

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Nancy Witherell



NCPC File No. 6761

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**PROPOSED OPENING AND DEDICATION, AND PROPOSED ABANDONMENT, OF  
STREETS LOCATED IN SQUARES 743, 744, W-771, 771, 802, 826, 827, 853, 883, and 884 IN  
THE SOUTHEAST FEDERAL CENTER**

(S.O. 07-8801 and 07-8802)

M Street and New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the District of Columbia Surveyor

August 30, 2007

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## Abstract

The Surveyor has referred an application for the opening and dedication of public streets and also for the abandonment of public streets in the Southeast Federal Center. The plats generally reflect the street plan for the Southeast Federal Center (also called The Yards) as shown in the approved revised 2004 Master Plan for the site and the 2007 Programmatic Agreement. At the July 12, 2007 meeting, the Commission approved 35% plans for street and landscape design. Portions of the rights-of-way of both 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, SE and Canal Street, SE have been assigned to the Washington Area Sewer Authority's Pumping Station in order to establish a formal perimeter for the building and a yard for its operations, and are reflected in the plats under review by the Commission.

## Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of comments to the Council of the District of Columbia regarding the approval of Highway Plan Amendments pursuant to D.C. Code § 9-103.02 and the abandonment of public streets pursuant to D.C. Code § 9-202.02.

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## Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

**Approves** the proposed Highway Plan Amendments for the opening and dedication of public streets in the Southeast Federal Center; as shown on NCPC Map File No. 41.11 (44.40)42278; and

**Comments favorably** to the District of Columbia Council on the proposed abandonment of public streets at the Southeast Federal Center, as also shown on NCPC Map File No. 41.11 (44.40)42278.

**Advises** that the cobblestones that form part of the Pumping Station setting should be retained and incorporated in the street and landscape plans for the area.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The Southeast Federal Center (SEFC)—now also known as The Yards—comprises 55 acres in Southeast Washington, DC. It extends from Isaac Hull Avenue on the east to 1<sup>st</sup> Street on the west, and from M Street on the north to the Anacostia River on the south. The site lies to the west of the historic Washington Navy Yard and partially surrounds the historic Main Pumping Station (identified on the aerial photograph below), which is operated by the Washington Area Sewer Authority (WASA).



### Background and Previous Commission Actions

In January of 2004 the Commission approved comments to the General Services Administration (GSA) on the redevelopment plan. The Commission also commented to the Zoning Commission on proposed text and map amendments to add the Southeast Federal Center Overlay to the District of Columbia Zoning Regulations.

In May of 2004 the Commission approved the Southeast Federal Center Master Plan.

In July of 2007 the Commission commented favorably on the 35% street and landscape plans for The Yards. The plans also included the rehabilitation or construction of four buildings at the site.

In August of 2007 the General Services Administration (GSA) executed a Programmatic Agreement for the treatment of the Navy Yard Annex Historic District and the remaining historic buildings and features, pursuant to Section 106 and Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

### Proposal

The proposed street plan for the redevelopment of the Southeast Federal Center – The Yards -- incorporates streets with different histories: streets that reflect the original L'Enfant Plan; streets that were created, adjusted, or eliminated as the Washington Navy Yard was expanded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century; and streets and public spaces that have been created or adjusted on paper and will soon be realized in order to provide appropriate settings for the surviving historic industrial buildings as well as the parcels for new development. (Further information about the history of the streets in the Southeast Federal Center and the expansion of the Navy Yard can be found below, in the Historic Preservation section beginning on page 10.)

The D.C. Surveyor has submitted two plats to the Commission on behalf of the developer, Forest City. One plat reflects the proposed opening and dedication of portions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Tingey Street, N Street, and Water Street, SE. The plat would amend the Highway Plan; the Commission has approval authority for this review.

The other plat reflects the proposed closing of portions of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Street, N Street, Canal Street, and Potomac Avenue, SE. The Commission has an advisory role for this review and will submit its comments to the District of Columbia Council.

The closing and opening of streets will facilitate development of the Southeast Federal Center—and the waterfront neighborhood--according to approvals and agreements from various federal and District of Columbia agencies. The District of Columbia Council approved the public financing of public infrastructure (including roadways, sewers, water mains and streetscape improvements) and a waterfront park on the shore of the Anacostia River.

It's important to note that although the record indicates that Congress closed some streets proposed for closing in the current application in 1907 and in 1916, the current application to the D.C. Surveyor from Forest City includes them in order to eliminate any uncertainty.

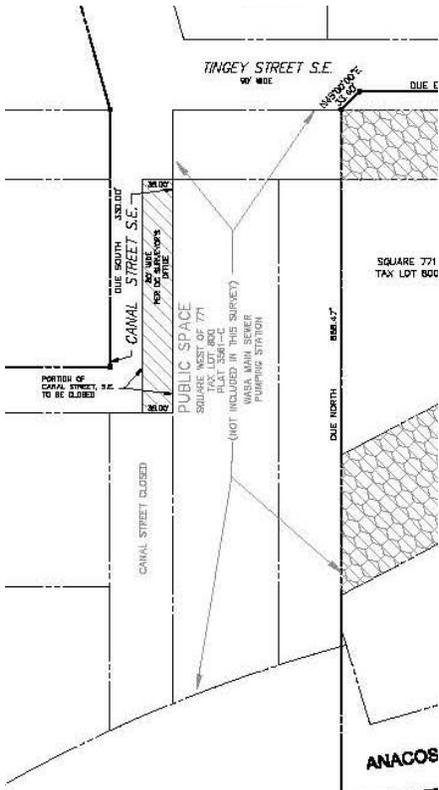
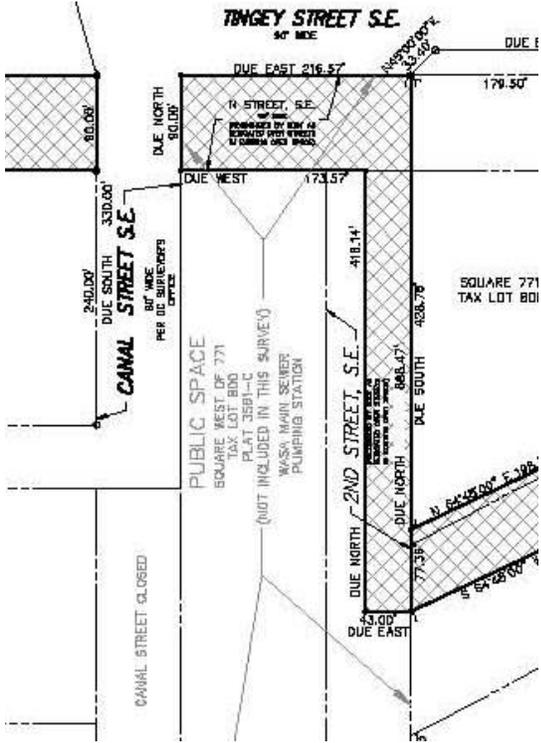
All of the streets will be constructed to D.C. Department of Transportation standards. The Commission reviewed 35% street design and landscape plans at the July 2007 meeting that included the design treatment for the streets. Street trees, public art, and amenity areas will be placed throughout the site, according to the hierarchy of streets. Streets will be paved with asphalt and sidewalks will be paved with concrete pavers of different sizes. A wide range of trees will be planted, all with current low-impact methods for protecting and irrigating tree roots. Granite cobblestones will be used in the tree planting zones.

When the Master Plan was developed several years ago, the specific boundaries for the Pumping Station and its yard had not been established. Now they have been established (and have been concurred in by WASA, Forest City, and the District of Columbia government, including the DC SHPO). The now-closed right-of-way of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street will be opened partially, to about half of its original width (43 feet of 80 feet) in order to establish an adequate work yard and perimeter on the east side of the WASA Pumping Station. On the west side of the Pumping Station, Canal Street, which is now a dedicated street, will be closed for about half its width for a length of one block (42 feet of 80 feet will remain open in the block between N Street and N Place, SE. (Canal Street below that block is closed for WASA operations.)

The determination of narrower rights-of-way for 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Canal Street and the establishment of a boundary for the Pumping Station are the result of agreements reached between Forest City and WASA, with the active involvement of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development. An independent engineering consultant, Parsons-Brinkerhoff, was retained to document the operational and security requirements of WASA, as well as the traffic, parking, and access requirements of the District of Columbia, Forest City, and the public for the road system surrounding the Pumping Station and the urban waterfront neighborhood. The study facilitated the mediation of a solution, which has been reached and is reflected in the plats submitted for review and approval by the Commission.

Maintenance and delivery trucks will use 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to enter the Pumping Station work yard. In order to accommodate the distance from the building required for 18-wheel trucks to enter the yard, the proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> Street right-of-way to be dedicated will be 43 feet of the original 80 foot right-of-way (which is now closed). The new 2<sup>nd</sup> Street right-of-way will include a two-lane cartway, with both 11-foot lanes carrying southbound traffic. There will be no parking lanes. The western edge of the street right-of-way will be marked by the floodwall fence and the WASA security fence, and a 2-foot planted shoulder and curb. On the east side of the travel lanes there will be a 6-foot planting strip and a 10-foot sidewalk to the face of the new condominium building to be constructed opposite the Pumping Station. (Vehicle access to the condominium building will also be provided by 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.)

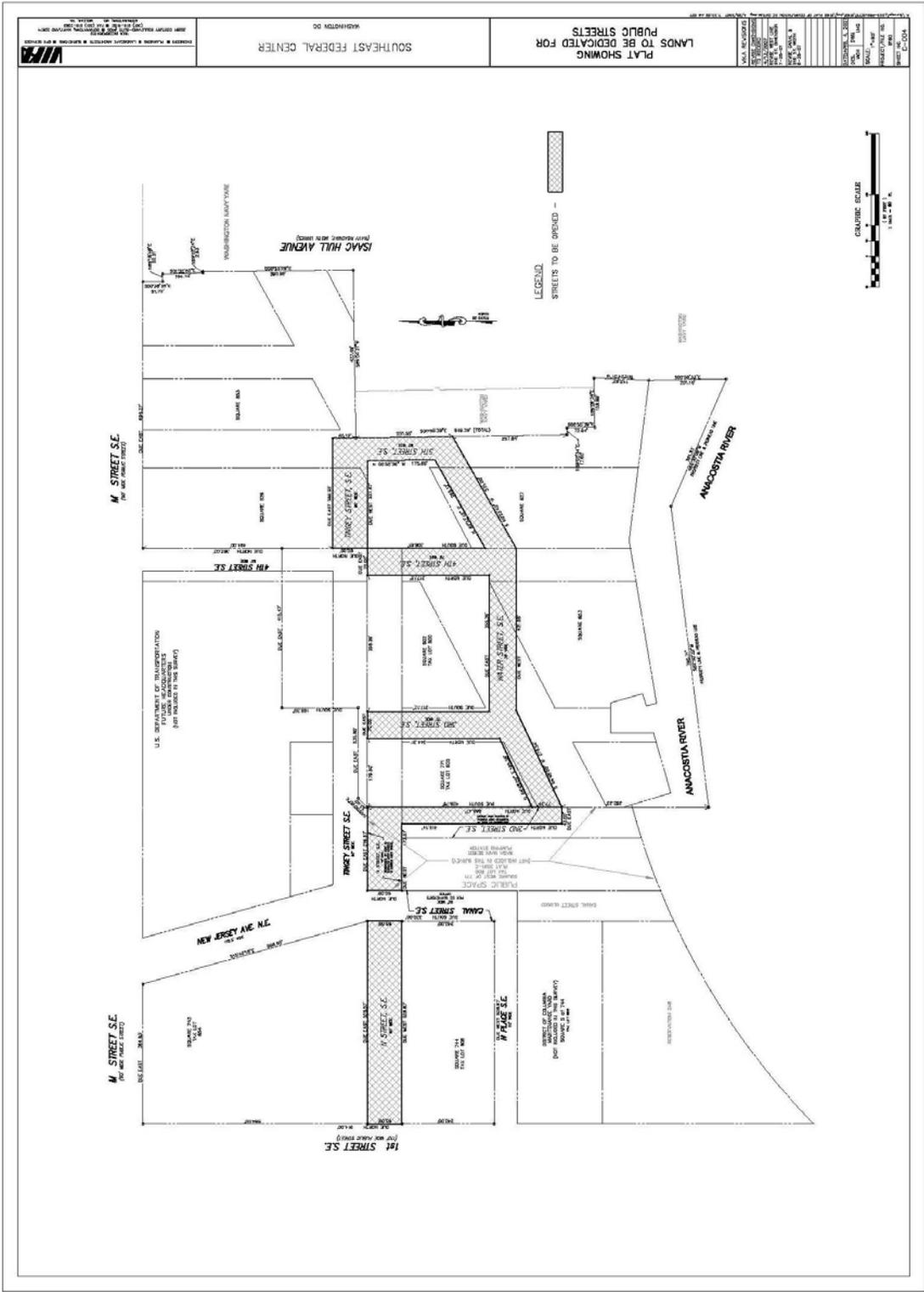
On the west side of the Pumping Station, the 42-foot width of Canal Street allows for circulation between N Street and N Place. WASA controls the Canal Street right-of-way below N Place for its access to the O Street Pumping Station.



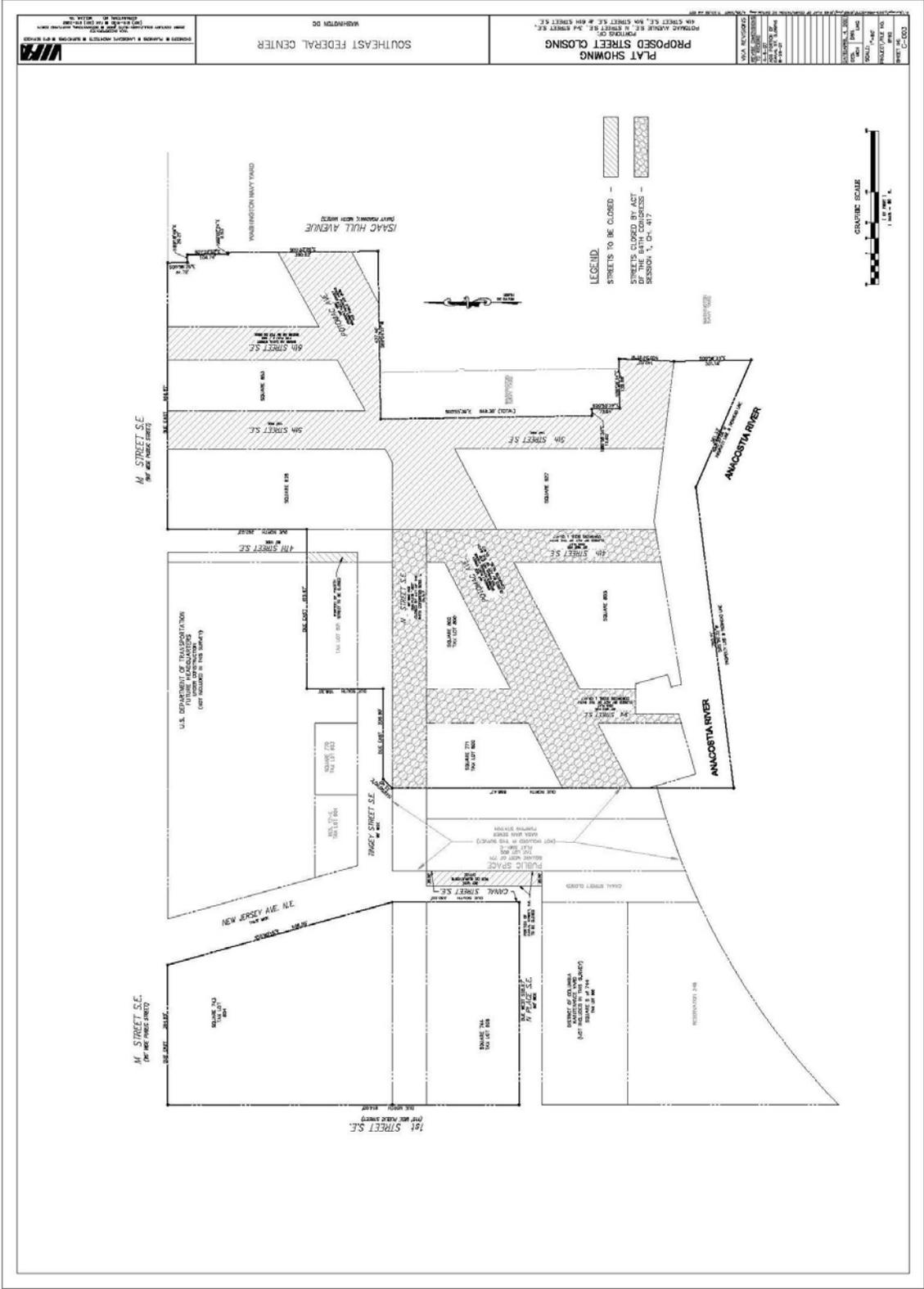
At top, a detail of the plat for street dedication, showing the partial opening of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to the east of the Pumping Station.

At bottom, a detail of the plat for street closing, showing the partial closing of one block of Canal Street to the west of the Pumping Station.

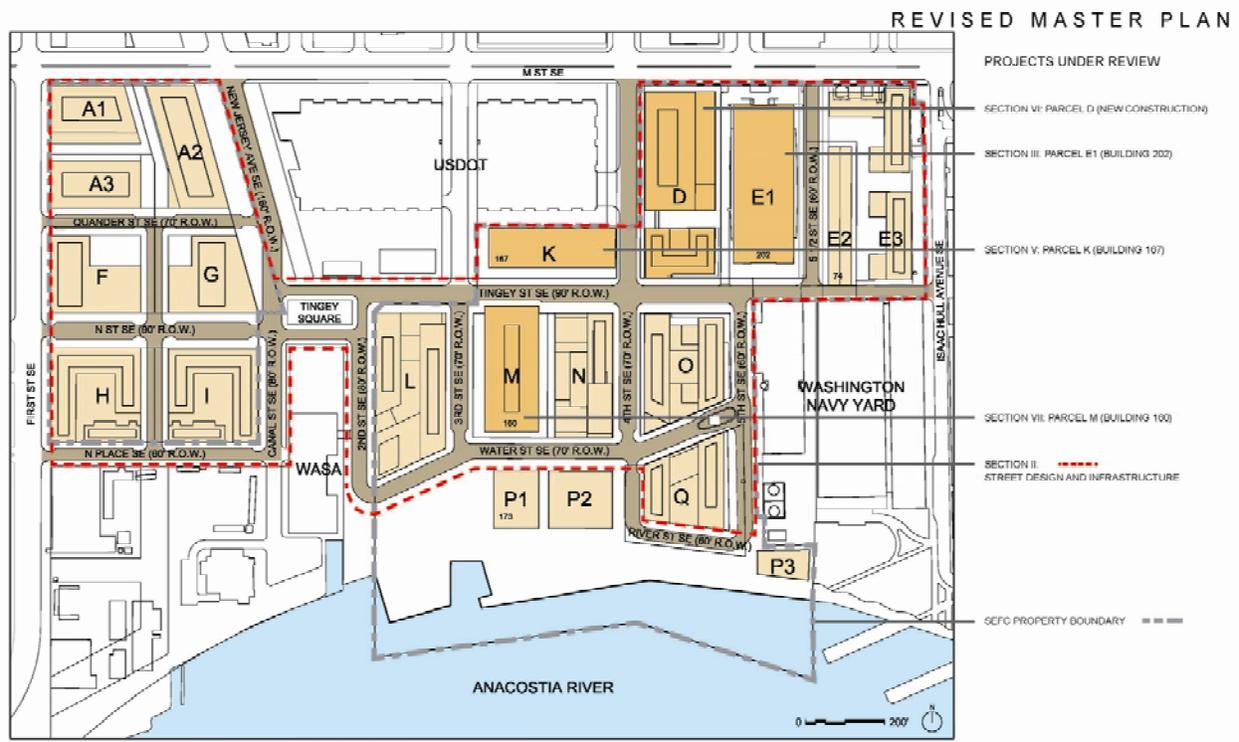
(North is to the top of the page)



Proposed street dedication (opening) – Highway Plan Amendment (north is to the left)



Proposed street closing (north is to the left)



## ANALYSIS

The staff recommends that the Commission approve the Highway Plan Amendment to dedicate (open) streets within the SEFC to conform as closely as possible to the right-of-way plan that existed in earlier eras.

The staff also recommends that the Commission comment favorably to the District of Columbia Council on the proposed street closings, which for the most part include streets understood to have been closed when the Navy Yard was expanded prior to the first World War. A portion of one block of Canal Street west of the Pumping Station will be closed to create a yard and perimeter for the station. The area immediate below the portion of Canal Street to be narrowed is already closed and is used by WASA for access to the nearby O Street Pumping Station.

The proposed street closing and street reopening and dedication of public streets is generally consistent with the 2004 revised Master Plan approved by the Commission and with other agreements and approvals for the redevelopment of the Southeast Federal Center.

The plats referred to the Commission by the D.C. Surveyor for the current review reflect the resolution of an issue that was outstanding at the time the Master Plan was developed—the establishment of a work yard and perimeter for the WASA Pumping Station. Because the

Pumping Station is abutted by the former right-of-way of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street on the east and Canal Street on the west, these rights-of-way will be partially used for the yard of the Pumping Station and will be incorporated within its boundary perimeter. The DC SHPO has concurred with the proposed narrowing of the historic rights-of-way.

The staff notes that the adjustments to the L'Enfant Plan rights-of-way are consistent with the history of alterations to or closing of public streets in the Navy Yard Annex/Southeast Federal Center in order to accommodate industrial buildings and infrastructure since the expansion of the Navy Yard a century ago. The area and uses around the Pumping Station will change dramatically in coming years and both the Pumping Station and the new mixed uses—residential, commercial, retail, recreation, park and open space—for a vibrant waterfront neighborhood must be accommodated.

The Pumping Station itself is a distinguished and visually prominent building that will contribute to the architectural character of the new waterfront.

The site design for the Pumping Station work yard and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, SE, right-of-way should incorporate the historic cobblestones, either preserved in place or, where appropriate, relocated either within the Pumping Station work yard or used in the public space adjacent to the Pumping Station. All agencies involved in the recent boundary agreements and in the ongoing development of and review of the site plans have agreed to consult on the cobblestones. They are an original feature of the setting of the Pumping Station.

## CONFORMANCE

### Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The staff has determined that policies in the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements* apply, in particular the following policies in the Preservation and Historic Features Element.

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. (National Capital Image: #1)

Plan carefully for appropriate uses and compatible design in and near the monumental core to reinforce and enhance its special role in the image of the nation's capital. (National Capital Image: #2)

Protect the settings of historic properties, including views to and from the sites where significant, and integral parts of the historic character of the property. (Stewardship of Historic Properties: #6)

Use historic properties for their original purpose or, if no longer feasible, for an adaptive use that is appropriate for the context and consistent with the significance and character of the property. (Stewardship of Historic Properties: #9)

Ensure the continued preservation of federal historic properties through ongoing maintenance and transfer to an appropriate new steward with when disposal of historic properties is appropriate. (Stewardship of Historic Properties: #10)

Plan, where feasible, for federal historic properties to serve as catalysts for local economic development and tourism. (Stewardship of Historic Properties: #15)

### National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The Commission is acting in its capacity to comment on a proposal involving the Southeast Federal Center. NCPC reviews this proposal by the District of Columbia as advisor to the street closing, and since NCPC comments are to advise only on Southeast Federal Center proposals, the Commission has no NEPA obligation regarding this review. The proposed street amendments are actions that are Categorically Excluded by NCPC policies and procedures at Section 8.C, item 13.

The General Services Administration (GSA) completed an Environmental Impact Statement on the planned development of the Southeast Federal Center, finalized in June 2004. Staff reviewed the EIS and took it into account in the review of the revised Master Plan, which identified the proposed street modifications. The District of Columbia applicant relies on the federal lead agency NEPA determination (GSA) on actions which relates to activities in which the District agency would participate in.

### National Historic Preservation Act

#### *Historical Background of the Site and Street Plan*

The Washington Navy Yard was established on the shore of the Anacostia River when the seat of the national capital was moved to Washington in 1800. The Navy Yard quickly became a prime industrial employer in the new city. By the late nineteenth century, and especially after the Spanish-American War of 1898, the United States aspired to becoming a world naval power. Examples of congressional interest in the development and increasing importance of the Navy range from the building program at the U.S. Naval Academy, the placement in 1912 of a statue to John Paul Jones in West Potomac Park, and the increasing manufacture of ships (elsewhere) and naval ordnance at the Navy Yard that led to the expansion of the Navy Yard by the annexation of the land to the west of Isaac Hull Avenue (6<sup>th</sup> Street, SE) and by the reclamation of land at the Anacostia River.

Although this area was part of the L'Enfant City and a city street grid had been minimally established, there were few buildings there. When the Naval Act was passed in 1916, a further expansion of the Navy Yard to 2<sup>nd</sup> Street (east of the former canal) occurred. Congress passed legislation to abandon streets and alleys in that area in 1907 and in 1916. During and after World War I, large industrial buildings were constructed at the site, and the building program continued through World War II, when the westernmost segment of the site (to 1<sup>st</sup> Street, SE) was annexed. By 1944, 26,000 employees worked at the Navy Yard, including the Annex. By 1947, the Yard had 132 buildings on 127 acres of land.

The Yard, therefore, developed as a highly industrialized area with its own internal network of streets, alleys, and railroad tracks—some of which were based on the original street plan. In order to move the ordnance through the site, railroad tracks were constructed. A segment of the N Street right-of-way was moved northward and renamed Tingey Street; Georgia Avenue was abandoned; 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets were retained; 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets were abandoned for railroad lines, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street right-of-way was also used for tracks. With the closing of the Annex in 1962, many of the industrial buildings were demolished. As the site was cleared of buildings, many of the organizing elements of the street system and infrastructure were also lost.

#### *Section 106 review for Southeast Federal Center*

GSA has executed a Programmatic Agreement (PA) with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office and with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The PA will guide further and future review of proposals for the historic buildings on the site and for treatment of archaeological features and other site conditions and characteristics of the setting, which is a historic district eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Components of the street plan are historic resources, either as elements of the L'Enfant Plan or as elements of the Washington Navy Yard and Navy Yard Annex historic districts. They are character-defining features of the Southeast Federal Center.

GSA's Section 106 consultation included a wide range of parties, including NCPC and the Commission of Fine Arts, adjacent and nearby federal and District agency representatives, community representatives, and interested planning and historic preservation organizations.

The parties are now reviewing the 35% site plans that the Commission reviewed at its July 2007 meeting. The SHPO has concurred with the narrowed rights-of-way around the Pumping Station to provide it an adequate area for its operations and perimeter fence and to establish formally a boundary and setting for the building. The Pumping Station is a visually prominent and architecturally distinguished building at the terminus of New Jersey Avenue, SE. While its qualities have long been recognized, it has not yet achieved local landmark protection with listing in the D. C. Inventory of Historic Sites.

The Washington Navy Yard Annex was determined eligible for listing by the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places on December 7, 1977. The annex (subsequently the SEFC, now The Yards) includes six historic structures—Buildings 74, 160, 167, 173, and 202 as well as

the historic Navy Yard wall and sentry tower—and archaeological sites. In addition, the historic district includes street rights-of-way that will serve traffic movement through the site as well as be public spaces providing access, long axial views, and the opportunity for vistas to the waterfront or the Capitol dome.

## CONSULTATION

### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on July 11, 2007, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project had been coordinated with all agencies represented. The participating agencies were: NCPC, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the District Department of Transportation; the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.