

STAFF RECOMMENDATION



Hinkle
NCPC File No. 7228

UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA STUDENT CENTER

4200 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC

Submitted by the University of the District of Columbia

November 22, 2011

Abstract

The University of the District of Columbia proposes to construct a new Student Center at its Van Ness campus. The Student Center will contain a mix of student-focused spaces and related support areas including a ballroom, fitness center, and ground-floor restaurant. The building, to be located at the intersection of Connecticut Avenue, NW and Van Ness Street, NW, has been designed to activate the surrounding public streetscape, harmonize with the existing campus character, serve as the primary pedestrian entrance to the campus, and provide a physical symbol to identify the university. The project incorporates a smaller public plaza in place of the existing underused plaza at the intersection, and also incorporates improvements to the surrounding landscaping and the adjacent Buildings 38 and 39. There is no additional parking proposed for the university that is related to this project. The project is designed to achieve a LEED Platinum rating.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

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

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

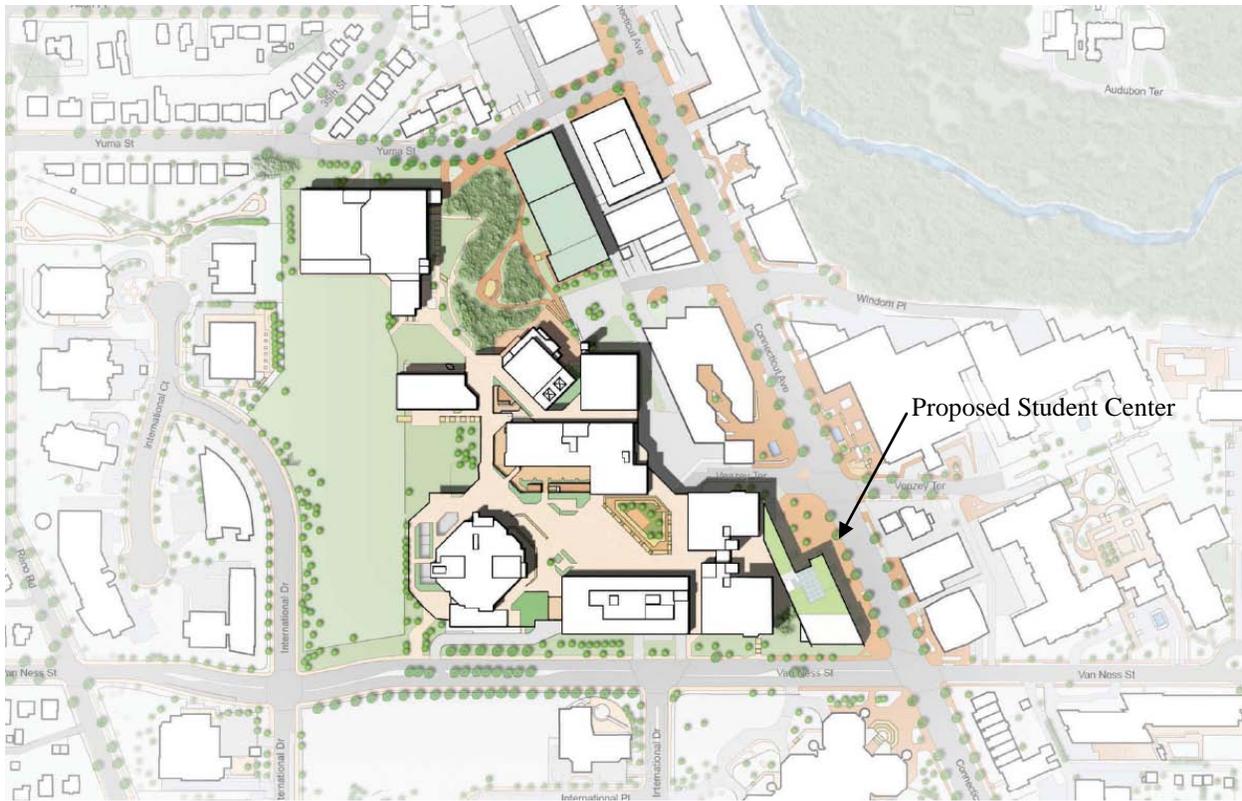
Approves the preliminary and final site and building plans for the new Student Center at the Van Ness campus of the University of the District of Columbia, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 72.00(38.00)43295.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The new Student Center at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) Van Ness Campus will be located at the intersection of Connecticut Avenue, NW and Van Ness Street, NW. A public plaza created with the original design of the campus currently occupies the site. The campus is immediately adjacent to the Van Ness Metrorail station on Connecticut Avenue, NW. Related to this Metrorail station, a Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) easement and utility vault occupies the northeastern portion of the site, which limits the site’s buildable area. The campus remains on property titled to the United States Government, however, jurisdiction over the property was transferred to the District of Columbia pursuant to a 1972 Transfer of Jurisdiction by the General Services Administration.



Site for the new Student Center at the UDC Van Ness Campus

Background

The UDC is currently implementing a program to transform the Van Ness Campus into a premier selective admissions university that offers affordable post-secondary education to District residents at the certificate, baccalaureate and graduate levels. Part of this program is to establish the Community College of the District of Columbia (CCDC) to more directly provide workforce development and professional training to District residents, and to establish satellite locations throughout the District to serve the CCDC. Another part of this program is to reposition the Van Ness Campus to support a selective admission 4-year institution. As such, the UDC has

developed a draft master plan to guide the physical transformation of the Van Ness Campus¹. A component of this master plan is to construct a new Student Center to function as the hub of the university and provide resources for the local community.



View of the site from the intersection of Connecticut Avenue, NW and Van Ness Street, NW

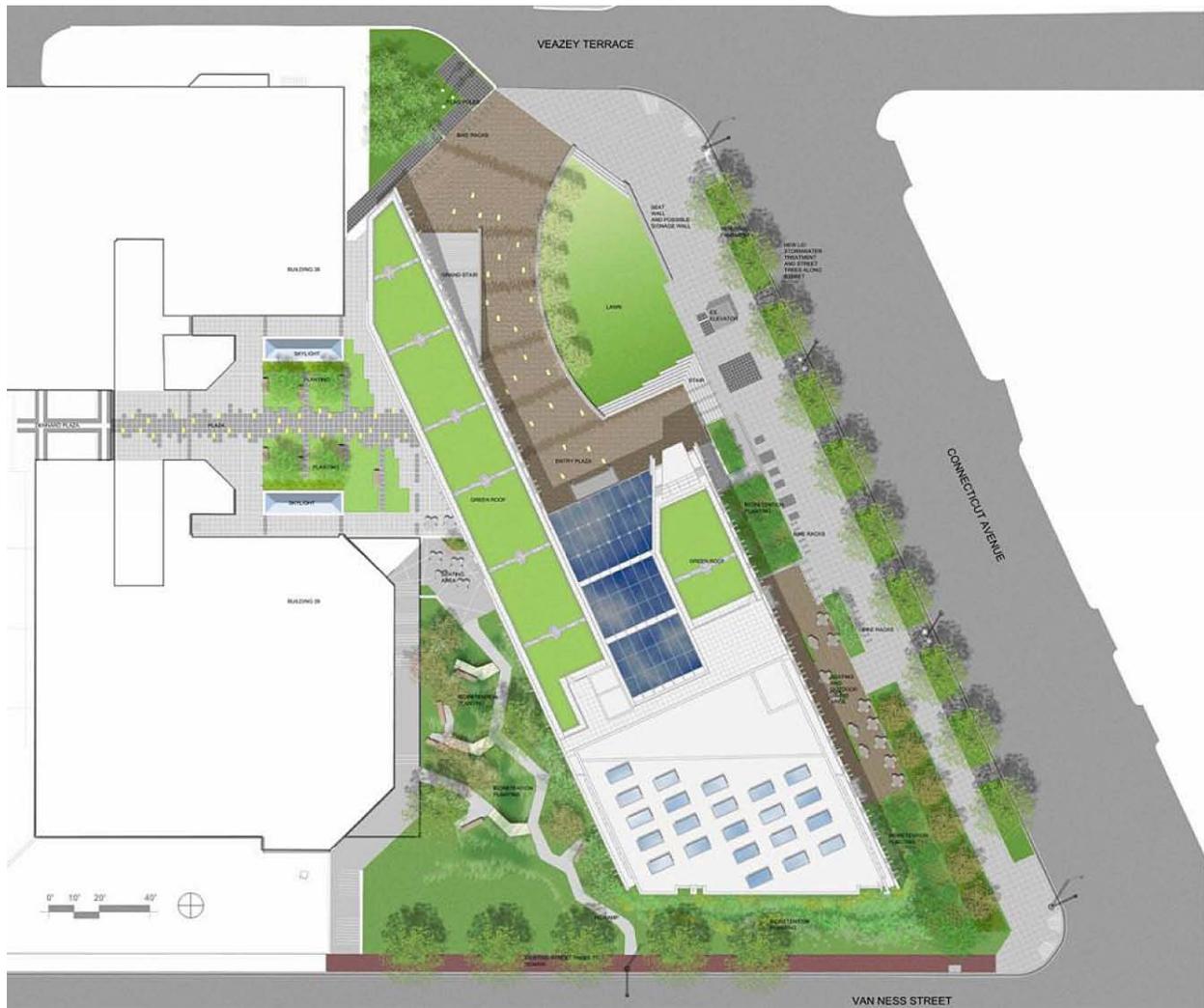


View of the site from the intersection of Connecticut Avenue, NW and Veazey Terrace, NW

¹ See NCPC Project No. MP40.

Proposal

The UDC has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for a new Student Center at its Van Ness Campus. The new Student Center will contain a mix of student-focused spaces and related support areas located within the building to both activate the surrounding public streetscape and harmonize with the existing campus character. Located at the intersection of Connecticut Avenue, NW and Van Ness Street, NW, the Student Center will anchor the corner with a fitness center, ballroom, and publicly accessible ground-floor restaurant, yet will also provide a mix of uses and spaces that specifically address university needs. The Student Center project also includes the renovation of portions of the adjacent Buildings 38 and 39.



Illustrated site plan and rooftop plan. A portion of the rooftop will be green, as illustrated.

The design objective for the Student Center is to create a building that serves as a physical symbol that identifies the University and provides a stronger form for the University at the key intersection of Connecticut Avenue, NW and Van Ness Streets, NW. The architectural design of the building will support goals for improved urban design by shaping an urban square framed by the Van Ness Center to the east, across Connecticut Avenue, NW; and by providing a clock

tower that marks this square as a civic place. The building is also being targeted for a LEED Platinum rating, which adheres to the University's high standards of environmental design.



Illustrated view of the Student Center from across Connecticut Avenue, NW

Landscape and streetscape improvements surrounding the proposed building will balance urban design and sustainability objectives to create an environment that is significantly greener than the current experience as well as an environment that provides more activity and interest at this transit-oriented location. A rain garden and bio-retention facilities both within the public right-of-way and along Connecticut Avenue, NW and Van Ness Streets, NW will mitigate the amount and quality of water entering the city's storm water system. A variety of landscape and streetscape features at the ground floor plaza in front of the Student Center entrance will be used to create a more pedestrian-oriented and inviting environment.

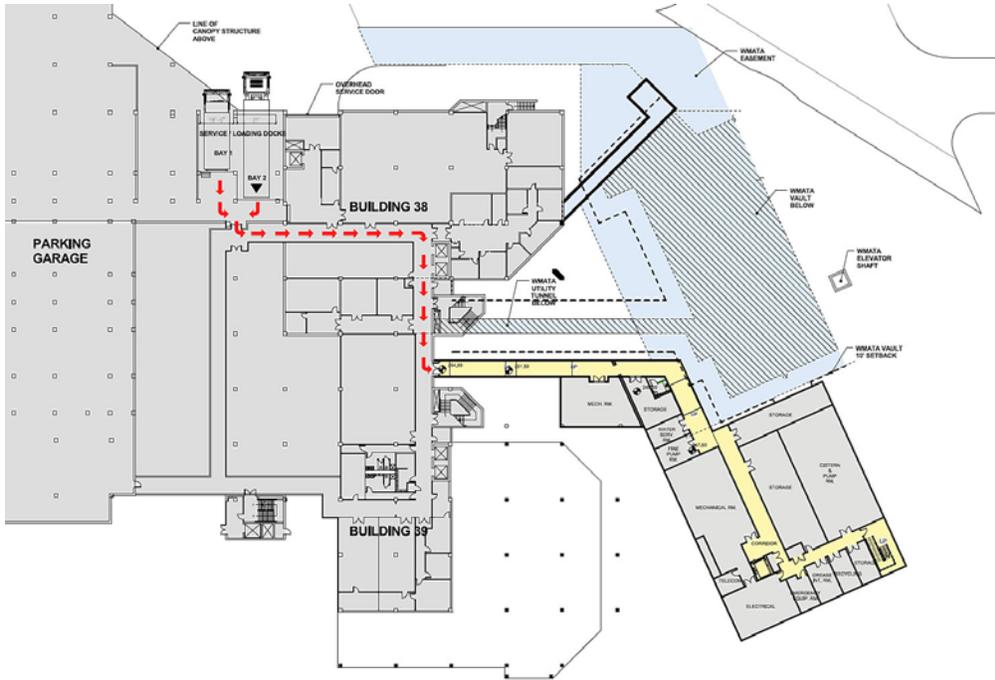
The design of the Student Center includes a combination of masonry, glass, and metal materials that modulate between the institutional nature of the campus and pedestrian nature of the street. The metal used will be a bronze color that matches mullions on existing buildings. Generous floor-to-ceiling heights and large amounts of glass at the building's ground level will permit the uses within to activate the surrounding environment during both day and evening hours. Key architectural features of the building that will improve its sustainability include the use of atriums both in the core of the Student Center and in the upper plaza to provide natural daylight to the spaces below, and a green roof at the top of the building.



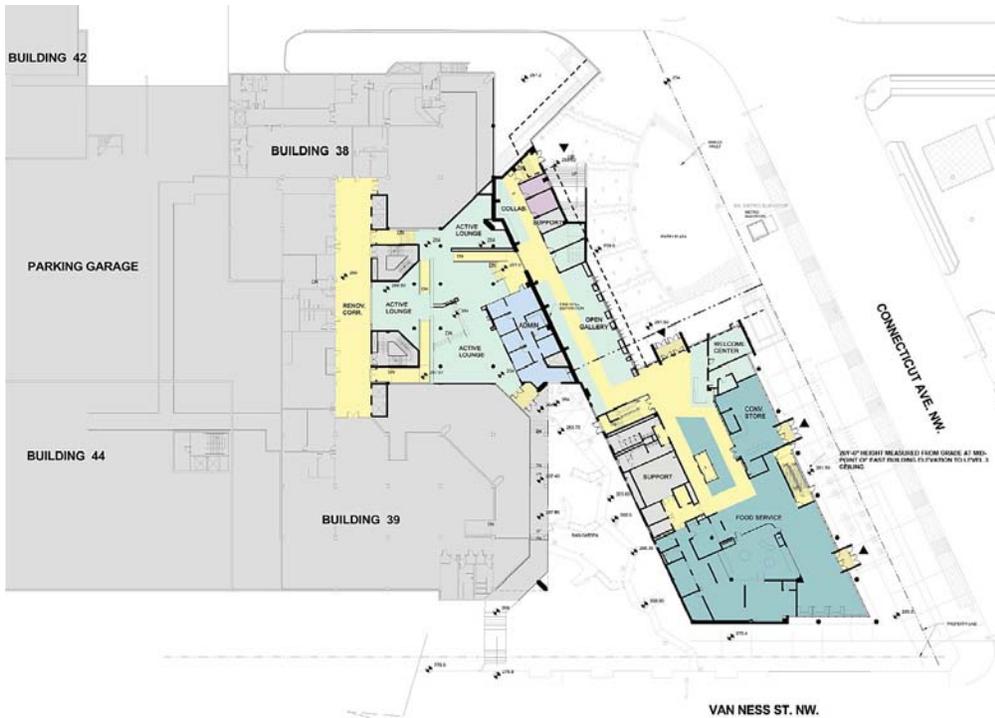
East (Connecticut Avenue, NW) elevation and south (Van Ness Street, NW) elevation



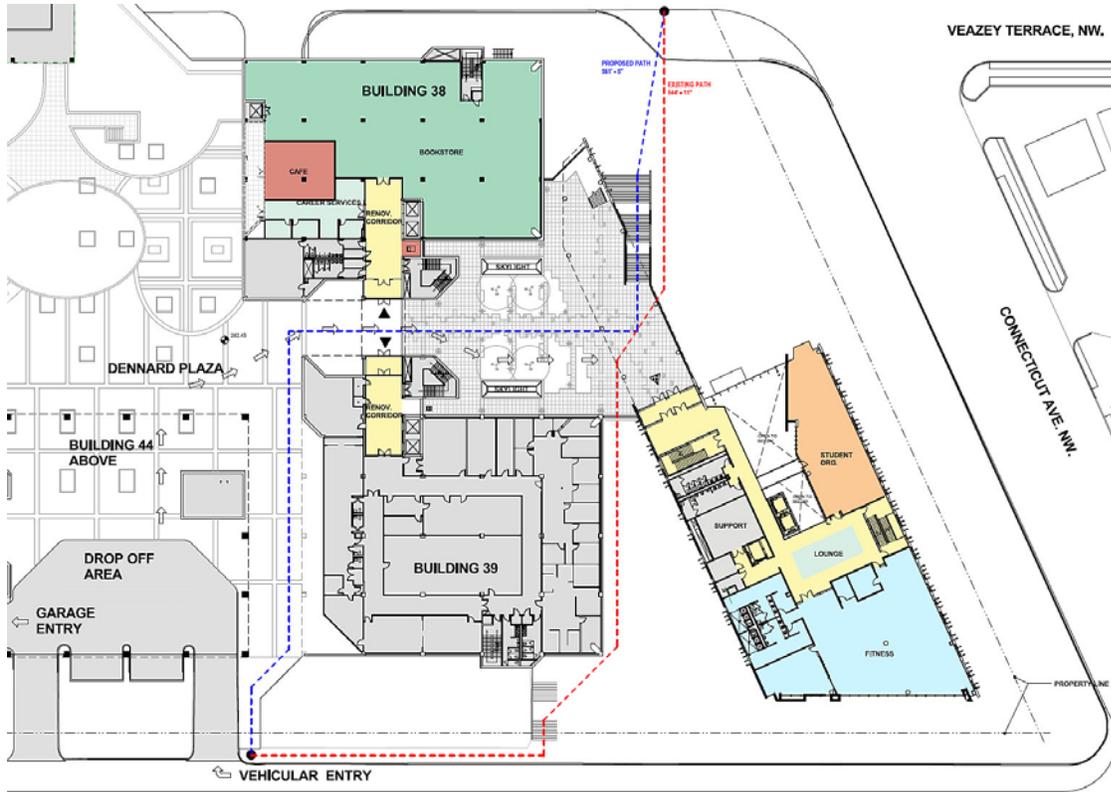
Illustrated view of the Student Center at the corner of Connecticut Avenue, NW and Van Ness Street, NW



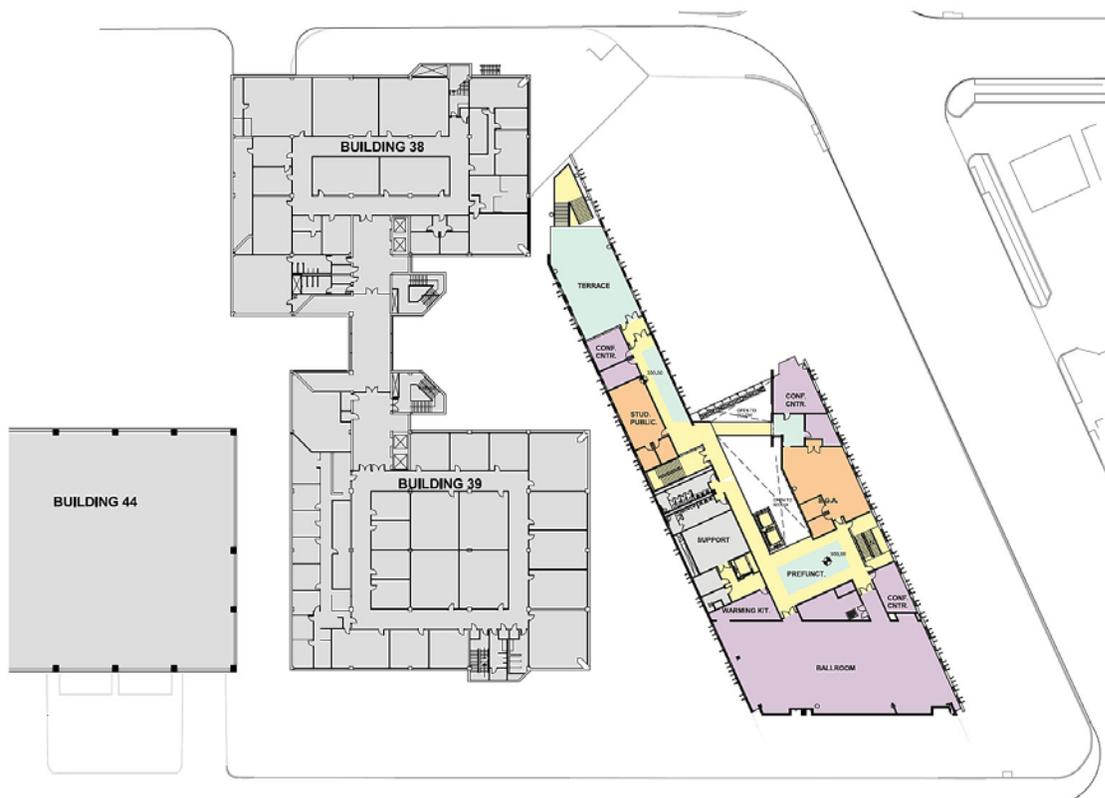
Cellar Level plan (showing WMATA easement in northeast corner of site). The new structure will use existing university loading facilities, as denoted by the arrows.



Level 1 plan. The structure provides new access to existing Buildings 38 and 39 at the ground level. Convenience retail and food service facilities are located adjacent to the Connecticut Avenue, NW commercial corridor.



Level 2 plan. At this level the new structure provides entry to the university's Dennard Plaza via a staircase off of Connecticut Avenue, NW. A fitness center and other university support uses will be located on this level.



Level 3 plan. A ballroom and other university support uses will be located on this level.



Illustrated view of the Student Center from Dennard Plaza (looking towards Connecticut Avenue, NW, which is one level down)

The planned center is expected to contain approximately 80,000 square feet of floor area and is designed to accommodate the planned needs of the University as its enrollment as a 4-year university continues to grow. The Council of the District of Columbia has allocated funding for the construction of the Student Center.

All waste removal and deliveries to the Student Center will occur at an existing central location within the campus parking structure, which is accessed by an existing road between Windom Place, NW and Veazey Terrace, NW. No additional parking associated with this project will be provided at the campus.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The Commission commented favorably on the concept design for the new Student Center at its May 5, 2011 meeting; the final site and building plans for the structure are similar, but offer refinements, to that conceptual design.

Development of the Student Center provides the University of the District of Columbia an opportunity to create a more positive public architectural expression for the university. UDC's Van Ness Campus lays in the heart of an established commercial district in the Van Ness neighborhood, located along one of the city's major thoroughfares, Connecticut Avenue, NW. While the commercial district is mixed-use in nature with stable residential communities, office establishments and a growing retail component, the campus feels physically disconnected from the corridor. As UDC is a prime stakeholder in the area, the Student Center provides a design

that engages the commercial district and activates the campus frontage on Connecticut Avenue, NW.



VIEW FROM NORTH EAST MAIN ENTRY

The Student Center introduces ground floor uses such a convenience store and dining facility that augment the existing commercial dining and retail establishments along Connecticut Avenue, NW. In addition, the site for the Student Center offers the advantage of high visibility and connectivity to existing campus academic buildings, service and infrastructure. Its location also offers the added benefit of re-defining the identity of the campus as it relates to the surrounding commercial district and the community, and creates a stronger main pedestrian entry to the campus.

As the site for the Student Center is immediately adjacent to the Van Ness Metrorail station, it contains an easement and existing utility vault for WMATA operations. The project designers have worked closely with WMATA and have designed the Student Center to minimally affect

the easement and vault. The presence of the easement and vault has been used by the designers, however, to provide the new public plaza at the corner of Veazey Street, NW and Connecticut Ave, NW, which further enhances the entry function of the Student Center and the Connecticut Avenue, NW streetscape.

As the Student Center enhances the Connecticut Avenue, NW corridor, provides a distinguishing entry for the university, and does not interfere with WMATA operations, **staff recommends that the Commission approve the final site and building plans for the Student Center at the UDC Van Ness Campus.**

CONFORMANCE

UDC Van Ness Campus Plan

The University of the District of Columbia is developing a new campus master plan concurrently with the plans for the new Student Center.² This 2011-2020 Van Ness Campus Plan features three primary physical changes to the campus: construction of the new Student Center; construction of student housing on the southwest corner of the campus; and renovation and improvements that will substantially "green" the campus. In addition to these physical changes, the plan identifies opportunities for the UDC to leverage its strategic location atop the Van Ness Metrorail station and adopt Transportation Demand Management strategies to fully utilize District transit options and minimize traffic and parking impacts.

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The University of the District of Columbia is not inconsistent with the District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital, which includes a designation of the Van Ness Campus site for "Local Public Facility" and "Institutional" uses and contains related provisions endorsing change and infill on university campuses consistent with approved campus plans.

While the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan do not specifically address public universities, the university was sited at the Van Ness Campus through a federal action and has been in operation at the Van Ness Campus since the 1970's. The proposed Student Center at the campus are appropriate university functions.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

As a District project outside the central area, the Commission does not have its own National Environmental Policy Act obligations. The UDC has initiated an environmental evaluation under District Code §8-109.01 et seq., which requires that all District agencies consider the environmental impact of all proposed major actions prior to implementing or issuing any permits for District agency actions.

² See NCPC Project No. MP40.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

As a District project outside the central area, the Commission does not have its own National Historic Preservation Act obligations. As a District undertaking, the Student Center is subject to review under Section 9b of the District of Columbia's Historic Landmark and Historic District Act of 1978, as amended (Act). The purpose of this section of the Act is to ensure that District agencies take into account the effect of an undertaking on properties listed in or eligible for listing in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites (Inventory) and to afford the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) an opportunity to comment on the undertaking. Under this review, the UDC determined that there are no properties listed in the Inventory in the immediate vicinity of the Student Center site nor are there any properties eligible for listing in the Inventory within the area where the proposed Student Center could have any effect. On November 4, 2011 the SHPO concurred with this determination.

CONSULTATION

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on April 13, 2011, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all participating agencies. However, at the time, the representative for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) noted that his coordination is contingent upon concurrence with WMATA's Office of Adjacent Construction. The project designers have since sufficiently coordinated with WMATA. The participating agencies were NCPC; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; the District of Columbia Office of Planning and WMATA.

The Coordinating Committee again reviewed the proposal in conjunction with the 2011-2020 Van Ness Campus Plan at its November 9, 2011 meeting, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that it has been coordinated with all participating agencies except NCPC. The representative for NCPC withheld coordination because of outstanding concerns of the Department of State and members of the Van Ness community in regards to the 2011-2020 Van Ness Campus Plan. Staff has worked to address these concerns through review of the Plan. The participating agencies were the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District Department of Transportation; the National Park Service; the General Services Administration; and WMATA.