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## **NCPC Reviews a Draft Plan for Armed Forces Retirement Home and a Perimeter Security Proposal for the Museum of Natural History**

**Washington** – Members of the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) today reviewed a draft master plan that proposes a framework for potential uses for the Armed Forces Retirement Home campus in Northwest Washington, D.C. The Commission’s comments on the plan will guide the Armed Forces Retirement Home as it develops a master plan for this historic site.

The Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) is overdue for a new master plan—the last one was prepared in 1970. The 272-acre campus, which occupies one of the highest elevations within the District and provides historic views of Washington, is surrounded by the Petworth residential neighborhood, the Catholic University of America, the Washington Hospital Center, the Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital, and the Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Home National Cemetery.

The AFRH was established in 1851 and provides shelter, healthcare, recreation, and other services to some 1,400 military veterans. It is an independent federal agency that is supported by a trust fund rather than annual appropriations to finance its operations. In 2002, Congress authorized AFRH to sell or lease a portion of its property to supplement its long-term operation. The master plan will guide this effort.

The agency’s submission to NCPC outlines a general development plan that addresses land use, open space, and density within different sub-areas of the campus. The Commission provided several comments on the plan that should help AFRH develop a master plan that will better preserve the campus and complement the surrounding area. The Commission’s recommendations included the following:

- The Commission does not support the applicant’s proposal to develop up to 9 million square feet of new space on the campus. The maximum amount of new development should not exceed the moderate range, as specified in the draft Environmental Impact Statement.
- Ensure that building heights will be compatible with the character and scale of the surrounding area, the topography and other natural conditions of the site, and the historic assets on the site, thus protecting historic view sheds. In determining building heights, surrounding residential patterns should also be recognized.

- Include publicly accessible recreational open space in several areas of the campus; and coordinate open space development with the community and NCPC staff.
- Prepare a Transportation Management Plan.
- Prior to submitting the master plan, provide NCPC staff with a revised draft plan that addresses the Commission's comments.

The proposal for the Armed Forces Retirement Home establishes six zones where expansion would occur. AFRH would retain the use of Zones 1 and 2, which encompass the central area and the northeastern section of the campus. Development in Zones 1 and 2 may include areas for recreational activities and a combination of single- and multi-family housing.

The highest concentration of development would occur in Zones 3 and 4, which are located in the southeastern section of the campus. These zones could potentially include research and development, office, residential, hotel, and educational uses.

The proposal calls for Zone 5, which is located at the southwestern edge of the campus to accommodate residential development with some retail on the ground floor. Zone 6, along the western side of the campus, is intended to reflect the residential character of the nearby Park View neighborhood, while including some small-scale retail. Open space could also be provided in this zone for new residents and for existing residents of the Park View neighborhood.

While new development could make the Armed Forces Retirement Home accessible in some locations, it is currently a secured site, not open to the public. The historic campus served as a retreat for American presidents, including Abraham Lincoln, and as a refuge for veterans of conflict, beginning with the Mexican-American War. Given the wealth of historic buildings and resources on the campus, development must be carefully reviewed to ensure that harm to a National Historic Landmark is minimized.

Another project the Commission reviewed will secure the perimeter of the National Museum of Natural History. The Commission had granted preliminary approval for a Mall-wide perimeter security program that included a scheme for this museum in October 2004. The Commission approved final plans today, noting that the revised scheme reflected direction from the Commission and consultation with NCPC staff.

The Smithsonian's design scheme for the museum responds to the unique site conditions that exist along Constitution Avenue, Madison Drive, 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and 9<sup>th</sup> Street. On Constitution Avenue, a free-standing wall of open cast-stainless steel panels interspersed with granite slabs will provide visually open security. Bollards and two new granite-faced guard booths will secure the Constitution Avenue driveways while new landscaping, an ADA-compliant entrance, and new signs will improve the entry's appearance and function.

On Madison Drive, existing retaining walls will be raised to create a security barrier, leaving the curbs and sidewalks unimpeded. Regraded planting beds will create a Bird Garden—similar to the Butterfly Garden established along 9<sup>th</sup> Street—and make the barriers less visible to pedestrians. In addition, the Smithsonian Institution will use stainless steel bollards and granite pavers in front of the entrance. The bollards will run parallel to the street curb; the sidewalk will be sloped toward the street; and the handicapped ramp will be widened to provide a more formal and integrated sidewalk design. An alternative scheme that the Commission recommends for the south façade consists of raising the level of Madison Drive in front of the museum in order to eliminate the curb. With this option, the bollards would be installed in the same location.

Security along 12<sup>th</sup> Street will extend elements from Madison Drive and Constitution Avenue while security along 9<sup>th</sup> Street will blend with the existing Butterfly Garden. The Smithsonian also will create a Geological Specimen Garden with boulders along the northeast and southeast corners of 9<sup>th</sup> Street.

The Commission commended the Smithsonian for developing a thoughtful, well-designed security scheme at this prominent location.

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*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.*