

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 6561



FORMER WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER SITE INTERIM PARKING LOT 900 9th Street, NW, Washington DC

Submitted by the Washington Convention Center Authority

January 27, 2005

Abstract

The Washington Convention Center Authority (WCCA), on behalf of the District of Columbia government has submitted a proposal for an interim parking lot on the site of the former Convention Center. The parking lot is intended for short-term rather than commuter parking and is also intended to accommodate public events such as festivals and other special events. The parking lot would be operational for three to five years. At the conclusion of this time period the site will be re-developed with a permanent solution that will include the reopening of 10th and I Streets to vehicular traffic.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept design plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(e) 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 design plans for an Interim Parking Lot at the former Washington Convention Center site at 900 9th Street, N.W., Washington, DC, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 21.00(49.00)41536, for a period not to exceed five years.

Excepts from approval the 10th Street art corridor between New York Avenue and H Street.

Requires that the applicant provide additional information on the art corridor that includes material samples for all major elements within this primary pedestrian circulation space.

Recommends that, during development of preliminary and final plans for the interim parking lot, the WCCA:

- Explore alternative landscaping treatment using natural plant materials along the pedestrian art corridor between New York Avenue and H Street.

- Ensure that the art banners along the art corridor are limited to works of art and do not include commercial advertisements.

- Use the most currently available and reliable technology for the parking ticketing / payment system that would facilitate vehicle movement into and out of the parking lot.

- Use more subdued colors to mark vehicle parking and circulation areas.

- Incorporate way-finding information such as Metrorail stations, bus stops, and nearby attractions on the illuminated kiosks that mark pedestrian entrances to the parking lot.

Expects that 10th and I Streets will be reopened to vehicular traffic when the permanent re-development plans for the former Convention Center site are implemented in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement executed in 1995 for the construction of the MCI Center.

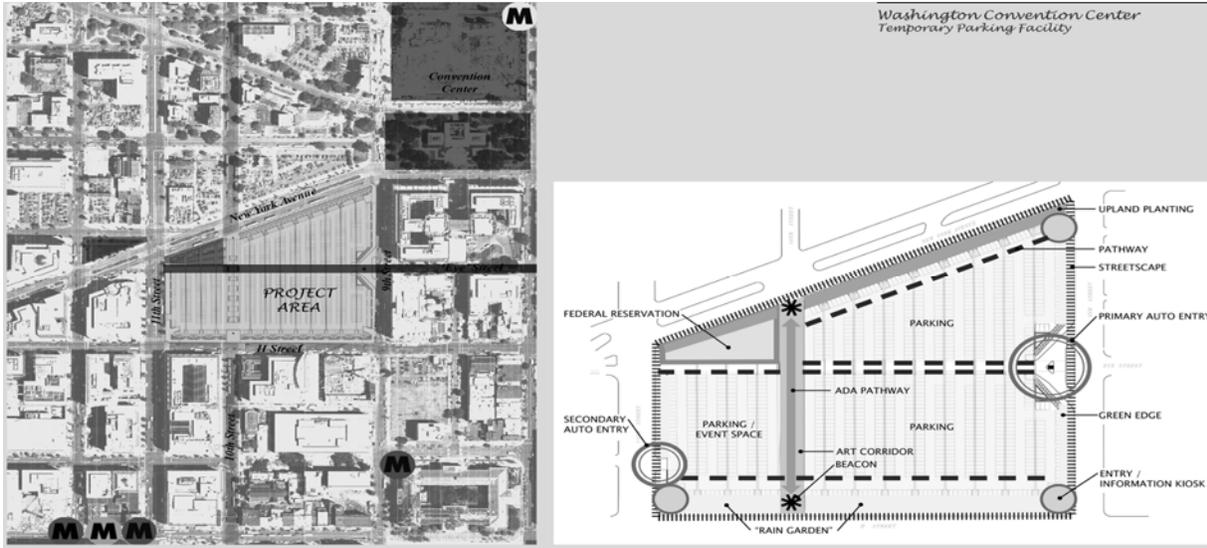
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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

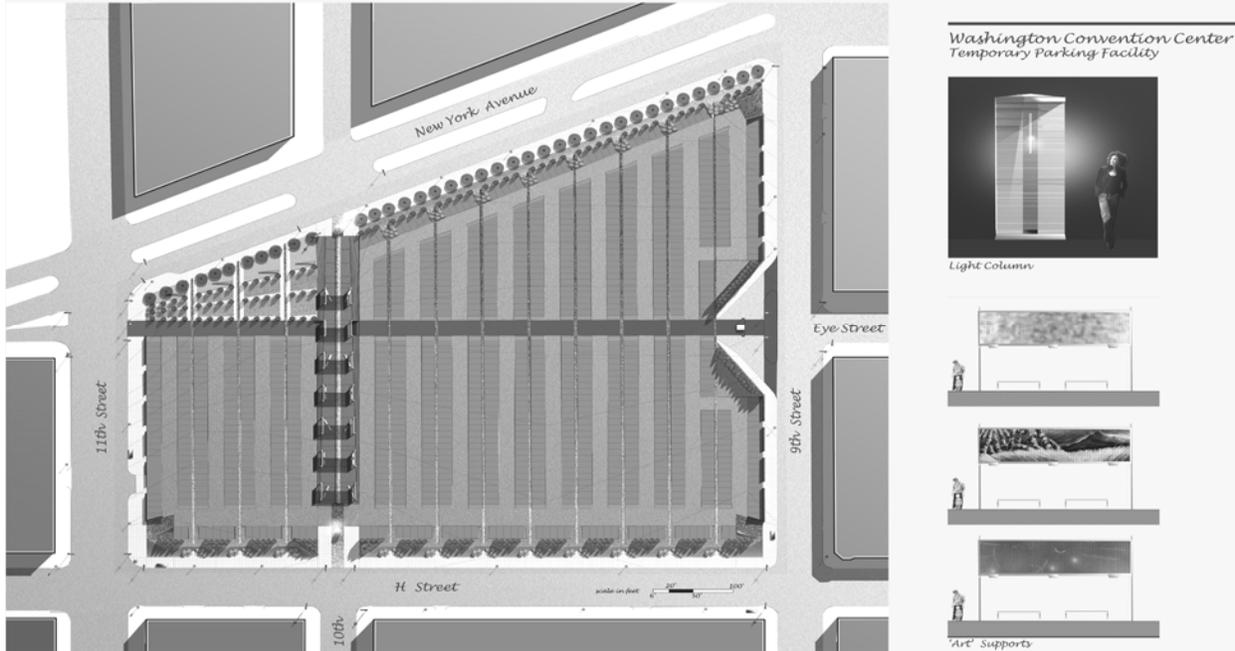
Site

The 10.2-acre site of the former D.C. Convention Center is bounded on the north by New York Avenue, on the south by H Street, on the east by 9th Street, and on the west by 11th Street. The site is surrounded by a variety of mixed uses and situated immediately southwest of Mount Vernon Square.



Design Concept

The design concept is intended to be a contemporary open space that serves as a flexible framework to accommodate a variety of uses ranging from a 1,000-car short term parking lot to a venue for festivals, markets, displays, cultural activities, and both large and small-scale events. Flexibility is envisioned both in the open space itself, and in an “amenity zone” along the perimeter of the site that would buffer views into the parking lot and provide varying-sized “rooms” that would accommodate vending/eating areas, bus shelters, art galleries, and landscaped settings. Both 10th and “I” Streets have been highlighted in the design. “I” Street would function as the main vehicular entry at 9th Street and the primary access for vehicles. 10th Street would be developed as a pedestrian-only thoroughfare and “art corridor” that bridges the neighborhoods to the north and the south of the site. A “rain garden” would be developed along the entire length of the site along H Street to collect rain water that flows from north to south on the sloping site.



Illustrative Plan

Streetscape

Streetlights, traffic signals, bus shelters and paving would be retained where possible. New concrete paving, lighting, site furnishing, and landscaping would augment salvageable elements along H Street, New York Avenue, 9th Street, and 11th Street.

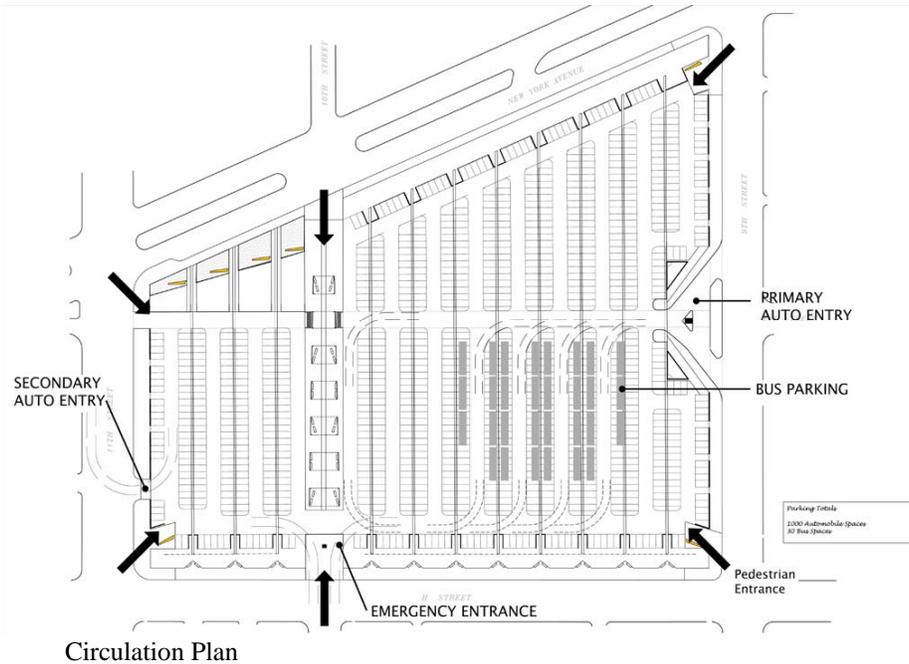
Vehicular entrances

The primary vehicle entry would be located at 9th and “I” Streets. A secondary entry would be located at 11th Street just north of H Street. This entry would be opened only when required to facilitate overflow parking or access for vehicles and equipment to support special events. Emergency vehicle access would be provided at the 10th and H Street pedestrian entry.

Vehicle and Pedestrian Circulation

A total of 1,000 parking spaces would be provided. The majority of vehicles would park east of the 10th Street “art corridor.” Overflow spaces would be provided west of the corridor. Space of 30 buses is allocated in the southeast area of the site.

Six prominent pedestrian entrances would be developed at 9th and H Streets, 10th and H Streets, 11th Street and New York Avenue, 10th Street and New York Avenue, and 9th Street and New York Avenue. The 10th Street entrances would be different from the other entrances through the installation of a recycled glass column at the north and south ends of the corridor. Pedestrian paths would be created in the lot through the use of paint in areas leading from the entrances.



New York Avenue

A row of 4" caliper Willow Oak trees and band of evergreen Virginia Red Cedar trees would define the northern edge of the site parallel to New York Avenue. Stone dust paving would define the pedestrian zone for seating and future art exhibitions behind the concrete sidewalk. Bold plantings of evergreen and deciduous shrubs and ground cover plants would be located on the slopes leading to parking areas.

9th and 11 Streets

Low green fences would define the streetscape along these streets. Galvanized steel grid fences would provide structure for a variety of deciduous and evergreen vines.

H Street "Rain Garden"

The entire site slopes from New York Avenue toward H Street. A series of north/south channels paved with recycled glass pavers would direct storm water toward the storm water management basin or "rain garden" along the length of H Street. Native plants tolerant of wet conditions and several feet of sand and gravel would cleanse storm water before it enters the city's storm water system. A series of nooks for pedestrians and vendors would be developed along the length of the "rain garden."

MATERIALS LIST

- ① Juniperus horizontalis 'Youngstown'
- ② Juniperus virginiana 'Brodie'
- ③ Quercus phellos
- ④ Rhus aromatica 'Grow-low'
- ⑤ Viburnum dentatum 'Christom'
- ⑥ x Cupressocyparis leylandii 'Naylor's Blue'
- ⑦ Parthenocissus tricuspidata
- ⑧ Clematis Vine
- ⑨ Salix purpurea 'Canyon Blue'
- ⑩ Ilex verticillata 'Red Sprite'
- ⑪ Betula nigra 'BNMTF' (Dura-Heat)
- ⑫ Carex species

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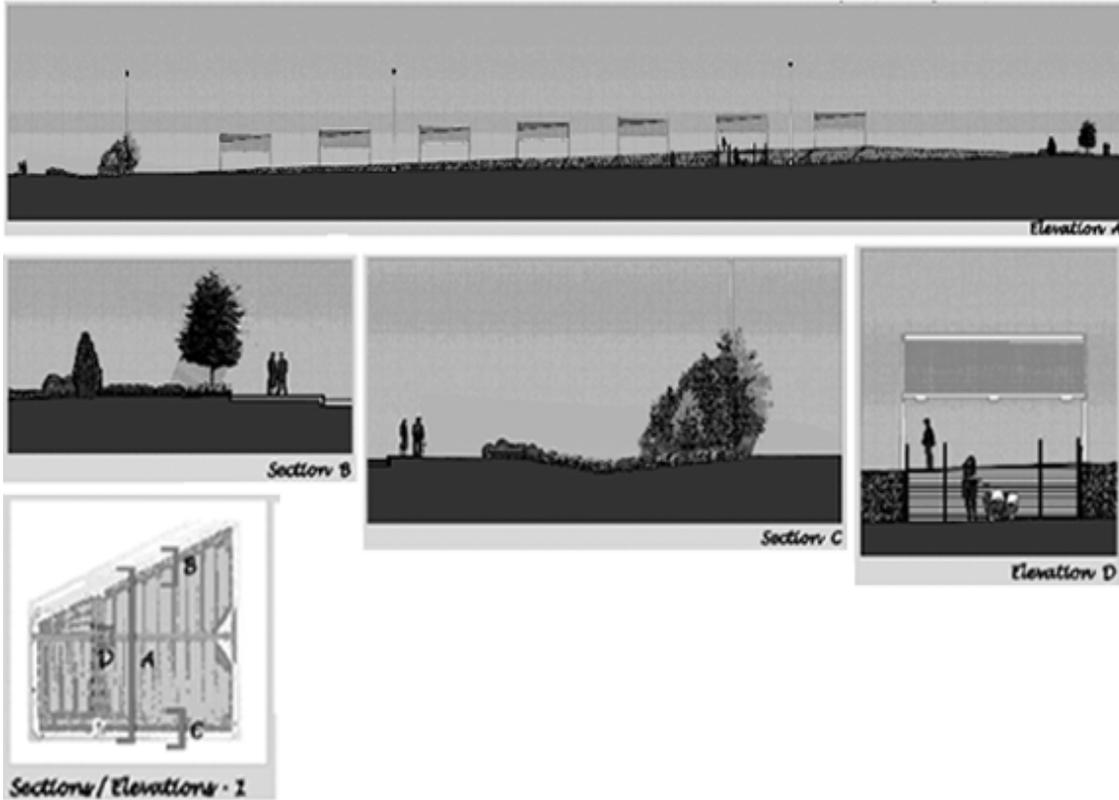
10. Ilex verticillata 'Red Sprite'

11. Betula nigra 'BNMTF' (Dura-Heat)

12. Carex species

10th Street Art Corridor

This area would be developed as the focal point pedestrian corridor. Recycled glass light columns would mark the entrances at H Street and New York Avenue. An ADA compliant path paved in recycled glass pavers would extend along the central spine of this element, flanked by artificial turf. Galvanized steel columns would support panels for “art” to be developed in association with the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities. These elements would also function as shading devices and benches would be located under the shade structures.



Lighting

Parking light standards would be located in the parking area, along the perimeter of the site, and along the 10th Street corridor. The “art” structures along 10th Street would be lighted. Existing street lights would illuminate the streetscape.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff understands that the proposed parking lot/public venue space is temporary for a period of three to five years while permanent plans for the former Convention Center site are developed. Careful planning during this time should ultimately provide a permanent solution that responds well to the larger overall urban context. As an interim use, there are several positive overall programmatic and urban design aspects of the proposal and staff recommends approval of the design concept:

- The proposal accommodates uses that are not adequately provided for elsewhere in the downtown area, including short-term visitor parking, parking for tour buses, and space for other special events. Currently, tour buses have an adverse impact on traffic circulation and particularly on the overall quality of life as they idle in various areas of the city. Public venues on the parking lot elevates the space to a destination place as well as providing for flexibility of use. Regarding urban design and siting, the site is surrounded by a variety of activities such as mixed use office and commercial activities, and Convention Center attractions. These surrounding land uses should provide the site with constant usage and activity, particularly during times festivals are held on the space.

This programmatic requirement for parking is similar to other downtown parking venues as experienced in Downtown Silver Spring and Bethesda.

- Providing new tree plantings and landscaping along the perimeter of the site screens and visually softens parked vehicles, gives the site a sense of enclosure, and strengthens the overall visual order of the surrounding streetscape. The proposal also specifically designs the landscape for each side of the site - upland plantings” on the north, a “rain garden” along the south, and a fenced “green edge” along 9th and 11th Streets.
- The proposal innovatively provides a rain water channeling, collecting, and filtering system (prior to depositing into the city storm sewer system) that is environmentally friendly. It also incorporates environmentally sensitive features such as a rain garden to filter run-off and also incorporates sustainable design principles by recycling salvageable materials from the imploded old Convention Center to provide new amenities on the site.
- The proposal restores viewsheds along the historic L’Enfant 10th and I Streets.
- Providing a landscaped open space on the U.S. Reservation at the corner of New York Avenue and 11th Street.
- The proposal makes creative use of color rather than traditional traffic-lane markings to define vehicle and pedestrian circulation throughout the site, and soften what would otherwise be an unsightly surface parking lot.

As the WCCA continues to develop preliminary and final plans for the interim parking lot, staff recommends the following:

- The submission materials included illustrations that indicated vibrant colors on the vehicle parking areas and primary circulation lane. These vibrant colors in conjunction with parked vehicles that are generally colorful and highly reflective, would be too visually intense for the site. Staff recommends using more subdued colors to define these areas to reduce the overall visual intensity of the 10.5-acre site.
- While the use of artificial turf may reduce maintenance costs, staff is concerned that it may be too unnatural and recommends that the applicant re-evaluate the use of this material. The use of artificial turf is not compatible with the use of natural plant materials in the rain garden and the Federal Reservation at 11th and New York Avenue.
- The most currently reliable parking ticket/payment system technology should be used to ensure efficient and timely vehicle movement into and out of the parking lot.
- The banners that would contain artwork along the “art corridor” connector between New York Avenue and H Street should be confined to displaying art and not general advertisement. Notice of events at the Convention Center would be acceptable as the “art corridor” is intended to bridge downtown with the Convention Center to the north.

- The illuminated elements at the corners of the site that mark and highlight pedestrian entrances should contain way-finding information such as locations of Metrorail Stations, bus stops, and nearby features and attractions.
- The “art corridor” should be excepted from approval at this time because staff does not have enough information on these elements to fully understand and thus, evaluate them. The applicant should provide material samples for all major elements of the “art corridor”.
- The Commission expects that 10th and I Streets will be re-established for vehicle traffic once permanent development plans for the former Convention Center site are implemented.

Overall, the WCCA should be commended for the design of an interim parking lot that elevates the site to a level that innovatively enhances the streetscape, provides amenities for pedestrians, and creates a destination place for a variety of public venues.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its October 4, 1979 meeting, the Commission approved the final site and building plans for the Washington, D.C. Convention Center (former) at 9th and H Streets, N.W. At this time, the Commission also approved the transfer of jurisdiction of the U.S. Reservation 174 at New York Avenue and 11th Street, N.W. from the National Park Service to the District of Columbia for Civic Center purposes.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. The Visitors element of the Plan states that:

- Development of tour bus parking and management strategies to reduce traffic congestion in and around the monumental core and near visitor attractions in other areas of the city and region should be encouraged (Policy # 4, page 180).
- Promote a pedestrian friendly monumental core and improved pedestrian access to neighborhoods and federal visitor attractions within the nation’s capital through the development of sidewalks, streetscape enhancements, and ground level retail or other amenities (Policy # 9, page 180).

National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

No perimeter security elements are proposed for the interim parking/ event facility and therefore, the proposal is not subject to the policies and recommendations contained in the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan.

National Environmental Policy Act

As a District of Columbia agency project, within the central area of the District, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review is applicable due to potential Commission approval action, as defined in the Planning Act. The Commission's Environmental and Historic Preservation Polices and Procedures provide for the review within the context and coordination of the District of Columbia's Environmental Policy act compliance process.

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. Title 20, DCMR, Chapter 72, Section 7202, *Actions For Which No Environmental Impact Screening Form Is Required*, exempts the proposal at 7202.1 (g) Any action within the Central Employment Area as defined in the zoning Regulations of the District of Columbia.

In accordance with the Commission's procedures at Section 8, the exempted action is a Categorical Exclusion for federal NEPA review purposes.

Historic Preservation Act

The old convention center site is located in the Central Area. NCPC will serve as lead Section 106 agency for this temporary parking lot, as well as for the future permanent construction on the site. The site includes a triangular reservation that is an element of the L'Enfant Plan. The rights-of-way of 10th and I Streets cross the site. The future of the rights-of-way was one subject of the Memorandum of Agreement executed in 1995 for the MCI Arena. The stipulation states: "If a new convention facility is constructed and when the debt on the existing Convention Center is retired, the District will demolish the existing Convention Center and reopen the underlying blocks of 10th and I streets, NW to vehicular traffic and restore those streets to the configuration that existed immediately prior to the construction of the existing Convention Center." The current parking lot is proposed for a period of three to five years, after which the site will be redeveloped.

The staff is just beginning consultation with the DC State Historic Preservation Office on this concept design. As a preliminary determination, staff believes the project will have no adverse effect on the L'Enfant Plan. The L'Enfant reservation will be landscaped to reinforce its boundaries and to distinguish it from the hardscape around it, New York Avenue and H Street will be planted with street trees to reinforce their edges, and a planted wall will be installed along 9th and 11th Streets to screen vehicles from the view of pedestrians

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on January 12, 2005. The Committee forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies represented. The participating agencies were: NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the District Department of Transportation; the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts approved the design concept at its January 25, 2005 meeting. The Commission expressed concern that the proposed colors that would define the individual parking spaces may be too bright. They did however, endorse the idea of using the parking lot for public events and activities and thought that it was an overall desirable approach for an interim use.