



Commission Action

December 3, 2020

PROJECT Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden Revitalization Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Independence Avenue, SW & 7th Street, SW Washington, DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 7889
SUBMITTED BY Smithsonian Institution	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 1.71(38.00)45227
REVIEW AUTHORITY Federal Projects in the District per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)	APPLICANT'S REQUEST Approval of preliminary site development plans
	ACTION TAKEN Approved preliminary site development plans with comments

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary site development plans for the Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden Revitalization, with the exception of the proposed changes to the inner partition wall and the reflecting pool.

Supports the Smithsonian's intention to revitalize the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden to improve the visitor experience and public engagement, as well as accommodate the museum's mission and contemporary programming needs.

Finds that components of the revitalization can reinforce and improve the visual and physical connections between the National Mall, Sculpture Garden, and Museum.

Finds the revitalization must balance visitor experience, changing programming needs, and historic preservation considerations.

Notes the preliminary design for the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden incorporates a design and artistic vision based on Zen garden principles.

Finds the sculpture garden design has changed substantially over time in response to improving visitor access, environmental comfort, and programmatic needs; however certain components of Bunshaft's original design including the reflecting pool, perimeter walls, and inner partition wall have remained unchanged.

Visitor Access and Experience

Supports improvements that enhance accessibility to and through the sculpture garden for visitors of all abilities.

Notes the museum site and sculpture garden were originally connected by a tunnel beneath Jefferson Drive. The tunnel was closed in 1993.

Supports re-opening the tunnel connection between the museum and the garden to improve connectivity between the two areas.

Supports the applicant's preferred approach to expand the stair opening to the top of the monumental Plaza entrance stairs, without bisecting the stairs, which allows for the desired daylight into the stair entrance and tunnel.

Requests the applicant work with the National Park Service regarding design options for Jefferson Drive that improve the pedestrian crossing.

Finds the inclusion of trees and plantings throughout the garden enhance shade which is important to visitor comfort.

Programming

Notes the museum and garden have a need to accommodate interactive art, larger sculpture, and other contemporary installations, in addition to the bronze sculpture collection displayed today.

Supports the museum's goal to revitalize the sculpture garden to accommodate new, flexible, and varied opportunities for museum programming.

Historic Preservation

Notes that staff analyzed the preliminary design for the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden revitalization project using the Comprehensive Plan policies and the Secretary of the Interior Standards, namely to preserve, rehabilitate, and protect historic landscapes and open spaces, both natural and designed, which are integral components of federal properties.

Notes that in following the guidance of the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards, as well as discussions during the Section 106 consultation process, staff has emphasized the preservation of contributing and character-defining elements of the current garden, while acknowledging that the Museum's programming needs may justify certain alterations if there are no other alternatives.

Notes the Hirshhorn Museum Building and Sculpture Garden have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the complex was designed by noted architect Gordon Bunshaft.

Notes the original Bunshaft elements have been determined to contribute to the eligibility of the garden. These elements include the sunken plan, concrete perimeter walls and inner partition wall, reflecting pool, south and north stairs, and the setting for display of rotating sculpture.

Notes that the Lester Collin design elements, introduced to the garden in 1981, have been re-evaluated as part of the Section 106 consultation process and have been determined to contribute to the significance of the sculpture garden. Those elements include the hardscape paving, garden "rooms", lateral north ramps for accessibility, and the east ramp at the intermediate level.

Finds the sunken garden space is a fundamental feature of the original Bunshaft design and the proposed revitalization will not alter the relationship of the garden's elevation to the National Mall.

Reflecting Pool

Supports the applicant's desire to improve the area around the reflecting pool, including the addition of another pool, to accommodate new performance programs.

Finds the reflecting pool is a fundamental feature of the original Bunshaft design. The pool proportions were intended to relate to the north window and balcony of the Hirshhorn Museum. The reflecting pool was retained by Collins in his 1981 alterations.

Finds that in response to the Commission's comments at the concept review, the applicant is proposing a design for the pool element that adds to the reflecting pool's original dimensions, with an expanded apron of water on three sides.

Finds the design for the proposed treatment of the Bunshaft reflecting pool, with the expanded apron of water on three sides, does not visually retain the distinct dimensions of the original reflecting pool and that the program need for the expansion is unclear.

Recommends the applicant provide a comprehensive rationale for the programming needs that require the expanded aprons around the Bunshaft reflecting pool and study other design alternatives prior to any Commission consideration.

Walls

Notes that all the existing concrete walls within the Sculpture Garden suffer from alkali silica reactions (concrete disease) and require replacement.

Notes that staff has evaluated the Sculpture Garden's walls in three groups: the perimeter wall, inner partition wall, and the auxiliary walls. Each wall group has a different purpose and relationship to the garden.

Perimeter Walls

Notes the existing perimeter walls are contributing elements to Bunshaft's garden design and the concrete aggregate material directly relates the sculpture garden to the museum building.

Supports the effort to replace the failing original perimeter aggregate walls of Bunshaft's design with in-kind materials, consisting of Swenson Pink aggregate, to maintain these character-defining elements.

Supports the reconfiguration of the north and south overlooks and the introduction of new overlooks to the east and west, to improve the connectivity of the garden with the National Mall.

Inner Partition Wall

Notes the inner partition wall is a contributing element to Bunshaft's garden design and was retained by Collins in his 1981 alteration.

Notes that the current location of the inner partition wall appears to meet the applicant's programming needs as it will be replaced in the same location.

Notes the applicant proposes to change the inner partition wall's material composition from the original concrete aggregate to stacked stone, with some Swenson Pink granite stones incorporated, noting the change is part of an artistic vision for the overall garden.

Finds the inner partition wall is a central focus of the overall garden and backdrop to the reflecting pool and the concrete aggregate material directly relates the sculpture garden to the museum building.

Finds that the applicant has not demonstrated a strong programmatic rationale for altering this character-defining feature.

Recommends the applicant provide a comprehensive rationale of the programming need for the change in material prior to any Commission consideration.

Auxiliary Walls

Notes that the existing non-contributing auxiliary walls within the garden will be removed to allow for the construction of universal accessibility ramps on the north and south end of the garden and for other programming needs.

Supports the introduction of walls in new locations to assist in providing universal accessibility into the garden and to enhance the Museum's programming needs while serving as backdrops for the sculpture collection.

Notes the design proposes the introduction of new stacked stone walls within the garden that will act as new backdrops for displayed art, while defining space.

Notes that the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation require that new additions to historic resources be contemporary in design expression but compatible with the historic contributing, character-defining elements.

Notes that in keeping with the Standards, new auxiliary walls in the garden should be easily differentiated from the Bunshaft aggregate perimeter walls so as not to create a false sense of history or confusion. The new walls should always be lower in height than the historic concrete perimeter walls to provide a sense of hierarchy.

Recommends the applicant continue to explore ways in which the new stacked stone walls can be made more compatible with the historic aggregate perimeter walls and inner partition wall, through material, texture, color tone, or stacking pattern.

Security

Notes a guard booth will be located from the north side of the garden, adjacent to the National Mall, to the south side, near the western apron, adjacent to the new accessibility ramps.

Notes the applicant is continuing to explore options for the design of the guard booth, with input from the consulting parties.

Notes that security gates will be located at all pedestrian access to the garden, to allow for securing the garden when not open to the public.

Stormwater Management

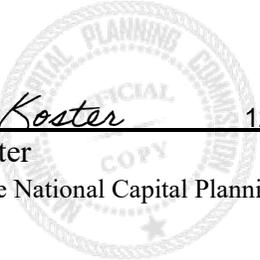
Finds that the garden currently suffers from a lack of updated stormwater management practices, and the garden experiences flooding during significant rain events.

Notes the applicant intends to meet local stormwater management requirements and flooding issues, and therefore has been coordinating with the District Department of Energy and Environment.

Coordination

Requests the applicant continue to coordinate with the National Park Service to address any issues related to potential impacts to the National Mall or Jefferson Drive.

Requests the applicant continue to consult as necessary with the federal agencies and the Section 106 consulting parties, to continue to explore ways to minimize impacts to historic resources, and to determine appropriate mitigation to resolve adverse effects, to be included in a Memorandum of Agreement.

A circular official seal of the National Capital Planning Commission is visible in the background. The seal contains the text "NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION" around the perimeter, "OFFICIAL" in the center, and "COPY" below it. A star is at the bottom of the seal.
Julia Koster 12/04/20

Julia A. Koster
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission