

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 5253



**CHANCERY OF MOROCCO
INTERNATIONAL CENTER**
International Drive and Reno Road, NW
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the United States Department of State

January 29, 2009

Abstract

The United States Department of State, on behalf of the Chancery of the Kingdom of Morocco, has submitted final site and building plans for the new Moroccan Chancery, located at the International Center in northwest Washington, D.C. The project includes a building to serve as office space, the Ambassador's quarters, and a multipurpose hall; an underground parking garage; and related site improvements.

Commission Actions Requested by Applicant

Approval of final site and building plans 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 final site and building plans for a new chancery building for the Kingdom of Morocco, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 72.10(38.00)42664.

Commends the applicant and the design team for extensive consultation that has resulted in a well developed and elegant design for the proposed Chancery of Morocco.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The Chancery of Morocco is proposed to be constructed on Lot #4 at the International Center in northwest Washington D.C. The site is bounded by International Drive to the north, Reno Road to the south, the Chancery of Bangladesh to the west, and the Chancery of Ethiopia to the east. The 34,000 square foot site is nearly level adjacent to International Drive but has a steep slope on its south side down to Reno Road; the total change in grade is approximately 55 feet.



**PROJECT LOCATION
INTERNATIONAL CENTER (LOT 4)**

Prior Commission Action

The Commission approved the preliminary site and building plans for the Chancery of Morocco at its August 2007 meeting. The Executive Director's Recommendation (EDR), which was approved by the Commission, required that the following design modifications be considered for the final submission:

- A reduction in the footprint and horizontal massing of the guard booth.
- The addition of detailing to reduce the guard booth's monolithic appearance and the incorporation of additional window openings and subtle use of traditional Moroccan elements.

The Commission action also required the applicant to include a tree removal and planting plan, fully developed elevations, proposed exterior and site lighting, and a summary of parking accommodations.

The final submission has addressed the Commission's recommendations and includes the requested documentation. While the applicant was unable to reduce the overall footprint of the guard booth due to space requirements, the applicant has added several details to reduce its

appearance and improve the overall design to complement the main building.

Proposal

The United States Department of State (DOS) has submitted final site and building plans for a new Chancery for the Kingdom of Morocco. The proposed 49,000 square foot, four-story building will have three main components: the Chancery (offices), an Ambassador's quarters, and a multipurpose hall that will connect the public and private areas. Below grade parking will provide 50 parking spaces and there will also be ten outdoor visitor parking spaces.

The steep slope and the pie shaped lot have influenced the building design. The four-story chancery building sits on the front of the lot; the ambassador's office quarters are perched on the rear walls; and in between is the multipurpose hall connecting these two components.



Chancery of Morocco
Front Elevation

The chancery will be constructed of a light color cast stone in a horizontal striped pattern, with a combination of punched and projecting windows. Reminiscent of the traditional art and architecture of Morocco, a variety of ornamentation is incorporated into the exterior of the building, including exterior wall texture, a main entrance portico, bas relief carvings, baked wood windows, and crenellated parapets. The roof tiles are made of clay and have a glazed greenish hue.

Pedestrian and vehicular entry to the building will be through a paved and landscaped forecourt monitored from a simple guard booth that will be constructed of materials to match the Chancery; the forecourt will also provide an area for ten visitor parking spaces.

Site improvements will include terraces, trellises, metal perimeter fencing, and landscaping that will retain existing topography and level of cover as much as feasible. The steep slope towards Reno Road will necessitate a large curved retaining wall on the northwest side of the lot to accommodate an entrance ramp to the parking garage below. The grade change also results in a very tall rear façade, which is divided visually by function through the use of changes in scale, window openings, and roof shapes.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff recommends that the Commission commend the applicant and their design team for a well developed and elegant design for the proposed Chancery of Morocco; through ongoing consultation with NCPC and CFA staffs, the current design is a thoughtful improvement from the preliminary site and building submission and will be a positive addition to the International Center.

The improved building design better reflects the rich art and architectural history of Morocco. This is evident through the addition of symbolic and functional traditional architectural elements such as window shapes, exterior wall textures, main entrance portico and bay windows. The new design includes projecting windows on the front and rear of the building that are made of wood-like material or “baked wood” consistent with examples from Morocco. The main entrance portico is more elegant with the addition of new curved archways. The roof, which is now pitched in the center, consists of glazed clay tiles. The front of the building includes ornate cast aluminum screens which connect to the building wings.



Preliminary Submission
View from International Drive, NW (rendered)

Per the Commission’s direction, the guard booth has been redesigned to better relate to the proposed chancery building and overall site improvements. The design now includes window openings, a pitched roof with glazed clay tiles, and the subtle use of traditional Moroccan elements. While the applicant was not able to reduce the overall footprint due to space requirements, the revised design now enhances the overall image of the Chancery.



Final Submission
View from International Drive, NW (rendered)

The tree removal and planting plan illustrates that approximately eight trees will be removed for construction and 16 trees will remain on the site. The remaining part of the hill towards Reno Road, which is not part of the site, will not be altered. Over 35% of the site (12,000 square feet) will be restored to and/or remain in its original condition. Current contours will be maintained to the maximum extent possible. The proposed landscaping plan proposes a mix of evergreen and deciduous trees, including American Holly, Russian Sage, Bamboo, Beech and Hawthorne trees that



Light Rendering

will minimize the visual impact of the rear elevation to Reno Road on a year-round basis.

Staff has reviewed the lighting plan for the front and side areas along with required security lighting for the rear side of the building and finds it acceptable. The proposed lighting subtly displays the building's architectural elements and provides security. It does not cast light upon the adjacent lots or the landscaped hill behind the building.

The proposed design meets the NCPC Development Controls for the International Center (Controls) with regard to site restrictions, building frontage/setbacks, open space, parking requirements, and maximum elevation (Section 521.10 limits building height to a prescribed elevation of 392' above sea level). The overall height of the structure exceeds the 48-foot building height limit to allow for a parapet and pitched roof in the center, which are architectural elements representative of the architecture and cultural traditions of Morocco, as encouraged by the Controls. The elements are in harmony with the design of the building and have no adverse visual impacts on facilities within surrounding areas of the International Center or on views from distant points in the city.



Chancery of Morocco
Rear Elevation

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 policies in the Foreign Missions and International Organizations Element. The chancery “will demonstrate an appreciation of the architectural style and landscape of the surrounding environs while representing the finest architectural thought of the corresponding nation” and will “add visual interest and character, contribute to the cultural life, and promote diverse and lively communities.”

National Environmental Policy Act

The original Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the International Center, prepared jointly by the US Department of State, NCPC, and GSA, included evaluation of the Chancery of Morocco on Lot 4 of the Center. Since no significant changes to the site have occurred since the original evaluation, staff has determined that the EIS is sufficient for the current decision and that no additional environmental review is required for this project.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The Department of State has determined that proposed actions inside the International 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. 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 July 11, 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 General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

In its meeting of November 20, 2008, the Commission of Fine Arts approved the revised concept design for the new Chancery of Morocco. The Commission members concluded that their concerns about the previous scheme reviewed in September of 2007 had been addressed and that the project was much improved. The applicant will submit the final site and building plans to the Commission of Fine Arts in April 2009.