

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 6427



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**U.S. NAVAL OBSERVATORY  
SECURITY UPGRADES AT SOUTH GATE  
PRELIMINARY AND FINAL SITE AND BUILDING PLANS  
34<sup>th</sup> Street and Massachusetts Avenue, NW**

Submission by the Department of the Navy

February 26, 2004

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***Abstract***

The Department of Navy has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for perimeter security improvements at the South Gate of the Naval Observatory grounds that would provide upgraded vehicle barriers and new pedestrian entrance controls to this entry area of the Observatory grounds.

The submitted plans also include a replacement guardhouse with improved features and that is more architecturally compatible with the nearby Navy buildings in both appearance and scale. The new vehicle barriers create an inspection zone for larger trucks and electronic screening of all undercarriages of vehicles entering the post. Additionally, a new pedestrian turnstile will create a secure but manageable employee entrance to the facility.

***Commission Action Requested by Applicant***

Approval of preliminary and final site and building plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1)).

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***Executive Director's Recommendation***

The Commission:

**Approves** the preliminary and final site and building plans as shown on NCPC Map File No. 71.20(38.00)-41321, with the requirement that the vehicle barriers be painted a uniform light grey color at the 10-inch front visibility panel and utilize the three red hazard lights within the panel as the obstruction warning.

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## **BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION**

### *DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL*

The U.S. Navy plans to upgrade the existing security measures at the South Gate at the Naval Observatory located 900 feet west of Massachusetts Avenue and uphill and west of the British Embassy. The entrance gate is utilized primarily as a service and employee entrance to the Observatory grounds.

The submitted plans call for the installation of three new heavy duty vehicle barriers arranged around an existing intersection and traffic island, which will create an inspection area with pullout driveway space. The existing roadway shoulder area is widened to create new sidewalks and is further defined in establishing a contained area by construction of new 3-foot-high concrete retaining walls.

The new vehicle barriers are supplemented by a vehicle inspection system which screens and photographs the undersides of each vehicle entering the inspection area through the use of an electronic in-road-surface scanning system. The scan system is operated from a new upgraded security guard station located in the traffic island and would replace an existing guardhouse at the same site. Thirty metal sleeved permanent bollards are located adjacent to a new sidewalk and near the guardhouse to further define and contain the vehicle-path area of the inspection area.

The purpose of the new facility is to complete the modification of security measures at the U.S. Naval Observatory to meet revised and newly issued security criteria of the Department of Defense. Architectural finishes for the new guardhouse consist of masonry cladding and a standing seam metal roof. All brick and roof materials are intended to match those found at the adjacent Building 56, which serves primarily as a meeting and conference center. Electrical work for this project includes providing power to new active vehicle barriers and the under-vehicle surveillance system, general area lighting, a closed-circuit television system, and installing conduit for a future intrusion detection system.

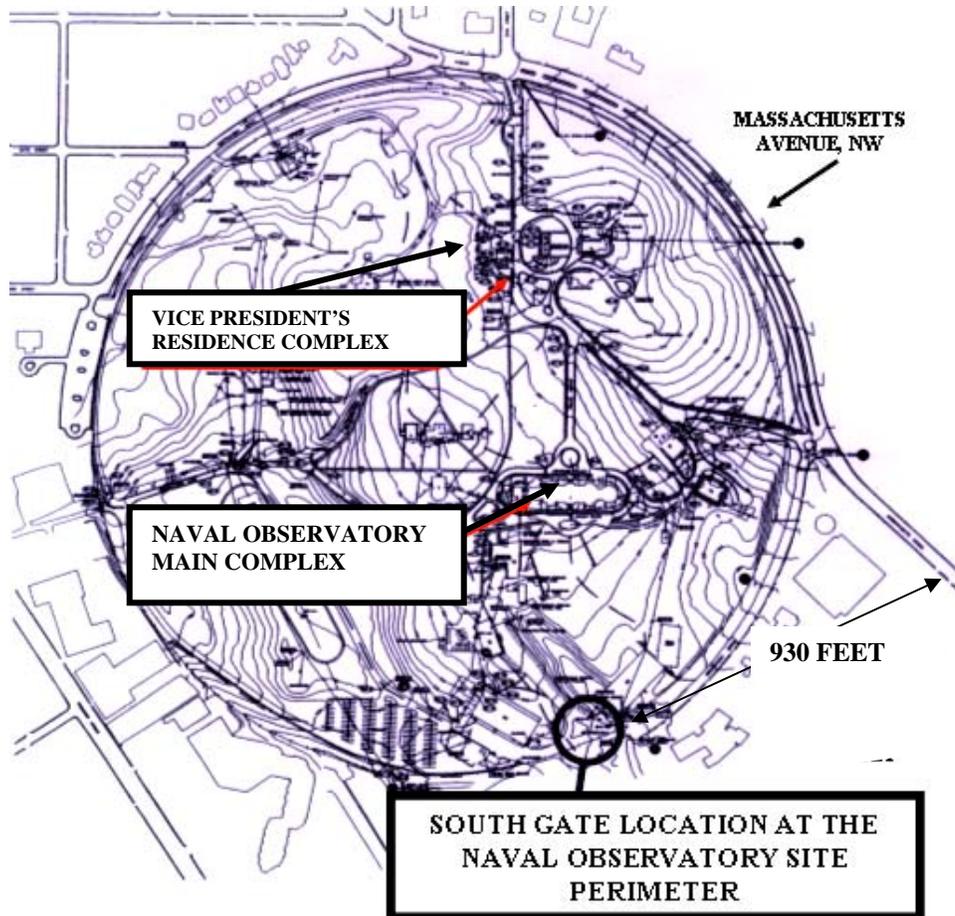
### *DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM*

Applicant: Department of the Navy

Architect: Einhorn Yaffee Prescott, Architect and Engineers, PC  
Washington, DC

Cost: Unknown

Schedule: Construction will be complete by September 29, 2004.

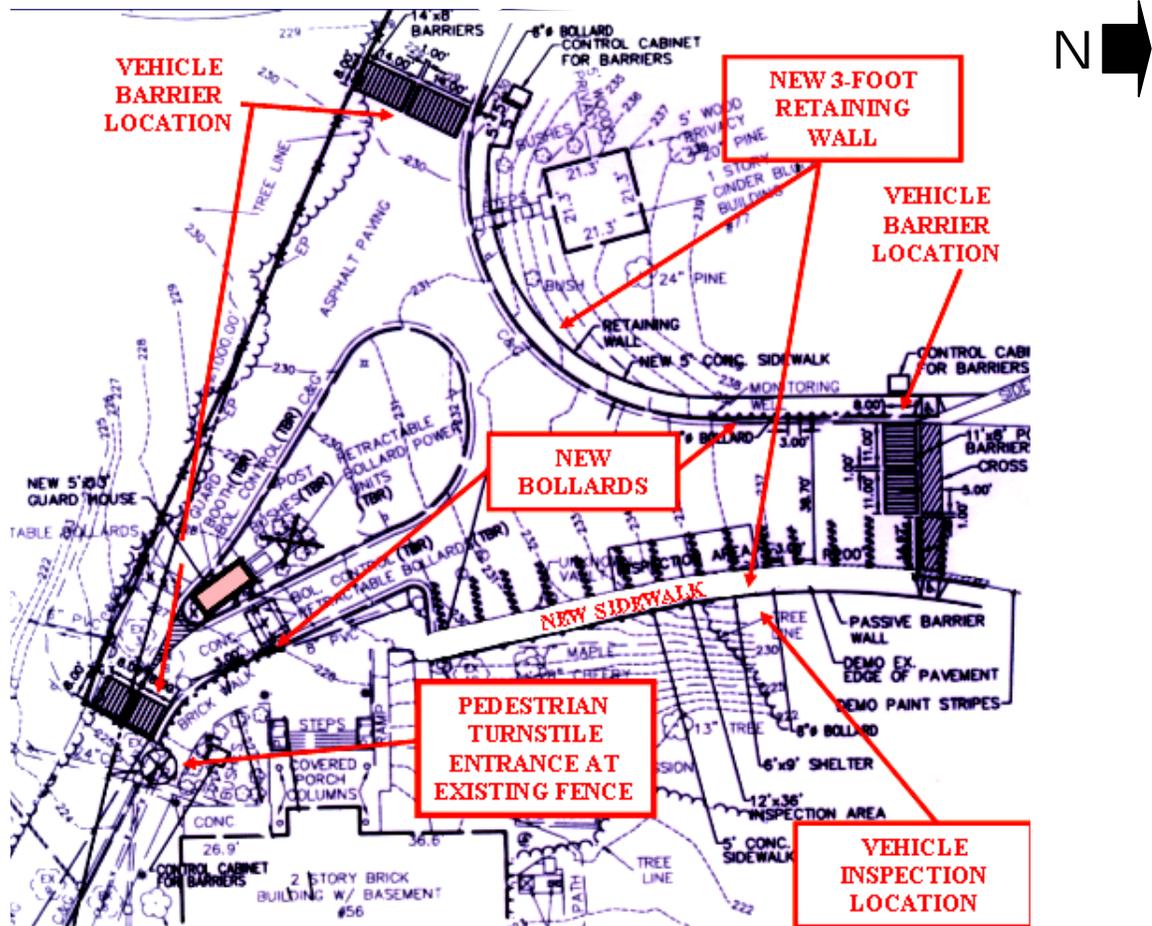


**GENERAL OVERVIEW PLAN OF NAVAL OBSERVATORY WITH SOUTH GATE LOCATION**

*COORDINATION*

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on January 14, 2004 and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.



**SOUTH GATE SITE PLAN**

*CONFORMANCE*

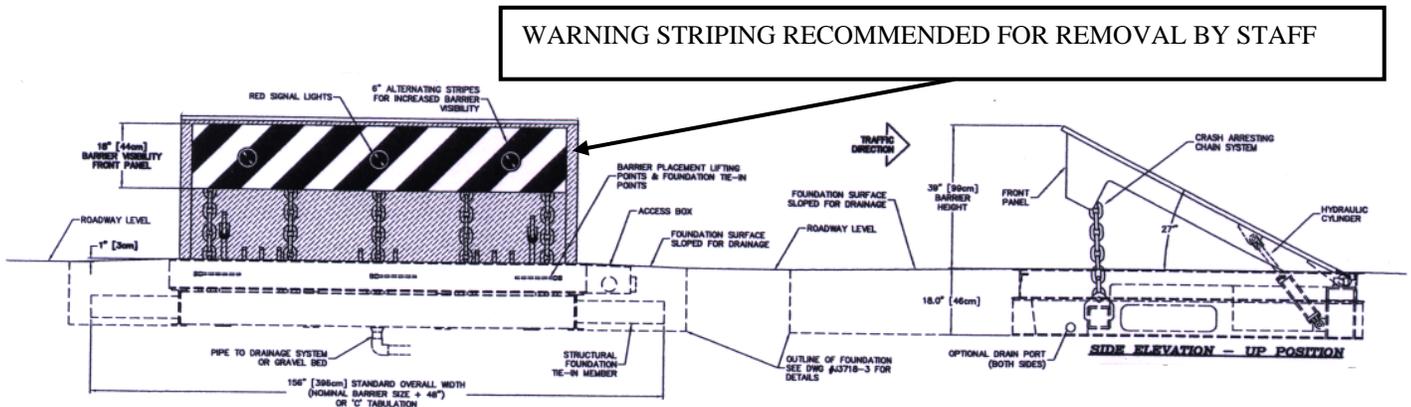
Urban Design and Security Plan (UDSP)

The proposed perimeter security is the final gate area for a security perimeter upgrading that exists at the U.S. Naval Observatory property.

On November 1, 2001, the National Capital Planning Commission adopted a report of the Interagency Security Task Force entitled *Designing for Security in the Nation's Capital*. The report recommended specific urban design strategies to improve mobility and aesthetic conditions through a coordinated prepared plan. The Plan approved by the Commission in October 2002 focuses exclusively on perimeter building security designed to protect employees,

visitors, and federal functions and property from threats generated by unauthorized vehicles approaching or entering sensitive building areas.

The proposed measures identified with the submitted plans adhere to the concepts of the Plan and are established using features of the Commission’s Plan, such as engaged and integrated barrier walls and bollards, which make the improvements minimal in appearance and not visible to Massachusetts Avenue viewshed.



**FRONT ELEVATION AND PROFILE VIEW OF VEHICLE BARRIER**

Because the gate area is proposed to function as a locked sally-port for heavy vehicle inspections, the necessity to deviate from the plan in the use of hydraulic barriers is justified by its function. Even so, the submitted plans do incorporate suggested features of the UDSP as noted above.

Master Plan Compliance

No formal approved master plan exists for the Naval Observatory. An effort was undertaken in early to mid 1990s to develop and submit a plan, but the effort was never completed after the provisions for a vice president’s residence were undertaken, which made evident future development of the property would be limited or non-existent.

National Historic Preservation Act

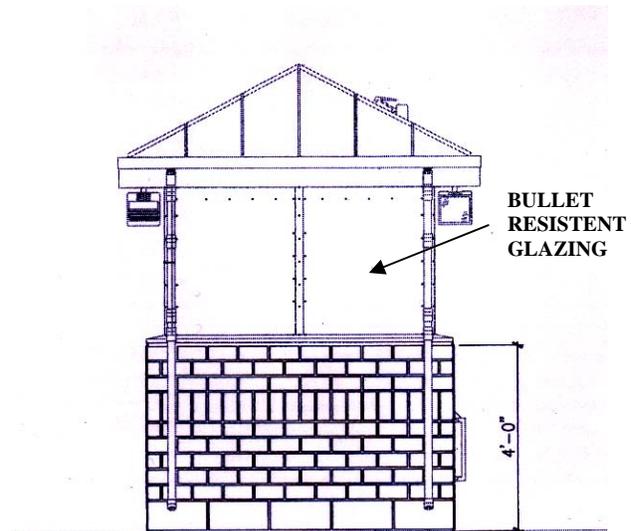
The Navy has initiated its Section 106 responsibilities for the security modifications at the South Gate of the U.S. Naval Observatory. The Navy has determined that the project would have no adverse effect on the historic character of the Observatory. The D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with this determination on February 4, 2004.

*EVALUATION*

Staff **recommends approval** of the preliminary and final site and building plans, with one condition. NCPC staff analysis concludes the new security measures are a minor addition to the

existing perimeter of the property and are situated well within the context of existing buildings and property landscaping.

Because the submitted design is located entirely within the Observatory property, it is not visible and would not impact the adjacent Massachusetts Avenue corridor. Staff does, however, recommend the front panel of the vehicle barriers only exhibit a monochrome appearance and that the alternating striping feature of the heavy-duty barrier be removed. The panels, as delivered from the manufacture, provide three red hazard warning lights which are sufficient to indicate the “up” position of the vehicle barrier when engaged. Moreover, the visual presence of the guardhouse at the intersection and bollards adjacent to the roadway provide adequate warning of the gate zone to vehicle operators.



**PROPOSED BRICK AND GREEN  
METAL ROOF GUARDHOUSE**

#### National Environmental Policy Act

In conformance with its NEPA compliance procedures, the Department completed a determination that the proposal is a Categorical Exclusion. Staff review and determination finds the submitted design conforms to the Categorical Exclusion criteria of NCPC.

#### Federal Capital Improvements Program

The South Gate improvements are not included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program, Fiscal Years 2003-2008 adopted by the Commission on July 11, 2002, or any succeeding program. The 2004-2009 FCIP was adopted September 4, 2003 and this project was not submitted in that program.

#### Comprehensive Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. Only one policy applies to the special operations that are maintained at the Naval Observatory:

Federal facilities with special security or safety requirements should make special provisions to the extent practicable, for cultural educational or recreational activities, which are compatible with the operation of the facility.

As noted in the project description, Building 56 is utilized as a public meeting space when authorized.