

PRESS RELEASE



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NCPC Reviewed Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Design and Historic Patent Office Building Plans

Washington, DC – At its monthly meeting today the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) commented favorably on a revised concept design for the proposed Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial. The selected site for the memorial is a four-acre, triangular-shaped parcel of land located on the northwest corner of the Tidal Basin in West Potomac Park on Independence Avenue, SW. The revised design features include a *mountain of despair*—a large stone sliced in half and approximately 30 feet high that will serve as the main entrance to the memorial; a stone of hope that will be engraved with Dr. King’s image; and a variety of landscaping elements that will complement the existing setting at the Tidal Basin.

In response to the Commission’s comments from an earlier review in December 2005, the memorial sponsor eliminated a proposed memorial walk with 15 private niches; removed a water element that would have flowed over panels that are to be inscribed with Dr. King’s orations; and widened the *mountain of despair* stone entryway. As anticipated by the Commission, most of these changes help to focus the visitor’s attention on the memorial’s key features. However, the Commission observed that the widened entryway might actually reduce the visual relationship between the *mountain of despair* and the *stone of hope*. The Commission recommended that the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation consider returning to the former entry design, which allowed for a 12-foot passageway.

The Commission asked that the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation work with the National Park Service on the size, location, and programmatic requirements of a Ranger and Visitor Information Kiosk. The kiosk would include space for a Park Service ranger station, two restrooms, an information booth, and a gift shop.

The Commission also reviewed three elements of the Patent Office Building, home to the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery. These elements included preliminary site development plans for the building’s courtyard and revised concept designs for exterior landscaping and reconstruction of the F Street staircase.

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The Commission approved preliminary site development plans for the reconstruction of the courtyard for the Patent Office Building. The courtyard will include the use of two types of black granite for the courtyard floor, large white marble planters with seating on the edges, and a daytime museum café. The Commission did not approve three proposed catering benches. They believed that the proposed catering benches would detract from the character and function of the courtyard as a public space and should be located elsewhere in the building.

The Commission also recommended that a proposed water scrim (a shallow moving sheet of water) that will traverse the entire length of the courtyard be reconfigured. The Commission thinks that the water scrim is a good solution, but its current design and location need further refinement.

The Smithsonian researched restoring historic fountains that had formerly been located in the courtyard and determined that they could not be acceptably restored and installed. The Commission concurred that the fountains are not in a condition to be reused as originally anticipated, and agreed with the Smithsonian's suggestion to treat the fountains as artifacts to be interpreted in a permanent exhibit on the history of the building in the museum.

The Commission also commented favorably on a revised concept design for rebuilding the F Street stair and landscape improvements to the Patent Office Building's reservation. The proposed plans will return the site to its 1870s-1930s configuration before the 1935 realignment of F Street. The 1935 action removed the stairs and decreased the size of the building's lawn. The Smithsonian's proposal will rebuild the F Street staircase, extend the south lawn, relocate the historic fence to its previous position, and install new street trees, street lights, and sidewalks.

The Smithsonian is currently conducting a threat assessment for the building and the Commission requested that the Smithsonian submit any necessary perimeter security proposals with the reservation landscape preliminary site and building plans.

Today's submissions reflect the Smithsonian's response to the Commission's previous review of the project on September 8, 2005. At that time the Commission approved final site and building plans for the enclosure of the historic courtyard with a glass canopy. The Commission's approval was conditional on the Smithsonian following specific measures to offset the adverse effect of the canopy on the building and the demolition of the original open courtyard landscape. The mitigation measures included reconstructing the courtyard, restoring and installing the two original cast iron courtyard fountains, reconstructing an F Street stair, and implementing a landscape and streetscape plan.

The Commission also commented favorably on concept site and building plans for the first phase of building modernization for the U.S. Department of Commerce Herbert C. Hoover Building except for perimeter security and related streetscape elements. The department is located in the Federal Triangle at 14th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW. As part of the plan, the National Aquarium will relocate from the 14th Street side of the building to a location fronting Constitution Avenue with a dedicated entrance.

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NCPC's *National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan* first promoted the idea of a comprehensive perimeter security master plan for the entire Federal Triangle, and the Commission recommended that the Hoover Building's perimeter security design be deferred until it can be coordinated with efforts to develop a comprehensive design solution for the entire Federal Triangle.

Finally, the Commission approved preliminary and final site and building plans, except for perimeter security elements shown in the submitted renderings, for the Food and Drug Administration's six-story Center for Devices and Radiological Health Office Building. The Center will be located at FDA's consolidated campus at the White Oak Federal Research Center in Montgomery County, Maryland. The Commission will review a Transportation Management Plan for this new facility at its June 1, 2006 meeting.

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.

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