

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. UR10/6685



**FORT LINCOLN URBAN RENEWAL AREA (FORT LINCOLN NEW TOWN)
WASHINGTON GATEWAY REGIONAL RETAIL CENTER**
Bounded by New York Avenue, South Dakota Avenue,
33rd Place and Fort Lincoln Drive, NE
Washington, D.C.

Submitted By the National Capital Revitalization Corporation

September 28, 2006

Abstract

The National Capital Revitalization Corporation (NCRC) has submitted concept site and building plans for the Washington Gateway Regional Retail Center in the Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Area in northeast Washington, DC. The 42-acre site is owned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is subject to the terms of the Urban Renewal Plan for the Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Area adopted by the Commission on May 6, 1972 and re-adopted on April 5, 1990. The proposed development would include four large-scale (big-box) retailers and a variety of smaller, independent retailers and service providers. The total planned development includes 424,000 gross square feet of retail space and approximately 2,200 surface parking spaces.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept site and building plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. §8722(b)(1) and (d).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Comments favorably on the overall design concept for the Washington Gateway Regional Retail Center in the Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Area shown on NCPC Map File No. 52.10(38.00)42105.

Requires the following at the preliminary design stage, in order to bring the project into conformance with the Urban Renewal Plan:

- More fully developed pedestrian connections to adjacent housing areas and Anacostia Park through the design of crosswalks, site lighting and landscaping at major intersections with Fort Lincoln Drive and 33rd Place.

- More extensive fenestration, surface treatments, or landscaping to minimize the effects of blank façade areas of both large-scale retail stores and buildings fronting on Fort Lincoln Drive. The treatments that may be used include additional fenestration, changes in façade materials/plane, landscaping, and/or other surface treatments (i.e., trellises, color, texture, etc.).
- Detailed landscape designs and lighting alternatives that minimize visual impacts to adjacent streets and residential development as well as enhance views and vistas to/from/within the site. Since much of the proposed retail design is not oriented toward Fort Lincoln Drive, landscaping or other site elements along that edge should be extensive and designed to provide for year-round screening, especially adjacent to loading areas.
- Parking and circulation plan showing trees, shrubs, and other landscape elements that reduce adverse visual impacts and may aid in minimizing stormwater runoff.
- An Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures. The EA or EIS is required to guide the decision making process for, and be reflected in, the preliminary and final site and building plans.

Recommends that the following be included at the preliminary design stage:

- Incorporation of low-impact design strategies to minimize the effects of stormwater runoff on the Anacostia River resulting from expansive areas of roof and paved surface.
- Screening methods to minimize visual effects of rooftop mechanical equipment from adjacent residential areas and circulation arteries.

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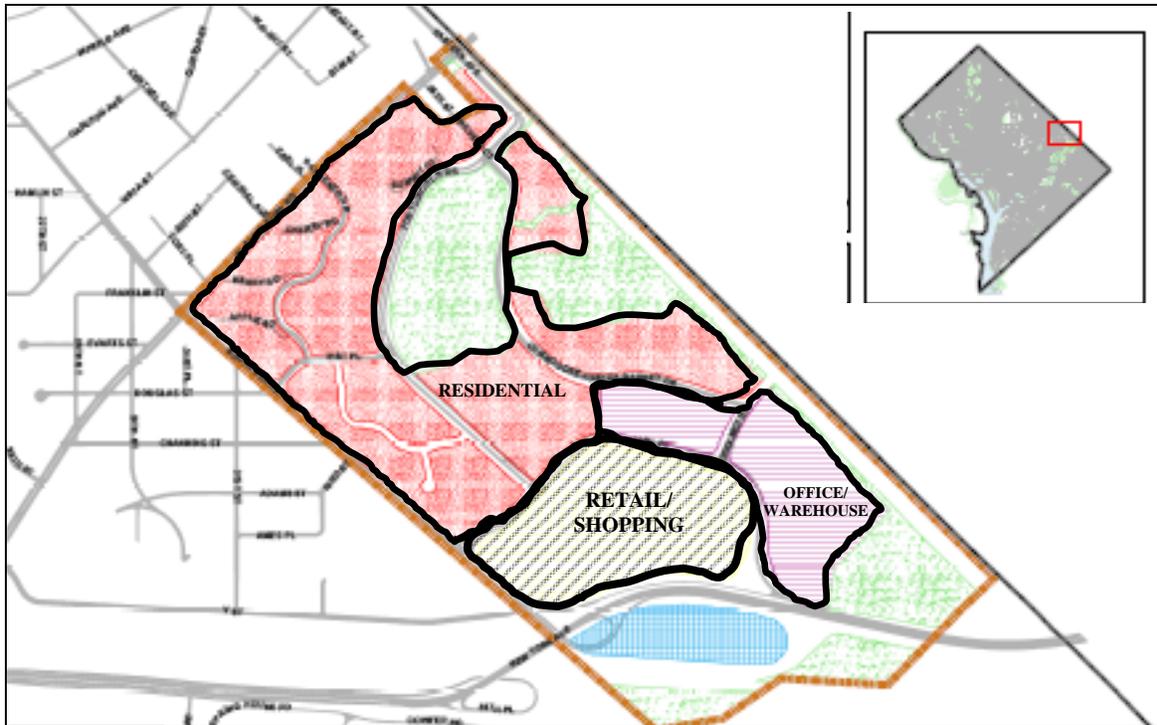
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background

The Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Area (Area) was established in 1972 as a “model in-town community” comprised of mixed-use development that would maximize urban amenities and livability. The Urban Renewal Plan (Plan) for the Area was last amended in April of 1990 to allow for development of the current Land Use Plan [NCPC Map File No. 52.10(04-12)30399]; the Washington Gateway Regional Retail Center project will satisfy the “Retail/Shopping” element of the current Plan. Accompanying the land use modifications in 1990 were circulation changes that were intended to further define the retail-shopping area as well as provide increased accessibility to the same.

The site is owned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is federal land; the applicant, RLARC/NCRC (formerly DC RLA), has been assigned oversight responsibilities and acts as the designated owner’s representative.

As a result of a Zoning amendment approved by NCPC on March 12, 2003, the land is currently zoned C-2-B; this zoning classification permits medium density mixed-use development to a maximum height of 65 feet. The proposed matter-of-right development is subject to the requirements of the Plan as well as the zoning regulations.



FORT LINCOLN – GENERAL LAND USE PLAN

Site

The 42.4-acre Washington Gateway site is part of Square 4327 in northeast Washington, DC and is bounded on the south by New York Avenue, on the west by South Dakota Avenue, and on the north/east by 33rd Place and Fort Lincoln Drive. The land is currently unimproved and is covered by a variety of trees and other vegetation.



PROJECT SITE

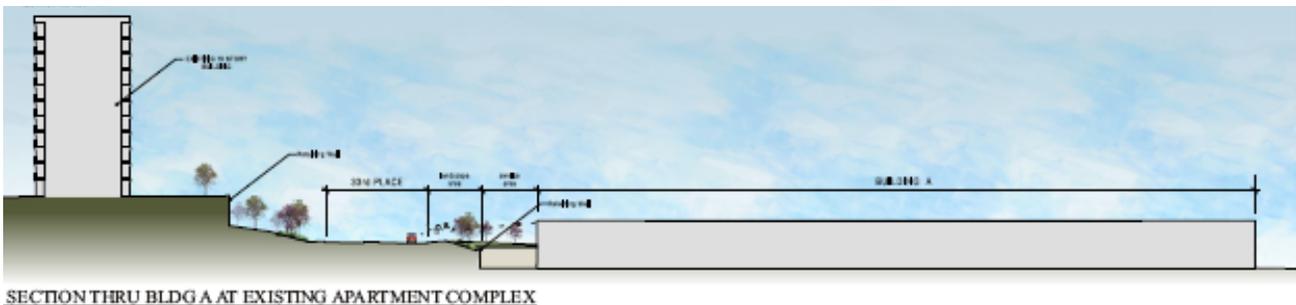
The site has relatively steep grades, with elevations rising from south to north beginning at New York Avenue; proposed development includes regrading to create a level area on which to build. The finished grade is expected to be approximately 12 feet below the intersection of Fort Lincoln Drive and 33rd Place and between 10 and 20 feet above the grade of New York Avenue; larger buildings are sited with the intent to establish site lines that minimize views of buildings and rooftops, where possible.



SITE SECTIONS at TARGET Store

The site has been vacant for more than 25 years, and is surrounded by limited residential/assisted living development to the north and office/light industrial use to the east. Mixed-income residential development (the “Heights”) to the north/northeast is currently under construction, and is comprised primarily of single family townhouses. Other areas surrounding the site contain a mix of commercial and retail uses, light industrial, public assembly/recreation areas, park lands, municipal facilities, and government offices. Primary access to/from the site is currently from New York and South Dakota Avenues.

It is important to note that the surrounding automobile-oriented residential and industrial development, accompanied by the lack of public transportation, has resulted in the Fort Lincoln New Town area evolving into more of a suburban (rather than urban) area.



SITE SECTIONS at COSTCO and Shoppers Food Warehouse

Proposal

In accordance with Section 632.00 of the “Urban Renewal Plan for the Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Area” (Urban Renewal Plan), the National Capital Revitalization Corporation (NCRC), through its subsidiary RLA Revitalization Corporation (RLARC), has submitted concept site and building plans for review by the Commission. The proposed development includes 424,000 gross square feet of retail/service space and approximately 2,200 surface parking spaces.

Included in the proposed development are four (4) freestanding anchor retail stores (Target, Costco, Shoppers Food Warehouse, and Staples) ranging from 67,000 to 15,000 square feet (big-box) and a pedestrian-oriented plaza and shopping street consisting of smaller, service-oriented stores. Modest landscaping and site embellishments are included to enhance/buffer site edges (identified as “landscape zone” on site sections), define parking areas, screen blank walls, and provide shade. Many, but not all, of the building and site elements conform to the design limitations and regulations established by the Urban Renewal Plan.



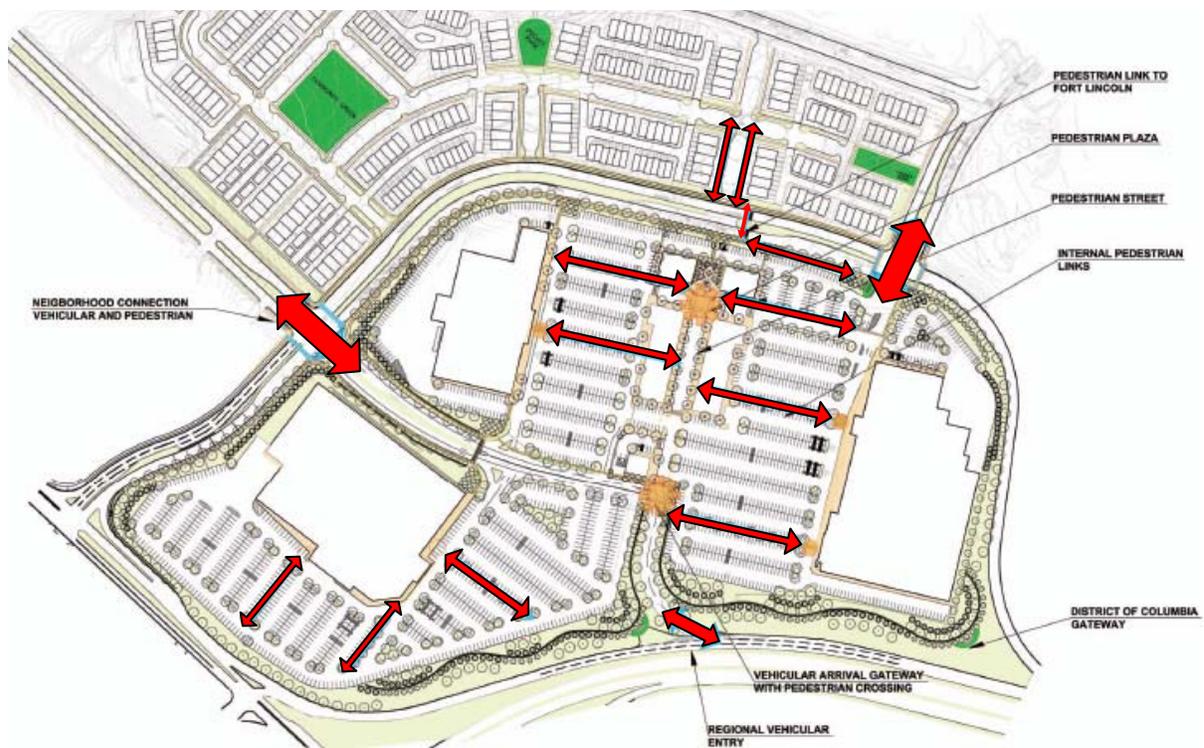
PROPOSED SITE PLAN

The planned development conforms to the established “Retail/Shopping” land use of the Plan, and is expected to aid in meeting the goal of providing a balance of shopping, recreation, employment and necessary community facilities to serve the daytime and nighttime needs of the area residents and surrounding neighborhood.

Through consultation regarding the requirements of the Urban Renewal Plan, the applicant has agreed to address staff comments regarding requirements for pedestrian connections to adjacent residential areas, design of pedestrian-oriented retail, landscaping, façade design, parking, stormwater management and other environmental issues, screening of roof-top mechanical

equipment, signage, and the need for public transportation service to the site. The proposed concept design submission reflects developments resulting from consultation, including improved pedestrian links to adjacent townhouse development, the lay-out of pedestrian shopping areas, and visual screening of loading areas. The applicant and developer are committed to providing high quality landscaping, especially along circulation routes and adjacent to loading areas, to minimize negative visual impacts to the surrounding areas; development of landscaping plans will be undertaken following more detailed engineering studies.

Also resulting from consultation, the preliminary design phase of the project is expected to further address some of the other areas that do not currently conform to the Urban Renewal Plan for Fort Lincoln: the design team has been pursuing design modifications with the big-box retailers to incorporate increased fenestration and façade treatments; links to Anacostia Park will be evaluated, in consultation with the National Park Service; an accessible bus route to the shopping area will be developed in consultation with WMATA; and environmental review and compliance will be undertaken.



PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

One of the focal points of the design is the pedestrian shopping street and plaza (see images below); the latter is expected to serve the community as a gathering place and to also provide a venue for community and cultural events. Water features, site elements (i.e., tables and benches), plantings, and other design features are intended to provide retail and service establishments at a much more human scale.



PROPOSED PEDESTRIAN SHOPPING STREET



PROPOSED PEDESTRIAN PLAZA



PROPOSED ANCHOR RETAILER (Typical)



PROPOSED INDEPENDENT RETAILER (Typical)



VIEW WESTBOUND ON NEW YORK AVENUE

In addition to serving the local neighborhood and nearby communities, the site also serves as the gateway to the National Capital; views along New York Avenue are critical, and a 75-foot setback area along the northern edge will be heavily landscaped, as required by the Plan. No buildings or structures will be placed in the setback area, and signage will be designed in accordance with the requirements of the Urban Renewal Plan.



PROPOSED ENTRANCE SIGN (Approximately 12 feet high)

Development Program

The Washington Gateway project will be developed by the Fort Lincoln/Washington Gateway, LLC (a joint venture of Fort Lincoln New Town Corporation and the Peterson Companies); the Revitalization Land Agency Revitalization Corporation (RLARC) is the designated agent of the owner, HUD.

The development team is working towards final approval of site and building plans in October 2007 with construction commencing in April 2008. Full occupancy of retail stores is anticipated by November 2009.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

In March 2003, the Commission commented favorably on a zoning amendment (NCPC File No. Z.C. 02-33) that rezoned the undeveloped land for this project from C-3-C, SP-2, and R-5-D to C-2-B. The zoning change was intended to allow for big-box retail development; at that time, NCPC recommended development as a Planned Unit Development, in part to ensure that site designs would comply with the Urban Renewal Plan's requirement to maximize environmental character and urban amenities, and to emphasize the site's scenic values and its location as the gateway to the National Capital.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The Fort Lincoln Urban Renewal Plan (Plan) defines design requirements for the retail/shopping area. The table on the following page summarizes the requirements defined by the Plan and to what extent the proposed concept design meets those requirements.

Generally, the proposed concept site and building plans for the Washington Gateway Regional Retail Center are consistent with the Plan, especially with regard to overall building and site constraints. The planned use of a local and regional retail/shopping area in the allotted location conforms to the established Land Use Plan, and the overall design also conforms to the density, Floor Area Ratio (FAR), height, and setback parameters defined. Additionally, pedestrian connections have been identified and aligned with streets and sidewalks of the adjacent residential development.

The concept design does not, however, fully respond to more detailed design requirements for façade design, building orientation, parking, landscaping, loading areas, and pedestrian links to Anacostia Park. A majority of the buildings are not oriented towards 33rd Place and Fort Lincoln Drive, and much of the primary façades of the big-box stores are blank. Landscaping for parking areas, street edges, and loading areas is not adequate given the deficiencies in those areas with regard to building design. The number of parking spaces, accommodated solely by surface lots, far exceeds the Plan's required minimum as well as the minimum spaces required by the zoning regulations. The development team has determined that structured parking is not economically or functionally feasible primarily due to soil conditions, but staff has learned through consultation that the large paved surface areas may generate excessive runoff; further investigation as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process is needed before making a final determination on this issue.

FORT LINCOLN URBAN RENEWAL PLAN
SUMMARY OF REQUIREMENTS FOR RETAIL/SHOPPING AREA

(excerpted)

| ITEM | REQUIREMENT | CONFORMANCE |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Site / Building Restrictions | Lot Occupancy, maximum: 60 percent Gross Floor Area, maximum: 700,000 sq. ft. Floor Area Ratio, maximum: 0.5 Building Height, maximum: 40 feet | Full |
| Building Orientation | Buildings and stores shall, to the extent possible, be oriented towards 33 rd Place and Fort Lincoln Drive. | Partial |
| Façades / Blank Walls | Blank walls limited to a maximum of 50 percent of the individual front store façade. | Partial |
| Loading Areas | Loading facilities shall, at no time, be visible from residential areas or adjoining Streets unless landscaping, berming or other techniques are used to minimize their impact. Depressed loading areas shall be encouraged if they minimize visual impact. | Partial |
| Parking | One parking space for each 300 square feet of gross floor area, provided within buildings or in separate parking structures, where feasible. Structures shall be designed to take full advantage of the steep slope if they minimize cut and fill. All surface parking lots shall be improved with trees, shrubs and other landscaping techniques to reduce adverse visual impacts. | Partial |
| Pedestrian Ways | Pedestrian ways, a minimum of 20 feet in width (at least 10 feet of width paved) shall be provided to link project area to adjacent areas and to Anacostia Park. Pedestrian ways shall be lighted to assure safe and convenient night time use with a standard equal to that of a local street. | Partial |
| New York Ave. Setback Area | A 75-foot building restriction shall be established on the north and south sides of the New York Avenue right-of-way to maintain and enhance the character and quality of the avenue as a major Gateway. This area shall contain landscaping of particularly high quality, to enhance the natural setting, and adequately screen parking and loading areas, service road, and adjacent roof-tops and equipment. Landscaping should give attention to scenic views from the road and include attractive street lighting and informative signs for visitors. No buildings, structures, parking lot, or advertising signs are permitted in the setback. | Full (set-back) Partial (landscaping) |
| Landscaping | Landscaping shall be an integral part of the general development program... structuring major vistas to the Anacostia River such as from Fort Lincoln Drive or from other high points, reducing the negative impact of large paved areas by including planting strips and islands for shade trees and low shrubs, and lastly, enhancing the general character of buildings, structures, and blank walls. | Partial |
| Signs / Advertising | Signs and advertising within or upon any building is subject to design and location review, and must be compatible in design with the character of the use on the site. | Full |

As the preliminary design is further developed, the applicant is required to do the following in order to address the items that do not fully comply with the plan:

- Develop more fully pedestrian connections to adjacent housing areas and Anacostia Park through the design of crosswalks, site lighting and landscaping at major intersections with Fort Lincoln Drive and 33rd Place.
- Incorporate more extensive fenestration, surface treatments, or landscaping to minimize the effects of blank façade areas of large-scale retail and façades of buildings fronting on Fort Lincoln Drive. The treatments that may be used include additional fenestration, changes in façade materials/plane, landscaping, and/or other surface treatments (i.e., trellises, color, texture, etc.).
- Develop detailed landscape designs and lighting alternatives to minimize visual impacts to adjacent streets and residential development as well as enhance views and vistas to/from/within the site (including views to the Anacostia River). Since much of the proposed retail design is not oriented toward Fort Lincoln Drive, landscaping or other site elements along that edge should be extensive and designed to provide for year-round screening, especially adjacent to loading areas.
- Create a parking and circulation plan that incorporates trees, shrubs, and other landscape elements that reduce adverse visual impacts and may aid in minimizing stormwater runoff. NCPC also encourages the applicant to incorporate low-impact design strategies to minimize the effects of stormwater runoff on the Anacostia River resulting from expansive paved areas.
- Prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures. The EA or EIS is required to guide the decision making process for, and be reflected in, the preliminary and final site and building plans for this project on federal land.

Additionally, staff recommends screening methods to minimize visual effects of rooftop mechanical equipment from adjacent residential areas and circulation arteries.

(Refer to next page for site plan illustrating items identified above.)

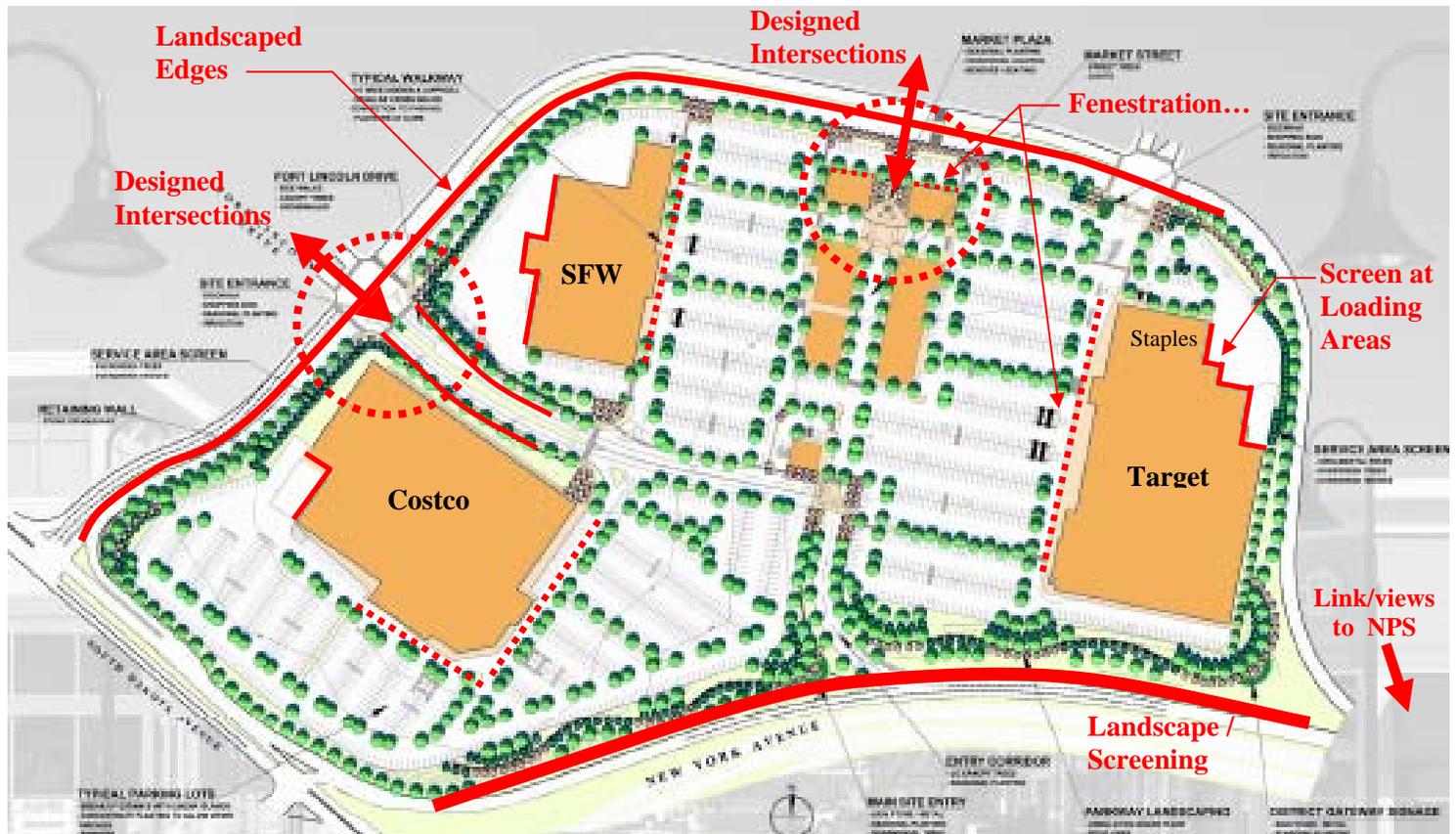
CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The proposed development plan is not inconsistent with the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

The project site is within a District Development Opportunity Area, an area that offers opportunities to accommodate new growth and development. The proposed project supports the District Land Use Element, *Policies In Support Of The Commercial Areas Objectives*, subsection 1108.1:

- (a) Promote appropriate commercial development, including centers for retail and office uses, to serve the needs of the economy of the District and its neighborhoods, to provide a focus for the expansion of housing and employment that the District will have to accommodate in the future because of its urban center role within the region, and to expand employment opportunities in the region for District residents.



GRAPHIC DEPICTION OF STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

This project is being developed on federal land. NCPC’s Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures (Environmental Procedures) do not require a NEPA document at the concept design stage, but an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required with the preliminary design submission, as outlined in NCPC’s Project Plans Submission Requirements and in accord with NCPC’s Environmental Procedures.

As the federal landowner, HUD prepared an EIS for development of the Area in 1972, and subsequently undertook additional Environmental Assessments for specific projects in the Area; due to the amount of time that has passed since the EIS was prepared, much of the EIS documentation is too dated to be used in evaluating the proposed development. The Environmental Assessments do not apply to the current project.

Components of an environmental review that are of particular interest include, but are not limited to, the following: transportation, storm drainage, sanitary sewer service, construction effects, public safety/security, and solid waste management. NCPC invites the applicant to consult with NCPC to help facilitate the NEPA review process.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

While NCPC has review responsibility for Section 106 of the NHPA, it is not part of the concept review process. There are no known visible National Register listed properties or historic districts in the vicinity of Fort Lincoln. However, past reviews for projects in the Urban Renewal Area have indicated that archeological remains and artifacts may be discovered during construction and, if encountered, should be adequately documented and archived.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed a prior proposal (subsequently withdrawn) at its July 12, 2006 meeting, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were NCPC, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the Fire Department, the District Department of Transportation, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the National Park Service, the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

The National Park Service (NPS) representative expressed concern that studies for stormwater management are needed to determine the overall environmental effects of the development. Also discussed was the pedestrian connection to Anacostia Park; NPS requested that the development team consult with the NPS to discuss possible ways to achieve this link.

The District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP) representative identified some design aspects of the concept plan that did not conform to the “Urban Renewal Plan,” including the absence of structured parking and the orientation of loading areas toward the adjacent residential areas. Additionally, DCOP pointed out that the site elevations of the residential areas to the north are higher than the project site, and the view south towards the retail center should take that into consideration.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission Single Member District Commissioner 5A12

A letter of support (dated July 19, 2006) for the project was submitted by Mr. Robert King, ANC Commissioner for Single Member District 5A12 and President of the Fort Lincoln Civic Association. Mr. King stated that the proposed project “represents a much needed opportunity to have retail goods and services made available close to home...[and to] help create new employment opportunities for our residents.”