

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 6437



SAINT COLETTA OF GREATER WASHINGTON, INC.
19th Street, SE at Independence Avenue, SE
Washington, DC

Submitted by the District of Columbia Office of Property Management

March 25, 2004

Abstract

The District of Columbia Office of Property Management has submitted a proposal for a school to serve autistic and mentally disabled children and adults at the corner of 19th Street, SE and Independence Avenue, SE in the northwest corner of U.S. Reservation 13 (Square E-112, part of Lot 800).

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

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

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary and final site and building plans for Saint Coletta of Greater Washington, Inc. in southeast Washington, DC, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 41(38.00)-41327.

Recommends that the applicant:

- Provide visual screening of the disabled parking area from the sidewalk along Independence Avenue, SE by means of a low wall and landscaping, so that parked cars are not visible from the sidewalk.

Advises the District of Columbia Office of Property Management that all future projects on Reservation 13 must be submitted to the National Capital Planning Commission for review and comment under Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act.

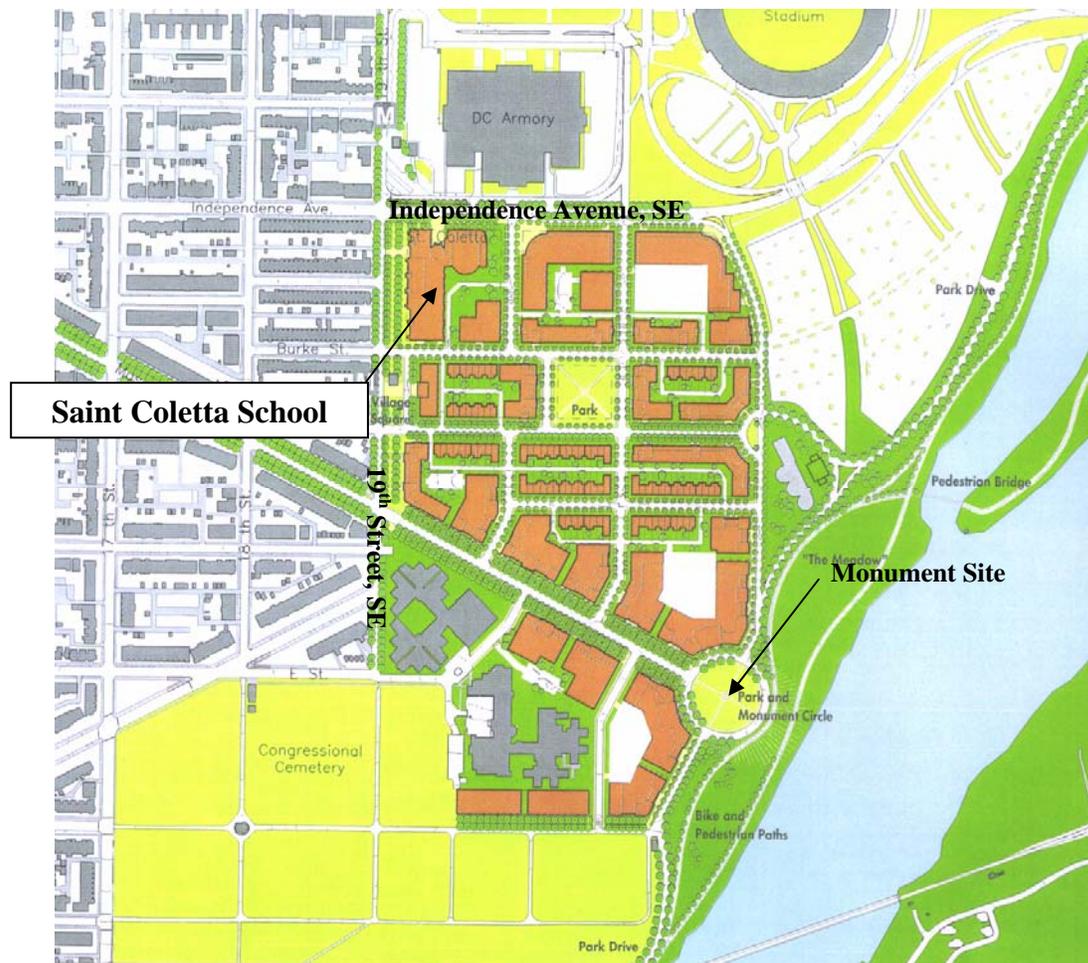
Advises the District of Columbia Office of Planning that the master plan for Public Reservation 13 must be submitted to the National Capital Planning Commission for review under Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act prior to the submission of additional projects on Reservation 13.

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Site Description

The project is located in the northwest corner of U.S. Reservation 13, at the corner of 19th Street, SE and Independence Avenue, SE. To the west of the site across 19th Street is the Hill East neighborhood. To the north across Independence Avenue is the National Armory. To the south and east of the project is the remainder of U.S. Reservation 13, currently occupied by DC General Hospital and the DC City Jail among other uses. U.S. Reservation 13 is situated near the west bank of the Anacostia River.



Saint Coletta Site/ Reservation 13 Master Plan



Saint Coletta Site/Existing Conditions

Previous Commission Action

The Commission approved and forwarded comments on this project to the District of Columbia Zoning Commission in February 2004. The Commission found that the project did not adversely affect the identified federal interests and was consistent with the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital, and included recommendations for landscape screening along both Independence Avenue, SE and 19th Street, SE. The applicant has clarified in this submission that adequate screening is to be provided along 19th Street, but fails to demonstrate the existence of any screening along Independence Avenue. For this reason, the Commission's previous recommendation for screening along Independence Avenue is included herein.

Background

Transfer of Jurisdiction

On October 25, 2002, the General Services Administration (GSA) transferred jurisdiction over Public Reservation 13 from the federal government to the municipal government of the District of Columbia for municipal purposes under the auspices of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 (40 U.S.C. 481 et seq.) Unlike a typical transfer of jurisdiction in which NCPC has approval, GSA may transfer property to the District of Columbia under this federal real property disposal statute without coming to NCPC for approval. Ownership of the 65-acre parcel remains in the hands of the federal government.

The transfer of jurisdiction requires that the District seek approval from GSA prior to entering into any leases on Reservation 13, the terms of which would exceed 15 years. GSA must certify

in such cases that there are no identified future federal government uses for the property. The transfer of jurisdiction outlines conditions required to be met by the District government in order to protect certain federal interests, including:

1. District compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.
2. District compliance with federal, state and local laws relating to hazardous substances.
3. District assessment, preservation and maintenance of historic structures and archeological resources on the property (restrictions may be cancelled for good cause, upon request of the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer in concurrence with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and written concurrence from GSA).
4. Extension of Massachusetts Avenue, SE in line with the Avenue's present orientation and width, extending onto the adjoining Reservation 343, terminating in a cul-de-sac or traffic circle upon the southeastern boundary line of Reservation 13 with Reservation 343.
5. Recognition of the existing leasehold tenancy of the Federal Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA).
6. Prohibitions regarding air navigation over the property.
7. A restriction on leases or other outgrants exceeding fifteen (15) years without the express written concurrence of GSA.

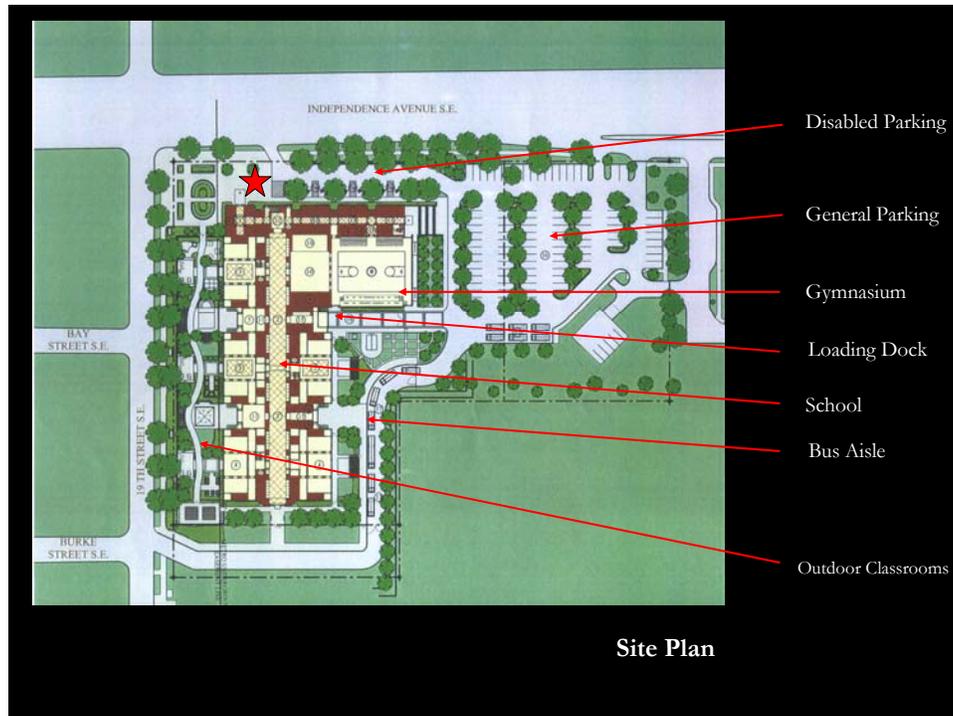
Lease to Saint Coletta of Greater Washington, Inc.

With GSA's approval, the District of Columbia entered into a 99-year lease for 5.22 acres of Reservation 13 with Saint Coletta of Greater Washington, Inc. in 2003. The lease was subsequently approved by the Council of the District of Columbia in 2003.

Proposal

Saint Coletta of Greater Washington, Inc., a not for profit private school, proposes to construct a 100,000-square-foot school for 225 mentally disabled and autistic children and 25 adults on 5.22 acres of land in the northwest corner of Reservation 13 at the intersection of Independence Avenue, SE and 19th Street, SE in the District of Columbia. The school will be staffed by 200 employees. The project will include a school building with attached gymnasium, outdoor classroom areas, surface parking for disabled staff and visitors, and a circulation drive for school buses. In addition, the school will improve and utilize 112 existing surface parking spaces on an adjacent lot to the east of the school site. More than half of Saint Coletta's students are anticipated to reside in the District of Columbia, with the remainder coming from throughout the metropolitan area.

The remainder of Reservation 13, approximately 67 acres, currently houses the DC Jail and the former DC General Hospital, which has only a few buildings still in use. The District of Columbia Office of Planning's 2002 master plan calls for the redevelopment of Reservation 13 into a new mixed-use neighborhood that will transition between the Hill East neighborhood and the Anacostia waterfront.



Saint Coletta Site Plan

Architectural Design Concept

The building is designed by Michael Graves Associates in New York City. According to the project submission, the architectural design of the project is intended to reflect the Capitol Hill neighborhood's colorful painted brick rowhouses as well as to create playful physical environment for the school's students. The building is composed primarily of two-story and three-story elements along its street fronts and incorporates residential building forms. The school is set back from 19th Street, SE due to an existing easement for the Metrorail tunnel that runs along the east side of 19th Street in this location. This building set-back is in line with other buildings that will be constructed on 19th Street as part of the master plan for Reservation 13. The building is also set back along Independence Avenue, SE in alignment with the set back established for planned buildings to the east of the site. Along Independence Avenue, the set-back is being utilized to provide convenient surface parking for the disabled, which according to the project submission, cannot be provided elsewhere on the site due to the building orientation and difficult site grades. The building is 52 feet high at its highest point at the corner of 19th Street and Independence Avenue.

The project includes a total of approximately 100,000 square feet of space, including classrooms, offices, a gymnasium and support spaces. The one-story gymnasium is located to the rear of the building, screened from Independence Avenue by the higher, three-story portions of the building housing classroom space. A drive aisle for circulating school buses and loading docks are located to the rear of the building, away from surrounding streets and residential areas.

Along the 19th Street, SE side of the property, a 6-foot to 7-foot-high wall alternating between transparent cast iron sections and opaque colored concrete sections will separate the site from the adjoining sidewalk. The wall's concrete sections will be covered with evergreen and flowering vines facing the sidewalk. The entire wall will be offset from the sidewalk by approximately

five feet to allow room for planting. The wall serves two purposes. The first is to provide security for students using the outdoor classroom spaces beyond, and the second is to visually screen the building and the outdoor classrooms from the residential area across 19th Street, SE.

The project incorporate public access to Saint Coletta's interior meeting and recreation facilities in accordance with the requirements set by the District of Columbia Zoning Commission.



Saint Coletta Perspective from the Northwest

Building Height

Although Saint Coletta School will have only two functional floors, the building rises to 52 feet in height at its highest point near the intersection of 19th Street and Independence Avenue. In general, the tallest sections of the building front Independence Avenue, SE facing the DC Armory, which is 88 feet high. The Independence Avenue façade of the school appears to contain three floors when viewed from the street, but the third floor contains only mechanical equipment and serves to screen the roof of the gymnasium from view of Independence Avenue. Saint Coletta's 19th Street façade steps down to two stories in height in deference to the residential scale of the buildings across 19th Street.

Building Setback

The Saint Coletta School building is set back from the sidewalk along both Independence Avenue and 19th Street in accordance with the guidelines established by the Reservation 13 master plan. Additionally, the setback along 19th Street accommodates an easement for the Metrorail tunnel in this location. Saint Coletta has recaptured the space in the easement area for

use as “outdoor classrooms,” which will accommodate structured learning activities. Along Independence Avenue, the setback mimics that of the DC Armory across the street.

Landscaping

The building is generally well-landscaped in areas that face public space and adjoining development parcels. The wall along 19th Street is planted with evergreen and flowering vines. Both 19th Street and Independence Avenue host a double row of street trees along the sidewalk. In the rear of the building, at the southeast corner, a high retaining wall is necessary to accommodate the significant change in grade between the Saint Coletta site and the adjoining parcel. This retaining wall will be terraced and heavily planted. The applicant is contributing funds toward the reconstruction of Burke Street, west of 19th Street. Saint Coletta will landscape the existing surface parking area to the east of the project site with grass medians and trees. When completed, Burke Street will also include street trees.

The one area of the site that appears to lack adequate landscaping is the disabled parking area between the building and Independence Avenue, which will be served by a new curb cut along the south side of the Avenue. Six parking spaces and a drive aisle will abut the north face of the building to serve disabled visitors. This parking area is directly adjacent to the sidewalk that runs along Independence Avenue, yet the submission lacks any indication of landscaping between the parking area and the sidewalk. The applicant is unable to relocate this parking area to another part of the site, and there is adequate room to provide landscaping to screen the parking area from view along the sidewalk.

Building Materials

The applicant has revised the exterior building materials several times in response to comments from the DC Office of Planning and the surrounding community. With the exception of the gymnasium, which is not visible from the street, building facades are composed entirely of colored brick and ceramic tile. The building’s roof surfaces are colored standing seam metal. The exterior walls of the gymnasium will be stucco. The architect has incorporated various different colors in the brick, tile and roof surfaces in the building to reflect the many painted brick rowhouses on Capitol Hill and the building program’s emphasis on young students.



Independence Avenue Façade



View of Retaining Wall from Parking Lot East of School



OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS - ENLARGED PLAN



19TH STREET FENCE - ELEVATION

19TH STREET FENCE DESCRIPTION & DETAILS:

- setbacks**
 - 13 feet from sidewalk
- finishes**
 - 6 foot panels, 7 feet at top of ornamental metal picket installation
- materials**
 - Fence consists of three panel types, to break up linearity
 - Panel (1) "Vine-Controlled": Colored concrete with Bushes Try coverage (full color)
 - Panel (2) "Ornamental Metal": 3-foot concrete base with undulating ornamental metal picket fence on top. Low shrubs at base.
 - Panel (3): "Green Fence": Concrete with wire trellis frame on outside for vine support. Evergreen vine coverage.
- legend**
 - Alternating panels at 30-foot increments, to match with building layout.
 - Ornamental Metal panels can be seen through.
 - Green Fence and Vine-Control panels are solid on top.
 - Cabinet's side to provide metal walls and frame backings for school curriculum. Publication side is landscaped.



Details of Wall along 19th Street, SE

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Staff finds the design of the Saint Coletta School project appropriate for the school's setting for the following reasons. The project conforms to the guidelines established by the District of Columbia Master Plan for Reservation 13. Despite its controversial architectural design, the project's architectural concept is responsive to the residential east end of the Capitol Hill neighborhood as well as to the applicant's program as a school for the disabled. The building incorporates residential forms, materials and colors common to the neighborhood, and varies its height in accordance with the buildings that face the school from across both 19th Street and Independence Avenue. Building forms are both colorful and playful as befits a setting for young students. The building's setbacks, forms and massing are consistent with its surroundings, and a screen wall is employed along 19th Street, SE to soften the building's visual impact and to obscure views into the school's outdoor classroom space from the residential area across 19th Street, SE. In response to Commissioner concerns expressed during the March 2004 Commission meeting, staff has re-analyzed this screen wall and is satisfied that it is adequate to screen views from the residential area. Potentially objectionable uses are confined to the area behind the school, and as such are not visible from public space. The applicant has also incorporated design elements that will discourage school buses from traversing adjoining neighborhood streets. The applicant has responded to the concerns of the District of Columbia and those of the surrounding residents by modifying the building and site design in response to those concerns. **Staff finds one important design component lacking in the project: screening of the disabled parking area along Independence Avenue, and recommends that the Commission require this screening to be added to the project.**

Transportation and Parking

The applicant will provide 112 surface parking spaces by utilizing an existing parking lot east of the Saint Coletta development site. Access and egress will be to and from Independence Avenue on the north using existing curb cuts. Six parking spaces for disabled staff and visitors will be constructed along the north side of the building, between the building and Independence Avenue. Entry to the disabled parking area will be provided through a new curb cut near the northwest corner of the site, while traffic exiting the disabled parking area will share the driveway from the larger 112-space parking lot. The applicant's traffic analysis, reviewed by the District Department of Transportation, indicates that this number of parking spaces is sufficient to serve parking demands at the Saint Coletta site. Saint Coletta's lease with the District Office of Property Management requires that Saint Coletta must vacate the surface parking lot when the District is prepared to construct 20th Street, SE and that 100 replacement parking spaces will be provided for Saint Coletta's use either beneath a new building to be constructed to the east of 20th Street or at an alternate location in close proximity at no cost to Saint Coletta.

Staff recommends that screening be provided between the disabled parking area and the sidewalk along Independence Avenue so that parked and circulating cars will be less visible from the sidewalk. Appropriate screening devices would include a low wall with landscaping along the sidewalk side.

Approximately 50 percent of Saint Coletta staff currently use Metrorail or some other form of transit to travel to work at the school's existing Alexandria location. Saint Coletta participates in Metro's Metrochek program, which allows employers to provide transit and vanpool fares as a tax-free employee benefit. Saint Coletta's Reservation 13 site is situated between the two entrances to the Stadium-Armory Metro station on Metro's blue and orange lines, a mere 200 feet from the south entrance on 19th Street, SE. Saint Coletta School will take full advantage of its Metro-accessible location and strive to increase participation in its Metrochek program. This will significantly reduce automobile traffic that might otherwise be introduced into the surrounding residential neighborhood because of the school's development. For analysis purposes, however, the school's existing mode split was utilized to project future traffic volumes at the site.

The exact number of school buses transporting students to the site is unknown. A transportation study accompanying the submission indicates that as many as 63 vehicles may drop-off and pick-up students and adult clients from around the District and suburban Maryland and Virginia. An examination of existing conditions at Saint Coletta School in Alexandria would indicate that only about 32 school buses would serve the new school in the District. The final number of buses will be determined by the individual school districts sending students to the school. Buses will enter the site from Independence Avenue, circulate behind the building and exit northbound on 19th Street. As part of the Saint Coletta development, Burke Street will be extended east of 19th Street and become the exit for school buses onto 19th Street. The intersection at Burke and 19th Streets will be constructed so as to allow only a right turn movement for exiting school buses. This modification was made in response to residents' concerns to discourage buses from utilizing Hill East neighborhood streets. No school buses will be stored on site.

Loading Docks

The school's loading docks are positioned to the rear of the site at the inside of the block, away from surrounding streets and residential areas. Trucks will enter and exit the site using the same drive aisles as the school buses.

Zoning

The project site has been zoned SP-1. The SP-1 zone permits as a matter-of-right medium density development including all kinds of residential uses, with limited offices for non-profit organizations, trade associations and professionals permitted as a special exception requiring approval of the BZA, to a maximum lot occupancy of 80 percent for residential use, a maximum FAR of 4.0 for residential and 2.5 for other permitted uses, and a maximum height of 65 feet. Zoning on the surrounding parcels includes R-4 for the area to the west of 19th Street, which permits matter-of-right development of single-family residential uses (including detached, semi-detached, row dwellings, and flats), churches and public schools. To the north, south and east of the site sits unzoned federal land, including the remainder of Reservation 13 to the south and east, as well as the National Guard Armory and RFK Stadium to the north. The SP-1 zoning for the subject property is consistent with the surrounding zoning, and is compatible with the intended uses for Reservation 13 proposed in the master plan. The building is compatible with the zoning. At its regular meeting in February 2004, the Commission found that the proposed zoning did not have an adverse impact on the identified federal interests for this project.

PROJECT CONFORMANCE

Anacostia Waterfront Initiative and Reservation 13 Master Plan

The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) is a partnership among 20 federal and District of Columbia agencies that own or control land along the Anacostia River. These agencies, including the National Capital Planning Commission, have signed the AWI Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The stated goal of the MOU (March, 2000) is to guide a series of projects that will "...transform the Anacostia River from the city's forgotten river to a gem that could rival any urban waterfront in the world." The draft AWI Framework Plan developed to guide the revitalization effort, outlines eight target areas for detailed study and recommendations. One such target area is the waterfront east of Reservation 13.

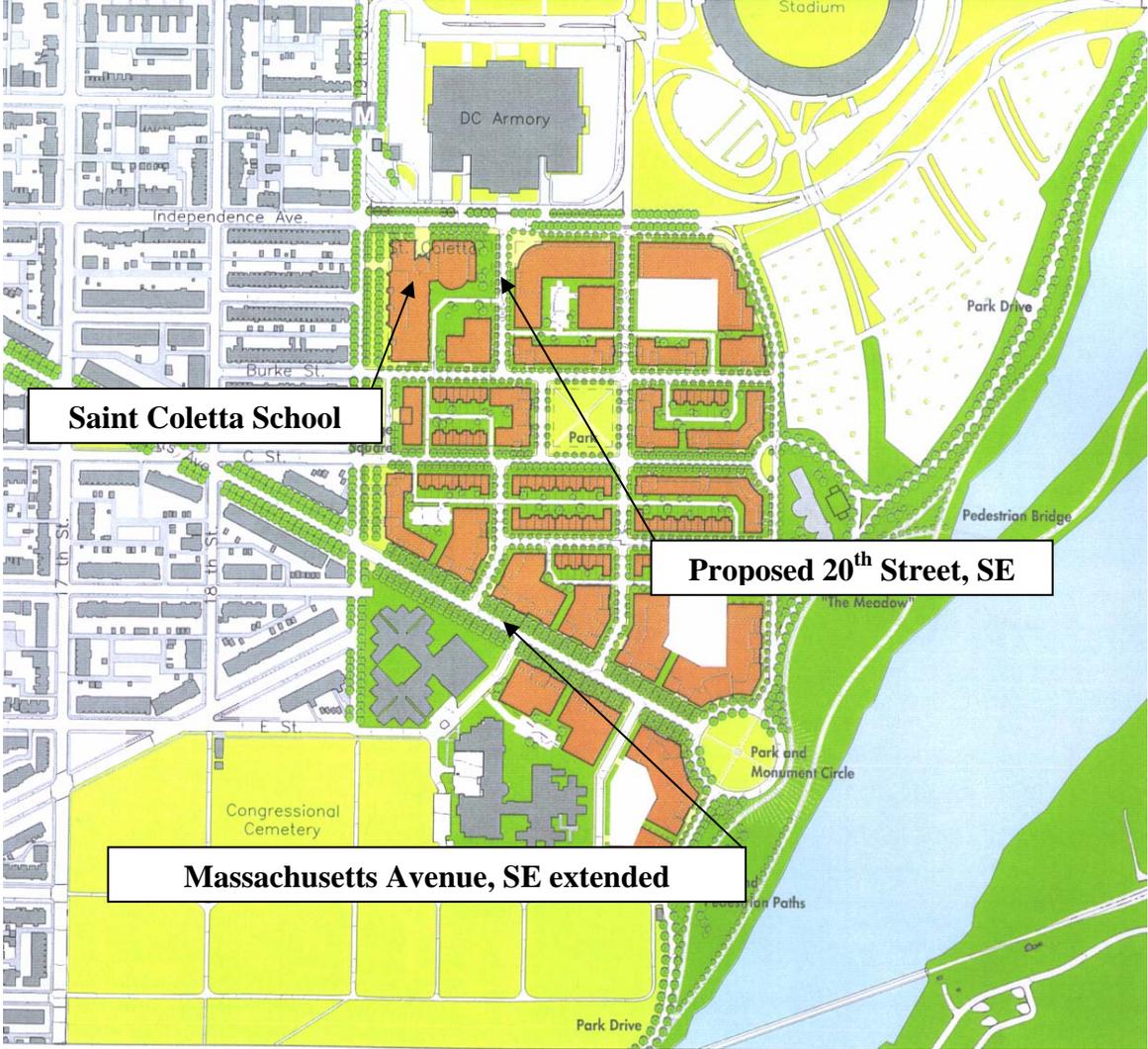
The 2002 Master Plan for Reservation 13 approved by the Council of the District of Columbia and the Reservation 13 transfer of jurisdiction require an extension of Massachusetts Avenue, SE through the Reservation 13 site to connect to a park along the Anacostia River. The street will culminate in public space suitable for use as a memorial site and connect the neighborhoods of Capitol Hill to the new riverfront park through a redeveloped Reservation 13. The master plan is consistent with the Memorials and Museums Master Plan and the Federal elements of the Comprehensive Plan, but it has not been approved by NCPC.

The Saint Coletta School site complies with the master plan for reservation 13, and is in fact depicted in the master plan as a planned project for the corner of 19th Street, SE and Independence Avenue, SE.

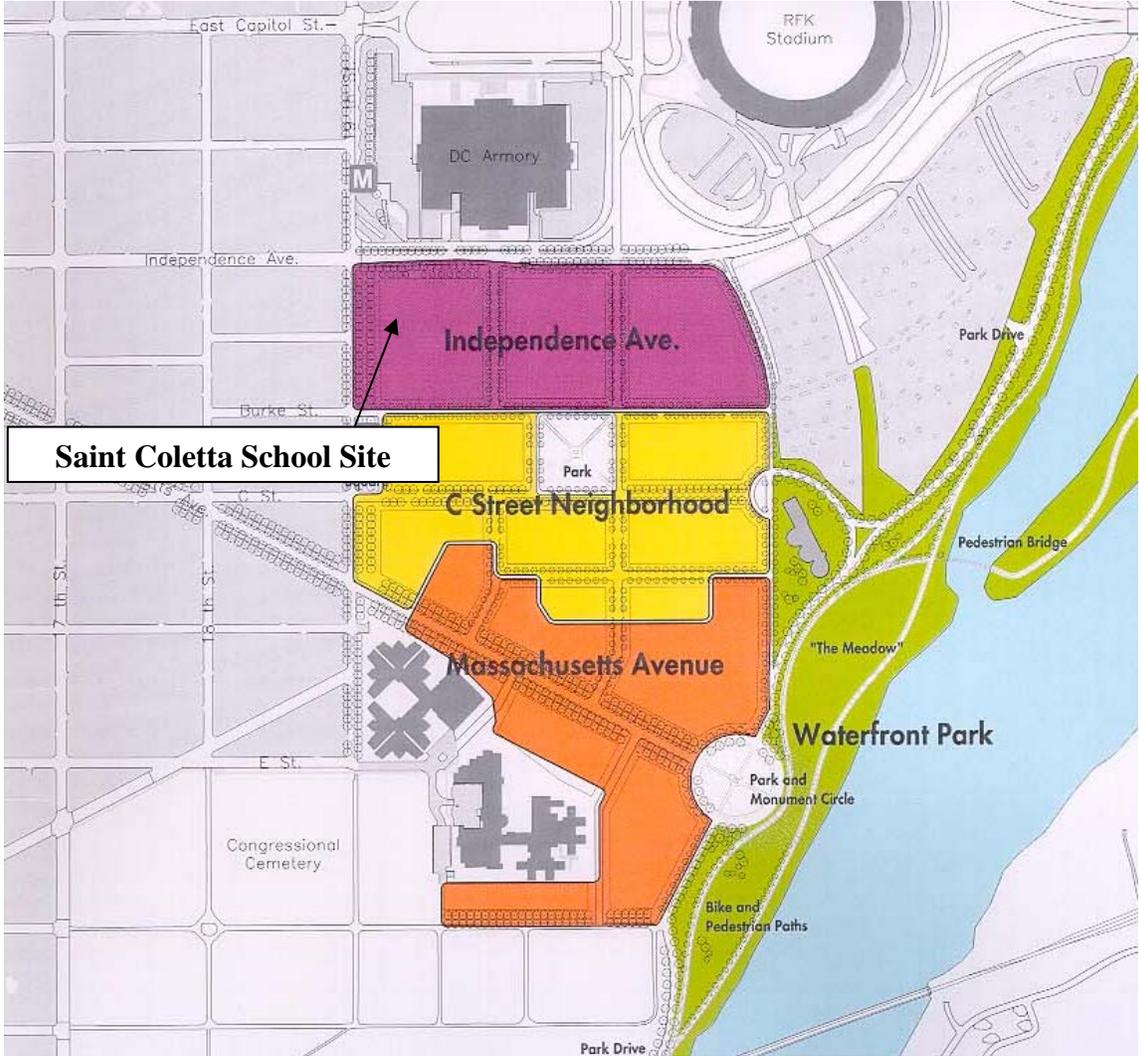
Reservation 13 Master Plan

The site for Saint Coletta School is included as part of the "Independence Avenue District" in the District of Columbia's 2002 Reservation 13 Master Plan, and is described in the plan as a phase one project. According to the plan, "The Saint Coletta School location ... is consistent with the city-wide services function of this district as well as the residential scale and character proposed along 19th Street." A core principle of the plan is to locate city-wide uses in this district to minimize through traffic on surrounding residential streets, as "This area provides easy access from Independence Avenue and the surrounding regional network of roads..." The master plan specifically states that the Independence Avenue District "...will be devoted to city-wide uses, St. Coletta School and services including health-care, recreation, and education."

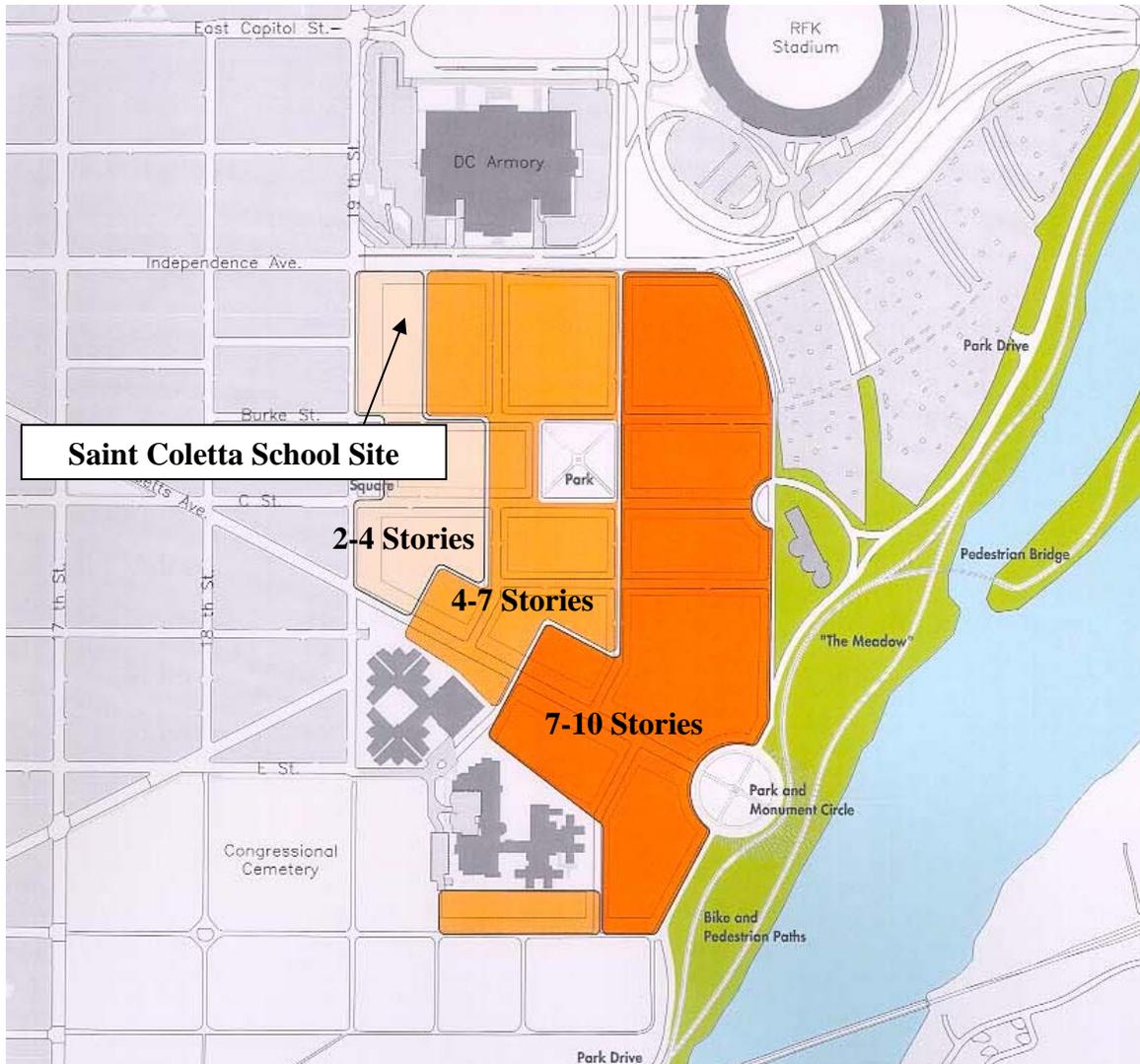
Set-back lines for the master plan are conceived to continue current set-backs in adjacent Hill East neighborhood. These set-backs allow for development of green 'front-yard' spaces and greatly increase the amount of landscaped spaces in the new plan. Building heights of 2-4 stories are recommended at the corner of 19th Street and Independence Avenue. The master plan recognizes Reservation 13 as a public resource hosting a mixture of uses, including health care, civic, residential, educational, community and other public uses. The siting of Saint Coletta School does not adversely impact upon the goals of the master plan to establish an interconnected street grid on Reservation 13, including the extension of Massachusetts Avenue, terminating in a riverfront memorial site. The project conforms to General Services Administration requirements included in the transfer of jurisdiction to the District of Columbia.



Reservation 13 Master Plan



Reservation 13 Master Plan showing Independence Avenue District



Reservation 13 Master Plan showing Recommended Building Heights

National Environmental Policy Act

The proposed action, as a non-federal activity situated on leased property administered by the District of Columbia and outside the central area of the city, is not subject to Commission environmental review under the current procedures of the Commission. The staff, however, reviewed the planned action in conformance with the requirements of the District of Columbia Environmental Policy Act of 1989 and found a Phase 1 site assessment had been prepared in the anticipated need for drafting of a District of Columbia Environmental Impact Screening Form (EISF).

The site assessment review, prepared in conformance with ASTM environmental standard 1527-2000, found no unusual environmental conditions or contaminants present in the proposed project site area.

National Historic Preservation Act

The project was reviewed by the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO) under the requirements of the Reservation 13 transfer agreement between the General Services Administration and the District of Columbia government. There are no historic buildings on this portion of the site, nor any that would be affected by the project. A Phase I archaeological investigation was conducted in September 2003 on the portion of the project site that held the old District of Columbia Jail. A portion of the jail foundation was uncovered, but nothing more. The DC SHPO determined that there was no value to further investigation and notified the applicant that no further investigation was warranted.

CONSULTATION

District of Columbia Office of Planning

The District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP) recommends approval of the project with the modification of the disabled parking area configuration. DCOP prefers that the disabled parking spaces be provided parallel to the north face of the Saint Coletta building rather than perpendicular in order to minimize the amount of land area dedicated to pavement in this location. Staff does not concur with this recommendation, because of applicant concerns about traffic flow on site. **Staff is recommending instead that the applicant screen the parking area from the sidewalk along Independence Avenue, SE by means of a low wall and accompanying landscaping to minimize views of the parking area from the sidewalk.**

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts advises that the applicant is required to present this project at CFA because it is being constructed on land under the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia, and that the project has not yet been submitted.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on February 11, 2004 and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating, except the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. The representative for WMATA withheld coordination pending review of this project by its engineering department. The participating agencies were: NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District Department of Transportation; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. Subsequent to the meeting, WMATA concurred in the coordination of this project.

District of Columbia Department of Transportation

The District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) has extensively reviewed this project in conjunction with the zoning process that preceded NCPC staff review. DDOT recommends approval of the project with the condition that Saint Coletta fund a portion of the construction of Burke Street extended west of 19th Street, SE.

Community Concerns

Residents of surrounding residential areas, ANC 6-B and the Capitol Hill Restoration Society have expressed written opposition to the Saint Coletta project, citing their dissatisfaction with the process under which land in Reservation 13 was leased to Saint Coletta of Greater Washington, Inc. by the District of Columbia government. Additionally, opponents have expressed a dislike for the project's architecture, contending that it is inappropriate for its setting. Saint Coletta representatives have met with opponents of the project and have modified the building's architecture, site circulation patterns and building materials in response to their concerns. Additionally, Saint Coletta School has agreed to provide the public access to its gymnasium and meeting areas, and to arrange for event-specific overflow parking with the DC Sports and Entertainment Commission in order to minimize adverse impacts to residential streets. Staff is satisfied that the applicant has worked with due diligence to address and satisfy community concerns.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Commission approve the Saint Coletta of Greater Washington, Inc. project on 5.22 acres of U.S. Reservation 13 near the intersection of 19th Street, SE and Independence Avenue, SE, with the recommendation to the applicant to screen the disabled parking area from the sidewalk along the south side of Independence Avenue, SE using a low wall and landscaping placed between the parking area and the sidewalk.

Section 5 Review Requirement

Staff further recommends that the Commission advise the District of Columbia Office of Property Management that all future projects proposed for Reservation 13 are required to be reviewed by NCPC under Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act.

Staff also advises the Commission that the DC Office of Planning is required to submit the master plan for Reservation 13 to NCPC for review under Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act. Section 5 requires that "To ensure the comprehensive planning and orderly development of the National Capital, a federal or District of Columbia agency, before preparing construction plans the agency originates for proposed developments and projects or before making a commitment to acquire land, to be paid for at least in part from federal or District amounts, shall advise and consult with the Commission as the agency prepares plans and programs in preliminary and successive stages that affect the plan and development of the National Capital."