



Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: March 7, 2019

PROJECT Preservation of Meridian Hill Park Phase V and VI Meridian Hill Park Northwest, Washington, DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 7642
	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 32.00(70.00)44873
SUBMITTED BY United States Department of the Interior National Park Service	APPLICANT'S REQUEST Approval of preliminary site development plans
REVIEW AUTHORITY Federal Projects in the District per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)	PROPOSED ACTION Approve preliminary site development plans with comments
	ACTION ITEM TYPE Consent Calendar

PROJECT SUMMARY

The National Park Service has submitted preliminary site development plans for proposed improvements at Meridian Hill Park. The park is a National Historic Landmark, significant for its design based on Italian hill gardens and its elaborate architectural features constructed of exposed aggregate concrete. It is a 12-acre formal landscape designed and built between 1912 and 1936. The park is located between 15th and 16th Streets to the east and west, and Euclid and W Streets to the north and south in northwest Washington, DC. The topography slopes downward from north to south, with generally steep grades on 15th and 16th Streets. The park is divided into two main areas. The lower park includes a fountain and cascade of linked basins, symmetric stairways and a large reflecting pool surrounded by a plaza. The upper park includes an open mall, wooded areas flanking the mall, and a broad terrace overlooking the Lower Plaza. The park affords views of the monumental core from the Great Terrace at the upper level, and is heavily used by residents and visitors alike.

As part of the project, architectural features at the Lower Plaza and Great Stair will be rehabilitated, including repairs to concrete paving, walls, and decorative elements. The character of the original landscape will be restored at the Lower Plaza and the Allee. Plant species will be updated and replaced as necessary. Other improvements will include stabilization of the Buchanan Memorial; barrier-free access to the Lower Plaza; pleaching of trees at the Allee; and drainage improvements and repairs at the Great Stair.

KEY INFORMATION

- Meridian Hill Park is a 12-acre site located in northwest Washington, DC. It is on a heavily sloped site, and includes several levels and many steps between various sections.

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- The park was designed and built between 1912 and 1935, and is a National Historic Landmark.
 - The site is heavily sloped from north to south, and included several levels connected by stairs throughout the southern portion of the park.
 - The park contains a memorial to James Buchanan, the 15th President of the United States, located at the east end of the Lower Plaza. The memorial includes a bronze classical sculpture of Buchanan.
 - The site is also referred to as Malcolm X Park by many local residents.
 - Rehabilitation of the park began in 2004, and has included repairing and restoring the unique structures and landscape. The current proposal includes Phase IV and V of work, with future phases focusing on additional restoration of the Great Terrace.
 - The proposed project will include rehabilitation and repair of much of the historic fabric, and the addition of an accessible entry and pathways at the Lower Plaza, to include a new opening in the wall along 16th Street, NW.
 - The original designs for the park included a pleached Linden tree allee at the west edge of the Upper Park. Pleaching is a technique for training trees into specific shapes. Never fully implemented, the pleaching has been incorporated into the project.
 - The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts staff reviewed and approved the project by delegation on February 12, 2019.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary site development plans for the proposed improvements at Meridian Hill Park, including the rehabilitation of the Lower Plaza, construction of accessible entrance and walkways, and addition of frames at the allee.

Finds the project will help improve the accessibility and visitor experience at the Lower Plaza of Meridian Hill Park, while respecting its historic setting and character.

Notes that previous projects had focused on concrete repairs throughout the park, restoration of the cascade and fountains, and restoration of the Lodge House. Future phases will focus on the Great Terrace.

PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

Previous actions	- None
Remaining actions (anticipated)	– Review of final site development plans – Review of future project phases, as necessary

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Phases V and VI of the Preservation of Meridian Hill Park includes rehabilitation of the Lower Plaza; stabilization of the Buchanan Memorial; barrier-free access to the Lower Plaza; pleaching of trees at the Allee; and drainage improvements and concrete repairs at the Great Stair. Overall, the project will help rehabilitate the park, while making necessary changes to improve accessibility. As such, staff recommends the **Commission approves the preliminary site development plans for the proposed improvements at Meridian Hill Park, including the rehabilitation of the Lower Plaza, construction of accessible entrance and walkways, and addition of frames at the allee.** Further, staff recommends the **Commission finds the project will help improve the accessibility and visitor experience at the Lower Plaza of Meridian Hill Park, while respecting its historic setting and character.**

Analysis

In 1819, John Porter erected a home on Meridian Hill. The site was named as such because it was on the exact longitude of the original District of Columbia milestone marker. After its conversion to a public park, Union troops encamped on the grounds during the Civil War. The U.S. government purchased the grounds in 1910. Landscape architects George Burnap and Horace Peaslee planned an Italian style garden, which was designed and built between 1912 and 1936. The park is a National Historic Landmark due to its design, as well as its elaborate architectural features constructed of exposed aggregate concrete. Though officially Meridian Hill Park, local residents often refer to it as Malcolm X Park, or a combination of both names. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the park as a site for community organizing, and the name continues to be used today.

Today, the park is a green respite in an urban area. The surrounding blocks include medium density residential uses, with some institutional uses and historic homes. The interior of the park is screened from this street by a perimeter concrete wall as well as by changes in grade. In some locations, the park is up to forty feet above the street level. The combination of wall and topographical changes help to screen the park from surrounding traffic.

Proposed Project

Rehabilitation of the park began in 2004, and has included repairing and restoring the unique structures and landscape. Previous projects had focused on concrete repairs throughout the park, restoration of the cascade and fountains, and restoration of the Lodge House. Future phases will focus on the Great Terrace. The current proposal includes Phase IV and V, includes rehabilitation of the Lower Plaza; stabilization of the Buchanan Memorial; barrier-free access to the Lower Plaza; pleaching of trees at the allee; and drainage improvements and concrete repairs at the Great Stair.

Rehabilitation of the lower plaza includes replacing all drainage piping and inlets. To do so, sections of paving will be cut out and salvaged for reinstallation after the piping is replaced. Additional paving will be removed and salvaged for construction of structures to contain the soil volumes required to sustain the new trees. Other paving details will be reconstructed, and new cast iron inlets matching the design of the original bronze inlets will be installed.

As part of the project, the existing Buchanan Memorial will also be stabilized. Open joints in the memorial base and wall stones will be waterproofed. Future phases will focus on resetting stone, cleaning, and other conservation treatments for both the stone and bronze components of the memorial.

As noted previously, the topography of the site required many flights of stairs, including steps from 16th Street into the Lower Plaza and steps from the Lower Plaza to the Buchanan Memorial. As such, the Lower Plaza is not currently accessible to those with mobility needs. To address this issue, an accessible route consisting of three sloped walks is proposed at the Lower Plaza. The walks will connect 16th Street to the three levels of the Lower Plaza. The walks will be sloped so that handrails and railings are not necessary. The route will enter the park just south of an existing pier in the 16th Street perimeter wall, and a new pier will be constructed to flank the new opening. Inside the Park, a new section of wall, continuing an existing wall, will retain the earth to the north. Another two sections of walkway bridge the smaller grade changes to the east. The curbs of the new walks will be continuous in size and material with the existing curbs, a golden tan exposed aggregate concrete. New lighting will be provided at the lowest level of the walks from low bollards. In general, the 14" bollards appear most appropriate in size. Staff finds the proposed entrance and walkway will minimally alter the existing park design, and will accommodate improved accessibility.

Other improvements include concrete repairs and drainage improvements at the Great Stair. The drains have been leaking, and they will be replaced and the concrete repaired. Any drainage will follow its current path, daylighted to planting beds. In addition, several areas of deteriorated concrete in the wall of the stair will be repaired to match the existing concrete. Throughout the project area, plant species will also be updated and replaced as necessary.

Finally, the original designs for the Park included a pleached Linden tree allee at the west edge of the Upper Park. Pleaching is a technique for training trees into specific shapes. This is most often seen in many formal European gardens. The allee was replanted recently after the restoration of the wall along 16th Street, but not they have not been pleached. Steel frames will be installed and used to guide the pruning of the trees into a vault over into the future.

CONFORMANCE TO EXISTING PLANS, POLICIES AND RELATED GUIDANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The project is consistent with the goals and policies set forth in the Comprehensive Plan. In particular, policies related to Urban Design, Historic Preservation, Parks and Open Space, and Visitors and Commemoration, were found to be considered and addressed.

National Historic Preservation Act

NPS has initiated Section 106 consultation regarding the undertaking. It has been determined the project will have an adverse effects on the National Historic Landmark, specifically due to the addition of the new accessible entrance within the 16th Street wall. A memorandum of agreement will be prepared to resolve any adverse effects. NCPC has designated NPS lead federal agency for purposes of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and will be a signatory on the memorandum of agreement when it is finalized. Section 106 consultation must be completed prior to final review and approval by the Commission.

National Environmental Policy Act

For the purposes of compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), NPS has indicated that they will apply a categorical exclusion. NCPC also has an independent responsibility to comply with NEPA due to its approval authority over the project. NCPC will apply categorical exclusion #2, which allows for the approval of minor site elements, such as, but not limited to, identification signs, sidewalks, patios, and fences. NCPC further determined no extraordinary circumstances were present in the application of the categorical exclusion.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its February 13, 2019 meeting. Without objection, the Committee forwarded the proposed to the Commission with the statement that the proposal had been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were: NCPC, the DC SHPO; the District Department of Transportation; the District Department of Energy and the Environment (DOEE); the National Park Service; the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). DC SHPO noted that coordination is subject to the successful completion of a memorandum of agreement to resolve adverse effects resulting from the project.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts staff reviewed and approved the project by delegation on February 12, 2019. A copy of the letter is attached.

ONLINE REFERENCE

The following supporting documents for this project are available online at www.ncpc.gov:

- Submission Package

Prepared by Matthew Flis
02/27/2019

ATTACHMENTS

- Submission Package
- Commission of Fine Arts letter

Preservation of Meridian Hill Park - Phase V and VI

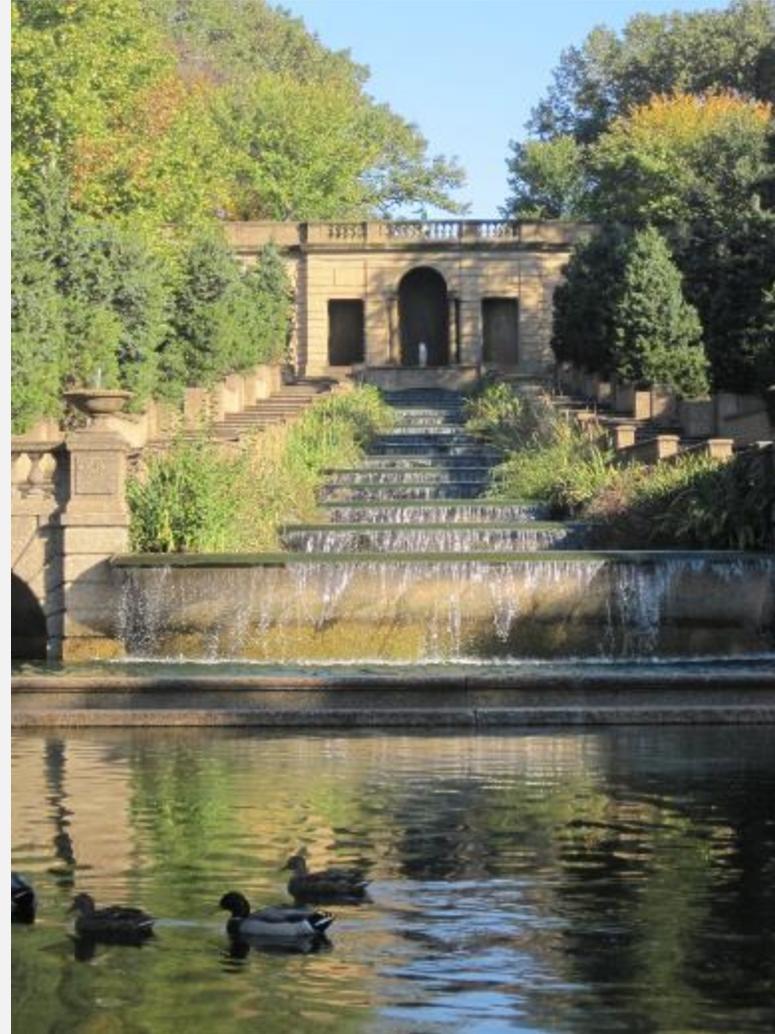
Northwest, Washington DC

Approval of Preliminary Site Development Plans

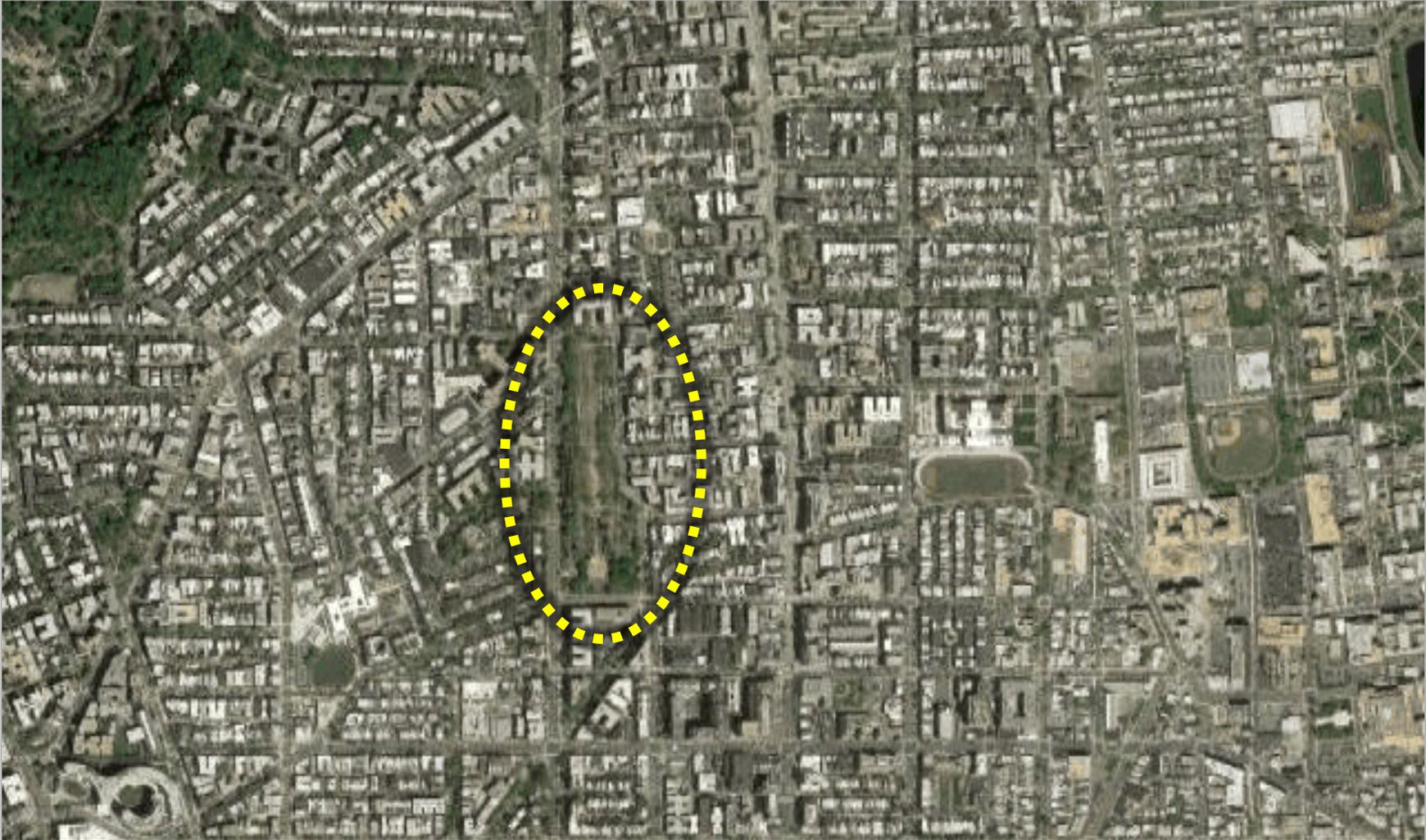
United States Department of the Interior

Project Summary

- Creates barrier-free access to significant park areas and vistas on the Lower Plaza
- Limits historic fabric impacts
- Restores paving, drainage and lighting
- Restores original planting character
- Creates intended Allee tree configuration
- Improves visitor safety



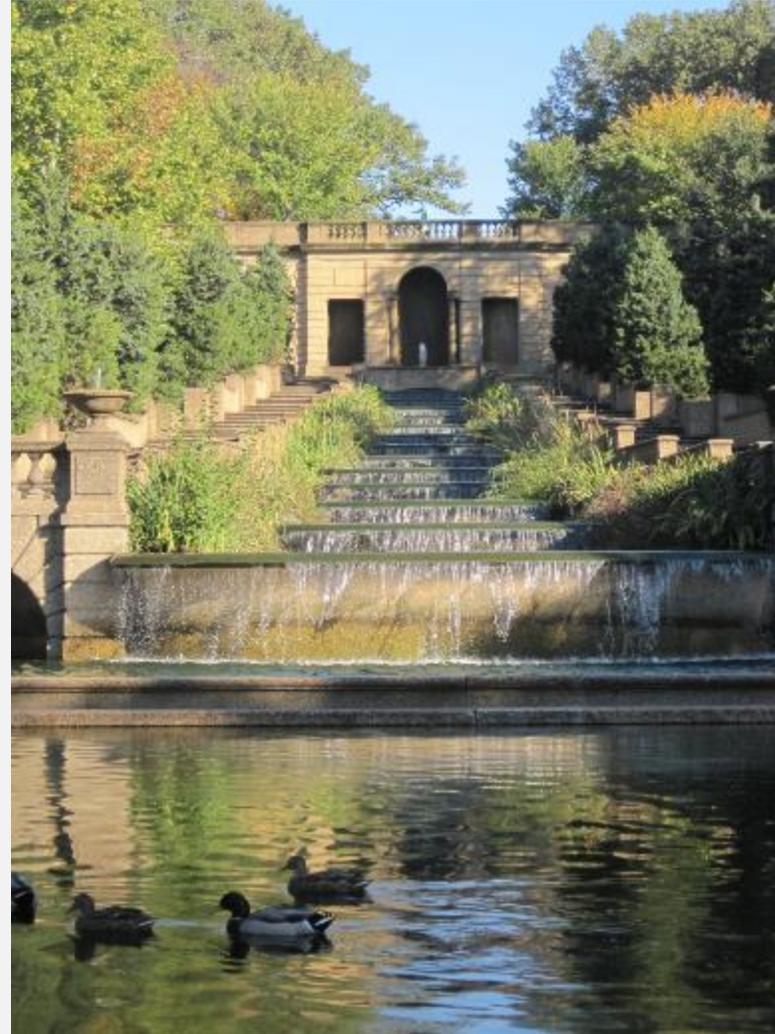
Site Location



Location Map

Project Summary

- Creates barrier-free access to significant park areas and vistas on the Lower Plaza
- Limits historic fabric impacts
 - Restores paving, drainage and lighting
 - Restores original planting character
- Creates intended Allee tree configuration
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Project Overview

- Rehabilitate the Lower Plaza, including paving, drainage, lighting, and plantings.
- Construct accessible walkways from 16th Street to the Lower Plaza and Buchanan Memorial.
- Add intended frames to shape trees at Allee.



Lower Plaza Existing Conditions – Paving and Drainage



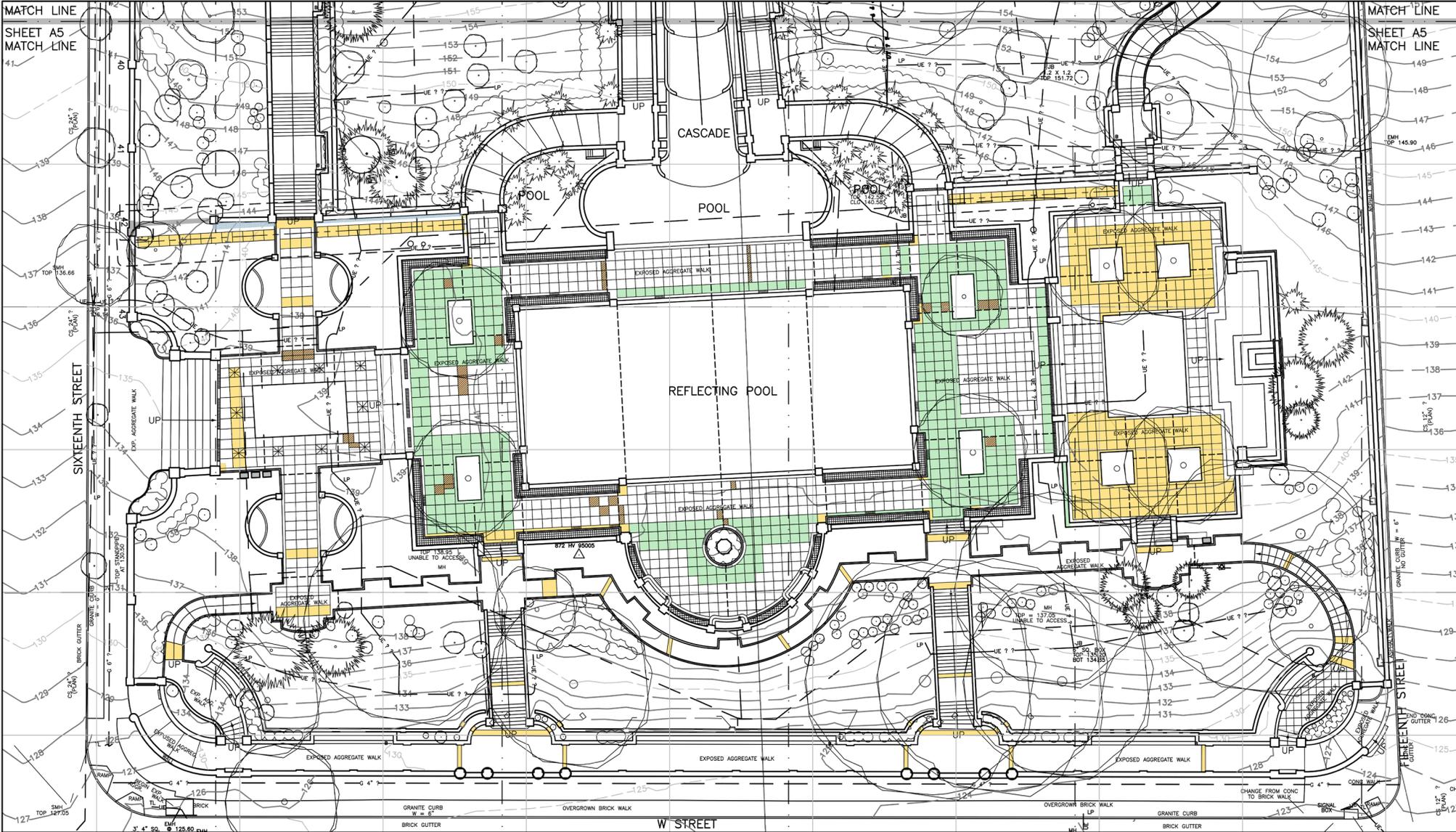
Lower Plaza Existing Conditions – Paving and Drainage



Lower Plaza Rehabilitation – Paving and Drainage Scope

- Level and reset heaved paving and reinstall salvaged panels
- Add new paving to match and install with positive drainage throughout
- Replace all drainage inlets and piping
- Replace historic light fixtures in existing recesses around the Reflecting Pool with new LED fixtures to match original fixtures

Pavement Rehabilitation



Lower Plaza Existing Planting Conditions



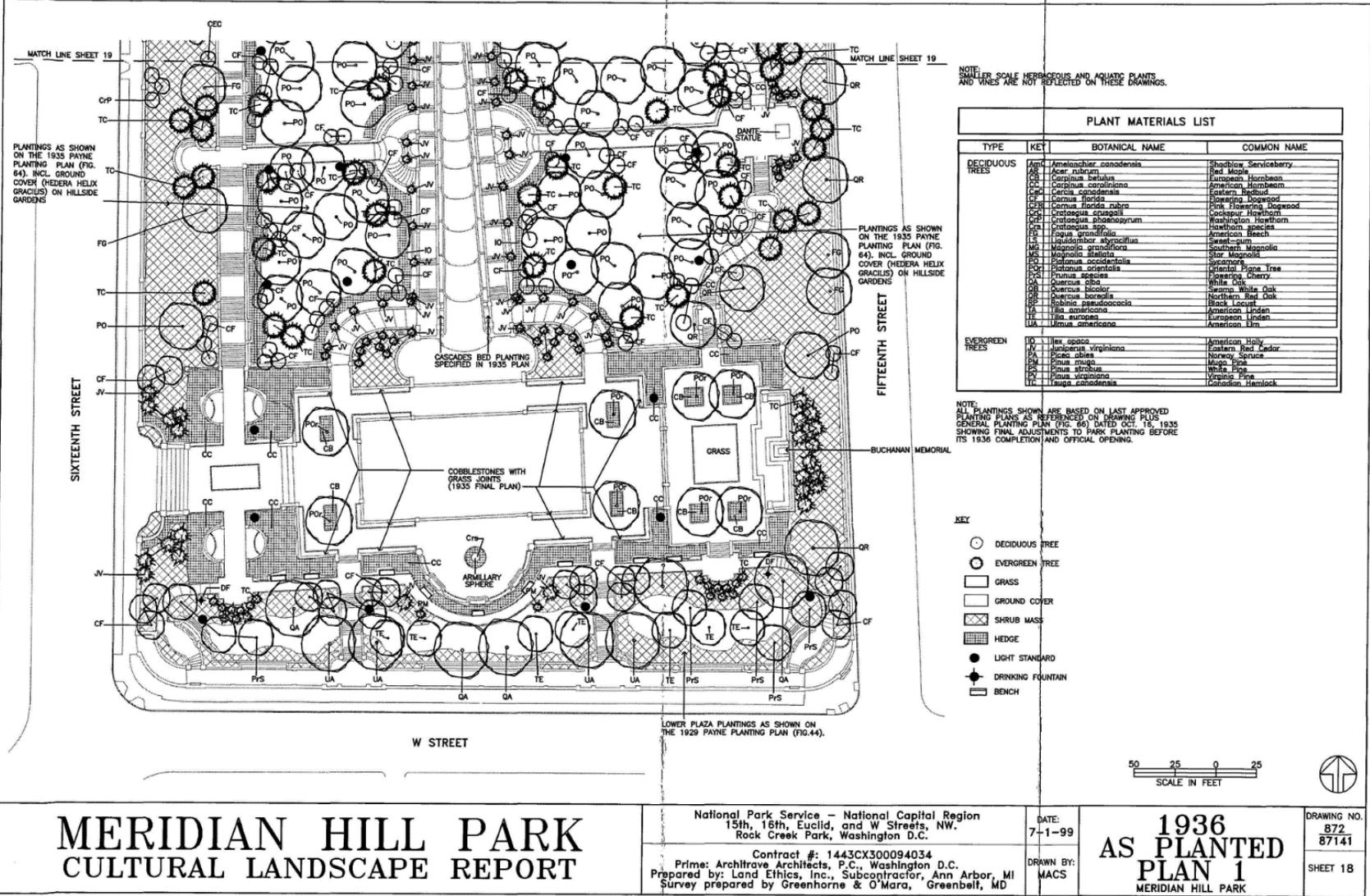
Lower Plaza Historic Character



Lower Plaza Historic Character



Cultural Landscape Report – 1936 Plan



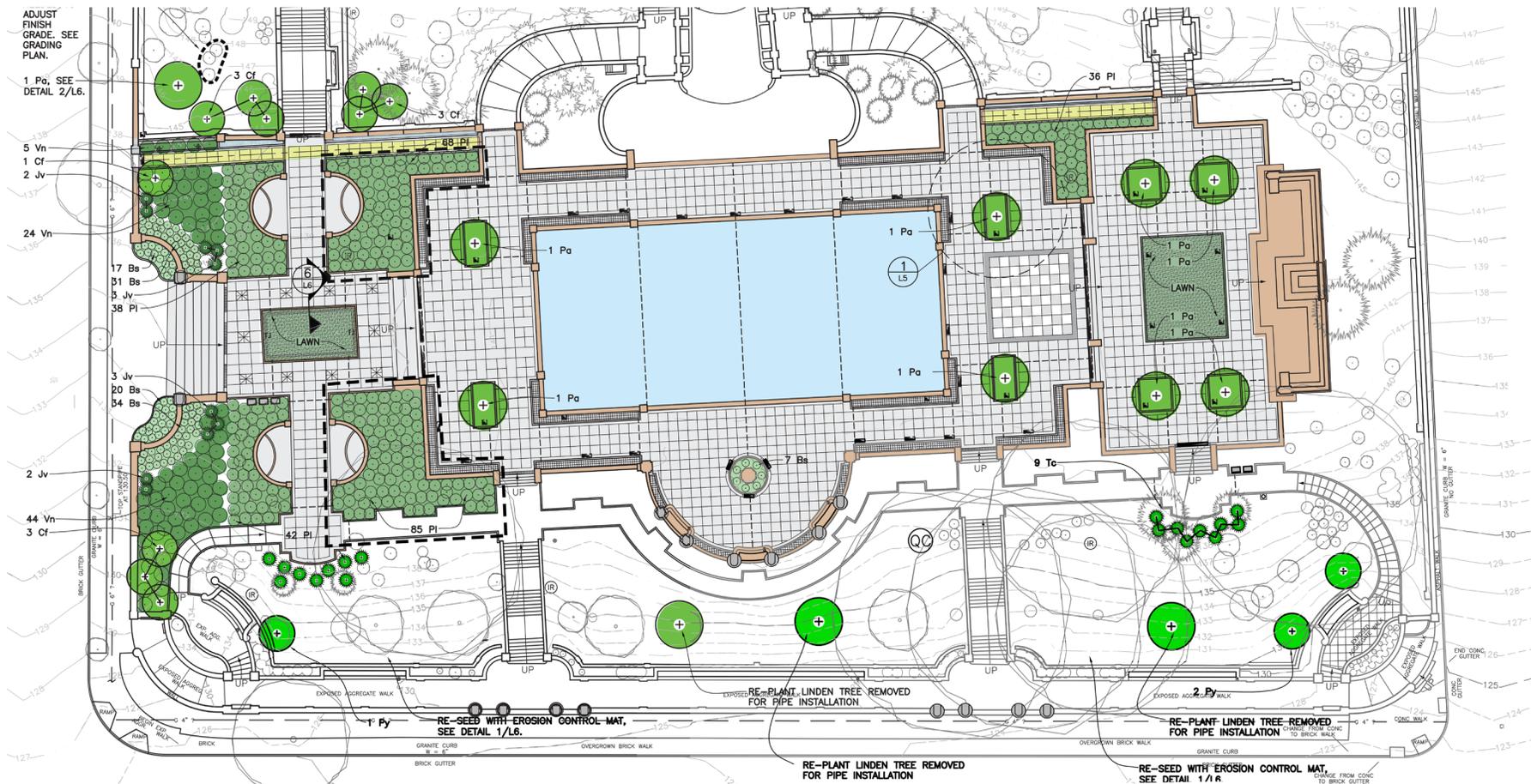
Park Landscape Today



Lower Plaza Plantings Rehabilitation Scope

- Remove Zelkova Trees and replace with Columbia Plane Trees with larger soil volume for improved tree health and longevity
- Continue planting process to recapture the historic landscape character, including dense plantings to define spaces within the Park

Lower Plaza Plantings Rehabilitation Plan



LOWER PLAZA REHABILITATION

AREA A:

- REMOVE ALL PAVING. SALVAGE DECORATIVE PANELS. EXISTING CURBS & BORDERS TO REMAIN IN PLACE.
- REMOVE & REPLACE ALL DRAINAGE PIPING.
- INSTALL EXPOSED AGGREGATE PAVING TO MATCH ORIGINAL. INSTALL SALVAGED PANELS.
- REPLACE DRAIN GRATES W/ SLOTTED CAST IRON.

AREA B:

- REMOVE ALL PAVING INCLUDING CURBS. SALVAGE APPROX. 50% FOR REINSTALLATION. SALVAGE CHESSBOARD PIECES FOR REINSTALLATION.
- REMOVE & REPLACE ALL DRAINAGE PIPING.
- INSTALL SALVAGED PANELS & NEW PANELS W/ PEBBLE-DASH STRIPED TO MATCH EXISTING.
- REPLACE ALL DRAINAGE GRATES W/ SLOTTED CAST IRON.
- REMOVE & REPLACE ALL GRANITE COBBLES. ASSUME 50% SALVAGE FOR REINSTALLATION.

AREA C:

- REMOVE ALL PAVING INCLUDING CURBS. SALVAGE APPROX. 50% FOR REINSTALLATION.
- REMOVE & REPLACE ALL DRAINAGE PIPING.
- INSTALL SALVAGED & NEW PAVING TO MATCH EXISTING.
- REPLACE ALL DRAINAGE GRATES W/ SLOTTED CAST IRON.

ROCR 185767 PRESERVATION OF MERIDIAN HILL PARK

M+S Project No.: 0918
0 4 8 16

LOWER PLAZA

October 17, 2018



Proposed Plant Materials



Existing and Proposed Entrances

The diagram is a detailed site plan of a long, rectangular building. It is bounded by Sixteenth Street to the north, Fifteenth Street to the south, W Street to the west, and Euclid Street to the east. The plan shows the building's footprint, internal corridors, and various rooms. Entrance points are marked with arrows: green arrows with a blue wheelchair symbol indicate accessible entrances, while red arrows indicate non-accessible entrances. A central vertical corridor is highlighted with green arrows, suggesting an accessible path. Several photos are included: a stone wall with a monument on the left; an arched stone entrance with steps on the top right; a stone wall with a fence on the middle right; a paved walkway leading to a building on the bottom right; and a stone wall with a monument on the bottom left.

Legend:

- ➡ Accessible Entrance
- ➡ Non-accessible Entrance

Existing Lower Plaza Entry with Steps



Buchanan Memorial – Existing Conditions



Historic 16th Street Frontage

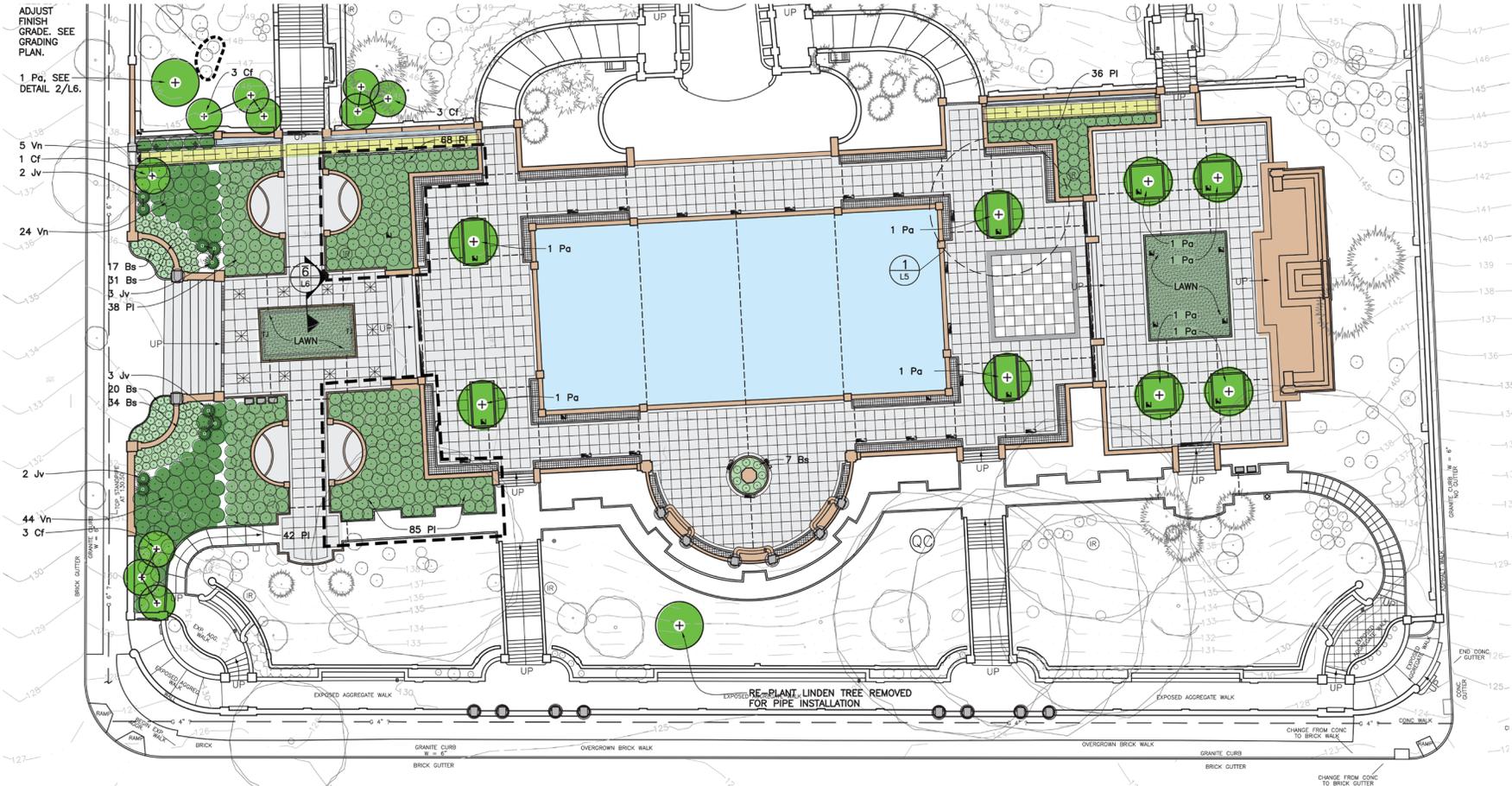


Proposed barrier-free
entrance

Barrier-Free Access Scope

- Construct sloped walks to connect the 16th Street sidewalk to all three levels at the Lower Park: the entry plaza, the Lower Plaza, and the Buchanan Plaza
- Cut a new entrance through the 16th Street perimeter wall, including a new rusticated pier
- Construct new elements from materials similar in character to the existing

Proposed Plan for Barrier-Free Access



LOWER PLAZA REHABILITATION

- AREA A:**
- REMOVE ALL PAVING. SALVAGE DECORATIVE PANELS. EXISTING CURBS & BORDERS TO REMAIN IN PLACE.
 - REMOVE & REPLACE ALL DRAINAGE PIPING.
 - INSTALL EXPOSED AGGREGATE PAVING TO MATCH ORIGINAL. INSTALL SALVAGED PANELS.
 - REPLACE DRAIN GRATES W/ SLOTTED CAST IRON.

- AREA B:**
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 - REPLACE ALL DRAINAGE GRATES W/ SLOTTED CAST IRON.
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ROCR 185767 PRESERVATION OF MERIDIAN HILL PARK

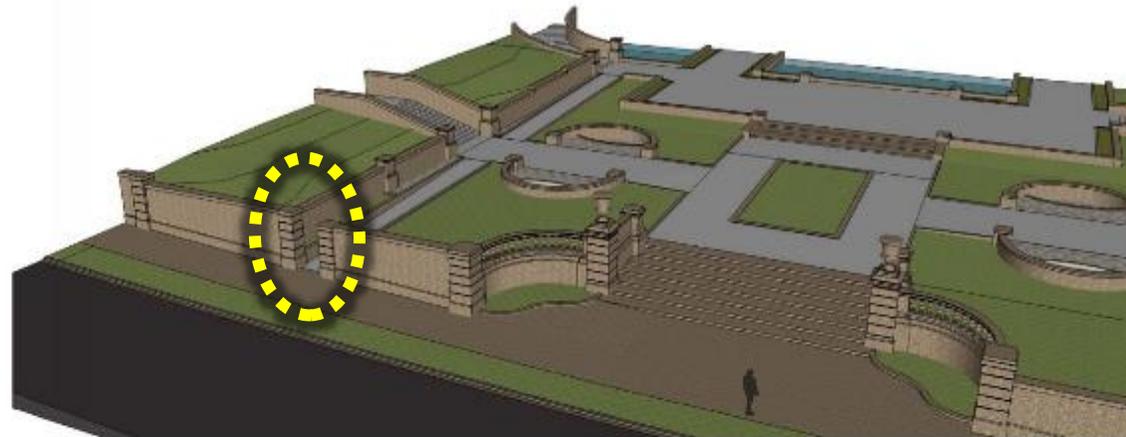
M+S Project No.: 0918
0 4 8 16

LOWER PLAZA

October 17, 2018



Proposed Entrance



Meridian Hill Park - Proposed Barrier Free Entrance

Meridian Hill Park, Washington, D.C.
M+S Project No.: 0918

View 1

October 17, 2018

M+S^a
Mills + Schwering Architects, LLC
Architecture + Historic Preservation

**Heritage
Landscapes**
Preservation Landscape
Architects & Planners

Proposed Entrance



Meridian Hill Park - Proposed Barrier Free Entrance

Meridian Hill Park, Washington, D.C.
M+S Project No.: 0918

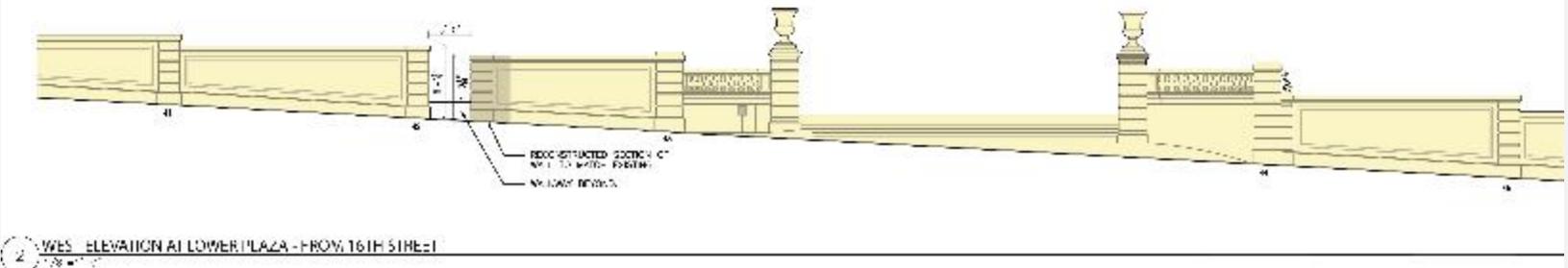
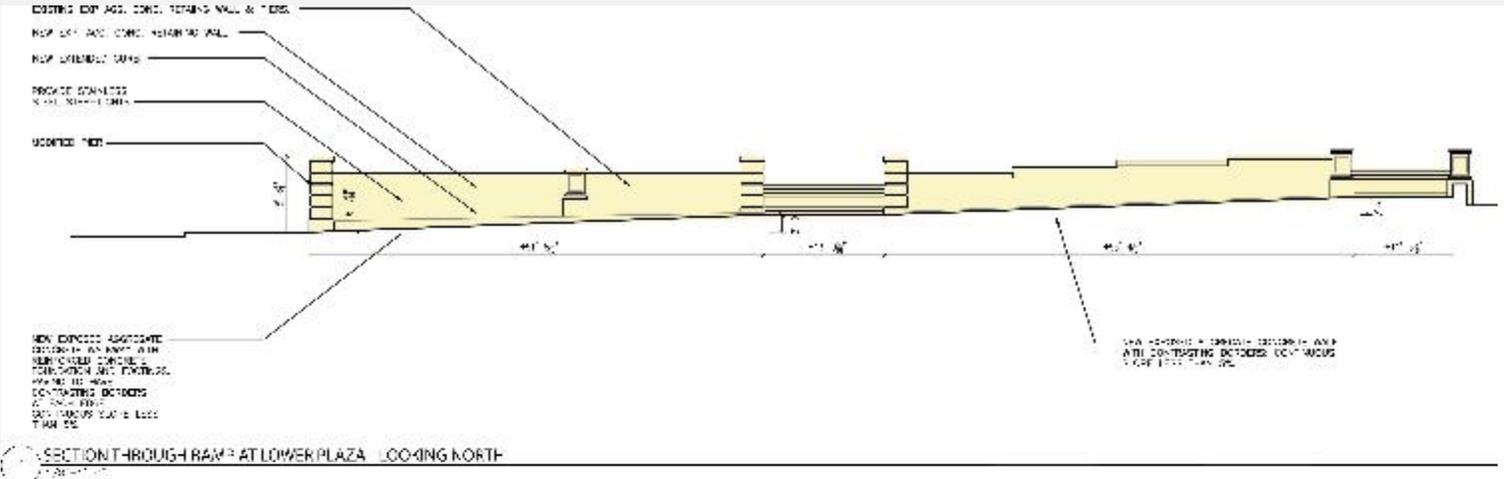
View 2

October 17, 2018

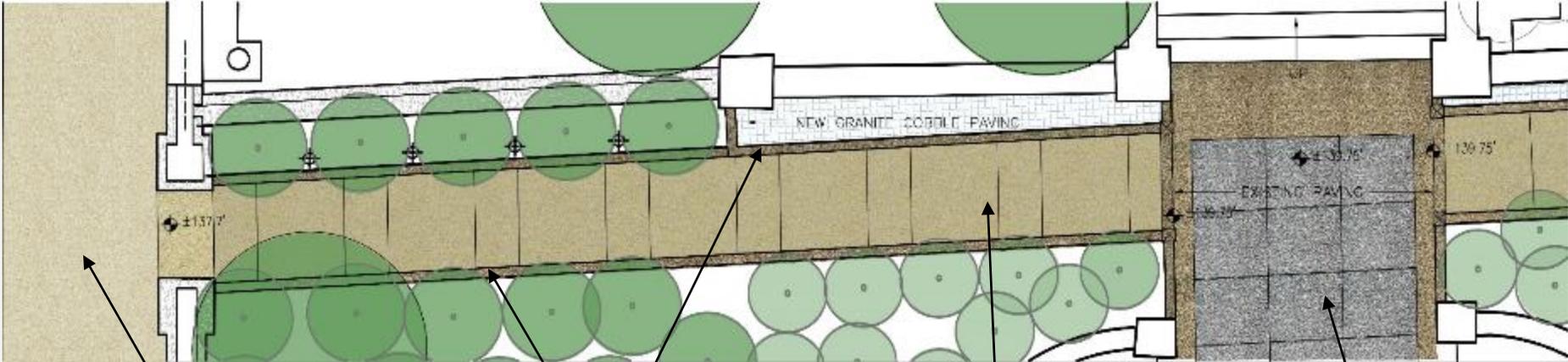
M+S^a
Mills + Schroering Architects, LLC
Architecture + Historic Preservation

Heritage Landscapes
Preservation Landscape
Architects & Planners

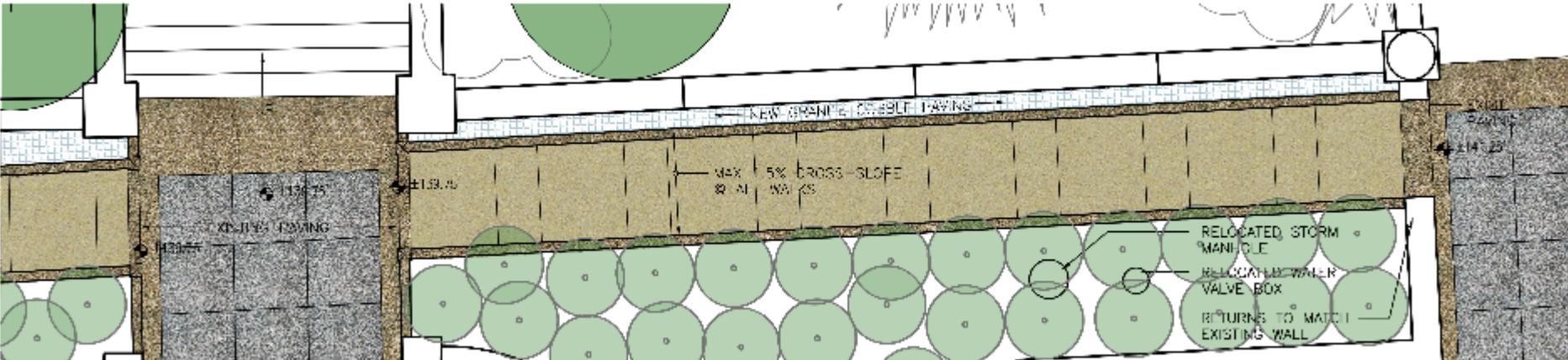
Proposed Entrance



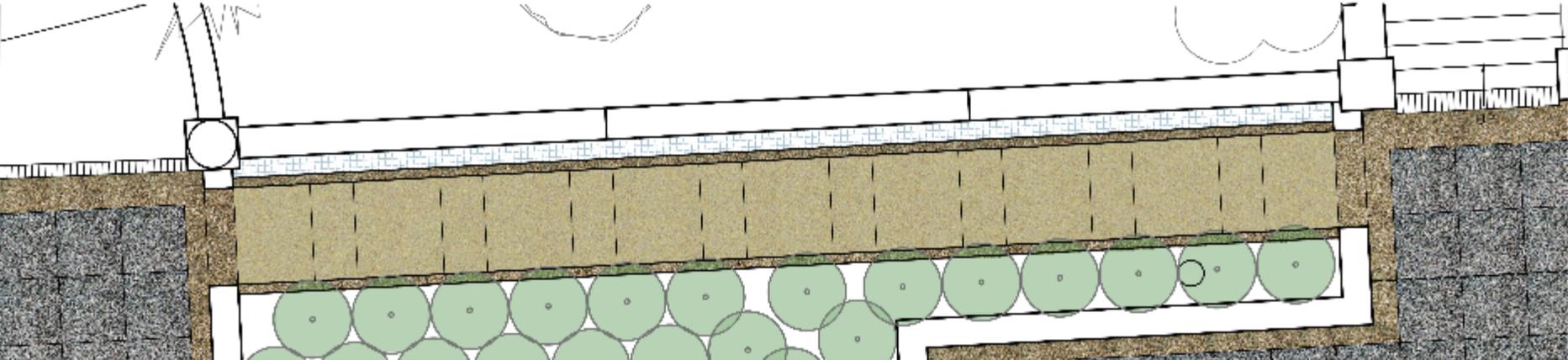
Paving at Proposed Entrance



Paving at Walkways



Base of Ascent to Lower Plaza



Lower Plaza to Buchanan Memorial

Proposed Lighting



5 1/8" diam.
x 5" tall



5 1/2" diam.
x 14 1/4" tall



7 7/8" diam.
x 24" tall

Historic Allee Design

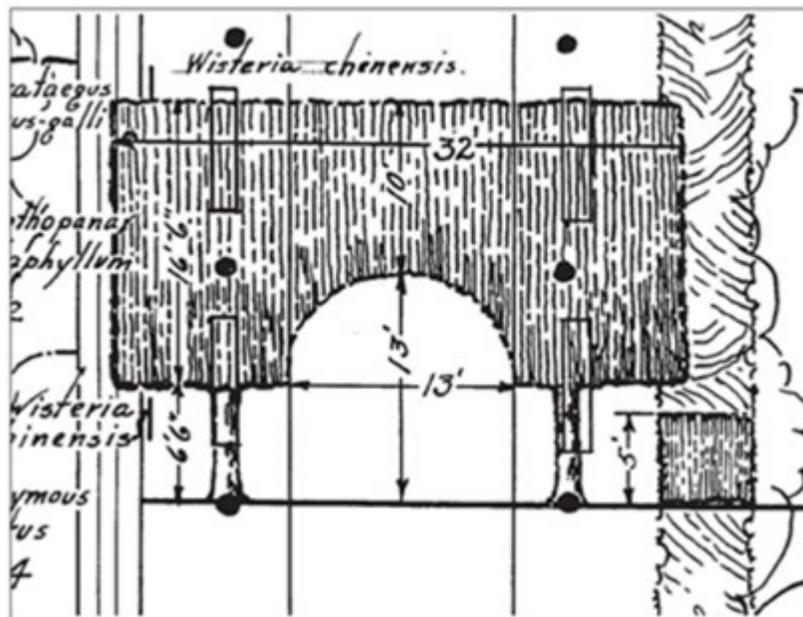
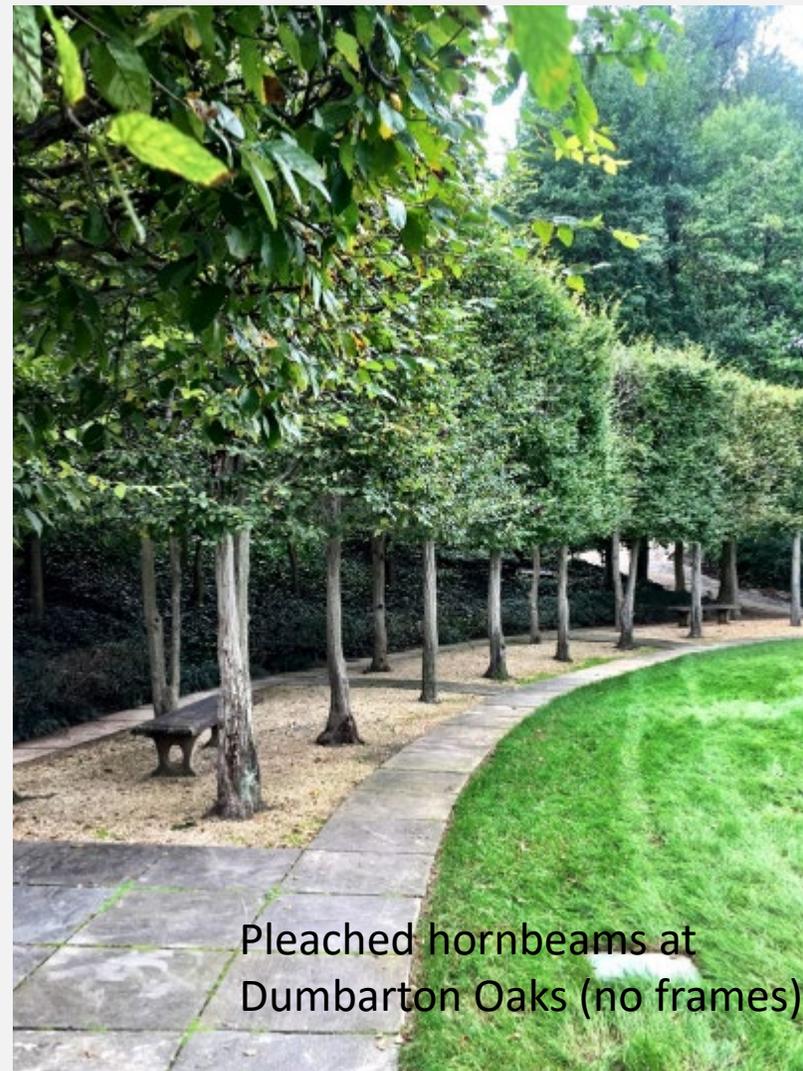
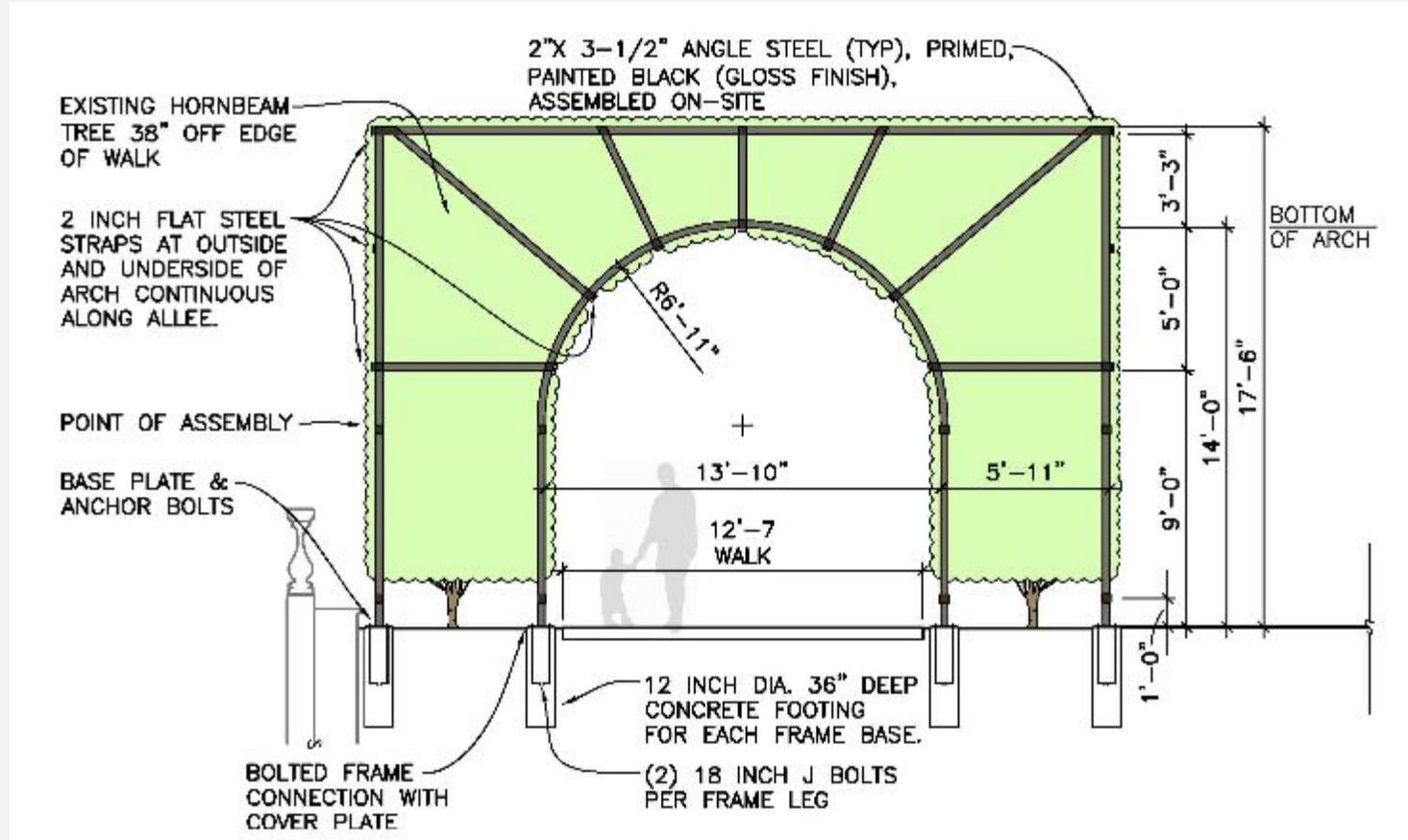
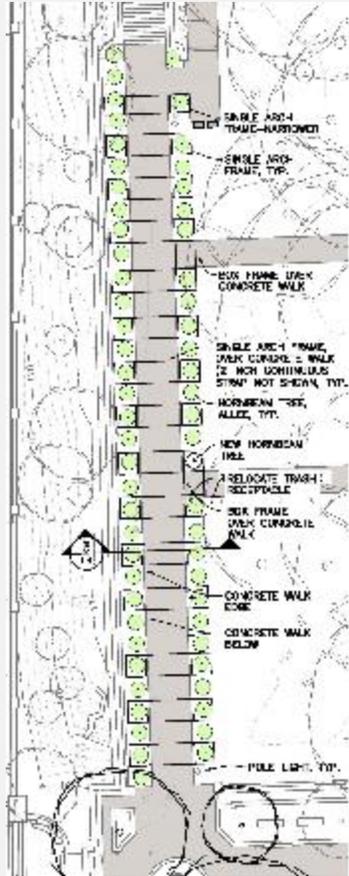


Figure 29: Enlargement of section of Vitale's 1919 planting plan for the great terrace and southern portion of the mall showing pleaching of the Linden Allee from figure 32. The Lindens were to have been formally clipped to 23 feet in height with a 13 foot high archway clipped in the center of the walkway. This detail appeared on all the subsequent and revised planting plans, but there is no evidence this clipping was ever implemented. (National Archives RG 79, 41.2-5).



Pleached hornbeams at Dumbarton Oaks (no frames)

Allee Plan and Proposed Pleaching Frame



Existing Allee



Proposed Allee



CFA 21/FEB/19-v

LOCATION:

16th and W Streets, NW
Washington, DC

PROPERTY:

Meridian Hill Park

DESCRIPTION:

Park restoration and new access ramp to lower plaza

REVIEW TYPE:

Final

PREVIOUS REVIEW:

[CFA 19/FEB/15-2](#)

Recommendation

Project approved by delegation. See letter dated 12 February 2019. Final design conforms to previously approved concept submission. Refer to DC Historic Preservation Office.

Letter

12 February 2019

Dear Ms. Mendelson-Ielmini:

The staff of the Commission of Fine Arts has reviewed the final design for the rehabilitation of the lower plaza of Meridian Hill Park, located at 16th and W Streets, NW, including a new access ramp to the lower plaza. The final design conforms with the previous recommendations of the Commission and the staff has no objections to the design as submitted.

With the authority delegated by the Commission at its meeting of 19 February 2015, we approve the final designs for the project, as documented in the drawings and materials received and dated 30 January 2019. If there are any additional changes, please contact the staff to determine if additional review will be required. As always, the staff is available to assist you with future submissions.

Sincerely,

/s/Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Lisa Mendelson-Ielmini, Acting Regional Director
National Park Service-National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20242