

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 6561



**FORMER WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER SITE
INTERIM PARKING LOT
900 9th Street, NW, Washington, D.C.**

Submission by the Washington Convention Center Authority

March 31, 2005

Abstract

The Washington Convention Center Authority (WCCA), on behalf of the District of Columbia government has submitted preliminary and final plans 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 preliminary and final site and building 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 preliminary and final site and building plans for an interim parking lot at the former Washington Convention Center site at 900 9th Street, NW, Washington, D.C., as shown on NCPC Map file No. 21.00(49.00)41571, for a period not to exceed five years.

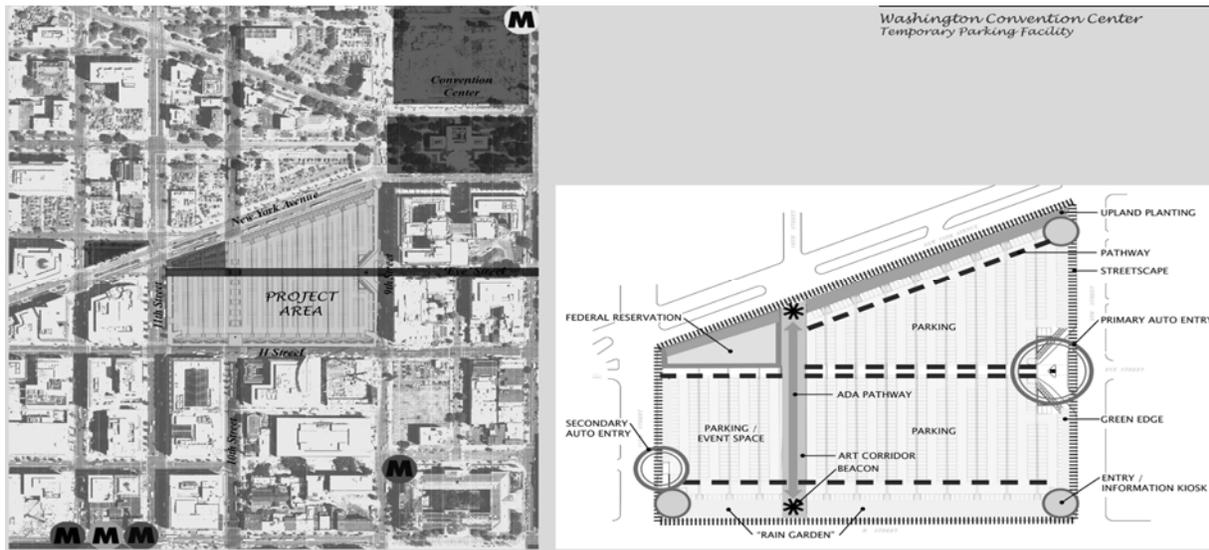
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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

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 the 10th and I Street alignments have been highlighted in the design. The I Street alignment would function as the main vehicular entry at 9th Street and the primary access for vehicles. The 10th Street alignment 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.

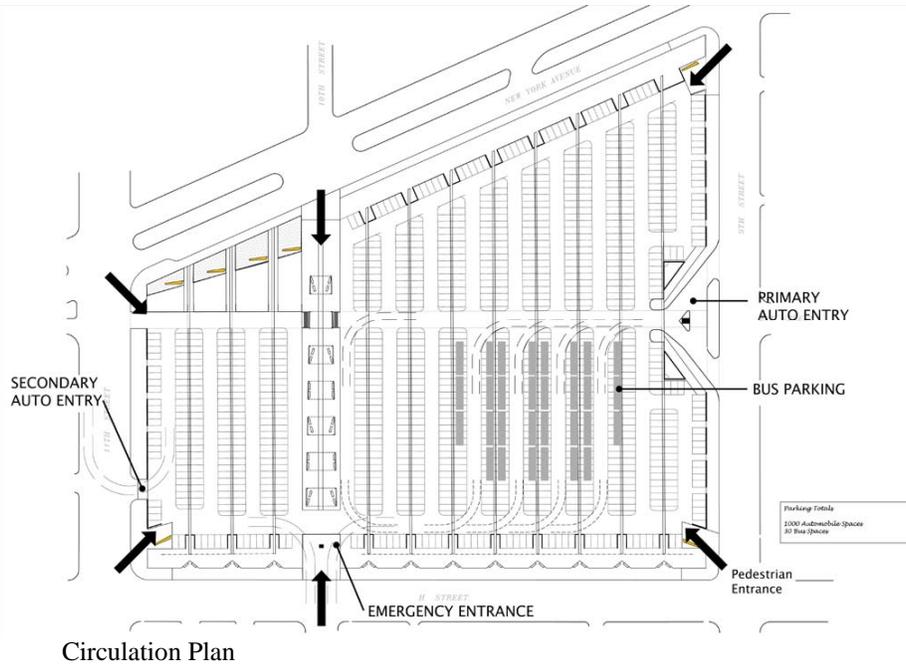
Vehicular entrances

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 for 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 walkways would be identified 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.

Ninth and Eleventh 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 channels paved with recycled glass pavers would direct storm water to the storm water management basin or "rain garden" along 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."

Tenth 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 artwork 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.

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

Plant Materials

Elevation A

Section B

Section C

Elevation D

Sections / Elevations - 1

10th Street Art Corridor Sections

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.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its February 3, 2005 meeting, the Commission:

Approved the concept design plans for an Interim Parking Lot at the former Washington Convention Center site at 900 9th Street, NW, Washington, D.C., for a period not to exceed five years.

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

- Provide additional information on the art corridor that included material samples for all major elements within this primary pedestrian circulation space.
- 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.

It is our understanding 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.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff understands that the proposed parking lot/public venue space is temporary for a period of up 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. When the Commission approved the design concept, several issues were raised and the WCCA has adequately responded:

- Additional information has been provided which gives more details of the art corridor including material samples. The principle issue previously raised by staff was the use of artificial turf along the art corridor. Staff preferred the use of natural plant material that would be more compatible with the use of natural plant material along New York Avenue and H Street. However, the natural plant material that would be used along New York Avenue and H Street would not be walked upon by pedestrians, whereas the art corridor is the primary north/south pedestrian path through the site. WCCA advises that programmatically, this area needed a surface and materials that would maintain color, withstand heavy pedestrian traffic, provide a seating area and require minimum maintenance. The use of synthetic turf meets the criteria, therefore, staff is accepting of the use of this material along the art corridor.
- WCCA ensures that the art banners along the art corridor would be limited to works of art and would not include commercial advertisements. WCCA has commenced meetings with the D.C. Commission of the Arts and Humanities to develop the art program that would be implemented.
- Regarding the most currently available technology for the parking/ticketing/payment system for the parking lot, WCCA has advised that they intend to engage the services of an experienced parking lot operator to manage the parking operation. It is expected that the operator of the lot would use state-of-the-art parking lot equipment to facilitate vehicle movement into and out of the parking lot. WCCA also advises that it is in the process of preparing a draft scope of work for a request for proposals that would include the requirement to use state-of-the-art parking technology.
- The color palette for the surface of the parking lot has been modified in a manner that now only uses one color to demark the parking spaces rather than the multi-colored approach indicated in the concept plans. Also, two separate colors are used to mark vehicle circulation areas. Staff feels that this approach would “read” more clearly and be less visually intense than the previous submission.
- WCCA has adopted the BID’s specifications for way-finding information that would be incorporated around the perimeter of the site.

Staff therefore recommends approval of the preliminary and final site and building plans.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements. 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 Policies 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 Executive Director determined that the proposed interim parking lot design and installation would have no adverse effect on the L'Enfant Plan. The proposed greenscape in the federal reservation and the trees around the edge of the site, as well as the open corridors within part of the rights-of-way of both 10th and I Streets will help to define the edges of L'Enfant Plan public space. The D.C. State Historic Preservation Office has concurred with the Executive Director's determination of no adverse effect.

CONSULTATION

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on January 25, 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 preliminary and final plans at its March 17, 2005 meeting.