

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Nancy Witherell
NCPC File No. 6423/6636



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
PERIMETER SECURITY AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
The National Mall, Madison Avenue and 12th Street, NW

Submitted by the Smithsonian Institution

May 29, 2008

Abstract

The Smithsonian Institution has submitted revised final site and building plans for a portion of the perimeter security around the National Museum of Natural History, located on the National Mall and on Constitution Avenue between 9th and 12th Streets, NW. Previous reviews by the Commission for perimeter security at the museum include the final site and building plans at its February 2, 2006 meeting. The Smithsonian's subsequent study of the perimeter for the Madison Drive frontage along the Mall and a portion of 12th Street, NW has led to the current submission of a revised design for the planting beds inside the sidewalks of both streets. The submission proposes to substitute the approved 36-inch wall with a cable system in the planting beds, similar in design and placement to that approved by the Commission for the National Museum of American History on March 1, 2007. The current submission does not include the approved line of bollards at the paved Madison Drive entrance to the museum. It also does not contain the security design for the perimeter on the north and east sides of the museum, which have been constructed.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of revised final site and building plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the revised final site and building plans for perimeter security consisting of a cable system in the planting beds along Madison Drive and a portion of 12th Street, NW at the National Museum of Natural History, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.41(38.40) 41956.

* * *

PROJECT SUMMARY

Site Description

The National Museum of Natural History is located on the north side of the National Mall, with its south entrance facing Madison Drive, NW and its north entrance facing Constitution Avenue, NW. The monumental Beaux Arts-style building occupies the site between 9th and 12th Streets, NW. The museum building has a sunken parking lot and loading dock on its south, east, and west sides, beyond a planting bed inside the sidewalk.

Background

The Smithsonian Institution (SI) has consulted with NCPC staff and with other review agencies and their staffs, as well as with other interested groups on the Mall-wide security design plan since 2003. The Commission approved the final site and building plans for perimeter security at the National Museum of Natural History in February 2006.

The perimeter security approved by the Commission has been constructed around the rest of the building's perimeter, with the bollards at the south entrance now under construction. The Smithsonian chose to construct the "base option" approved by the Commission in 2006. The base option has a sloping ramp at the sidewalk where it meets Madison Drive; the bollards on the ramp are two inches taller than those on the sidewalk in order to preserve an even height for the line of bollards.

The Smithsonian's subsequent study of the perimeter for the Madison Drive frontage along the Mall and a portion of 12th Street, NW led to the current submission of a revised design for the planting beds inside the sidewalks of both streets. Instead of the approved 36-inch walls, a cable system is now proposed.

Proposal

The revised security plan proposes the installation of a rigid cable system in the planting beds along the Madison Drive frontage as well as a contiguous portion of 12th Street, NW. The metal cable posts would be 36 inches in height, carrying two cables, the upper one at 30 inches in height. The primary cable posts would be spaced 80 feet apart, with intermediate posts with smaller footings every 20 feet to carry the cable, which would be contained within a channel. The minimum clearance between the back of the lawn curb on Madison Drive and the largest footing is about 13 inches. On 12th Street, the distance between the cable and the back of the lawn curb is 9 inches, with some of the footings partly extending under the sidewalk. The height of the upper cable, at 30 inches (lower than in other security projects reviewed by the Commission) reflects the Smithsonian's analysis of the level of security deemed necessary for its museums. The current proposal follows the approval by the Commission in 2007 of a cable system at the National Museum of American History.

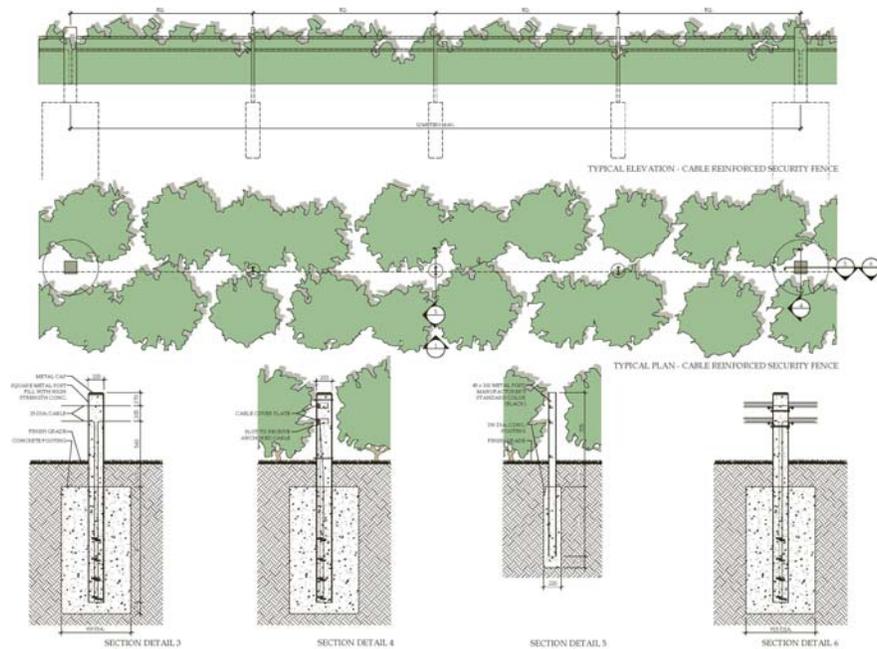
The final site and building plans approved by the Commission two years ago proposed a wall at the rear of the planting beds, extending 36 inches above the level of the sidewalk. The wall was an extension of the retaining wall around the sunken parking lot on the museum's south and west elevations. While commended at the time, the proposal required a considerable amount of

construction and the removal of the mature planting beds and their replacement with new plantings. The Smithsonian proposed plantings that would create a bird garden, a companion to the butterfly garden adjacent to the 9th Street sidewalk.

For purposes of comparison, three images from the current submission are shown below, followed by the equivalent images from the 2006 approved design.



2008 site plan showing security perimeter



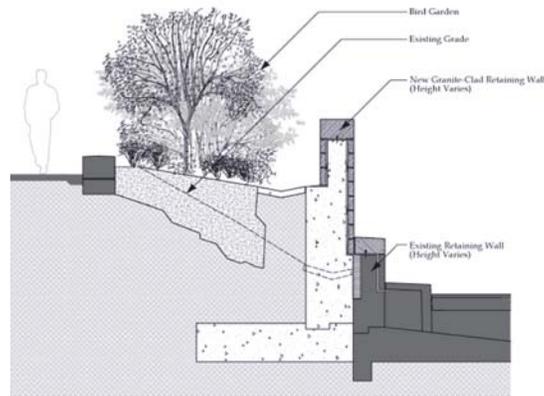
2008 elevation, plan, and section showing cable posts and stays with new plantings.



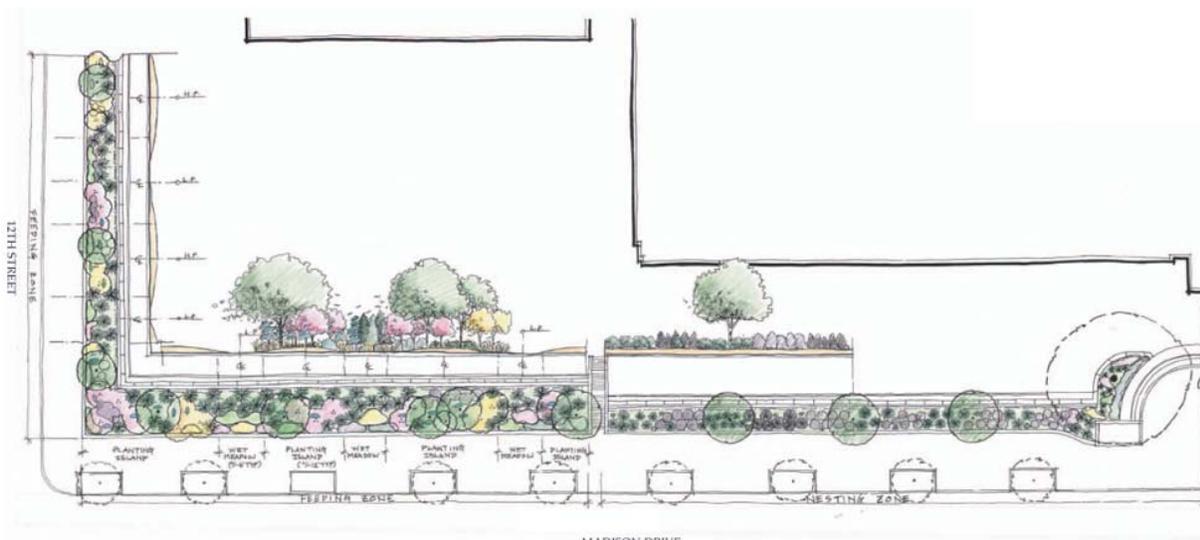
2008 planting plan, primarily with Chinese juniper and Mountain Laurel, but with an extensive variety of plants designed to attract birds. The more mature trees and shrubbery at the rear of the planting beds was to have been removed in the earlier plan but can be retained in the current proposal. The new plantings will grow up and over the posts and cables.



2006 site plan showing security perimeter



2006 section of retaining wall at rear of planting bed between sidewalk and the sunken parking lot.



2006 planting plan showing retaining wall at rear of beds. The Bird Garden will also be planted in the current proposal.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The staff commends the Smithsonian for a thoughtful and well-designed plan for perimeter security at the National Museum of Natural History. The current submission for a security barrier in the planting beds on the south and a portion of the west facades of the building are a welcome improvement to the earlier scheme, because it is a less visually intrusive design solution that will be more cost effective, require less construction, and allow for the preservation of the mature trees and shrubbery in the rear portion of the beds and does not require substantial re-grading. The current proposal reflects the continuing evolution of thinking about security design and technology, in which the Smithsonian has played a leading role.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Applicable policies include:

Express the dignity befitting the image of the federal government in the national capital. Federal development should adhere to the high aesthetic standards already established by the planning and design legacy of the nation's capital. This legacy encompasses both the old and the new – the capital's rich architectural heritage, continually augmented by the design contributions of each generation. (Preservation and Historic Features, National Capital Image, #1)

Protect the settings of historic properties, including views to and from the sites where significant, as integral parts of the historic character of the property. (Preservation and Historic Features, Stewardship of Historic Properties, #6)

Urban Design and Security Plan

The current proposal for portions of the Madison Avenue frontage conforms to the principles and guidance in the Plan, because the barrier is in the yard of the museum, behind the public sidewalk, is as visually unobtrusive as possible, and will be landscaped with plant materials that in themselves serve an independent and useful purpose related to the mission of the museum. The Smithsonian is a leader in establishing site-specific and facility-specific security criteria and security designs that reflect that analysis.

National Environmental Policy Act

In compliance with the requirements of Commission project submission procedures and the Commission's environmental policies, at the preliminary site and building plan stage of this project NCPC staff reviewed the Smithsonian Institution's Environmental Assessment for planning and construction of perimeter security improvements at Smithsonian Museums on the mall ("mall security EA") and, using that information, on July 13, 2004 made a Finding of No Significant Impact for preliminary site and building for perimeter security for the Museum of Natural History. In considering the revised final site and building plans for perimeter security around the National Museum of Natural History, the staff has again reviewed the Mall security EA, and finds that the EA sets forth an effective analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the current proposed action, and sufficient alternatives, and continues to be applicable. The location of the security barrier-- in the planting beds behind the sidewalk – remains the same.

National Historic Preservation Act

The Smithsonian executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for this undertaking in 2005, also signed by the DC State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The MOA was revised and re-executed by the DC SHPO and the Advisory Council between February and April 2008, with agreement that the proposed revision is less visually intrusive than the original plan. Many parties consulted in the development of the

original scheme. The Smithsonian held an additional consultation meeting with the parties in September 2007 to propose and discuss the revised plan.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on May 14, 2008, and forwarded it to the Commission with the statement that the project was coordinated by all agencies represented, except the National Park Service. The Park Service noted that the location of the property boundary in the vicinity of this project must be verified. Close coordination between the Smithsonian and the Park Service will be required during construction to ensure that the project is constructed fully on Smithsonian property. The other participating agencies were NCPC; the General Services Administration; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District Department of Transportation; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts approved the revised plans at its meeting on May 15, 2008.