Executive Director’s Recommendation

Commission Meeting: June 2, 2022

PROJECT
Armed Forces Retirement Home Master Plan Amendment 2
Armed Forces Retirement Home
140 Rock Creek Church Road, NW
Washington, DC

NCPC FILE NUMBER
MP060

NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER
12.10(05.00)45490

APPLICANT’S REQUEST
Approval of final master plan

APPROVED ACTION
Approve final master plan with comments

ACTION ITEM TYPE
Staff Presentation

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) in Washington, DC has submitted for Commission review and approval a second amendment to its campus master plan, which was approved by the Commission in July 2008 and initially amended in 2018. AFRH maintains a 272-acre campus with more than 100 buildings and ancillary structures, which provide residences and related services for approximately 600 eligible retired and former members of the Armed Forces. On-site amenities include health services, a bank, chapels, a convenience store, a post office, a barber shop and beauty salon, and a range of recreational facilities including a nine-hole golf course and walking trails. AFRH is a non-appropriated independent federal agency, and as such, is hoping to use the master plan to leverage unused portions of its campus to sustain funding through a long-term lease with a private developer. The original master plan and current amendment will provide a basis for facilitating and directing this future development.

The master plan divides the campus into two primary zones: 1) the AFRH Zone, which houses the main AFRH campus and will be retained for federal use (192 acres), and 2) Zone A, which will be leased for private mixed-use development, including residential, office, research and development, institutional, medical, retail, and hotel uses (80 acres). Detailed guidance in the master plan outlines allowable land uses, building massing, street layouts, and parking supplies for this zone, which, per a memorandum of understanding (MOU) among NCPC, AFRH, and the District of Columbia (DCOP) Office of Planning, would be used by the DCOP to recommend zoning for DC Zoning Commission consideration and adoption. The MOU stipulates that this area of the campus would then be subject to DC local land development controls moving forward.

This master plan amendment proposes minor modifications to the parcel plan in Zone A based on changes in local planning strategies, requirements, and priorities since 2008 including a more objective-based and context-specific approach to design guidelines for new development in Zone
A; and a small increase in density in Zone A, as well as more flexibility in use and building type, while maintaining all previously approved guidelines related to height and viewshed protection. Finally, the amendment reflects changes in AFRH’s assessment data related to archaeological potential on the campus, as well as the agency’s compliance with federal laws related to the protection of archaeological resources. The applicant has also committed to a variety of mitigations to address traffic impacts from the proposed development including the addition of Capital Bikeshare stations, intersections improvements at Irving and First Streets, NW and North Capitol, Allison Street, and Hawaii Avenue; a transit center in Zone A to serve as a lay by station for current and future bus routes; and pedestrian paths on Irving and North Capitol Streets with connections into, and throughout the site.

KEY INFORMATION

- AFRH maintains a 272-acre campus with more than 100 buildings and ancillary structures, which provide residences and related services for approximately 600 eligible retired and former members of the Armed Forces.
- As a non-appropriated independent federal agency, AFRH is hoping to use the master plan to leverage unused portions of its campus to pursue a long-term lease with a private developer.
- The original master plan for the campus was approved in 2008 for a total of 4.3 million square feet of development. The master plan was amended in 2018 to include the decommissioned boiler plant in Zone A, increasing the square footage by 36,000 and changing the Zone A boundary.
- The proposed master plan amendment largely focuses on changes to Zone A including an overall increase in density of 500,000 square feet to a total of 4.9 million, minor changes to the street layout to maintain key views and create better access, changes to the residential types to include townhouses, an improved terminus of Scale Gate at the Forwood building and the Mess Hall, a decrease in the overall parking onsite and changes to the type of parking.
- NCPC entered into an MOU with AFRH and DCOP in 2020 that outlines the unique master planning and zoning process for this campus to ensure that all legal authorities are met and that AFRH has a predictable process for updating the master plan and implementing the private development through zoning. Per the MOU, NCPC will review and approve the master plan as a guiding development plan for District zoning and therefore has a NEPA responsibility.
- AFRH conducted an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the master plan when it was completed in 2008. As part of the master plan amendment process, AFRH developed a supplemental EIS to reflect current law and policy and update the transportation analysis in light of recent development in the surrounding area.
- AFRH has selected a developer for Zone A that will implement the proposed development in several phases expected to last up to 10 years.
- The DC Office of Planning provided comments on the submission regarding affordable housing, transportation access and connectivity, and parking amounts and types and worked with AFRH to find mutually beneficial solutions.
• The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) also provided comments on the SEIS and the submission regarding the mitigation measures proposed to address anticipated traffic impacts. Since that time, AFRH has worked with DDOT to come to consensus on the necessary mitigations. The final resultant list of mitigations is included as an attachment to the record of decision (ROD).
• After approval of the master plan by the Commission, the development team will continue to work with DCOP to establish zoning for Zone A which will need to be approved by the DC Council. Any changes to the design of Zone A that are outside the parameters of the master plan will require review and approval of a master plan amendment by the Commission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission:

Approves the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) Master Plan Amendment 2, which updates the site plan, development program, and design guidelines for Zone A to reflect market conditions, current planning standards and principles, transportation impacts, and mitigation.

Adopts the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Armed Forces Retirement Home Master Plan.

Notes that the AFRH team has coordinated extensively with NCPC staff, the DC Office of Planning, the District Department of Transportation, and the Commission of Fine Arts, and the public to ensure to the best extent possible that the final elements of the amendment adhere to the planning and transportation standards of the Federal and District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

Notes that while the overall block and street network is largely the same as the approved 2008 master plan, the applicant has made the following updates to the development program, urban design, and transportation components:

Development Program

Notes the amendment includes an increase in overall density in Zone A, comprised of an additional 990,378 square feet of residential (townhouses, high-density multi-family housing, and senior housing) and 401,298 square foot reduction in commercial, bringing the total development program to 4.9 million square feet.

Notes the plan includes a commitment to affordable housing, that will be addressed by zoning, in recognition of both the District’s affordable housing goals and the Biden Administration’s goal to increase affordable housing nationwide.

Urban Design
**Finds** that the street and block layout and building heights continue to respect established viewsheds such as the U.S. Capitol and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

**Finds** the redesign of the Mess Hall terminus at Scale Gate and Forwood Streets protects a large stand of mature trees and creates a dramatic entry to the site.

**Notes** the applicant has updated the design standards to:

- Reduce the unbroken block face of each building to a maximum of 200 feet;
- Require the building facades to have the same level of architectural treatment on all sides and ground level facades to be visually interesting and pedestrian oriented in design;
- Require buildings on Irving Street to be oriented functionally on both Irving and Pershing Streets;
- Require sustainable development and stormwater management.

**Notes** the plan anticipates the removal of the North Capitol Street cloverleaf intersection in the future and does not preclude a new connection between parcels P and F to North Capitol Street and between parcels E and F to Irving Street.

**Requests** that AFRH re-engage with NCPC staff, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the National Park Service, and the community to evaluate the feasibility of possible public access through the western portion of the AFRH Zone (golf course and open space) as part of a future AFRH submission for the golf course and open space.

**Notes** the AFRH team is committed to providing an update on the open space topic as part of future submissions for this area.

**Transportation**

**Notes** that the amendment includes a reduction of 400 parking spaces from the 2008 plan and proposes a maximum of 4,844 spaces in largely above ground structures as previously approved. The parking ratio will be higher in Phase 1 and lower in later phases as public transit and bike/pedestrian infrastructure to and within the site increases.

**Notes** that the District Department of Transportation provided extensive comments on the SEIS and AFRH worked with DDOT to come to consensus on the necessary mitigations for traffic impacts. The list of mitigations is attached to the record of decision (ROD) and includes:

- A new transit center and bus turnaround at the site;
- A network of on and off-street bike and pedestrian connections throughout the site; and
- Intersection improvements adjacent to the site.

**Requests** the AFRH team continue to work towards a greater reduction in overall parking, moving parking underground, and creating bike and pedestrian connectivity from the west through the AFRH Zone to Zone A as future phases are implemented.
Notes that any proposal to update/modify the approved master plan, including changes proposed by the selected developer, would require AFRH to submit a master plan amendment for NCPC review and approval. Amendments that result in changes to anticipated traffic levels or approved parking would require an updated transportation management plan.

Notes that Zone A is subject to the DC zoning process following the approval of the master plan and all future Zone A development will adhere to an extensive historic preservation review process in the future.

PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous actions</th>
<th>July 2008 – Commission reviewed and approved final master plan.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 2018 – Commission reviewed and approved master plan amendment 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remaining actions (anticipated)</th>
<th>- Review and approval of federal projects that result from the AFRH zone of the master plan.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Review and provide comments to the DC Zoning Commission any zoning update or map amendment that is referred to NCPC.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Staff has reviewed the submitted master plan amendment and finds that the proposed modifications to the master plan would effectively meet the needs of AFRH, while aligning with the larger goals, objectives, and development guidelines that were approved by the Commission in the original master plan. The changes to the master plan are relatively minor and address needed updates throughout Zone A to ensure that the proposed development is appropriate for the site and the impacts properly mitigated. The proposed amendment includes an overall increase in density of 500,000 square feet to a total of 4.9 million, minor changes to the street layout to maintain key views and create better access, changes to the residential types to include townhouses, an improved terminus of Scale Gate at the Forwood building and the Mess Hall, a decrease in the overall parking onsite and changes to the type of parking.

The AFRH team has coordinated extensively with NCPC staff, the DC Office of Planning, the District Department of Transportation, and the Commission of Fine Arts, and the public to ensure to the best extent possible the final elements of the amendment adhere to the planning and
transportation standards of the Federal and District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Accordingly, NCPC staff recommends that the Commission approves the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) Master Plan Amendment 2, which updates the site plan, development program, and design guidelines for Zone A to reflect market conditions, current planning standards and principles, transportation impacts and mitigations.

Analysis

Background

The Armed Forces Retirement Home is an independent federal executive agency located northwest Washington, DC. The 272-acre campus is developed with more than 100 buildings and ancillary structures that are home to over 600 enlisted military veterans. The campus includes amenities such as health-related facilities, private rooms for residents, chapels, a convenience store, a post office, laundry facilities, a barber shop and beauty salon, dining rooms, a golf course, fishing ponds, and 24-hour security and staff. Although a federally owned facility, AFRH does not receive appropriated funding and relies on revenues to its trust fund to support residential and healthcare programs for its residents. In recent years, recognizing that these revenues have been insufficient to support AFRH’s costs, Congress granted AFRH authority to explore private development of portions of the campus through long-term ground leases as a way to generate a new and reliable revenue stream to support its mission. To leverage its real estate, AFRH has created and maintained this Master Plan, which will be the basis for facilitating and directing future development by the private sector, thereby increasing revenue to the Trust Fund. The Master Plan also addresses the need for new facilities for AFRH.

The campus is an irregular-shaped site that comes to a peak at its northern-most point. The campus occupies one of the highest elevations within the District of Columbia, and it provides historic views of the District. The general terrain of the site slopes downward from north to south. South of the primary northern campus are wooded areas and an open area which includes a nine-hole golf course. The campus can be separated into four functional areas: 1) the northern part of the campus, 2) the support and utility area, 3) the King Health Center, and 4) the recreational areas. The primary retirement home and administrative facilities occupied by AFRH today are located in the northern section of the site. The area includes a National Monument, a National Historic Landmark, and a National Register Historic District and a number of resources deemed to be contributing to the historical character of the site. Several of these resources are vacant, most notably the Grant and Security Buildings. The National Trust for Historic Preservation renovated the Lincoln Cottage and the Administration Building as a museum and visitor center with separate management and operations.

The support and utility area of the Home is located along the southeastern border of the site. This area consists of single-level, flat-roofed brick structures built in the 1950s, as well as the 1906 Heating Plant and associated buildings. All of these buildings were used as warehouse and mechanical facilities to support the mission of AFRH but are now decommissioned and/or vacant. With the exception of the Heating Plant, these buildings will be removed to facilitate development in Zone A. The King Health Center is located in the central part of the southern end of the campus. Significant buildings in this area include the Forwood Building, the Mess Hall, and the Barnes
Building, all of which are Contributing Resources and are currently vacant. The LaGarde Building, constructed in 1992 and vacated in 2013, forms the north side of the hospital complex. Adjacent to the quadrangle formed by these buildings is the Pipes Building, which is vacant and non-historic. With the exception of the LaGarde Building, the buildings in this area require substantial capital investments to bring them to modern, habitable conditions which is addressed in the master plan.

The recreational area is located in the south and southwest parts of the site. This area covers approximately one-third of the campus. It includes the fields south of the Scott Building, a nine-hole golf course, two fishing ponds (also known as the “Lakes”), and a garden for residents’ use. The terrain of this recreational area, like the majority of the site, has its highest elevation in the north and slopes down towards the southern end of the site. Also located in this area is an underground water reservoir beneath the golf course.

Land uses adjacent to the Home are residential, institutional (medical and educational facilities), cemeteries, churches, and small retail uses. To the west of the site are two residential neighborhoods: Petworth and Park View. Beyond these neighborhoods is Howard University. To the north of the site are two cemeteries: the Rock Creek Church Yard and Cemetery and the United States Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Home National Cemetery. To the southeast is the North Capitol cloverleaf, to the east are The Catholic University of America (CUA) and Trinity University, and to the south are the Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital, Children’s Hospital, National Rehabilitation Hospital, and Washington Hospital Center.

Master Plan History

As noted, the Commission initially reviewed and approved the final master plan for AFRH in July of 2008, which ultimately divided the campus into two main areas: 1) The AFRH Zone, which would be retained for federal AFRH operations, and 2) Zone A, which would be leased to a private entity for the creation of a mixed-use development to provide an income stream for AFRH. While several new projects were proposed for the AFRH Zone (totaling 398,000 square feet), the majority of the master plan provided a comprehensive new vision for Zone A. Development in Zone A was intended to create a sustainable, walkable community, which included the introduction of a new street grid with a range of street typologies, and the construction of multiple major mixed-use developments, including uses such as research and development, office, residential, hotel, and retail (totaling 4,366,995 square feet).

The master plan also provided detailed design guidelines to help ensure a semi-urban character and to protect major viewsheds. The transportation plan was also approved for the site, which allotted 5,155 parking spaces for development proposed in Zone A, as well as guidelines to manage any increases or decreases in parking. Prior to submitting the original master plan in 2008, AFRH had selected a developer for Zone A; however, this selection coincided with an economic downturn, and the development was eventually determined financially infeasible, and the developer abandoned its plans. Implementation of the plan for Zone A has consequently been on hold for many years.

To address the unique circumstances of the project and guide development of Zone A, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was developed in 2007 among NCPC, AFRH, and the DC
Office of Planning, which dictated how the proposed master plan would be used by the DC Office of Planning to recommend zoning of the property for DC Zoning Commission consideration and adoption. The NCPC-approved design and guidelines would be reflected in the final zoning, and any variation in elements including, but not limited to, design parameters, street configuration, or parking proposed for Zone A would require AFRH to submit a master plan amendment for NCPC review and approval. Further, any changes that would result in changes to anticipated traffic levels or approved parking would require an updated transportation plan. In anticipation of the proposed master plan amendment, the MOU was updated in 2020 and will be discussed later in this report.

Amendment #1

In 2017, AFRH began the process to select a new developer/designer partner to update the master plan and refocus on implementation. The approved amendment #1 modified Zone A to include a heating plant and associated outbuildings (Parcel U), which were decommissioned by AFRH in 2013 and sitting vacant. The inclusion of the Heating Plant Parcel in Zone A represented a negligible change overall to planned new development in Zone A. The amendment also included a minor adjustment to the fence line between the AFRH Zone and Zone A to accommodate this change. Because AFRH must maintain the use of its Main Substation (Building 71), which sits just south of the heating plant, the fence will need to cross AFRH-retained land in this area and this portion of fence will require further review by the Commission, as will any other projects proposed for the AFRH Zone. The Commission approved the inclusion of Parcel U in Zone A at the March 2018 meeting.

Amendment #2

Overview

The Armed Forces Retirement Home is proposing to update the approved 2008 master plan to address changes in the surrounding city, planning philosophies, transportation requirements, and concepts related to sustainability, urban design, and historic preservation. The applicant initiated the discussion with staff and other stakeholders on this amendment in 2019 and has worked extensively since that time to address concerns and comments.

AFRH published a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) that analyzed the proposed changes in various laws and executive orders since the issuance of the original record of decision (ROD) in 2008. The SEIS includes an updated traffic analysis, which proposes mitigation measures that consider a range of strategies to reduce or eliminate potential impacts of the proposed development on the adjacent transportation network. The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) provided comments on the SEIS, coordinating the appropriate mitigation measures to address anticipated traffic impacts. AFRH has included the mitigation measures in the updated ROD. AFRH has indicated that implementation of the measures identified in the updated ROD will be a contractual requirement of the developer as part of the ground lease. Considering the District’s comments on the SEIS were addressed by AFRH, staff recommends that the Commission adopts the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Armed Forces Retirement Home Master Plan.
As noted above and throughout this report, there was extensive coordination between the applicant and NCPC staff, DCOP, DDOT, the Commission of Fine Arts, the public and others to ensure that the proposed amendment addressed all comments and concerns raised by these stakeholders. Overall, the proposed amendment maintains the original vision to create a new urban district that blends new construction with significant historic structures as an amenity for the residents of the Home and the neighborhood. Amendment 2 primarily addresses changes in Zone A that include:

- An increase in density from the existing master plan and 2018 amendment
- Minor changes to the street design and typologies
- Changes to the building types and design guidelines
- Changes to the land uses, an improved entry at Scale Gate and terminus at the Forwood Building
- A reduction in the number of parking spaces and change in type of facilities, and
- Several transportation and pedestrian improvements.

As such, staff recommends the Commission notes that while the overall block and street network is largely the same as the approved 2008 master plan, the applicant has made the following updates to the development program, urban design, and transportation components.

**Development Program**

The applicant is proposing a variety of minor updates to the approved 2008 master plan including the density and land uses of Zone A. The approved density in the 2008 master plan was 4,316,995 square feet, which was increased to 4,353,083 with the approval of the 2018 amendment 1. The applicant is proposing to increase the density of Zone A to 4,906,075, an increase of 552,992 square feet. The majority (71%) of the square footage is allocated to residential uses including assisted living, with the remainder divided between commercial uses such as office, retail, hotel, and medical office. This is a shift from the previous land use make up to a higher proportion of residential and staff recommends the Commission notes the amendment includes an increase in overall density in Zone A, comprised of an additional 990,378 square feet of residential (townhouses, high-density multi-family housing, and senior housing) and 401,298 square foot reduction in commercial, bringing the total development program to 4.9 million square feet.

The increase in housing in Zone A reflects changing land use demands in the marketplace. The applicant is proposing to include through the zoning process, affordable housing as part of the residential development. The addition of hundreds of new multi-family and single-family residential units in Zone A will improve affordability for District residents, and the provision of both affordable and senior housing units will directly help the city address the critical housing issues facing Washington, DC. As such staff recommends the Commission notes the plan includes a commitment to affordable housing, that will be addressed by zoning, in recognition of both the District’s affordable housing goals and the Biden Administration’s goal to increase affordable housing nationwide.

**Urban Design**
A key element of the design of the master plan in 2008 was that it utilized the grade and proposed roadways to both protect and enhance the significant views that the site affords. The AFRH campus is one of the highest points in the city and offers views to several important landmarks in the city. The proposed modifications to Zone A in Amendment 2 maintain this concept and include additional guidance and design features to ensure the views are protected. As such, staff recommends the Commission finds that the street and block layout and building heights continue to respect established viewsheds such as the U.S. Capitol and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

While many of the proposed changes in Amendment 2 are minor, the reconfiguration of the entry at Scale Gate is the most impactful. The design of this entry point at the northern end of Zone A started in the 2008 master plan by terminating directly southwest of Scale Gate at a small park in front of the historic Mess Hall. The roadway created at the terminus of Scale Gate, Carney Road, was originally designed to wrap around the small park, creating street frontage for the west sides of blocks K and M, and then flank the pasture as it headed south. In reevaluating the block shapes for Amendment 2, the applicant realized that the existing part of Carney Road had significant trees southeast of the Mess Hall and so to preserve these trees, the existing roadway was preserved requiring a redesign of blocks K and M and the terminus of Scale Gate. In consultation with CFA, the applicant reconfigured the terminus to focus on the Forwood Building and added the small open space back to the plan to allow for a view of the Mess Hall as well. Staff recommends the Commission finds the redesign of the Mess Hall terminus at Scale Gate and Forwood Streets protects a large stand of mature trees and creates a dramatic entry to the site.

The applicant, in coordination with DCOP, focused design guidelines updates to ensure there would not be long, unbroken block faces, enhanced architectural character on all sides of each building, pedestrian scale design when a building faces a street, specifically on both Irving and Pershing Streets, and a variety of sustainable design commitments. Additionally, Zone A will go through the District zoning process after approval of the master plan and will be subject the Historic Preservation Review Board. Staff believes that the updates to the design guidelines will assist future developers to create visually attractive and compatible buildings that will engage the streetscape in and around the site. Staff recommends the Commission notes the applicant has updated the design standards to:

- Reduce the unbroken block face of each building to a maximum of 200 feet;
- Require the building facades to have the same level of architectural treatment on all sides and ground level facades to be visually interesting and pedestrian oriented in design;
- Require buildings on Irving Street to be oriented functionally on both Irving and Pershing Streets;
- Require sustainable development and stormwater management.

As noted in the site description, the North Capitol cloverleaf with Irving Street is located at the southeast corner of the site. The cloverleaf and this northern section of North Capitol as they are
currently designed are not compatible with a high-quality urban neighborhood. In coordination with DCOP, the applicant included a future design option, should the cloverleaf be removed. The design allows for additional building area in the location of the northwest on-ramp and includes two potential roadway connections from Zone A to North Capitol Street and Irving Street. Staff believes the proposed future design is a positive extension of the existing development in Zone A and recommends the Commission notes the plan anticipates the removal of the North Capitol Street cloverleaf intersection in the future and does not preclude a new connection between parcels P and F to North Capitol Street and between parcels E and F to Irving Street.

With the implementation of this master plan, there will be approximately 20 acres of new publicly available open space and as part of the ROD, AFRH has committed to building a multi-use path from Zone A to the western edge of the campus along Irving to facilitate connectivity. The issue of greater connectivity has been a discussion since the 2008 master plan. There are several reasons why AFRH is not an open campus including:

AFRH is an accredited gated Senior retirement home, and security of the residents is a significant part of these accreditations. Unrestricted public access through the secure portion of the campus would present a significant risk to AFRH's accreditation. They have a legally mandated fiduciary duty by the Home for both the financial and security-related well-being of the residents. In recent years, AFRH has provided access to the community on a measured and secure basis, including:

- Working with Friends of the Old Soldiers Home and others to expand volunteer opportunities.
- Working in partnership with President Lincoln's Cottage to allow public access to the President Lincoln and Soldiers' Home National Monument and to allow events on the grounds of the national monument and AFRH, as well as in specific AFRH buildings.
- Opening the golf course and driving range, which have existed since 1900 for the amusement and recreational therapy of the residents and to those in the community who choose to be paying associate members.

While the development of Zone A will dramatically increase access to the site and significant new open space, the AFRH Zone still presents a large obstacle in a relatively dense neighborhood. In later phases, AFRH is going to evaluate the future of the golf course and adjacent open space, which staff thinks would be a good time to look at the possibility of better connectivity. Therefore, staff requests that AFRH re-engage with NCPC staff, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the National Park Service, and the community to evaluate the feasibility of possible public access through the western portion of the AFRH Zone (golf course and open space) as part of a future AFRH submission for the golf course and open space.

The proposed changes to the master plan as part of Amendment 2 did not make any significant changes to the AFRH Zone. This zone, which will remain under federal control and review. During the review and approval of the 2008 master plan, the western and southwestern portions of this zone were initially designated as Zones B and C. After extensive feedback from area residents, these two zones were eliminated from the master plan. AFRH did agree to work with area
stakeholders to determine if there was a way to create a public park out of what was Zone C. This process, which commenced after the approval of the master plan, did not generate a viable outcome. The applicant has indicated in the submission that the AFRH Zone is a secure area to protect the residents and the intent is for it to remain this way into the future. Staff has been in discussions with the applicant on this topic and recommends the Commission notes the AFRH team is committed to providing an update on the open space topic as part of future submissions for this area.

**Transportation**

The existing circulation pattern of the site with meandering, tree-lined, two-lane, shared use roads with off-street parking formed a character-defining element for future roadways. The applicant is proposing to maintain the shared-use emphasis of streets within the site to preserving a consistent historic, pastoral character or urban streetscape as applicable. Streetscapes within urbanized areas will be designed to safely accommodate high volumes of foot and vehicular traffic, while roads that wind through the Home’s open spaces shall reflect the character of a rural road: narrow, bending, tree-lined rights-of-way. This is of particular importance in the AFRH Zone and around the pasture in Zone A.

The new streets and street sections proposed in the master plan will complement the existing street network to serve new development and existing buildings. New streets will retain existing street patterns and alignments to the extent possible and include the use of brick sidewalks, granite curb cuts, quality street lighting, and sizeable street trees.

The applicant coordinated new street sections with NCPC and DDOT to ensure that the streets meet District standards. Six street section types are proposed for use across the site that range in right-of-way width from 22 feet to 91 feet with a variety of amenities design specifically for the area they will be implemented. The street section types also include options to respond to potential future changes in adjacent roadways that may impact Zone A development.

The update to the master plan also addresses parking and parking facilities. The applicant is proposing a maximum of 4822 parking spaces in Zone A. This is a reduction from the 2018 master plan and is more significant given the increase in density proposed. The applicant is also proposing above grade parking garages on some blocks. The garages will be located inside and surrounded by buildings when used. Both DCOP and DDOT expressed concerns regarding the amount of parking and the extent of above grade parking. The applicant reduced the amount of parking through those discussions and updated the language in Amendment 2 to clarify that the parking is a maximum number and they anticipate that as new transit opportunities are implemented, parking can be reduced in later phases of the project. In addition, they updated language and graphics to clarity that above grade parking garages are not required, only permitted, and that as they build out later phases, they hope to not have to build them. Staff believes that the applicant has addressed this issue and recommends the Commission notes that the amendment includes a reduction of 400 parking spaces from the 2008 plan and proposes a maximum of 4,844 spaces in largely above ground structures as previously approved. The parking ratio will be higher in Phase 1 and lower in later phases as public transit and bike/pedestrian infrastructure to and within the site increases.
In addition to the comments on parking, DDOT had significant comments on the applicant’s transportation plans. The AFRH team coordinated with DDOT through the Comprehensive Transportation Review (CTR) process. The result of this process and DDOT’s review of the SEIS, is an extensive list of transportation mitigations that the applicant has committed to as the project develops. This includes a variety of improvements such as a new bus transit center on site that will be designed and implemented in consultation with DDOT. This transit station will not only act as a bus stop but also a layby station for bus drivers. The mitigations also includes improvements to intersections around the site, a bike and pedestrian network that will significantly enhance pedestrian and bike connectivity to and through the site, as well as provides for connectivity should North Capitol be urbanized in the future, and Capital Bikeshare stations on site as well. These mitigations are included in the record of decision that AFRH issued with the SEIS and the Amendment 2 language and staff recommends the Commission notes that the District Department of Transportation provided extensive comments on the SEIS and AFRH worked with DDOT to come to consensus on the necessary mitigations for traffic impacts. The list of mitigations is attached to the record of decision (ROD) and includes:

- A new transit center and bus turnaround at the site;
- A network of on and off-street bike and pedestrian connections throughout the site; and
- Intersection improvements adjacent to the site.

As part of the review of the project, DCOP requested that the applicant consider providing more connectivity through the site. AFRH has stated in these discussions and in the language of the master plan that the AFRH Zone is considered a secure federal campus for the safety of their residents, as noted above. However, staff believes that as with other elements of the master plan such as parking, the current status of sitewide porosity could change in the future and recommends that the Commission requests the AFRH team continue to work towards a greater reduction in overall parking, moving parking underground, and creating bike and pedestrian connectivity from the west through the AFRH Zone to Zone A as future phases are implemented.

Review Process

This site is unique and generally unprecedented compared to other master plans that the Commission reviews and approves. Since AFRH has the authority to develop a portion of their campus for private development, but has chosen to utilize a long-term ground lease instead of selling the land, the process to review and approve the master plan and projects needed to be articulated. Staff worked with the applicant and DCOP to create a Memorandum of Understanding that was beneficial to all parties and clearly outlined the review process for Zone A. The MOU dictates that the applicant prepare an updated master plan for review and approval by the Commission. Once that is complete, the applicant can then work with DCOP and the District Zoning Commission on implementing zoning for Zone A. At the completion of zoning, the applicant can apply for building permits and proceed with implementation of the project. This process does not apply to the AFRH Zone which will remain federal. Since the master plan is a high-level document that will be used to guide zoning, there is a possibility that it will not address every future scenario and staff recommends the Commission notes that any proposal to
update/modify the approved master plan, including changes proposed by the selected developer, would require AFRH to submit a master plan amendment for NCPC review and approval. Amendments that result in changes to anticipated traffic levels or approved parking may require an updated transportation demand management plan.

It is important to note that the entire AFRH site is an Historic District and that after the zoning is approved, all building designs, including those in Zone A, will be subject to review and approval of the Districts Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB). This process includes significant community stakeholder engagement, extensive guidance and review by the Districts State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and thorough review by HPRB. This additional review will ensure that the design of the buildings is well coordinated and appropriate for the site and staff recommends that the Commission notes that Zone A is subject to the DC zoning process following the approval of the master plan and all future Zone A development will adhere to an extensive historic preservation review process in the future.

CONFORMANCE TO EXISTING PLANS, POLICIES AND RELATED GUIDANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

NCPC staff has reviewed this proposal for compliance with relevant guidance and has determined that it is not inconsistent with the policies established in the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. In particular, the project is supported by policies in the Environment, Federal Workplace, Urban Design, and Historic Preservation Elements.

Environment: Development on the AFRH campus will alter the natural and built environment. The master plan will result in the use of natural resources as described in the Supplemental EIS, which states that the master plan will develop the site in a manner that “provides a setting that benefits the local community, provides a model for the country, and is worthy of the nation’s capital.” Because it will generate revenue for AFRH, development pursuant to the master plan will help to ensure AFRH can continue to fulfill its mission of housing and caring for retired enlisted military personnel.

Federal Workplace: Consistent with this element, the Master Plan accommodates the consolidation of federal operations at AFRH-W, reducing the agency’s footprint. However, maintaining the entirety of the campus as both AFRH’s home and as a federal property is important to preserving the legacy of this historic institution. The Master Plan, therefore, allows AFRH to leverage its underutilized land and facilities through a ground lease to introduce new uses that are beneficial to the federal workforce at AFRH, to the residents that call AFRH home, and to the communities that surround the campus. The Master Plan includes also publicly accessible open space, shopping, dining, hotel, and residential uses that will be valuable to the community. In addition, the Master Plan calls for a pedestrian-friendly environment and an extensive network of bicycle paths connecting to adjacent neighborhoods.

Urban Design: The proposed master plan will conserve and enhance the park and open space network of the National Capital Region, ensure that adequate resources are available for future generations, and promote an appropriate balance between open space resources and the built
environment. Within Zone A, there will be open space created and/or maintained, much of which will be open to the public. Currently, the entire site is secure and not open to the general public. Situated at one of Washington’s “Capital Gateways” and at the northern terminus of a major axial street (North Capitol Street), the development of Zone A will play an important role in marking one of the significant entry points to the monumental core. AFRH also has a significant location on the “topographic bowl,” where views to and from the campus are significant to the character of the city. The master plan uses strategic placement of new construction and detailed design guidelines to ensure that new development at AFRH honors these important planning considerations.

**Historic Preservation:** The development of the site could potentially result in adverse effects to the historic character of the site. AFRH previously executed a programmatic agreement with the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), DC State Historic Preservation Office (DCSHPO), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and the U.S. National Park Service that enumerates the measures which will be undertaken to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential adverse effects.

**Transportation:** NCPC’s Master Plan Guidance, sets a standard that “A TMP is required for installations with 100 or more employees (including existing and proposed employees).” AFRH currently has less than 300 employees on campus. The employees work in 3 shifts, with the first shift having the largest number at 221 workers. These workers are comprised of a mix of medical, food service, security and maintenance workers, and a small number of office workers. Thus, AFRH differs from most federal facilities in that a majority of its employees are not office workers. Due to the nature of the jobs, most of the AFRH employees do not have much flexibility in working schedules and do not have the option of telecommuting. Furthermore, approximately 11% of the employees are already taking advantage of the SmarTrip benefit program and are most likely using transit to travel to/from work. AFRH has provided information to NCPC on its employee count and employee commuting patterns to demonstrate that AFRH does not meet the threshold requirements for preparing a TMP for its operations. AFRH will comply with NCPC parking ratios for any new construction in the AFRH Zone and will require developers to prepare and implement TMPs for their projects.

As Zone A of the master plan will have private development, the transportation planning was coordinated with the District Department of Transportation. As noted previously, AFRH coordinated extensively with DDOT on the transportation plans and mitigations through the Districts comprehensive transportation review (CTR) process. The agreed upon transportation mitigations are included in both the ROD and Amendment 2.

**National Historic Preservation Act**

AFRH followed the Section 106 review process outlined in the 2008 Programmatic Agreement (PA) developed for the master planning process to fulfill its National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) responsibility. The Section 106 process for this amendment has been completed with the execution of the PA in 2008. For purposes of its Section 106 obligation, NCPC designated AFRH as the lead federal agency and was a signatory to the 2008 PA. The parties amended the PA in
2015, and NCPC agreed to and signed the amendment. Thus, at this time there is no further action required under Section 106 of the NHPA.

Because the Commission has an advisory authority on master plans, it does not have an independent responsibility to comply with the NHPA for this amendment. Additionally, as described in the MOU among AFRH, DC Office of Planning, and NCPC, all projects in Zone A will be subject to local regulatory controls. Accordingly, they will require review with the DC Historic Preservation Review Board and will not require Section 106 consultation. AFRH will need to follow the historic preservation review process outlined in the PA for federal undertakings in the AFRH Zone.

**National Environmental Policy Act**

Pursuant to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), AFRH prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze the potential impacts associated with implementation of its original master plan. It issued a ROD to document its decision in 2008. AFRH initiated a new, supplemental EIS (SEIS) in 2017 as part of the current amendment process. The SEIS analyzed a variety of alternatives including the proposed Amendment 2 and determined that this alternative best met the purpose and need and could also be mitigated through measures agreed to by DDOT. Though the Commission is typically advisory in its review of master plans, the MOU for this project makes the review of this master plan more like a development plan and changes the Commission’s authority to approval, giving NCPC an independent NEPA obligation. NCPC environmental regulations allow NCPC to utilize the applicant’s NEPA analysis for the proposed master plan to meet its NEPA obligation, as well as to apply to future individual master plan projects that are subject to Commission review and approval, such as the AFRH Zone. To meet the Commission’s NEPA obligation for the proposed amendment, NCPC staff reviewed the AFRH SEIS and ROD, and agreed with the analysis and chosen alternative. NCPC issued a draft ROD, separate from the applicants, for public review ahead of the Commission meeting, in compliance with NCPC’s NEPA guidance.

**CONSULTATION**

**Coordinating Committee**

Without objection, the Committee forwarded the proposed final master plan to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies. DOEE noted that the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) should take a holistic approach to stormwater management across its proposed projects. Some individual projects might trigger DOEE’s stormwater requirements and may be hard to meet those requirements on-site. Given that federal entities cannot purchase stormwater credits, the alternative is to build stormwater management facilities on-site elsewhere on the base. The AFRH should assess which of its projects trigger stormwater requirements and further assess where stormwater facilities can be constructed in alternative locations. DOEE is happy to help with making these assessments. DCOP noted an interest in zoning for affordable housing and reduced parking and will share further comments. DDOT noted that the project was still under review and seconded that interest. The applicant
further coordinated with DCOP and DDOT on their concerns in consultation with NCPC staff. The resolution of the issues is reflected in this report and Amendment 2 of the master plan.

ONLINE REFERENCE

The following supporting documents for this project are available online:

- Submission Materials
- Supplemental EIS
- Record of Decision
- Public Comments

POWERPOINT (ATTACHED)
Armed Forces Retirement Home Master Plan Amendment

140 Rock Creek Church Road, NW, Washington DC

Approval of Final Master Plan

Armed Forces Retirement Home
Commission Review – Final Master Plan

- Has the applicant addressed previous Commission comments?
- Are there any unresolved issues with the final plan?
- Are there any off-site impacts?
- What is the phasing of the master plan?
- Is the Transportation Management Plan complete?
- Are the landscape/stormwater plans complete?
Site Location
Presentation Overview

• Existing Conditions
• Master Plan Overview
• Street Typology and Connectivity
• Parking
• Open Space
• Phasing
AFRH Master Plan – Area Context
AFRH Master Plan – Agency Overview

- 272-acre historic campus
- More than 100 buildings and structures
- Approximately 600 eligible retired and former members of the armed forces
- Range of amenities for residents
- AFRH is a non-appropriated federal agency
- AFRH seeks to lease unused portions of the campus to sustain funding
- Master plan is the basis for future AFRH and private development
AFRH Master Plan – Existing Conditions

AFRH-W Existing Conditions

AFRH-W Existing Land Uses
The AFRH design team has been continuously consulting with staff from NCPC, DCOP, and DDOT.

After approval by the Commission, AFRH will coordinate with DCOP on zoning approvals for the site in compliance with the master plan.
# AFRH Master Plan Overview

## Proposed Amendment #2 Density

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LAND USE</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Gross Square Footage</th>
<th>Parking Spaces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXISTING &amp; TO REMAIN</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,360,217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,360,217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFRH Zone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>368,890</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td></td>
<td>269,000</td>
<td>769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapel Woods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td></td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf Course</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZONE A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>45-120</td>
<td>4,696,075</td>
<td>4644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,175,177</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td></td>
<td>732,846</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td></td>
<td>319,077</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisted Living</td>
<td></td>
<td>253,207</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td></td>
<td>399,676</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL NEW DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>5,304,975&quot;</td>
<td>5506</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFRH GRAND TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,664,292</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior Density:
- 2008 Master Plan: 4,316,995
- 2018 Amendment #1: 4,353,083
AFRH Master Plan – 2008 Comparison

2008 Master Plan

2022 Master Plan
AFRH Amendment #2 – Overview

Amendment Highlights:

• This amendment responds to changes on campus and in the surrounding area since the original Master Plan was approved in 2008.
• Most of these revisions do not change the overall vision for, or treatment of, the campus and historic district.
• The amendment does not include changes to the development plan or design guidelines for the AFRH Zone.
• The amendment accommodates minor changes to the parcel plan in Zone A, responds to changes in local planning strategies and priorities since 2008, and reflects a more objective-based and context-specific approach to design guidelines for new development in Zone A.
• The amendment accommodates a small increase in density in Zone A, as well as more flexibility in use and product type, while maintaining all previously approved guidelines related to height and view shed protection.
• The amendment reflects changes in AFRH-W’s assessment data related to archaeological potential on the campus, as well as the agency’s compliance with federal laws related to the protection of archaeological resources.
AFRH Amendment #2 – Street Typologies
AFRH Amendment #2 – Connectivity Plan
AFRH Amendment #2 – Bicycle Plan
AFRH Amendment #2 – Parking Plan

Parking Summary

AFRH ZONE - North-Northeast

Existing parking to remain:
- Sherman Building: 26 spaces
- Sherman (1): 15 spaces
Total existing parking to remain in N-NW Subzone: 40 spaces

Eliminated surface parking to be replaced:
- Grant Building: 42 spaces
- Sherman (2): 110 spaces
- Hanwood/N Capital: 135 spaces
- Sherman (2): 65 spaces
- Sherman (3): 202 spaces
Sub-total eliminated surface parking to be replaced in N-NW Subzone: 554 eliminated spaces

Required new parking for development:
- New development 350,000 SF: 700 spaces
- New spaces for Grant Building: 338 spaces
Sub-total required new parking for development in N-NW Subzone: 1,038 new spaces
Sub-total required new parking for N-NW Subzone: 1,592 required spaces

New AFRH ZONE - North-NE Parking
- Northern parcel: 2.5-story parking structure, 16 spaces/floor: 290 spaces
- Central parcel: 2-story parking structure, 390 spaces/floor: 792 spaces
- Southern parcel: 3-story parking structure, 170 spaces/floor: 510 spaces
Total new North-NE Subzone Parking: 1,592 spaces

AFRH ZONE - Chapel Woods
- New development 42,000 SF: 42 required parking spaces
- Garage located in each unit: 24 spaces
- New surface lot and street parking: 18 spaces
Total New Chapel Woods Subzone Parking: 84 spaces

ZONE A
- New development 4,000,000 SF: 4844 required parking spaces
Total New Zone A Parking: 4844 spaces
AFRH Amendment #2 – Building Heights
AFRH Amendment #2 – Viewsheds
AFRH Amendment #2 – Street Edge Plan
AFRH Amendment #2 – Block Build To Plan
AFRH Amendment #2 – Open Space Plan
AFRH Amendment #2 – Scale Gate Entry
AFRH Amendment #2 – Phasing Plan
Executive Director’s Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) Master Plan Amendment 2, which updates the site plan, development program, and design guidelines for Zone A to reflect market conditions, current planning standards and principles, transportation impacts, and mitigation.

Adopts the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Armed Forces Retirement Home Master Plan.

Notes that the AFRH team has coordinated extensively with NCPC staff, the DC Office of Planning, the District Department of Transportation, and the Commission of Fine Arts, and the public to ensure to the best extent possible that the final elements of the amendment adhere to the planning and transportation standards of the Federal and District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

Notes that while the overall block and street network is largely the same as the approved 2008 master plan, the applicant has made the following updates to the development program, urban design, and transportation components:
Executive Director’s Recommendation

*Development Program*

**Notes** the amendment includes an increase in overall density in Zone A, comprised of an additional 990,378 square feet of residential (townhouses, high-density multi-family housing, and senior housing) and 401,298 square foot reduction in commercial, bringing the total development program to 4.9 million square feet.

**Notes** the plan includes a commitment to affordable housing, that will be addressed by zoning, in recognition of both the District’s affordable housing goals and the Biden Administration’s goal to increase affordable housing nationwide.

*Urban Design*

**Finds** that the street and block layout and building heights continue to respect established viewsheds such as the U.S. Capitol and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

**Finds** the redesign of the Mess Hall terminus at Scale Gate and Forwood Streets protects a large stand of mature trees and creates a dramatic entry to the site.
Executive Director’s Recommendation

_Urban Design continued_

**Notes** the applicant has updated the design standards to:

- Reduce the unbroken block face of each building to a maximum of 200 feet;
- Require the building facades to have the same level of architectural treatment on all sides and ground level facades to be visually interesting and pedestrian oriented in design;
- Require buildings on Irving Street to be oriented functionally on both Irving and Pershing Streets;
- Require sustainable development and stormwater management.

**Notes** the plan anticipates the removal of the North Capitol Street cloverleaf intersection in the future and does not preclude a new connection between parcels P and F to North Capitol Street and between parcels E and F to Irving Street.

**Requests** that AFRH re-engage with NCPC staff, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the National Park Service, and the community to evaluate the feasibility of possible public access through the western portion of the AFRH Zone (golf course and open space) as part of a future AFRH submission for the golf course and open space.

**Notes** the AFRH team is committed to providing an update on the open space topic as part of future submissions for this area.
Executive Director’s Recommendation

Transportation

Notes that the amendment includes a reduction of 400 parking spaces from the 2008 plan and proposes a maximum of 4,844 spaces in largely above ground structures as previously approved. The parking ratio will be higher in Phase 1 and lower in later phases as public transit and bike/pedestrian infrastructure to and within the site increases.

Notes that the District Department of Transportation provided extensive comments on the SEIS and AFRH worked with DDOT to come to consensus on the necessary mitigations for traffic impacts. The list of mitigations is attached to the record of decision (ROD) and includes:

- A new transit center and bus turnaround at the site;
- A network of on and off-street bike and pedestrian connections throughout the site; and
- Intersection improvements adjacent to the site.

Requests the AFRH team continue to work towards a greater reduction in overall parking, moving parking underground, and creating bike and pedestrian connectivity from the west through the AFRH Zone to Zone A as future phases are implemented.
Executive Director’s Recommendation

Review Process

Notes that any proposal to update/modify the approved master plan, including changes proposed by the selected developer, would require AFRH to submit a master plan amendment for NCPC review and approval. Amendments that result in changes to anticipated traffic levels or approved parking would require an updated transportation management plan.

Notes that Zone A is subject to the DC zoning process following the approval of the master plan and all future Zone A development will adhere to an extensive historic preservation review process in the future.
Regarding MP060, Armed Forces Retirement Home Master Plan Amendment 2

Dear commissioners,

I'm interested in the proposed master plan amendment for the Armed Forces Retirement Home. The plan was written very well, but I'm concerned about a substandard component, regarding tree replacement.

The plan proposes a 1:1 tree replacement requirement. The NCPC recently strengthened its tree replacement requirements to require higher replacement for tree replacement. See page 17 of:

https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/07_CP_2016_Environment_Element_2.29.16_revised.pdf

I recognize that this plan is allowed to keep the previous tree replacement requirements, but with our climate crisis, and the need to both retain and replenish our urban tree canopy in DC, I believe this component should be brought up to date to the current NCPC standard.

This project will significantly alter the city, in this critical nexus between the East and West side of DC. Please help make it as attractive and environmentally sustainable as possible.

Thank you for considering this comment.
To whom it may concern,

Thank you for reviewing this comment on the Armed Forces Retirement Home Master Plan Amendment 2, ahead of your June meeting.

I’m the president of Georgia Avenue Thrive, a volunteer-led non-profit that works to build an inclusive, connected and vibrant community in Park View, which borders the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH).

Our programming and projects have included cleanups on the grounds of the Armed Forces Retirement Home in partnership with another neighborhood organization, Friends of the Old Soldiers Home. Earlier this year, we cleaned along the historic fence on Park Place, in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Department, which blocked a lane of traffic to make the cleanup possible.

A before-and-after photo showing a small portion of our work to clean the fence outside AFRH.
We write to express concern that approving the master plan entrenches the racism, exclusion and community distrust that have tarnished the history of the Armed Forces Retirement Home.

Georgia Avenue Thrive has conducted a listening tour this year to hear from neighbors about the community’s relationship with the Armed Forces Retirement Home.

Our oldest neighbors have told us that as children in the 1950s they walked, played, biked and went sledding at the Armed Forces Retirement Home. The gates at Park Road, Randolph Street and Upshur Street were open to all.

But neighbors describe that the gates were locked, the fences got taller, and barbed wire was added as the racial demographics of the neighborhood changed in the 1950s and 1960s. The Armed Forces Retirement Home’s decisions were typical of an era of White flight, segregation and racism.

Our survey of neighbors found that 99% want community access to be restored to the AFRM green spaces. Park View residents say they feel unwelcome as a neighbor of the Armed Forces Retirement Home. They describe feeling frustrated, segregated and cut out of their own neighborhood.

As one neighbor put it — “[I’m] disenfranchised from the inability to enjoy my own neighborhood. The property would be in better shape if the neighboring community had a stake in being able to enjoy the premises in some form or fashion. Be it through restricted time frames on specific days or season, either way, the property could use some community love.”

Our volunteers would love to have the chance to take care of some of the grounds, labeled as “other areas” in the master plan. Volunteers say they would cut the grass, maintain the fishing ponds and care for the historic Tiber Creek (formerly Goose Creek), which the master plan does not acknowledge by name, or for its greater significance to DC.
The master plan calls for a roughly 20-acre park in Zone A. For Park View neighbors, this park would be inconvenient and difficult to access on foot due to its entry point. Other inconvenient green-spaces in adjacent neighborhoods would be a shorter walk.

The master plan calls for keeping the gates locked at Park Road and Randolph Street. It also restricts the community from accessing Lake Mary Barnes, which the home’s plan admits is “one of the most significant landscape features in the Home’s property.”

The lakes were long a highlight for visitors spending time at the Armed Forces Retirement Home, as the master plan acknowledges. We recommend that the National Capital Planning Commission insist on a plan that does not continue to lock away the best features of the home from the community.

The National Capital Planning Commission has the opportunity to show it has learned lessons from the nation’s racial reckoning following the 2020 deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor.

In 2020, a banner appeared on the fence at the Armed Forces Retirement Home that said in essence — if we are anti-racist, this fence wouldn’t be here.

Restoring direct community access to green spaces via the Randolph Street and Park Road gates is a meaningful step toward building a stronger community that rises above the discriminatory decisions of the past.

Georgia Avenue Thrive is continuing our listening tour, engaging with key stakeholders such as Howard University, DC Public Schools, Washington Hospital Center and neighborhood businesses.

We hope you’ll work with us to seize a moment to make a DC historic landmark less isolated, and more inclusive. The community stands ready to lean in, and do its part to make this a win-win for everyone.
Warmest regards,

Matt McFarland

Georgia Avenue Thrive, president

**Georgia Avenue Thrive** is a volunteer-led nonprofit that works to build an inclusive, connected, and vibrant community for the neighbors, businesses, and visitors of Lower Georgia Avenue and Park View.