

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

J. McIntyre

NCPC File No. 6547



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**WALTER REED ARMY MEDICAL CENTER, MAIN SECTION**  
**ELECTRICAL SWITCHING BOX LOCATIONS**  
Georgia Avenue, NW at Elder Street, NW  
Washington, DC

Submitted by the Walter Reed Army Medical Center

December 22, 2004

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## **Abstract**

The Department of the Army has submitted a preliminary and final site plan for the installation of electrical switching boxes throughout the Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC), Main Section. Eighteen sites are identified for the installation of above and below grade (vault) electrical switching boxes. The locations identified represent consensus resulting from on-site coordination between the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO), the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), and NCPC, and meet the approval of all three agencies.

## **Commission Action Requested by Applicant**

Approval of preliminary and final site plan(s) 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 plan(s) for the electrical switching box locations at WRAMC, Washington, DC, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 62.10(38.00)41472.
- **Commends** the applicant for coordination with NCPC, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO) to reach consensus on eighteen acceptable site locations for the electrical switching boxes.

- **Recommends** that the applicant include documentation of consultation with surrounding communities in all future submissions.

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## BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

### DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

#### Site Description

The 113-acre Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC), Main Section, is located within a predominantly residential area in northwest Washington, DC. It is bordered on the north by Fern Street and Alaska Avenue, on the south by Aspen Street, on the east by Georgia Avenue, and on the west by 16<sup>th</sup> Street. Rock Creek Park is located across 16<sup>th</sup> Street just west of the Main Section. WRAMC has rolling topography and a significant amount of tree coverage, especially in the area adjacent to 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Alaska Avenue. The Installation includes a Historic District that encompasses the area west of 14<sup>th</sup> Street and as far north as Dahlia Avenue.



**Aerial View of Walter Reed Army Medical Center – Main Section**

#### Background

In August, 2001, an explosion and fire at the electrical switching station severely limited the ability of WRAMC to distribute power reliably to the installation. On July 1, 2003, the

Executive Director approved, under authority delegated from the Commission, an addition to the boiler plant (Building 15) to house a switching station to replace one that was destroyed by the fire. This submission is for electrical isolation switch boxes to be installed as part of the earlier-approved project. The isolation switch boxes will provide short circuit/overload protection and a means of load interruptive disconnect. Fifteen of the eighteen sites are located within the boundary of the Historic District.

Extensive coordination and a series of several meetings were conducted with NCPC, CFA, and the DC SHPO to reach agreement on locations for electrical switch boxes. In response to a request from NCPC staff, a spreadsheet was submitted with a concurrence column for both CFA and the DC SHPO. Based on discussions with the other two agencies, WRAMC agreed to relocate over half of the switch boxes initially submitted. It was agreed to relocate three at underground locations to alleviate visual clutter of the landscape. Seven of the agency non-concurrences resulted in agreement to delete those switches after engineering re-analysis. Therefore, the project now refers to eighteen sites where switching boxes are to be sited. For several of those eighteen sites, redesign is required and is underway in order to identify acceptable locations above ground that will preserve viewsheds on the landscape.

### Design Concept

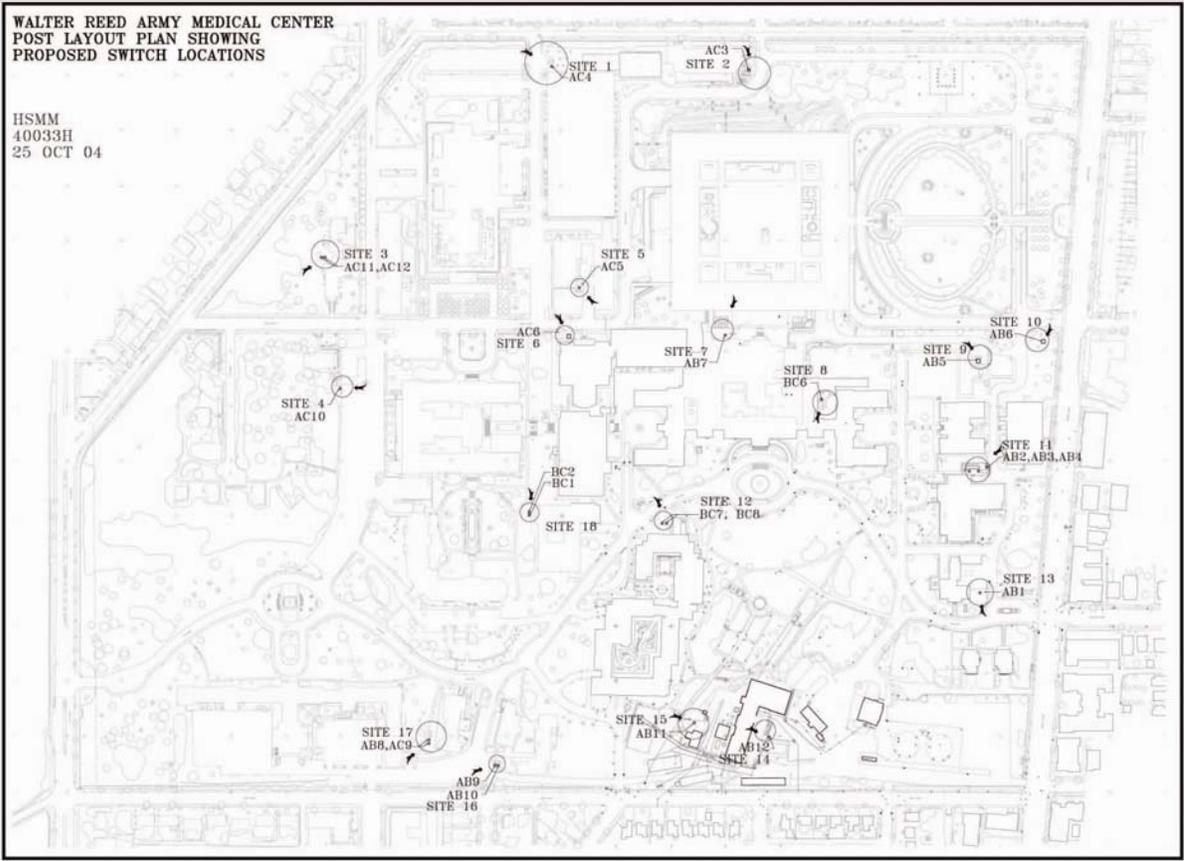
The switchboxes generally measure 5' 0" wide x 5' 0" deep by 5' 0" high. Some are to be installed above grade, while others are to be installed in below-grade vaults. Initially, all boxes were to be located above grade. Based on consultation with NCPC, CFA and the DC SHPO, boxes were located below grade where feasible. Where below-grade vaults did not exist or were not easily accessible, above ground switchboxes will be camouflaged by placing in proximity to existing or proposed vegetative screening, and making use of existing concrete pads.

### Development Program

Applicant:	Walter Reed Army Medical Center
Architects:	Hayes Seay, Mattern & Mattern
Acreage:	113 acres
Estimated Cost:	Unknown
Schedule:	Project is scheduled to begin in 2005.

### Previous Commission Action

On July 1, 2003, the Executive Director approved, under authority delegated from the Commission, preliminary and final site and building plans for an addition to the boiler plant (Building 15) to house a switching station to replace one that was destroyed by fire in 2001, under NCPC file number 6366. The site of the addition to Building 15 as a new Switching Station was included on the 2002 Master Plan, which was approved by NCPC in April, 2003.



**Project Site Plan**



**SITE 16 @ Bldg. 91 (Switches AB9 & AB10 on Pad inside Plantings)**



**SITE 5 @ Bldg. 53 (Switch AC5 on Pad)**



**SITE 14 @ Bldg. 95 (Switch AB12 on Pad) (Existing Transformer in Foreground)**



**SITE 10 @ Dahlia St. Entry**

## PROJECT ANALYSIS

The process undertaken for this project consisted of site inventory and selection based on availability and compatibility with requirements of the electric isolation switch boxes. Those requirements were reanalyzed based on comments from CFA and DC SHPO. Recommendations for relocation were considered and incorporated wherever feasible. Staff finds the final sites selected appropriate, and commends WRAMC for its efforts and success in achieving consensus between NCPC, CFA and the DC SHPO regarding the siting of the isolation switch boxes.

Staff recommends that the same level of thorough coordination employed with federal and DC agencies be applied to early, proactive consultation with surrounding communities in order to discover the nature and extent of citizen interest early in the review process

## CONFORMANCE

### Comprehensive Plan

The proposed concept is not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

## COORDINATION

### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on November 10, 2004. The Committee forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project had been coordinated with all agencies represented. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning, Department of Housing and Community Development, and Department of Transportation; the National Park Service, General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

### Commission of Fine Arts

NCPC requested that WRAMC achieve concurrence with CFA and the DC SHPO prior to submitting the project formally for Commission action. The Army met several times with the various agencies, and agreement was reached by reviewing each switch box each on a case by case basis. The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) gave it concept approval on October 21, 2004.

### Historic Preservation Act

WRAMC received a determination of no adverse affect from the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DCSHPO) on April 4, 2002 under the provision of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. With the specific knowledge of the 18 locations for

isolation switch boxes now known, the DCSHPO has been re-engaged for consultation. In joint sessions with CFA and NCPC, as well as an individual tour of the entire site, DCSHPO staff provided concurrence or non-concurrence to each proposed location. As with comments from CFA, the DCSHPO's comments were considered and incorporated into the final design and site locations for all switch boxes.

#### Advisory Neighborhood Commissions 4A and 4B

This project was scheduled for approval as a delegated action in November, 2004, but the project was withdrawn by the applicant following expressions of concern from Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANC) 4A and 4B. This concern appeared to be based on a lack of information regarding this and other projects at WRAMC. On December 7, WRAMC held a briefing for representatives of the ANC, attended by NCPC staff. Following that briefing, ANC representatives concerns regarding this project appeared to be allayed, although other concerns remain. Staff recommends that WRAMC demonstrate in future submissions that they have engaged in similar consultation with the ANCs.

#### National Environmental Policy Act

WRAMC completed an Environmental Assessment that resulted in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on November 5, 2002 on the Electrical Switch Station.