

# COMMISSION ACTION

NCPC File No. 6724



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**H STREET, NE BETWEEN 3<sup>rd</sup> AND 14<sup>th</sup> STREETS, NE  
STREET, SIDEWALK, AND STREETCAR RAIL CONSTRUCTION  
Washington, DC**

District of Columbia Department of Transportation

February 1, 2007

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*Commission Action Requested by Applicant*

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

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*Commission Action*

The Commission:

**Approves** the final site and building plans for the reconstruction of the street and sidewalk of H Street, NE, between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets, NE, understanding that DDOT, in collaboration with the Commission and others, will continue to evaluate the range of streetcar propulsion technologies, and advising DDOT that the Commission does not support the implementation of a streetcar system that would use an overhead contact system on streets within the L'Enfant city and Georgetown.

**Commends** the District of Columbia for implementing the Great Streets program of public space improvements, improved accessibility, and pedestrian amenities to assist the revitalization of the neighborhood commercial corridor of H Street, NE.

**Supports** the District of Columbia in providing improved transit services throughout the city.

**Finds** that:

- The future use of streetcars with an overhead contact system would entail the installation of infrastructure to support the wires--including regularly spaced posts with support arms cantilevered over traffic lanes--that would change the historically open character and appearance of Washington's rights-of-way.
- Since the late nineteenth century, there has been a legal prohibition against overhead wires within Washington City (the L'Enfant city) and Georgetown, resulting in rights-of-way that are free of electric wires and that were free of overhead wires when streetcars were previously in use.

- The Commission has a federal interest in retaining and protecting the nationally recognized, characteristic, and significant open vistas of the rights-of-way within the L'Enfant Plan, which is protected by listing in the National Register of Historic Places and in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites.
- The proposed installation of tracks in the H Street cartway, while not in itself a negative impact to the historically open character of a street within the L'Enfant Plan, might preclude alternative or emerging technologies for a future streetcar route on H Street, NE and elsewhere in the District of Columbia.
- The recommended approval of the streetscape plan does not connote the Commission's acceptance of a future streetcar system that uses an overhead contact system.
- DDOT should return to the Commission for review of every segment of a future streetcar system.
- Both the District of Columbia government and the National Capital Planning Commission share the goals of protecting the integrity of Washington's characteristic open streets and of meeting public transit service needs. These goals should be weighed together and a streetcar system should be considered as a whole before irrevocable decisions are made concerning one segment.

**Requests that DDOT:**

- Return to the Commission for review of the elements associated with a city-wide streetcar system, such as pylons, signs, and passenger shelters, prior to DDOT's making a final decision about the design of these elements.
- With the collaboration of other relevant District of Columbia and federal agencies, including the Commission, continue to investigate transit alternatives to a streetcar system that uses overhead wires with supporting infrastructure. Transit modes and technologies should meet the transit goals of both the District of Columbia government and the Commission, as well as our mutual mandates to protect Washington's historically open right-of-way vistas and to comply with federal law.

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Deborah B. Young  
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission