



Commission Action

January 7, 2016

PROJECT Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library Rehabilitation and Modernization 901 G Street, NW Washington, DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 7610
SUBMITTED BY District of Columbia Public Library	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 21.00(38.00)44009
	APPLICANT'S REQUEST Approval of comments on concept design
	ACTION TAKEN Approved comments as requested
	REVIEW AUTHORITY Approval per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (e)

The Commission:

Supports the District of Columbia Public Library's vision to transform the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library into a world-class facility that honors its significance and character.

Notes that the District of Columbia Public Library's concept plan requires balancing historic preservation, planning, and design considerations. The Commission offers the following comments on the project:

Site Design and Exterior

Notes that the exterior wall adjacent to the vehicle ramp along 9th Street is a historic element and a character-defining feature of the building, however it blocks views to and from the building and presents a public safety issue. Therefore, the Commission strongly supports lowering the wall and eliminating the east vehicle ramp along 9th Street, NW in Options 2 and 3 to:

- Improve the visual presence of the library.
- Strengthen the connection of the building and site to its surrounding urban context by establishing a public open space that enlivens the corner of 9th Street and G Place, NW.
- Improve public safety by: 1) reducing potential conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles; 2) lowering the existing site walls and establishing a visual connection between activities in the building, the city, and surrounding cultural institutions.

Does not support the retention of the east vehicle ramp along 9th Street, NW, Option 1, as it would not allow for an open, accessible public space that would connect MLK Library visually and physically to the city.

Requests the District of Columbia Public Library explore additional landscaping designs and pedestrian amenities in the vicinity of the loading dock to improve the function and aesthetics of the area.

Notes the proposed rooftop addition is consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation as it is differentiated from the original rectilinear building, but also compatible in terms of its scale, form, and massing.

Historic Preservation

Notes that the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library, a property listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, a recognized master of Modern architecture, and is his only building in the District of Columbia and his only executed library design.

Notes that the Commission through the Section 106 process and in consultation with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office, the District of Columbia Public Library, and consulting parties determined the project would have adverse effects on the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library and the Commission will execute a memorandum of agreement to resolve those effects.

Notes that though there would be adverse effects, the concept plans respect the historic significance of the MLK Library while accommodating new uses within the library program.

Requests that as design development continues and prior to the Commission's preliminary review, the District of Columbia Public Library consider how historic preservation and design issues will continue to be balanced.

- Entrance Vestibule - Continue consultation with the appropriate review bodies regarding the use of glass in the entrance vestibule. The Commission supports the library's efforts to introduce a greater degree of transparency and invite visitors to explore the building.
- Pods - Identify options to avoid or minimize adverse effects by reducing the number and size of the proposed pods in the digital commons. This may involve a change in material so that the pods are more transparent and allow the west reading room to be perceived as a large open space as it was originally designed.
- Lighting - Balance the lighting requirements for new programmatic uses with the original lighting design in a manner that minimizes visual effects.
- Steel Curtain Wall - Continue to explore design solutions that would minimize adverse effects by retaining the historic steel curtain wall fabric which is integral to the character of both the interior and exterior of the building.

Acknowledges that the Mayor is considering undertaking a study regarding the sharing or collocating all or parts of the DC Archives at the MLK Library to enhance the utility of the central library and the public's access to historic resources. Such study should be made available to the public.

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Deborah B. Young	Date
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission	