



Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: July 7, 2016

PROJECT New Perimeter Fence and Gates White House Complex 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 7776
SUBMITTED BY United States Department of the Interior National Park Service	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 1.31(38.40)44366
REVIEW AUTHORITY Federal Projects in the District per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)	APPLICANT'S REQUEST Approval of comments on concept design
	PROPOSED ACTION Approve comments as requested
	ACTION ITEM TYPE Staff Presentation

PROJECT SUMMARY

The National Park Service (Department of the Interior), in cooperation with the United States Secret Service, has submitted concept plans to install a new perimeter fence and gates at the White House. The planned improvements will follow the existing fence alignment and will retain current gate access points. The first White House fence was installed around 1803 and has evolved over time to become the design currently in place. The fence piers will be reconstructed to be similar to the existing historic piers; however, the scale of these elements will be adjusted to accommodate the new proposed fence height. The existing light fixtures will be retained and reincorporated into the fence design. Anti-climb measures are also proposed for the top of the fence.

The Commission approved temporary improvements to the fence in May and July 2015. Since that time, the National Park Service (NPS) and US Secret Service (USSS) have evaluated a number of permanent security measures. In addition to security requirements, the proposed improvements consider the historic setting of the White House, a National Historic Landmark, as well as views to and from the grounds. The improvements intend to balance security needs with the visual quality of public space.

KEY INFORMATION

- The White House is the official residence and executive office for the President of the United States.
 - The White House complex covers an area of approximately 18.65 acres.
 - The Commission approved temporary improvements to the White House fence in May and July 2015.
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RECOMMENDATION

The Commission:

Notes the Commission previously approved temporary security measures for the White House fence, with the understanding that a more lasting solution would be developed.

Supports comprehensive, permanent measures to address the security needs of the White House complex.

Notes three options have been developed regarding the fence top and base design, including both ornamental and functional elements. All options assume the same fence height. Regarding these options:

Comments that Option (1) appears somewhat ornate and may visually compete with the more modest neo-classical style of the President's residence.

Comments favorably on the fence design for Option (2), as it provides an appropriate hierarchy of ornamental and security elements, and limits the visual weight of the fence top.

Does not support Option (3) as it emphasizes security elements instead of ornamental features, and will therefore detract from the visitor experience.

Recommends the applicant continue to develop the fence elements, including the pickets, finials, anti-climb measures, and other components, to best balance proportion, hierarchy and the level of detail appropriate to the design.

Requests the fence base and foundation be designed to avoid unnecessary impacts to the root zone of any significant or specimen trees.

Notes two alternatives for picket size and spacing have been submitted, including a 2" picket with 5-1/2" spacing, and a 1-3/4" picket with 5" spacing.

Comments favorably on the 2" picket with 5-1/2" spacing as the NPS and USSS preferred alternative, noting that the wider picket spacing may provide better visual access to the White House and grounds for visitors located near the fence.

Requests the opportunity to review a full-size mock-up of the fence design prior to preliminary review, including the picket size and spacing, posts, anti-climb features and ornamental elements.

Requests additional renderings and perspectives of the fence from several locations prior to preliminary review, along with a comparison to existing conditions. These additional perspectives should include:

- Several direct views of the fence from a variety of locations and distances along Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
- A view from the Ellipse, looking north toward the White House; and
- A view from Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, of a proposed pedestrian and vehicular gate

Previous actions	May 2015 – Approval of Temporary Improvements to the Perimeter Fence (North & South) July 2015 – Approval of Temporary Improvement to the Perimeter Fence (All Sides)
Remaining actions (anticipated)	– Preliminary Review – Final Review

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

NPS, on behalf of the USSS, has submitted concept plans to install a new perimeter fence and gates at the White House. Three fence design options have been developed. The options vary in the design of the fence top and base, including both ornamental and functional elements. All alternatives assume the same fence height. In addition, two variations in picket size and spacing have been submitted for consideration.

Staff has analyzed the options considering principles related to historic preservation, urban design and visitor experience. The proposed improvements are the first phase of comprehensive security improvements that will ultimately include the Treasury Building and the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. Phase 1, currently under consideration, includes the perimeter gate and fence surrounding the approximately 18.65-acre White House grounds. The fence is approximately 3,500 feet long, and generally follows along Pennsylvania Avenue, NW to the north, East Executive Avenue, NW to the east, E Street, NW to the south, and West Executive Ave, NW to the west.

The Commission reviewed and approved temporary improvements to the fence in May and July 2015. Staff recommends **the Commission note that temporary security measures for the White House fence were previously approved, with the understanding that a more lasting solution would be developed;** and further, **the Commission supports comprehensive, permanent measures to address the security needs of the White House complex.**

Analysis

The proposed improvements seek to meet contemporary security standards while recognizing the historic and symbolic importance of the White House and the surrounding grounds. Staff requests **the Commission note that three fence options have been developed. The options vary in the design of the fence details, including both ornamental and functional elements. All options assume the same fence height.** The options were analyzed based upon a number of planning considerations, including historic preservation, urban design and visitor experience. The primary components of the proposal include fence height, fence top and base, picket size and spacing, and fence gates.

Fence Height

The existing White House fence is currently 6'-0" on a 2'-0" stone base, for an overall height of approximately 8'-0". The USSS has evaluated the fence height and current security requirements. As a result, the proposed fence height is 10'-7" on an 18" stone base. Anti-climb features measuring 1'-0" in height would be installed at the top of the fence, and the entire assembly measures 13'-1" from the ground. The fence would generally follow the topography of the site, and the existing fence piers would be increased in scale to accommodate the new fence height. The proposed height reflects the USSS evaluation of the security needs at the White House, and all options reflect the same fence height.

Fence Top & Base

The three fence options vary based upon the design of the fence top and base. The elements at the top of the fence provide additional design details, while accommodating anti-climb measures which are intended to deter climbers from grasping the top bar. A variety of solutions have been explored for these features. In general, all of the options include finials at the apex of each picket, anti-climb features across the top, and decorative arches beneath the bar.

The fence top options range from a more ornate design to one which uses simpler elements. Option (1) includes spear-shaped finials with a cross-like section. Decorative scrolling can be found below the finial on four sides, in a design reminiscent of a fleur de lis. Anti-climb features respond to the curve of the ornamental arches found below the top bar. Option (2) utilizes somewhat simpler elements, including a single spear finial set atop a small sphere. The pencil spikes follow the curve of the ornamental arches below the top bar. Finally, Option (3) utilizes the "pencil point" as the primary design feature. The picket tops and anti-climb measures have the same general form, with some variation in height and scale.

The fence detailing provided in Option (2) reflects some of the elements of the current fence. Further, the more modest design does not draw attention to the fence itself. By contrast, staff recommends **the Commission note Option (1) appears somewhat ornate and may visually compete with the more modest neo-classical style of the President's residence.** Option (3) relies on the "pencil point" as the primary motif, resulting in a fence that appears uninviting and unsuitable for the setting. Therefore, staff recommends **the Commission comment favorably on**

the fence design for Option (2), as it provides an appropriate hierarchy of ornamental and security elements, and limits the visual weight of the fence top. Staff further recommends the Commission not support Option (3) as it emphasizes security elements instead of ornamental features, and will therefore detract from the visitor experience. The fence design will continue to be refined prior to preliminary review. As such, staff recommends **the Commission recommend the applicant continue to develop the fence elements, including the pickets, finials, anti-climb measures, and other elements, to best balance proportion, hierarchy and the level of detail appropriate to the design.**

In all options, the field stone base will be replaced with a more finished ashlar, similar to that currently in place on the south side of the White House grounds. In addition, the pickets will extend into a stone cap at the top of the base. As the base will be reconstructed, staff recommends **the Commission request the fence base and foundation be designed to avoid unnecessary impacts to the root zone of any significant or specimen trees.**

Picket Size & Spacing

The fence is comprised of vertical elements called pickets. The size and spacing of the pickets impact the visual transparency of the fence and the visitor experience along Pennsylvania Avenue and E Street, NW. In general, a more open fence can preserve views of the White House and reduce the feeling of enclosure or obstruction resulting from a taller fence. Staff recommends **the Commission note two alternatives for picket size and spacing have be submitted, including a 2" picket with 5-1/2" spacing, and a 1-3/4" picket with 5" spacing.**

USSS and NPS have indicated that the 2" picket with 5-1/2" spacing is preferred. This alternative provides the greatest width in picket spacing, as well as security advantages. The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed the proposal at its June 16, 2016 meeting and indicated support for the USSS and NPS preferred alternative.

The current fence has 7/8" diameter pickets with 4-5/8" of clear space between each. USSS has indicated that the picket size must be increased to accommodate both structural and security requirements. The USSS proposes two alternatives regarding picket size and spacing. The alternatives apply to all three design options previously discussed, and are represented by an "A" or "B" designation. Alternative "A" includes 2" diameter pickets with a 5-1/2" spacing. Alternative "B" includes 1-3/4" pickets with a 5" spacing. For the purposes of comparing these two alternatives, along with the existing condition, it is helpful to understand the relative amount of open space versus solid structure in each design. The existing fence, for example, has an open space to solid ratio of 5.28. By comparison, the Alternative "A" results in an open/solid ratio of 2.75. Alternative "B" result in an open/solid ratio of 2.86. Therefore, both alternatives have similar levels of transparency.

Another measure of the visual openness of the fence considers the viewer's cone of vision. This identifies the angle at which the fence appears solid to the viewer. For example, as one looks down the length of a fence, at this angle, the fence will appear solid because the pickets align to block the view beyond. In the case of the current fence, the fence will appear solid at 9 degrees. Both

proposed options will appear solid at approximately 15 degrees. Therefore, both alternatives ultimately result in a smaller cone of vision where the fence will appear transparent as compared to the existing condition.

The analysis above indicates that the overall transparency and angle at which the fences will appear solid is very similar. In staff's opinion, the two variations in picket sizes and spacing are not likely to be appear significantly different when viewed at a distance. However, when viewed up close, the wider picket spacing provided by Alternative "B" may provide somewhat better views through the fence to the White House and grounds. As such, staff recommends **the Commission comment favorably on the 2" picket with 5-1/2" spacing as the NPS and USSS preferred alternative, noting that the wider picket spacing may provide better visual access to the White House and grounds for visitors located near the fence.**

Staff appreciates the drawings and renderings provided in the submittal. However, given the scale of the fence and the limitations in graphically representing the proposed fence's elements, additional materials may be necessary to inform the Commission's decision. As such, staff recommends **the Commission requests the opportunity to review a full-size mock-up of the fence design prior to preliminary review, including the picket size and spacing, posts, anti-climb features and ornamental elements.**

Further, additional renderings will be beneficial in understanding the potential impacts of both alternatives on the visitor experience. As such, staff recommends **the Commission request additional renderings and perspectives of the fence from several locations prior to preliminary review, along with a comparison to existing conditions. These additional perspectives should include:**

- **Several direct views of the fence from a variety of locations and distances along Pennsylvania Avenue, NW**
- **A view from the Ellipse, looking north toward the White House; and**
- **A view from Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, of a proposed pedestrian and vehicular gate.**

In addition, staff recommends that all renderings and perspectives, both existing and proposed, include human figures for scale purposes.

Fence Gates

Pedestrian and vehicular access points are proposed to be replaced as part of the project. Seven pedestrian and six vehicular gates currently exist. These gates will be replaced in their current locations. The vehicular gates will have a standard width of 13'-5", and where existing, the adjacent stone piers will be raised to accommodate the new fence height. Existing light fixtures will also be retained. Due to their location and ceremonial significance, gates located along Pennsylvania Avenue, NW will have more elaborate detailing at the base. This design reflects the gates which currently exist facing Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. The remaining gates will have a unified, but simpler design approach.

CONFORMANCE TO EXISTING PLANS, POLICIES AND RELATED GUIDANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Staff finds that this proposal is not inconsistent with the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* (Comprehensive Plan). Specific policies contained within the Parks and Open Space, Visitors, and Preservation and Historic Features Elements of the Comprehensive Plan support the design direction of the proposed project.

White House and President's Park Comprehensive Design Plan

NPS completed the White House and President's Park Comprehensive Design Plan in 2000. The proposal is consistent with the policies and vision of that plan with respect to visitor services and cultural resources. Policies in the plan encourage high quality care and treatment of cultural and natural resources within President's Park as well as the White House.

National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

In general, the project is consistent with the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan Objectives and Policies. Adopted by the Commission in May 2005, these objectives and policies address planning and design issues associated with risk management strategies that impact the public realm. The objectives and policies reinforce the importance of design quality in the nation's capital where it is important to respect community identity and a culture of democracy. They are intended to balance the need for security measures with the function and visual quality of public space.

National Historic Preservation Act

Pursuant to the Section 107 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the White House and its grounds are exempt from Section 106 consultation and the requirements of NHPA.

National Environmental Policy Act

NCPC and NPS each have an independent responsibility to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NCPC's responsibility stems from its approval authority over the project. At the time of preliminary review, environmental documentation will be submitted in compliance with NEPA.

Coordinating Committee

A copy of the submission materials was transmitted to the Coordinating Committee for consideration. No comments have been received to date. The Coordinating Committee will review the proposal again prior to preliminary review.

US Commission of Fine Arts

As noted previously, the CFA reviewed the proposal at their June 16, 2016 meeting, and approved the concept plans for fence and gates. CFA indicated support for the USSS preferred alternative, noting it provided the widest gaps between pickets and conveyed a character of strength.

ONLINE REFERENCE

The following supporting documents for this project are available online:

- Submission Letter
- Submission Package
- CFA Letter

Prepared by Matthew J. Flis
06/30/2016

POWERPOINT (ATTACHED)

NCPC File #: 7776

New Perimeter Fence and Gates

White House Complex
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC

National Park Service

Concept

Commission meeting date: July 7, 2016

NCPC review authority: Federal project in the District of Columbia

Applicant request: Review of concept plans

Delegated / consent / open / executive session: Open Session

NCPC Review Officer: M. Flis

NCPC File number: 7776

Project summary:

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Pennsylvania Avenue, NW



E Street, NW



Photo ca. 1900
East Executive Avenue - iron fence & gates

Library of Congress



Photo ca. 1915
Fence attains current form between 1900 & 1920



Belgian Parliament (Palais de la Nation) | Brussels
(Est. 24" base, 11' fence)



Nassau Hall | Princeton, NJ
(36" base, 10' fence, 1" square iron pickets, 4" clear space)

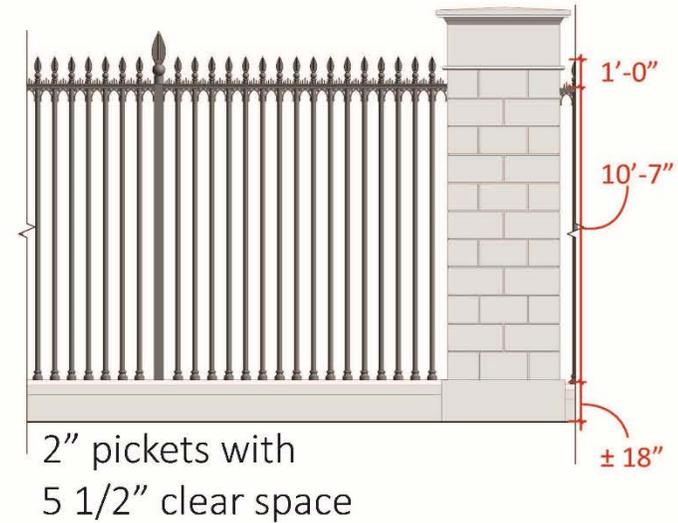
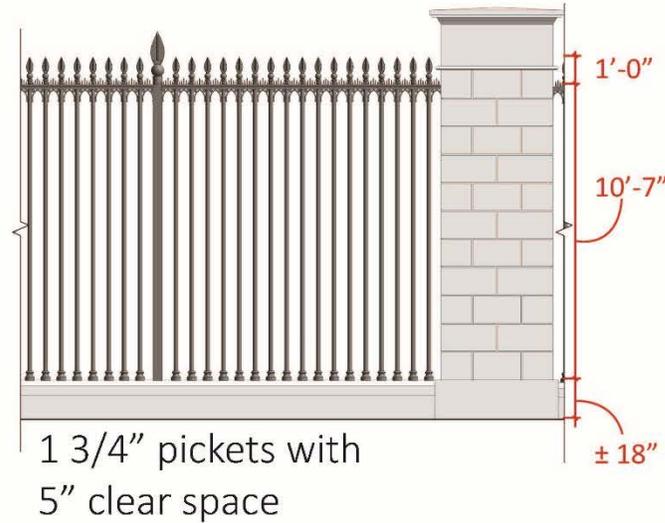
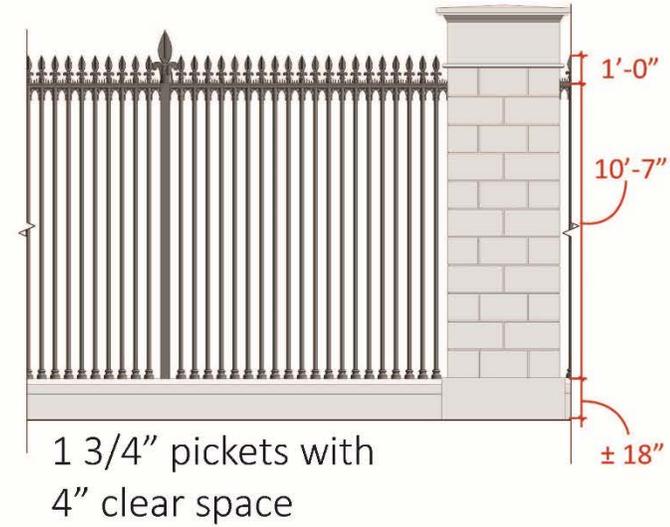


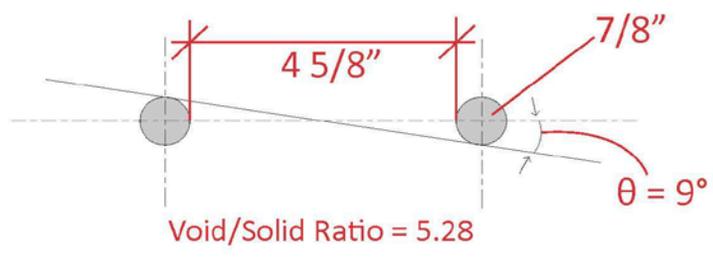
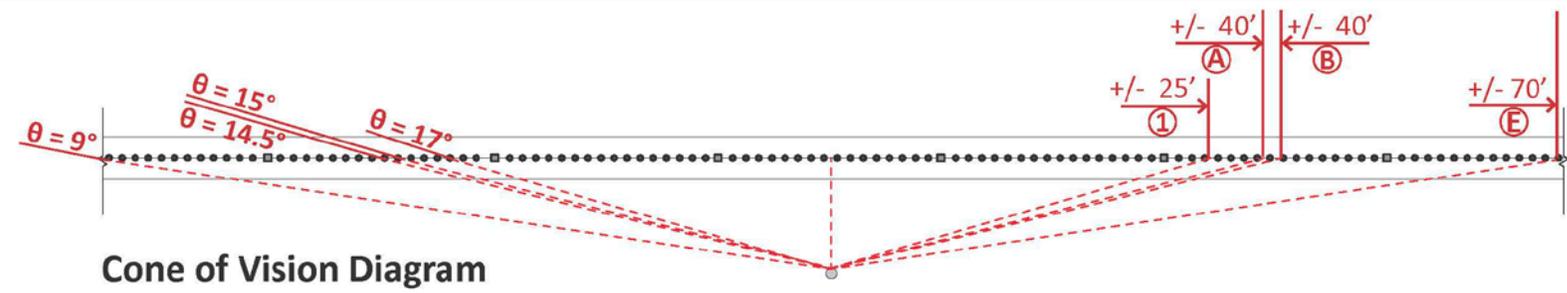
Virginia State Capital | Richmond, VA
(7' fence, 1 1/2" diam. pickets, 4 1/2" clear space)



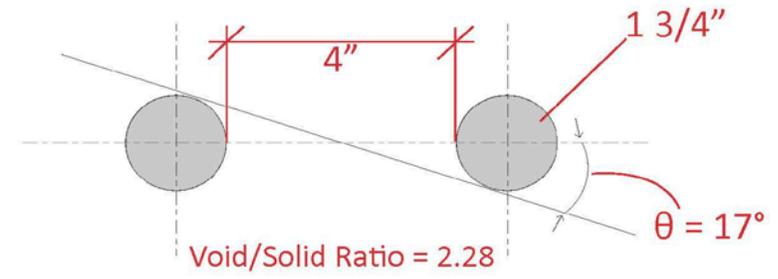
Grove Street Cemetery | New Haven, CT
(7' fence, 1 1/2" square iron pickets, 4 1/2" clear space)

- Fence Height
- Picket Size & Spacing
- Fence Top & Base Details
- Pedestrian & Vehicular Gates

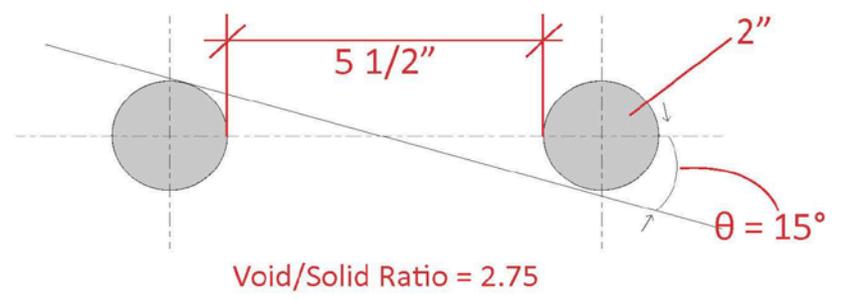




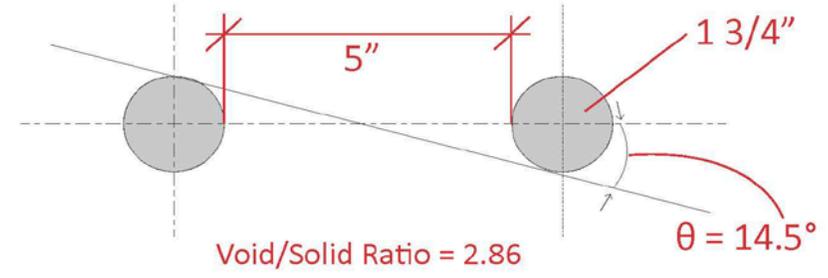
Ⓔ Existing Fence: 7/8" pickets with 4 5/8" clear space



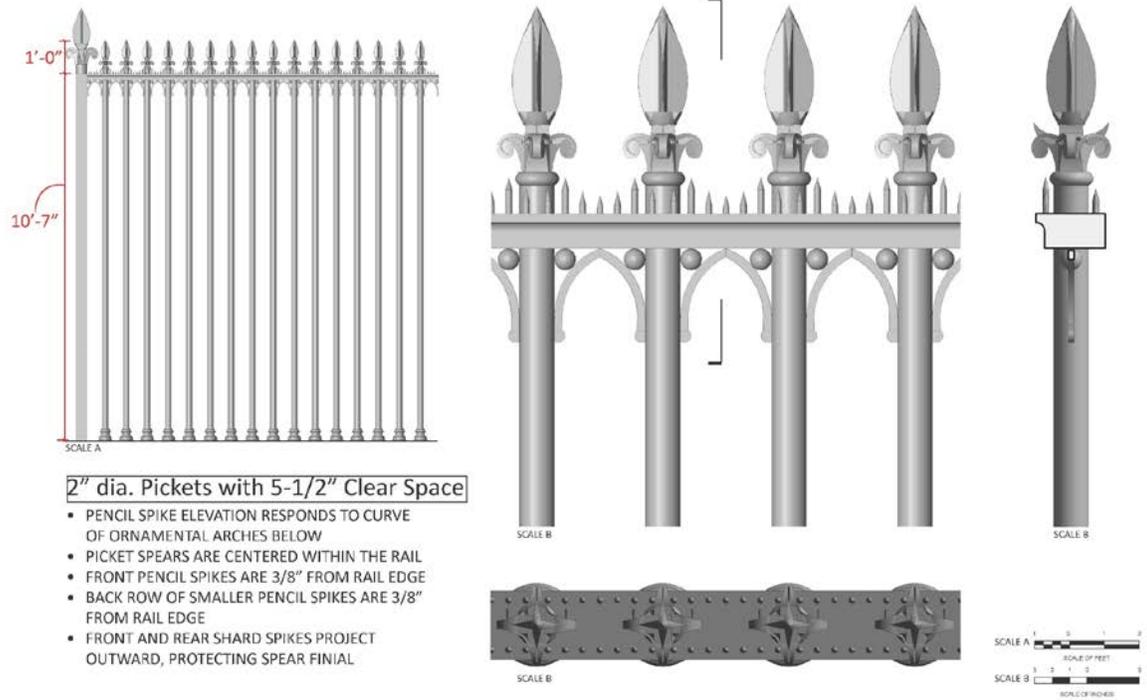
Ⓛ 1 3/4" diam. pickets with 4" clear space



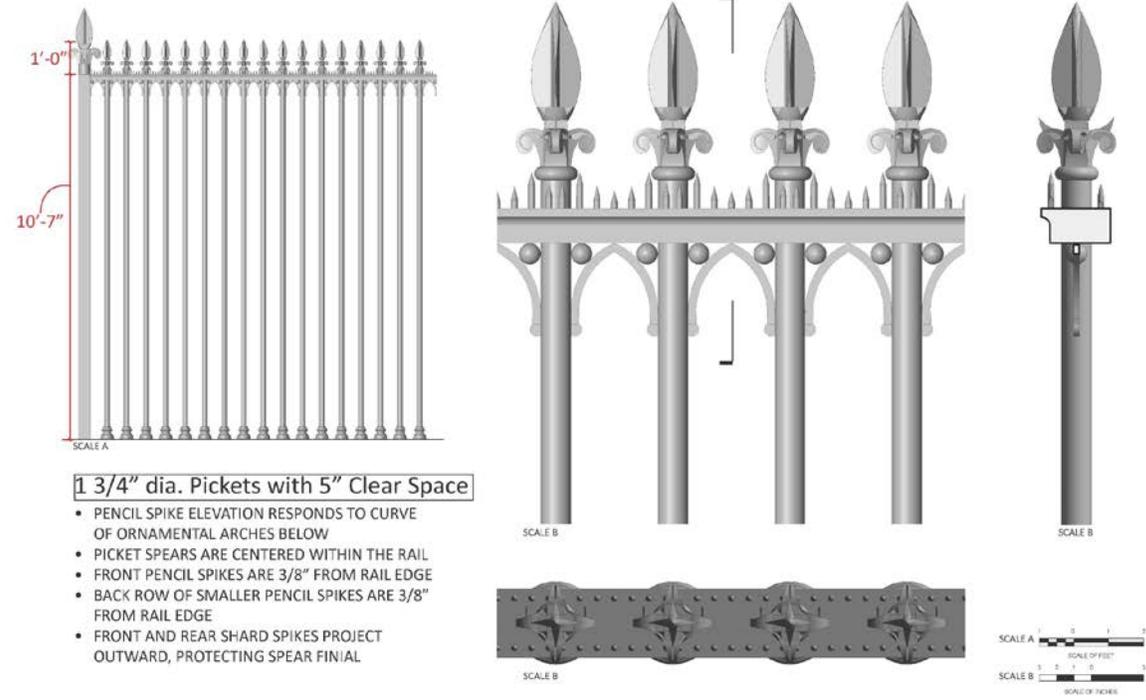
Ⓐ 2" diam. pickets with 5 1/2" clear space



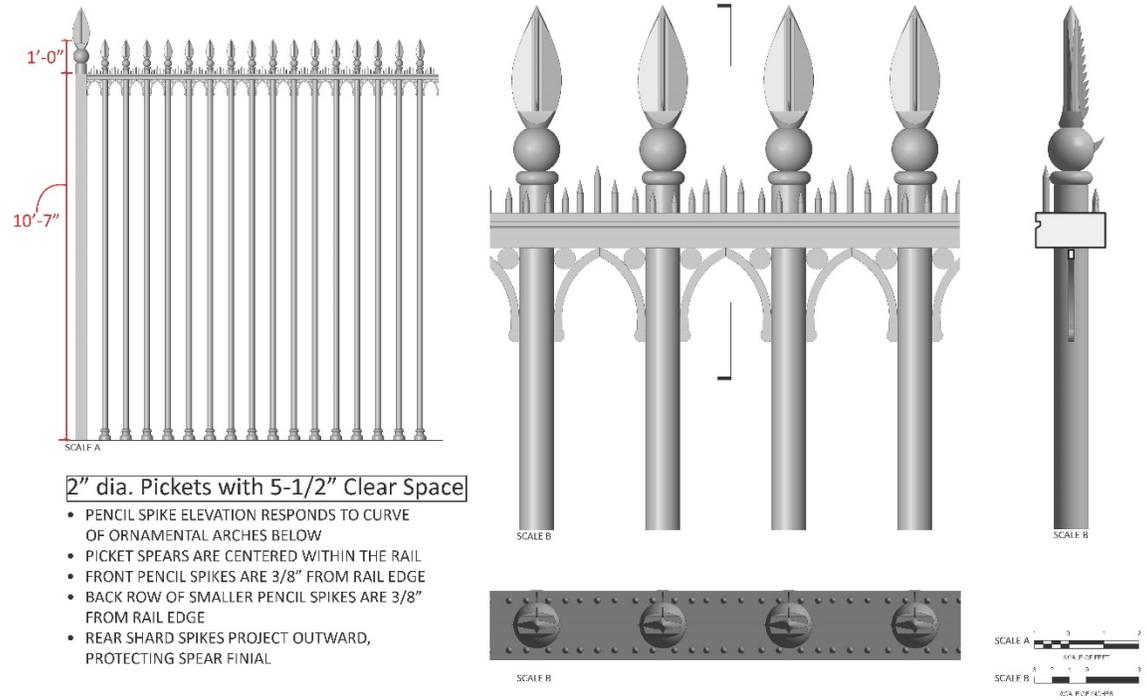
Ⓑ 1 3/4" diam. pickets with 5" clear space



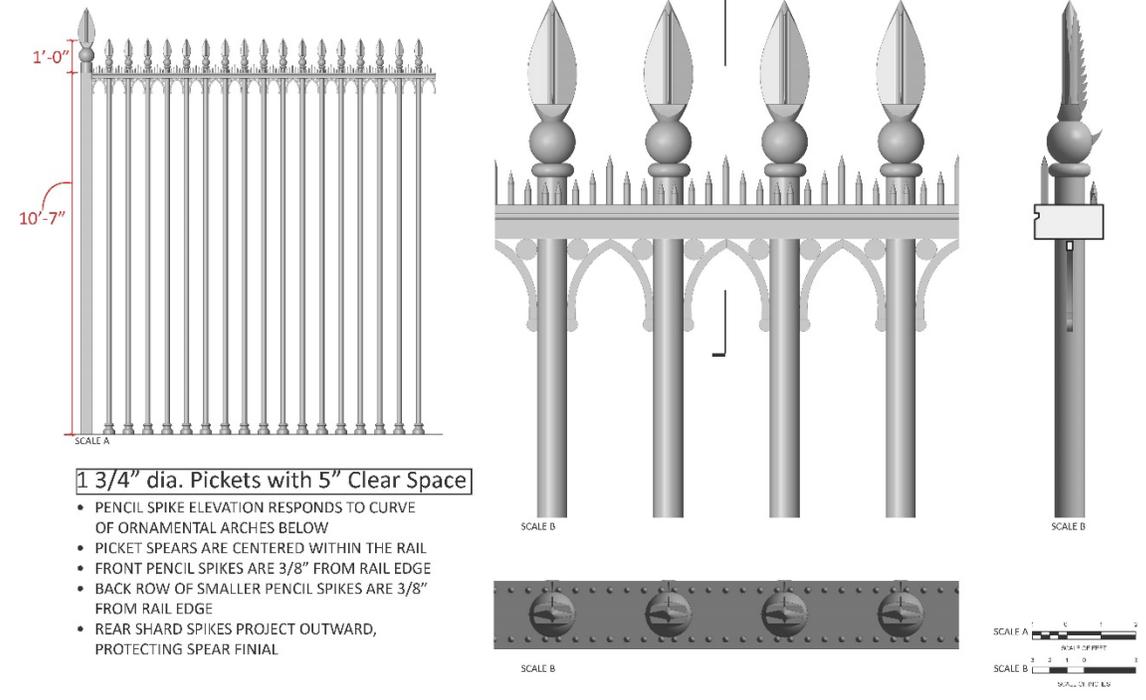
Option 1A



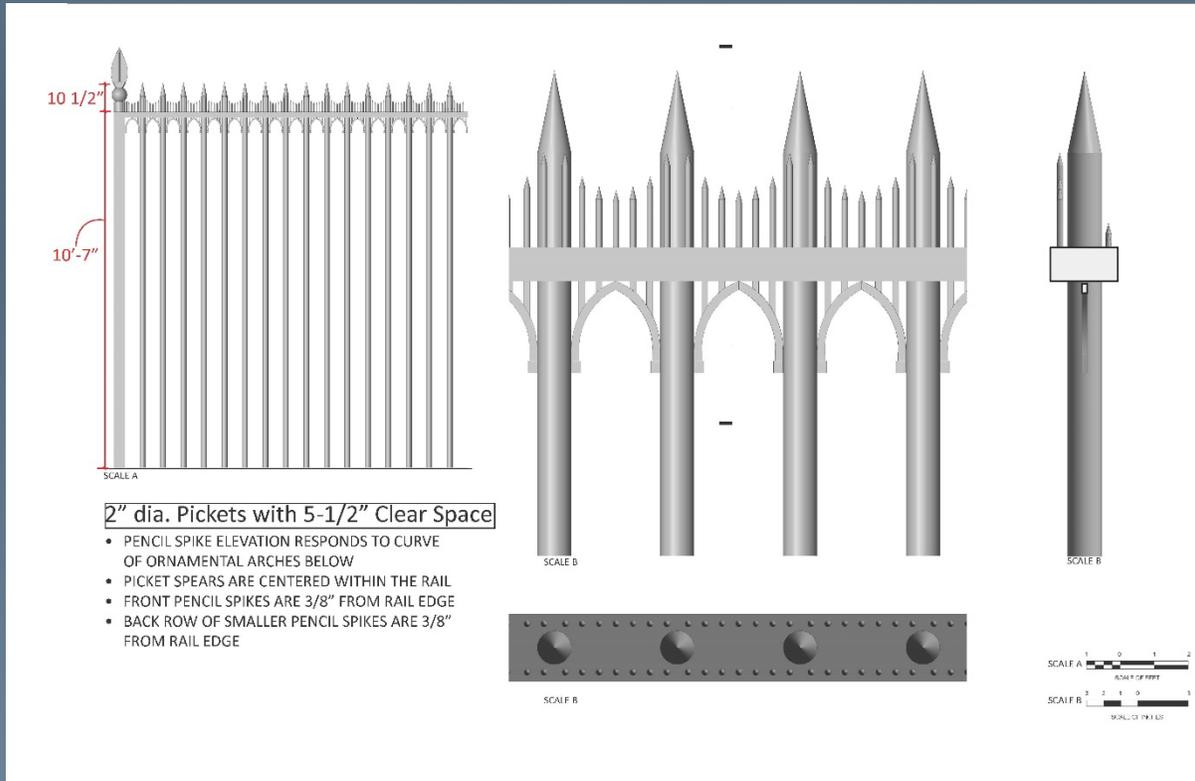
Option 1B



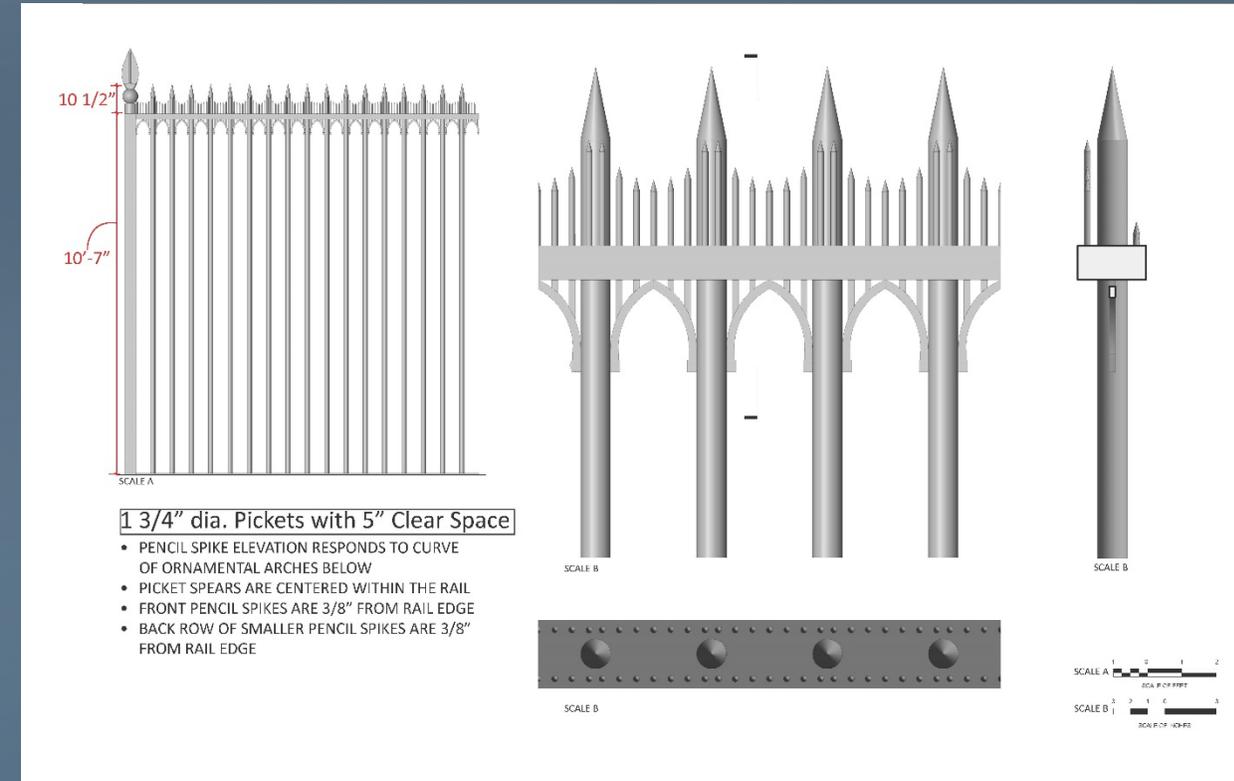
Option 2A



Option 2B



Option 3A



Option 3B



North side along Pennsylvania Avenue
Existing (7/8" pickets with 4 5/8" clear space)



North side along Pennsylvania Avenue
Concept A (2" pickets with 5 1/2" clear space)



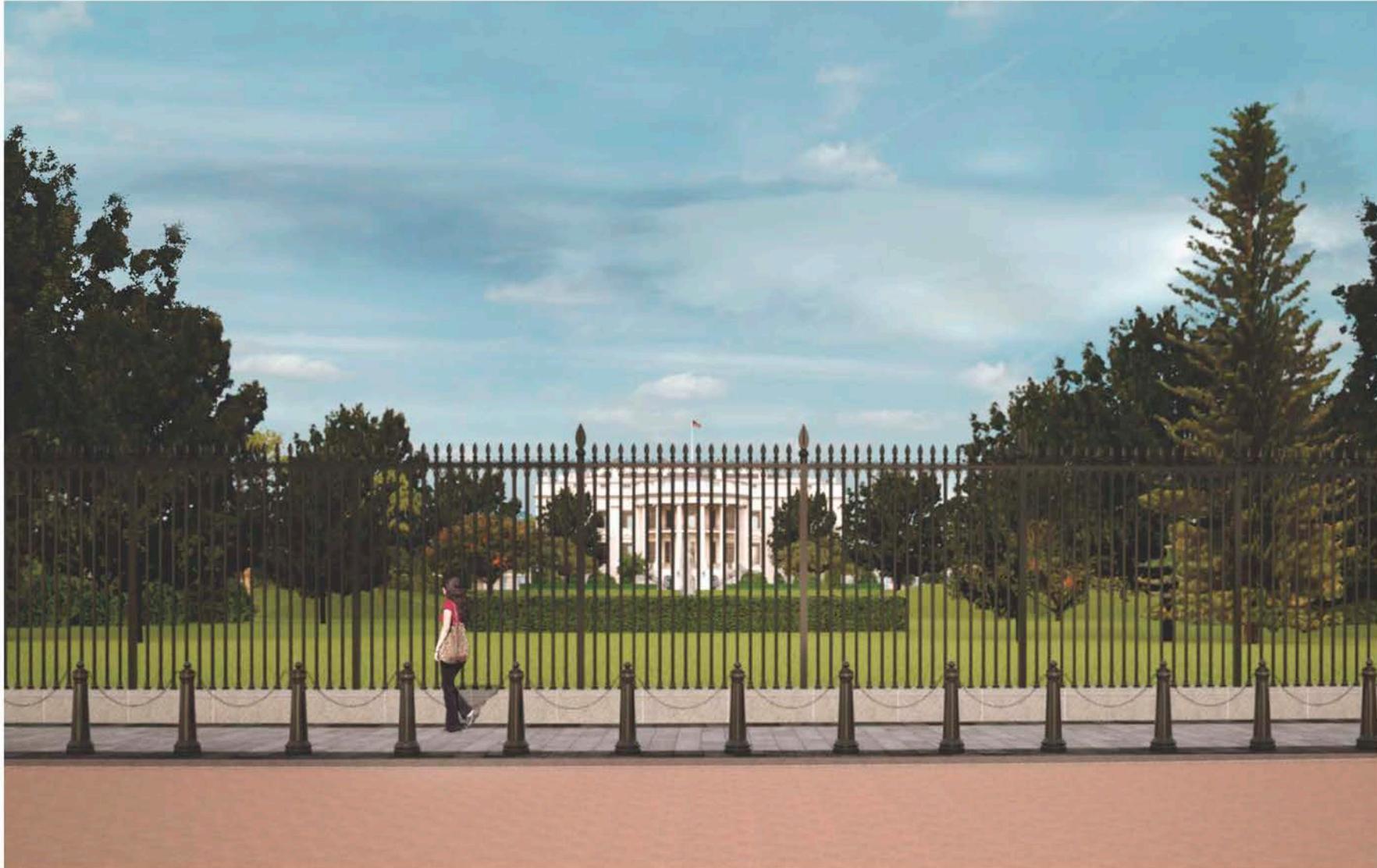
Concept A (2" pickets with 5 1/2" clear space)



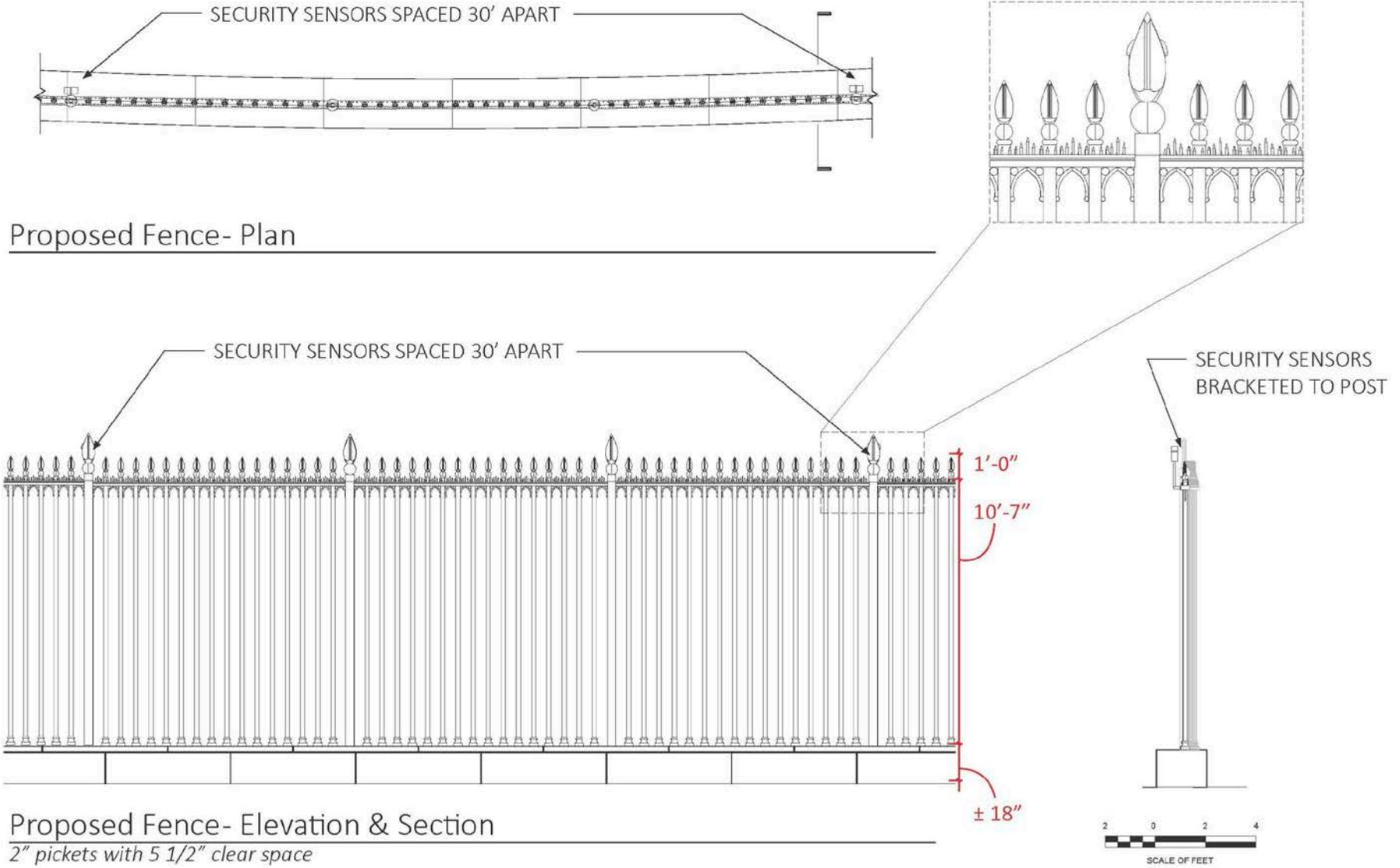
Concept A (2" pickets with 5 1/2" clear space)

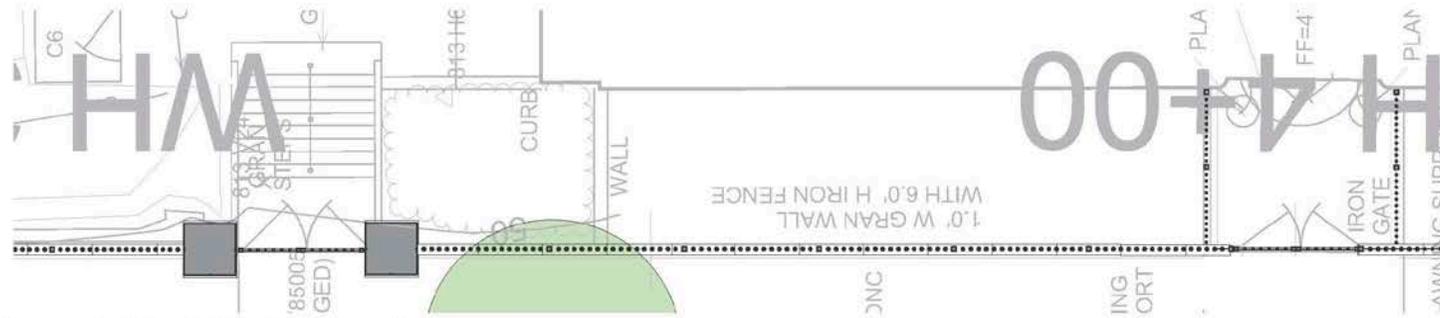


(7/8" pickets with 4 5/8" clear space)

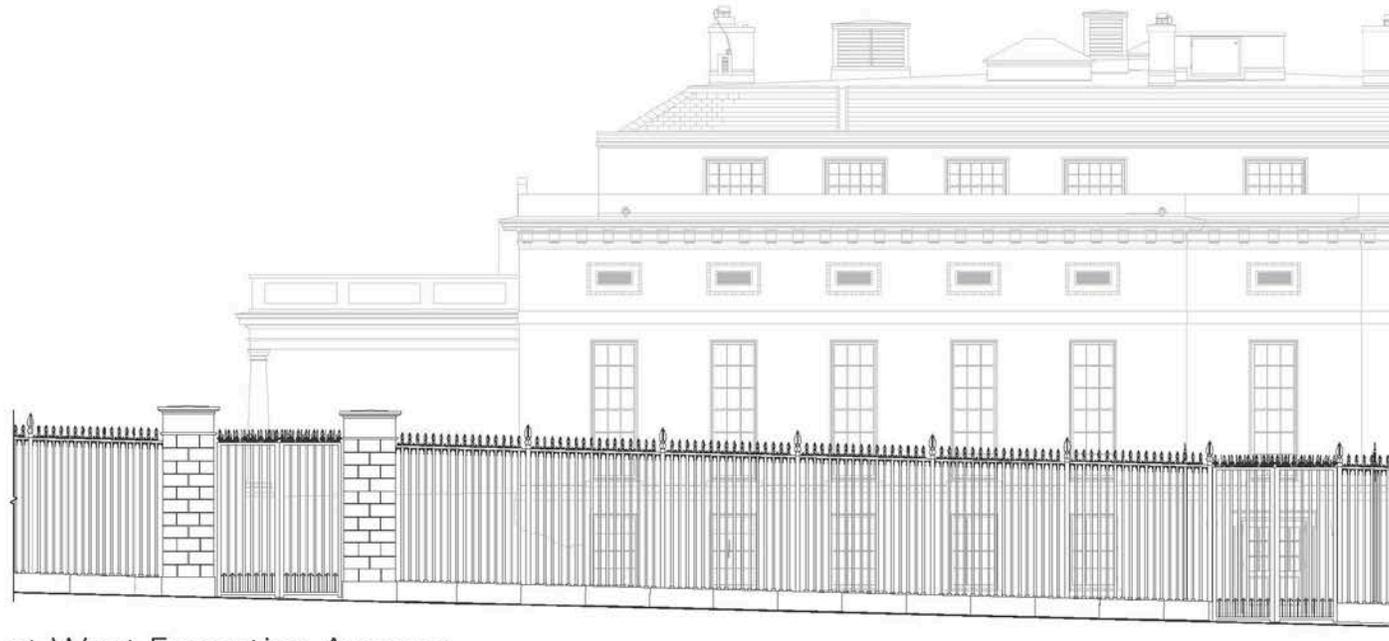


Concept A (2" pickets with 5 1/2" clear space)



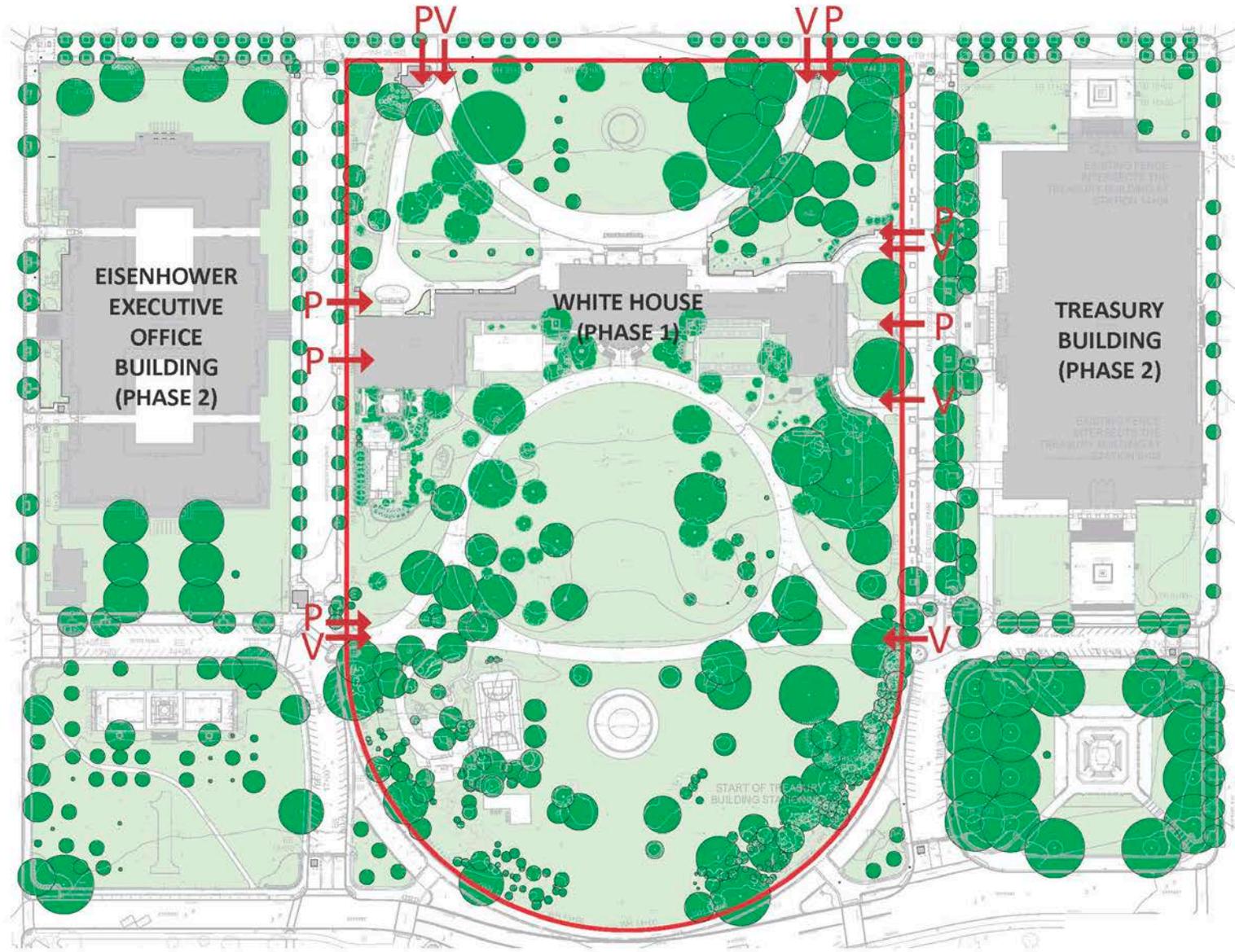


Partial Plan at West Executive Avenue



Elevation at West Executive Avenue

2" pickets with 5 1/2" clear space



P- Pedestrian Gate **V**- Vehicle Gate



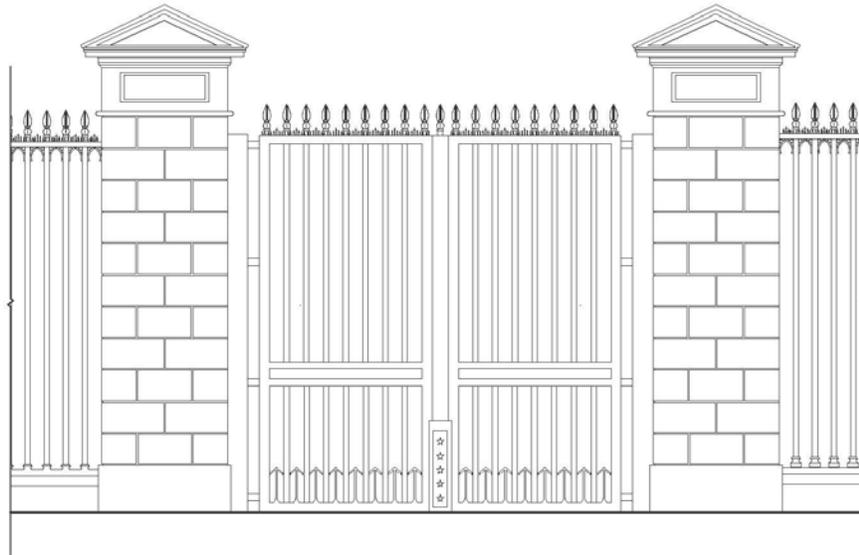
Pedestrian Gate
Pennsylvania Ave



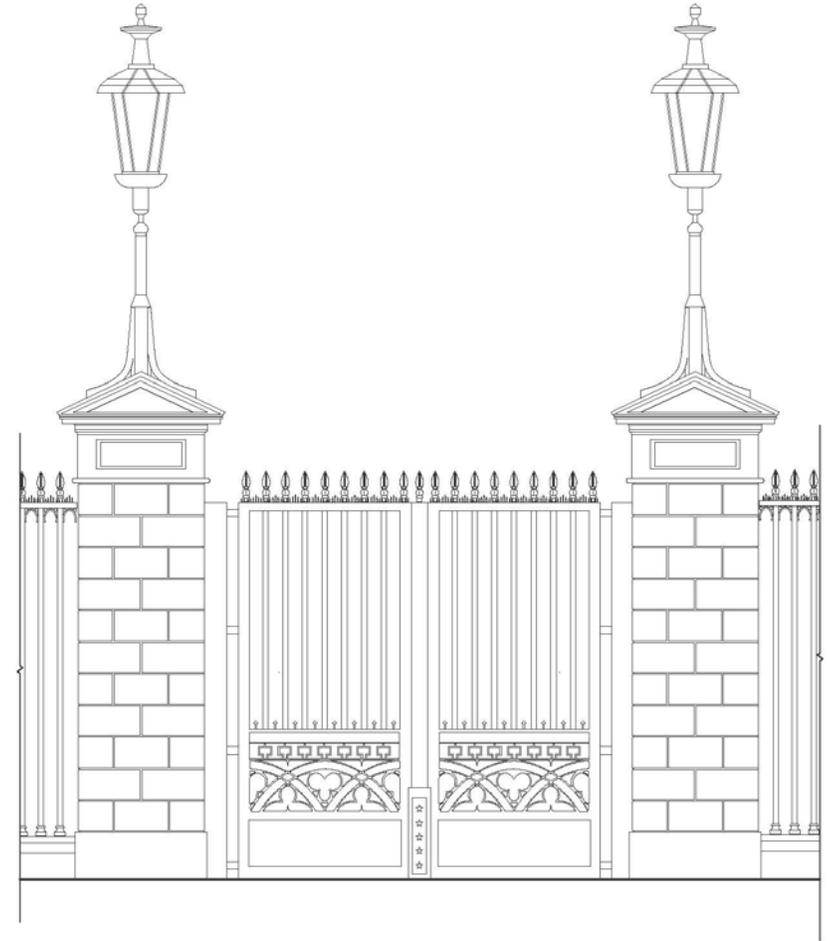
Visitor Entrance Gate
East Executive



Vehicle Gate
Gate to circular drive from Pennsylvania Ave



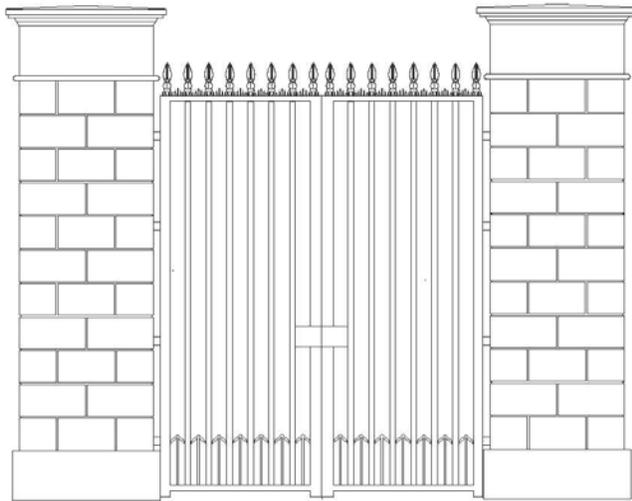
Vehicle Gate Concept: 13'-5" high x 16' wide
East & West Executive



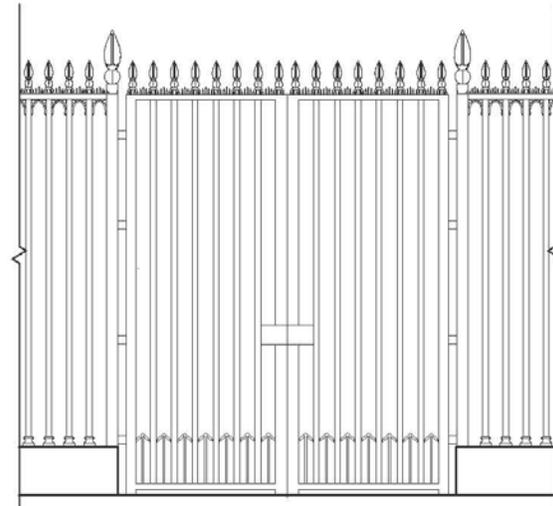
Vehicle Gate Concept: 13'-5" high x 16' wide
Pennsylvania Ave.



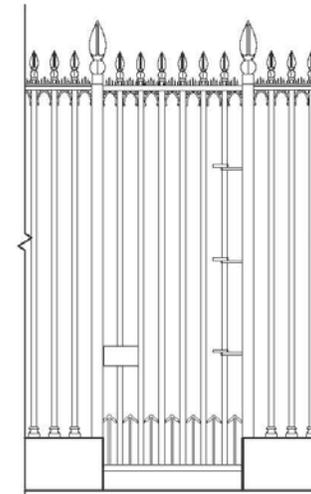
SCALE OF FEET



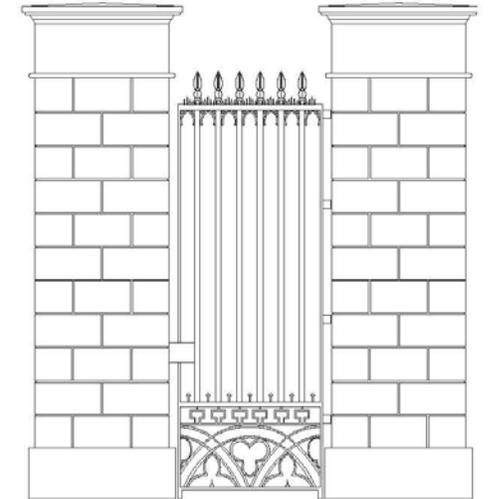
Pedestrian Gate Concept
West Executive



Pedestrian Gate Concept
East & West Executive



Pedestrian Gate Concept
East & West Executive



Pedestrian Gate Concept
Pennsylvania Ave.



SCALE OF FEET