



Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: November 1, 2012

PROJECT Japanese Lantern Site Enhancements Tidal Basin West Potomac Park Southwest, Washington DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 7338
SUBMITTED BY United States Department of Interior, National Park Service	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 1.44(38.00)43509
REVIEW AUTHORITY Approval per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)	APPLICANT'S REQUEST Preliminary and final approval of site development plans
	PROPOSED ACTION Approve with comments
	ACTION ITEM TYPE Consent Calendar

PROJECT SUMMARY

The National Park Service, on behalf of the Government of Japan, has submitted preliminary and final site development plans for enhancements to the Japanese lantern site located on the Tidal Basin, West Potomac Park. The proposed enhancements would provide a pathway that would lead to the lantern and a new plaza adjacent to the lantern. The plaza is designed to evoke a zen style stone garden with natural boulders and granite pavers that suggest patterns of raking. The National Park Service is also proposing to relocate a nearby plaque that commemorates the 1912 gift of the cherry trees to the proposed plaza.

KEY INFORMATION

- The Japanese Government is putting forth the proposed site enhancements in recognition of the 100th anniversary of Japan's 1912 gift of approximately 3,000 cherry trees.
 - The NPS has removed a pathway that was in the concept design because the construction of the pathway could have negatively impacted the cherry trees.
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RECOMMENDATION

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary and final site development plans for site enhancements at the Japanese lantern located near the Tidal Basin in West Potomac Park.

Supports the removal of the west pathway that would have traversed from the Japanese Lantern plaza to the Tidal Basin sidewalk, near the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, due to potential

impacts on the cherry trees from construction of such a path; however, **recommends** that the National Park Service monitor pedestrian flow after construction of the site enhancements to ensure that a second path is not necessary to protect the cherry trees from pedestrian foot traffic.

PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

Previous actions	February 2, 2012 – The Commission reviewed the concept design for the site lantern and commended the Japanese Government and NPS on a design. The Commission recommended that as the design progresses, the applicant evaluate one pathway material and the removal of a handrail on the west pathway.
Remaining actions	None

Prepared by C. Kelly
October 25, 2012

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The Japanese lantern is located on the National Mall along the north side of the Tidal Basin. The site is bordered by Independence Avenue to the north, the Kutz Bridge to the northeast, and the Tidal Basin on the south. The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial is located in close proximity to the lantern on the west.



Figure 1: Project Location

The Japanese lantern site is a grassy open area facing Independence Avenue. Surrounding the lantern to south are the cherry trees that line the Tidal Basin. Surrounding the Tidal Basin is a sidewalk that connects the Japanese lantern site to the Kutz Bridge and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial.



Figure 2: Project Site

Background

The Government of Japan is seeking to make landscape improvements to the site of the 360 year old Japanese lantern given to the United States from Japan, in 1954, in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the signing of the peace treaty of amity and friendship between the United States and Japan. In addition, improvements to an existing plaque commemorating Japan's 1912 gift of approximately 3000 cherry trees are also proposed. The project is in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the 1912 gift which symbolized the friendship between the people of Japan and the people of the United States.

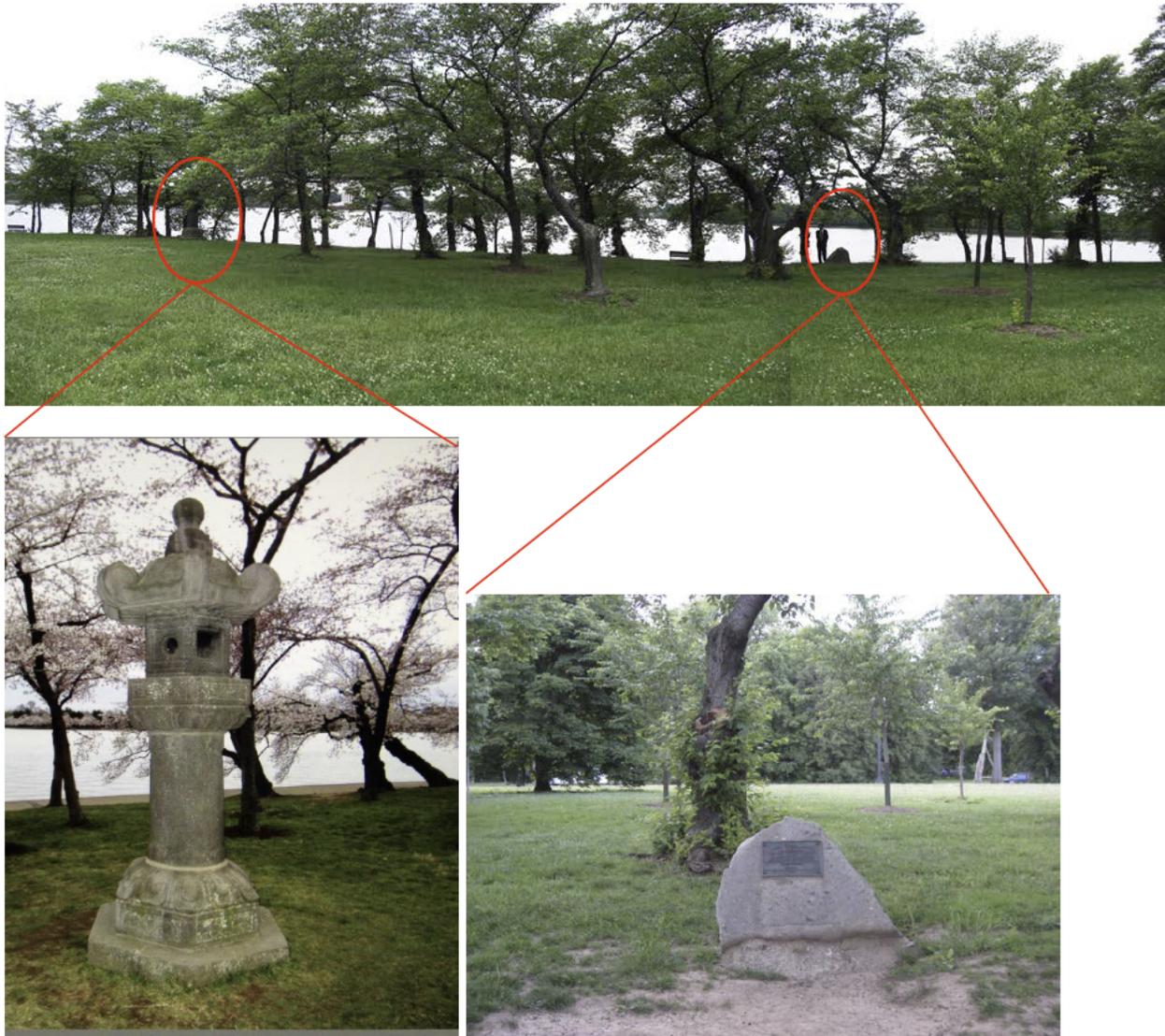


Figure 3: Current Site Conditions of the Japanese lantern and commemorative plaque

Proposal

The National Park Service, on behalf of the Government of Japanese, has submitted preliminary and final site development plans for site enhancements to the Japanese lantern site. These enhancements include: a new pathway that leads from the existing sidewalk around the Tidal Basin to the site, a new granite plaza on the north side of the lantern, relocating the plaque commemorating the 1912 gift of the cherry trees to the plaza area, and the placement of natural boulders throughout the plaza and pathway areas.

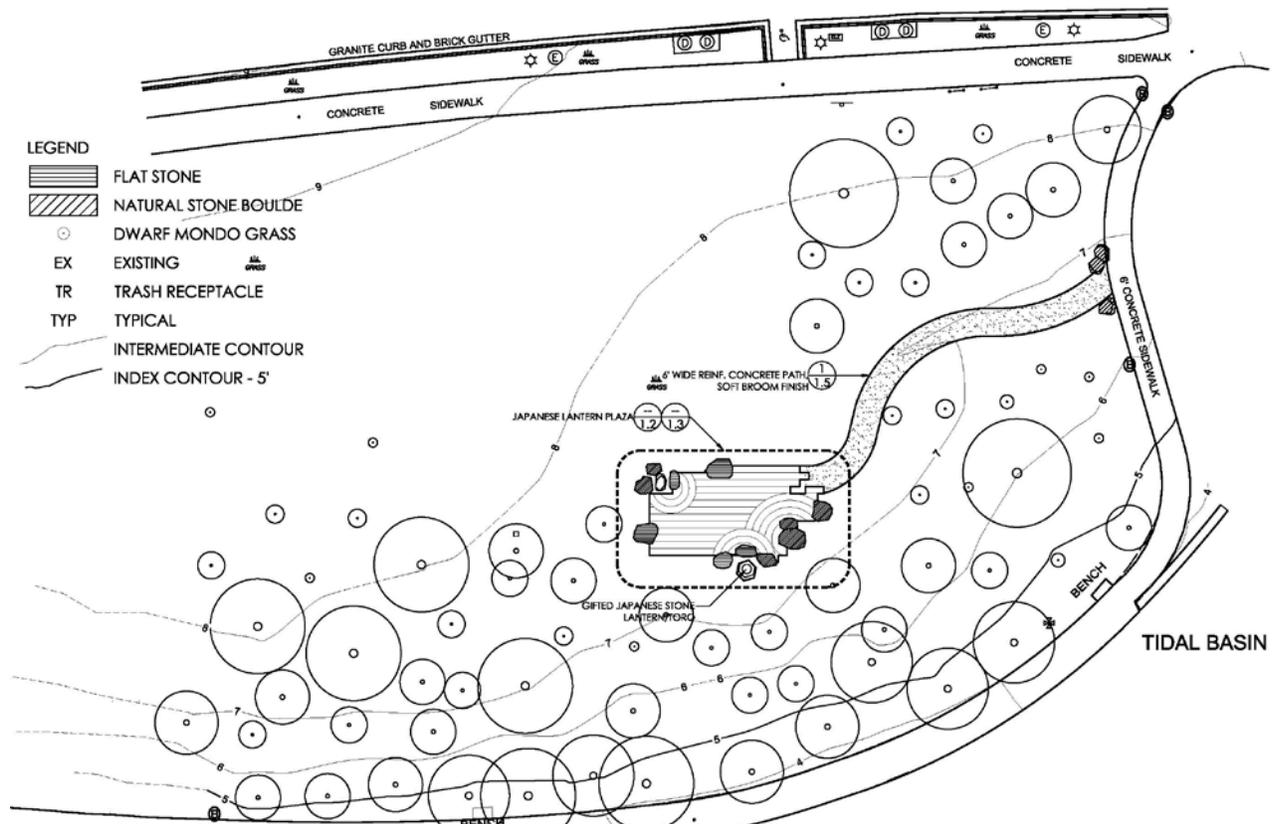


Figure 4: Proposed Site Enhancements

A new pathway that would connect people from the Tidal Basin near the Kutz Bridge to the lantern site will be approximately 90 linear feet and 6 feet wide. The pathway will be concrete with a broom finish. The entrance to the pathway will be marked by three boulders of varying sizes. Figure 5, shows the section for the concrete walkway.

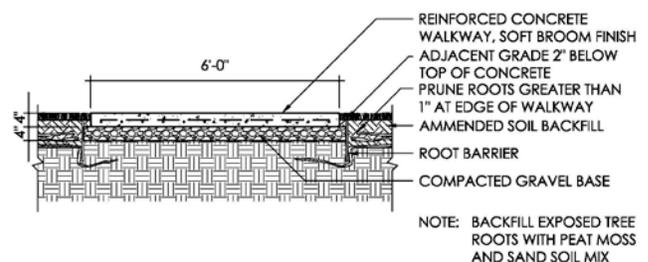


Figure 5: Concrete Walkway Section

The pathway leads to a 20 x 40 foot plaza located on the north side of the lantern. The design intent of the plaza is to mimic a Japanese zen garden with natural boulders and raking patterns. The plaza will be constructed with granite pavers. The pavers will be smoothed to minimize the appearance of joints. Circular cuts in the granite will radiate from the lantern, mimicking a raking pattern seen in zen gardens. The plaque commemorating the 1912 Japanese gift of the cherry trees will be placed on the west side of the plaza.

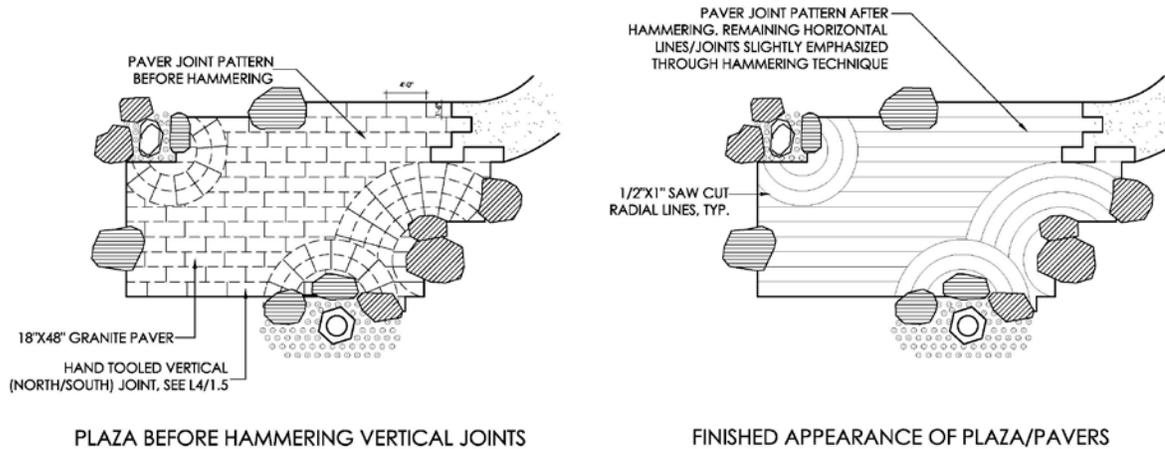


Figure 6: Site plan indicating paver joint pattern

As part of the Japanese garden design, the project includes the use of eleven boulders. The boulders vary in height, from flush to five feet tall. The tallest boulders will be located on the east side of the plaza. Smaller boulders will be placed around the lantern and the 1912 commemoration plaque. Figure 7 shows the location and heights of the proposed boulders.

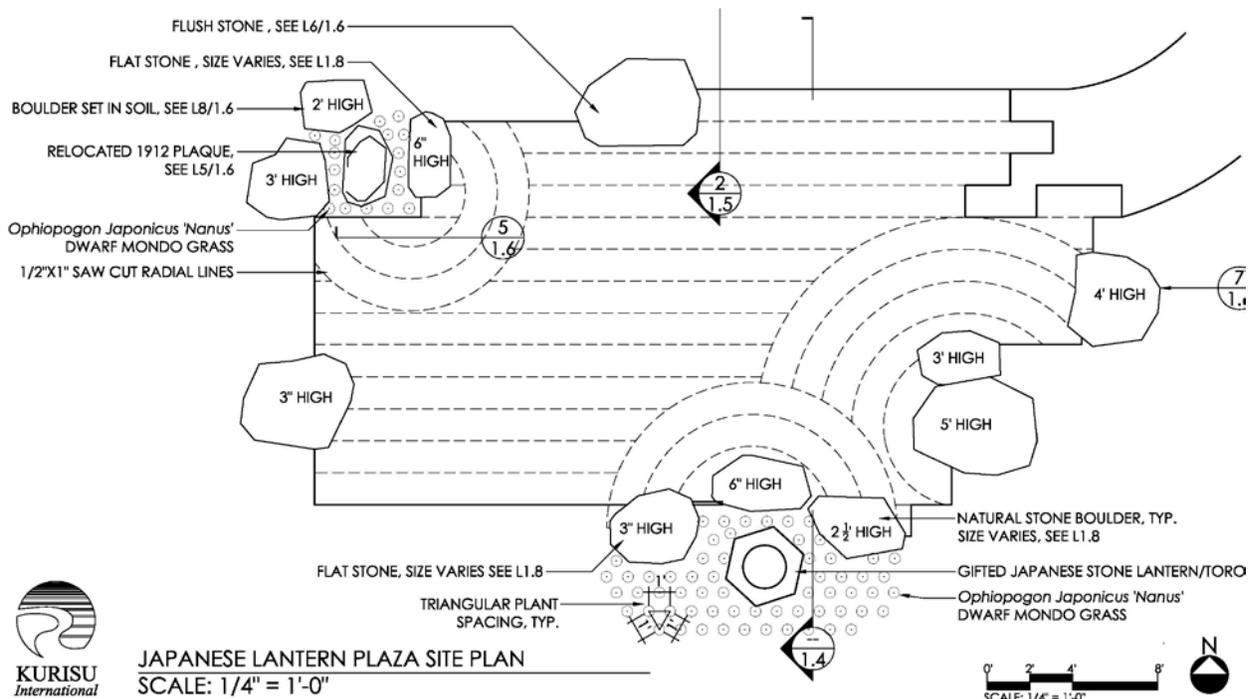


Figure 7: Site plan indicating boulder height

II. PROJECT ANALYSIS/CONFORMANCE

Analysis

Staff supports the proposed enhancement project. The project has been designed to enhance the setting for the two existing commemorations and to make them more accessible to the public. The relocation of the 1912 plaque and the introduction of new pathway will also serve to better protect the cherry trees, since visitors currently looking for the plaque must trample the roots of some of the oldest cherry trees in order to find the cherry tree plaque. Currently, the grass around the lantern and the plaque get worn away from use.

In the concept design for the project, the NPS proposed a new five-foot wide pathway west of the new plaza that would have led people towards the Tidal Basin and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. The proposed pathway would have begun as a concrete broom finished path and then would have transition to a recycled wood/composite path material. This alternative material was proposed in order to minimize disturbance to the root system of the existing cherry trees. Furthermore, in areas where the grade requires, a handrail would have been provided. At the time that the Commission reviewed the concept design, the Commission recommended that the NPS evaluate the used of one pathway material to minimize different types of materials in the historic landscape and also recommended that the NPS evaluate pathway options that would not require a handrail in order to minimize the appearance the new walkway has on the landscape setting of the cherry trees.

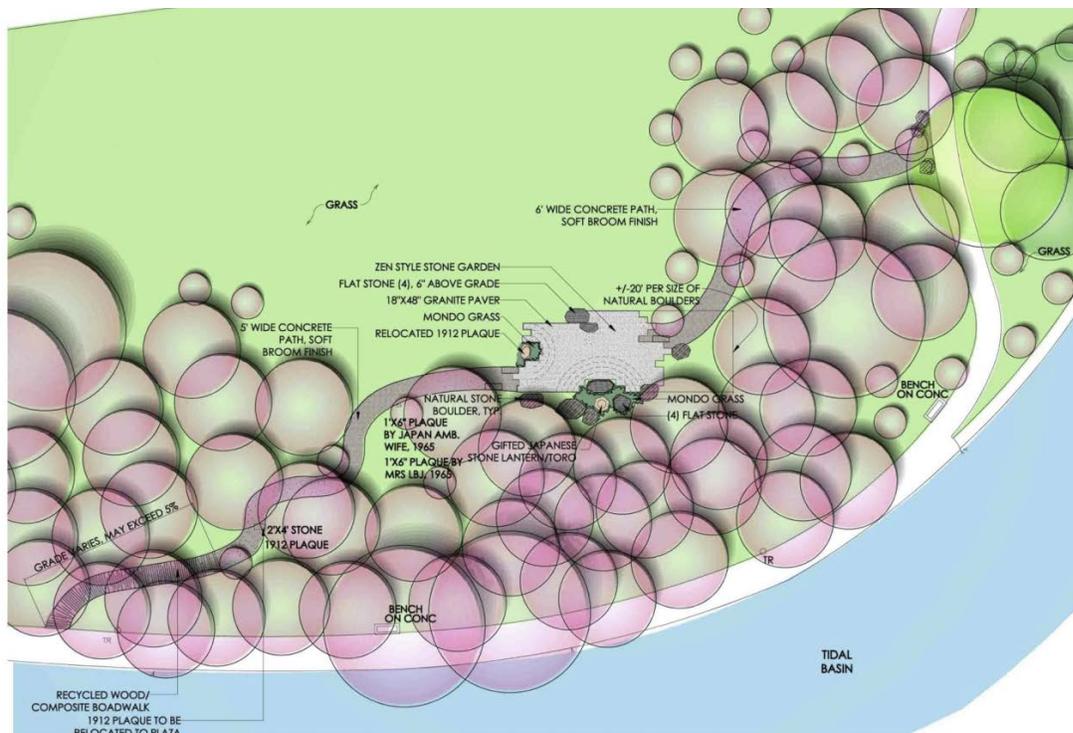


Figure 8: Concept Design

Since concept design, the NPS has evaluated the west pathway and has determined to remove the pathway from the design as the construction of such a path could negatively affect the cherry trees in this location. The NPS, NCPC staff, and Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) staff walked the site to evaluate potential pathway locations and NCPC staff agrees that a western pathway could negatively affect the cherry trees in that location due to the close proximity of the cherry trees to each other and the exposed roots of the cherry trees. As these are some of the oldest cherry trees, protection of the trees is very important. While staff is supportive of the removal of the pathway at this time, we recommend that the NPS evaluate pedestrian flow after the construction of the site enhancements to ensure that informal pedestrian pathways are not created, which may also greatly impact the cherry trees.

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The proposed project is in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements, and in particular the Parks and Open Space Element.

Parks and Open Space Element

- Enhance parks and preserve open green space for future generations
- Maintain East and West Potomac Park as an extension of the Mall, as a valuable recreational open space, and as a space that can be used for outdoor cultural events, gatherings, and celebrations.

Historic Preservation Element

- Identify and protect historic properties and disseminate information about their significance to the public

Federal Capital Improvements Program

The proposed project will be funded through the Japanese Government, without federal capital money. Therefore, the project is not included in the Federal Capital Improvements Plan.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Regarding the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the NPS found that the project meets the requirements for a categorical exclusion under its NEPA regulations, C-17, for minor landscaping in areas showing clear evidence of recent human disturbance. NCPC staff reviewed the final submission and found that the proposed site improvements can be categorically excluded under criteria of §8(C)(2) of the Commission's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures as an action minimally modifying an existing landscape.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

Regarding Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the NPS found that the project will have no adverse effect on historic properties. The NPS submitted the project to

the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO), who concluded with the NPS that the project will have no adverse effect. NCPC staff reviewed the project documentation and also found that the project will have no adverse effect on historic properties.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its January 11, 2012 meeting, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District of Columbia Department of Transportation; the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services; the National Park Service; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) approved the concept design for the site enhancements at its January 19, 2012 meeting. CFA was supportive of the project and delegated final approval to staff. On October 5, 2012, the CFA staff approved the final submission for the project noting that they had no objections to the final designs.