

PRESS RELEASE



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NCPC Updated on Streetcar Proposal in Washington, DC and Plans for the Old Convention Center

Commission also reviewed plans for a Planned Unit Development in the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic District

Washington, DC – The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) at its monthly meeting on Thursday, March 6 received a status report from the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) on a pilot project to bring streetcars back to Washington, DC. The director of DDOT, Emeka Moneme, briefed the Commission on the status of the pilot project in Anacostia, and DDOT's investigation of innovative streetcar technology that does not require overhead wires. Federal laws prohibit overhead wires in the historic L'Enfant City and Georgetown.

The update also included a presentation from NCPC staff on the history of streetcars in Washington and a discussion on the project in the context of NCPC's plans and policies. The Commission has requested that DDOT continue exploration of alternative streetcar technology that would avoid the use of overhead wires.

The pilot project is expected to be operational in approximately 18 months. Moneme added that a solicitation of proposals from streetcar manufacturers for a citywide system may begin at the end of this year. That process is expected to take up to two years.

The Commission also commented on the proposed action of the District of Columbia Zoning Commission to approve a Consolidated Planned Unit Development (PUD) at the corner of 10th and F Streets in Northwest. The site for the proposed development is located across 10th Street from Ford's Theater and across F Street from the old Woodward & Lothrop Department Store building. As proposed, the existing building would be renovated and incorporated into the design of a new 11-story office building with ground floor retail.

With guidance from the Historic Preservation Review Board, the building has been designed to reflect the historic elements of the district and surrounding buildings in the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic District. The building exterior is terra cotta veneer along the west and southern walls. The historic, two-story, masonry structure at the corner of F and 10th streets will be renovated, and an aluminum glass curtain wall system will complete the design. Pedestrians will have access to retail along F and 10th streets; the office space will only be accessible along F Street. The parking spaces and a loading area will be accessible using a 20-foot wide alley at the rear of the building.

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The Commission's role is to advise the District of Columbia Zoning Commission on whether the project will adversely affect an identified federal interest. The identified federal interest related to this project is the Height of Buildings Act of 1910.

The Height Act establishes the maximum height for this building at 120 feet, based on the width of F Street. The uppermost roof of the building is 120 feet height, but a parapet wall at this level rises above that height. The building also has a penthouse that does not meet the Height Act's setback requirements.

The Commission advised the Zoning Commission that the proposal would be adverse to the federal interest because it does not conform to the requirements of the Height of Buildings Act. The Commission also recommended that the applicant be required to modify the design to set the parapet wall and the penthouse back from the exterior walls of the building a distance equal to their height above the adjacent roof.

The meeting concluded with an informational presentation from the District of Columbia Deputy Mayor's Office for Planning and Economic Development. The Commission was briefed on the redevelopment plans for the Old Convention Center site. The site, bounded by New York Avenue and H Street, and 9th and 11th streets in Northwest, will feature six buildings with office and residential space, ground-level retail, and underground parking.

The District envisions the redeveloped site as a major shopping attraction and a pedestrian friendly destination in the heart of downtown Washington. Environmental sustainability is a priority, and the design team plans to use low-impact development techniques to meet the standards of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System. The site also will include the new Northwest Park. The Commission expects to review plans for Northwest Park at its April 3, 2008 meeting.

This month the Commission also approved one consent calendar item (no presentation given): preliminary and final site and building plans at the Henry A. Wallace Beltsville Agriculture Research Center for the replacement of nine T-Mobile transmitting and receiving antennas, one microwave antenna, and two associated ground-level equipment cabinets.

Information about actions taken at today's Commission meeting can be accessed at 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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