

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 6690

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## RESERVATION 174: NORTHWEST PARK (OLD CONVENTION CENTER SITE)

New York Avenue and 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and I Streets, NW  
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the District of Columbia, Office of the Deputy Mayor  
for Planning and Economic Development

March 27, 2008

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### Abstract

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development for the District of Columbia has submitted preliminary and final site plans for the creation of a public park on Reservation 174 in northwest Washington, D.C. The site is at the northwest corner of the Old Convention Center site, and the park is one component of a master plan for mixed-use development at that site. The design respects the historic L'Enfant bow-tie reservation while creating a vibrant public urban space, and reopens the portions of 10<sup>th</sup> and I Streets that were closed at the time the old Convention Center was constructed. Memorandums of Agreement for both the DC Arena (currently the Verizon Center) and the new Convention Center require the District to restore these rights-of-way to the configuration that existed prior to the construction of the Old Convention Center (as shown on the 1965 Baist map); a covenant has been recorded by the District to require the streets re-opening.

The park's design is comprised of several major elements, including a large triangle fountain, smaller entry fountain, fixed and moveable seating, reserved vendor spaces, and landscaping with street and flowering accent trees as well as other shrubbery. The south (I Street) edge of the park is notable in that the street paving between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets is raised to the curb level, and will provide opportunities for the site to be closed to accommodate up to 1000 people at special events and gatherings.

Reservation 174 is currently owned by the United States of America, but Public Law 109-359 has authorized transfer of ownership to the District of Columbia. Transfer of land is expected to occur in April 2008.

### Commission Action Requested by Applicant

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

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## Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

**Approves** the preliminary and final site development plans for the Reservation 174: Northwest Park as shown on NCPC Map File No. 31.20(05.00)42220.

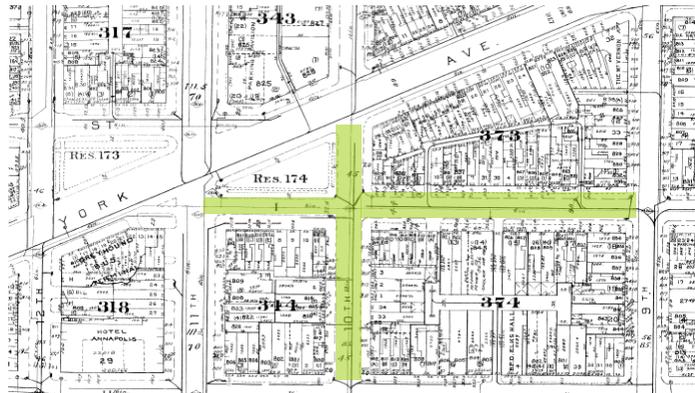
**Commends** the applicant and their development team on a high-quality, durable, and sustainable design that respects the historic L'Enfant streets and reservations of the District of Columbia.

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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Background

The Northwest Park is located on Reservation 174, which is part of a pair of historic L'Enfant "bow-tie" reservations that are transected by New York Avenue in downtown, Washington. The Reservation occupies the northwest corner of the old Convention Center site, and the proposed park project is just one component of a master plan for a large-scale, mixed-use development. Also part of the master plan objectives, the portions of 10<sup>th</sup> and I Streets that were closed at the time the old Convention Center was constructed will be reopened; Memorandums of Agreement for both the DC Arena (currently the Verizon Center) and the new Convention Center require the District to restore these rights-of-way to the configuration that existed prior to the construction of the Old Convention Center.



**BAIST MAP (1965)**



**LOCATION PLAN**

Reservation 174 is currently owned by the United States of America, but Sec. 203 of Public Law 109-396 has authorized transfer of ownership to the District of Columbia; this section also stipulates that "...not less than 1¼ acres [of the former Convention Center Site]...are set aside for public open space...." Transfer of land is expected to occur in April 2008. It is envisioned that the Northwest Park will be licensed by the District of Columbia to the development team, who will have the responsibility to construct the park improvements and maintain the park during the term of the license agreement.

The current review is under NCPC authority over federal plans and proposals. Once ownership is transferred, review will be under NCPC authority over District projects in the Central Area.

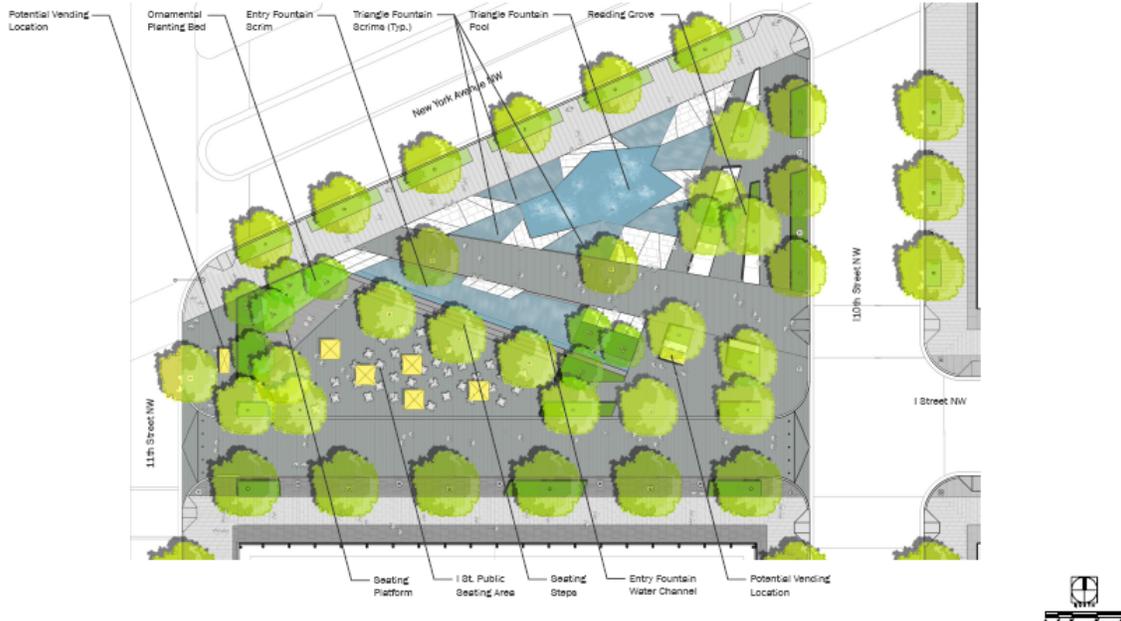
### Site

Located a short distance to historic Mount Vernon Square, the triangular site is bounded by New York Avenue on the north, I street on the south, and 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets on the east and west, respectively. Several federal facilities are in the immediate vicinity, including the former Carnegie Library at Mount Vernon Square and the National Archives, just a few blocks south on axis with 10<sup>th</sup> Street.

The site boundaries to the east and south reflect reestablishment of the 10<sup>th</sup> and I Streets rights-of-way; park edges will be defined with paving as well as street trees that align with existing trees on adjacent blocks.

### Proposal

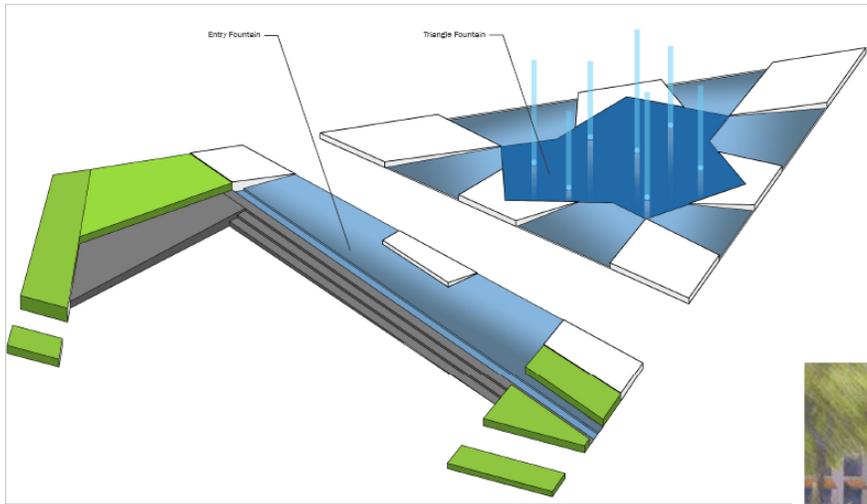
The development team has proposed an urban and durable park setting, with several major elements incorporated into the design. The park's general design approach is being guided by three major principles: connecting to the city, integrating into the neighborhood, and creating a unique and inviting destination.



**PROPOSED SITE PLAN**

Several major elements comprise the park, including a large triangle fountain, smaller entry fountain, fixed and moveable seating, reserved vendor spaces, and landscaping with street and flowering accent trees as well as other shrubbery. Various areas have been designed to accommodate a multitude of users and provide for different experiences. Areas to the north are more static, providing intimate locations for reading or more passive uses; and areas to the south are more active in nature, providing areas for seating, vendors, and group events.

The triangle fountain at the northeast corner of the site is intended to be the centerpiece and generator of the park's composition. Comprised of large blocks of stone interspersed with sloping planes of water, the variety of water and texture is intended to provide a flexible and dynamic space that is engaging to park users. A smaller entry fountain is located across the southwest edge of the triangle fountain, and provides a more intimate scale while helping to frame the path through the park that connects to the remainder of the development site.



### TRIANGLE / ENTRY FOUNTAINS

Notable is the closure of I Street to regular vehicular traffic, with the right-of-way being maintained to allow for use by emergency vehicles. The granite curb line will be established, but paving along I Street, between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets, will be raised flush to the curb level, allowing the southern section of the park to be temporarily closed for special events and seasonal venues, accommodating up to 1000 people.



Clear Event Area: 1000 people (7.5 sq. ft./person)



Potential Skating Rink Size and Location

### PARK PROGRAMMING: POTENTIAL GATHERING AREAS

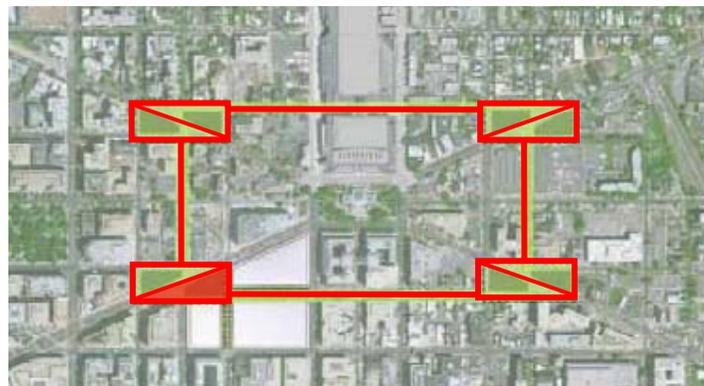


Concept Image: Lurie Garden, Chicago

### SEATING AREAS

### PROJECT ANALYSIS

The project site is one-half of a pair of “bow-tie” reservations, and one of four pairs that surround historic Mount Vernon Square. These reservations comprehensively serve to connect the surrounding neighborhoods with the Square as well as to anchor the Square into the larger context of the L’Enfant plan for the city. Collectively, Reservations 173 and 174 also serve to frame and enhance the views east toward the Square and west toward the White House.



### MOUNT VERNON SQUARE WITH BOW-TIE RESERVATIONS

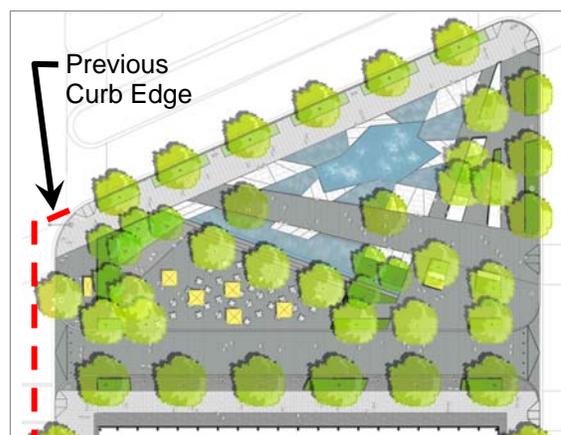
Staff supports the overall site development plans and commends the development team on a high-quality, durable, and sustainable design that respects the historic L’Enfant streets and reservations of the District of Columbia. Staff also supports the re-establishment and general design of those portions of 10<sup>th</sup> and I Streets adjacent to the Reservation, and notes that the 1965 Baist map should provide the basis for locating street, sidewalk, and curb lines.

Staff also notes that the final design of the park includes refinements in response to the Commission’s recommendations from their concept design review. Specifically, the design team has coordinated with the appropriate agencies to ensure that the rights-of-way have been reestablished according to the 1965 Baist map and that the plan complies with the Downtown Streetscape Regulations. To reflect the site’s contribution to the historical plan of Washington and its relation to three other “bow-tie” shaped parcels around Mount Vernon Square, the amount of green space has been increased, the size of the monumental Triangle fountain has been refined, and a restrained material and planting palette has been selected. A careful study of the views along New York Avenue has led to tree and light spacing which enhances the pedestrian experience of the sidewalk while reinforcing the significance of this corridor.

Another notable change since the Concept design submission is the modification of the western edge of the park; in response to NCPC staff consultation, a widening of the sidewalk into the 11<sup>th</sup> Street, NW right-of-way has been eliminated and the historic current curb line maintained.



**MAY 2007 SITE PLAN**



**FEB 2008 SITE PLAN**

## CONFORMANCE

### Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The overall design concept for the park is consistent with the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*. The Preservation and Historic Features Element includes several policies related to the preservation and enhancement of the historic street rights-of-way and reservations that form the District’s urban design framework.

### National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NCPC reviews this action by the District of Columbia in the Central Area for approval. The applicant has not yet undertaken its own environmental review of the project under the District of Columbia Environmental Policy Act because, due to the proposal’s location in the Central Employment Area, the project is exempted from that review under the exemption provisions of the District of Columbia Environmental Policy Act. Since NCPC has approval authority over

this project, the National Environmental Policy Act applies and NCPC must determine whether the applicant is required to undertake an environmental review of NCPC's use.

This project is categorically excluded from further NEPA review under the NCPC Categorical Exclusion, Section 8.C.21, because the action is an improvement to an existing facility where all of the following conditions are met:

- The proposed uses are in compliance with local planning and zoning and any applicable District of Columbia, state, or federal requirements—here the project is in compliance with all such requirements.
- The proposed site improvements will not substantially increase the number of motor vehicles at the facility—here, the land has been in continual use as a park, previously under ownership of the National Park Service, for at least 55 years, and since the land use will not change, and the focus is on serving pedestrians, we do not anticipate any increase in motor vehicles related to the park improvements
- The site and the scale of the proposed construction is consistent with existing adjacent or nearby buildings—here, the park, and will provide a variety of active and passive spaces to serve the heavy pedestrian use that is anticipated, and that scale and use are consistent with nearby buildings and the proposed new construction.
- There is no evidence of community controversy or other environmental issues; and
- There are no extraordinary circumstances present.

Additionally, staff expects the proposed site development plan to have beneficial impacts on the environment by providing needed pedestrian space in the downtown while not increasing the number of motorized vehicles in the area. Also, because the developers of the site are using effective stormwater management practices, development of the park is expected to reduce runoff into the District's sewer system.

An Environmental Site Assessment Report was prepared in April 2007 in preparation for the land transfer from the federal government to the District of Columbia, and a copy of that report has been provided to NCPC; no evidence of recognized environmental conditions was found, except for potential contamination from a former underground storage tank (its location unknown) and from adjacent property uses. The parcel remained undeveloped and served as open sidewalk space with trees while the old Convention Center was constructed and in use.

#### National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

NCPC is the federal agency responsible for Section 106 review of the project. The reservation, one of the reservations that extend the reach of park land in concert with Mount Vernon Square and major streets at this significant node in the L'Enfant Plan, is still in federal ownership but will soon be transferred to the District of Columbia government. The project site is in the Central Area, within which the Commission has approval authority for the District's public projects. In addition to the public scoping meetings and presentations held by the District of Columbia government as the Old Convention Center site master plan has been developed, the Commission meetings have allowed further dissemination of information to the public as well as opportunities for members of the public to comment.

NCPC has completed Section 106 review, determining that the proposed plans indicate that Reservation 174 will once again serve its historic purpose as a public park, and that its open space configuration in the L'Enfant Plan will be restored. Accordingly, the Acting Executive Director determined that the proposed site plan and park design for Reservation 174 will not have an adverse effect on the qualities that qualify the L'Enfant Plan for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or on other National Register-listed resources. The State Historic Preservation Officer for the District of Columbia (DCSHPO) has concurred with this determination.

While the reservation was not directly the subject of either the sports arena (now Verizon Center) MOA of 1995 or the new convention center MOA of 1997, the streets within the Old Convention Center site were. (NCPC served as lead federal agency for both MOAs.) Staff notes that the applicant has adhered to the agreements in the MOAs, which include the restoration of the streets to the earlier configuration. The Acting Executive Director forwarded the proposed plans and specifications for the street configuration to the DCSHPO for his review and comment, as stipulated in the 1995 MOA. The DC SHPO agreed that the proposed restoration of the rights-of-way of the 800 and 900 blocks of 10<sup>th</sup> Street, NW and the 900 and 1000 blocks of I Street, NW is compatible with the terms of the 1995 MOA for the treatment of the L'Enfant rights-of-way through the convention center site (refer to NCPC File 6690/5413 - April 3, 2008).

## COORDINATION

### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the concept design proposal on April 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 National Park Service, the District Department of Transportation, the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

The Committee completed coordination for the current design at their March 12, 2008 meeting; 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.

### Commission of Fine Arts

This final development plans for the Old Convention Center Site were presented to the Commission at an information presentation on March 20, 2008; the Commission commented favorably. It was also noted that the current Northwest Park plan includes refinements made as a result of the Commission's May 17, 2007 recommendations at their concept design review.