

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 6910



NATIONAL MALL AND MEMORIAL PARKS WAYFINDING AND SIGN PROGRAM

National Mall and East Potomac Park
Washington, DC

Submitted by the National Park Service

April 30, 2009

Abstract

The National Park Service has submitted a proposed wayfinding and sign program for National Park Service-managed land on the National Mall and in East Potomac Park. The existing signs would be removed. The proposed program includes several categories of signs, including National Park Service sites and facilities identification signs, rules and regulations signs, and orientation and wayfinding signs. The Service-wide sign program, which is also being installed at other national parks, is known as the UniGuide System. The majority of the proposed signs follow the national sign system in design and use. Several additional categories of signs are in discussion but have not been submitted to the Commission for review at this time. These include proposed map kiosks, pedestrian wayfinding pylons, and identification signs at memorials. The signs are funded through the National Park Service's Centennial Fund with a match from the Trust for the National Mall. All alternatives in the National Mall Plan, now in progress, include a new wayfinding and sign program.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary and final site development plans, pursuant to § 8722(b)(1) and (d).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Commends the National Park Service for replacing and updating the current signs on the National Mall and in East Potomac Park with the proposed Sign and Wayfinding Program, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 00.00(78.00)42704.

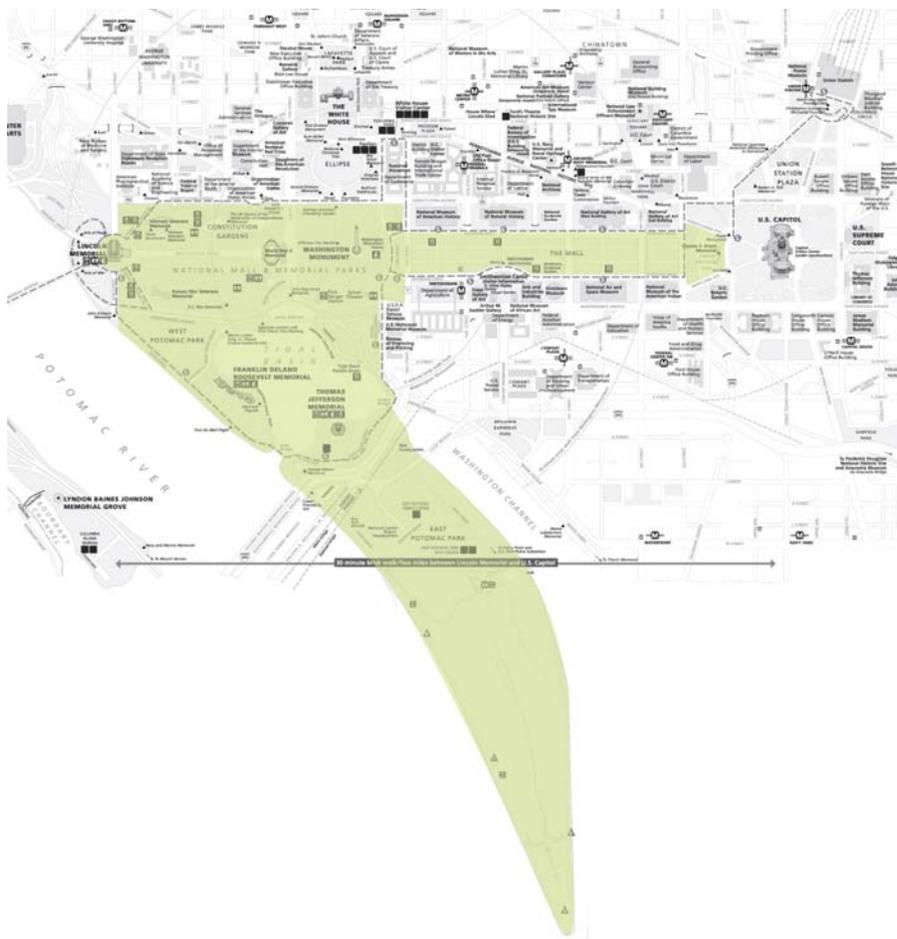
Approves preliminary and final site development plans for the installation of the UniGuide sign system that includes the National Park Service sites and facilities identification signs (ID100s, and ID200s categories); and for the rules and regulations signs (RR001 through RR060 categories), with the condition that the National Park Service consult with staff and the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer in determining the final placement and number of signs proposed in the vicinity of the memorials.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes the removal and replacement of signs on the National Mall and in East Potomac Park.



Background

The signs currently on the Mall reflect several eras of sign design and *ad hoc* installation. National Mall and Memorial Parks was successful in being awarded NPS Centennial Funds, which have been matched by funds from the Trust for the National Mall. The existing signs will be removed and the new sign program installed. Improved identification and wayfinding signs are included in all alternatives for the National Mall Plan.

The signs are proposed for installation on land under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, although the content of the orientation and wayfinding signs includes information about the Smithsonian museums and other buildings on the Mall, as well as institutions and services near the National Mall.

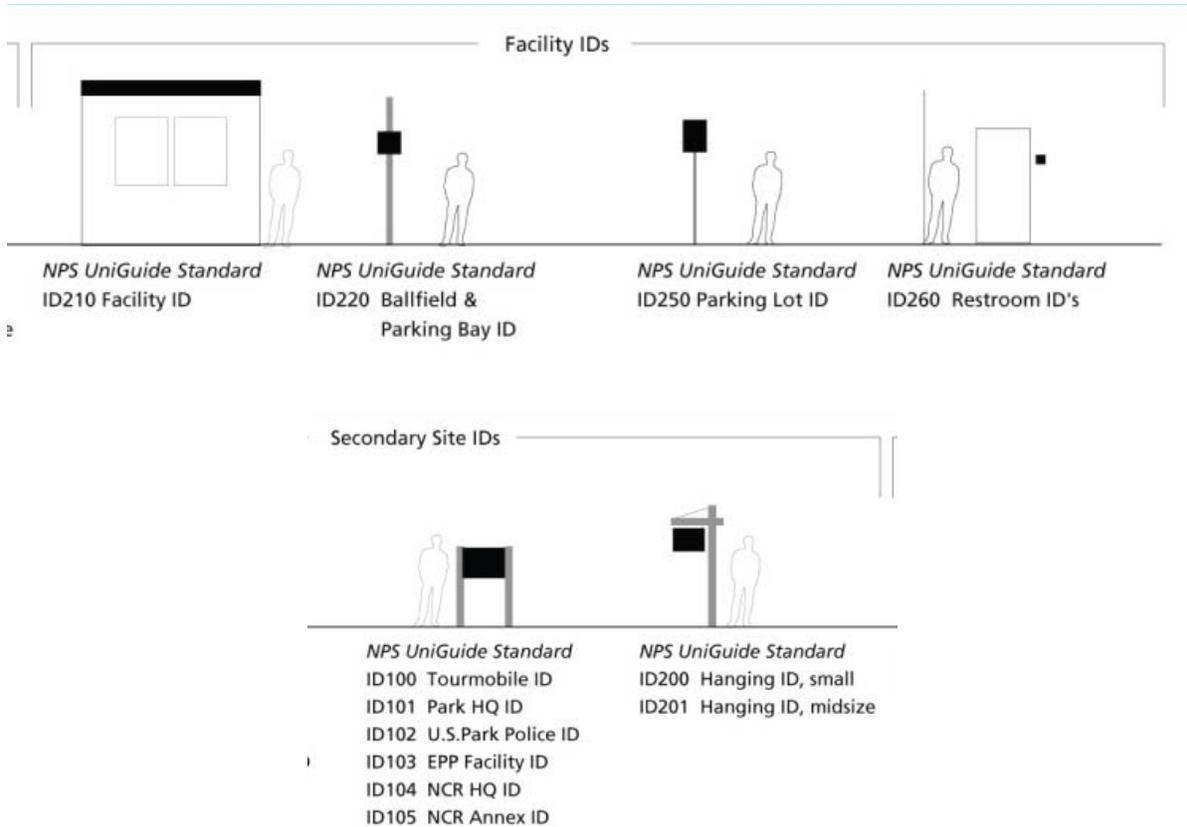
Proposal

NPS proposes the removal of all 327 existing signs on the National Mall and East Potomac Park and proposes replacing the signs with a sign program developed by NPS for national parks, as well as with signs designed specifically for the National Mall and East Potomac Park. Approximately 305 new signs are proposed in the entire program, which is more extensive than NPS's submission to the Commission for review at this time. Approximately 162 operational signs are proposed in this submission, pending field-checks with Commission staff.

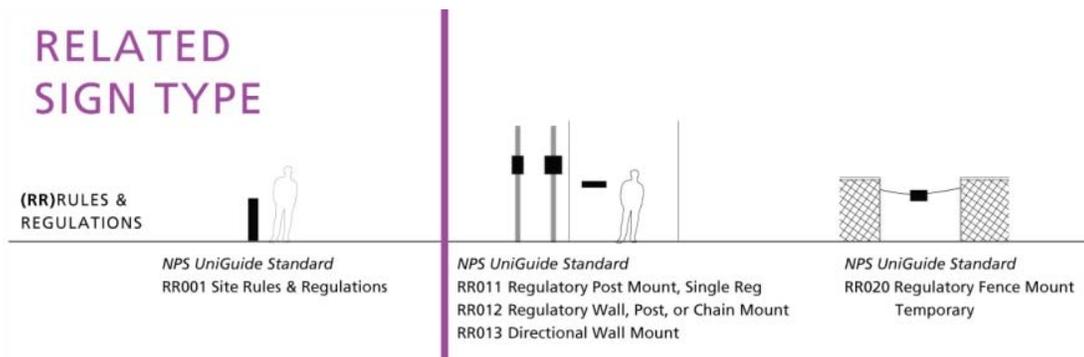
NPS has determined that some signs are needed where none now exist (primarily at the periphery of the National Mall). The current number of regulatory and information signs at memorials will be reduced by about half, as signs installed in an *ad hoc* manner over the years are replaced with a coordinated sign system. NPS's national sign program, called the UniGuide system, includes many categories of signs and comprises the majority of the proposed signs for the National Mall and East Potomac Park.

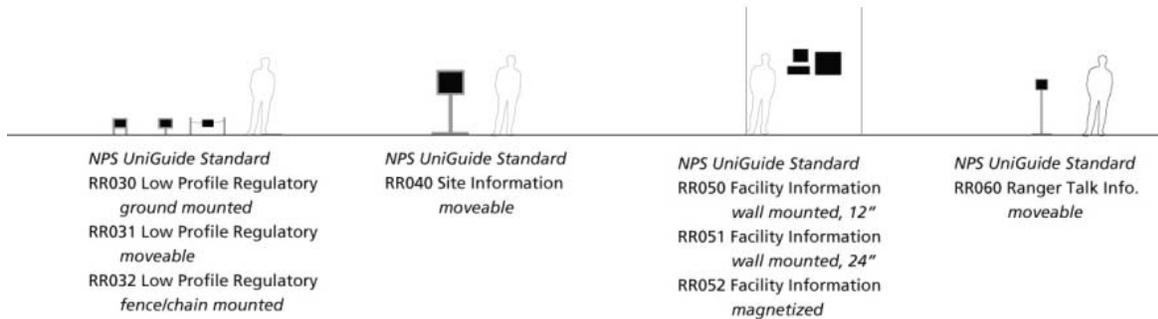
The following categories of signs proposed for the National Mall and East Potomac Park are submitted to the Commission for review at this time:

1. *National Park Service Sites and Facilities signs.* These UniGuide signs identify NPS offices and facilities, such as the regional headquarters and park offices on Ohio Drive and buildings used by the U.S. Park Police; and they identify the location of softball fields, parking bays, restrooms, and food kiosks. The signs are attached to buildings or to poles, and are uniform in design and of neutral colors. Some of the signs have a sign band with the NPS insignia and the name of the park, National Mall and Memorial Parks.



- Rules and Regulations signs.* These signs, also elements of NPS’s nationwide UniGuide system, provide information about Ranger talks, ticketing, and accessing information or assistance. They announce, as appropriate, rules and regulations with the international symbols prohibiting food and drink, smoking, pets, swimming, and skateboarding. The small metal signs can be attached to building walls, fences or chains, or can be on moveable stands. The basic “site rules and regulations” sign is a flat vertical sign measuring 4’6” in height by 8” in width. The international prohibition symbols are displayed vertically.





Additional sign categories not submitted to the Commission for review at this time, pending further development and consultation, include orientation signs (map kiosks), wayfinding signs (pylons in two sizes), and identification signs at monuments and memorials. Some of these signs were shown by NPS in an information presentation at the April 2, 2009 Commission meeting.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

During the ongoing development of the National Mall Plan, the National Park Service has received thousands of comments from the public about visitor services. The need for a coordinated, consistent, coherent, and informative sign program is among the top requests and

recommendations of the public. A good sign program can improve the quality and comfort of the experience for visitors. It also improves the image and appearance of the National Mall. The installation of a new sign and wayfinding program is a high priority for the National Park Service and is included in all alternatives of the National Mall Plan, which will be released in draft later this year.

The staff recommends that the Commission commend the National Park Service for replacing and updating the current signs on the National Mall and in East Potomac Park.

The National Park Service is proposing a comprehensive sign program that reduces the number, visual clutter, and confusion of *ad hoc* identification, information, and regulation signs, especially at and near memorials. The staff will continue to field check--with NPS staff and D.C. State Historic Preservation Office staff--the type, number, and location of signs.

The number regulatory signs at memorials will be reduced by about half. In addition to field review of signs near memorials, staff has reviewed and is reviewing signs to be installed elsewhere, and has recommended the use of lower regulatory signs at Constitution Gardens Lake, for example. NPS has confirmed that the sign locations can be adjusted after installation, if necessary, and that the UniGuide system will continue in use in order to avoid the return of visual clutter in future owing to a variety of sign types. The signs will be replaced or updated as necessary.

The proposed sign locations were selected to avoid prominent viewsheds and are scaled appropriately for their purpose and placement. The National Park Service has committed to working with Commission staff to ensure that the placement of signs is field-checked for visual effect.

Staff recommends approval of the preliminary and final site development plans for the categories of signs that are operational in nature. These include facility and site identification signs, information signs, and regulatory signs. Staff recommends approval of these signs with the condition that NPS continue to work with Commission staff and the staff of the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer (DCSHPO) in determining the placement of some of the signs, especially at the memorials. Staff anticipates reviewing some of the sign placements in the field as precise installation plans are developed.

Staff is analyzing and consulting on the entire proposed sign program, some components of which are still in development. The visual effect of the sign program on the landscape of the Mall is part of the analysis, as well as the need for the sign types to relate to each other appropriately in content and purpose. NPS has not submitted three categories of signs for review by the Commission at this time—map kiosks, pedestrian wayfinding pylons, and monument identification signs. These additional signs, if approved, would increase the number of new signs on the National Mall and East Potomac Park from approximately 162 to the proposed total of 305. 305 signs would be slightly below the number of signs – 327 – currently in place.

NPS will continue to develop, in consultation with Commission staff and others, the entire proposed sign program before returning to the Commission with the other elements.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The following are applicable policies from the *Preservation and Historic Features Element* of the Comprehensive Plan:

National Capital Image

1. Express the dignity befitting the image of the federal government in the national capital.
5. Protect and enhance the vistas and views, both natural and designed, that are an integral part of the national capital's image.

Stewardship of Historic Properties

5. Identify and protect both the significant historic design integrity and the use of historic landscapes and open spaces.

The Historic Plan of Washington, DC

2. Promote continuity in the historic design framework of the nation's capital by protecting and enhancing the elements, views, and principles of the L'Enfant Plan.
5. Protect the reservations that contain historic landscapes and features from incompatible changes or incursions.

Relevant Federal Facility Master Plan

Since 2006, NPS has been engaged in consultation and study leading to the development of the National Mall Plan, which will be released in draft later this year. All alternatives in the Plan include the removal of the existing signs on the National Mall and their replacement with a comprehensive wayfinding and sign program.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NPS has undertaken its own internal analysis for its NEPA compliance and has determined that the installation of the proposed signs meets the NEPA standards for categorical exclusion, as they are largely replacement for existing signs, do not disturb previously undisturbed soil, and have minimal visual impact.

Under NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, staff has determined that the categorical exclusion at Section 8 (C) 2, which addresses the replacement and routine installation of site and building identification signs, applies to the proposed action. Staff has made this determination following review of proposed installation locations on site to confirm the minimal visual impact of the signs, and in the context of Section 106 consultation

with the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer and the consulting parties for the National Mall Plan.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The DC SHPO concurred with NPS that the proposed UniGuide sign types used throughout the National Park System are covered by a nationwide Programmatic Agreement that requires an internal analysis of the proposed sign installation for appropriateness. The operational signs were reviewed by the DC SHPO, who found them consistent with the nationwide Programmatic Agreement.

The signs were reviewed for design and location by the DC SHPO. In a letter dated March 9, 2009, the DC SHPO concurred that the signs would have *No Adverse Effect* on the National Mall or East Potomac Park. The DC SHPO found the project:

. . . commendable because the standardization of inconsistent signage will greatly improve the mismatched conditions that currently exist. The total number of signs may ultimately increase, but the need for additional signage has long been recognized and the relatively modest size of most of the proposed signs will result in negligible visual effect when compared to the monumental scale of the National Mall. Locating the signage along the perimeter of the National Mall will help to minimize visual impacts by ensuring that primary views and vistas are not interrupted

NPS posted information on its Planning, Environment and public Comment (PEPC) website and the sign program was the subject of discussion at a Mall Plan Section 106 consultation meeting on March 17, 2009. Parties generally agreed with the program with the exception of the Coalition to Save Our Mall, which in letters to NPS dated March 3, 2009 and March 18, 2009 expressed concern with the frequency, logic, and content of the signs, as well as with the need to define the National Mall before a sign program is implemented. The letter of March 3rd was provided to Commissioners prior to NPS's Information Presentation on the sign program at the Commission's March 5, 2009 meeting. A letter of March 18th referred specifically to the proposed design of the pedestrian wayfinding pylons.

The DC SHPO, in its letter of March 9th, focused on the pedestrian pylons that are not before the Commission for action today. The DC SHPO determined that the signs would have *No Adverse Effect* on the historic properties of the Mall provided that NPS: 1) consult further with the DC SHPO during the CFA and NCPC review processes regarding the final type, location and number of pedestrian guide pylons near the major monuments and memorials (expressing concern in particular for the use of the tall pylons near the Washington Monument); 2) provide additional opportunities for public review and comment such as the National Mall Plan meeting forum; and 3) assess the potential for archaeological impacts for signage located outside of East and West Potomac Parks where the soil is not entirely composed primarily of fill.

NPS has acknowledged the DC SHPO's conditions in its March 9, 2009 letter and will continue to consult with the DC SHPO and others as design and installation proceeds. NCPC's Section

106 responsibilities incorporate the consultation to date with the DC SHPO, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and consulting parties.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the wayfinding and sign program at its meeting on February 11, 2009. All agencies present coordinated the project.

Commission of Fine Arts

At its February 19, 2009 meeting the Commission gave concept approval for the sign program, with the exception of the taller pylons (10 feet in height), which were not approved. NPS plans to return to CFA for further review and discussion at its May 21 meeting with a modified version of the taller pylon.

Referral to relevant local planning agencies

As an update on the discussion at the Commission's April 2, 2009 meeting, NPS is continuing to consult with the District of Columbia Office of Planning's (DC OP) staff on the content of the information proposed for the wayfinding pylons and the coordinated placement of the pylons in relation to nearby blue Downtown Business Improvement District signs. DC OP staff states that it is satisfied with progress in the discussions to date.