STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 6913

NATIONAL NAVAL MEDICAL CENTER
CONNECTORS AND COURTYARDS

8901 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Montgomery County, Maryland

Submitted by Department of the Navy

March 26, 2009

Abstract

The United States Department of the Navy has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for a system of enclosed walkways and four small courtyards at the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) located at 8901 Rockville Pike in Bethesda, Maryland. The proposed walkways, referred to as "connectors", will connect patients to and from the existing facilities and the new buildings. The Master Plan for the campus originally envisioned the system of walkways underground, however; they are now proposed to be above grade due to unforeseen site constraints. The project includes both new construction and renovation work. As a result of the new connectors, three internal courtyards will be created and the existing courtyard between the new Building A and the new parking garage will be reconfigured and relandscaped.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

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

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary and final site and building plans for the connectors and courtyards at the National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 3101.30(38.00)42708.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) is located at 8901 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Maryland, just northeast of the Bethesda Central Business District (CBD). The campus is comprised of approximately 245 acres and is bounded on the west by Rockville Pike, on the northeast by I-495, and on the south by Jones Bridge Road. The land uses in the immediate area are the National Institutes of Health across Rockville Pike, Stoney Ridge School of the Sacred Heart and medium-density residential housing to the north, Rock Creek Park and North Chevy Chase Park to the east and Columbia Country Club and medium-density residential housing to the south across Jones Bridge Road.

The topography of the campus includes gently sloping areas where development is concentrated, and some areas of moderately steep terrain. The campus is divided into development clusters related to medical, administrative, permanent housing, temporary housing, community services, and education. Building One, the central tower block, is the prime landmark structure of the existing National Naval Medical Center due to its architectural distinction and association with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, as well as with achievements in the practice of military medicine. Buildings 3 and 5 are slightly later ancillary structures in a similar architectural style, also designed under the supervision of the Tower Block's architect, Paul Philippe Cret and drawing significance from the same contexts. Building One is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), while the other two buildings have been determined contributing elements of the surrounding historic district eligible for the NRHP.

Prior Commission Actions

The Commission commented favorably on the concept design for the connectors and courtyards at its March 12, 2009 meeting. The Executive Director's Recommendation (EDR), which was adopted by the Commission, requested that the Navy submit a modified and more detailed site and landscape plan for the exterior courtyard between Buildings 3 and 5 and the circular driveway. They were asked to consider:

- reducing the size of the circular driveway and increasing the width of the sidewalks;
- creating continuous pedestrian access in front of the garage entrance;
- relocating the covered benches to the entrance of Building A where patients will be dropped off and picked up.

They also requested that the Navy submit landscape plans for the new interior courtyards created by the connectors.

The Navy has since submitted the requested information and adequately addressed the points outlined above.

Background

As a result of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) recommendations, the existing Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) located in Washington, D.C. will be closed and military medical services in the National Capital Area (NCA) will be realigned between two primary facilities serving the northern and southern portions of the NCA. The southern NCA will be served by a new hospital at Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, and the existing National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) in Bethesda, Maryland will be expanded and renovated to serve the northern NCA. All existing tertiary (sub-specialty and complex care) medical services currently provided at WRAMC will be relocated to Bethesda. At the time of the relocation, by September 15, 2011, the expanded NNMC will become a tri-service facility and be renamed the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda (WRNMMC).

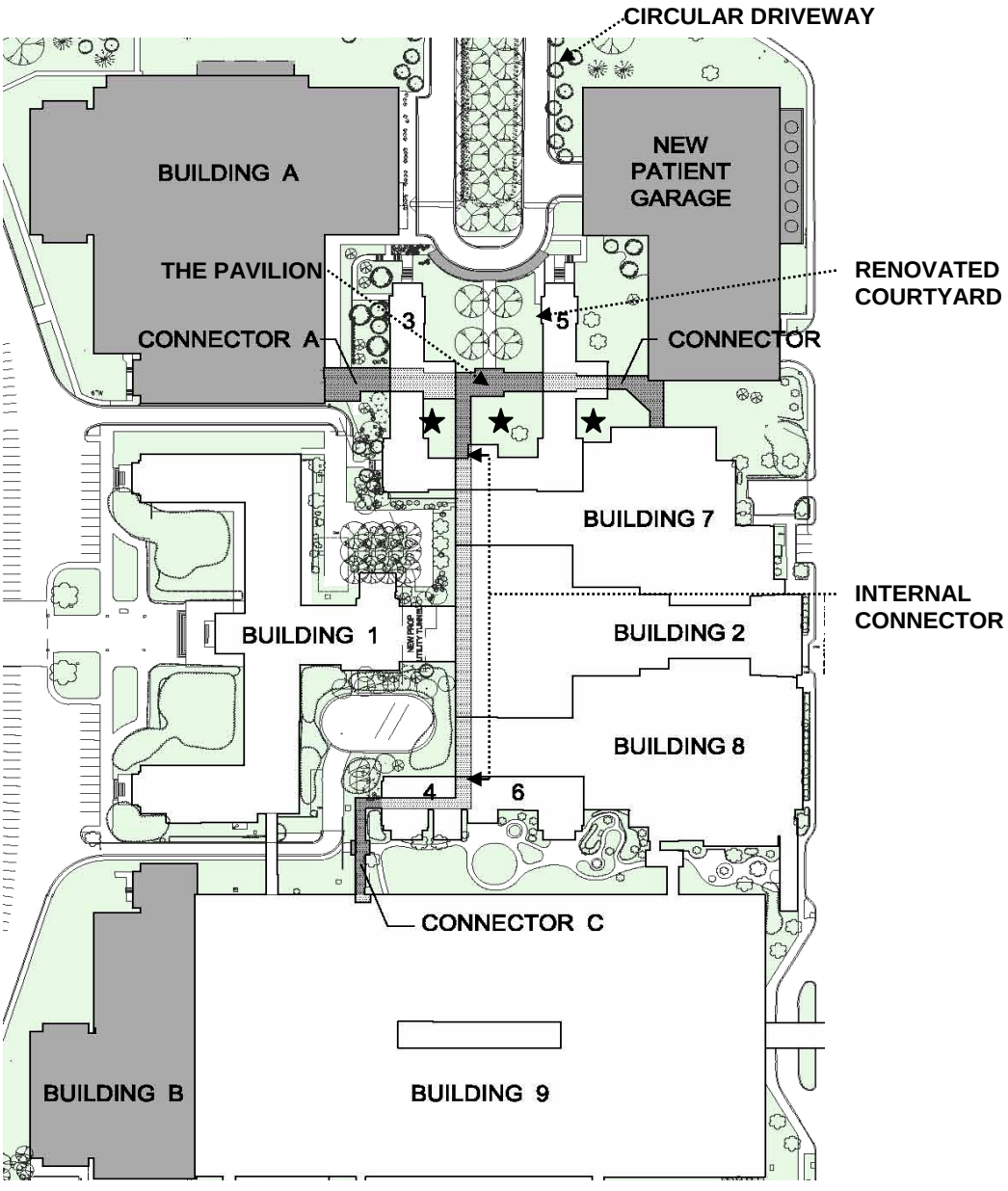
The first phase of the BRAC action is currently under construction. This includes Buildings A and B and a new patient parking garage. Building A will house a new outpatient care facility and Building B will accommodate inpatient diagnostic and critical care functions. The Navy is now proposing to construct "connectors" among Building A, the new parking garage and the existing buildings to accommodate easy patient mobility. As a result, they will create three new interior courtyards and renovate the existing courtyard between Buildings 3 and 5, Building A, and the new parking garage.

Proposal

The connectors and courtyards project includes both new construction and renovation work surrounding the medical care facilities on the campus.

Connectors

The planning concept for the new patient connectors envisions simple, efficient, internal connections among the medical buildings. The medical facilities are located in a series of separate buildings to the east, north and south of the historic Building One, the icon of the campus. Some of the older buildings are already connected whereas Buildings A and B and the patient garage are not. The connectors will be constructed of metal and glass. The first floor will occupy a footprint of approximately 7,760 square feet. The second floor will be approximately 6,480 square feet.



Proposed Site Plan
★ Interior Courtyard

The following individual connectors are proposed:

Connector A
Connector A will connect Building A and Building 3. Adjacent to Building 3 the Connector will be two stories, but as it connects with Building A, the new four story medical building, it will become four stories to enclose a stairwell.

02 CONNECTOR A - NORTH ELEVATION

01 CONNECTOR A - SOUTH ELEVATION

The Pavilion
This connector, termed the Pavilion, hallways already connect these two bui gurneys. The buildings are also occup passing through. The proposed Pavil transition to two stories as it connects proposed a large glass entryway in be newly designed courtyard and patient location, it will not be a major entrywa 3, 5, and A. The purpose of the Pav connector in between Buildings 3 and 5

Proposed Pavilion

Connector B
Connector B is one story and will connect the patient garage to Building 5 and Building 7.

Internal Connector
The Internal Connector, an existing two story connector that runs through Buildings 7, 2, and 8, will be renovated.

Connector C
Connector C will link Building 4 and Building 9. The first floor of this connector already exists. The project proposes to add a second floor onto the same footprint. There will not be any substantive changes to the courtyards immediately north of Building 9.

Courtyards

One of the defining attributes of the original campus is the courtyards. As a result of the new patient garage, Building A and the new system of connectors, a series of new interior courtyards will be created and the existing courtyard between Buildings 3 and 5 will be modified. The historic courtyards to the east of Building One will not be disturbed.

Pachysandra procumbens
(Alleghany Spurge)

The three new interior courtyards will provide light and vegetation to the surrounding building and connectors. The courtyards will be planted with Pachysandra procumbens (Alleghany Spurge) which will provide full groundcover that will thrive in the shade.

The larger area between Buildings 3 and 5, the patient garage, and Building A will include the modified courtyard and circular driveway. In between Buildings 3 and 5 there will be grass areas for sitting, benches and a row of Willow Oak trees that will frame the walkway. There will also be a row of canopied benches at the turnaround point of the driveway. The purpose of this element is to provide a visual end to the driveway and to help enclose the courtyard. They will also provide rain cover for patients walking from the garage to Building A. The Pavilion Connector will have doors that open to the plaza area.

Existing courtyard between Buildings 3 and 5

Proposed courtyard between Buildings 3 and 5

The island of the circular driveway between Building A and the new patient garage will be landscaped with a double row of Willow Oak trees and several Rhododendron bushes. The driveway is 24’ wide allowing for two rows of vehicles. There is a patient loading zone in front of the entrance to Building A that will be 160’ long. This will adequately allow for eight cars to load and unload at once if necessary. The plan also includes continuous 5’ sidewalks from the

entrance of Building A and the parking garage to North Palmer Road. The drop-off area will have a covered entrance, benches, and will be planted with Dragon Lady Holly.

Landscape plan for the exterior courtyard between Buildings 3 and 5, the driveway area, and the interior courtyards.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The Connectors

The design of the Connectors has not changed since the concept submission. Initially, the Navy considered connecting the new patient garage to Building A through the existing hallways of Buildings 3 and 5; however, the size of the hallways and the number of required turns resulted in an impractical route for patients in wheelchairs and gurneys. Furthermore, Buildings 3 and 5 are largely comprised of offices which would not be conducive to patient traffic. The Master Plan Update for the campus proposed putting the connectors underground to limit adverse effects to the campus; however, it was determined that extensive underground utility lines would prohibit such tunnels. There were also concerns about excavation affecting the historic courtyards. As a result, the Navy has determined that the proposed system of connectors is the only feasible option.

The design of the patient connectors is simple and efficient providing internal connections among the medical buildings. The new work will not connect directly to historic Building One and the new connectors will not be visible from Wisconsin Avenue.

The appearance of the connectors is very important, particularly because several of them interface with contributing Buildings 3 and 5. The applicant originally considered using precast and punched windows similar to the vocabulary of the historic buildings as well as Buildings A and B; however, because of the differences in precast finish and because it was felt that each building should be identifiable, it has been proposed that the connectors be constructed of metal and glass. This will still relate to the vocabulary of the existing structures, but allow each building to maintain its own identity. It also allows people to see the original buildings through the glass.

The Courtyards

In response to the Commission's previous action, the Navy has submitted a more detailed site and landscape plan for the exterior courtyard between Buildings 3 and 5 and the circular driveway. Staff finds the landscape plan suitable for the proposed space given its main function as a patient pick-up and drop-off area. The Willow Oaks and Rhododendrons in the center island will provide a colorful and largely maintenance-free landscape. The area between Buildings 3 and 5 has been neatly simplified to include grass cover and a row of Oak trees and benches that will frame the walkway to the Pavilion.

Rendering of the loading zone in front of Building A

Originally staff was concerned that too much of the area was dedicated to the driveway; however, the more detailed plan shows that the driveway is 24' wide which is necessary for two vehicular lanes – one to continue around the circle and the other to pull over to the loading zone. The loading zone is adequately sized (approximately eight cars long) to accommodate several vehicles with disabled patients. The Navy has added continuous sidewalks and crosswalks from North Palmer Road to Building A, the parking garage, and the Pavilion entrance. They have also added a continuous sidewalk in front of the parking garage, and a sheltered area and benches in front of the loading zone at Building A.

The Navy has submitted a landscape plan for the interior courtyards. Originally, they thought the courtyards would be publically accessible with benches and tables; however; upon further consideration, they determined that the small size and dark nature of the spaces would not be conducive to public use. Instead, the Navy has proposed to plant a vegetative groundcover that will thrive in the shade. Staff finds that the living vegetation will be visually appealing for those walking through the connectors and will also help to manage stormwater.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

At its February 2009 meeting, the Commission found that the Master Plan Update for the campus is not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital, and particularly conforms to the goals and policies of the Federal Workplace and Transportation Elements of the Plan. The proposed project is anticipated in the Master Plan Update and therefore is also not found to be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NCPC does not have independent NEPA responsibility for federal projects outside the District of Columbia. The Department of the Navy recently completed the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the WRNMMC campus. To allow flexibility in the design process, the EIS assumes that the medical addition footprint could vary somewhat from the specific footprint shown in the EIS but would remain in the area bounded by North Palmer Road, South Palmer Road, Wood Road, and Brown Drive. While the proposed connectors were not specifically analyzed, the EIS found that any change within the area above would not be expected to increase environmental impacts identified in the EIS.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

NCPC does not have independent Section 106 responsibility for federal projects outside the District of Columbia. The Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) has reviewed the connectors and courtyards project and has determined that the project will have an adverse effect on historic resources. The removal of historic material and the alteration of features and space that characterize these contributing resources are not in keeping with *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. MHT recognizes that the Navy explored alternative routes and was unable to find a way of internalizing the connectors while still maintaining a functional patient

path through the buildings. In an effort to minimize the adverse effect, the Navy did make changes to the plan for the Pavilion, however these changes did not entirely avoid the adverse effect.

In order to facilitate the resolution of this adverse effect on Buildings 3 and 5, the Navy has agreed to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with MHT. The MOA is being developed and it is anticipated that it will be executed in a couple months. MHT does not foresee any problems with the Navy regarding the mitigation requirements of the MOA and they support NCPC taking action on the project prior to the MOA being executed.

CONSULTATION

The following agencies have reviewed the EIS and determined that the Master Plan Update for the campus expansion is generally consistent with their plans, programs, and objectives:

- Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission in Montgomery County
- Maryland Department of Transportation
- Maryland Department of Planning
- Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development
- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

Maryland Historical Trust

The Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) found that the project will have an adverse effect on Buildings 3 and 5. In order to facilitate the resolution of this adverse effect, the Navy has agreed to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with MHT. Since this project is a component of the larger BRAC RFP2 Support Facilities undertaking at the campus, MHT requests that the Navy include the connectors and courtyards project as part of a comprehensive MOA for the RFP2 undertaking. The MOA is currently being developed and it is anticipated that it will be executed in a couple months. MHT does not foresee any problems with the Navy regarding the mitigation requirements of the MOA and they support NCPC taking action on the project prior to the MOA being executed.