

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. MP 04/6486



**WALTER REED ARMY MEDICAL CENTER, MAIN SECTION  
MASTER PLAN MODIFICATION AND VEHICULAR ENTRANCE SECURITY  
UPGRADES  
14<sup>th</sup> and Dahlia Streets, NW  
Washington, D.C.**

Submitted by the Department of the Army

July 1, 2004

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## Abstract

The Army has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for security upgrades at four entrances to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Main Section (16<sup>th</sup> Street/Main Drive, Alaska Avenue/14<sup>th</sup> Street, Georgia Avenue/Elder Street and Georgia Avenue/Dahlia Street). The improvements consist of the construction of visitor registration buildings at two locations and guard houses at three entrances. Each gate will also have widened entrance drives; two traffic islands; vehicle search areas; reconfigured fencing and gates; new landscaping and site work, including a retaining wall at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street gate; and, modifications to existing sidewalks, lighting and utilities. The proposal requires a master plan modification for the 16<sup>th</sup> Street gate improvements.

## Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of master plan modification and 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 master plan modification and preliminary and final site and building plans for the vehicular entrance security upgrades at four entrances to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Main Section, as shown on NCPC Map File Nos. 62.10(05.12)-41399 and 62.10(38.00)-41393, respectively; and,

**Recommends** that WRAMC reconsider the addition of the future guard booths at each entrance.

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## PROJECT SUMMARY

### Site Description

The 113-acre Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Main Section, is located in a residential area approximately five miles north of the White House. It is bordered on the north by Fern Street, on the south by Aspen Street, on the east by Georgia Avenue, on the west by 16<sup>th</sup> Street, and on the northwest by Alaska Avenue. Adjacent to the campus on the west is Rock Creek Park, and residential communities are on the north, south, and east. The site has a rolling topography and a significant amount of tree coverage, especially in the area along 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Alaska Avenue.

A black wrought iron fence surrounds the campus and five operable entrance/exit gates for both pedestrians and vehicles provide access to the site. Of the five gates, three are located on Georgia Avenue, a fourth gate is on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, and the final entrance/exit is off of Alaska Avenue. The Takoma Metrorail station is approximately 0.6 miles to the east, and numerous Metrobus lines pass the campus perimeter.

### Background

The Department of the Army has submitted plans for security upgrades at four entrances to the Post. The project was included in the WRAMC revised Master Plan approved by the Commission in April of 2003, with the exception of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street gate. The entrances to the Post have been secured since September 11, 2001 and open public access is no longer permitted. The proposal includes formalizing many of the security-related activities which already take place at the Post entrances with a permanent, designed security solution.

### Previous Commission Action

On April 3, 2003 the Commission approved the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Main Section, revised Master Plan, with the exception of the truck processing station, the child care center and the Fisher House. The Commission further required that WRAMC: “restudy the location of the proposed truck processing station on 16<sup>th</sup> Street or design it in such a way that its impact on the existing hill and mature trees is minimal. This might be accomplished by significantly reducing the footprint of the visitor center/truck processing area or designing the facility such that it is built within the grade of the existing hill.”

On May 28, 2004 the Executive Director, through delegated authority, approved the security-related site work at the Alaska Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup> Street entrance to the Post. As a result, the proposed security upgrades at this gate are limited to the installation of a guard house.

## Development Program

Applicant: Department of the Army  
Architect: Cetrom-Ortega Group (Design-Build)  
Square Footage: 2,400 net square feet  
Estimated Cost: \$3.78 million  
Schedule: Completion date Spring 2005

## Proposal

The Department of the Army has submitted site and building plans for permanent security improvements at four of the five entrances to the Post. The fifth entrance, at Georgia Avenue and Butternut Street will continue to be operated as an employee-only exit and no modifications proposed at this time. The improvements are intended to provide permanent vehicular security at the perimeter of the Post. The four gates where security upgrades are proposed are:

- 16<sup>th</sup> Street
- Georgia Avenue and Elder Street
- Georgia Avenue and Dahlia Street
- Alaska Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup> Street

There are similarities between each of the gate modifications, including: widened pavement and the addition of traffic islands; reconfigured fencing, utilities, lighting and sidewalks; a guard house flanked by raised brick planters; and, additional retractable bollards matching the existing bollards. A concrete pad is being provided on one of the two new traffic islands for the future construction of a guard booth to provide weather protection for guards at each entrance. Two visitor registration centers and three guard houses will also be constructed.

### Visitor Registration Center

Each 1,000 net-square-foot, one-story visitor registration center will contain both visitor waiting and processing areas, and staff space. The buildings will be constructed of brick masonry, painted aluminum panels and window glazing. Cantilevered metal canopies will be located over each public entrance and the building will have a standing seam metal hipped roof. The staff areas will be hardened to meet Army security requirements.

### Guard House

The guardhouses are designed to be compatible with the visitor registration centers, with brick cladding and painted metal panels. The flat-roofed building will have a cast stone water table and cantilevered metal canopies. The building will be prefabricated, with the exception of the brick base and water table, and will be hardened to meet Army security requirements.

Below is a description of the modifications proposed at each gate:

### 16<sup>th</sup> Street Gate

This gate will function as a contractor and truck entrance, although employees will also be permitted to enter/exit here. Although truck processing already takes place at this gate the new entrance will be much larger and will impact an existing hill with mature trees. The new entrance gate will include a visitor registration center, as well as a truck inspection area and visitor parking. A two-person guard house will be located on one of the two new medians. A right-turn lane (northbound) will be constructed on 16<sup>th</sup> Street and a left-turn signal will be installed for the existing southbound turn lane (the turn lane already exists) to facilitate traffic into the Post. The existing bus stop along 16<sup>th</sup> Street will be relocated north of the new gate, across Main Drive.

A major feature of this new entrance is a retaining wall along the eastern side of the site. The retaining wall will be clad with a cast stone veneer base and brick facing, and will have ornamental iron fencing on the top. The wall will reach a height of almost 12 feet at its tallest point. There will be trees and shrubs planted in front of the retaining wall, as well as over the entire site.

#### Georgia Avenue and Elder Street

This will be the main entrance to the Post for visitors and patients due to its proximity to the hospital. The entrance will be open 24 hours a day. A visitor registration center with associated parking will also be constructed in this location, as well as a vehicle inspection/bus turn around lane. A southbound right-turn lane on Georgia Avenue will be created by moving an existing bus stop and on-street parking. The existing traffic island and guard house at this entrance will remain.

#### Georgia Avenue/Dahlia Street

This gate currently functions as an exit-only during afternoon hours and is also the entrance for ambulances. Modifications to this entrance are more limited, with the addition of traffic medians for the guard house and raised planters, enlarged pavement width, and new bollards and fencing.

#### 14<sup>th</sup> Street/Alaska Avenue

This entrance is for employees and regular visitors and is open during business hours. The site improvements for this gate have already been approved and the current proposal is to add a guard house and raised planters.

### PROJECT ANALYSIS

#### Executive Summary

The staff recommends that the Commission *approve* the master plan modification and preliminary site and building plans for the security-related improvements at four entrances to the Post. The gate modifications will formalize existing security-related activities by replacing temporary canopies, jersey barriers and traffic cones with more appropriate permanent structures designed to be compatible with the campus. Staff regrets that both the guard booths and the canopy over the truck inspection area were not included as part of the current proposal and finds

that the guard booths may be a redundant security feature. If WRAMC intends to include a truck canopy it should not be a temporary canopy but a permanent element designed in such a way that it is both compatible with the proposed security features and minimally visible.

When the Commission approved the WRAMC revised Master Plan in April of 2003 they withheld approval of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street entrance gate improvements (in draft form at that time) because of the impact the facility would have on the hillside and mature trees on this low-density portion of the campus. The Commission recommended that WRAMC reconsider the location of the facility or redesign the facility so that it had a minimal impact on the hillside. The Commission suggested that this could be accomplished by locating the facility across Main Drive, in the area occupied by the jogging track, or by building the facility within the hillside so that it had a lesser impact.

The applicant considered the Commission's recommendations relating to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street gate improvements and was able to modify the entrance by reducing the footprint of the new entrance at its proposed location on the south side of Main Drive. The Army stated that they could not relocate the gate across Main Drive because a new building, possibly including the National Medical Museum, is likely to be constructed in this portion of the Post. While there is still a significant impact on the existing hill and mature trees the entrance has been improved by the addition of more landscape screening and by the reduction in the amount of paved area associated with the entrance. One travel lane has been eliminated and the parking associated with the visitor registration center has been relocated to the south so that the necessary standoff distance is achieved in a smaller area (this is a 26 percent reduction in the amount of paved area). By constructing the facility at a lower grade than the nearby residences on Aspen Street and historic Building 11 the facility is able to be screened by both the retaining wall and the bermed areas to the south and west. With these considerations staff concurs that the proposed location is the most viable for the 16<sup>th</sup> Street gate.

## PROJECT CONFORMANCE

### Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The proposed security gate enhancements are not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

### Federal Capital Improvements Program

The proposed security gate enhancements are not included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program, Fiscal Years 2004-2009.

### Conformance with the Master Plan

The applicant is requesting that the master plan be modified to permit the construction of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street gate improvements, which staff is recommending. The proposed improvements at the other three gates are consistent with the WRAMC revised Master Plan.

#### National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

In general, the proposal to construct security-related gate improvements is consistent with perimeter security treatments at many other federal installations in the City and the region. Walter Reed is similar to many campus-like installations, and almost all of them are already enclosed with perimeter fences and manned vehicular entrances.

#### National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Department of the Army completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the master plan update in October 2002. The EA addressed the potential environmental impacts of new security facilities that included the submitted gate areas and truck screening facility. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was determined and signed by the Department of Army authorities on November 5, 2002. The Commission staff, pursuant to delegations of authority, adopted the EA and issued a FONSI in January 2003.

No modifications have occurred in the submitted final plans which would significantly affect the environmental analysis of the proposed actions, or the conclusions identified at that time, as described and analyzed by the June 2003 EA. Consequently, the determinations of the Finding remain valid.

#### National Historic Preservation Act

The Department of the Army made a determination of no adverse effect on the Walter Reed Historic District on April 30, 2004 and on June 30, 2004 the DCHPO concurred with the Army's finding.

#### CONSULTATION

##### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on June 16, 2004, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies are: NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District Department of Transportation; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

##### Commission of Fine Arts

At the May 20, 2004 meeting, the Commission of Fine Art approved the majority of the proposed improvements, with the exception of the retaining wall at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street gate. Subsequent to the CFA meeting the applicant modified the retaining wall and the Commission approved the revisions on June 17, 2004.