposal

The development team has proposed an urban and durable park setting, with several major elements incorporated into the design. The park's general design approach is being guided by three major principles: connecting to the city, integrating into the neighborhood, and creating a unique and inviting destination.

Several major elements comprise the park, including a large triangle fountain, smaller entry fountain, fixed and moveable seating, reserved vendor spaces, and landscaping with street and flowering accent trees as well as other shrubbery. Various areas have been designed to accommodate a multitude of users and provide for different experiences. Areas to the north are more static, providing intimate locations for reading or more passive uses; and areas to the south are more active in nature, providing areas for seating, vendors, and group events. New site and accent lighting, not yet included in the design, will be incorporated into subsequent plans for the park.



PROPOSED SITE PLAN

The triangle fountain at the northeast corner of the site is intended to be the centerpiece and generator of the park's composition. Comprised of large blocks of stone interspersed with sloping planes of water, the variety of water and texture is intended to provide a flexible and dynamic space that is engaging to park users. A smaller entry fountain is located across the southwest edge of the triangle fountain, and provides a more intimate scale while helping to frame the path through the park that connects to the remainder of the development site.



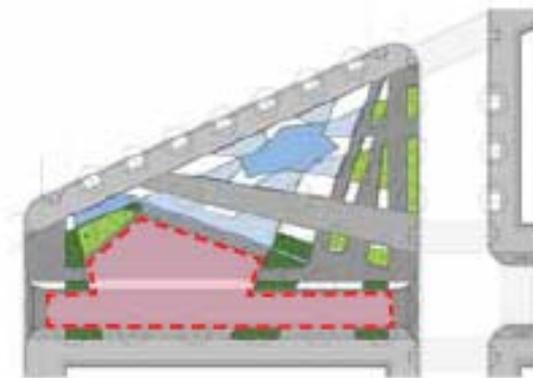
TRIANGLE / ENTRY FOUNTAINS



Concept Image: Lurie Garden, Chicago

SEATING AREAS

Notable is the closure of I Street to regular vehicular traffic, with the right-of-way being maintained to allow for use by emergency vehicles. Paving along this Street will be raised to the curb level between 10th and 11th Streets, allowing the south edge of the park to merge with the street. This configuration will allow for opportunities to temporarily close the site for special events and seasonal venues, and is programmed to accommodate up to 1000 people.



Clear Event Area: 1000 people (7.5 sq. ft./person)



Potential Skating Rink Size and Location

PARK PROGRAMMING: POTENTIAL GATHERING AREAS

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Applicant: District of Columbia, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development

Architects: Foster + Partners (commercial)
Shalom Baranes Associates (residential)
Gustafson Guthrie Nichol Ltd. (landscape)

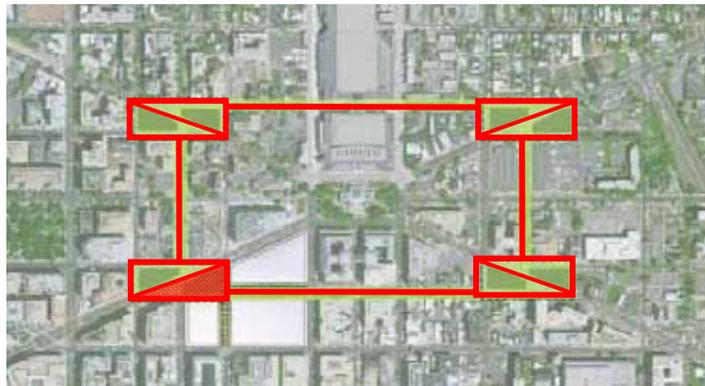
Developer: Hines / Archstone-Smith

Project Schedule: Design Development: Fall 2007
Construction: Fall 2008 through Fall 2011

Cost Estimate: \$4.0 to \$5.0 million

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The project site is one-half of a pair of “bow-tie” reservations, and one of four pairs that surround historic Mount Vernon Square. These reservations comprehensively serve to connect the surrounding neighborhoods with the Square as well as to anchor the Square into the larger context of the L’Enfant plan for the city. Collectively, Reservations 173 and 174 also serve to frame and enhance the views east toward the Square and west toward the White House.



**MOUNT VERNON SQUARE WITH
BOW-TIE RESERVATIONS**

Staff supports the overall concept design and commends the development team on a high-quality, durable, and sustainable design that respects the historic L’Enfant streets and reservations of the District of Columbia.

Staff also supports the re-establishment and general design of those portions of 10th and I Streets adjacent to the Reservation, and notes that the 1965 Baist map should provide the basis for locating street, sidewalk, and curb lines. Staff recommends that in the preparation of preliminary site development plans, street edges be reinforced through the use of granite curbing, street trees and plantings, lighting and other treatments complying with the Downtown Streetscape Regulations (DDOT August 2000).

With regard to the park design, the proposed concept includes several hardscape and water elements not common to the other L’Enfant reservations. While staff supports a park design that encourages a more active level of use, we recommend that the applicant work cooperatively with the National Park Service and the District Department of Transportation, as both those agencies plan for modifications, respectively, to Reservation 173 and the New York Avenue right-of-way.

The final design of the park should be one that better reflects the site's contribution to the historic plan of Washington, relates to the three other bow-tie pairs around Mt. Vernon Square, and also enhances the reciprocal views both to Mount Vernon Square and to the White House.

Staff also recommends that the District of Columbia not lease, license, or otherwise transfer control of the Northwest Park to the development team, since such an agreement effects privatization of an historic L'Enfant reservation; and instead recommends that the District grant a long-term permit to the development team to execute an approved park design in conjunction with a long-term maintenance agreement.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The overall design concept for the park is consistent with the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*. The Preservation and Historic Features Element includes several policies related to the preservation and enhancement of the historic street rights-of-way and reservations that form the District's urban design framework.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Under NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, the applicant is not required to submit environmental review materials at the Concept Design stage. For the preliminary design submission, NCPC must undertake an environmental review, either because the land is federal or, if ownership has been transferred to the District of Columbia, because the project is located within the Central Area. The applicant is required to work with NCPC to determine what materials and process it must undertake to enable NCPC to meet its NEPA obligations.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

NCPC is the federal agency responsible for Section 106 review of the project. The reservation, one of the reservations that extend the reach of park land in concert with Mount Vernon Square and major streets at this significant node in the L'Enfant Plan, is still in federal ownership but will soon be transferred to the District of Columbia government. The project site is in the Central Area, within which the Commission has approval authority for the District's public projects. In addition to the public scoping meetings and presentations held by the District of Columbia government as the Old Convention Center site master plan has been developed, the Commission meetings allow further dissemination of information to the public as well as opportunities for the public to comment.

While the reservation was not directly the subject of either the sports arena (now Verizon Center) MOA or the new convention center MOA, the streets within the Old Convention Center site were. (NCPC served as lead federal agency for both MOAs.) Staff notes that the applicant is required to adhere to the agreements in the MOAs, which include the restoration of the streets to the earlier configuration, as well as Section 106 review related to this stipulation.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on April 11, 2007, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies represented. The participating agencies were NCPC, the National Park Service, the District Department of Transportation, the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.