

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 6713



**WASHINGTON CANAL PARK**  
Bounded by Canal, 2<sup>nd</sup>, I and M Streets, SE  
Washington, D.C.

Submitted By the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation

October 26, 2006

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## Abstract

The Anacostia Waterfront Corporation has submitted concept site plans for the Washington Canal Park in southeast Washington, DC. The 3-block site encompasses a portion of the former Washington Canal that connected the Anacostia River to the National Mall and the Potomac River. The proposed design includes a combination of open green space, several water elements, a public amphitheater, and an urban plaza. Low Impact Development strategies are planned to allow for on-site collection, treatment, and reuse of stormwater runoff from the park.

## Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept design pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1).

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## Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

**Comments favorably** on the overall design concept for the Washington Canal Park as shown on NCPC Map File No. 41.10(38.00)42135.

**Requests** the following at the preliminary design stage:

- More fully developed streetscape designs at street edges and crosswalks.
- Simplified overall design and consideration of materials and elements that will be more durable and require less routine maintenance.
- Lighting design demonstrating minimal visual impacts to adjacent streets and mixed-use development.
- Details of water elements demonstrating the character of the park during periods when water will be turned off.
- Design details indicating accommodations for the physically disabled, including persons with visual or hearing impairments.

**Commends** the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation and the design team for the integration of Low Impact Development strategies to minimize the effects of stormwater runoff from the site.

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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Background

Washington Canal Park is the product of a design competition funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and initiated by the DC Office of Planning (DCOP) in partnership with the Canal Park Development Association. Two significant requirements of the competition's design brief were that the park reference the history of the Washington Canal (that once connected the Anacostia River to the National Mall and the Potomac River) and that it incorporate state-of-the-art innovations in storm water management. The selected design will feature distinctive water features and exceptional landscape design, recapturing the history of the neighborhood and integrating Low Impact Development strategies to transform urban storm water into a neighborhood amenity.

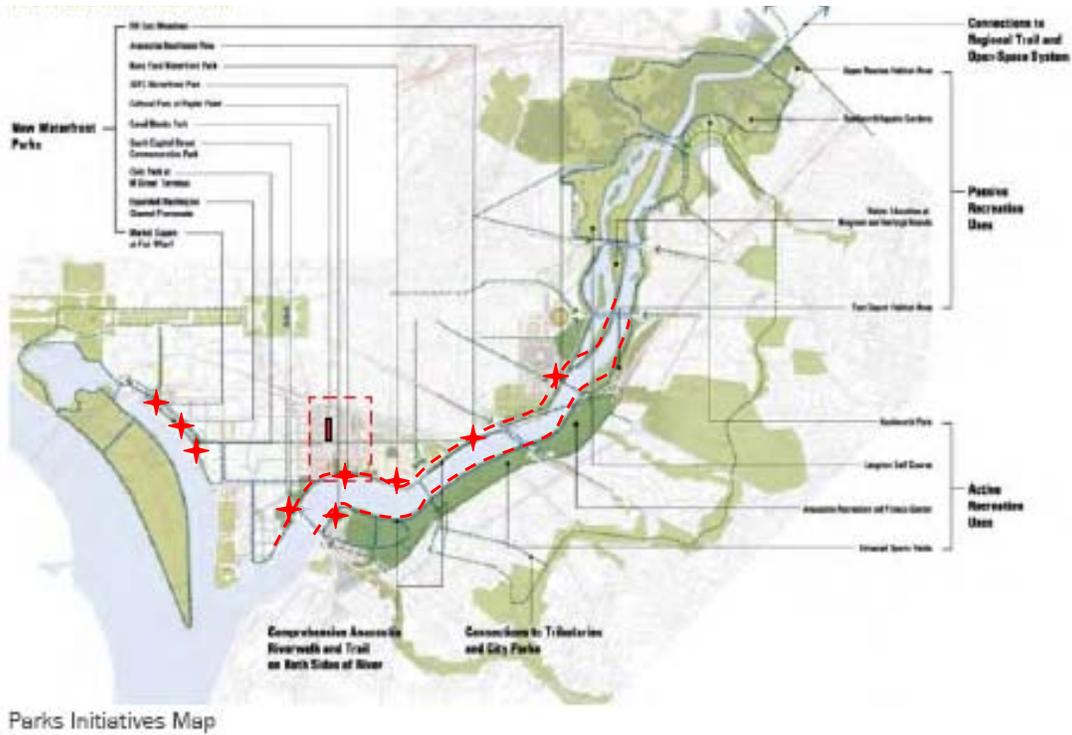
With the park's proximity to the Capper/Carrollsborg housing to the east, the new US Department of Transportation headquarters to the south, and mixed-use development to the north and west, Washington Canal Park will be a focal point for the surrounding area and a unique gathering space and centerpiece for the emerging Near Southeast waterfront neighborhood.

The land for the park is owned by the District of Columbia (formerly US Reservation 17, Parcels b, c, and d), and will be maintained under the auspices of the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation (the applicant).



### **PROJECT LOCATION**

Washington Canal Park will be the first new public park built under the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative. The Park will provide an essential link in an open space network connecting Garfield Park on Capitol Hill to Heritage Market Plaza at the new US DOT Headquarters, a waterfront park at the Southeast Federal Center, and the Anacostia River Trails.



## ANACOSTIA WATERFRONT INITIATIVE PARKS SYSTEM

### Site

The Washington Canal Park will be located on a narrow three-block site in southeast Washington, DC bounded on the east by Canal Street, on the south by M Street, on the west by 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, and on the north by I Street; the site is traversed by L and K Streets, SE. The land is currently used by the District of Columbia to store school buses, and enclosed by a chain link fence.



### PROJECT SITE

The existing site is relatively flat, with a grade that slopes approximately 1% from north to south. The design of the park will accentuate this natural slope to facilitate collection of stormwater runoff. The use of plantings, water features, and wood boardwalks will be used to define both edges and specialized areas of the park, while also serving to harvest rainwater.

### Proposal

The Washington Canal Park will span the three blocks bounded by Canal, 2<sup>nd</sup>, I and M Streets, SE, and will be designed to reflect the former Washington Canal that once connected the Anacostia River to the National Mall and the Potomac River. This park is the first of several planned community and public parks to be placed along the Anacostia Riverfront, and is intended to eventually link to the system of riverfront parks and trails as well as the Capitol Hill neighborhood to the north (past the Southeast Freeway).

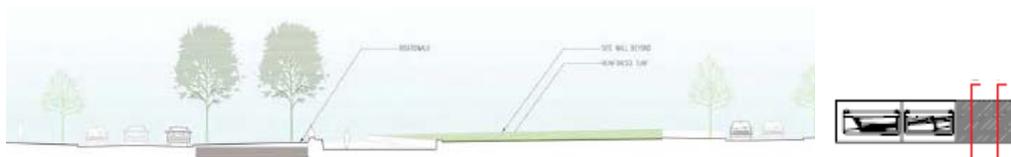
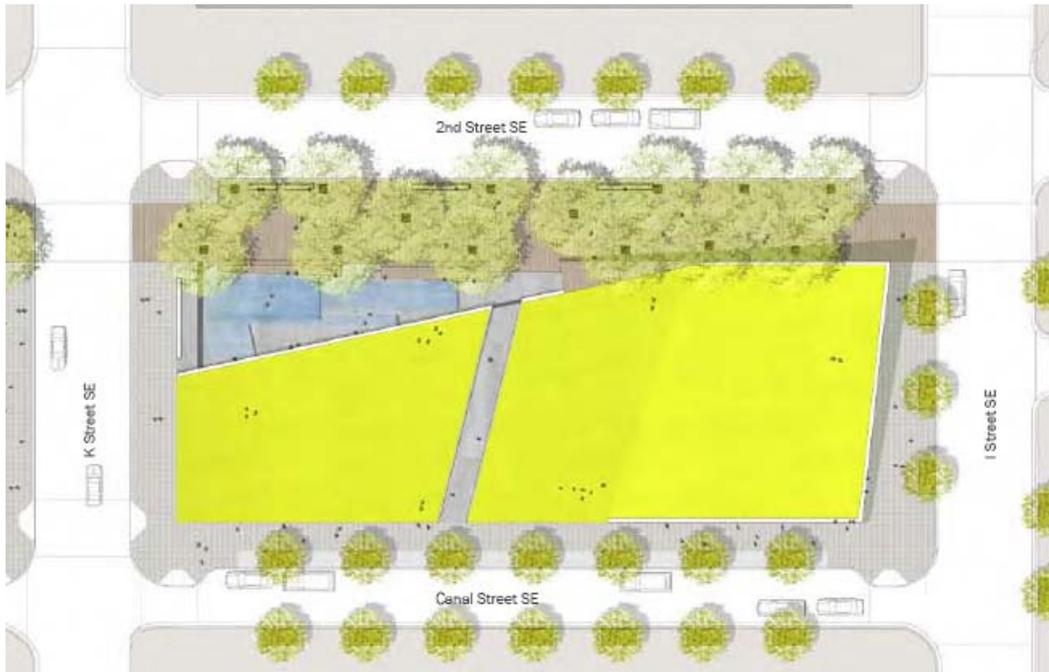
The park will have three distinct, yet related, areas physically separated by city streets. The park's theme is "Convey-Celebrate-Collect." This refers to the movement from north to south of both people and water through the park. The north block has a passive recreation area (seeded) and an emergent water feature, the middle block has a passive water feature and an aquatic garden, and the southern block has an amphitheater and plaza. A certified hardwood boardwalk along the western edge of the site connects all three blocks and is planned to extend north to Garfield Park.



**PROPOSED SITE PLAN**

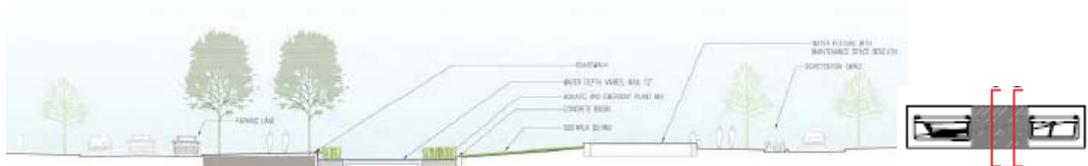


**PERSPECTIVE ALONG BOARDWALK**



**NORTH BLOCK: PLAN AND SECTION**

**North Block:** The north block serves as the starting point of the park and will contain a large open green space and an emergent water feature. The site slope will be accentuated by creation of a raised land form at the northern end. The lawn is intended to provide neighborhood open space for picnics and passive recreation. The water feature is to be of dark sloped stone with horizontal jets of water and overlapping scrim.



### MIDDLE BLOCK: PLAN AND SECTION

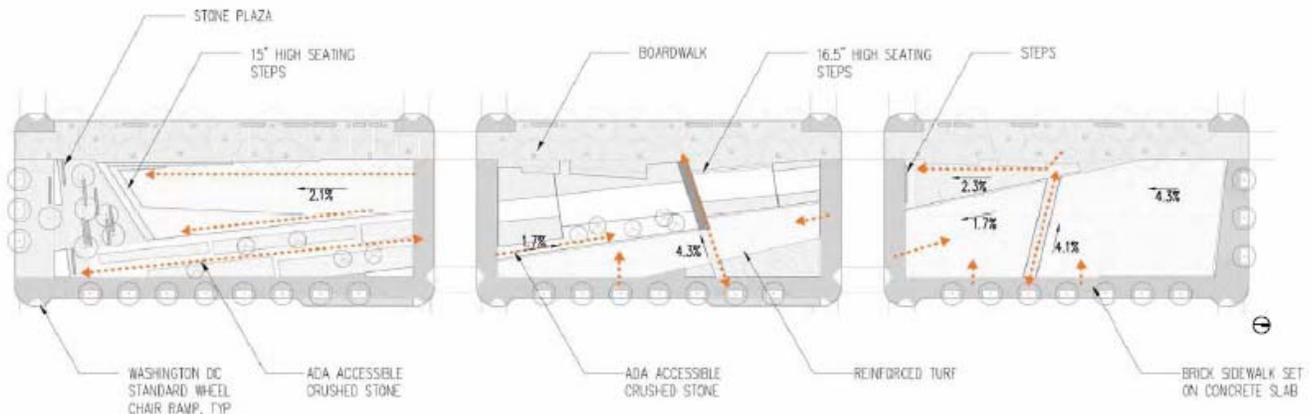
**Middle Block:** The middle block connects to the north block conceptually with a reciprocal water feature with horizontal jets of water creating a “raindrop” effect. The western portion of the site has an aquatic garden with horticultural displays. The aquatic garden is intended to be fed by runoff from the park blocks, and will contain plants and displays recalling the history of the canal and the area’s swamps.



**SOUTH BLOCK: PLAN AND SECTION**

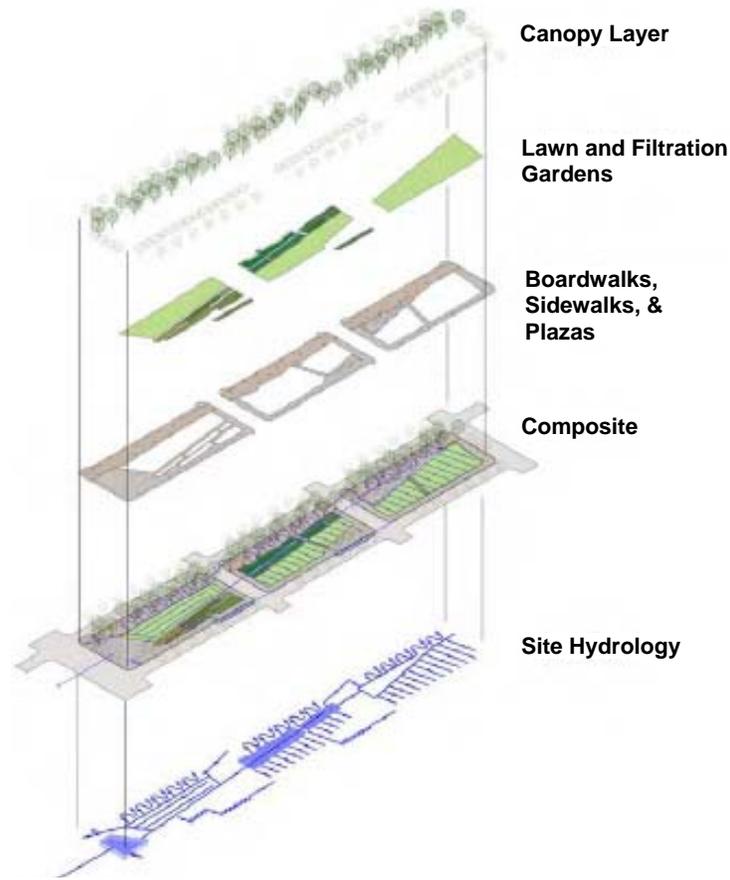
**South Block:** The south block will contain an agricultural garden, amphitheater, and plaza. The garden plantings and configuration are intended to evoke the seasonal shifting of the site’s history and to offer a place for community involvement in the care of the park. The amphitheater at the south end of the park, created as a series of shallow angular steps, will accommodate a variety of uses from social gatherings to musical performances. The plaza along M Street will be paved for active use by both neighborhood residents and office workers and will also serve as a cover for the water storage cistern below that will collect water from the entire site (and potentially from the adjacent development).

The park’s design allows for accessibility for disabled users, utilizing ADA-compliant ramps and surfaces (i.e., brick pavers, wood boardwalk, and gravel walkways). Water features are also accessible to visitors in wheelchairs.



**ACCESSIBILITY**

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the park's design is its plan to maximize the benefits of Low Impact Development strategies; stormwater runoff in the park (and potentially from the adjacent building rooftops) will be collected, treated, and reused on-site. Site hydrology directs stormwater to a cistern under the plaza at the south terminus of the site; this water will then be reused for site irrigation.



**LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT**



**BOARDWALK SECTION**

The boardwalk along the park's western edge will facilitate water collection as well as shelter and circulation through the site. A bioretention planting trench will be located under the boardwalk, and water will be directed to the trench from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street as well as through the surface joints of the boardwalk itself. The soil mix in the trench will serve to slow, cool, and clean the stormwater runoff prior to incorporating it into the larger hydrological systems of the site.

### Development Program

With the formation of the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation and an established working budget of approximately \$6 million, the design is being carried forward with the intent of opening the park in the spring of 2008.

The Anacostia Waterfront Corporation is exploring innovative methods of ensuring the long-term maintenance and operation of the park, including partnerships with local property and business owners and the District of Columbia. At this stage, maintenance principles anticipate organic gardening including natural fertilization, drought-tolerant plant selection, and reuse of waster generated on-site.

### PROJECT ANALYSIS

The Washington Canal Park concept design reflects a very thorough and elegant response to site history, conditions, and surrounding development. The land forms, geometry, and unpredictability of some of the elements create a complex composition of spaces large and small, open and intimate. The full integration of Low Impact Development technologies is particularly commendable.

There are a few issues that staff encourages the design team to explore further when moving on to preliminary and final design, as follows:

- **Street Edges and Crosswalks** require careful consideration and attention to detail due to the mixed-use environment of the park. Pedestrian safety when traveling between park blocks is critical. The applicant and design team should continue to work with the District Department of Transportation to design transverse streets (K and L Streets, SE) and intersections to ensure safety and accessibility for pedestrians.
- **Maintenance** of the site, given the complexity of the design will be very costly in both labor and costs. The design team is encouraged to explore the use of more durable and self-sustaining materials wherever possible, without compromising the design intent. Phased installation of materials and elements requiring more routine maintenance may be considered; partnerships for care of these elements should be established prior to installation.
- **Lighting** for the site will be of major impact to the overall security of the site after dark, as well as to allow park use during evening hours. Lighting should also be responsive to the adjacent residential community, avoiding bright lights toward those areas.
- **Water features** should be designed for year-round use and/or appearance; aesthetics should not be compromised in cold months when water must be turned off. Also, the effects of mineral content of D.C. water should be considered when selecting materials and system components.
- **Accessibility** for physically disabled users should continue to be developed, including persons with visual or hearing impairments.

## 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.

### National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Because the site is outside of the central area, NCPC does not have independent NEPA responsibility. However, environmental review is required by the District of Columbia in accordance with the requirements of the District Office of the Environment.

### National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

Because the site is outside of the central area, NCPC does not have independent Section 106 responsibility.

## COORDINATION

### Coordinating Committee

The project was reviewed and fully coordinated by all parties in attendance at the October 11, 2006 Coordinating Committee meeting.

### Commission of Fine Arts

At its meeting on October 19, 2006, the Commission of Fine Arts enthusiastically approved the concept design, and stressed the need for material exploration as part of the preliminary design phase. The Commission also encouraged the design team to explore less maintenance-heavy and more durable design overall, including alternative materials for the boardwalk along the west edge of the park.