

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 1841



**CHANCERY OF ISRAEL BUILDING ADDITION
INTERNATIONAL CENTER
Van Ness Street and Reno Road, NW
Washington, DC**

Submitted by The United States Department of State

June 28, 2007

Abstract

The United States Department of State, on behalf of the Chancery of Israel, is submitting preliminary site and building plans for expansion of the Chancery, located at the International Center at the intersection of Van Ness Street and Reno Road, NW. The expansion will include a building addition to serve as the Ambassador's residence and related landscape and site modifications.

Commission Actions Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary site and building plans for the Chancery addition pursuant to the International Center Act of 1968, Public Law 90-553 as amended by Public Law 97-186 (1982), at Section 3.

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary site and building plans for a building addition and related site modifications to the Chancery of Israel, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 72.10(38.40)42271.

Requires that the applicant include the following information with the final design submission for the Chancery addition:

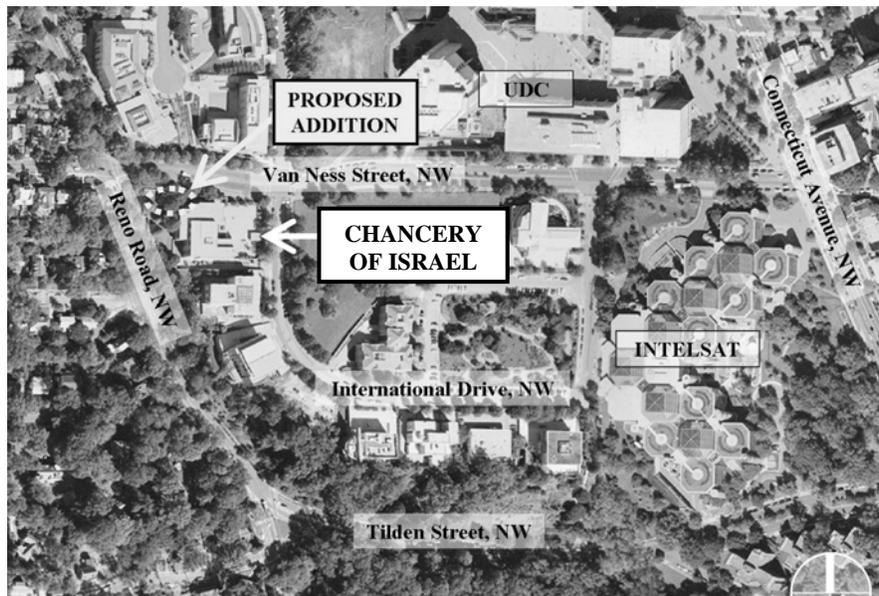
- Fully developed site plan identifying the following:
 - Tree planting including existing and proposed tree canopy (including street and building yard trees), trees slated for demolition, and size/type/location of proposed new trees.
 - Other site features such as the existing cable barrier, paving, and exterior lighting in and adjacent to the site.
 - Proposed new exterior building and/or site lighting.
 - Large-scale plan, elevations, and details of the proposed pedestrian entrance on Van Ness Street, NW.
- Fully developed elevations identifying dimensions of the addition as well as all related fences, walls, sculptures, and landscaping.
- Material samples of curtain wall glazing as well as of the metal to be used for the curved security wall.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background

The Israeli Embassy was the first embassy to be constructed at the International Center in 1980, and occupies one of the smallest lots. Since that time the overall mission and security needs of the Chancery have evolved, and an addition is needed to provide a residence for the Ambassador as well as additional working area. By combining the residential function within the Chancery, it will allow the Department of State to provide the type of security that is required at one central location rather than at two separate locations.



PROJECT LOCATION

Site

The Chancery of Israel is located on Lot 1 of the International Center in northwest Washington, and is bounded by Van Ness Street to the north, International Drive to the east, Reno Road to the west, and the Chancery of Ghana to the south. The site is generally flat, with a gentle slope down from west to east.

Proposal

The United States Department of State (DOS) is submitting preliminary site and building plans for a building expansion to the Chancery of Israel. The proposed 2,767 square foot, three-story addition will provide an Ambassador's residence and reception hall, and connect to the existing Chancery at its northwest corner. The addition will also be accessible externally from the existing forecourt or through an entrance off of Van Ness Street, NW; the Van Ness Street entrance will be used solely for family access and will be reserved for emergency egress if an evacuation is needed. The addition will be constructed of cast-in-place concrete and clad with internally illuminated glass curtain wall that will be etched and sandblasted with tree designs. The project will also include site improvements such as a sculpture garden, landscaping, and replacement of the corner segments of the existing brick security screen wall with a curved metal wall; the curved wall will be placed over a foundation plan at the ground plane representational of an ancient temple.



PROPOSED CHANCERY ADDITION AND CURVED METAL SCREEN WALL
(View from Van Ness Street, NW - Looking East)



PROPOSED CURVED METAL SCREEN WALL



EXISTING CHANCERY AND PROPOSED ADDITION
(View from Van Ness Street, NW - Looking West)

The glass walls of the addition will lit internally by neon tube lighting or LED lighting operated with a dimmer system. The dimmer system will be programmable so that preset schemes with timing and illumination levels coordinated with the seasons and daylight hours can be developed; illumination levels are expected to range between three and five foot-candles and final schemes will be determined through on-site mock-ups that will include review by NCPC and CFA.



PROPOSED CHANCERY ADDITION – NIGHTTIME VIEW
(View from Van Ness Street, NW - Looking East)

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS

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.

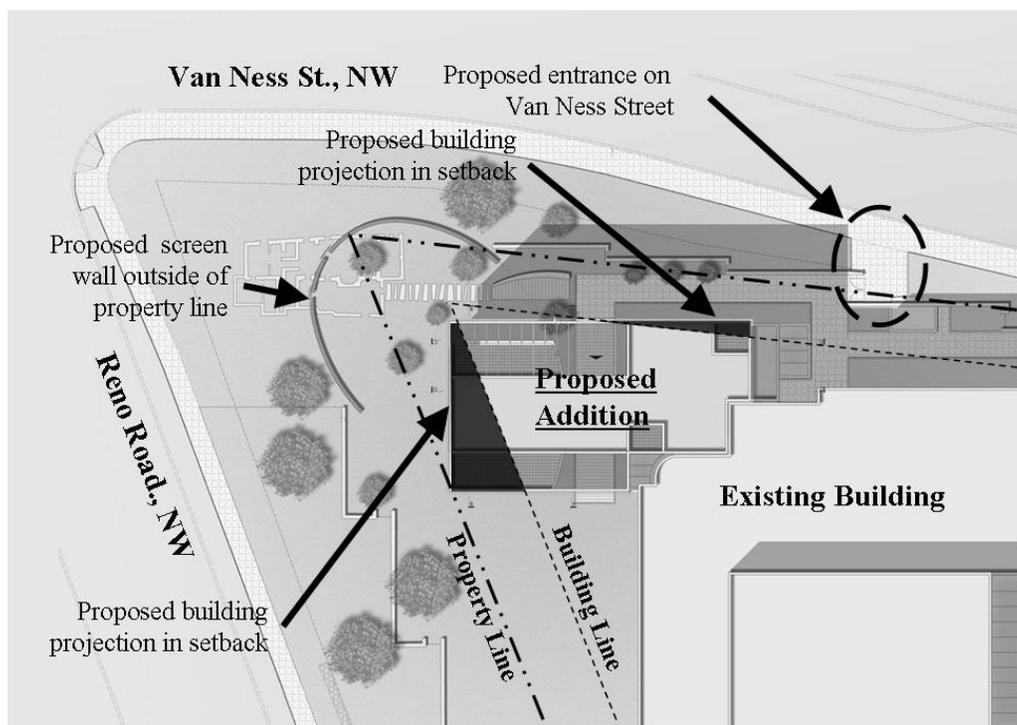
At its December 6, 2001 meeting, the Commission approved the preliminary and final site development plans for the security wall at the Chancery of Israel in the International Center, as shown on NCPC Map File No 72.10(38.00)40971.

At its May 4, 2006 meeting, the Commission approved the concept design for the building addition. In its Action at that meeting, the Commission also required the applicant to submit justification and waivers for items that did not comply with the Development Controls, permission for construction on DOS property, information regarding exterior lighting, documentation of compliance with environmental policies, and additional information about the pedestrian entrance on Van Ness Street; all the requested information was provided as part of this Preliminary Design submission.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff is in support of the proposed addition to the Chancery of Israel and finds that the proposed design is compatible with the existing Chancery with regard to both massing and scale. The introduction of new building materials and site elements will conceptually serve as an interesting new gateway to the western entrance of the International Center.

In response the Concept Design review by the Commission (May 4, 2006), the Department of State (DOS) has requested several waivers to NCPC's *Development Controls for the Chancery Section of the International Center in the District of Columbia* and has provided justification for exceeding the allowable lot occupancy and for locating proposed design elements outside of the building line. The DOS has also agreed to permit the Chancery of Israel to build a curved metal wall and some low-level landscape elements outside of the Chancery's property line on DOS property.



DEVELOPMENT CONTROL ISSUES

It is important to note that the Israeli Chancery was the first constructed at the International Center and it is sited on one of the smallest lots in the Center; the combination of the Chancery's location at a prominent corner, the small size of the lot, and increased security needs that have evolved significantly since initial construction in 1980 make it necessary to allow for waivers to the Development Controls that would not typically be granted. Staff has determined the following waivers to be reasonable and minor to accommodate modern security and diplomatic operation needs:

Sec 540.00 "Lot Occupancy"

Article 541.00 of NCPC's *Development Controls* states that "the Building Area on a Lot shall not exceed 30 percent of the area of the Lot." The total Lot area is 51,380 square feet and the total building area, including the proposed 2,747 square feet addition, is 18,515 square feet. Construction of the proposed expansion of the Israeli Chancery would result in a total building area that exceeds the maximum allowable lot occupancy, which is 30 percent, by 6 percent.

The addition is needed to provide a residence for the Ambassador as well as additional working area for the Chancery. The functions that will be housed in the addition are required due to recent developments in the bilateral relations between the USA and Israel, and the diplomatic activities associated with them.

The Israeli Embassy was the first embassy to be constructed at the International Center in 1980, and occupies one of the smallest lots. Over time the embassy's overall mission and security needs have evolved; and by combining this function within the chancery building, it will allow the DOS to provide the type of security that is required at one central location rather than at two separate locations. The additional building area that would be permitted would not affect light or air to the neighboring properties.

Sec 550.00 "Building Frontage and Setbacks"

Section 550.00 of NCPC's *Development Controls* 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" The footprint of the addition will project into the setback area; however, the proposed construction will not impact Department operations and will allow the Chancery to provide a residence and related outdoor garden for the Ambassador. The proposed size and scale of the proposed work is efficient and aims to minimize construction outside the allowable building area. As with lot occupancy evaluation, the additional area permitted will not have any adverse effects on the neighboring properties.

Sec 611.00 "Fences and Retaining Walls"

Section 611.00 of NCPC's *Development Controls* states that "fences and retaining walls may be constructed on Lot lines and within setback areas and building lines, provided that"... (611.11) "...such fences may be no higher than six and one-half feet (6'-6") above the final grade..." and (611.12) "no fences ... or other construction shall be ...within any building restriction line...." Staff notes that the curved security wall exceeds the height permitted by

the Controls and portions of the wall, proposed temple foundation plan, and other landscape elements are located outside of the property line on Department of State property.

The proposed curved wall is both a security enhancement and design element that will be integral to the Chancery addition. In order to continue the stepping configuration of the existing perimeter wall, to maintain security, and also to relate aesthetically to the new addition, it will be necessary to construct the curved wall slightly higher (by approximately two to three feet) than the Development Controls permit. This increase would not have any adverse effects on the neighboring properties.

The Department would also permit construction of site elements, including the curved wall as well as landscaping included in the project to be located beyond the Chancery's property line on Department property.

Staff requires that the applicant provide further information and samples of the proposed finish materials with the final submission.

The applicant has submitted lighting information and calculations for the addition, which will be illuminated to emphasize the new wing contours without impacting the neighboring areas. The low-level illumination will be provided by neon tube lighting or LED lighting operated by dimmers and is expected to range between three and five foot-candles. The lighting dimmer system is intended to be programmable so that preset schemes with timing and illumination levels coordinated with the seasons and daylight hours can be developed. The DOS will review final lighting schemes with NCPC and CFA staff once installation of the system is complete.

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 requires that the applicant depict the existing and proposed tree canopy, including street and building yard trees, as well as other site features in their the final design submission.

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 Environmental Policy Act

The site and building plans for the Chancery building addition have been reviewed by the Department, which states that the work is consistent with the policies and objectives of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. NCPC Staff has reviewed the original Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the International Center and has determined that no additional environmental assessment is required for the building addition. Staff has reviewed the waiver requests submitted by the Department of State, and determined that the addition of less than 3,000 square feet and some additional landscape improvements would not be a significant change requiring further assessment.

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 on June 13, 2007, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies represented, the participating agencies were: NCPC, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the District Department of Transportation; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.