

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Jonathan McIntyre

NCPC File No. 6423/6636



---

**SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION**  
PERIMETER SECURITY AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY  
The National Mall, Constitution Avenue between 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW  
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the Smithsonian Institution

February 22, 2007

---

## Abstract

The Smithsonian Institution has submitted final site development plans for perimeter security around the National Museum of American History, located on the National Mall and on Constitution Avenue between 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW, in Washington, D.C. The Commission reviewed a proposed concept for Mall-wide building perimeter security, including the National Museum of American History, at its February 5, 2004 meeting and approved preliminary site and building plans at its October 2, 2004 meeting.

## Commission Action Requested by Applicant

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

---

## Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

**Approves** the final site development plans for perimeter security around the National Museum of American History, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.41(38.40) 42195.

**Recommends** that the applicant consider incorporating foundation plantings in the area between the south terrace balustrade and the proposed 24-inch high, freestanding site walls located within the Madison Drive building yard.

**Requires** that existing and future museum identification and way-finding signs, that will be relocated or proposed due to the perimeter security installation, be submitted to the Commission for review and approval.

\* \* \*

## PROJECT SUMMARY

### Site Description

The National Museum of American History is located on the north side of the National Mall, with its south entrance facing Madison Drive, NW and its north entrance facing Constitution Avenue, NW. The museum occupies the site between 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW. The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History is to the east and the future site of Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture is to the west.

The museum site slopes down, approximately one building story, from the south to the north between Madison Drive and Constitution Avenue, and slopes gently down from the east to the west along Madison Drive. The site is relatively level along Constitution Avenue. Within the site, steep grades slope down from 12th and 14th Streets to lawn/garden areas located immediately to the east and west of the building's ground level.

### Background

The Smithsonian Institution (SI) has consulted with NCPC staff and the Commission, other review agencies and their staffs, and with interested groups on the Mall-wide security design plan since 2003. The Commission has reviewed both a concept submission (February 2004) and preliminary site and building plan submission (October 2004) for Mall-wide perimeter security design for its museums. SI plans to complete the designs for each museum as funds and schedules allow. The context and issues for each museum's final security design have been established through the prior reviews. The Commission has already approved final security design plans for the National Museum of the American Indian, the National Air and Space Museum and the National Museum of Natural History. The current submission is solely for the National Museum of American History (NMAH).

### Prior Commission Action

At its October 2004 meeting, the Commission approved preliminary design for the Smithsonian's Mall-wide building perimeter security which included NMAH. The Commission excepted from its approval the low free-standing walls at the NMAH north entrance fountain, along 14th Street, NW, and recommended that in the development of the NMAH final site plans the Smithsonian Institution:

- Redesign the north entrance area to incorporate and/or modify the existing fountain as part of the perimeter security.
- Relocate the perimeter security line along 14th Street, NW and incorporate it into the landscape of the building yard.



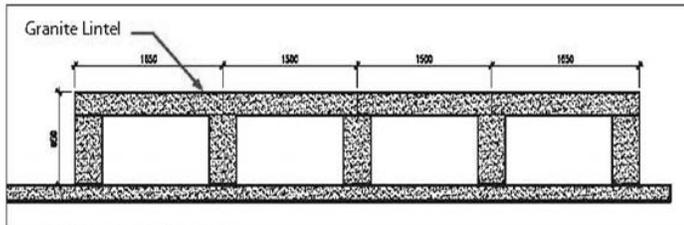
## Proposal

The current proposal is a design refinement of approved preliminary site development plans for the NMAH perimeter security. The final design integrates security elements into the urban landscape and has been influenced by the existing and future site and building context.

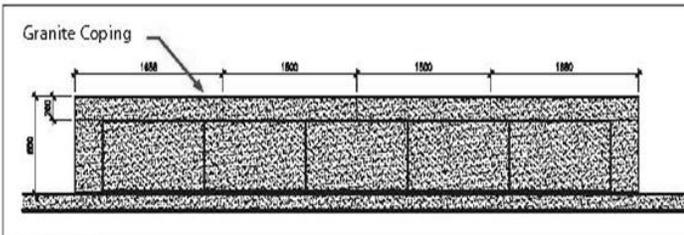
A variety of security elements have been designed and located in response to site conditions and building and site finishes. Existing museum identification and way-finding signs will be relocated as required for installation of the security elements. Existing bus and Tourmobile stops and on-street parking surrounding the site will not be impacted by this proposal. The project will include some general landscape improvements. Several trees will be added to the building yard and several street trees will be replaced around the perimeter. The following basic perimeter security elements are proposed:

- Site walls, balustrade walls, similar in appearance to the existing terrace balustrades, and benches will be clad in stone to match the existing building veneer or terrace pavement. The walls and benches typically will be 38 inches high, 24 inches deep, and range up to 20 feet in length.
- Eight inch diameter fixed and operable bollards, approximately 31 inches high and spaced approximately 5 feet on-center, will be located at pedestrian and vehicular entrances. The bollards will be sheathed in dark gray stainless steel covers with a rough cast finish on the sides and non-directional satin finish on the tops (similar to the bollards approved for the National Museum of Natural History).
- Guardhouses will be a simple contemporary design, similar to the design approved and installed at the National Air and Space Museum. The flat, copper-roofed guardhouses will have stone base panels with windows above on all four sides.

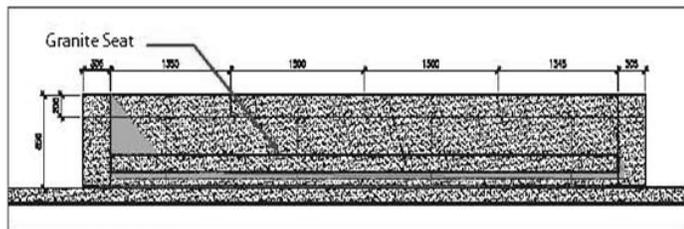
- Cable-reinforced fence system that will be concealed within dense, evergreen shrubs located along portions of 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets and Madison Drive. Installation of the fence will minimize construction disturbance and help preserve the existing landscape.



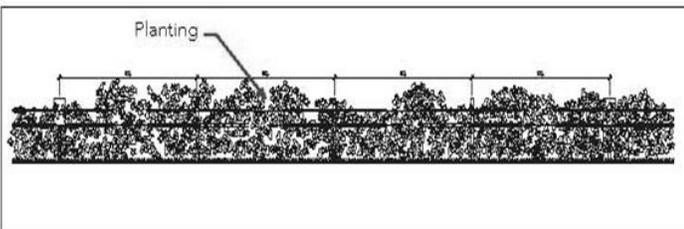
BALUSTRADE WALL



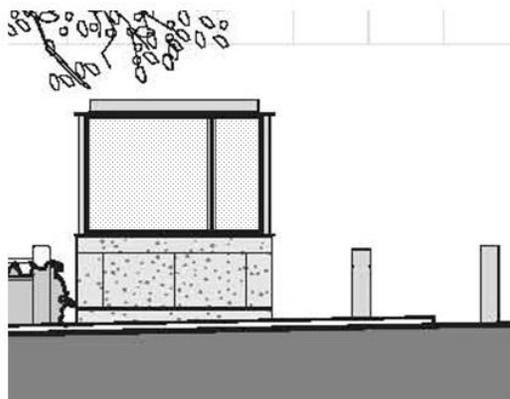
SITE WALL



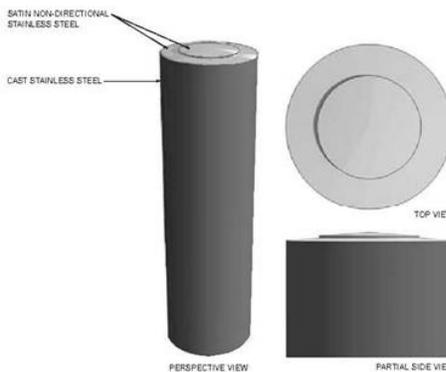
BENCH



CABLE-REINFORCED FENCE

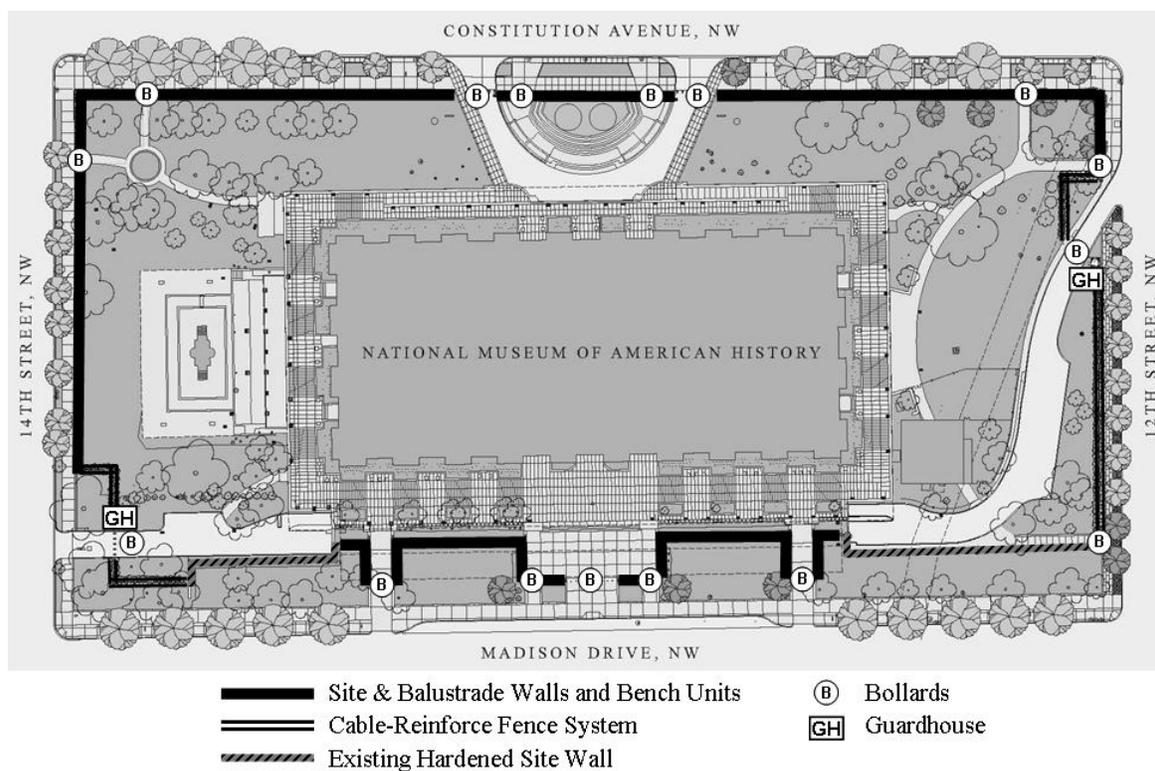


GUARDHOUSE



BOLLARD DETAILS

**PROPOSED SECURITY ELEMENTS AND PHOTOS OF EXISTING SITE ELEMENTS**



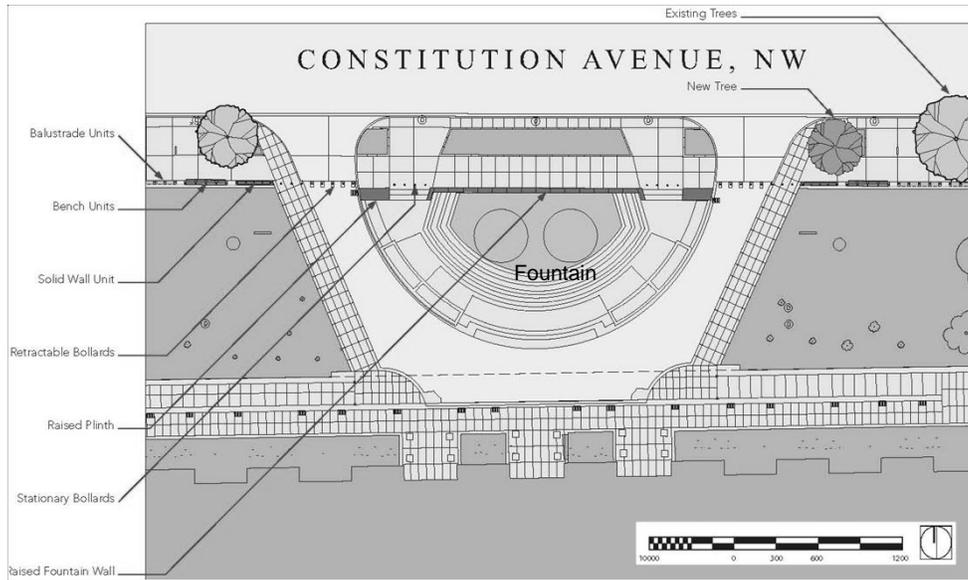
**PROPOSED SITE PLAN: BASIC PERIMETER SECURITY BARRIER LINES & ELEMENTS**

The following describes the application of the site security elements from each side of the site:

Constitution Avenue, NW

A combination of balustrade and site walls and benches will be located along the edge of the building yard, adjacent to the sidewalk. Typically the existing, non-historic, granite lawn curbs will be relocated directly behind the proposed site walls and benches. The curbs will provide a mow strip between the new elements and building yard. Multiple openings between the wall and bench units will allow pedestrian access into the lawn area.

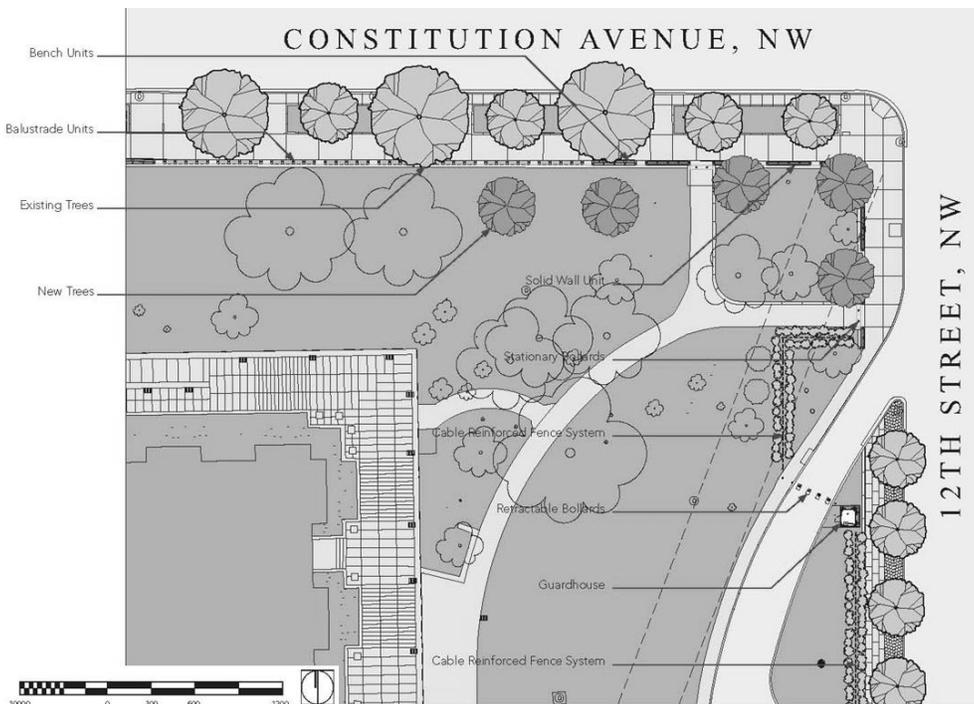
A low site wall, approximately 25 inches high, will be integrated into the front edge of the existing fountain, adjacent to the sidewalk. Two 38-inch high stone plinths will flank the fountain. Fixed bollards will be placed across the existing museum entrance walkways and other existing pedestrian passageways into the site. Retractable bollards will be placed across the semi-circular driveway openings.



**SITE PLAN DETAIL: FOUNTAIN & NORTH ENTRANCE AT CONSTITUTION AVE.**

12th Street, NW

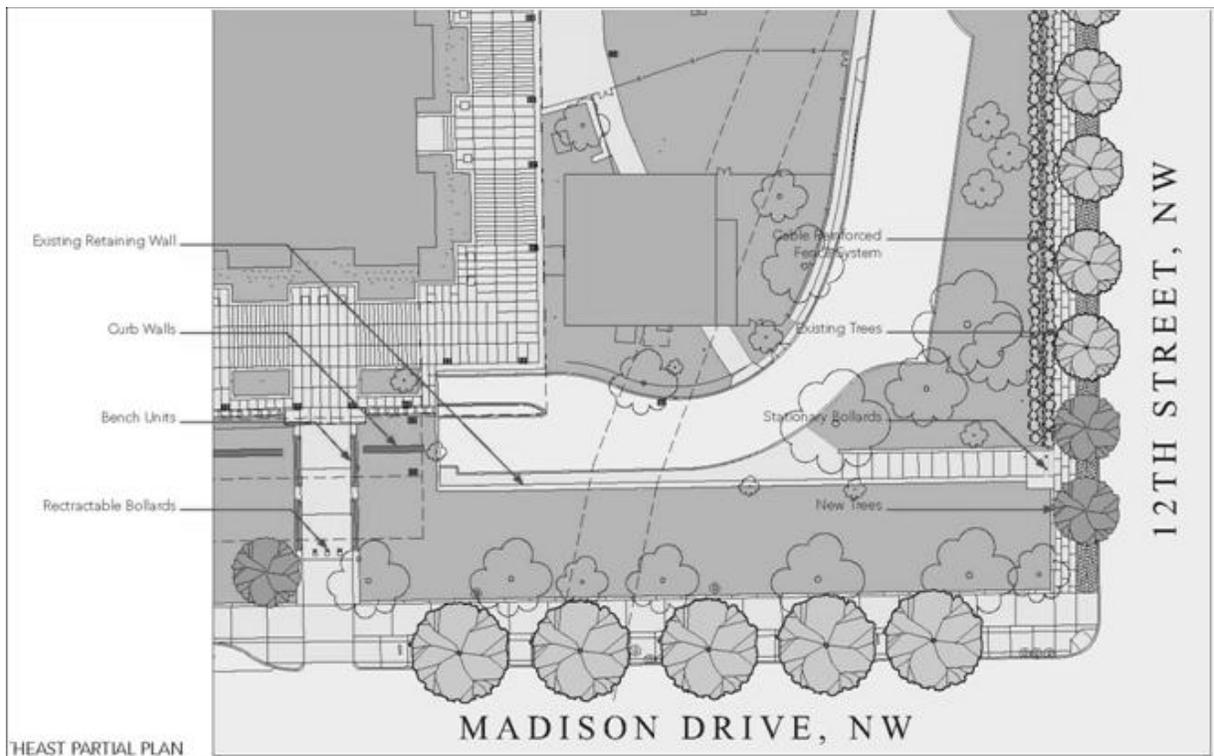
Site walls and relocated granite curbs will continue along the northeast edge of the building yard and adjacent to the sidewalk. Fixed bollards will be placed across the existing pedestrian passageways into the site. A guardhouse will be located beside the existing employee/service driveway. Retractable bollards will be placed across the driveway and inbound to the site in order to accommodate vehicular queuing space off of 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Cable-reinforced fencing will be located adjacent to the sidewalk along the remainder of 12<sup>th</sup> Street.



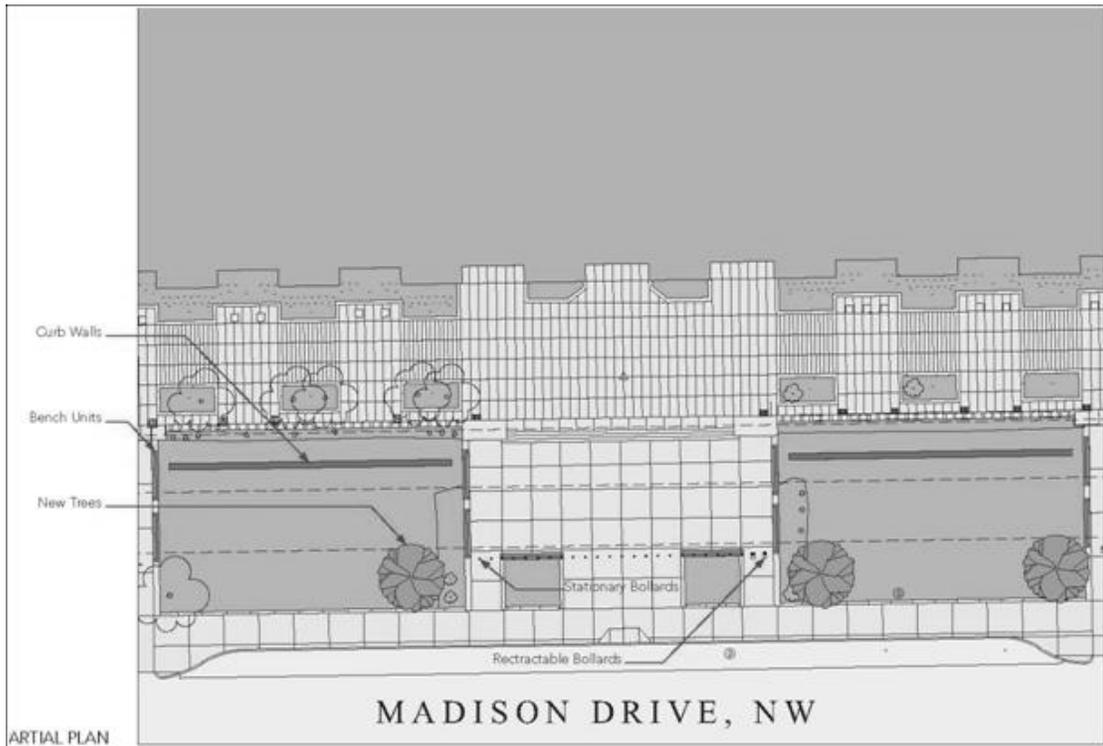
**SITE PLAN DETAIL: 12<sup>th</sup> STREET EMPLOYEE/SERVICE DRIVEWAY**

### Madison Drive, NW (The Mall)

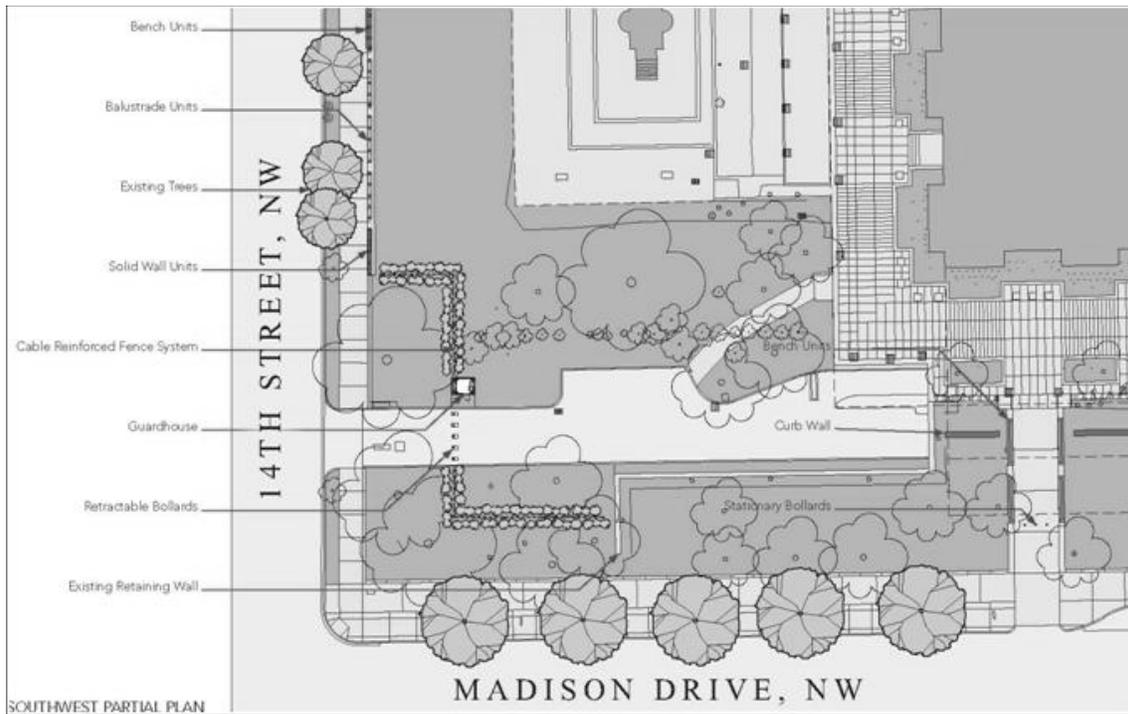
A combination of retaining walls, balustrade and low site walls, benches and cable-reinforced fencing will be located well within the south lawn along Madison Drive. Portions of the existing site retaining walls, located on the east and west of the south entrance, will be hardened. Due to constructability, below grade building conditions, desired setbacks and design refinement, the preliminary perimeter security line was shifted out from the edge of the existing, elevated building terrace and down into the lawn and adjacent to the south entrance plaza. Low site walls, approximately 24 inches high and with shallow footings, will run in front of and parallel to the terrace and span the area between the existing retaining walls, secondary terrace entrances and entrance plaza. Full depth bollards will be placed towards the front and across the main entrance plaza, and benches will run along the north edge of the existing planting areas. Benches will flank both sides of the entrance plaza. Bollards will be placed towards the front and across the secondary terrace entrances and benches will flank the passageways. In the southwest portion of the site, cable-reinforced fencing will extend from the existing retaining wall and run parallel with the existing 14<sup>th</sup> Street employee/service driveway.



**SITE PLAN DETAIL: MADISON DRIVE – EAST SIDE**



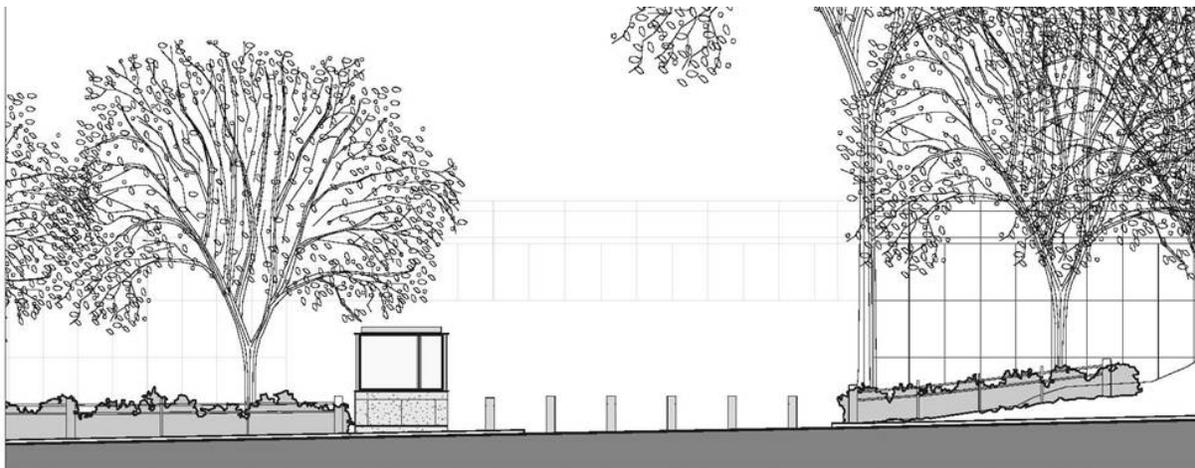
**SITE PLAN DETAIL: MALL ENTRANCE PLAZA ON MADISON DRIVE**



**SITE PLAN DETAIL: MADISON DRIVE - WEST SIDE**

14th Street, NW

Cable-reinforced fencing will be located within the building yard and extend from Madison Drive north and south of the existing 14<sup>th</sup> Street employee/service driveway. A guardhouse will be located adjacent to the driveway. Retractable bollards will be placed across the driveway and inbound to the site in order to accommodate vehicular queuing space off of 14<sup>th</sup> Street. A combination of balustrade and site walls, benches and relocated granite curbs will be located along the edge of the building yard and adjacent to the sidewalk north of the driveway. Multiple openings between the site walls and bench units will allow pedestrians access into the lawn area.



**ELEVATION DETAIL: 14<sup>th</sup> ST. EMPLOYEE/SERVICE DRIVEWAY ENTRANCE**

## PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff commends SI for a thoughtful and well-designed plan and consultation process for perimeter security at the National Museum of American History. Since the Commission's October 2004 approval of the plan for Mall-wide building perimeter security, SI and its design team have made design refinements to the security elements and barrier lines and responded to NCPC's recommendations. The variety and placement of the elements has been studied in relation to the building façade and the landscape. Multiple openings between the wall and bench units surrounding portions of the site will maintain public access into the museum lawn areas. Benches will provide a welcome amenity for tourists and pedestrians. Further design development around the existing fountain has integrated the security wall into the leading edge of the fountain. The height of this wall, adjacent to the Constitution Avenue sidewalk, will be low enough to serve as a seat for pedestrians.

Staff notes the following issues and recommendations for the final submission:

- In consultation, SI discussed some conceptual, long-range development plans for NMAH; staff supports SI's proposed barrier location along the edge of the 14<sup>th</sup> Street building yard in anticipation with these plans. Once the in-house development plan becomes formalized, staff encourages SI to submit it to the Commission for review and approval.
- The proposed 24-inch high, freestanding site walls, parallel to the existing south terrace balustrade and spanning the lawn area between the existing retaining walls, secondary

terrace entrances and entrance plaza, appear to be floating within the lawn area. **Staff recommends that SI consider incorporating foundation plantings in this area to help integrate the walls into the landscape design.**



**PARTIAL SITE PLAN: MALL ENTRANCE PLAZA ON MADISON DRIVE**

- SI noted that they will be relocating existing museum identification and way-finding signs as required for installation of the proposed perimeter security. However, information regarding signage relocation was not included with this submission. **Staff requires that existing and future museum identification and way-finding signs, that will be relocated or proposed due to the perimeter security installation, be submitted to the Commission for review and approval.**

## CONFORMANCE

### Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Staff has determined that the proposed project is consistent with the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements*, in particular the following policies:

- Express the dignity befitting the image of the federal government in the national capital. Federal development should adhere to the high aesthetic standards already established by the planning and design legacy of the nation's capital. This legacy encompasses both the old and the new – the capital's rich architectural heritage, continually augmented by the design contributions of each generation. (Preservation and Historic Features, National Capital Image, #1)
- Coordinate the planning, design, and construction of building perimeter security for neighboring federal buildings that share frontage on a street. (Federal Workplace: Location, Impact, and the Community, Development of Workplaces with Communities – Security, #9)

- Incorporate security needs into the design of buildings, streetscapes, and landscapes using urban design principles in a manner that:
  - Enhances and beautifies the public realm, resulting in coherent and welcoming streetscapes.
  - Does not excessively restrict or impede operational use of sidewalks or pedestrian, handicap, and vehicular mobility.
  - Does not impact the health of existing mature trees.(Federal Workplace: Location, Impact, and the Community, Development of Workplaces with Communities – Security, #10)
- Design security barrier lines and elements that complement and enhance the character of the area in which they will be located and that respect the historic context of the area when applicable. (Federal Workplace: Location, Impact, and the Community, Development of Workplaces with Communities – Security, #12)
- Design security barriers and checkpoints at vehicular entry points on federal installations to accommodate vehicular queuing on site and to avoid adverse effects on adjacent public roadway operations and safety. (Federal Workplace: Location, Impact, and the Community, Development of Workplaces with Communities – Security, #16)

### The National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

The final perimeter security design is consistent with the National Mall design framework and goals of the *National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan* (UDSP) as adopted by the Commission in October 2002 and November 2004 addendum. Staff notes that the February 2004 concept approval and October 2004 preliminary approval for the SI Mall-wide building perimeter security preceded the Commission's UDSP addendum adopted in November 2004 and the UDSP Objectives and Policies adopted by in May 2005.

### National Environmental Policy Act

In compliance with the requirements of the Commission's project submission procedures and environmental policies, NCPC staff reviewed the Smithsonian Institution's Environmental Assessment (EA) for planning and construction of perimeter security improvements at Smithsonian Museums on the Mall ("Mall Security EA") at the preliminary site development plan stage of this project. NCPC was the lead federal agency for NEPA. Using that information, the Commission made a Finding of No Significant Impact for site development plans for the NMAH perimeter security on July 13, 2004. In considering the final submission, staff has again reviewed the EA and finds that, even taking into account the design refinement between the preliminary and final proposals, the EA sets forth an effective analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the current proposed action. The submitted final site development plans therefore remain consistent with the analysis of environmental effects in the EA and the July 2004 NCPC FONSI remains valid.

### National Historic Preservation Act

SI has completed the Section 106 review. The Smithsonian Institution formally initiated consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO) on October 29, 2003, indicating that it determined that the Mall perimeter security enhancement project would have an

effect on the National Mall and on the L'Enfant Plan. Consultation with review agencies and interested parties, including the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the D.C. Preservation League, the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, and the National Coalition to Save Our Mall, has resulted in design refinements to the earlier concept and preliminary Mall-wide Security Master Plan as it pertained to the National Museum of American History. On January 3, 2007, the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the Smithsonian's determination of No Adverse Effect for the installation of perimeter security at the National Museum of American History.

## CONSULTATION

### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on January 14, 2004 (prior to concept review by the Commission) and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC, the District of Columbia's Office of Planning and Department of Housing and Community Development, the General Services Administration, and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

### Commission of Fine Arts

At its February 15, 2007 meeting, the Commission of Fine Arts approved the final site development plans for the NMAH perimeter security project.