

H. CARL MOULTRIE I COURTHOUSE
MODIFICATION TO THE JOHN MARSHALL PLAZA ENTRY
500 Indiana Avenue, NW
Washington, DC

Delegated Action of the Executive Director

November 26, 2004

Pursuant to delegations of authority adopted by the Commission on October 3, 1996, I approve the concept design plans to modify the John Marshall Plaza entry to the new Family Court at the District of Columbia Courts, H. Carl Moultrie I Courthouse, Washington, DC by constructing a new vestibule flush with the building face and a new ramp leading into the entrance, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.20(38.00)41493.

* * *

The District of Columbia Courts, under the provisions of the Family Court Act of 2001, has modified the use of the John Marshall Plaza level of the Moultrie Courthouse to operate as a self-contained Family Court. Since the facility became operational in August 2004, the DC Courts have discovered that the existing stairs and handicapped accessible lift to the Family Court are not successfully accommodating movement of visitors to the facility, in particular parents negotiating the entry descent with strollers and children in hand. In addition, it is the Court's position that all citizens should arrive to the building in a similar fashion; the use of the existing lift for disabled individuals runs counter to that philosophy.

The District of Columbia Courts proposes to eliminate the existing stair and lift and replace them with a single slope (1:15), broad ramp from the John Marshall Plaza down approximately three and a half feet to the building entrance where a new vestibule will be constructed flush with the outside building face. The 900 square foot ramp will be located within the same footprint as the existing plaza walkway. The materials and design vocabulary of the ramp and associated handrails, guardrails and low retaining walls will match conditions found within the existing plaza. The existing storefront entrance will be removed and replaced by a new vestibule

spanning the entire entrance opening at the face of the existing building. The applicant, under a separate submission, is planning to explore placement of child and adult scaled benches adjacent to the entrance and a canopy partially extending over the entrance ramp. Staff advises the applicant that weather canopies for security check points are discouraged. If the applicant choose to proceed, the canopy design must be successfully integrated with the building and not affect either the views of the bas reliefs on the plaza retaining walls or the 4th Street axial view through John Marshall Park toward the Old Courthouse.

The Coordinating Committee coordinated this item at its meeting on October 13, 2004. Staff has determined that the project qualifies as a categorical exclusion as specified by Section 8 of the NCPC Environmental Procedures. NCPC will serve as the lead agency for Section 106 review. I have determined that the ramp itself would not have an adverse effect on the view shed. While the Moultrie Courthouse is not a historic structure, its setting is part of Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site. Furthermore, the 4th Street axis is a significant element of the L'Enfant Plan. The Judiciary Square Master Plan has been under development for almost two years and staff anticipates that it will be reviewed by the Commission in early 2005. The Master Plan includes the allocation of a portion of the Moultrie Courthouse for use by the Family Court.

Patricia E. Gallagher, AICP
Executive Director