



**WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER
STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS**

Mount Vernon Place, NW
Washington, D.C.

Report to the Washington Convention Center Authority

December 6, 2001

Abstract

The Washington Convention Center Authority has submitted preliminary and final site development plans for the installation of streetscape improvements adjacent to and across the street from the new Washington Convention Center. Currently under construction, the new building extends from Mount Vernon Place to N Street, and from 7th to 9th Streets, NW. The sidewalks include those adjacent to the building as well as those across 7th, 9th, and N Streets, NW. The proposal includes the installation of pavement, street trees, trash receptacles, and light standards on these streets, as well as lighting on L and M Streets between 7th and 9th Streets, NW.

Authority

D.C. Code, Section 5-432, and Section 5 (a) and (c) of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952, as amended (40 U.S.C. 71d).

Commission Action

The Commission **approves** the preliminary and final site development plans for the installation of streetscape improvements adjacent to and across the street from the new Washington Convention Center, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 31.20(38.00)-40975.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The D.C. Department of Public Works has reviewed and approved the proposed streetscape improvements. The proposal includes the following elements:

Site and sidewalk paving

- *At corners of building within building line at Mount Vernon Place, L Street, and at the Metro station entrance: Granite paving*
- *Sidewalks adjacent to building: 4"x 8" precast concrete pavers (charcoal and white) to be laid in a basketweave pattern, with precast concrete pavers (in charcoal) laid in a header band*
- *Sidewalk Curbs: Granite*
- *Sidewalks across 7th, 9th, and N Streets, NW: red brick sidewalks laid in a basketweave pattern*
- *Pedestrian Crosswalks: on concrete streets, a darker gray concrete with an impressed grid pattern*
- *Low seating walls at southeast and southwest corners of the Convention Center on Mount Vernon Place, NW: Granite*
- *Bollards for pedestrian safety at taxi and bus drop-off points on Mount Vernon Place and L Street: precast concrete sleeves*

Street Trees

- *On sidewalks adjacent to new Convention Center: Scarlet Oaks, Northern Red Oaks, Sugar Maples (with tree grates). At Mount Vernon Place, trees are planted in beds with English ivy and dwarf Japanese yew. New trees are 4-4.5" caliper.*
- *Across 7th, 9th and N Streets, NW: Scarlet Oaks will replace diseased or missing trees as necessary on 7th and N Streets; new trees will be planted along three-block length of the west side of 9th Street, due to the reconstruction of 9th Street.*

Street Furniture

- *On sidewalks adjacent to and across the street from the new Convention Center:* trash receptacles.

Lighting

- *On sidewalks adjacent to new Convention Center:* the Washington Globe light standard (“Twin Twenties”) installed at 45’ on center.
- *On sidewalks opposite new Convention Center:* the Washington Globe light standard installed at 90’ on center
- *Lights at intersections:* the Cobrahead lights (standard at major intersections in the District of Columbia)
- *On L Street between 7th and 9th Streets, NW:* six light fixtures suspended from stainless steel cables attached to building facades and crossed over street; downlighting from the undersides of the canopies to the sidewalks
- *On M Street between 7th and 9th Streets, NW:* recessed lighting on the underside of the building above the street

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its September 1997 meeting, the Commission approved the location and the preliminary site and building plans for the new Convention Center. A Memorandum of Agreement with stipulations for future streetscape improvements in the adjacent neighborhood was signed prior to the Commission’s action.

The Commission approved the final site and building plans for the New Washington Convention Center at its December 1998 meeting. The final site and building plans include canopies along both sides of L Street that project across the width of the sidewalks. In the Commission’s approval, it was noted that many elements were subject to further review as they were developed, including the “landscape design and streetscape plans, to include paving, street trees, planters, lighting, street furniture, and way-finding signage.”

The sidewalk on the south side of Mount Vernon Place and other improvements for Mount Vernon Square were approved by the Commission at its August 2001 meeting.

EVALUATION

Paving materials, crosswalks, street trees, bollards, and trash receptacles

The proposed streetscape improvements were reviewed and approved by the D.C. Department of Public Works (DC DPW) as consistent with its Streetscape Manual. This review included the species and placement of street trees, the style and placement of the trash receptacles, the use and placement of the Washington Globe and Cobrahead light standards, the use of light fixtures suspended from stainless steel cables above L Street to either side of the pedestrian bridge, and the use of recessed lights above M Street. It also included the choice and use of paving materials.

The proposal is also consistent with the stipulation of the Memorandum of Agreement of September 1997 (pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act) to make improvements to the sidewalks on 7th, 9th, and N Streets across from the new Convention Center. Further, the proposal has been reviewed by the Convention Center Advisory Committee, a group established by WCCA and comprised of public and private sector representatives.

The staff concurs with the applicant's proposed pavers for the sidewalk adjacent to the new Convention Center. The facades of the new building will be limestone, precast concrete in a limestone color, and beige brick, with a granite base. The selection of a contrasting color that is also complementary to the granite is appropriate for this major public building.

It is appropriate to use red brick for the repaired or rebuilt sidewalks across 7th, 9th, and N Streets, NW. The predominant sidewalk paving material on those blocks and in the surrounding neighborhoods is red brick.

Bollards are proposed for the sidewalks at the taxi drop-off points on Mount Vernon Square and at the bus drop-off points on L Street. These bollards, 2'6" in height and 1' in diameter, would have a precast concrete sleeve. They are not intended to be security bollards; they are intended to prevent accidents between pedestrians and vehicles at the curb. They would be installed 2'6" back from the edge of the curb (on center) and 20' apart (also on center).

Lighting

Cobrahead lights will be used at the intersections, as directed by DC DPW.

Recessed lighting will be installed on the underside of the building above M Street, and also in the soffit of the L Street pedestrian bridge.

WCCA proposes to light the L Street roadway by suspending six light fixtures on crossed stainless steel cables over the street because there is not sufficient room on the sidewalks to install both the light standards and the projecting canopies. Six light fixtures, three on either side of the pedestrian bridge, would be hung on cables attached directly to the steel structure inside the building facades through stainless steel escutcheons at a façade height of approximately 30'. With the slack in the cables, the bottom side of the two-foot-high fixtures would hang

approximately 25' above the street. For comparison, the underside of the pedestrian bridge is also approximately 25' above the street.

The purpose of the proposed lighting along L Street is to cast light into the traffic lanes; the hanging fixtures would be centered over the midpoint of the right-of-way. For pedestrian safety, the sidewalks would be illuminated by light emanating from the undersides of the canopies.

The L Street entrances to the building (under the pedestrian bridge and also at the corners) are major drop-off points for visitors coming by bus to the Convention Center. The site has been designed so that up to sixteen buses can drop off passengers at a time, eight buses in each direction on L Street. Canopies will be installed over the sidewalks, except under the pedestrian bridge, for passengers alighting from or boarding the buses.

The original 90' right-of-way of L Street (from building face to building face) is maintained through the site. The road will have six lanes, two lanes for through traffic in each direction, plus two additional bus lay-by lanes, one in each direction. The sidewalks are each 14' wide. The canopies will project 12'6" over the sidewalks. The remaining 1'6" sidewalk width is not sufficient to install the Washington Globe light standards without their abutting the edges of the canopies. The Twin Twenties are typically installed with their center point set 2'6" back from the front edge of the curb.

The staff would prefer that L Street be lit by Washington Globe light standards as they are typically installed in Washington. One of the Commission's primary objectives during its review of the Convention Center was that of scaling and designing the Convention Center so that it fit as well as possible into its urban context. For example, WCCA designed the pedestrian bridge across L Street so that as much of the street would be open to the air as possible. Using the same light standards on L Street that are used around the site would reinforce the Commission's goal of knitting L Street into the street pattern through and around the Convention Center as much as possible, despite the pedestrian bridge.

However, the canopies along L Street were included on the final site and building plans that the Commission approved in December 1998, and the canopy steel has been purchased and is on site. The canopies have a recognized functional reason for projecting over the sidewalk to shelter visitors boarding or alighting from buses in inclement weather. L Street is, in essence, a public street through the convention center, along which both sides are dedicated to bus lay-bys.

Given the lack of space on the sidewalk, the WCCA design team studied and ultimately discarded the following alternatives to the installation of the Washington Globe light standards along L Street:

- 1) Use of the illumination emanating from the underside of the canopies alone. The staff concurs with the applicant's conclusion that this is insufficient to light the roadway (especially if buses are lining the sidewalks).
- 2) Installation of approximately 22-foot-long projecting brackets for light fixtures on building facades on both sides of L Street. The staff concurs with the applicants that

- the brackets would be more noticeable and more distinctively unique as a streetscape feature than the hanging fixtures, especially during the day. This would defeat the goal of having L Street look as typical a street as possible.
- 3) Installation of lights on the edges of the canopies that would project into the roadway. This suggestion came from the DC Office of Planning representative on the Convention Center Advisory Committee. While appreciating the suggestion of an additional option, the staff believes this design would create lighting that is more noticeable, even glaring, to drivers and pedestrians and more distinctively unique than the hanging lights. Commercial and institutional canopies in the District of Columbia do not typically contain lights that cast illumination horizontally into the middle of the street.

Therefore, even though the suspended light fixtures are not used elsewhere in the District of Columbia, the staff finds that the other options (also not found in the District) are even more visually intrusive and more distinctly different than the suspended fixtures. The light cast by the fixtures shines downward to the traffic lanes, with a wash of approximately 50-60'. Six lights in total are proposed for the 500' length of the two blocks of L Street. Further, the underside of the suspended lights is at a similar height to the soffit of the bridge, thus minimizing their presence by day and night as much as possible. Given the prior approval of the projecting canopies for functional reasons and the subsequent purchase and fabrication of the canopy steel, the staff recommends that the hanging fixtures be installed over L Street.

COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

The Commission of Fine Arts expects to review this project at either its December 2001 or January 2002 meeting.

CONFORMANCE

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on November 14, 2001, 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 Public Works; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

National Historic Preservation Act

NCPC served as the lead federal agency for Section 106 review of the new Convention Center. A Memorandum of Agreement was signed in September 1997 prior to the Commission's approval of location and preliminary site and building plans. The stipulations of the Memorandum of Agreement have been or are being fulfilled as anticipated, including the stipulation to provide streetscape improvements for the sidewalks on the opposite sides of the streets adjacent to the convention center. WCCA agreed that the streetscape improvements

would be substantially complete by the date of the issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy. The new Washington Convention Center is expected to open in March 2003.

National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and in accordance with the Commission's Environmental Policies and Procedures, the Commission and WCCA prepared a Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in April 1997 and issued a Record of Decision on the action in September 25, 1997. That analysis included streetscape and viewshed impacts.

Site landscaping includes the implementation of street trees and streetscape improvements, earlier identified in the Section 106 MOA for the project, involving a majority of both sides of all of the streets adjacent to the New Convention Center. However, the incorporation of street trees on L and M Streets is limited by the presence of the lower-level exhibit hall. All aspects of the submitted landscape and surface pavement improvements adhere to the mitigation identified in the NEPA process. Landscape/streetscape construction implementation is scheduled to follow building construction.

Comprehensive Plan

Streetscape improvements are proposed for the Washington Convention Center now under construction, which is located adjacent to 7th and 9th Streets, NE, respectively. These streets are designated Special Streets in the Preservation and Historic Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan. A policy in this element applicable to the construction of new buildings on Special Streets specifies:

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

The proposal is generally consistent with this policy. However, some limited adjustment may be needed to the design of the canopy and related lighting proposed to provide an adequate blending with the other streetscape improvements.