

STAFF RECOMMENDATION



S. Dettman

NCPC File No. 7009

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE HEADQUARTERS
(HERBERT HOOVER BUILDING)
NATIONAL AQUARIUM ENTRANCE**

1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC

Submitted by the General Services Administration

June 24, 2010

Abstract

The General Services Administration has submitted concept plans for a new entrance pavilion to the National Aquarium located along the Constitution Avenue NW side of the Department of Commerce Headquarters – Herbert Hoover Building. The proposed entrance is necessary to provide access to the Aquarium which will be relocated to a portion of the basement-level at the southern end of the building. The entrance will be located along the existing inside edge of the sidewalk and consist of two, 42-inch high, 216-foot long, granite-clad walls spaced 10 feet apart. The wall immediately adjacent to the sidewalk will incorporate perimeter security. Signage will be located at either end of the entrance. Finally, the proposal also includes the placement of a public art element near the intersection of 14th Street and Constitution Avenue. The public art has yet to be designed though it is anticipated that it will relate to the mission of the National Aquarium.

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 proposed concept design for a new entrance pavilion to the National Aquarium located at 1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Department of Commerce Headquarters (Herbert Hoover Building) as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.23(38.00)42909.

Commends GSA on its coordination with federal and District stakeholders, and for its efforts to balance various design considerations.

Notes that permanent perimeter security for the Department of Commerce’s Herbert Hoover Building is not included in the proposed concept design, but that GSA has indicated that the outer wall of the entrance pavilion, located along the existing inside edge of the sidewalk, can, and will, be designed in a manner so as not to preclude a perimeter security solution at the edge of the building yard, or inside the sidewalk, at a later date.

Recommends that GSA continue working cooperatively with NCPC, the District Department of Transportation, the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office, and other interested stakeholders to refine the design of the proposed concept to ensure that the project is consistent with the intent of the District’s public space regulations while balancing other equally important considerations such as historic preservation, perimeter security, and flood protection.

Recommends that GSA continue studying how to minimize to the maximum extent possible any potential impacts to pedestrian access and circulation caused by the proposed entrance pavilion.

Requires GSA to resolve all outstanding design issues identified in the Memorandum of Agreement established as part of the Section 106 consultation process, and those listed below, prior to submitting the project for preliminary and/or final approval:

- Design and grading of the green roof
- Detailing and design of the outer pavilion wall including the incorporation of perimeter security
- Design of the proposed public art element
- Flood protection
- Lighting of the pavilion and public art element
- Successful resolution of all public space issues
- Determination of whether the existing configuration of adjacent landscaped areas can be maintained or modified to a lesser extent than currently proposed

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The headquarters of the U.S. Department of Commerce, also known as the Herbert C. Hoover Building, is located at 1401 Constitution Avenue, NW (“the project site”, “the site”). The project site is located within the area of Washington, DC known as the Federal Triangle, and is bounded

by Pennsylvania Avenue to the north, Constitution Avenue to the south, 14th Street to the east, and 15th Street to the west. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) as a contributing structure in the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site and the Federal Triangle Historic District. The site is surrounded by several cultural, recreational, and governmental uses such as: Pershing Park and Freedom Plaza to the north, the National Mall and related cultural institutions to the south, the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center and headquarters to the Environmental Protection Agency to the east, and the White House and Ellipse to the west. The site of the future National Museum of African American History and Culture is located immediate south of the project site, across Constitution Avenue on the National Mall.



Project site and surrounding area

Background

At its March 30, 2006 meeting, the Commission provided favorable comments on the concept site and building plans for the first phase of modernization of the Herbert C. Hoover Building, with the exception of perimeter security and streetscape elements. According to the staff report prepared for this project, the scope of this phase of the modernization included the general repair of the building's interior and exterior, modifications and enhancements to meet current building standards and new programmatic functions, and the replacement of all major site utilities and

building service infrastructure. Though not formally submitted to the Commission, the proposal to relocate the National Aquarium and construct a new entrance pavilion was referred to in staff's analysis of the project. In its analysis, staff indicated support for the relocation of the aquarium to Constitution Avenue and recommended maximizing pedestrian circulation space in front of the entrance areaway by incorporating perimeter security into the entrance design. Furthermore, staff recommended further design study of the entrance in consultation with NCPC, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO).



Aerial view of the Herbert C. Hoover Building (south façade)

At its September 29, 2007 meeting, the Commission approved the preliminary and final building plans for the aforementioned Phase I modernization. In addition, the Commission reminded the General Services Administration (GSA) that it would need to conduct an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the potential impacts associated with any future improvements located within public space, “including perimeter security elements and the relocation

of the National Aquarium, which is anticipated to have a new entrance facility located at least in part in public space.” GSA has since completed an EA for exterior improvements to the project site including the proposed entrance to the National Aquarium, ADA ramps, and permanent perimeter security. On April 6, 2010, GSA issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the proposed aquarium entrance and ADA ramps only, noting that “the proposed perimeter security elements will be subject to additional NEPA analysis and/or documentation.”

Proposal

The General Services Administration (GSA) has submitted a proposal for a new entrance pavilion to the National Aquarium (the Aquarium). The pavilion is a component of GSA's initiative to relocate the National Aquarium to the basement level of the Constitution Avenue side of the Department of the Commerce headquarters building, also known as the Herbert C. Hoover Building (HCHB). Currently, the Aquarium occupies approximately 18,000 square feet of the basement level at the north side of the building. It has occupied this location ever since the HCHB was built in 1932.

Originally, access to the Aquarium was provided via a staircase and two elevators directly from the main building lobby. Over time, the configuration of the main lobby has been altered due to building security and the need to separate publicly accessible spaces from the remainder of the building. This has led to changes in circulation and the elimination the main lobby as a means of

accessing the Aquarium. Currently, visitors access the Aquarium through the northern building entrance along 14th Street. After entering the building and passing through a tightly configured security screening area visitors then follow a circuitous path down a fire stair to the basement level. At street-level, the only indication of the Aquarium's locale is a modest sign located within the building yard near the 14th Street entrance. No other exterior signage exists around the HCHB that would help attract visitors to the Aquarium. Not only is this configuration a significant departure from what was originally intended when the HCHB was constructed, it is considered by GSA to be inappropriate for the National Aquarium and for the Department of Commerce. In addition, the lack of signage and visibility along the street compromises the long-term success of the National Aquarium as a destination in Washington, DC. The proposed entrance pavilion that is the subject of staff's review is perpetuated by the GSA's initiative to relocate the National Aquarium to a portion of the south basement of the HCHB. According to information provided to staff, GSA has determined that this location is the most appropriate because of its proximity to the National Mall and its ability to separate pedestrian tourist traffic from general building operations, similar to the condition that exists at the White House Visitor Center located at the north end of the HCHB adjacent to Pennsylvania Avenue.



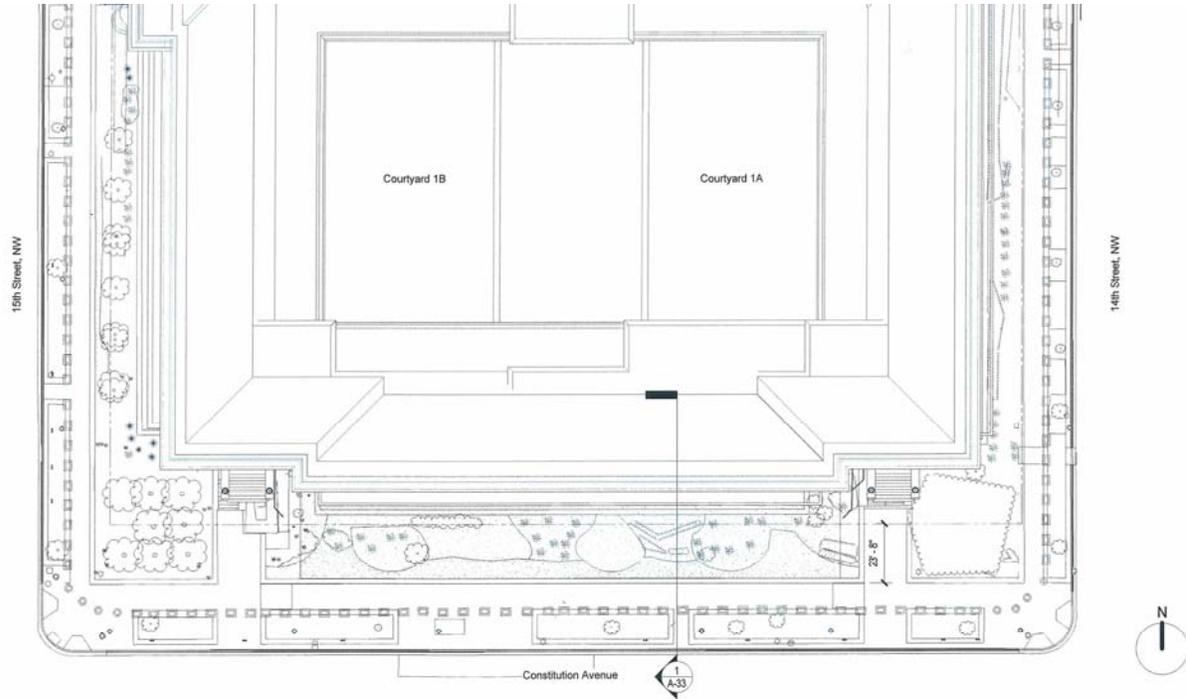
Existing view of project site (looking west)

The proposed entrance pavilion will provide access to the below-grade National Aquarium which will encompass approximately 30,000 square feet of building area. Roughly 22,000 square feet of this space will be located entirely within the south basement level of the HCHB, while the remaining 8,000 square feet will be located primarily below grade within the building yard that extends from the south façade of the HCHB to the current inside edge of the sidewalk along Constitution Avenue. As is the case with many buildings throughout Washington, the HCHB's building yard is partially located within

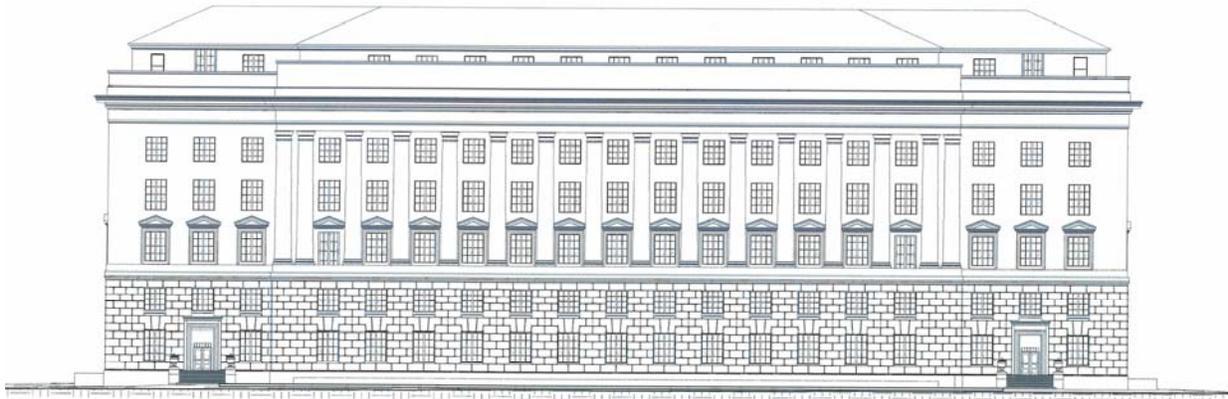
the boundaries of the HCHB property lines, and partially within the adjacent Constitution Avenue right-of-way.¹ Specifically, approximately 5,000 square feet of building area will extend below the right-of-way into what is known as "vault space."²

¹ For the proposed project, and any other within the L'Enfant City, the property within the existing street right-of-way is owned by the United States Government with administrative jurisdiction held by the District of Columbia government. Therefore, that portion of the Aquarium, and proposed entrance pavilion, located either within vault space or aboveground public space is subject to local policies and regulations governing the use of that space barring any other federal law stating otherwise.

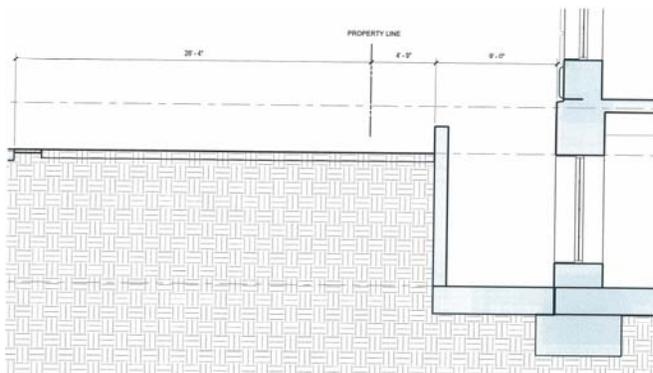
² Vault space can be described as occupiable building area located below publicly owned property such as a street right-of-way.



Existing site plan of project site



Existing south elevation

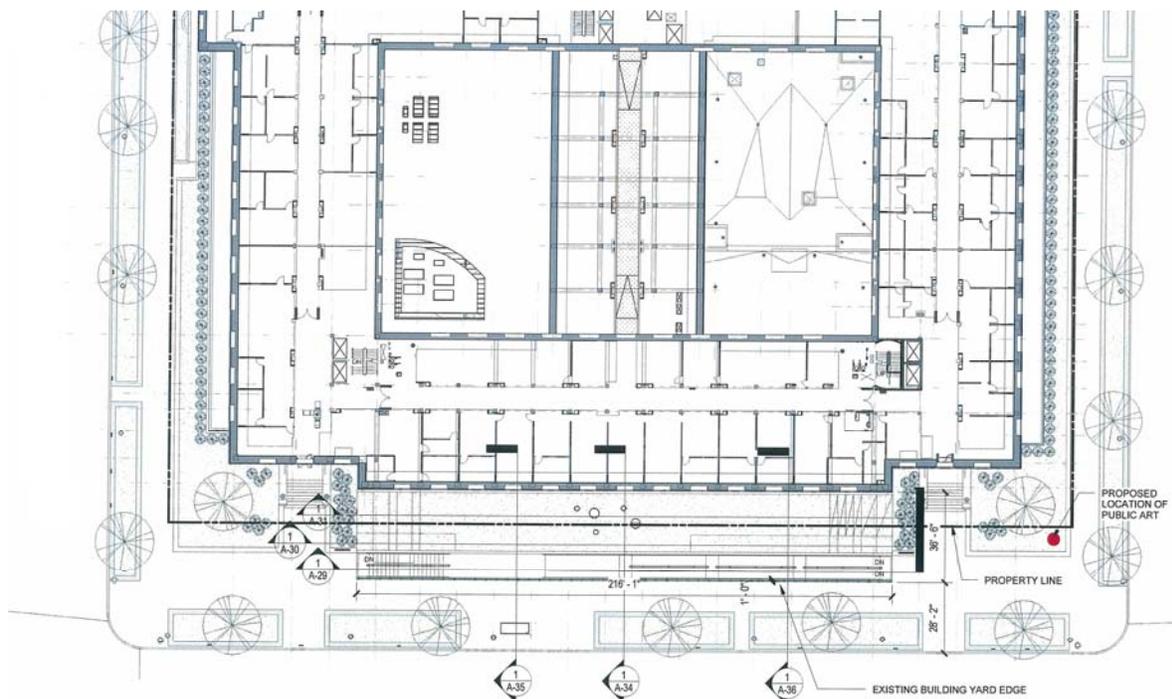


Cross section of project site showing existing areaway

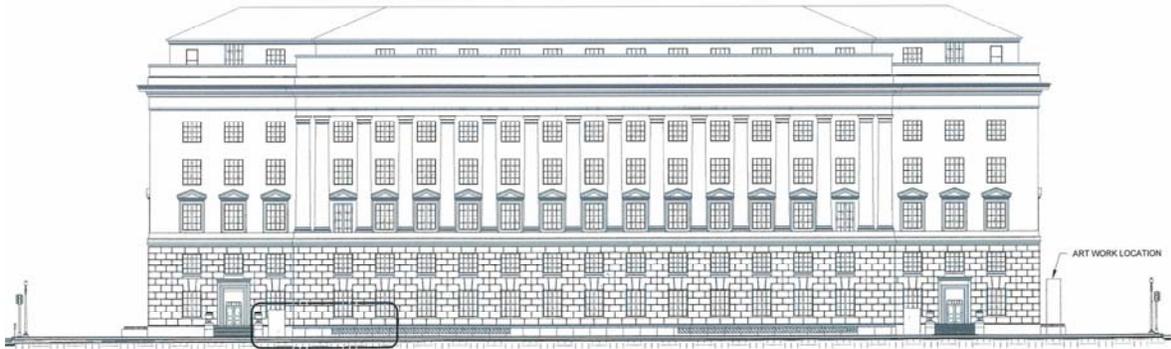


Existing areaway at southern base of building

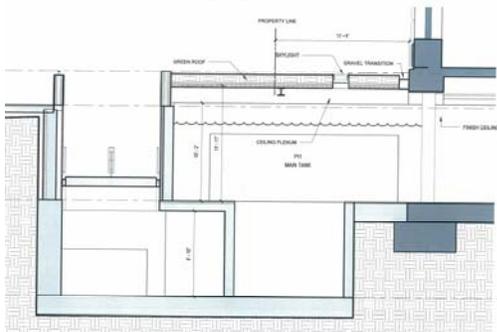
The proposed pavilion will span the length of the HCHB's central southern colonnade, cover over a nine-foot wide areaway located at the base of the building, and occupy a footprint that is approximately 216' x 37'. The areaway and building yard will be excavated and then covered over with a green roof at a maximum elevation of three and a half feet above grade, or 42 inches. This elevation will extend southward from the base of the building thereby establishing the ceiling height of the Aquarium [vault] space below. The southernmost 10' x 216' portion of the pavilion will be comprised of a granite ramp and stair that lead visitors down to the Aquarium entrance. The ramp and stair will be positioned between the 42-inch vault extension on the north, and a 42-inch wall / guard railing on the south, both of which will be constructed of granite and run parallel to each other. The southern, or outer, pavilion wall will be located along the existing edge of the building yard and therefore will not require a narrowing of the sidewalk along Constitution Avenue. In response to design concerns raised by interested stakeholders, GSA has submitted two design alternatives for the outer pavilion wall. The two alternatives function in the same way and are essentially the same in their material make-up. In order to maintain a sense of openness within the public space both alternatives will be at least 50 percent visually permeable and composed of granite, metal decorative screen, and a metal railing. The first alternative proposes a full height, 42-inch granite wall with large sections of intricate metal screens. The second alternative utilizes a combination of a granite wall and metal top railing in order to reach the required height of 42 inches. This alternative proposes etching along the length of the granite wall that will portray the Aquarium motif. At two points along the wall, the granite will be replaced with metal screens designed to match the etching on the wall. Although perimeter security for the entire HCHB is not part of the proposed project, the design of the outer wall will be sufficiently hardened in the event perimeter security is added at a later date. Furthermore, the outer wall will also incorporate flood protection measures to guard the lower level against flooding from the street.



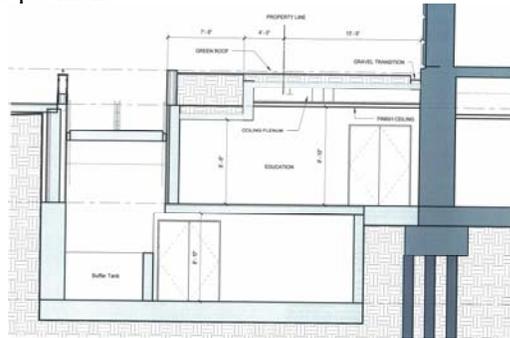
Site plan of proposed National Aquarium entrance pavilion



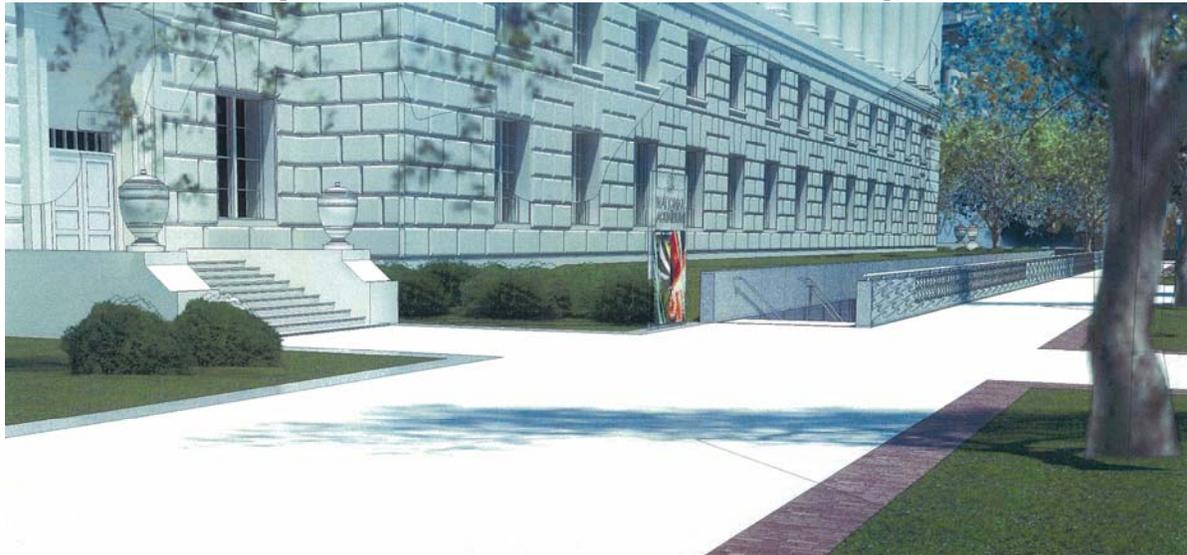
South elevation of proposed National Aquarium entrance pavilion



Cross section of entrance pavilion at shark tank



Cross section of entrance pavilion at class room



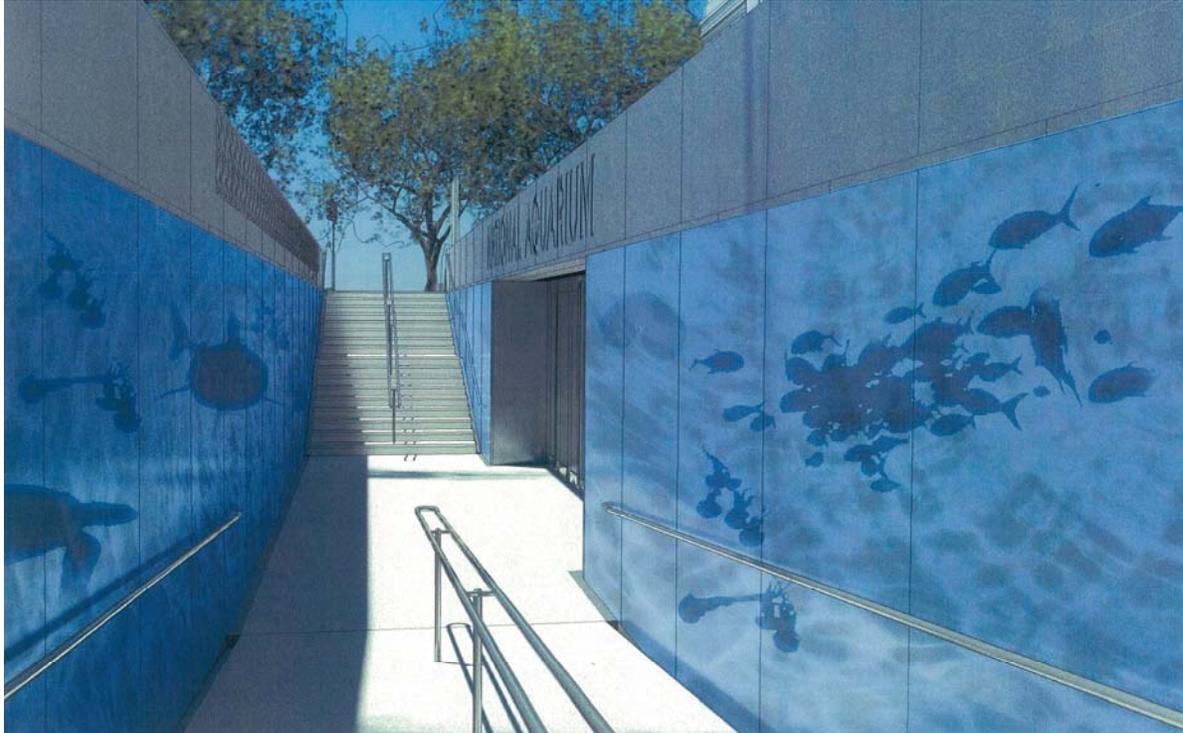
Rendered view of entrance pavilion looking east from 15th Street NW



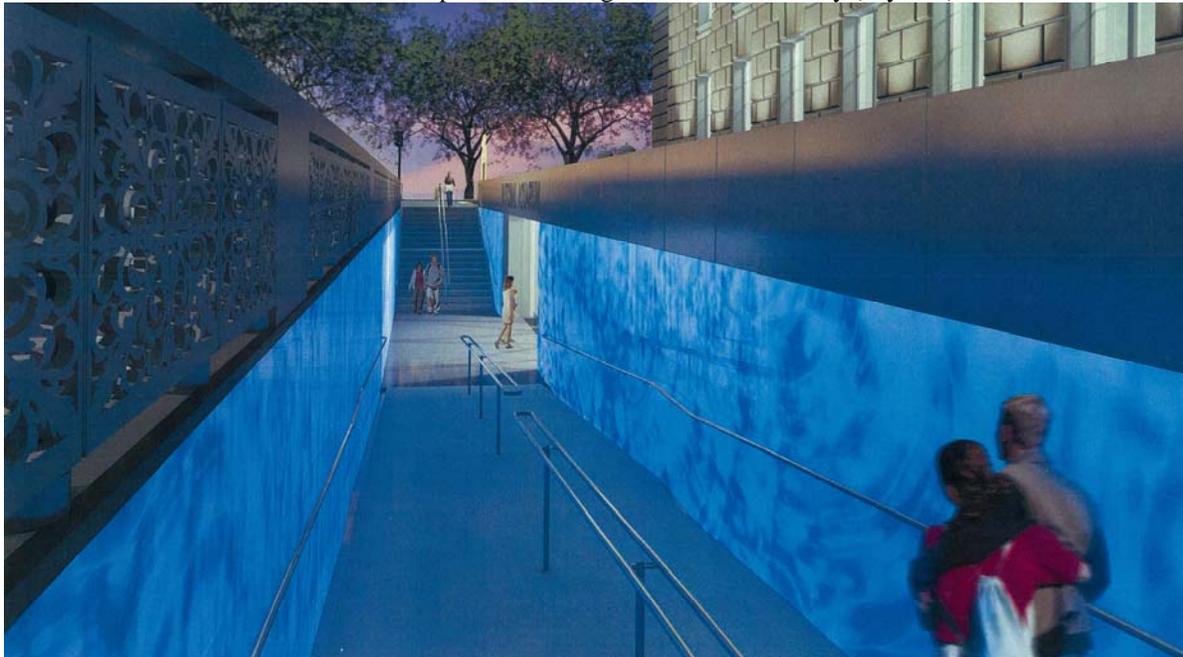
Rendered view from top of entrance pavilion stairway (looking east)



Rendered view from top of entrance pavilion access ramp (looking west)



Rendered view from within the entrance pavilion looking west toward stairway (daytime)



Rendered view from within the entrance pavilion looking west toward stairway showing LED display

In addition to the proposed entrance pavilion, minimal signage and a public art element are also part of the project. Twenty-four inch high, etched lettering depicting “National Aquarium” is proposed for along the south face of the vault extension above the Aquarium’s entryway. Two signage elements are also proposed, one at each end of the pavilion at the top of the ramp and stair. The two signs will be equally sized and symmetrically located to maintain the overall

balance of the pavilion and the south façade of the HCHB. Finally, a large public art element is proposed near the corner of 14th Street and Constitution Avenue. Although not yet designed, it is intended that the element will relate somehow to the mission of the Aquarium.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Overall, staff is supportive of the proposed entrance pavilion and recommends that the Commission **comment favorably on the project and recommend that GSA continue its close coordination with interested stakeholders in order to resolve outstanding design issues prior to submitting the project for preliminary and final approval.** Staff commends GSA for its responsiveness to the many divergent design concerns raised by stakeholders. The proposed concept design responds well to recent public space concerns raised by DDOT, and in fact has received a favorable response from DDOT with respect to the project's likelihood of receiving a public space permit once the design is finalized. GSA has been able to address the bulk of these public space issues while maintaining the overall design simplicity favored by those with historic preservation interests. While staff is supportive of the project and sees great benefit in increasing the visibility of the National Aquarium, both from the perspective of the long-term viability of the Aquarium and from the impact the project will have on the vitality of the Federal Triangle, it has identified several outstanding design issues that will need to be resolved prior to the Commission taking a preliminary and final action on the project.

Public Space and Pedestrian Access and Circulation

Although the proposed concept maintains the existing width of the sidewalk along Constitution Avenue, **staff recommends that GSA continue studying how to minimize to the maximum extent possible any potential impacts to pedestrian access and circulation caused by the proposed entrance pavilion.** Currently, the sidewalk adjacent to the project site is heavily traveled by pedestrians making their way to and from destinations along the National Mall with the intersection of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue acting as a point of convergence. The relocation of the National Aquarium, and the future opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, will substantially increase the pedestrian volumes at this intersection. Visitor queuing will need to be an important consideration as this project advances. GSA will need to study whether the proposed ramp and staircase can accommodate the required amount of queuing, and take the necessary precautions in order to avoid spillover into pedestrian traffic along the sidewalk. In addition, GSA will also need to look at whether the potential for queuing will impact access to the two south entrances to the HCHB.

Views and Vistas

Views and vistas are an essential design element to the historic plan of Washington, especially along important streets and avenues. The proposed pavilion has the potential to adversely impact the existing viewshed along Constitution Avenue, and even along 14th Street, if not designed carefully. Currently, the viewshed along this avenue is primarily characterized by the uniform, neo-classical architectural style of the Federal Triangle on the north, and sizable, landscaped

building yards to the north and the south. The project will disrupt this view by raising the grade of the existing building yard and inserting hard-edged structures into an area that has traditionally been landscaped. **Therefore, as the project advances staff recommends that GSA develop ways to reduce the visibility of the pavilion to the maximum extent possible through landscaping and by maximizing the visual openness of the outer wall. In addition, staff requests that GSA investigate whether the existing landscaped panels on either side of the HCHB building entrances can remain in their current location in order to further reduce impacts to views and vistas.**

Historic Features and Elements

The proposed concept design for the National Aquarium's entrance pavilion has been carried out in close consultation with NCPC, the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The modest scale of the pavilion is intended to be identifiable only from a short distance, and will have minimal impact on the south elevation of the HCHB overall. The pavilion has been designed to be subservient to the HCHB, given the significance and monumentality of the historic building. The proposed ramp and stair that provide access down to the Aquarium entrance are intended to be perceived as a part of the streetscape and less a part of the HCHB. This will be achieved through the use of the uninterrupted landscape surrounding the building and the visual detachment of the new pavilion from the building's exterior wall.



Rendering of wall alternatives (also showing proposed signage)

GSA is continuing to refine the design of the outer pavilion wall in close consultation with NCPC and all other interested stakeholders. Staff has reviewed the two submitted wall alternatives and is satisfied with the direction the design is going in. Both alternatives are relatively simplistic and maintain a clean visual line that does not compete with the south elevation of the HCHB. Staff will continue to work with GSA and the other stakeholders to identify and finalize one wall design prior to the project being submitted for preliminary and final approval.

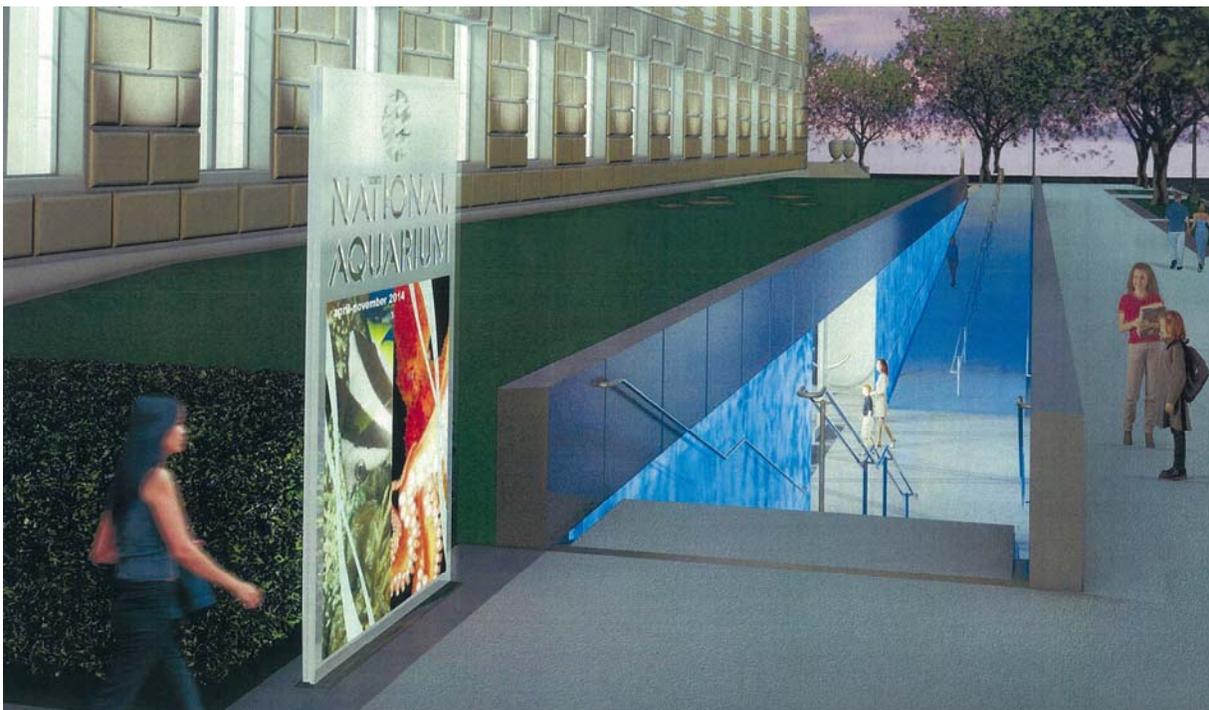
The proposed project entails reducing the depth of the landscaped areas located to the outside of the HCHB entrances along Constitution Avenue. This is

proposed in order to facilitate pedestrian circulation to and from the Aquarium entrance pavilion though it may increase the visual impacts of the entrance pavilion on the historic HCHB and other historic features nearby. **As the project advances staff recommends that GSA explore the feasibility of maintaining the aforementioned landscaped areas in their existing**

configuration or in a slightly modified configuration that could partially maintain the existing edge along Constitution Avenue. This has the potential to further reduce the visibility of the new entrance pavilion, and will maintain to a greater degree a condition that is original to the building's 1932 construction.

Lighting

According to information provided by GSA, the parallel granite walls of the entrance pavilion will “receive a glass facing and are envisioned to be animated both day and night by a subtle, aquatically themed LED lighting installation.” While lighting of the pavilion will be absolutely necessary for purposes of safety and security, it is essential that it be done in a manner that does not detract from the prominence of the historic HCHB, or from the hierarchy of nighttime illumination that exists for the National Mall and its surroundings. Staff is supportive of the idea of animating the space between the pavilion walls and sees it as providing a public benefit. However, the LED lighting installation currently under consideration should be designed to blend in with the façade of the HCHB when viewed from a distance. Staff notes that the project site is visible from the Washington Monument, and that the lighting for the below-grade entrance pavilion should not appear as a brightly glowing slot in the foreground of the HCHB. **In order to ensure that the lighting for the proposed entrance pavilion contributes to its surroundings, additional analysis will be necessary prior to the Commission taking a preliminary and final action on the project. This analysis should include nighttime renderings of the pavilion from several vantage points including both east and west along Constitution Avenue, from the grounds of the Washington Monument, from the site of the future National Museum of African American History and Culture, and from within the pavilion itself.**



Rendered view from top of staircase looking east showing lighting of entrance pavilion

Perimeter Security

Perimeter security at the HCHB is the subject of ongoing discussions between GSA, NCPC, the Department of Commerce, and other interested stakeholders. The proposed project is somewhat tied to these discussions given the uncertainty of whether perimeter security will actually be constructed, the timeline for implementation, and site specific considerations such as the design and location of the perimeter security elements. Due to this uncertainty and the desire to avoid having to retroactively harden the Aquarium's entrance pavilion, the design of the outer pavilion wall will incorporate perimeter security measures. Although the design of the entrance pavilion is still in the concept stage, staff is confident that the proposed height and depth of the outer wall will be capable of housing adequate perimeter protection. The 42-inch high, 12-inch deep, granite-clad pavilion wall has similar dimensions as the hardened garden walls recently approved by the Commission for Federal Office Building 8, which were designed to provide Level of Protection IV.

As the project advances, staff requests further refinement of the design of the outer pavilion wall to clearly demonstrate its ability to provide perimeter security. This should include bollard dimensions and spacing, footing design, and type of cladding, and level of protection rating. Staff notes that given the size of the HCHB, the number of employees employed there, and that the building is a headquarters of a cabinet-level agency, the outer pavilion wall should be designed to provide the required level of protection according to ISC design criteria. Staff further notes that given the 37-foot width of the building yard along the entire Constitution Avenue façade of the HCHB, the design of the outer pavilion wall should conform to NCPC's Urban Design and Security Plan Objectives and Policies. Finally, GSA should examine whether the existing landscaped panels on either side of the HCHB building entrances can remain in their current location in order to provide a consistent barrier line along Constitution Avenue if in the future a permanent perimeter security plan is implemented.



Site plan of proposed National Aquarium entrance pavilion with border of existing landscaped panels superimposed

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital contains several policies that support the relocation of the National Aquarium and the proposed entrance pavilion. In particular, the policies of the Federal Workplace and Visitors Elements encourage greater public access at federal facilities. This includes the use of federal workplaces for cultural, educational, and/or recreational activities. In addition to its many exhibits, the National Aquarium will offer educational programs on aquatic life and marine conservation.

Although still located within the basement of the HCHB, the Aquarium's new entrance pavilion along Constitution Avenue will provide the Aquarium with a degree of "street presence." This highly visible location across from the National Mall should attract additional visitors that might unknowingly pass by the Aquarium if it was to remain in its existing location. The new location of the Aquarium entrance should also stimulate additional pedestrian traffic throughout the Federal Triangle by drawing people off the National Mall, and along Constitution Avenue from the east. Furthermore, visitors traveling to the Aquarium from downtown may choose to meander through the Federal Triangle's many plazas and passages thereby increasing activity in those areas as well. In addition to the entrance pavilion, the proposed public art element will serve as an attraction in and of itself, and also provide an informal means of wayfinding.

As required by the Comprehensive Plan, the design of the proposed concept appears to be consistent with federal and local planning, land use, and perimeter security policies to the maximum extent feasible. Through extensive consultation with NCPC, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO), District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP), and the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), GSA's conceptual design for the proposed entrance pavilion responds well to the historic, public space, and perimeter security concerns raised by interested stakeholders. Responding to concerns raised by DDOT and DCOP, the design minimizes to the maximum extent feasible the amount of building area that projects above grade and into public space, it also maintains a sense of openness along the street by keeping the outer wall of the pavilion 50 percent visibly permeable. Finally, the new location of the National Aquarium maintains the easy transit accessibility of this federal attraction. The Aquarium will remain in close proximity to the Federal Triangle Metrorail Station and the DC Circulator. It will also continue to be served by several Metrobus routes.

The inclusion of perimeter security into the design of the proposed entrance pavilion is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's policy to "incorporate security needs into the design of buildings, streetscapes, and landscapes in a manner that enhances the public realm, does not excessively restrict or impede operational use of sidewalks or pedestrian, handicap, and vehicular mobility, does not impact the health of existing mature trees." This approach will not restrict or impede pedestrian mobility as the existing width of the sidewalk will be maintained. In addition, unlike curbside perimeter security, locating security elements within the existing building yard would eliminate the need to remove existing mature street trees around the HCHB. Although a final perimeter security plan for the HCHB has yet to be developed, staff finds that hardening the outer pavilion wall is an appropriate step to take as this will preserve the option of locating perimeter security within the building yard around the HCHB in the future. As discussed below,

NCPC policy requires perimeter security to be located within the existing building yard in situations where the yard is at least 20 feet wide; the yard surrounding an overwhelming majority of the HCHB meets or exceeds this threshold.

The Preservation and Historic Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan contains several policies that seek to protect the visual, functional, and symbolic qualities of L'Enfant rights-of-way. For example, the Comprehensive Plan encourages the federal government to protect the integrity, form, and design of the L'Enfant Plan's system of streets and reservations from inappropriate new buildings and physical incursions. In principle, staff considers the proposed entrance pavilion such an incursion. However, staff considers the degree to which the pavilion impacts historic features to be acceptable when looked at in conjunction with the public benefits the new Aquarium will offer, and the effect it will have on activating the Federal Triangle. The development of the proposed concept design has been carried out in close consultation with NCPC, CFA, DC SHPO in order to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate adverse effects to existing historic features. The modest, clean-edged, simplistic design of the pavilion will only be visible from a short distance, and will not take away from the historic HCHB facade. Impacts to the historic L'Enfant Plan will be minimized through placement of the pavilion entirely within the existing building yard, and through further refinement of the outer pavilion wall and green roof. Pursuant to a Memorandum of Agreement established through the Section 106 process between GSA, DCSHPO, the Department of Commerce, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, refinements to the design of the Aquarium entrance pavilion will be addressed as "Outstanding Design Elements." These elements will be resolved prior to the Commission taking a preliminary and final action on the project.

Though the Comprehensive Plan seeks to protect the L'Enfant Plan's system of streets and reservations from inappropriate new buildings and physical incursions, it also contains policies that encourage the embellishment of L'Enfant reservations, avenues, and streets with monuments, fountains, and civic art in order to provide views and points of reference. The proposal to locate a prominent, Aquarium-related, public art element at the intersection of 14th Street and Constitution Avenue will create a visual focal point along both of these rights-of-way. This will create an interesting contrast with the historic backdrop of the Federal Triangle, provide pedestrians with a reference point by which to navigate, and help establish a presence for the Aquarium. The public art will also contribute to the existing collection of classical and modern sculpture that is part of the Federal Triangle's architecture, and located throughout the area's parks and plazas.

Monumental Core Framework Plan

Staff finds that the proposed entry pavilion is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Monumental Core Framework Plan (Framework Plan). The project site is located within the Federal Triangle precinct of the Framework Plan study area. Within the Federal Triangle, the Framework Plan seeks to improve connections between downtown and the National Mall by establishing new destination along Pennsylvania Avenue, and by enhancing the public realm. The relocation of the National Aquarium to the Constitution Avenue side of the Department of Commerce Building is acknowledged in the Framework Plan as a project that will help integrate downtown, the Federal Triangle, and the monumental core. The project site's prominent location at 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, directly across from the National Mall, will provide

greater visibility for the National Aquarium, further activate this intersection, and has the potential to draw Mall visitors across Constitution Avenue and further into downtown.

The project will also advance the Framework Plan's goal to improve the public realm within the Federal Triangle. The area's uniform, monumental-scale architecture, poor wayfinding, and lack of ground-floor activity combine to create a public realm that fails to engage visitors and encourage pedestrian movement. The proposed entrance pavilion and public art element will establish a focal point along Constitution Avenue and 14th Street that pedestrians can use as a means of orientation. These elements will also help to reduce the monumental scale of this area by providing human-scale features within the building yard and at the edge of the sidewalk. Finally, the presence of the aquarium at Constitution Avenue and 15th Street, together with the National Museum of American History and the future National Museum of African American History and Culture, will help establish this intersection as a destination at the edge of the Mall, rather than merely a place to traverse as a means to an end.

National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan Objectives and Policies

Though perimeter security is not part of the current project being reviewed by staff, the proposed National Aquarium entrance pavilion does relate to ongoing discussions related to the implementation of a permanent perimeter security solution at the U.S. Department of Commerce. As described above, the proposed entrance pavilion is located within the HCHB's existing building yard along Constitution Avenue. According to NCPC's National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan Objectives and Policies, the building yard is recommended as the place to locate perimeter security elements in instances where the yard is at least 20-feet wide. The HCHB's building yard along Constitution Avenue is approximately 37 feet wide.

Since a final decision has not been made with respect to the location of perimeter security at the HCHB, staff notes the importance of incorporating perimeter security into the outside wall of the proposed pavilion in order to avoid the need to retroactively harden the wall if a building yard solution is implemented at a later time. GSA has informed staff that the outermost wall of the entrance pavilion will incorporate perimeter security design characteristics. The wall will be 42-inches high and 12-inches deep, similar to the hardened garden walls recently approved by the Commission at Federal Office Building 8. Although still only a concept, the incorporation of the perimeter security into the proposed entrance pavilion appears to be consistent with NCPC's policies and objectives.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The project is included in the Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by GSA, and to which NCPC is a cooperating agency, for exterior improvements to the Herbert C. Hoover Building. In addition to analyzing the potential environmental impacts of a new entrance to the National Aquarium along Constitution Avenue, the EA also includes accessibility ramps and permanent perimeter security measures, neither of which are part of the current submission. The following environmental topic areas are included in the EA: cultural, socioeconomic, and natural resources; transportation, utilities and infrastructure, air quality, and noise. On April 6, 2010, GSA published the final EA and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the proposed new entrance to the National Aquarium and accessibility ramps. The FONSI does not cover

permanent perimeter security. According to the FONSI, the aquarium entrance and handicap accessibility improvements were found to have independent utility and could be implemented separate from the perimeter security elements that were studied in the EA. Furthermore, the FONSI states that “the perimeter security elements will be subject to additional NEPA analysis and/or documentation.”

Due to its approval authority over the project, NCPC has an independent responsibility to satisfy the requirements of NEPA in accordance with its own environmental policies and procedures, and the Council on Environmental Quality’s rules. NCPC staff is currently conducting a thorough review of the final EA to assess whether the new entrance pavilion to the National Aquarium has the potential to have significant impacts to the human environment. If staff determines that the project will not cause significant environmental impacts, NCPC will issue its own FONSI prior to the Commission taking a preliminary and final action on the project.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

On September 10, 2009, GSA initiated Section 106 consultation with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) for the proposed aquarium entrance pavilion and other improvements to the HCHB. Other consulting parties include NCPC, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, National Park Service (NPS), the Smithsonian Institution, the National Aquarium, DDOT, and the DC Office of Planning. As a result of the consultation that has occurred for the proposed entrance pavilion, GSA has determined the Undertaking will have an adverse effect on historic properties located within the Area of Potential Effect. Therefore, GSA has entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the DC SHPO, U.S. Department of Commerce, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; collectively the signatories to the MOA, in order to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate the adverse effects caused by the Undertaking. As the project advances staff will continue working with GSA, DC SHPO, and other consulting parties to ensure that any modifications to the proposed concept design are adequately addressed in the existing MOA or an amended MOA, if necessary.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its April 14, 2010 meeting and forwarded it to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies, except the District of Columbia Office of Planning. The representative for DCOP noted a number of concerns raised by DDOT with respect to the portion of the project located within public space. These concerns have since been resolved through direct consultation between GSA and DDOT. The participating agencies were NCPC, NPS, GSA, the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services, and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

At its June 17, 2010 meeting, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed the concept design for the proposed National Aquarium entrance pavilion. CFA was supportive of the

general idea of establishing the new Aquarium entrance and requested further study of particular design details pertaining to the entrance walls. CFA requested that the rear wall of the pavilion be treated more like an extension of the HCHB, perhaps through the use of terraced landscaping that would tie back to the building, and also suggested that the front pavilion wall incorporate more artwork without losing the ability to provide perimeter security. Finally, CFA requested GSA to study the relationship of the granite pavilions walls to the glass panel walls on either side of the access ramp and staircase.