

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

N. Witherell

NCPC File No. 6972



LINCOLN MEMORIAL GROUNDS AND WEST POTOMAC PARK REHABILITATION AND PERIMETER SECURITY

Constitution Avenue and Bacon Drive, NW
Washington, DC

Submitted by the National Park Service

August 27, 2009

Abstract

The National Park Service (NPS) has submitted a proposal for a comprehensive design for circulation and access, security, and rehabilitation on the Lincoln Memorial Grounds and in West Potomac Park, including the Reflecting Pool and the Elm Walks. The submission incorporates a security barrier for the east side of the memorial within the larger landscape setting while correcting for deficiencies in accessibility through the site and addressing the need for the rehabilitation of the Reflecting Pool and the Elm Walks. In the interim, a temporary security barrier was installed for the Lincoln Bicentennial and presidential inaugural. In August 2007, NPS wrote to the Executive Director pledging a more comprehensive planning and design approach for West Potomac Park, to be prepared by a new design team. The concept design currently under review is the first step in NPS's comprehensive design approach, which has been encouraged by the Commission. NPS has retained Sasaki Associates for this effort, which is the largest project under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) being undertaken by NPS in the nation.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of comments on 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 rehabilitation of the Lincoln Memorial Grounds and West Potomac Park and for the installation of perimeter security, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.44(38.40)42846.

Recommends that the National Park Service develop the proposal with security barrier-retaining walls that are lower in height than the 36-inch walls shown in the concept design, so that the walls can be used as seating walls and be compatibly integrated into the historic landscape.

Notes that:

- The project is a comprehensive approach to address needed improvements in West Potomac Park as well as perimeter security for the Lincoln Memorial Grounds, and will replace the temporary vehicle barriers in place on the East Plaza of the Lincoln Memorial.
- The project is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.
- The National Park Service is developing a security analysis and an environmental document that will assist the National Park Service and the Commission in reviewing the proposed perimeter security barriers.
- The project will also address the source and quality of the water in the Reflecting Pool, which is still under study and will be submitted to the Commission at a future date.

* * *

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The area of the proposed work includes the lower stairs and surrounding circulation paths to the east of the Lincoln Memorial, the Reflecting Pool and adjacent areas to the north and south of the pool, and the North and South Elm Walks



Background

The Commission has commented on and reviewed NPS's proposals for security barriers at the Lincoln Memorial since NPS first proposed them during the development of the Urban Design and Security Plan in 2001-2002. The Commission approved final plans for a security barrier retaining wall around the north, west, and south sides of the memorial at Lincoln Memorial Circle (among other improvements for transportation and visitors services at the memorial) in February 2004. After concerted attempts to find consensus among the review agencies for a barrier location and design on the east (Mall) side of the memorial, NPS wrote to the Executive Director in August 2007 to propose a fresh start with a new design team and a comprehensive approach to improve conditions at the memorial and in West Potomac Park. The Commission subsequently approved the installation of temporary security barriers on the east side of the memorial that will be removed when the current project is implemented. NPS's August 2007 letter is attached to this report.

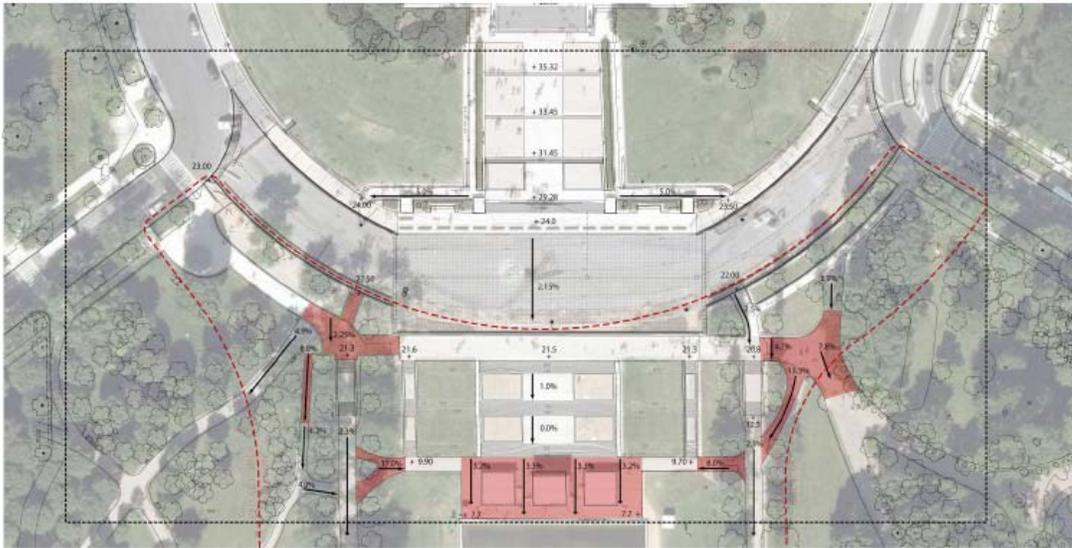
Proposal

The project includes:

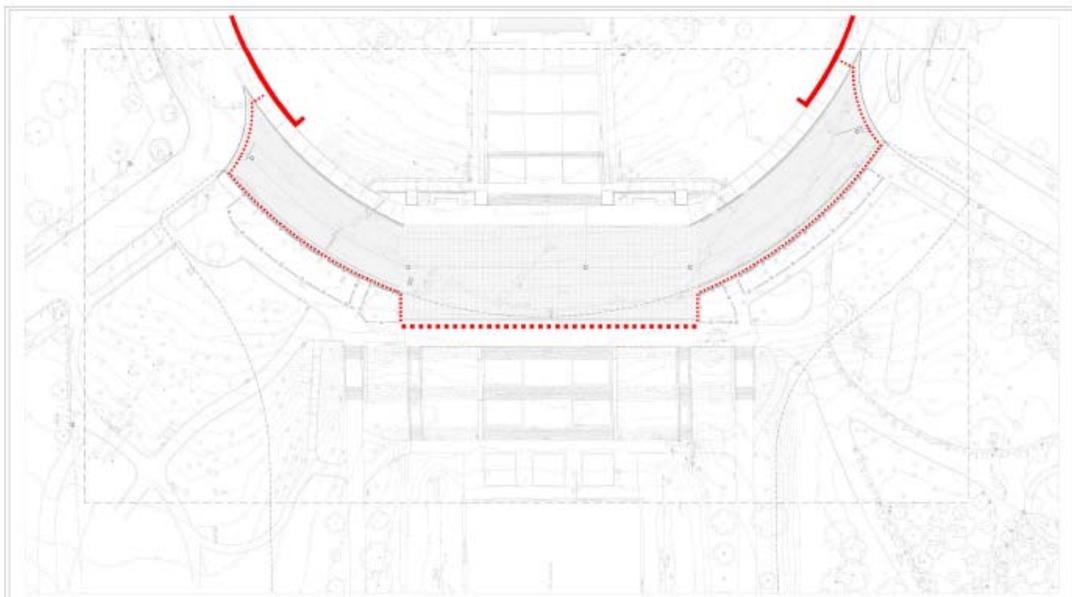
- Provision of accessible circulation paths (less than a 5% slope) throughout the site from the level of the Reflecting Pool to the level of the Lincoln Memorial Circle.
- Completion of the memorial's security barrier on the east side, integrated with the circulation plan.
- Repair of structural damage to the Reflecting Pool and its coping stones and the addition of paved walkways along the north and south sides of the pool where visitors walk.
- Replacement of the water intake source and the drainage system for the Reflecting Pool (which will be submitted to the Commission for review at a future date).
- Refurbishment and relocation of site furnishings such as benches and trash receptacles along the Elm Walks and the provision of lighting.

Circulation – Accessibility and Security

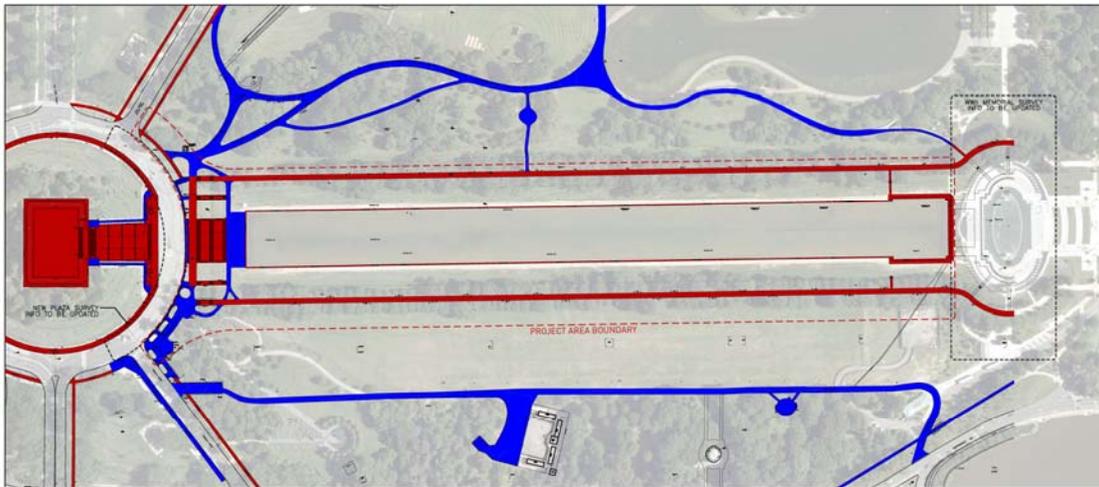
The concept design incorporates the security barrier with additions to the path system to provide full accessibility through the site in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The barrier will consist of a combination of retaining walls and bollards along these new paths. The historic fabric of the central stairs will not be altered. The security barrier is a significantly less prominent visual barrier across the central axis, which was a strong concern with previous design schemes. The reduced visual prominence is achieved by using the western edge of the Reflecting Pool itself as the barrier across the central axis, and by creating new accessible paths designed in conjunction with walls and bollards that also serve as vehicle barriers. The new paths extend beyond the Elm Walks to the north and south and meet existing paths that carry visitors to Lincoln Memorial Circle. The sloped paths are kept below a 5% grade, meaning that handrails will not be required, even on the levee slope on the north side.



Current Conditions: Shaded areas indicate paths that do not meet accessibility standards under the Americans with Disabilities Act.



Current conditions: schematic plan of the security barrier on the east side of the Lincoln Memorial. The retaining wall (shown as a solid line) runs along the inner sidewalk of the Circle, with bollards (fine dots) crossing the Circle at Bacon and French Drives in order to continue eastward toward the center axis of the Mall. Across the center of the Plaza, concrete blocks (shown as larger dots) have been placed as a temporary measure to close the security perimeter. The bollard lines to the north and south of the temporary barrier will be removed and relocated farther to the north and south, thus reducing the number of bollards in the central view to and from the memorial.



HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

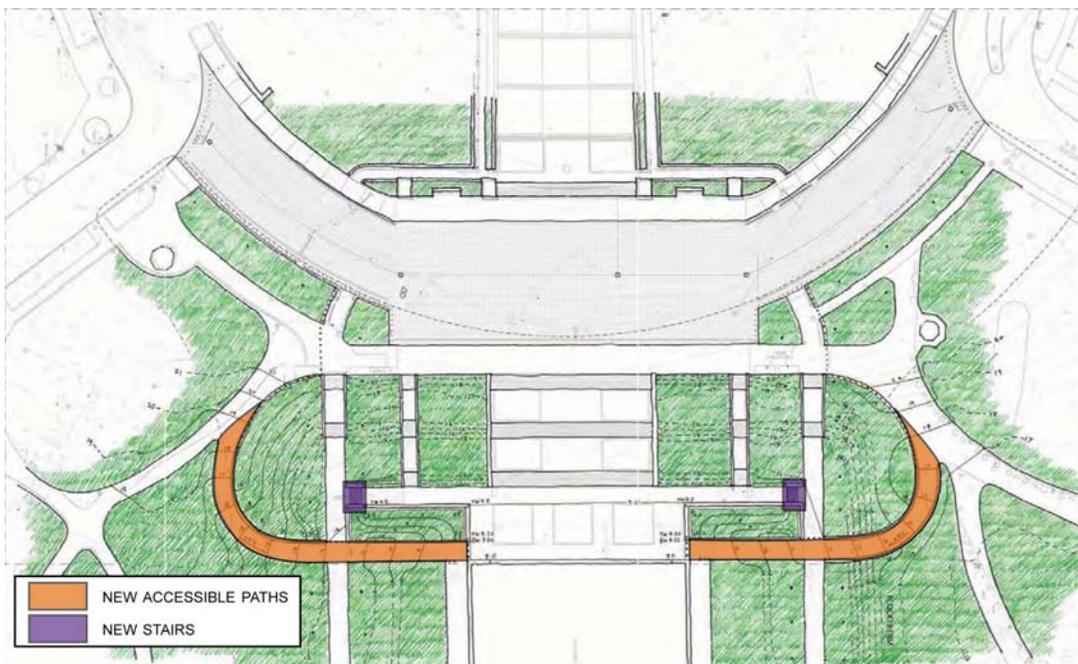
REHABILITATE LINCOLN MEMORIAL REFLECTING POOL AND SURROUNDING AREA
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
 NATIONAL MALL 150274

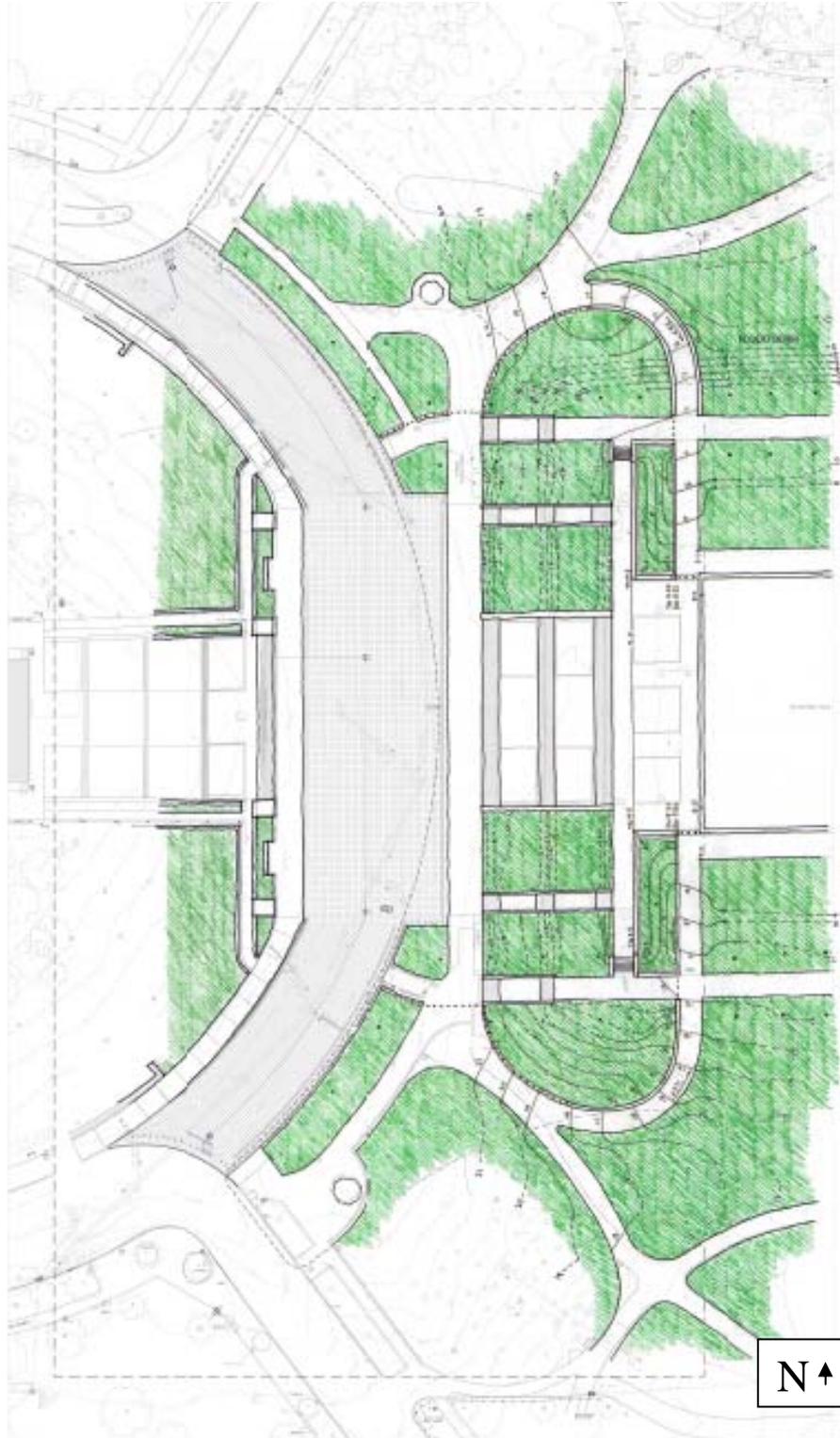
HARDSCAPE FEATURES OF NON-HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE (POST 1933) [Blue line]
 HARDSCAPE FEATURES FROM THE PERIOD OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (1914 - 1933) [Red line]



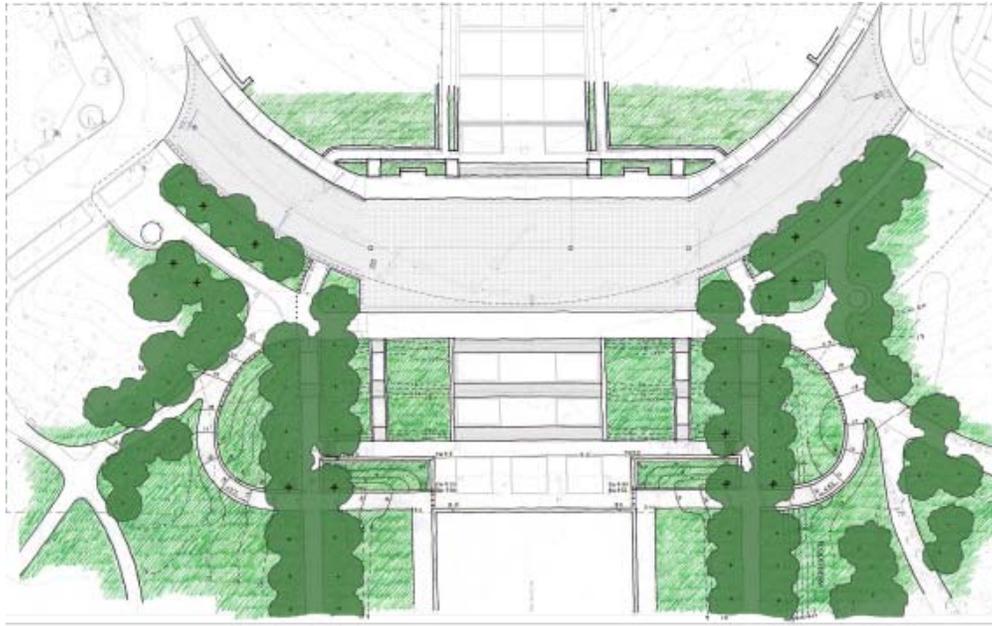
Current conditions: Plan showing HISTORIC (RED) and NON-HISTORIC (BLUE) path circulation system. Outside of the rectilinear paths and stairs in the central Mall axis (RED), the circulation plan has been altered since the Memorial and Reflecting Pool were completed in the 1920s.

As shown in the plan, below, new north-south paths would be created at the western edge of the Reflecting Pool. Existing paths that cross the Elm Walks would be modified. (New accessible paths are shown in ORANGE and new stairs to modify the existing path are shown in PURPLE.)





The proposed circulation and security plan, with north oriented to the top of the page and west to the left.



The proposed scheme, above, shown with the existing tree canopy. (West oriented to the top of the page)

The scheme will likely cause the removal of four elm trees. Since the elm trees form an alley along the Elm Walks, the intersection of the new curving paths with the Elm Walks may require the removal of two trees on the north Elm Walk and two on the south Elm Walk, depending on the precise location of the new paths. Most of these trees are later replacements and not original or early elms.

New retaining and above-grade walls near the Reflecting Pool (still within the immediate area of the historic lower stairs) will serve as vehicle barriers but will not raise the full height of a vehicle barrier above the existing grade in most locations. Instead, the designers propose manipulating the level of the turf in front of the walls by grading it in a downward slope to create the effect of ha-ha walls when seen from the memorial. While the curbs and sides of the walls will be exposed and visible to visitors in the vicinity, their visibility in long views will be minimized because the walls will not extend as high above grade as they would if the base of the walls were at grade. As determined from early visual studies to date, the visual effect of the barrier on the iconic, long views of the Lincoln Memorial from the Reflecting Pool and central axis will be reduced significantly.

The two areas of the sloped turf, which create the conditions that allow for retaining walls to be used as vehicle barriers, can be described as rectangles created by the addition of the new accessible paths. They are located immediately to the west of the new paths to the north and south of the west end of the Reflecting Pool. Each rectangle measures 80 feet in the north-south dimension and 23 feet in the east-west dimension. NPS has designed the concept design with a 36-inch vehicle barrier, which results in an 11% slope in the east-west dimension with the rectangular areas.

Bollards will also be part of the barrier design, used across paths and along the new accessible paths as they rise to Lincoln Memorial Circle. The location of the new accessible paths in relation to the existing historic conditions at the west end of the Reflecting Pool was designed in order to orient some of the bollards parallel to the Mall's long axis so that they will be less visible to visitors walking in that direction and alongside the Reflecting Pool.

The following perspectives by the applicant's design team illustrate the proposed design concept for providing accessibility and security on the east side of the Lincoln Memorial.



View north from the plaza between the Reflecting Pool and the lower approach way stairs. The edge of the reflecting pool forms part of the vehicle barrier. Straight ahead in the illustration is the proposed north accessible path. Three bollards across the path form part of the barrier. In long, axial east-west Mall views, the bollards will be less apparent because they run parallel to the length of the Reflecting Pool. Immediately to the west (left in this illustration) of the accessible path is the sunken barrier -- the rectangular turf area with a sloping grade--where new walls will form part of the barrier. In this illustration, visitors are sitting on the wall.

The turf slope is shown in greater detail in the perspective on the following page.



The sloping turf, surrounded by the retaining walls and the new circulation configuration, creates part of the vehicle barrier. In the immediate foreground, new stairs that are similar to the historic stairs to the left in this illustration create a finished edge to a new retaining wall.



The visibility of the vehicle barrier is reduced in the axial views of the memorial because most of the barrier wall's vertical height is below the existing grade. In addition, the barrier is integrated with the design of the existing and proposed circulation plan, which is also designed to provide accessibility throughout the site.



View east along South Elm Walk from Lincoln Memorial Circle. The pair of accessible paths rises from the Reflecting Pool to the Circle by crossing the Elm Walks. This allows the grade to be kept below a 5% slope and removes portions of the vehicle barrier from the central axial view shed. The barriers alongside the accessible paths are proposed to be a combination of walls and bollards.

In the above perspective, created to study different types of vehicle barriers, a wall is used along the entire length of the accessible path, ending at the Memorial Circle. NMS's preferred design approach proposes walls on the lower portions of the paths and bollards as the paths rise to the level of the Circle through more informal parkland.

In the perspective, the wall is 36 inches in height. The bollards are 42 inches in height. Existing bollards will be removed from the central, axial view shed because the barrier line in the proposal extends farther to the north and south – away from the central axis – in the proposed concept design.

Reflecting Pool

The coping stones on the edge of the Reflecting Pool has been damaged and weakened over the years and will be repaired. In addition, the turf is worn away for a distance of up to about fifteen feet along the north and south edges of the pool. While visitors have always walked along the pool and worn paths in the turf, the width of the worn path has widened noticeably since the completion of the World War II Memorial in 2004. After studying several locations for the paths that included the retention of some turf adjacent to the pool's coping, NPS and its design team, in concert with the DC SHPO and others, determined that visitors will continue to want to walk along the pool edge and, therefore, that the most practical solution is to add a paved path adjacent to the pool. The design team proposes a paved path of 12 feet in width along each side of the Reflecting Pool. It is likely that concrete walks will be used, consistent with the walks already in place at the east end of the pool, as shown in the photo on page 11 of this report.

In an effort to make the pool more sustainable, NPS and its project team are studying the water source and systems for maintaining water quality for the Reflecting Pool as part of this ARRA-funded project. Proposals will be submitted to the Commission for review at a future date.



The worn paths along the north and south sides of the Reflecting Pool would be paved with concrete pavers similar to those already in use at the east end of the Reflecting Pool, as shown in the above photo. (The boy with the red backpack is walking on concrete pavers. Ahead of him is the wide path worn by visitors in recent years, especially since the dedication of the World War II Memorial in 2004.)

Below, the proposed solution to the worn turf along the north and south sides of the Reflecting Pool: place pavers along the entire length of the Reflecting Pool to a width of 12 feet.



Elm Walks

The Elm Walks are in need of refurbishment. The asphalt paths are worn and crumbling at the edges, and path lighting has become seen as a necessary addition. The project also includes funding to refurbish the park benches and trash receptacles. NPS and its design team propose pedestrian-level light standards (under the tree canopy) that would project over the paths and illuminate them with downward facing fixtures that would not spill light unduly into adjacent areas. Below is an early, conceptual illustration of the approach proposed by NPS for lighting the Elm Walks. All the elements—lighting standards, benches, and trash receptacles—will be moved to the outer sides of the Elm Walks to create a more regular, coordinated relationship.



PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

The staff supports the proposal at the concept design phase and commends the National Park Service for gaining ARRA funds to rehabilitate the Lincoln Memorial Grounds and West Potomac Park, work that has been needed for some years. *Given the tight schedule for ARRA projects during the coming fiscal year, NPS has submitted a concept design at this time in order to gain the comments and recommendations of the Commission on the overall approach and primary concepts contained in the proposal.* NPS will return in several months to the Commission with a proposal to improve water quality in the Reflecting Pool, and will prepare an environmental document and security analysis, as required at the next stage of review by the Commission, and a more detailed site development plan.

Staff commends NPS for proposing a comprehensive landscape plan to address the requirements for visitor accessibility and perimeter security. For the first time, the Commission is reviewing a proposal that does not include bollards directly across the central axis of Lincoln Memorial Plaza, the lower approach way stairs, or the Reflecting Pool. The proposal also avoids bollards running along the sides of the lower approachway stairs. Rather, the location of the barrier line is moved away from the central axis as much as possible, so that much of the barrier is to the outside of the Elm Walks, where the tree canopy will also help to obscure their visual effect.

Perimeter Security

The comprehensive approach taken by NPS in this scheme differs from the more limited scope and funding available to NPS in prior attempts to design the closure of the security barrier for the memorial on the east (Mall) side. Staff and others have previously suggested the use of the Reflecting Pool edge as part of the vehicle barrier. The collective desire to avoid a barrier line directly across the east-west axis of the Mall has prevented earlier design proposals from reaching consensus among all the agencies.

With the current proposal, the barrier line is disguised as much as possible by creating an approximately 11% slope in two areas of turf flanking the Reflecting Pool to create retaining walls that form the effect of ha-ha walls in some locations. The two turf areas—rectangles measuring 23 feet by 80 feet—will be formed by the existing paths and the creation of two accessible paths (colored orange on the annotated site plan on page 5 of this report) extending north and south from the corners of the Reflecting Pool. The retaining walls serve as vehicle barriers, but they also form the edges of paths, and therefore are better integrated as features into the landscape than were some of the previous security barriers reviewed by the Commission.

While part of the retaining walls will be visible above grade, most of the height of the walls will be below the existing grade in the area near the Reflecting Pool. The walls will form vehicle barriers because the grade of the turf will be lowered the necessary depth at the west side of the two rectangular areas of turf. While the new walls are necessarily exposed (since they form vehicle barriers) and will be visible to visitors standing in the vicinity of the lower approach way, they will be less apparent to visitors enjoying long views from both the east (from the sides of the Reflecting Pool) and the west (from the memorial itself). This is because most of the height of the walls will be below the prevailing grade.

The use of several bollards across paths is required by this scheme. The bollards are indicated with dots in the plan on page 6 of this report. One advantage of this scheme over earlier proposals, however, is that the bollards immediately to the west of the Reflecting Pool are aligned parallel to the long sides of the pool rather than perpendicular to the pool, so they will be less visible in axial views than if they were crossing the east-west axis. Bollards are also required across the Elm Walks in one location on each walk.

The annotated plan on page 5 illustrates two proposed new stairs, highlighted in purple. The stairs, designed to be similar to the stairs of the lower approach way, would constitute a modification of the existing paths and would provide a formal transition to the higher grade of the Elm Walks. The stairs also would allow for a more finished appearance to the retaining walls

immediately to their east on both sides, which is the area where the turf has the greatest proposed downward slope at 11%.

The security barrier will still be visible in the landscape. The historic landscape will be altered. In addition to the visibility of the walls at close proximity, the panoramic view from the memorial plaza and memorial chamber will include the new curving paths and the walls and bollards along one side of them as they extend outside the Elm Walks.

But the avoidance of barriers directly in front of the central stairs of the lower approach way and Reflecting Pool is a significant advancement in the landscape design approach and is achievable by the larger scope of the current project, which also addresses the need for full accessibility through the site. Although the barrier line as now proposed extends across the entire area, the most visible security elements will be pulled away from the central axis, toward and beyond the north and south Elm Walks, where the elms themselves will filter direct views of the paths and barriers.

The result of the comprehensive landscape approach will be to reduce the appearance of security barriers across the most formal elements of the historic landscape: the lower approach way and Reflecting Pool on the Mall's central axis.

Staff emphasizes, however, that the extent of the ultimate success of the proposal lies in reducing the height of the retaining walls as much as possible and thereby minimizing the appearance of apparent security elements in the landscape. NPS is developing an environmental assessment and security analysis that will assist both NPS and the Commission in further review of the vehicle barriers.

Accessible pedestrian circulation throughout the site

The proposed provision for the first time of full accessibility to all visitors is a significant achievement of the proposed plan. The new paths are shown in orange on page 5 of this report. Combining the new paths, which do not exceed a 5% slope and therefore do not require handrails, with the vehicle barrier is a more natural way of introducing the barrier into the landscape. The barrier along the edge of the new paths will likely be a combination of seating walls and bollards, as shown in the perspectives illustrating this report. The design team is continuing to study the design.

Staff concurs with NMS's preferred approach, which is that barrier walls be used at the lower level, complementing the more formal design of the Reflecting Pool, and that bollards be used as the paths rise to meet the existing path system. Staff concurs that using bollards on the upper slopes will appear less formal and more park-like, and will be more appropriate as the historic setting transitions from the McMillan Plan's more formal elements to the later informal park paths.

Elm Walks

The desire for lighting along the Elm Walks has been in discussion for several years. Temporary light standards were put in place in response to congressional concerns. Staff recommends support for the approach presented by the applicant and design team: low lighting standards, below the tree canopy, that project illumination downward over the Elm Walks. The light standards and benches are proposed for the outer sides of the Elm Walks. Staff concurs that a contemporary design for the light standard is appropriate in this location, as illustrated schematically in the rendering. No design has been submitted to the Commission.

The palette of materials is still being considered. One of the many decisions requiring further attention is the transition of materials on the surface of the proposed new paths near the Reflecting Pool as they rise toward Lincoln Memorial Circle. The current thinking is that the new paths will likely be concrete to match the pavement around the Reflecting Pool. But the paths will cross the Elm Walks, which are currently paved with dark asphalt. The material of the Elm Walks was concrete historically, but in recent years it has been asphalt, which is preferred by runners.

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.

Federal Capital Improvements Plan

This project was funded with American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) funds and did not appear previously as a Capital Improvement project.

National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Plan's goals, because it takes advantage of the existing topography, combines existing features (the Reflecting Pool) and proposed functional features (accessible paths) with the security barrier, and because it takes into consideration the historic landscape and setting in a comprehensive, holistic design.

The National Park Service is now conducting a security analysis, pursuant to the Commission's Supplemental Submission Guidelines for Permanent Perimeter Security Projects, adopted August 4, 2005. This analysis, along with an environmental assessment, are required with NMS's submission of the preliminary site development plans to guide the Commission's decision-making.

Federal Facility Master Plan

The proposed project has been anticipated since NPS's August 2007 letter to the Executive Director and is consistent with all alternatives of NPS's National Mall Plan.

National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)

The National Park Service is developing an environmental assessment for the project. A public scoping meeting was held at the Old Post Office on the evening of Thursday, July 9, 2009.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The National Park Service formally initiated consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) in a July 7, 2009 letter. The July 9, 2009 scoping meeting also served as an introductory consultation meeting for interested individuals and organizations pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. NPS illustrated a range of possible alternatives and the iterative process employed by the design team to date. The concept design submitted by NPS to the Commission for review was presented at the meeting. A site visit for consulting parties is scheduled for August 31, 2009.

To date, NPS has not made a determination of effect. The DC State Historic Preservation Officer has indicated early approval of the design approach proposed by NPS and its design team.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Committee reviewed the proposal at its August 12, 2009 meeting, at which time it was coordinated by all participating agencies. The participating agencies included: NCPC; the National Park Service; the General Services Administration, the Washington Metropolitan Area

Transit Authority, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, Fire and Emergency Medical Services, and the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Staffs of the Commission of Fine Arts, the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office, and the D.C. Office of Planning have participated in several consultation meetings with NPS and the design team to study the issues and concerns inherent in proposals for West Potomac Park, to introduce possible concept designs, and to develop further recommendations. The DC State Historic Preservation Officer has informally endorsed the direction of the proposed concept design.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission reviewed and gave concept approval to the proposal at its July 16, 2009 meeting. The Commission's letter expresses enthusiasm for the concept, which would remove barriers that interrupt the primary vistas to and from the memorial.

The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed less-developed illustrations than those submitted to NCPC for inclusion in this report. CFA asked NPS to submit a revised concept once further design development had occurred, with clearer depictions of the location and treatment of the barriers within the landscape, the design and materials of the Elm Walk, and the proposed paths along the Reflecting Pool. The Commission also asked for the submission of options for the sustainable maintenance of the Reflecting Pool.

The Commission's letter is attached to this report.