

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Revised – 5/5/04

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NCPC File No. 6458



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE HEADQUARTERS COMPLEX
PERIMETER SECURITY
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture

April 29, 2004

Abstract

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has submitted concept site development plans for perimeter security around the four buildings that make up the agency's Headquarters Complex. The Complex includes the Whitten, Yates and South Buildings, and the Cotton Annex. Preliminary and final site development plans for each building will be submitted to the Commission for independent approval as funding becomes available. The submitted concept reflects the overall approach that U.S. Department of Agriculture intends to follow in developing site development plans for individual buildings.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept site development plan pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b) (1)).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the concept site development plans for perimeter security for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Headquarters Complex, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.71(05.17)-41358.

Commends the U.S. Department of Agriculture for adopting a unified approach in developing the concept for enhanced perimeter security for its Headquarters Complex.

Recommends that, as the U.S. Department of Agriculture develops preliminary and final site development plans:

- Increase bollard spacing throughout to the full extent practicable and in accordance with current recommendations of the Interagency Security Committee. This applies particularly to vehicular entrances to the South Building from C Street, where bollards intrude into the pedestrian path and bollard placement precludes high-speed vehicle approaches.
- Increase pedestrian circulation and queuing space at all street corners where the concept recommends bollards, and ensure that bollard spacing and placement does not obstruct wheelchair access on and around handicapped ramps.
- Provide additional street trees and hardened benches, particularly along Independence Avenue adjacent to the Whitten and South Buildings.
- Minimize use of wedge-type vehicle barriers at driveways. Where required, these barriers should be located so that their visibility from adjacent sidewalks is minimized.
- Coordinate with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority regarding the placement of other bollards and security elements around the existing Metro station entrance at the northeast corner of the South Building, at the intersection of 12th Street and Independence Avenue.
- Relocate bollards along 12th Street at the west side of the Cotton Annex to the building yard, or provide additional justification for the threat level assigned to this facility.

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Site Description

The USDA Headquarters is comprised of four separate buildings: Whitten, South, and Yates Buildings, and the Cotton Annex. The northernmost building is the Whitten Building, bounded on the north by Jefferson Drive, on the south by Independence Avenue, on the east by 12th Street, and on the west by 14th Street. Immediately south of the Whitten Building is the South Building. This building is bounded on the north by Independence Avenue, on the south by C Street, on the east by 12th Street, and on the west by 14th Street. The Yates Building (formerly Auditors Building) is located immediately west of the Whitten and South Buildings. It is bounded on the north by Independence Avenue, on the south by the Holocaust Museum, on the east by 14th Street, and on the west by Raoul Wallenberg Place (formerly 15th Street). The Cotton Annex, located immediately southeast of the South Building, is bounded on the north by C Street, on the south by D Street, on the east by the I-395 exit ramp.

The Whitten Building was constructed between 1904 and 1930. The front façade faces the National Mall, and memorial trees and long formal gardens flanking the main entrance define

this side of the building. A wide sidewalk with curbing only at the main entrance defines the edge of this block adjacent to Jefferson Drive. The building's south façade overlooks Independence Avenue and is connected to the South Building via two overhead enclosed bridges. This façade is defined by three projecting wings. Parking lots are located around these projecting wings and result in a number of curb cuts from Independence Avenue. The central wing features a "moat," which is a vehicle ramp that provides access below grade for the discharge and pick-up of passengers. It is used for VIP access during times of heightened security.

The South Building was constructed between 1930 and 1936. It is a two block long, five story structure marked by seven wings and six internal courtyards. The building fills the entire block bounded by Independence Avenue, C, 12th and 14th Streets. Areaways surround all sides of the building and are only interrupted by building entrances and courtyard access points. There is a Metro entrance at the northeast corner of the building, at 12th Street and Independence Avenue. There are six vehicular entrances to the interior courtyards from C Street, each with its own guard booth. A continuous planting strip and wide sidewalk define the 12th Street side, while a narrower sidewalk and a low curb and lawn area define the 14th Street side.

The Yates Building, constructed between 1878 and 1900, occupies the northeast portion of the block defined by 14th Street, Independence Avenue, Raoul Wallenberg Place, and D Street. The building is a four-story Romanesque structure. The main building entrance and a small visitor center are at the corner of 14th Street and Independence Avenue. The north façade features a grand, double sided stair that leads to the second floor of the building. The north building yard provides a fenced and screened play area for the child care center. Areaways line the majority of the building perimeter. There is a driveway with a guard booth and retractable bollards at the southeast corner of the building that provides shared access with the Holocaust Museum. The Holocaust Museum operates the guard booth and retractable bollards and has installed curbside bollards at the northwest corner of the Yates Building, along Independence Avenue.

The Cotton Annex was completed in 1937. Shallow lawn panels form the building yard to the north and west, and are separated from the building by shallow areaways. Surface parking lots abut the building to the east and south. The parking area to the south of the building is fenced and for the exclusive use by the USDA. A driveway at the southeast corner of the building provides access to this parking area. The parking area to the east of the building is unsecured public parking. Access to the public parking area is achieved through a driveway to the north of the building. The service entrance is on the east side of the building, with access through the public parking area.

Background

The USDA is proposing a concept for site development that establishes a framework for perimeter security enhancements around the four buildings that comprise its headquarters complex. All of these buildings are fully occupied and house approximately 7,000 employees. The threat level is C, medium risk, and the concept incorporates a variety of security elements including hardened street furniture, bollards, bollard fences, plinth walls retractable bollards and other elements recommended in the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan. USDA

advises that preliminary and final site development plans for each building will be submitted to the Commission for independent approval as funding becomes available. The submitted concept is reflective of the overall approach that USDA intends to follow.

Development Program

Applicant: U.S. Department of Agriculture.
Architect: Shalom Baranes Associates and EDAW.
Estimated Cost: **\$13 million to \$14 million.**
Schedule: Undetermined.

Proposal

As mentioned, the design concept for security enhancements will impact the four buildings that comprise the USDA headquarters complex. Proposals for each building include:

Whitten Building

The concept on the north side proposes a landscape approach with freestanding bollard fences in the landscape transitioning to retaining walls at the main entrance. Bollards on the east and west sides of the building would be buried within a hedge. A streetscape approach that includes retractable bollards and barriers, tree well enclosures, raised planters, free standing walls, and free standing bollards would be used along Independence Avenue. At all driveway entrances, retractable bollards in conjunction with gate arms would be used. USDA advises that existing gate arms are currently used for traffic control and the proposed retractable bollards would be used for security.

South Building

The concept for the north, south and east sides (Independence Avenue, C Street, and 12th Street) would provide a combination of streetscape bollards and hardened tree well enclosures. The bus lay by at C Street would be removed for increased standoff. Streetscape bollards and bollard fences comprise the treatment along 14th Street. The sidewalk at 14th Street would be widened to maintain the current existing width. New and/or replaced street trees would be added along Independence Avenue, 12th Street, and C Street. The trees within the USDA planting strip along 14th Street would be replaced when the planting strip is relocated closer to the building to allow for a wider sidewalk.

Yates Building

The proposed treatment for the Yates Building includes streetscape bollards along 14th Street and the rebuilding and slight realignment of the corner of 14th Street and Independence Avenue. Additionally, a combination of streetscape bollards, bollard fences, and hardened site and areaway walls along Independence Avenue would be provided.

Cotton Annex

Security improvements for the Cotton Annex include retractable bollards at the 12th Street entrance to the staff parking lot on the south, freestanding bollards along 12 Street, a bollard fence along C Street to the north, and a hardened fence along the west side of the building between the staff parking lot and the adjacent public parking lot.

Phasing

Although the proposal would be implemented in phases, it is not yet determined which portions of the overall design concept would be initially implemented.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff recommends approval of the concept site development plans. The overall plan evolved from the Urban Design and Security Plan (UDSP) and is comprehensive in scope. Many of the recommended security elements contained in the plan are also recommended in the UDSP. For example, the use of plinth walls, fixed and retractable bollards, hardened street furniture, bollard fences, and bollards within plantings are all proposed in the concept.

As the USDA prepares preliminary and final site development plans for the individual buildings within its headquarters complex, staff provides the following recommendations:

- Drawings seem to indicate that the proposed bollard spacing is four feet on center. Staff has been informed that the Interagency Security Committee is recommending spacing up to 4.9 feet, and recommends that increased spacing be considered. Staff also notes that bollard placement at driveways on the south side of the South Building preclude the possibility of high-speed vehicle approaches, and note that increased spacing of bollards in this location would reduce intrusions into the pathway of pedestrians on the sidewalk.
- Staff is concerned that bollard placement shown at corners provides inadequate pedestrian circulation and queuing space, particularly given the amount of pedestrian activity there is in this area. Staff is also concerned that bollard placement will present obstacles to the use of wheelchairs on and around handicapped ramps at the curb. Staff recommends that the circulation and queuing space be increased, and bollard placement be carefully considered to eliminate obstructions to wheelchairs.
- Staff recommends additional placement of street trees and hardened benches, particularly along Independence Avenue adjacent to the Whitten and South Buildings.
- The use of wedge-type vehicle barriers should be restricted wherever possible, to eliminate unsightly intrusions into the public realm. Where their use is required, they should be located so that their visibility from the sidewalk is minimized or eliminated.

- At Coordinating Committee, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority expressed concern regarding potential conflicts between security elements and plans to install a canopy over the entrance to the Metro Station at the southeast corner of 12th and Independence Avenue. Staff recommends that USDA coordinate with WMATA in the placement of bollards and other security elements in this area.
- Noting that the Cotton Annex is immediately adjacent to an unsecured public parking lot, staff believes that the placement of bollards in the public right-of-way along 12th Street is unjustified, and recommends that the bollard line be relocated to within the building yard.

Overall, staff is pleased with the comprehensive approach of the USDA in developing a concept for perimeter security for all the buildings in its headquarters complex.

PROJECT CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposed concept is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. The Federal Facilities element of the plan state that it is a goal of the Federal Government to “Provide for the efficient and effective operation of the Federal establishment while contributing to the general order and beauty of the National Capital by:

Promoting the expression of an urban design framework for the National Capital in all Federal Facility plans;

Assuring that Federal Facilities are compatible with their surroundings and make a positive contribution to their environment;

Encouraging the maintenance of Federal Facilities and grounds in a manner befitting their location in the Nation’s Capital, reflecting the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of our system of government.

The proposed concept site development plans result in an overall design framework for enhancing perimeter security around the USDA headquarters complex. The concept is consistent with above stated goals.

National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

The proposal is consistent with the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan. USDA’s overall approach to planning security proposals for the headquarters complex is comprehensive in that all buildings are examined and analyzed as a group, and the same design consultants that designed the Mall perimeter security are retained to design the USDA perimeter enhancements. Additionally, many of the proposed security elements contained in the UDSP are proposed in the design concept.

National Environmental Policy Act

The current submission, as a concept design proposal, does not require the Commission to complete its NEPA determination at this stage of project review. Based on the initial information by USDA, it will be undertaking preparation of an environmental assessment prior to submission of preliminary plans.

In developing the submission of preliminary project plans to the Commission, the USDA should prepare an environmental assessment in conformance with the Commission's environmental policy and procedures that should include public scoping, distribution for review and comment, and response to any substantive comments on the environmental assessment prior to the submission of the project for NCPC review.

National Historic Preservation Act

The Department of Agriculture has initiated Section 106 consultation with the DC SHPO. The Department of Agriculture Administration Building and the Auditor's Building are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and the Department of Agriculture South Building has been determined eligible for listing in the Register. In addition, the Mall and some of the streets surrounding the buildings are contributing elements of the L'Enfant Plan.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on April 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; District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District Department of Transportation; the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.