



STARBURST INTERSECTION PLAZA
BLADENSBURG & BENNING ROADS & MARYLAND AVENUE, & H STREET NE,
Washington, D.C.

District of Columbia Department of Transportation

Delegated Action of the Executive Director

October 27, 2005

Pursuant to delegations of authority adopted by the Commission on October 3, 1996, I approve the preliminary and final site development plans for a pedestrian plaza to be created by joining two existing traffic islands spanning Maryland Avenue, NE, where Bladensburg and Benning Roads and H Street, NE intersect in a “Starburst” pattern, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 42.00(41.22)41672, and reminds DDOT that NCPC looks forward to reviewing any future plans for a memorial sited at Starburst Plaza, as well as design for vertical art features.

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The District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) proposes to create a pedestrian plaza by joining two existing traffic islands spanning Maryland Avenue, NE, where Bladensburg and Benning Roads and H Street, NE intersect in a “Starburst” pattern. With assistance from the Project for Public Space (PPS), DDOT has involved local communities in its “placemaking process” for the plaza design. In September 2005, NCPC approved DDOT’s plan to reconfigure the roadways that form the Starburst Intersection; and to redirect northeast bound Maryland Avenue traffic north around the future plaza on Bladensburg Road. NCPC had previously approved the H Street Corridor Transportation Study on May 28, 2004, requiring that road realignment maintain sightlines along the Maryland Avenue axis and preserve views of the Capitol through careful tree placement. The site listed is a candidate site in NCPC’s Memorials and Museums Master Plan.

Plaza amenities would include seating sheltered from sun and traffic, suitable for transit users. Landscape features would include tall shade trees for high visibility of the space and personal safety. Parallel rows of trees would frame the view corridor of Maryland Avenue with the open centerline looking southwest towards the Capitol. Pedestrian lighting would include fixtures following H Street historic standards as well as lighting installed in the pavement. A water wall no higher than 9 feet would be framed by two sets of stairs, would retain the site’s natural slope

as it increases towards Hechinger Mall, and would lead to an ADA compliant overlook pathway to the mall. The surface of the water wall would also serve as a mural/art wall. Two symmetrical vertical gateway art features to be created by the H Street Starburst Public Arts Project and funded by the DC Commission on Arts & Humanities would frame the Maryland Avenue view corridor, as well as a possible mural for the water wall. Enhanced transit shelters would face Bladensburg Road and Maryland Avenue, and art-bollards would protect the space from vehicles at the intersection of Benning and Bladensburg Roads.

While streamlining vehicle traffic, buffering pedestrians from it, and improving actual and perceived pedestrian safety, staff believes the plaza would transform the heavily traveled intersection into a public space with improved transit links, create a gateway between the H Street corridor and commercial centers to the north, and establish a community landmark. Although earlier sketches showed a narrower Maryland Avenue view corridor to the Capitol defined by off-center rows of trees, causing concern for staff, current drawings show parallel rows of trees framing the open centerline looking southwest towards the Capitol. To enhance and further honor the view, the applicant has indicated the location of vertical sculptural elements as markers to frame it, and has assured staff that any future memorial sited on the plaza would be centered within the Maryland Avenue axis. This commitment was demonstrated by shifting the location of a community designed medallion in the pavement to one side of the corridor. The wall's height and flowing water function concerned staff initially in terms of safety and ability to operate in cold weather. The height, however, will be buffered by the site's upward slope towards the mall parking lot, and the water pump will not be accessible, but encased in the wall. Staff hopes that artwork will enhance the view corridor and express the character of the surrounding neighborhoods, while creating a highly visible landmark, which will contribute to the revitalization and economic growth of this area. Since artwork has not been designed and a memorial has not been sited yet, staff reminds DDOT that NCPC looks forward to their review.

The Coordinating Committee reviewed and coordinated the proposal at its October 12, 2005 meeting. As a District of Columbia agency project, outside of the central area of the District on non-federal property, the National Environmental Policy Act does not apply to the proposed construction. The District of Columbia has reviewed the action and determined that it qualifies as an exempted action in accordance with the implementing rules of the District of Columbia Environmental Policy Act of 1989. NCPC has an advisory role in the review of this project and the Commission's action constitutes part of the Section 106 consultation currently underway between DDOT (on behalf of FHWA) and the DC SHPO. The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) approved the project at their October 20, 2005 meeting.

Patricia E. Gallagher, AICP
Executive Director