

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION



NCPC File No. 6276

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### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OLD COURTHOUSE/CITY HALL UNDERGROUND PARKING GARAGE

5<sup>th</sup> and D Streets, NW  
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the General Services Administration

May 27, 2004

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#### Abstract

The General Services Administration (GSA) has submitted, on behalf of the District of Columbia Courts, preliminary and final site and building plans for a 218 space underground parking garage at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and D Streets, NW in Judiciary Square. The parking facility will serve the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces and the Old DC Courthouse/City Hall building, which is undergoing renovation for its future use as the District of Columbia Court of Appeals.

#### Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary and final site and building plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(e), Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b) (1)), and D.C. Code § 10-603.

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#### Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

**Approves** the preliminary and final site and building plans for the underground parking garage at 5<sup>th</sup> and D Streets, NW, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.20(38.00)-41352.

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#### PROJECT SUMMARY

##### Site Description

The location for the proposed underground parking garage is at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and D Streets, NW, on the southwestern corner of Judiciary Square. The site is currently an open area,

improved with a series of pedestrian paths and the historic Darlington Fountain, which is located at the center of the site. A brick ventilation shaft, which is also considered to be a historic element, is located in the northeast quadrant of the site. The site is bordered by the Old DC Courthouse/City Hall on the east and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces on the north, both of which are historic buildings.

### Background

The proposed underground parking garage was presented to the Commission in August 2002, but approval was deferred on the project until a draft Master Plan for Judiciary Square was submitted for review. The draft Master Plan was submitted and presented to the Commission at its July 2003 meeting, thereby allowing for the proposed underground parking garage to proceed in its reviews by the Commission.

### Previous Commission Action

The Commission approved the design concept for the proposed underground parking garage, except for the trellis element, at its August 7, 2003 meeting. At this time, the Commission recommended that the final plans include a security scheme that included a plinth wall. Additionally, the Commission recommended that mechanical and circulation elements be grouped on the western edge and the northeastern corner of the site. The Commission requested further development of the design of the trellis element.

### Development Program

Applicant: General Services Administration  
Architect: Beyer Blinder Belle  
Cost: \$12,400,000  
Schedule: Construction to begin in September, 2004, with completion in December, 2005.

### Proposal

The proposal for the underground parking garage and re-establishment of the landscape above includes:

- Parking for 218 vehicles for the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces and the Old DC Courthouse/City Hall building
- Re-establishing the landscape on top of the garage facility with the addition of vehicle access to the garage as well as necessary exits and mechanical elements
- Relocating the existing brick ventilation tower in the northeastern corner of the site adjacent to a new structure housing an elevator, egress stairs, and ventilation shaft
- Providing a second structure containing egress stairs and ventilation shaft in the southwestern edge of the site along 5<sup>th</sup> Street

- Restoring the existing landscape in a manner that retains the open informal character of the space by placing a mix of deciduous shade and flowering trees in a random pattern within the open space and concentrating them along 5<sup>th</sup> Street
- Providing street trees along the curb line of 5<sup>th</sup> Street and Indiana Avenue
- Providing low shrubbery and benches around the Darlington Memorial Fountain
- Incorporating vine plantings along the trellis loggia over the garage ramp for the purpose of visually softening and incorporating this element into the overall landscape treatment
- Providing a 30-inch-high plinth wall along the south and west sides of the park, with pedestrian entrances located along D Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Street, to provide perimeter security for the site

## PROJECT ANALYSIS

The preliminary and final site and building plans respond to the previous issues raised by the Commission during the approval of the design concept. The final plans provide:

- Appurtenances (egress stairs, elevator, and vent shafts) located in the southwestern and northeastern sections of the site combine glass to reduce the perceived mass of these elements and granite to relate to the base of the nearby Court buildings
- A landscaping plan which is consistent with the draft Judiciary Master Plan in that it provides for an open informal character, reinforces and clarifies the existing pathway network, and provides for tree plantings at appropriate locations along 5<sup>th</sup> Street and Indiana Avenue. The park will also include seating around the Darlington Memorial Fountain
- A plinth wall on the south and west sides of the site that provides a sense of enclosure as well as security

Overall, the proposal is well executed and will allow for the removal of existing surface parking within Judiciary Square, re-establish quality open space, and retain historic features in the park. Staff recommends approval of the preliminary and final site and building plans.

## PROJECT CONFORMANCE

### Comprehensive Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. The Preservation and Historic Features Element states that:

The distinguishing qualities or character of Historic Landscapes should be protected and enhanced.

Publicly owned Historic Landscapes and historic open spaces such as monument grounds, public building grounds, gardens, forts, battlefields, cemeteries, reservations, parks, and park systems should be protected from unrelated and unnecessary construction that would adversely affect their integrity.

The urban spaces, circles, squares, and plazas generated by the L'Enfant Plan and McMillan Plan and the unique views and vistas of the National Capital be preserved and enhanced.

A coordinated Federal and District of Columbia government program of preserving the important Historic Features of the National Capital be supported.

#### Judiciary Square Master Plan

At its August 7, 2003 meeting, the Commission approved the Draft Master Plan for Judiciary Square. This plan indicates that the preservation and enhancement of open space, building compositions and views are important characteristics of the overall Master Plan. The proposed enhancement of the park and Darlington Memorial Fountain are consistent with this goal.

Also at its August 2003 meeting, the Commission waived the requirement that the Master Plan be completed before consideration of the preliminary and final plans for the underground parking garage.

#### Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts reviewed and approved the proposal at its April 15, 2004 meeting.

#### 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.

#### National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

Judiciary Square's unique character is not addressed directly in The National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan (UDSP) adopted by the Commission in October, 2002. However, the plinth wall and limited use of bollards is not inconsistent with the goals of the UDSP.

### National Historic Preservation Act

GSA has completed its Section 106 responsibilities with the execution of a Memorandum of Agreement for the construction of the underground parking garage and the treatment of the landscape above it. The site is adjacent to two historic buildings--the Old DC Courthouse and the US Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces (USCAAF). The signatories are GSA, the DC Courts, USCAAF, the DC SHPO, and the Advisory Council.

The site is part of Judiciary Square, a significant element in the L'Enfant Plan and part of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site. GSA determined that the garage would have an adverse effect on Judiciary Square. The location and design of the garage entrance and of the above-grade entrances and exits and other appurtenances were designed--and refined through consultation--to minimize their visual effect and to preserve to the extent possible the historic, open character of the landscaped square.

The MOA stipulates the protection of the structural integrity of the adjacent historic buildings during construction, as well as the protection of the Joseph J. Darlington Memorial Fountain and the 1892 brick ventilating tower, both historic contributing features of the site. Both of these features will be removed, documented, stored appropriately, and replaced at or near their historic locations. Provisions have been included in the MOA in the event that a previously unidentified archaeological resource is discovered.

### National Environmental Policy Act

In conformance with procedures and the requirements of National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), NCPC staff analyzed the prepared June 2003 Environmental Assessment (EA) on the Judiciary Master Plan, which included the submitted Old District of Columbia Courthouse Building underground parking garage. That document was completed by the Commission as lead federal agency and joint lead agency with the District of Columbia Courts. Staff drafted a Finding of No Significant Impact based on the EA, in July 2003, conforming with the Commission's delegated authority to the Executive Director. The EA included the review of the underground parking garage proposal and concluded that the analysis of the project and its potential environmental impacts demonstrated no significant environmental effects from the planned action.

No modifications have occurred in the garage proposal which would significantly affect the environmental analysis of the project plans, as described and analyzed by the June 2003 EA. Consequently, the determinations of the Finding remain valid. Staff has reviewed the action for extraordinary circumstances as sanctioned by NEPA and has determined none are attributable to the action in accordance with the Commission's procedures.