

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

E. Keller

NCPC File No. 6670



FORT RENO PARK
FORT RENO PARK BALL FIELD RENOVATION
Belt Road and Chesapeake Street, NW
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by The District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation
On behalf of the National Park Service

July 27, 2006

Abstract

The District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation has submitted a proposal for the construction of new recreation facilities on a portion of Fort Reno Park. The District of Columbia manages this section of the park area under a management/use agreement for the creation of active athletic fields. The final plans consist of one new baseball diamond, one new full regulation sized soccer field, one new practice soccer field area, and renovation of a pathway and rebuilt sidewalk.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary and final site development plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary and final site development plans for the renovation of Fort Reno Park ball fields as shown on NCPC Map File No. 10.05(70.00)-42072.

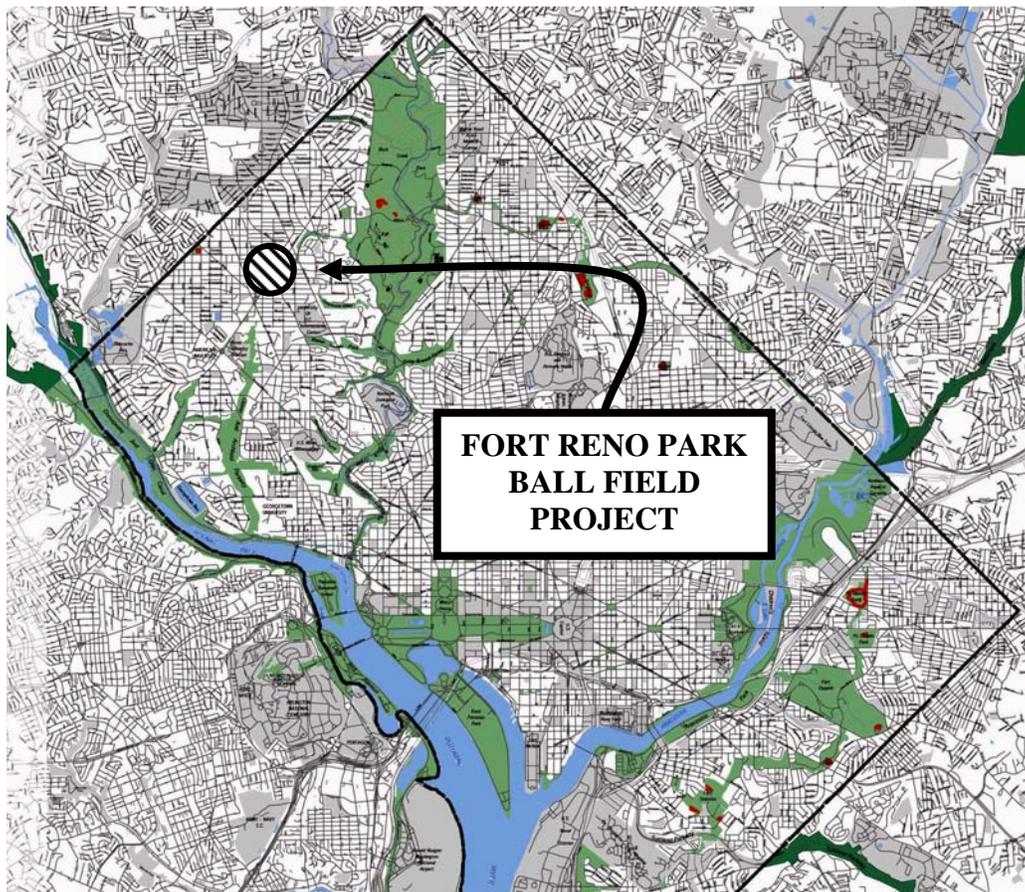
Encourages the National Park Service to improve the conditions, visibility, connections and overall management of the Fort Circle Parks in consultation with the National Capital Planning Commission, the District of Columbia, and local ANCs and neighborhood organizations.

* * *

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

This project site consists of approximately 9.8 acres of the full 45 acres that comprises Fort Reno Park and is located at the extreme southwestern corner of the park. The renovation work area is at the intersection of Belt Road and Chesapeake Street, NW. The whole of Fort Reno Park is titled to the United States and is administered by the National Park Service as a component of the Fort Circle Parks of Washington.



PROJECT LOCATION WITHIN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Background

In 2003 the District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation signed an agreement with the National Park Service to develop and maintain a 9.8 acre portion of Fort Reno Park. The Department of Parks and Recreation subsequently contemplated renovation of recreation fields for community use and organized athletic activities. The National Park Service agreed to the

alterations and after initial work with both the community and the Advisory Neighborhood Councils, the Park Service and District agency chose a preferred approach to establishing the renovated area in 2005. The Department of Parks and Recreation has completed plans according to the preferred approach and has submitted the project, on behalf of the National Park Service, for review by the Commission.



AERIAL VIEW OF SOUTHWEST PORTION OF FORT RENO PARK WITH EXISTING RECREATION FIELDS

Proposal

In 2003 the National Park Service agreed to allow the District to maintain the existing ball field at Fort Reno, and to permit the Department to develop and maintain new ball fields on the site within the footprint of a development Alternative analyzed by the Park Service's environmental review document of 2001. The agreement specified the approach for field renovation (see page 10). In addition, consistent with the findings of the 2001 environmental review, the Department of Parks and Recreation was advised by the National Park Service that Phase II archeology would have to be conducted if ground disturbing activities were proposed.

However, as detailed in the Department's subsequent design plans for the ball fields, the limited ground disturbing activities associated with the current proposed construction will occur in areas where the recent Phase I investigation indicated there are few, if any, intact historic resources. In the areas where there is a potential for historic resources, the improvements will be constructed on added fill. Because the proposed renovations and expansion of the fields will not require significant excavation, the National Park Service in consultation with the D.C. Historic Preservation Officer determined that a Phase II archeological investigation would not be necessary, but concluded that monitoring of all excavations at Fort Reno would be advisable.

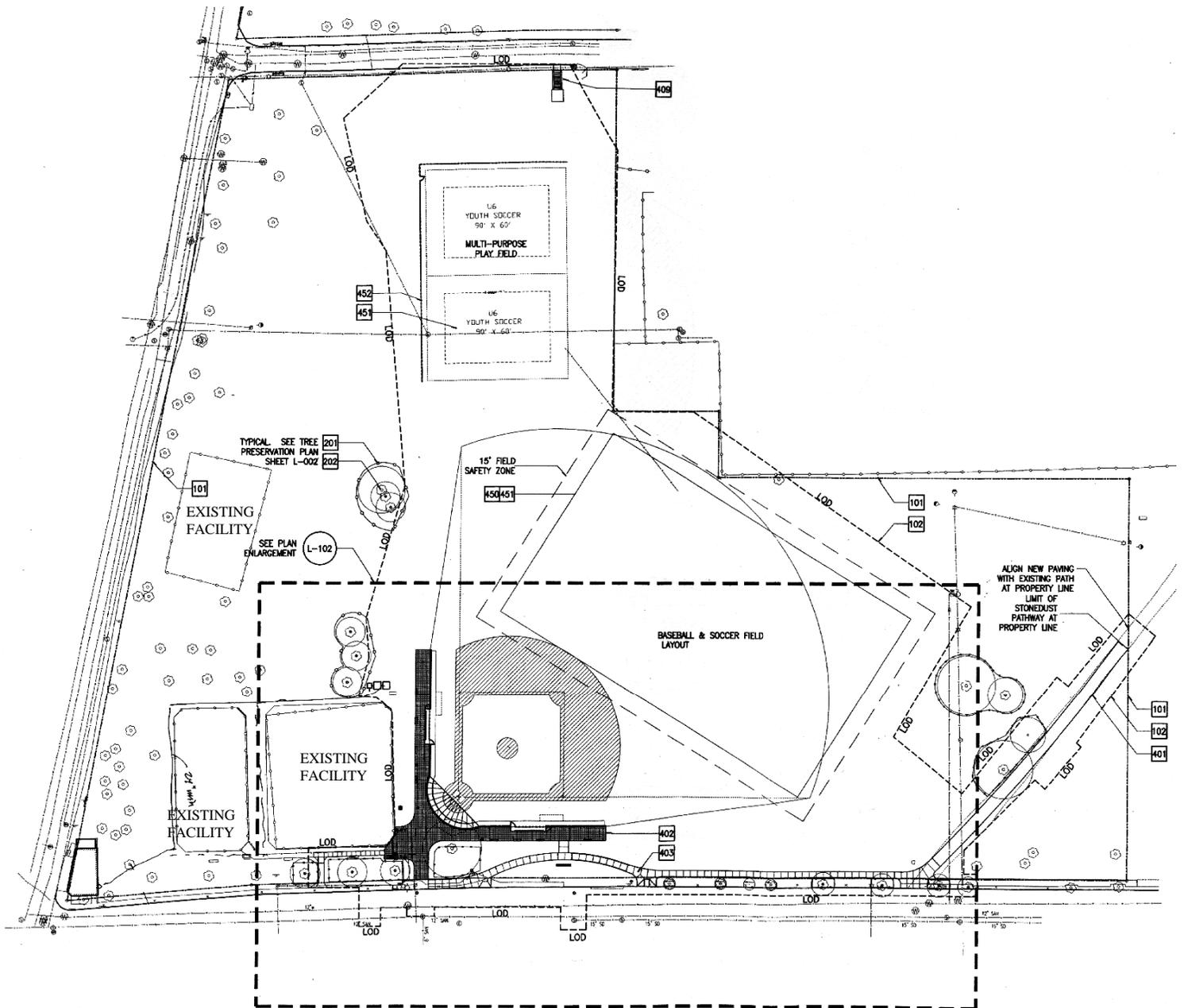
The submitted site development plans include three athletic fields while maintaining some unprogrammed space and protecting existing uses. The site currently contains a softball field and an informal soccer field. Due to their informal nature the fields are often misused and are not maintained for heavy play. The city-wide need for athletic fields forces the area into regular use. To address worsening conditions and increased need, the District Department proposes rehabilitating and improving the field space. The resulting plan calls for a full size baseball field, a regulation soccer field that overlays the baseball field, and a small practice field that can be used for youth soccer. Other improvements include the screening of the baseball field backstop with ornamental trees and a drop off area along Chesapeake Street (see site plan at page 5).

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Staff **recommends approval** of preliminary and final site development plans, given the level of detailed drawings submitted and the limited physical impact to the site of the renovation activity. Revised drawings indicate additional community-requested landscaping in lieu of a perimeter fence. The project involves no occupiable building space and demonstrates only renovation and reconstruction of useable athletic fields. No permanent buildings are proposed. In order to reduce the impact of the baseball backstop the plans call for ornamental trees that will enhance the park as a destination for residents. None of the proposed renovation work would have an adverse impact on land uses or environmental resources of the general site.

In a related observation regarding the submission review, the NCPC staff encourages the National Park Service to improve the conditions, visibility, connections and overall management of the Fort Circle Parks in consultation with the National Capital Planning Commission, the District of Columbia, and local ANCs and neighborhood organizations through the proposed *CapitalSpace* initiative.



FINAL SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN LAYOUT OF THREE RENOVATED BALL FIELDS AT FORT RENO PARK

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Within the Parks and Open Space Element of the Comprehensive plan, at the Preservation and Maintenance Section, the Element cites; “Some parks in ...Washington, for example, did not always serve a residential base and are not necessarily meeting residents’ needs. Additionally, some federal parks and open space are in need of maintenance. Federal partnerships with local agencies, such as the District’s Department of Parks and Recreation, business improvement districts, and nonprofit organizations, are key in developing a strategy and approach to upgrade these spaces, thereby improving their aesthetic and function, and adding vitality to their locations.

Moreover, within the Comprehensive Plan Element, staff finds the following polices apply to the proposal; the federal government should:

2. Maintain and conserve federal open space as a means of shaping and enhancing urban areas.
7. Maintain and conserve trees and other vegetation in the landscaped buffer areas on federal installations in a natural condition. Perimeter roads and cleared areas on these sites should be kept to a minimum, carefully landscaped, and managed in a manner that addresses security, aesthetics, and natural character.
8. Enter into joint ventures to acquire and manage parks and open space.

(Preservation and Maintenance Policies, page 104)

Furthermore, the Comprehensive Plan notes at the Parks and Landscapes Policies for Historic Parks that the federal government should:

2. Preserve the important scenic, historic, and natural elements of the Fort Circle Parks.

(Parks and Landscape Policies, page 112)

Staff concludes the submitted proposal conforms and positively responds to the above policy issues.

Federal Capital Improvements Plan

As a District of Columbia agency proposal submitted for review, the contemplated design and construction does not affect federal funding sources identified in the Federal Capital Improvements Program.

Relevant Federal Facility Master Plan

In 1974 the Commission approved a general plan of the Fort Circle Park land boundary in context with updating the Comprehensive Plan and which serves as a master plan boundary configuration in regards to land transfer actions that have occurred over subsequent years. In 2002 and 2003 the National Park Service prepared a Fort Circle Parks General Management Plan for the interpretation, management, and development of the Fort Circle Parks. The General Management Plan was not submitted to the Commission.

Three Washington, D.C., National Park Service area parks – Rock Creek Park, National Capital Parks-East, and the George Washington Memorial Parkway contain civil war earthworks collectively known as the “Fort Circle Parks”. Originally, these earthworks were to have been connected by a Fort Circle Drive that was begun, but never completed. The importance of these historic earthworks and the greenbelt of parks situated along the ridge surrounding the city make this a significant open-space element in the nation’s capital. Since the Fort Circle parks are managed by three units of the National Park System; maintenance, interpretation, and facilities vary among units. The new General Management Plan seeks to guide management and future development and to provide a consistent philosophy for all the fort sites and their connecting green spaces.

CapitalSpace

The *CapitalSpace* initiative is a multi-jurisdictional effort to improve access, quality, use and management coordination for federal and local park systems located in the District of Columbia. Key partners include the National Capital Planning Commission, the National Park Service, the D.C. Office of Planning, the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, and the D.C. Department of Transportation. Other partners include local and national parks and open space not-for profits, local ANCs and neighborhood organizations, local and national hiking/recreational associations, preservation and cultural resource experts. The initiative has three phases: a needs and asset assessment, to be completed in FY 2006, completion of a framework plan in FY 2007, and completion of an implementation agency in FY 2008. Even in the early phases of this project, there has been unanimous agreement about the need to improve the conditions, visibility, connections and overall management of the Fort Circle Parks. Staff encourages the National Park Services to continue working with the *CapitalSpace* partners to enhance the Fort Circle Parks and ensure that they remain an important piece of our national history and of the identity of the nation’s capital, as well as tremendous assets for local recreation.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

On June 27, 2006 the National Park Service concluded a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) based on the analysis and review of environmental effects presented in a 2001 Environmental Assessment (EA). The submitted action modifies the proposal described in the 2001 EA by revising facility locations and minimizing ground disturbance during construction of the field to mitigate any potential impact to archeological resources. NCPC staff has reviewed both the 2001 EA and the 2006 FONSI, and based on that information the Executive Director is issuing a finding of no significant impact for the proposed project.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

As required by the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and the regulations of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Park Service submitted the project developed by the Department of Parks and Recreation to the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) for review. In addition to several public meetings on the project that were held by the Department of Parks and Recreation, the DC SHPO also heard comments from the public over a six-month period. On March 8, 2006, the DC SHPO concurred with the National Park Service's determination that the proposed renovation and expansion of the athletic facilities would have no adverse effect on the historic and cultural resources of Fort Reno Park, as long as design modifications were developed to mitigate a then-proposed fence surrounding the soccer field. The Park Service and the District of Columbia Department of Recreation subsequently determined that the fence would be removed from the plans and that a low growing shrubbery would be planted at the bottom of the slope to prevent balls from rolling into the street.

As detailed in the Department's submitted design plans for the ball fields, the limited ground disturbing activities associated with construction will occur in areas where the recent Phase I investigation indicated there are few, if any, intact historic resources. In the areas where there is a potential for historic resources, the improvements will be constructed on added fill. Because the proposed renovations and expansion of the fields will not require excavation or "digging," the Park Service, in consultation with the DC SHPO, determined that a Phase II archeological investigation would not be necessary, but concluded that monitoring of all excavations at Fort Reno would be undertaken during construction (see the March 30, 2006 letter from DC SHPO at page 15 of this staff report).

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at the June 14, 2006 meeting of the Committee. The participants' forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies present. The participating agencies were: NCPC; District of Columbia Office of Planning, the District of Columbia Department of Transportation; the Fire Department; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Public Comment

In 2004 two community-wide meetings were held on March 30th and April 20th to present the project and present designs. This was followed by a number of smaller community meetings with interest groups as well as presentations to the surrounding Advisory Neighborhood Commissions as cited by the District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation.

More recently, as the Commission initially announced the potential review of the applicant's submission on the July and August agendas; several public comments letters were provided to the Commission staff. To date, four letters expressing views on the proposal have been submitted to the Commission for consideration (see attachments).

GENERAL AGREEMENT
BETWEEN
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION
ROCK CREEK PARK
AND
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

THIS AGREEMENT is made and entered into by and between the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Capital Region, Rock Creek Park, hereinafter "Rock Creek Park," and the District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation, hereinafter "D.C. Department of Recreation."

ARTICLE 1 – BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of this Agreement is to establish the standards, terms and conditions under which the D. C. Department of Recreation will develop, implement and maintain a portion of U.S. Reservation 470 which is commonly known as Fort Reno Park.

The United States owns the fee-simple title to a certain parcel of real property identified as U.S. Reservation 470, hereinafter referred to as Fort Reno Park.

Rock Creek Park manages and administers Fort Reno Park as a unit of the National Park System.

Rock Creek Park wishes to allow the D. C. Department of Recreation to maintain the existing ball field at Ft. Reno as shown in Attachment A of this Agreement. In addition, Rock Creek Park wishes to permit the D.C. Department of Recreation to develop and maintain a new ball field at Ft. Reno Park as shown in Attachment A of this Agreement.

The D.C. Department of Recreation similarly wishes to provide maintenance to the existing ball field and to develop and maintain a new ball field at Ft. Reno Park.

ARTICLE II – AUTHORITY

Rock Creek Park undertakes this Agreement pursuant to the legislative authorities of 16 U.S.C. 1, 2-4, and 6 (2000).

The D.C. Department of Recreation represents for itself that it has the requisite legal authority to undertake this Agreement.

Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as affecting the authorities of the parties or binding the parties beyond their respective authorities.

ARTICLE III – STATEMENT OF WORK

A. The D.C. Department of Recreation will:

1. Provide by October 30, 2003, detailed construction drawings and specifications of the proposed new ball field at Fort Reno for review and written approval by Rock Creek Park staff.
2. Provide a landscape maintenance plan for the areas defined in Attachment A of this Agreement for review and written approval by Rock Creek Park staff. The landscape maintenance plan will include the following:
 - mowing frequencies and height
 - ball field grooming schedule
 - fertilization schedule
 - litter pickup schedule
 - annual turf renovation schedule
3. Once the aforementioned drawings and specifications for the proposed new ball field have been approved by Rock Creek Park in writing, ensure the prompt and professional installation of said ball field. Then, once the said ball field is in place, its maintenance of it will begin in accordance with the landscape maintenance plan submitted to Rock Creek Park under Paragraph A.2 of this Article, provided that such plan has received written approval.

B. Rock Creek Park will:

1. Provide the D.C. Department of Recreation with copies of all maps, drawings, surveys or other documents related to Fort Reno to assist the Department of Recreation in developing and maintaining ball fields at Fort Reno.

2. Provide consultation, as requested, on horticultural grounds maintenance.
3. Review the items submitted to it under Article A.1 and A.2 of this Agreement in a timely fashion. Moreover, Rock Creek Park's approval of such items shall not be unreasonably withheld.

ARTICLE IV - GENERAL PROVISIONS

- A. No fences, dugouts, storage rooms, or structures of any kind are to be erected on National Park Service property pursuant to this Agreement.
- B. No digging, grading or leveling below six inches from the existing grade will be allowed pursuant to this Agreement.
- C. Any use of pesticides must be requested in writing and approved in advance by Rock Creek Park in writing.

ARTICLE V -- TERM OF AGREEMENT

This Agreement will be effective for a period of five years from the date of final signature, unless terminated earlier by one of the parties pursuant to Article VII of this Agreement.

ARTICLE VI -- KEY OFFICIALS

Key officials are essential to ensure maximum coordination and communication between the parties and the work being performed under this Agreement. They are:

- A. For Rock Creek Park:

Adrienne A. Coleman
Superintendent, Rock Creek Park
3545 Williamsburg Lane, NW
Washington, D. C. 20008
(202) 895-6004

B. For the D.C. Department of Recreation

Neil Albert, Director
D.C. Department of Recreation
3149 16th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20010
(202) 673-7885

ARTICLE VII – MODIFICATION AND TERMINATION

A. This Agreement may be modified only by a written instrument executed by the parties.

B. Either party may terminate this Agreement by providing the other party with thirty (30) days advance written notice. In the event that one party provides the other party with notice to terminate, the parties will meet promptly to discuss the reasons for the notice and to try to resolve their differences.

ARTICLE VIII – STANDARD CLAUSES

A. During the performance of this Agreement, the parties will not discriminate against any person because of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The parties will take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed without regard to their race, color, sexual orientation, national origin, disabilities, religion or sex.

B. The D.C. Department of Recreation represents, and it is a condition of this Agreement, that no member of delegate to, or resident commissioner in the United States Congress shall be admitted to any share or part of this Agreement, or to any benefits that may arise therefrom, unless the share or part or benefit is for the general benefit of a corporation or company.

C. Nothing contained in this Agreement shall be construed as binding the United States to expend in any one fiscal year any sum in excess of appropriations made by Congress and available for the purposes of this Agreement for that fiscal year, or as involving the United States in any contract or other obligation for the further expenditure of money in excess of such appropriations.

D. All terms and conditions with respect to this Agreement are expressly contained herein and the D.C. Department of Recreation agrees that no representative or agent of the United States has made any representation or promise with respect to this Agreement not expressly contained herein.

E. This Agreement may be signed in one or more identical counterparts, whether transmitted by telecopier or otherwise. Each such counterpart shall be deemed an original for purposes of this Agreement.

- F. Nothing in this Agreement shall constitute or otherwise be construed as a waiver of sovereign immunity.
- G. This Agreement shall be governed by, and interpreted in accordance with, Federal law.
- H. If any paragraph or provision of this Agreement is held to be invalid or illegal, then such paragraph or provision shall not affect the validity or enforceability of the remaining paragraphs or provisions.
- I. Rock Creek Park acknowledges that, in accordance with Division F, Title I, of Public Law 108-7 (Feb. 20, 2003), the text of 18 U.S.C. 1913 must be recited herein. The text of 18 U.S.C. 1913 provides as follows:

No part of the money appropriated by any enactment of Congress shall, in the absence of express authorization by Congress, be used directly or indirectly to pay for any personal service, advertisement, telegram, telephone, letter, printed or written matter, or other device, intended or designed to influence in any manner a Member of Congress, a jurisdiction, or an official of any government, to favor, adopt, or oppose, by vote or otherwise, any legislation, law, ratification, policy, or appropriation, whether before or after the introduction of any bill, measure, or resolution proposing such legislation, law, ratification, policy, or appropriation; but this shall not prevent officers or employees of the United States or of its department or agencies from communicating to any such Member or official, at his request, or to Congress or such official, through the proper official channels, requests for any legislation, law, ratification, policy or appropriations which they deem necessary for the efficient conduct of the public business, or from making any communication whose prohibition by this section might, in the opinion of the Attorney General, violate the Constitution or interfere with the conduct of foreign policy, counter-intelligence, intelligence, or national security activities. Violations of this section shall constitute violations of Section 1352(a) of Title 31.

- J. The captions and headings used in this Agreement are for convenience of reference only and in no way shall be used to construe or modify the provisions set forth in this Agreement. The use of the masculine or neuter genders shall include the masculine, feminine and neuter genders. The singular form shall include the plural if the context requires.

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



March 30, 2006

Leslie Schill
District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation
3149 16th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20010

Dear Ms. Schill:

We have received your memorandum of March 29 requesting additional review of the proposed utility trenches between the proposed baseball field (roughly, the existing soccer field) and tennis courts.

It is not clear from the maps produced thus far exactly where all the various utilities might fall relative to historic points of reference; certainly while some may be within the unopened Sheridan Street right-of-way, the proximity of some to the tennis courts suggests that they may continue onto the former Square 1765, in the vicinity of a demolished two-story stable or shed (likely postdating 1903). The map evidence is pretty convincing in suggesting that there were no buildings within the area of the paper street for the duration of the Reno subdivision. But the fact that the street was never opened suggests that there may have been little ground disturbance within that right-of-way before the destruction of Reno City. Thus, any archaeological resources predating the subdivision could remain.

The plans for the baseball field show the intention to fill much of its area, raising the grade in some places as much as a foot. This would suggest that the proposed drain lines could largely be installed atop the existing grade or with minimal ground disturbance. The baseball field area would contain most of any extant remains of the fort's barracks and kitchens, meaning that to leave the existing ground undisturbed would be the best course. Filling atop the present grade would be fine.

In the area between the field and the tennis courts, the 2000 Phase II investigation turned up artifacts at each of shovel test units (STUs). Any significant excavation is bound to uncover additional artifacts. However, no Civil War-era or earlier artifacts were uncovered across the entire site, nor items that can be directly related to the immediate postwar freedmen's settlement. As most of the earliest residential structures related to Reno are located toward the east end of the site, they would be beyond the utility line project area. The artifacts found in this vicinity no doubt relate to the former houses on Chesapeake and Dennison Streets and to subsequent use of the park. The amount of fill present, the mixture of artifacts and their distribution in these STUs well away from their apparent household sources suggest significant disturbance and at least the difficulty of understanding them as a diagnostic, coherent assemblage. In other words, such additional finds of scattered artifacts from the first quarter of the twentieth century are unlikely

to shed much light on the occupation of the Reno subdivision. The map evidence suggests a relatively low probability of finding features relating to that area in this immediate area, unless perhaps the foundations of the stable referenced above are found along the very western edge.

Nonetheless, it makes sense to *monitor* any excavation in Fort Reno Park, especially as Civil War-era occupation was undoubtedly spread across the site (as may have been prehistoric occupation) and such features or artifact scatters are likely to be much subtler than those of the turn of the twentieth century.

Sincerely,

Tim Dennee