

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 1841

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## CHANCERY OF ISRAEL BUILDING ADDITION

International Center, Connecticut Avenue and Van Ness Street, NW  
Washington, DC

United States Department of State

April 27, 2006

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### Abstract

The United States Department of State, on behalf of the Chancery of Israel, is submitting concept site and building plans for an addition to the Chancery of Israel located in the International Center at the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Van Ness Street, NW. The submission also includes proposed landscape and site modifications around the chancery addition.

### Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept design for building plans pursuant to the International Center Act of 1968, as amended, Public Law 90-553 (1968), and Public Law 97-186 (1982), at Section 3

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### Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

**Comments favorably** on the concept site and building plans for a building addition to the Chancery of Israel located, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 72.10(38.00)41963 **except** for the proposed pedestrian entrance facing Van Ness Street, NW.

**Advises** the applicant to consult with staff prior to any further design of the proposed pedestrian entrance facing Van Ness Street, NW in order to ensure that it is not inconsistent with NCPC's *Development Controls for the Chancery Section of the International Center in the District of Columbia*, which, in Section 551.00 of Building Frontage and Setbacks, states that no building shall front on Van Ness Street.

**Requires** that the applicant include the following information with the preliminary submission:

- Justification and waiver requests for amendments to NCPC's *Development Controls for the Chancery Section of the International Center in the District of Columbia* for as noted:
  - Section 540.00 Lot Occupancy to allow the Lot occupancy to exceed the maximum allowable area.
  - Section 550.00 Building Frontage and Setbacks to allow portions of the proposed building addition to be located on the property line and within the setback area.
  - Section 611.00 Fences and Retaining Walls to allow the proposed curved metal wall to be located outside the property line.
  
- Documentation of permission for the construction of the proposed curved metal wall and temple foundations in Department of State property.
- Additional lighting information and foot candle modeling describing the illumination of the proposed addition.
- Documentation of compliance with the Commission's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures (69 FR 41299) as updated April 1, 2004.
- Additional information that documents the design and function of the proposed pedestrian entrance facing Van Ness Street.

**Commends** the applicant for collaborating with NCPC and the District of Columbia Department of Transportation to replace the temporary security barriers, located in Van Ness Street, NW and across the adjacent sidewalk, with permanent perimeter security elements.

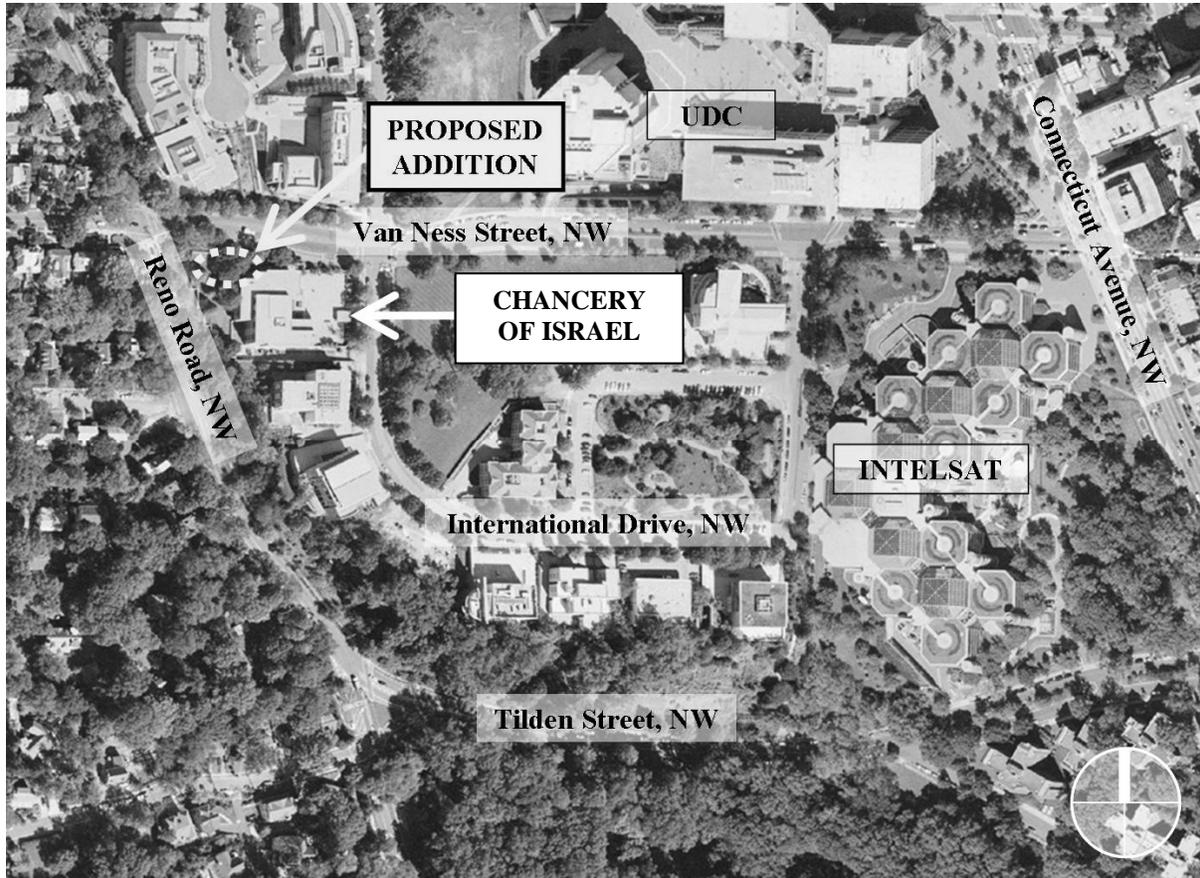
**Recommends** that the applicant develop and submit a coordinated, permanent perimeter security design concept with the proposed chancery addition preliminary and final submissions.

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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Site

The Chancery of Israel is located in the International Center at the intersection of the Connecticut Avenue and Van Ness Street, NW. The chancery is located on Lot 1 and is bounded by International Drive, NW to the east, Van Ness Street, NW to the north, Reno Road, NW to the west and the Chancery of Ghana to the south.



Site Aerial

### Background

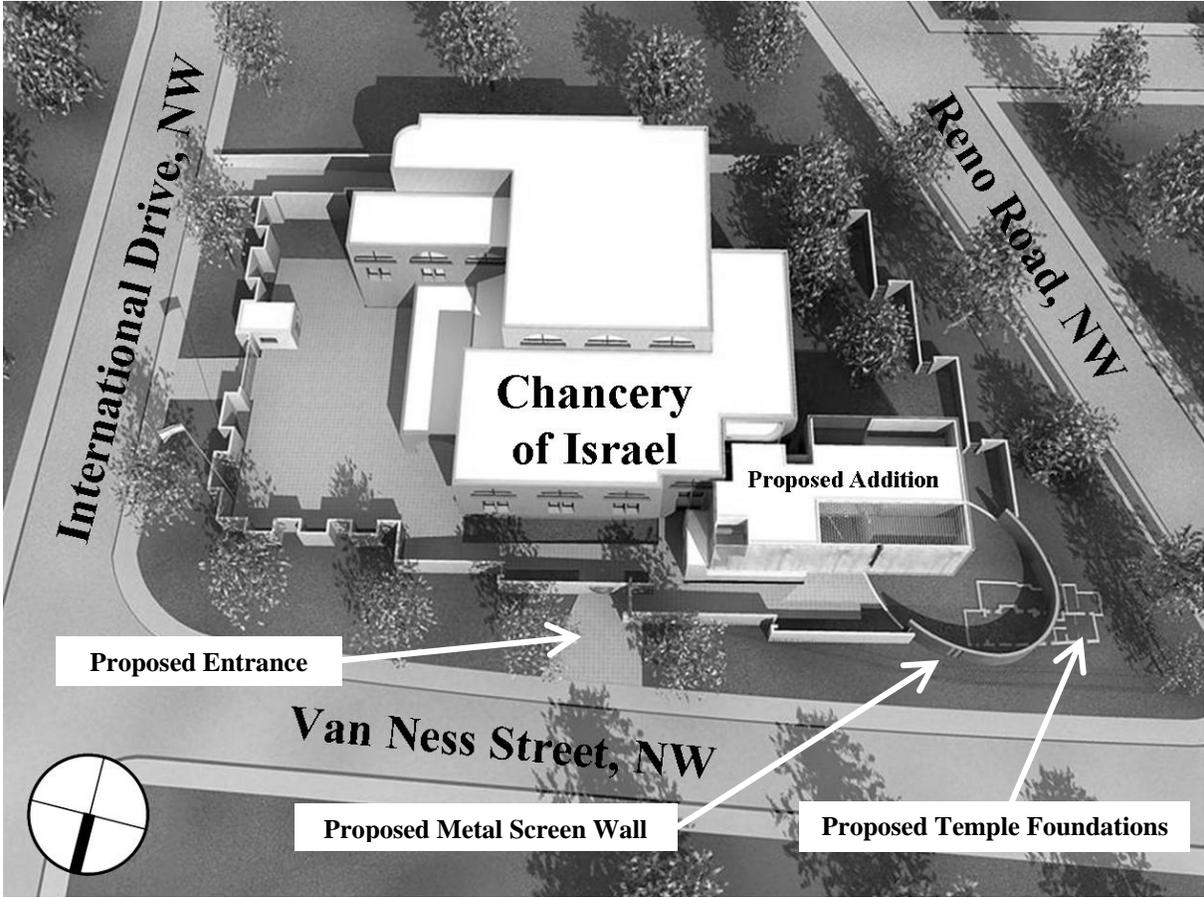
At its March 30, 1979 meeting, the Commission approved the final site and building plans for the Chancery of Israel in the International Center, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 72.10(38.00)28606. The Chancery of Israel was the first facility built in the International Center.

At its December 6, 2001 meeting, the Commission approved the preliminary and final site development plans for the security wall at the Chancery of Israel in the International Center, as shown on NCPC Map File No 72.10(38.00)-40971.

### Proposal

The United States Department of State (DOS) is submitting concept site and building plans for a building addition to the Chancery of Israel. The proposed 2,767 square foot, three-story addition will project from and connect to the northwest corner of the existing chancery. The addition will be accessed externally from the existing forecourt, via a passage running on the north side of the chancery and through an entrance off of Van Ness Street, NW, and internally from the chancery on several levels. The addition will be clad with an internally illuminated glass curtain which will be etched and sandblasted on both faces with tree designs. The proposed project also includes site improvements. Corner segments of the existing brick security screen wall will be

removed and replaced by a commissioned, curved metal wall which will feature inscriptions and/or graphic images. The proposed wall will create a private garden space for the chancery addition and will serve as public feature for the site. The wall will span over the proposed foundation plan recreating an ancient temple on the ground plane.



Proposed Site



Existing Chancery and Proposed Addition  
(View from Van Ness Street, NW)



**Proposed Chancery Addition and Curved Metal Screen Wall**  
**(View from Van Ness Street, NW and Reno Road, NW)**



**Proposed Curved Metal Screen Wall**

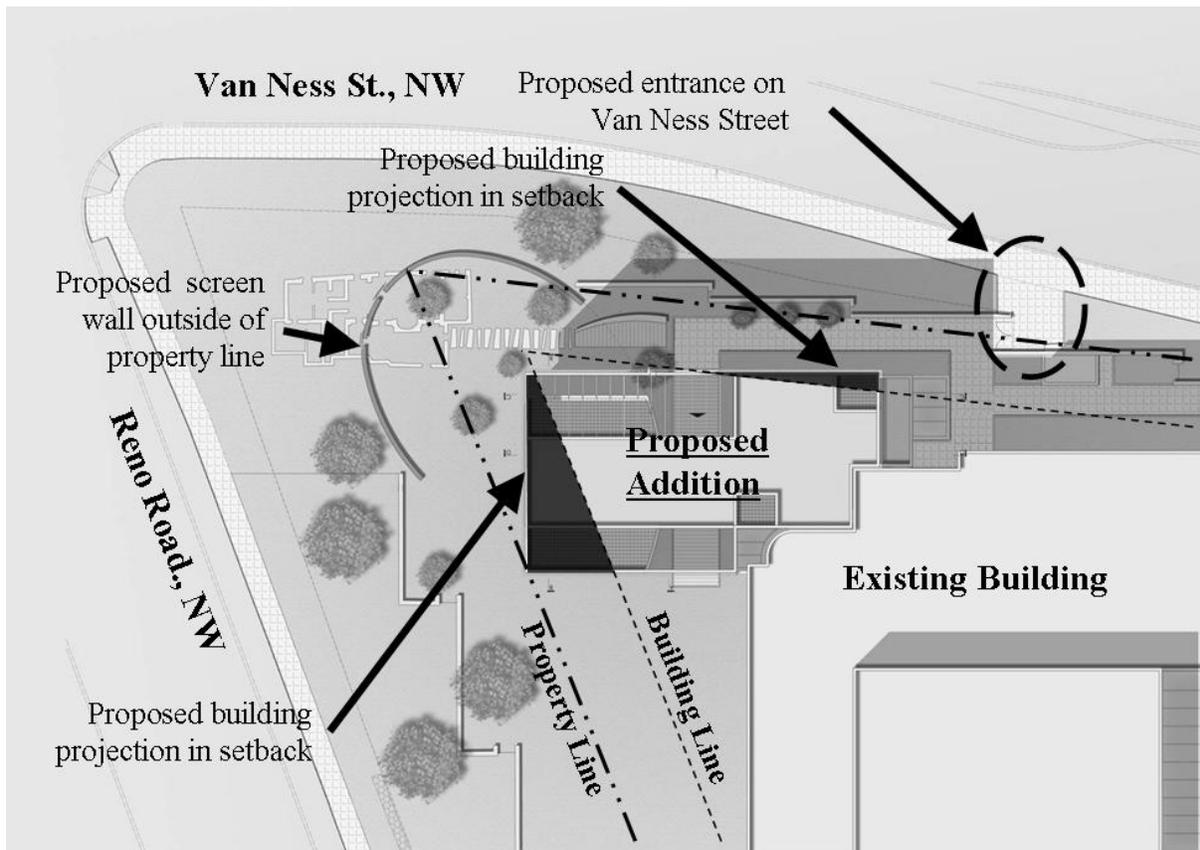
**Development Program**

Applicant: Department of State  
Architects: Knafo + Klimer  
Acreage: 1.1795 acres (Lot 1)  
Estimated Cost: *information not provided by applicant*  
Schedule: *information not provided by applicant*

## PROJECT ANALYSIS

### Executive Summary

Staff is in support of the proposed addition concept to the Chancery of Israel. The scale of the addition is compatible with the existing chancery and the architectural and site elements will stimulate cultural and public interest in the existing setting. The addition will conceptually serve as a gateway to the western entrance of International Center. Staff requires that the applicant include waivers to NCPC's *Development Controls for the Chancery Section of the International Center in the District of Columbia* in order to justify exceeding the Lot area and locating proposed design elements outside of the building line. Staff also requests DOS documentation that permits the applicant to build outside of their property line on DOS property. Staff is looking forward to working with applicant to develop a design concept to replace temporary security barriers, located in Van Ness Street, NW and across the sidewalk, into a permanent and integrated security solution.



Development Control Issues

Staff notes that the total building area (including the proposed addition) exceeds the maximum allowable lot occupancy by six percent. Section 540.00 Lot Occupancy in NCPC's *Development Controls for the Chancery Section of the International Center in the District of Columbia* states that (541.00) "the Building Area on a Lot shall not exceed 30 percent of the area of the Lot."

The total building area is the 18,515 square feet (the existing building is 15,748 square feet and the proposed addition is 2,747 square feet). The total Lot area is 51,380 square feet. **Staff requires the applicant to provide justification and request a waiver to amend the development controls with their preliminary and final submissions.**

Staff notes that portions of the proposed project extend onto the property line and into the building setback area. 550.00 Building Frontage and Setbacks in NCPC's *Development Controls for the Chancery Section of the International Center in the District of Columbia* states that "all buildings shall be set back not less than twenty (20) feet from the ... side Lot lines on all Lots and ... twenty (20) feet from the rear Lot Lines on Lots on Lots Nos. 1 ... ." **Staff requires the applicant to provide justification and request a waiver to amend the development controls with their preliminary and final submissions.**

**Staff advises further consultation prior to any further design of the proposed pedestrian entrance facing Van Ness Street, NW** in order to ensure that it is not inconsistent with NCPC's *Development Controls for the Chancery Section of the International Center in the District of Columbia*, which, in Section 551.00 of Building Frontage and Setbacks, states that "no building shall front on Van Ness Street..." On-street parking and standing vehicles are prohibited on Van Ness Street by the District of Columbia. Staff notes that the applicant has agreed to further consultation on the design of this building element.

Staff notes that the proposed curved metal wall is located outside of the property line and on Department of State property. Section 611.00 Fences and Retaining Walls in NCPC's *Development Controls for the Chancery Section of the International Center in the District of Columbia* states that "fences and retaining walls may be constructed on Lot lines and within setback areas and building lines, provided that"... (611.12) "no fences ... or other construction shall be ...within any building restriction line... ." **Staff requires the applicant to provide documentation with their preliminary and final submissions, from the Department of State, that grants permission to build the proposed curved metal wall on Department of State property. Staff requires the applicant to provide justification and request a waiver to amend the development controls with their preliminary and final submissions.**

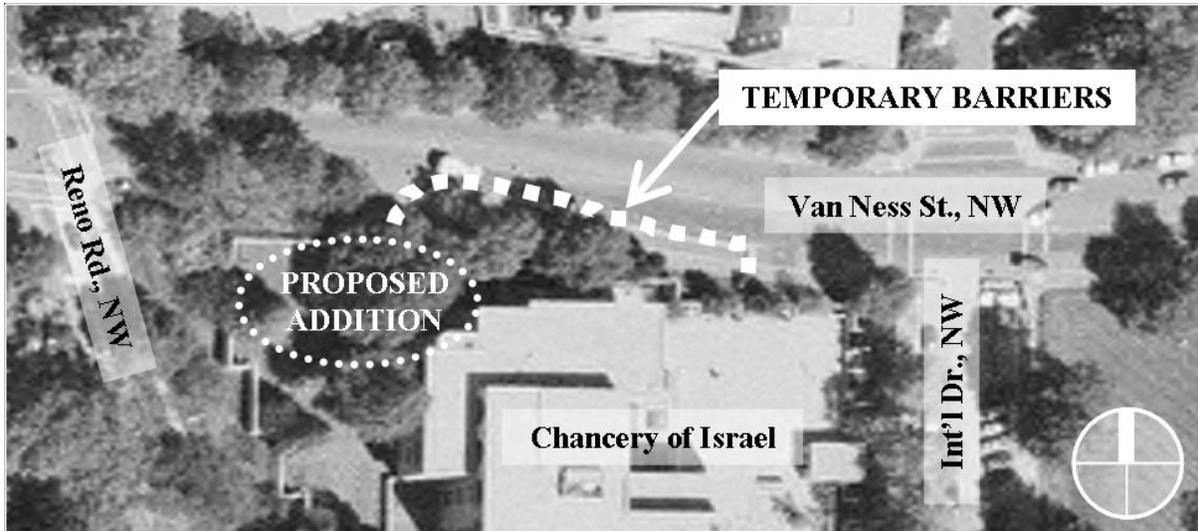
Staff notes that elements of the proposed temple foundation plan are located outside of the property line and on Department of State property. **Staff requires the applicant to provide documentation with their preliminary and final submissions that grants permission, from the Department of State, to build the proposed temple foundations on Department of State property.**

Staff encourages the applicant to minimize existing tree disturbance and removal for the chancery addition and site features and suggests that trees be replacement only if there are unavoidable conditions. Staff requests that the applicant depict the existing and proposed tree canopy, including street and building yard trees, as well as other site features, such as the existing cable barrier, in their the preliminary and final submissions.

Staff is concerned that the light from the proposed internal illuminated curtain wall may impact nearby yards, buildings and/or streets. Section 660.00 Outdoor Lighting in NCPC's

*Development Controls for the Chancery Section of the International Center in the District of Columbia* states that (661.00) “if any Lot is lighted for nighttime use for safety or display purposes, the lights shall not cast their director rays upon nearby yards, buildings or streets.” **Staff recommends that the applicant include specific lighting information and footcandle modeling with their preliminary and final submissions.**

Staff recommends that the applicant provide further information and samples of the proposed finish materials with their preliminary and final submissions.



**Site Aerial: Existing Temporary Security Barriers on Van Ness Street, NW**



**Existing Temporary Barriers in Van Ness Street and Across the Sidewalk**

During an initial site visit, adjacent to the proposed chancery addition site, staff noticed temporary security barriers/planters placed in Van Ness Street, closing one of the two east bound traffic lanes, and across the adjacent sidewalk. DDOT found DOS documentation from August 1998 that requested a September 1998 meeting with DDOT to discuss security measures for the Chancery of Israel and how this would impact public space and traffic control. Staff notes that

NCPC was not involved with this discussion nor were the temporary security barriers reviewed and approved by NCPC. DDOT did not provide any documentation negotiating any permanent solutions. On March 9, 2006, NCPC coordinated a on site meeting with DOS, Chancery of Israel and DDOT staffs to assess the current situation and to discuss potential alternatives to replace the temporary security barriers with a permanent solution. **Staff requests that the applicant develop permanent perimeter security along Van Ness Street with NCPC, DDOT, Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) and include it with their chancery addition preliminary and final submissions.**

## CONFORMANCE

### Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Staff has determined that proposed project is consistent with the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements*, in particular policies in the Foreign Missions and International Organizations element. The addition “will demonstrate an appreciation of the architectural style and landscape of the surrounding environs while representing the finest architectural thought or the corresponding nation” and will “add visual interest and character, contribute to the cultural life, and promote diverse and lively communities.” The landscape design will “promote a beautiful and healthy environment by preserving the tree canopy and avoiding the destruction of mature trees.”

### National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

Staff recommends that the applicant review NCPC’s *National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan* prior to developing design concepts for permanent perimeter security along Van Ness Street and streetscape. Permanent perimeter security elements should be incorporated into well designed landscape features and site amenities in a manner that enhances the public realm, rather than placing foreign and redundant objects in the landscape and streetscape. To the maximum extent possible, minimize the placement of barriers within and across the public realm. Staff also recommends that the applicant review *The National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan Objectives and Policies*, adopted May 2005, prior to submitting the concept design for permanent perimeter security with the preliminary and final submissions of the chancery addition.

### National Environmental Protection Act

Environmental documentation is not required for concept approval pursuant to the Commission’s Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures. However, NCPC staff forcefully reminds the applicant that NEPA documentation will be required for the further submission review of this project by NCPC. The Commission’s updated Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures (69 FR 41299) for actions at the International Center specifically stipulate the preparation of an Environmental Assessment of plans showing the location, height, bulk, number of stories, size, and provisions for open space...in and around buildings for foreign governments and international organizations on land sold or leased by the

Secretary of State in the northwest section of the District of Columbia bounded by Connecticut Avenue, Tilden Street, Reno Road, 36<sup>th</sup> Street, Yuma Street, and Van Ness Street.

Additionally, as previously undertaken by the DOS, any amended development control guidelines for the International Center have been analyzed by DOS through an Environmental Assessment developed by DOS in cooperation with NCPC. The last recent effort for such action occurred regarding amendment of the development controls pertaining to the establishment of the land area for the Chancery of the People's Republic of China. Staff recommends the Commission highlight the NEPA requirement to the DOS.

#### National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The Department of State has determined that proposed actions inside the International Chancery Center are not subject to further review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act because the buildings are not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The staff concurs, finding also that National Register-listed residential properties to the south of the Center would not be affected by the proposed project.

#### CONSULTATION

##### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its February 8, 2006 meeting, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the submission has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

##### Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed and approved the proposed concept at their January 19, 2006 commission meeting.