



## Delegated Action of the Executive Director

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**PROJECT**

**National Zoological Park  
Elephant Yard 1 Expansion**  
3001 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC

**NCPC FILE NUMBER**

7997

**NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER**

2.00(38.00)44777

**SUBMITTED BY**

Smithsonian Institution

**ACTION TAKEN**

Approve as requested

**REVIEW AUTHORITY**

Approval

Per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)

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The Smithsonian Institution has submitted preliminary and final site development plans for the expansion of the Elephant Yard 1 at the National Zoological Park (Zoo). The Zoo recently expanded its Asian elephant herd, which consists of six females and one adult male. In order to provide additional space for the animals, the Smithsonian needs to expand the existing 13,654 square-foot elephant yard into a small vacant area immediately adjacent to the Elephant House and the existing yard. The project entails incorporating a small vacant area to the north, formerly the Hippo Yard, and providing an enrichment/training area as part of the outdoor exhibit. The proposed enlarged yard will be 19,930 square feet.

Currently, there are two enrichment areas located inside the Elephant House; however, they are not accessible to the public. The proposed enrichment/training area integrated into the expanded yard adjacent to the Elephant Trail Visitor Path will provide the elephants an opportunity to socialize with a keeper during training sessions, allow keepers to closely monitor the health of the animals, and create a unique visitor experience for the public to observe special interactions with the elephants. During training sessions, keepers cue the elephants to present their trunks, feet, ears, shoulders and rear ends for close inspection. The keepers use positive reinforcement training by rewarding the elephants with their favorite treats. The project requires the following minor site work:

1. Removing existing elephant containment fence (steel bollards and cable barrier) between Elephant Yard 1 and the vacant yard.
2. Installing elephant containment (steel bollards and cable barrier) along the north and east perimeter of the vacant yard to match the existing animal containment fence throughout the elephant yards.
3. Adding an elephant enrichment/training area (steel and steel mesh) within the new containment barrier adjacent to the visitor path.
4. Removing and replacing 11 trees that are toxic to elephants, within reach of elephants, or in poor health, and preserving 33 trees.
5. Providing stormwater management, such as bioretention areas.

The elephant yard expansion was not specifically identified in the 2008 National Zoological Park Master Plan. However, the project is associated with the “Asia Trail Phase II” which was approved by the Commission in July 2007 (NCPC Project No. 6413). Due to construction cost overrun during the Asia Trail Phase II, the proposed elephant yard 1 expansion and improvements were not implemented, including the new amphitheater area, new elephant pool, and new concrete elephant containment walls at the southeast corner of the Elephant House.

The project is not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital, and will not adversely impact any federal properties, nor any other identified federal interests.

The Smithsonian Institution does not have an independent responsibility to fulfill the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as it is not considered a federal agency for NEPA purposes. However, as a result of its approval authority over the project NCPC does have an independent NEPA responsibility. Staff has reviewed the proposal in accordance with NCPC’s NEPA Regulations, and has determined that the project meets the conditions of § 601.12 categorical exclusion (2) which pertains to “approval of the installation or restoration of minor site elements, such as but not limited to identification signs, sidewalks, patios, fences, curbs, retaining walls, landscaping, and trail or stream improvements. Additional features include water distribution lines and sewer lines which involve work that is essentially replacement in kind.” Prior to applying this categorical exclusion, NCPC staff determined that no extraordinary circumstances were present as required by the Commission’s NEPA Regulations under § 601.11.

Both the Smithsonian and NCPC have a responsibility to satisfy the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Following consultation with NCPC staff and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO), the Smithsonian determined that the project would not adversely affect historic properties, specifically the National Zoo which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972, and the Elephant House (built in 1937), a contributing building. On June 5, 2018, the DC SHPO concurred with the Smithsonian’s determination. Staff also concurs with the determination of no adverse effect.

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its June 13, 2018 meeting. Without objection, the Committee forwarded the proposed preliminary and final site development plans to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were: NCPC; the State Historic Preservation Office; the District of Columbia Department of Transportation; the District Department of Energy and Environment; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

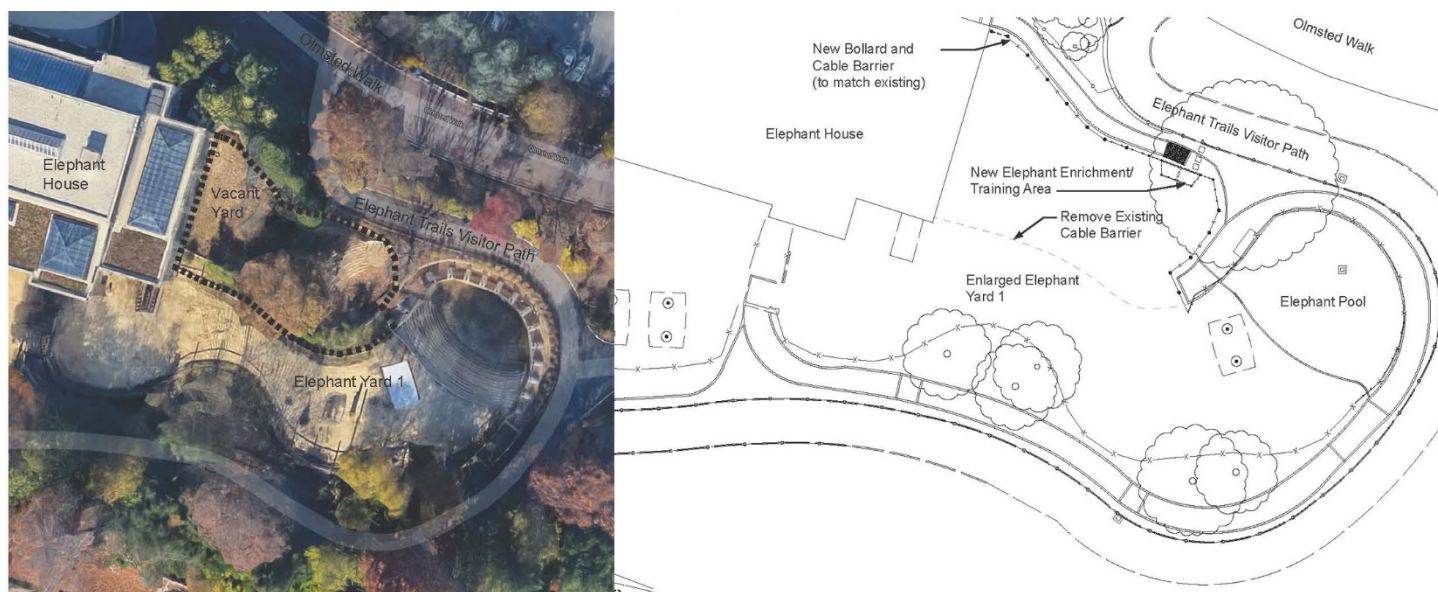


Figure 1 Existing and Proposed Site Plan

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Pursuant to delegations of authority adopted by the Commission on October 3, 1996 and per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d), I approve the preliminary and final site development plans for the Smithsonian National Zoological Park Elephant Yard 1 Expansion located at 3001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC.

// Original Signed //

July 5, 2018

Marcel Acosta  
Executive Director

Date