

**M STREET STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS**

M Street, SE, Between South Capitol and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets

Report to the District of Columbia Department of Public Works  
and the Department of the Navy

July 1, 1999

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*Abstract*

The proposal to implement streetscape improvements to the M Street corridor between South Capitol Street and 11<sup>th</sup> Street will greatly enhance the amenities and character of M Street, and contribute to economic development in the area, as well as provide public spaces for pedestrians. Major federal installations on M Street include the Washington Navy Yard and the Southeast Federal Center. Effective implementation of streetscape improvements will be consistent with the Commission's first initiatives in its Extending the Legacy Plan. Streetscape improvements will include Washington Globe Light fixtures, benches, single and double row street trees, special pedestrian plazas at selected intersections, and roadway reconstruction to include scored and tinted concrete pavers, and sidewalk and curb improvements.

*Authority*

Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952, as amended (40 U.S.C. 71d).

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*Commission Action*

The Commission:

- **Approves** the preliminary and final site and building plans for phases 1 and 2 of the M Street Streetscape Improvements, between South Capitol and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets, SE, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 24.00(38.00)-40649.
- **Except** for:
  - Alternates 4 and 5 to be submitted by the General Services Administration.
  - Light fixtures located in the median.
  - Street furniture, including the application of banners on light standards, pending further study.

*Related Recommendation*

The Commission requests that the General Services Administration submit for Commission review and approval, the design and environmental documentation for the proposed replacement of the existing Southeast Federal Center wall and related improvements along the south side of M Street between New Jersey Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, SE (Alternates 4 and 5).

## **BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION**

### *DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL*

The District of Columbia Department of Public Works (DPW), in cooperation with the Department of the Navy (Navy) and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for the M Street, SE Streetscape Improvements, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 24.00(38.00)-40649.

The proposal is a result of the Commission's Extending the Legacy Plan, which identified M Street in southeast Washington as an area of opportunity for economic revitalization. Four basic goals for improving the M Street corridor have been identified. These goals are:

- To recognize and help implement the Commission's Legacy Plan, which identifies M Street as one of its first initiatives;
- To develop working relationships between federal and local governments in the redesign of M Street, which would help to serve as a catalyst for urban change;
- To design the best plan for M Street; and
- To develop a streetscape design that ultimately enhances the environmental quality of the Anacostia River watershed.

To achieve these goals, the primary objective was to develop a physical design plan and an implementation strategy for M Street. This required Commission partnerships with DPW and the Navy. A stakeholders group was created that included GSA, the DC Office of Planning, DC Department of Housing and Community Development, representatives of Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and Councilwoman Sharon Ambrose's offices, private property owners, developers, and the community. Numerous meetings and workshops were conducted over the past two years. The proposed streetscape plan is the result of this effort and has the endorsement of the stakeholders group. According to the applicant, the major objectives of this streetscape plan include:

- Balancing both pedestrian and vehicular improvements.
- Creating special public spaces along the M Street corridor.
- Reinforcing a safe pedestrian environment.
- Identifying and implementing project elements.
- Creating two special high visibility projects in the plan to show immediate improvement.
- Accomplishing the first phase of the project as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

### Existing Conditions

M Street, SE is a six-lane, divided arterial that provides an east-west connection between downtown Washington, DC and the southeast part of the city. Destinations to the east include the 11<sup>th</sup> Street and John Phillip Sousa Bridges and Anacostia. Destinations to the west include South Capitol Street and its connections to the U.S. Capitol and Fort McNair and the southwest waterfront. The M Street corridor is well served by public transportation, including the Green Line Metrorail Station between New Jersey Avenue and Half Street. The major roadways surrounding the immediate are the Southeast Freeway (I-395) to the north, South Capitol Street to the west, and 11<sup>th</sup> Street to the east.

The M Street corridor primarily serves local traffic. The major employment centers adjacent to this project are the Southeast Federal Center (SEFC) and the Washington Navy Yard (Navy Yard), as well as other small private businesses. Access into the SEFC is at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. Access into the Navy Yard is at 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Isaac Hull Avenue, and 11<sup>th</sup> Street/N Street. Existing major pedestrian activities are concentrated in these areas, as well as in the 8<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, a north-south street that includes the Marine Barracks.

The M Street roadway contains six signalized intersections between South Capitol Street and 11<sup>th</sup> Street. A continuous sidewalk exists on both sides of M Street along its entire length. The sidewalk is deteriorated, narrow and below standard in many places.

### Proposed Streetscape Plan

The proposed streetscape improvements are derived from a “Conceptual Design Report for the M Street SE Corridor” (6 May 1999), prepared by consultants retained by the applicant. The corridor study examined, in part, existing and future pedestrian movements in relation to future development and land use patterns in the M Street corridor. In consideration of the study, the streetscape improvements are planned to occur in 2 phases. Phase 1 implementation would include typical streetscape improvements within the right-of-way of M Street from South Capitol Street to 11<sup>th</sup> Street. The right-of-way includes an approximate 70-foot roadway, including a four-foot median, and approximately 10 feet on either side for pedestrian improvements. These improvements would include the following major streetscape elements:

- Installation of Washington Globe (single and twin) and pole light fixtures. Poles would be augmented by banners and traffic signals, as appropriate and according to DPW standards. Poles would be located at a minimum of 1.5 feet from the face of the curb. Lighting would be provided according to required DC standards for illumination for safety and visibility.
- Site furnishings would include bollards with chains, benches, trash receptacles, bus shelters, telephone booths, and bike racks. The site furniture would be uniform and color coordinated.

- Continuous line of street trees on both sides of M Street and low-lying vegetation. A double row of trees will be implemented, wherever possible. Typical species of trees to be planted are Northern Red Oak and Willow Oak.
- All intersections would be repaved in Portland Cement Concrete with an inlaid pattern (scored and tinted concrete). All other road pavements between the intersections would be milled and resurfaced.
- Resurfacing the median, curb, and nearly all sidewalks and handicapped ramps along M Street.

The corridor study also identified opportunities for improvements beyond the 90-foot right-of-way. These special public places include the spaces in front of the Southeast Federal Center, the Washington Navy Yard, the Metro Station at Half Street, and the intersections at South Capitol Street, New Jersey Avenue, and 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Potomac Avenue. These Phase 2 improvements would include the following:

- Creation of pedestrian plazas at 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Potomac Avenue, New Jersey Avenue, and at the Metro Station at Half Street (Alternates #2, #4, and #8). Matching specimen trees, Washington Globe Light fixtures and scored and tinted concrete paving would be incorporated at these locations.
- Intensive landscaping at the entrances of the Navy Yard at Isaac Hull Gate, between 5<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and the 9<sup>th</sup> Street public gate.
- Intensive landscaping at the entrances of the Southeast Federal Center at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Establishing an additional approximate 20 feet of pedestrian space by demolishing the existing brick wall and installing a new, visually transparent, fence along the frontage of the Southeast Federal Center (Alternate #5).
- Establishing other landscaping on South Capitol Street, between Cushing Place and 1<sup>st</sup> Street, and on M Street between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, and at 11<sup>th</sup> Street (Alternates #1, #3, #6, and #7).

#### *CONSULTATION WITH DCDPW, NAVY, AND GSA*

Staff has consulted with DCDPW, NAVY AND GSA on the proposed M Street streetscape improvements on a continuing basis for the past two years. Staff believes that consultation has been productive and successful in preserving the integrity of the first initiative of the Commission's Legacy Plan.

## *EVALUATION*

Staff recommends that the Commission approve preliminary and final site and building plans for phase 1 and alternates 1,2,3,6,7 and 8 of phase 2 of the plans submitted by DCDPW. These improvements would greatly enhance the amenity and character of M Street, South Capitol Street, and Potomac Avenue, which are designated Special Streets in the Commission's Comprehensive Plan. It would also contribute to the economic revitalization of the M Street corridor, including present plans that would accommodate approximately 4,000 new Navy personnel at the Navy Yard, redevelopment of the SEFC, and new private development initiatives. Finally, the addition of uniform street trees, street repaving, street furniture, such as benches, Washington Globe Light fixtures, and trash receptacles, and pedestrian plazas is consistent with the goals contained in the Commission's Legacy Plan.

Alternate 4 includes the provision of a pedestrian plaza and landscaping at the intersection of M Street and New Jersey Avenue. Alternate 5 includes additional sidewalk and the removal and replacement of the existing wall on the SEFC property on the south side of M Street between New Jersey Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street SE. As both alternates 4 and 5 are located on GSA property, staff advises DPW that this action will require submission by GSA for approval by the Commission prior to implementation. Submission materials should include design details and appropriate environmental and historical documentation (Section 106). Staff anticipates that this action would be a desirable enhancement to the M Street corridor improvements and anxiously awaits review of the detailed submission.

Finally, staff notes that the redevelopment of Potomac Avenue **between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets** as a pedestrian plaza will require its closure to vehicular traffic by the Council of the District of Columbia. This will require review by the Commission.

## *COORDINATION*

### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on June 9, 1999, 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 Office of Planning; the Fire Department; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

## *CONFORMANCE*

### Comprehensive Plan

The proposed streetscape improvements would affect M Street, SW., South Capitol Street, New Jersey Avenue, Potomac Avenue, and Ninth Street, SW., all of which are designated Special Streets in the Preservation and Historic Features element of the Comprehensive Plan. The proposed Streetscape improvements would enhance the amenity and special character of these special roadways, which would be consistent with applicable policies in the Element. These policies specify:

Special Streets and Places should be maintained and enhanced in a manner that promotes their roles as major features that help establish the images and the symbols of the National Capital in the minds of its residents and visitors. They should be embellished, when possible, with monuments, fountains, sculpture, gardens, distinctive buildings, and other features of civic art. The embellishments should be placed strategically to serve as frequent points of orientation and visual delight...

The existing street space and the buildings fronting on Special Streets and Places should be maintained, protected and enhanced. Any repair, maintenance, improvements or new buildings should respect the historic elements, enhance the aesthetic quality, and promote the amenity of this space.

The exceptional width and openness of the street space along Special Streets should be retained where this quality exists. Street views or vistas should not be obscured and movement should not be impaired by structures or signs within the public rights-of-way.

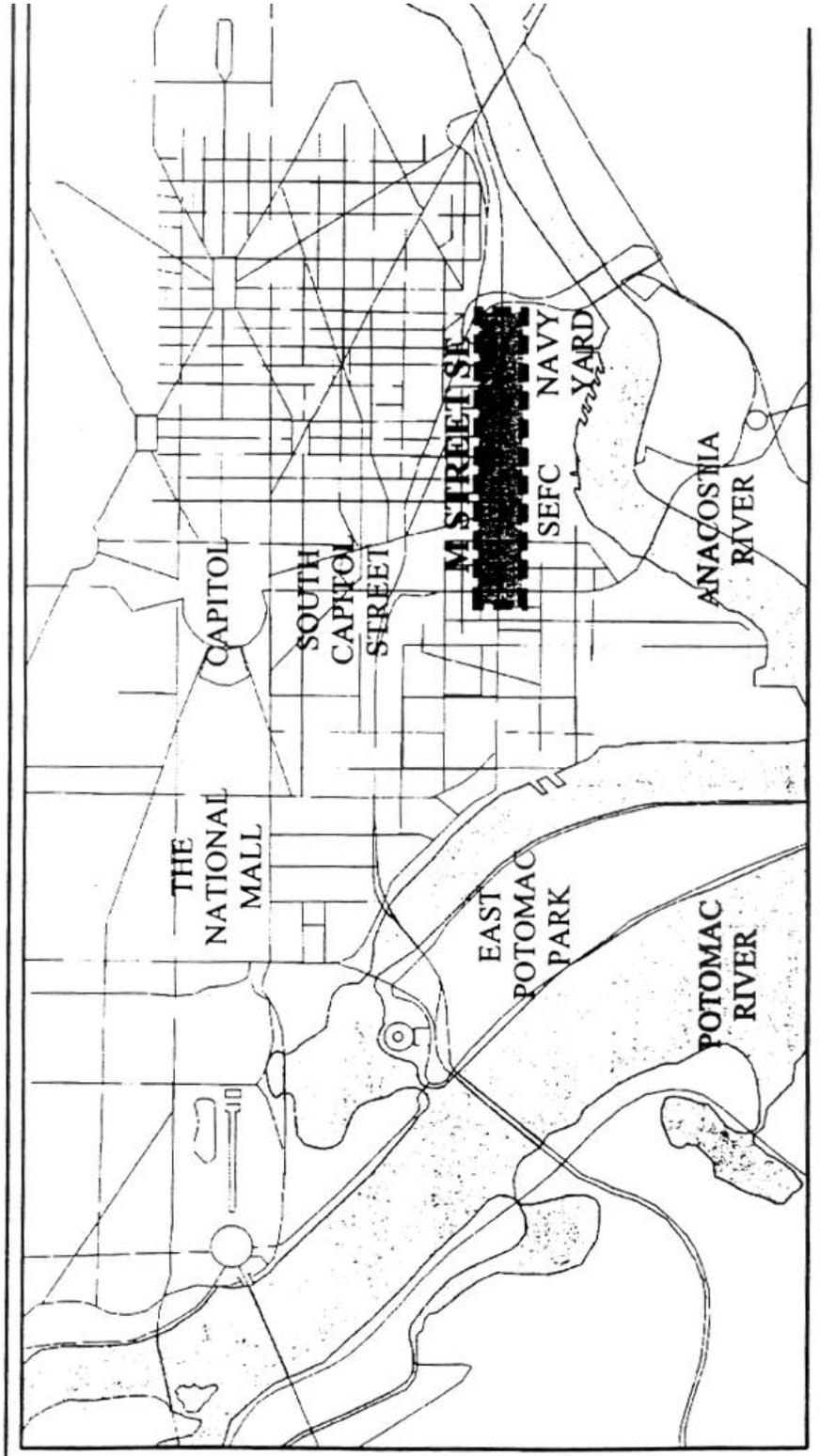
Within Historic Districts, and particularly within the L'Enfant City, original street patterns should be preserved by maintaining public rights-of-way. Where alleys continue to provide adequate off-street service and transportation functions, they should be retained.

### National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the District of Columbia has determined that the proposed project qualifies as a categorical exclusion.

National Historic Preservation Act

DPW has reviewed the proposal with the DC Historic Preservation Division. The 800 block of Potomac Avenue SE, proposed for alteration, no longer reflects the original right-of-way of the L'Enfant Plan and, therefore, is not a part of the National Register designation of the Plan.

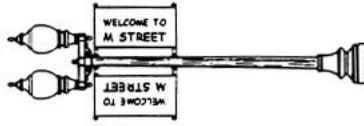


LOCATION PLAN

**Streetscape Elements**

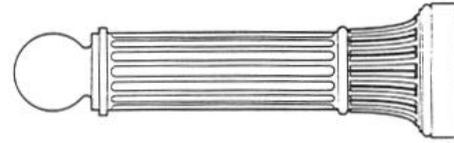
**Lighting**

Lighting will be provided according to District of Columbia standards. The Washington globe and pole are the standard fixtures for Washington streets. Lighting will perform to accepted and required standards for illumination for safety and visibility, and the vertical character of the light poles will be augmented by banner poles and signal poles as appropriate. Banner or banner-and-light poles will add a distinctive character and theming opportunity to the corridor.

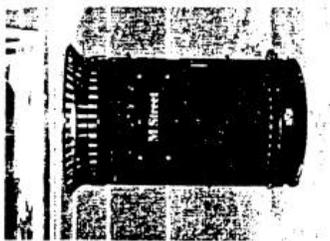
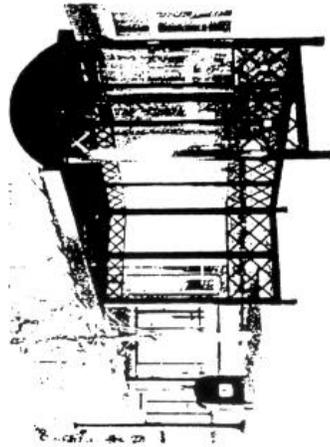


38 : DESIGN GUIDELINES & SPECIFICATIONS

**Site Furnishings**  
Site furnishings will be provided according to District of Columbia standards, spaced and located along the corridor to serve pedestrian commuter and resident populations. Bus shelters, benches, trash receptacles, bike racks and the like are important to lending civility to the public realm, and will be robustly made of durable materials, and color-coordinated, to underline the special character of M Street.



40 | DESIGN GUIDELINES & SPECIFICATIONS



M Street SE Concept Study

Inc.