

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## **Security Task Force Recommends New York Firm To Design Pennsylvania Avenue In Front Of The White House**

**Washington, DC** – The National Capital Planning Commission’s Interagency Security Task Force today recommended that the Commission select the New York based design firm of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates to create a pedestrian-oriented public precinct for Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House.

The Task Force made its recommendation after reviewing design concepts from four of the country’s top landscape architect design firms that had been invited to submit ideas for beautifying and securing one of the most visible locations in the Nation’s Capital. The other design firms included Balmori Associates of New York City; EDAW of Alexandria, Virginia; and Peter Walker and Partners of Berkeley, California.

“This is one of the most important, urban spaces in the nation and I am pleased that we are able to recommend a design team that can make this a site worthy of this incredible and special landscape,” said Task Force Chairman Richard Friedman. “I am confident Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates will design a plan that allows Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House to be secure, but also welcoming and dignified. A proper design is long overdue given it has been years since the street was closed and so-called temporary measures were taken to secure it.”

Van Valkenburgh’s design concept consists of three primary components:

- Creating threshold spaces at 15th and 17th Streets to provide locations for security checkpoints, to frame the area of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House, and to provide shaded seating areas.
- A precinct in front of the White House that incorporates a granular paving similar to that used in other renowned civic landscapes around the world.
- A street corridor lined with large trees located to the north of the center of Pennsylvania Avenue that could be used by a proposed secured Circulator, a new transit system planned for Downtown that would permit limited vehicular use of the Avenue in front of the White House.

The design also includes a simple array of historic Washington light fixtures, stone benches, and discreet bollards and allows for good views of the White House.

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“Van Valkenburgh submitted a plan that is sensitive to the historic character of this stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue,” said Alex Krieger, Chairman of the Department of Urban Planning and Design at Harvard University who serves as a consultant to the Security Task Force. “His concept calls for a subtle transformation that evokes a clear yet beautiful and gracious pedestrian realm.”

“This plan is a great conceptual starting point,” said Commission Chairman and Task Force member John V. Cogbill, III. “The design can evolve to incorporate comprehensive input from many parties regarding security and functional features. Most importantly, however, this design team best conveyed the four qualities we were seeking. We wanted a team that would be responsive to input from others, remain flexible in their thinking, be sensitive to context, and be creative. I fully endorse this recommendation to the full Commission.”

The Task Force requested that each design team follow established design guidelines when creating their concept for this stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue. These criteria included:

Security – incorporating necessary security features.

Pedestrian Environment – creating a welcoming setting that can be enjoyed by pedestrians, and that is enhanced by amenities such as designed lighting, paving, seating and other streetscape components.

Visual Quality – designing a setting in which landscape elements add to the visitor’s experience and are consistent with Lafayette Park and the White House grounds.

Historic Character – preserving the historic integrity of the street and the historic setting and views of the White House.

Circulation – creating a setting in which the Inaugural Parade can follow its traditional route in front of the White House and one in which a proposed secured Circulator could be accommodated.

Additional criteria included that the design not preclude the future reopening of the street to vehicular traffic and that it not preclude the possible future construction of a tunnel.

Participants in the process were pleased the Task Force recommended a design team that clearly recognized the importance of the site, as well as the need for security.

“I believe the Task Force has recommended a team that will be receptive to input regarding not only security needs, but also historic preservation issues,” said John L. Nau, III, Chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. “We look forward to continuing our collaboration with the Task Force and the designers on this important site.”

“The Secret Service is looking forward to working with the selected design team and to our continued participation with the NCPC on this very important project,” said Jim Mackin, spokesperson for the Secret Service.

Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House is just one part of the Task Force’s ongoing work on the Urban Design and Security Plan, due to be released in July. The Plan will identify permanent, comprehensive solutions to the ever increasing number of security elements that are cluttering Washington’s streets and sidewalks and marring the historic urban design and beauty of the Nation’s Capital.

In addition to the Pennsylvania Avenue design, the Task Force is working with designers on solutions for Washington’s entire Monumental Core, including the Federal Triangle, the National Mall, Downtown, the West End, and the Southwest Federal Center. Proposals will include an array of streetscape security and design solutions that would be implemented over the next three to five years. Security designs for some sites on the National Mall have already been presented to the Task Force and the Commission, including plans for the Washington Monument, and the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials.

If approved by the Commission when it is presented in July, the draft Urban Design and Security Plan will be circulated for public comment. The Commission expects to release a final Plan in fall 2002 and forward it to the President and to Congress at that time. In the meantime, the Commission will continue to work with the selected design team and key advisory groups, including the Secret Service, to develop preliminary and final design plans for Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House.

“It is our goal that a design for Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House be in place in time for the next Presidential Inauguration,” said Friedman. “Security measures have become an unfortunate but necessary feature of life, as clearly demonstrated in our capital city, but this is a huge step forward in making sure that good security and good urban design go hand in hand.”

Members of the Security Task Force include Chairman Richard Friedman; NCPC Chairman John V. Cogbill, III; and representatives from the Department of Interior, the General Services Administration, the DC Mayor’s office, and the District of Columbia Council’s office. Key advisory groups include the Secret Service, the Federal City Council, the Commission of Fine Arts, DC Department of Transportation and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

*The National Capital Planning Commission is the federal government’s central planning agency in the District of Columbia and surrounding counties in Maryland and Virginia. The Commission provides overall planning guidance for federal land and buildings in the region. It also reviews the design of federal projects and memorials, oversees long-range planning for future development, and monitors capital investment by federal agencies.*