

PRESS RELEASE



401 9th Street, NW
North Lobby, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20004
Tel: 202 482-7200
Fax: 202 482-7272
www.ncpc.gov

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Contact: Lisa MacSpadden or
Athena Hernandez
202-482-7263 or lisa@ncpc.gov
202-482-7270 or athena@ncpc.gov

NCPC Comments on Draft Master Plan for St. Elizabeths West Campus and Project Submissions for the John F. Kennedy Center and Patent Office Building

Washington, DC –The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), at its November 1 meeting, provided comments on the draft Master Plan for the proposed conversion of the St. Elizabeths West Campus into the headquarters for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The plan, submitted by the General Services Administration (GSA), includes two alternative designs for the site, each with transportation, parking and access plans, and perimeter security elements.

In its recommendations, the Commission required that GSA modify the draft Master Plan to include one or more alternatives that include a maximum of 2.5 million gross square feet of development above ground and to mitigate or minimize the major, long-term, adverse impacts of any alternative to the West Campus of St. Elizabeths. The Commission's requirements were organized according to five main themes: view sheds, transportation, community benefits, historic preservation, and environmental sustainability. These requirements are consistent with NCPC's *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*, GSA's mission and goals for this project, as well as the purpose and need identified in the DEIS. The Commission also directed GSA to provide additional information before submitting the final Master Plan including a Transportation Management Plan, a Historic Preservation Plan, and a Construction Management Plan.

Each of the two design scenarios for the site, referred to as Alternatives 3 and 4, include development of approximately 4.5 million gross square feet of office space and support space to accommodate approximately 14,000 DHS employees, plus 1.8 million gross square feet of parking. The variances in the two alternatives relate to the historic preservation of the site and the programmatic requirements of DHS.

In Alternative 3, the plan would demolish 25 existing buildings, retain 37 buildings, and add new structures throughout the existing campus. The plan also involves additions to the site's Center Building. The demolished buildings in Alternative 3 would be replaced with four areas of new construction on the site. Reflecting input from historic preservation groups, Alternative 4 would demolish 18 existing buildings and retain 44 buildings. This plan also includes undetermined additions to the Center Building and new structures elsewhere on the Campus where buildings will be demolished. Both scenarios preserve the Center Building, a red-brick structure in Gothic revival style designed by Thomas U. Walter, the architect responsible for the Capitol dome.

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To secure the facility, both plans propose a double fence line, vehicle barriers at entry points, secure entrances with screening areas at each building, a delivery screening facility, and surveillance equipment and alarms to augment the physical security elements. Access to the campus will be divided between three existing gates and two proposed new gates. The two new gates will be located along a proposed new access road that connects an exit ramp from I-295 with Firth Sterling Avenue. The plans each call for approximately 5,000 parking spaces.

The Commission's recommendations will provide guidance to GSA in the development of the final Master Plan, which is expected to be submitted to NCPC for approval in the spring of 2008.

The Commission also commented favorably on the concept design for a pair of glass and steel staircases and a pair of glass elevators that will connect the Kennedy Center River Terrace and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Trail. The applicant, the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), collaborated with the Kennedy Center and the National Park Service on the design. In addition to the staircases and elevators, which extend from the terrace to ground level, the concept design includes a retaining wall along the river side of the Parkway that forms the eastern edge of the plaza; a paved plaza with benches, grass, and cherry trees extending to the river's edge; and a railing at the river's edge. The stairs, elevators, and plaza would be illuminated at night. The design does not preclude the establishment of a boat dock in the future, as envisioned in the Commission's Legacy Plan.

The Commission recommended that, in the next phase of design development, DDOT fully consider the Kennedy Center's desire for the stairs to be perceived by their patrons as "inviting rather than a challenge." The Commission also recommended that DDOT consider the requests of the National Park Service to preserve the river vista from the parkway and to reconsider the inclusion of a proposed water feature as an unnecessary element that will increase maintenance costs.

Lastly, the Commission reviewed final site and building plans for the Patent Office Building's reservation landscape, F Street stair reconstruction, security elements, and signs. The Patent Office Building, a National Historic Landmark, houses the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture. The building occupies Reservation 8 in the L'Enfant Plan and is bounded by 7th and 9th Streets, and by F and G Streets, NW.

The Commission commended the Smithsonian Institution for enhancing the Patent Office Building's façade and reservation, for reconsidering its security requirements in response to previous Commission comments, and removing proposed barriers from public space.

The Commission approved the rehabilitation of the reservation landscape plan; reconstruction of the F Street staircase; and the security elements, which include a new granite wall supporting the historic cast iron fence, two guard booths, and six retractable bollards at the service entrances on the north side of the building. Also approved was the completion of a small, permanent exhibit on the history of the building's architecture and ornamentation, including the installation of a curved segment and urn from one of the historic courtyard's two original cast iron fountains.

Included in the submission was proposed signage on the sidewalks and attached to the cast iron fence for the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery. The Commission disapproved the signage as well as the proposed lettering on the building's exterior at the north and south entrances. Finally, the Commission required the Smithsonian, through Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, to consult with NCPC staff and other review agencies on the installed and proposed signs and lettering and formally submit the proposal to the Commission, as requested at the April 2007 meeting.

In addition to the action items in this month's public meeting, the Commission approved five consent calendar items (no presentations given) including the final site and building plans for the Porter Neuroscience Research Center at NIH in Bethesda, concept designs for Diamond Teague Park in Southeast, and replacement of six antennas and a new radio equipment cabinet at the Henry A. Wallace Beltsville Agriculture Research Center. Information about actions taken at the November 1 Commission meeting can be accessed on www.ncpc.gov.

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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