

NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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COMMISSION MEETING

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OPEN SESSION

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THURSDAY,
JANUARY 8, 2026

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The meeting convened in the Commission Hearing Room at 401 9th Street NW, Washington, D.C., and via videoconference, at 1:00 p.m., William Scharf, Chair, presiding.

NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS
PRESENT:

WILLIAM SCHARF, Chair
Presidential Appointee (At-Large)
STUART LEVENBACH, Vice Chair
Mayoral Appointee
LINDA ARGO, Mayoral Appointee
MICHAEL BLAIR, Presidential Appointee
EVAN CASH, Office of the Chairman of the Council
of the District of Columbia
ANITA COZART, Office of the Mayor of
the District of Columbia
ARRINGTON DIXON, Mayoral Appointee
ED FORST, Administrator, General Services
Administration
WILLIAM HENDERSON, U.S. Senate Committee on
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
ELLIE McGOWAN, U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
PHIL MENDELSON, Chairman, Council of the District
of Columbia

1 PAUL J. SCHAEFER, Department of Defense
2 TAMMY STIDHAM, Department of the Interior

3 NCPC STAFF PRESENT:

4 MARCEL C. ACOSTA, Executive Director
5 MEGHAN HOTTEL-COX, General Counsel & Secretariat
6 DIANE SULLIVAN, Director, Current Planning
Division
7 MATTHEW FLIS, Supervisory Urban Designer
8 STEPHANIE FREE, Urban Planner
LAURA SHIPMAN, Urban Planner
MICHAEL WEIL, Urban Planner

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1	CONTENTS	
2	Commissioner Roll Call	4
3	Report of the Chair	5
4	Report of the Executive Director	
5	Legislative Update	9
6	Consent Calendar Items	11
7	Action Items:	12
8	National Mall and Memorial	
9	Parks Telecommunications	
	Infrastructure Improvements	15
10	Long Bridge Corridor Project -	
11	South Section	47
12	National Zoological Park Construct	
	New Arabian Leopard Habitat	70
13	Information Presentation	
14	East Wing Modernization Project	91
15	Adjourn	
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 (1:03 p.m.)

3 (Off-microphone comments.)

4 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes. Commissioner
5 Cozart?

6 COMMISSIONER COZART: Here.

7 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Schaefer?

8 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Here.

9 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?
10 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: Here.

11 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?
12 COMMISSIONER ARGO: Here.

13 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach?

14 VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Here.

15 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Chairman Scharf?
16 CHAIR SCHARF: Present.

17 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Blair?
18 COMMISSIONER BLAIR: Here.

19 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Administrator Forst?
20 COMMISSIONER FORST: Here.

21 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?
22 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Here.

1 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

2 COMMISSIONER CASH: Present.

3 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Henderson?

4 Commissioner McGowan?

5 COMMISSIONER MCGOWAN: Here.

6 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Marcel Acosta, Executive
7 Director, and Diane Sullivan, current planning
8 director, are also in the meeting.

9 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Meghan. Noting
10 the presence of a quorum, I'd like to call this
11 meeting to order. Today's meeting is lived
12 streamed, as usual, and will be available in archive
13 video form on our website within a few days.

14 If there is no objection from any
15 Commissioner present, the agenda as posted is hereby
16 adopted, or as posted, is hereby adopted as the order
17 of business. And let's stand for the Pledge of
18 Allegiance.

19 (Pledge of Allegiance.)

20 REPORT OF THE CHAIR

21 CHAIR SCHARF: Agenda Item 2 is the Report
22 of the Chair. I'd like to note a few things. First

1 of all, there are a fair number of people here who
2 are not regulars to the National Capital Planning
3 Commission. And to you I would just say welcome.

4 The NCPC is a body that was founded over
5 a hundred years ago, initially as the National
6 Capital Park Commission. The 1952 National Capital
7 Planning Act is sort of our Bible and charter. And
8 we also have statutory authority relating to a
9 number of other crucial statutes, including the
10 Height of Buildings Act, Commemorative Works Act.

11 It's a very long way of saying that this is an
12 important commission that does very important,
13 serious work, the results of which are visible
14 really everywhere we go in this region.

15 When you look at the planning of
16 Washington, D.C., when you look at the projects that
17 really define this city, many, if not all of them
18 that have occurred in the last century, this
19 commission has been involved in. So I would say
20 welcome. We have a busy agenda today. It's not
21 our busiest meeting, but it's not our quietest
22 either.

1 I would also say that there is an item on
2 the agenda today, the ballroom, for which, about
3 which we've heard, I'd say, passionate comments on
4 both sides. We do have rules. We do operate this
5 commission according to those rules. While there
6 will be opportunities for public comment on the
7 ballroom project in the future, we would ask that
8 you not disrupt the Commission meeting today. And
9 if you do make an out-of-order disruption of the
10 Commission we will unfortunately have to ask you
11 to leave the room.

12 With that having been said, I'd like to
13 wish everybody here a very Happy New Year. This
14 is our first meeting of what promises to be a very
15 important, busy year for this Commission.

16 To those of you who have made New Year's
17 resolutions, I quit nicotine eight days ago. So
18 far, we're going strong. If I am irritable or less
19 enthusiastic or energetic as I normally would be,
20 that's the reason.

21 But this year obviously being America's
22 250th anniversary, our semiquincentennial, there

1 is a lot going on in the Capital Region. And we
2 have a lot of very exciting projects that have either
3 already come before this commission or will be in
4 the coming weeks and months. And I'm very excited
5 for the role that NCPC will play as the capital
6 really pulls out all the stops to celebrate this
7 momentous milestone in American history.

8 I'd also like to welcome Ed Forst to the
9 Commission. Ed is the Administrator of GSA. As
10 such, he serves as an ex-officio member of this
11 commission. Oftentimes, and there is nothing wrong
12 with this, ex-officio members of this commission
13 send designees or representatives to commission
14 meetings here. It's a great honor for us to have
15 Ed with us. Ed is really a real estate eminence.
16 Former head, I believe, of Cushman & Wakefield.

17 We're really excited to have you at GSA.
18 GSA and NCPC are going to be working together on
19 some very important projects in the coming months,
20 most notably, potentially, redevelopment plans in
21 Southwest D.C. I know you and I have already spoken
22 about that, Ed, but really just welcome to the

1 Commission. Thank you for being here. It's truly
2 an honor.

3 Lastly before I conclude, with respect to
4 the ballroom project, which is on the agenda for
5 today, I view today's presentation really as the
6 start of a process as the ballroom project moves
7 through the overall NCPC, overall NCPC process.

8 We're going to be hearing from the project team
9 today. This is an informational presentation.
10 We'll have opportunities for questions and comments
11 from Commissioners.

12 My objective, from the start, has been for
13 the NCPC to play a productive role as this ballroom
14 project moves ahead. NCPC, and our professional
15 staff, has an incredible amount of expertise and
16 experience dealing with complex construction
17 projects and monumental construction projects in
18 the D.C. area. And I have great confidence that
19 NCPC will be able to play a productive role in this
20 project as well in the months ahead.

21 So I'm excited for the presentation today.
22 And I'm excited to continue the consultations that

1 have already begun at the staff level between NCPC
2 staff and the White House and the ballroom project
3 team more generally. All that having been said,
4 that's my report.

5 We can move on to Agenda Item 3, which is
6 the report of our Executive Director, Marcel Acosta.
7 Marcel?

8 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

9 MR. ACOSTA: Thank you, Chair Scharf.
10 And Happy New Year, everyone. I'd also like to take
11 this opportunity to welcome Administrator Forst to
12 today's meeting. We do look forward to working with
13 you and your team over the coming years. So,
14 welcome aboard.

15 Given today's busy agenda, I only have one
16 item of interest for the Commission. Last month,
17 NCPC released its 2025 year in review, which looks
18 back at the agency's work advancing efforts to
19 revitalize some of the Capital's most visible and
20 important public places and its role in shaping the
21 design of several very important federal projects.

22 This report can be found on our website at ncpc.gov.

1 This concludes my update. My full report
2 is in your packet. I'm happy to answer any
3 questions that you might have.

4 CHAIR SCHARF: Do any Commissioners have
5 questions or comments for Marcel?

6 Seeing none, Meghan, can you provide us
7 with our legislative update?

8 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

9 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes. I have two
10 legislative items to report on this month. Both
11 are bills that passed in the House of
12 Representatives on December 9th, 2025, and are now
13 being considered in the Senate.

14 The first is H.2290, the World War II
15 Women's Memorial Location Act, which authorizes a
16 memorial to commemorate the sacrifice and service
17 of women who work on the home front to support the
18 military efforts during World War II. And that
19 bill is to be located on the National Mall in Area
20 1 or in the Reserve.

21 The second bill is H.2306, the Adams
22 Memorial-Great American Heroes Act. This bill

1 would extend the Adams Memorial Commission through
2 2032 to establish the Adams Memorial south of the
3 White House, adjacent to Ellipse Road or, if that
4 location ends up being not feasible, within the
5 Reserve.

6 That concludes my legislative report and
7 I'm happy to answer any questions.

8 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Meghan. Do any
9 Commissioners have questions or comments about our
10 legislative update? I look forward to seeing if
11 we do get a new memorial within the Reserve or in
12 Area 1.

13 CONSENT CALENDAR

14 Agenda Item 5 is the consent calendar.
15 There are four items on this month's consent
16 calendar. The first is to approve preliminary and
17 final site development plans for the Smithsonian
18 Gardens Street Tree Fence Design. The second is
19 to adopt the final updated Comprehensive Plan for
20 the National Capital: the Federal Elements proposed
21 by NCPC staff. The third is to approve the final
22 submission guidelines updated by NCPC staff. And

1 both those two items, those changes primarily
2 reflect changes dictated by executive orders since
3 the start of this administration, I believe.

4 And the final item is to approve
5 preliminary site and building plans for the New
6 District of Columbia Engine Company 7. That was
7 originally a delegated item. I asked for that to
8 be moved to the consent calendar. I apologize for
9 doing that; it could have easily been a delegated
10 item. But that is now Item Number 4 on the consent
11 calendar this month.

12 Are there any questions or comments from
13 any Commissioner? Yes, sir?

14 COMMISSIONER DIXON: I move that we adopt
15 the consent calendar.

16 CHAIR SCHARF: Hearing a motion from
17 Commissioner Dixon, is there a second?

18 COMMISSIONER ARGO: Second.

19 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

20 Can the Secretary please confirm the motion and
21 second and take the vote by roll, please?

22 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes. The motion was

1 made by Commissioner Dixon and seconded by
2 Commissioner Argo. Commissioner Cozart?

3 COMMISSIONER COZART: Yes.

4 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Schaefer?

5 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Yes.

6 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

7 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: Yes.

8 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?

9 COMMISSIONER ARGO: Yes.

10 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach?

11 VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Yes.

12 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Chairman Scharf?

13 CHAIR SCHARF: Yes.

14 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Blair?

15 COMMISSIONER BLAIR: Yes.

16 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Administrator Forst?

17 COMMISSIONER FORST: Yes.

18 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

19 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

20 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

21 COMMISSIONER CASH: Yes.

22 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Henderson?

1 COMMISSIONER HENDERSON: Yes.

2 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner McGowan?

3 COMMISSIONER MCGOWAN: Yes.

4 MS. HOTTEL-COX: The motion passes.

5 CHAIR SCHARF: Unanimously. Which is
6 always a good thing.

7 Moving on, we have three voting items and
8 an informational presentation and open session
9 today.

10 Agenda Item 6A is a request to approve
11 comments on concept plans for the National Mall and
12 Memorial Parks Telecommunications Infrastructure
13 Improvements.

14 And, Stephanie, do you want to proceed?

15 MS. FREE: Yes. Thank you.

16 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you.

17 NATIONAL MALL AND MEMORIAL PARKS
18 TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

19 MS. FREE: Good afternoon, Chairman
20 Scharf and Commissioners. The National Park
21 Service has submitted concept plans for the National
22 Mall and Memorial Parks, or NAMA, Telecommunication

1 Infrastructure Improvements.

2 The concept plans provide a planning and
3 technical framework to guide improvements to
4 wireless telecommunications across the National
5 Mall, with the primary goal to inform the minimum
6 build-out necessary to achieve a fivefold increase
7 in daily network capacity.

8 At the concept stage the Commission should
9 be focused on the issues such as consistency with
10 the Comprehensive Plan and other policies,
11 appropriateness of the concept plan for the site,
12 or if there are any particularly unique issues --
13 unique or complex issues.

14 The Commission received an informational
15 presentation on this proposal in July 2025. As I
16 mentioned, we are currently at the concept plan
17 review stage. By this spring, NPS will use the
18 concept plans, along with comments from the
19 Commission, the public, and other stakeholders, to
20 develop a request for proposals and evaluation
21 criteria under which network providers will submit
22 their proposals. The proposal selected by NPS will

1 then be submitted to the Commission for preliminary
2 and final review.

3 For today's presentation I will first
4 provide an overview of the purpose of this effort.

5 Then I will discuss the antenna typologies and the
6 conceptual approach to their application, the
7 sub-area recommendations, and then conclude with
8 coordination and implementation.

9 As a reminder, the Commission is
10 responsible for the review of antenna placement and
11 their structures on federal land in the National
12 Capital Region, and on District land -- and on
13 District of Columbia-owned land within Washington,
14 D.C. The Commission's primary interest in
15 telecommunications infrastructure improvements on
16 the Mall is the potential to impact the visual
17 quality of this unique setting and its
18 nationally-significant viewsheds. These
19 improvements also have the potential to impact the
20 status of the National Mall, the White House and
21 President's Park, and the L'Enfant Plan on the
22 National Register of Historic Places.

1 Here we have some examples of
2 telecommunications infrastructure installations on
3 buildings and streetscapes throughout the District.

4 This infrastructure is typically mounted to light
5 poles, pylons, buildings, or similar vertical
6 structures, like standalone poles.

7 And here we have a map of those existing
8 installations, indicated here by the red dots. You
9 can see there is an intentional gap in the
10 installations across the National Mall area.

11 In 2019, the Commission approved the
12 Federal Core Interest Area Map as part of the
13 District of Columbia Small Cell Guidelines. This
14 map identifies the only permissible locations for
15 small cell facilities on District rights-of-way in
16 the area of highest federal interests around the
17 National Mall.

18 The map excluded the National Mall itself,
19 as it was intended at that time that a more
20 comprehensive evaluation of coverage needs and
21 facilities placement would be developed for this
22 area. The proposed NAMA Telecommunications

1 Infrastructure Improvements provide this
2 evaluation as intended for NPS land on the National
3 Mall.

4 As part of this evaluation, NPS completed
5 a cellular coverage report to establish a baseline
6 for existing wireless network performance in the
7 study area. This study concluded, as seen here on
8 the map, that while there are few coverage gaps,
9 the overall quality of the signal is consistently
10 inadequate across the study area due to high user
11 demand.

12 Staff recognizes the growing demand to
13 improve wireless network telecommunications
14 infrastructure and, more importantly, that
15 improving coverage and capacity on existing
16 networks is essential to ensure public safety and
17 enhance the visitor experience on the National Mall.

18 There are several constraints to
19 implementing these improvements, including tree
20 canopy interference, below-grade limitations
21 within the flood plain, and visually integrating
22 physical properties of the antennas and their

1 equipment with the many cultural resources
2 throughout the Mall area.

3 Overall, staff finds that the fundamental
4 challenge is how to integrate this infrastructure
5 into this unique area in a way that allows modern
6 technology to meet current needs while preserving
7 the beauty and dignity of the nation's most
8 important public realm and buildings in the symbolic
9 heart of the nation.

10 Therefore, staff supports the intent of
11 the concept plans to provide a general framework
12 to achieve network capacity goals through an
13 evaluation of potentially acceptable
14 telecommunications infrastructure typologies in a
15 way that minimizes impacts to the public realm.

16 As this is just a framework, the
17 infrastructure design is not included. Design is
18 the responsibility of the network providers;
19 therefore, NPS has included area-wide design
20 criteria to guide their proposals.

21 Staff supports the criteria, as it
22 includes strong preference for proposals that limit

1 the quantity of nodes, share nodes between two or
2 more network providers, scale the nodes and
3 equipment appropriately within their context,
4 closely reproduce existing architectural elements,
5 integrate nodes with the architectural landscape,
6 and also meet capacity goals.

7 So in this next section of the presentation
8 I will discuss the antenna typologies evaluated in
9 the concept plans and the conceptual approach to
10 their application. The four antenna types
11 evaluated in the concept plans are standalone small
12 cells; dual-MNO DRANs, or DRAN-2; four-MNO DRAN,
13 or DRAN-4; and neutral host. The concept plans do
14 not recommend specific typology approaches and the
15 ultimate solution will likely include a combination
16 of typologies.

17 Overall, staff finds that there are
18 tradeoffs between the size and quantity of antennas
19 and their associated equipment across typologies.

20 For example, typologies that accommodate more than
21 one network provider will require fewer sites, but
22 typically have larger equipment cabinetry than

1 another typology that supports fewer network
2 providers but has more sites and smaller equipment.

3 The concept plans divide the study area
4 into five sub-areas: the National Mall East,
5 Washington Monument Grounds and President's Park
6 South, West Potomac Park/Lincoln Memorial, West
7 Potomac Park/Tidal Basin, and East Potomac Park.

8 For purposes of this presentation we have labeled
9 them, from east to west, Sub-Areas 1 through 5.

10 Given the unique context of the National
11 Mall, staff finds the antenna typologies with large
12 equipment enclosures that are difficult to conceal
13 are unfavorable, especially adjacent to monuments
14 and memorials, and recommends that, where possible,
15 equipment should be creatively sealed by
16 co-locating with other facilities or existing
17 small-scale architectural features, vaulted below
18 grade, or integrated with new developments.

19 To minimize impacts on cultural resources,
20 the concept plans recommend integrating
21 telecommunications infrastructure with existing
22 light poles, memorial lighting stanchions, and

1 building structures. In addition, new standalone
2 poles with a shrouded antenna at the top or a
3 yet-to-be-developed method may be necessary where
4 architectural features do not currently exist.

5 Staff finds that antenna installations on
6 multiple poles of varying designs from different
7 network providers may look disjointed or cluttered,
8 particularly when inserted into a
9 cohesively-designed landscape such as that of the
10 National Mall. Therefore, staff requests that NPS
11 work with the carriers and industrial designers to
12 develop unified designs for new standalone poles,
13 adapted or replicated light fixtures, any
14 yet-to-be-developed solutions, and related
15 equipment cabinetry, in consultation with NCPC, the
16 U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and the District's
17 State Historic Preservation Office.

18 The three light pole types considered for
19 integration in the study area are the Washington
20 Globe, Washington Twin Globe, and Olmsted fixtures,
21 which are contributing features of historic
22 properties. The concept plans indicate that these

1 light poles could be adapted or replaced with close
2 replicas to seamlessly incorporate
3 telecommunications infrastructure while also
4 offering lighting.

5 Overall, staff finds this approach may
6 have fewer visual impacts than more commonly used
7 methods and supports its further development.
8 However, if such an approach is proposed, a balance
9 must be reached between the quantity of historic
10 light fixtures that are altered or replaced, which
11 may vary between sub-areas.

12 Many of the memorials and commemorative
13 works within the study area currently utilize
14 special lighting stanchions, as seen here on the
15 left, which are not contributing features of
16 historic properties. The concept plans indicate
17 the light stanchions could be redesigned to
18 incorporate all existing functionality and house
19 antenna infrastructure with a similar visual
20 character as those in place today, as seen here on
21 the illustrative examples on the right.

22 Overall, staff supports this approach, as

1 the stanchions currently exist as utilitarian
2 elements in the National Mall landscape; therefore
3 they will be less noticeable than antenna
4 installations on other existing architectural
5 features.

6 The study area also contains multiple
7 types of buildings, including non-contributing
8 standalone comfortable stations and multiple food,
9 information, and souvenir kiosks, which would be
10 considered on a case-by-case basis as needed for
11 mounting antennas. Staff will utilize the antenna
12 installation practices and policies of the
13 Comprehensive Plan and NCPC's Antenna Submission
14 Guidelines' criteria in the review of antennas
15 attached to structures on the National Mall.

16 As noted earlier, the concept plans divide
17 the study area into five sub-areas. For staff's
18 analysis, Sub-Area 1, the National Mall East, and
19 Sub-Area 5, East Potomac Park, are analyzed
20 individually, as they have the highest and lowest
21 potential for visual impacts, respectively.
22 Sub-Areas 2, 3, and 4 are discussed collectively,

1 as they contain similar features, such as nationally
2 significant monuments and memorial sites and
3 preeminent viewsheds.

4 I'll begin with Sub-Area 1, National Mall
5 East. This sub-area contains the
6 nationally-significant formal landscape defined by
7 central lawn panels lined with historic Olmsted
8 light fixtures and multiple rows of trees that frame
9 the preeminent reciprocal viewshed between the U.S.
10 Capitol and the Washington Monument. Staff also
11 finds that proposed telecommunications in this
12 sub-area will have the highest potential for visual
13 impacts due to its rectilinear form, symmetrical
14 features, and overall formal character that define
15 this viewshed.

16 The concept plans identify potential
17 locations for new telecommunications
18 infrastructure along the outside edge of the center
19 lawn panels, as indicated by the green and yellow
20 dots here on the plan, roughly aligned with the
21 existing Olmsted light poles. The plans also
22 suggest replacing the existing Olmsted light poles

1 with close replicas that seamlessly incorporate
2 telecommunications infrastructure while also
3 offering lighting, or a yet-to-be-developed method.

4 Next I will discuss Sub-Area 5, East
5 Potomac Park. This sub-area includes Hains Point,
6 the East Potomac Park Golf Course, the U.S. Park
7 Police, and NPS National Capital Region
8 Headquarters. Network service is currently
9 limited in this area to traditional macro sites at
10 the north end where the NPS and U.S. Park Police
11 buildings are located. However, capacity demand
12 is less here than in other sub-areas.

13 Overall, staff finds that the proposed
14 telecommunications in this sub-area have the least
15 potential for visual impacts, as this is a less
16 formal landscape located outside of significant
17 viewsheds.

18 The concept plans identify locations for
19 new telecommunications infrastructure in line with
20 the existing Washington Globe light poles along Ohio
21 Drive. These would likely be standalone poles,
22 Washington Globe replicas, or a yet-to-be-developed

1 method.

2 The remaining sub-areas include the
3 Washington Monument Grounds and President Park
4 South, the West Potomac Park-Lincoln Memorial, and
5 the West Potomac Park-Tidal Basin.

6 Telecommunications infrastructure in these
7 sub-areas would likely take shape as standalone
8 poles, Washington Twin Globe, or Washington Globe
9 replicas, a yet-to-be-developed method, or placed
10 on memorial lighting stanchions.

11 In Sub-Area 2, at President's Park South,
12 the concept plans indicate that two
13 telecommunications nodes would be placed along the
14 roadway encircling the Ellipse, in line with the
15 Washington Globe light poles. Within the
16 Washington Monument Grounds, the
17 telecommunications infrastructure would be located
18 on light stanchions and the monument screening
19 facility.

20 However, staff finds it will be difficult
21 to fully conceal or architecturally integrate any
22 antenna typology on the Washington Monument

1 screening facility due to the building's symmetry,
2 rectilinear form, glass facade, horizontal roof
3 line, and immediate adjacency to the Washington
4 Monument. Therefore, staff requests the applicant
5 consider alternatives to placing the
6 telecommunications infrastructure on the screening
7 facility that would improve capacity without
8 altering the appearance of the facility and,
9 therefore, the view of the monument.

10 In Sub-Area 3, West Potomac Park-Lincoln
11 Memorial, the concept plans identify locations for
12 new telecommunications infrastructure along 17th
13 Street, Parkway Drive, Ash Road, through
14 Constitution Gardens and around the Lincoln
15 Memorial, including on the lighting stanchions.

16 And in Sub-Area 4, West Potomac Park-Tidal
17 Basin, the concept plans identify new
18 telecommunication infrastructure locations along
19 sidewalks and paths around the Tidal Basin and Ohio
20 Drive. Light stanchions at the Jefferson and FDR
21 Memorials would also be utilized.

22 So, in summary, staff supports further

1 development of the approach to closely replicate
2 the historic light fixtures to accommodate
3 telecommunications in all of the sub-areas, but
4 there must be a balance between the number of light
5 fixtures retained and those altered or replaced,
6 which may vary between sub-area.

7 Staff also supports utilizing the light
8 stanchions where available, and further development
9 of a yet-to-be-developed method that minimizes
10 visual impacts. Staff finds that standalone poles
11 may be acceptable outside of preeminent viewsheds
12 in Sub-Areas 2 through 5, but would not be
13 appropriate at all in Sub-Area 1.

14 In addition, antennas externally attached
15 to the light fixtures would not be appropriate
16 anywhere in the study area. And while the
17 building-mounted antennas throughout the study area
18 are expected to comply with NCPC's antenna
19 guidelines, staff requests the applicant explore
20 alternatives to mounting antennas on the Washington
21 Monument screening facility.

22 And in all sub-areas staff also supports

1 equipment cabinetry that can be creatively
2 concealed, but recognizes there may be additional
3 flexibility for larger equipment in Sub-Area 5, East
4 Potomac Park, that means fewer historic light
5 fixtures are impacted.

6 So, now we will move on to the last segment
7 of the presentation, which addresses additional
8 coordination and implementation. It is worth
9 noting that the telecommunications infrastructure
10 improvements on the National Mall landscape and the
11 macro antenna sites on the adjacent rooftops
12 ultimately create a network of wireless systems that
13 work together to reach coverage and capacity goals.

14 Therefore, staff finds that the amount of
15 antenna infrastructure needed in the National Mall
16 landscape may be less if macro sites on the adjacent
17 building rooftops are added or upgraded. However,
18 antenna installations on these buildings also have
19 historic preservation and viewshed implications.

20 Therefore, staff recommends the telecommunication
21 providers continue to explore, in consultation with
22 the Section 106 consulting parties, how additional

1 or upgraded rooftop antenna macro sites surrounding
2 the study area, when designed sensitively, could
3 help to reduce the quantity of telecommunications
4 infrastructure on the National Mall.

5 The RFP is another opportunity to ensure
6 stakeholders are coordinated throughout the design
7 and implementation processes. Therefore, staff
8 request the RFP include requests for eye-level,
9 photorealistic simulations of the proposed
10 infrastructure within significant viewsheds and
11 from primary approaches, reference to NCPC's
12 Comprehensive Plan and Antenna Submission
13 Guidelines, a coordinating phasing strategy that
14 outlines the methodology and timeline for how
15 antennas will be installed, and expectations for
16 network provider maintenance of the installations
17 and restoration, should they be removed in the
18 future.

19 So, this concludes my presentation. I've
20 incorporated the Executive Report's
21 recommendations into my presentation. Also have
22 them listed here, as well as in the Staff Report.

1 And I would now like to introduce Krista Sherwood,
2 Chief of Staff for the National Mall and Memorial
3 Parks, who would like to say a few words. Thank
4 you.

5 (Off-microphone comment.)

6 MS. FREE: She is online. Yeah.

7 CHAIR SCHARF: Oh, okay.

8 MS. FREE: Yes.

9 (Off-microphone comment.)

10 (Pause.)

11 MS. SHERWOOD: Okay. Good afternoon.

12 | Can you hear me?

13 CHAIR SCHAFER: Yes.

14 MS. SHERWOOD: Okay. Let me turn my
15 camera on. Great. Wonderful. Sorry for the
16 delay. Good afternoon, everyone. I am Krista
17 Sherwood, Chief of Staff for the National Mall and
18 Memorial Parks. Thank you to NCPC staff for that
19 great, comprehensive overview of the effort. And
20 thank you all for the opportunity to speak today.

21 The National Park Service is finalizing
22 this telecommunications concept plan for the

1 National Mall and surrounding NPS park areas in
2 Washington, D.C. The NPS submitted the concept
3 plan for NCPC review and comments, and appreciates
4 the Commission's input on this plan.

5 The plan identifies opportunities to
6 improve wireless coverage and capacity in this area
7 while protecting the views, the character, and
8 historic resources of the park. We do recognize
9 the need and urgency for these improvements, and
10 are aiming to finalize the plan and implement
11 opportunities to enhance public safety,
12 connectivity, and the overall visitor experience
13 as quickly as possible.

14 So, in the coming weeks the NPS will issue
15 a request for proposals for mobile network operators
16 and neutral host providers to submit formal
17 proposals. And this RFP will describe the limited
18 opportunities for improvements that are identified
19 in the plan and the applicable siting and design
20 criteria.

21 These proposals will be evaluated in a
22 transparent, equitable, and technically

1 coordinated manner that's consistent with the
2 National Park Service policy and the Department of
3 the Interior guidance for issuance of right-of-way
4 permits for telecommunications infrastructure
5 improvements. We plan to incorporate the comments
6 that are received from NCPC and incorporate these
7 into the RFP and, if applicable, the value in which
8 we review the proposals.

9 The NPS will return to NCPC once we have
10 selected a proposal and have the proposed
11 preliminary design to submit for NCPC's
12 consideration. We will also provide the final
13 design to NCPC for further review and consideration.

14 Again, I want to thank you for your time.
15 And when it's appropriate I'll be happy to answer
16 any questions.

17 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Krista. And
18 thank you again, Stephanie.

19 Do any Commissioners have any questions
20 for either of our two presenters on this --

21 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Chairman?

22 CHAIR SCHARF: Yes, sir.

1 COMMISSIONER DIXON: I have some
2 questions and discussion at my turn, when you get
3 to us, but I'd also like to move that we move it
4 for consideration and discussion so we'll have
5 something before us.

6 CHAIR SCHARF: Okay. Is there a second?

7 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: Second.

8 CHAIR SCHARF: Hearing a motion and a
9 second, I will now open this item up to the
10 Commission for discussion.

11 COMMISSIONER DIXON: All right.

12 CHAIR SCHARF: You're short-circuiting
13 our whole system here, Arrington.

14 (Laughter.)

15 CHAIR SCHARF: With that, Commissioner
16 Stidham?

17 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: Thank you. And
18 thank you for the great presentation and overview
19 of the plan. This plan has been a long time coming
20 and we're really thankful to be at this part of the
21 process. It really does set a framework for how
22 telecommunication infrastructure can be

1 implemented on the National Mall and the Ellipse
2 and the President's Park, in a way that is respectful
3 of the historic character, but yet provides the
4 character, the necessary capacity and coverage
5 needed for wide-scale events and frankly just every
6 day visitor use.

7 So, we're looking forward to our continued
8 work with the carrier in developing this beyond the
9 framework to actually have a proposal and a design
10 to bring back to the Commission.

11 CHAIR SCHARF: Thanks, Commissioner
12 Stidham. Commissioner Argo?

13 COMMISSIONER ARGO: No additional
14 comments (audio interference) presentation (audio
15 interference) where we are on this. And hoping it
16 move forward as quickly as possible. Thank you.

17 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
18 Vice Chairman Levenbach?

19 VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: So, I thought the
20 data were pretty compelling that there is a need
21 for coverage in the Mall. And so this is an
22 important project. It's an important project for

1 public safety. It's important this year given the
2 amount of use we're going to see of the area.

3 And so I think my only comment is that it's
4 important to manage it in a way where it can move
5 forward in an expeditious way. Obviously,
6 reporting all the comments in the very, it seems,
7 eminently reasonable strategy trying to incorporate
8 the infrastructure into existing lighting and so
9 forth. But setting it up where you have performance
10 standards, and then you let the vendors meet the
11 standards, as opposed to getting into a lot of touch
12 points and a lot of friction with the project as
13 it's being implemented.

14 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Vice Chairman.
15 Commissioner Blair?

16 COMMISSIONER BLAIR: I would just echo
17 Commissioner Levenbach's comments.

18 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner
19 Blair. Administrator Forst?

20 COMMISSIONER FORST: Thank you very much
21 for the presentation. I thought it was very
22 comprehensive. And it's, again, not a question of

1 whether we need it, but how to go about it. And
2 I think you show great respect for the different
3 territories there and how we might address it
4 locally. But I was most persuaded by the fact that
5 you are very open to looking for yet-to-be-developed
6 models. So I look forward being sensitive to that
7 design aesthetic and appreciate the time.

8 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Administrator
9 Forst. Commissioner Dixon?

10 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yeah, I didn't mean
11 to pull a rank on you here, but I've always kind
12 of believed that we ought to have something before
13 us before we discuss it.

14 CHAIR SCHARF: Got you.

15 COMMISSIONER DIXON: That's kind of --
16 but, anyhow, I don't always win on that one, but
17 --

18 CHAIR SCHARF: I usually open things up
19 for questions for the presenters before shifting
20 to the discussion section. But you've been here
21 longer than I have.

22 (Simultaneous speaking.)

1 CHAIR SCHARF: Yes, sir.

2 COMMISSIONER DIXON: I do have a couple
3 of questions, though. One, is this going to be a
4 single or multi-vendor opportunity? Because we've
5 had discussion before and the question is, let's
6 supposed to X company gets it, and Y and Z company
7 telephone be used in that environment. And that's
8 of interest to me. And it also gets us into hoteling
9 and whether we can have multiple carriers on one
10 device.

11 I also was interested in whether or not
12 it's possible, when you look at East Potomac Park,
13 there has always been a lighting issue there because
14 we've restricted the use of it to night -- restricted
15 nighttime use of it. I would like to think that
16 maybe we can figure out, redo these things, and put
17 some lighting in that is manageable that will allow
18 that to be available evening sometime when some
19 event is appropriate for it, rather than having the
20 dark areas that -- the limited lighted areas that
21 exist now.

22 I also was concerned about the -- it was

1 a multi-host provision that they're looking at?
2 I don't know if that addresses my issue about the
3 multi-carriers, because I've been concerned about
4 that with all of those wi-fi kind of services. You
5 know, if you have a certain carrier on your phone
6 can you get in? That's important for me to know.

7 So maybe that can be answered by someone, I don't
8 know.

9 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: Sure, I can hit
10 those questions.

11 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

12 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: So, let's start
13 with the easy one, the lighting piece for East
14 Potomac Park. As we continue to move forward with
15 a variety of projects, we'll start with that as part
16 of the discussion.

17 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Good, good.

18 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: As for carriers
19 and hoteling and multiple carriers, we are -- by
20 using the prospectus model for carriers to provide
21 proposals to the National Park Service for
22 consideration, that gives everyone the same

1 opportunity to develop proposals and come to meet
2 the criteria. But it also gives the carriers a
3 great opportunity to coordinate together and work
4 together to develop the solution that not only meets
5 our needs and criteria and the needs of the public
6 and safety needs, but also the needs of the carriers
7 together. Not competing them against each other,
8 but having them work together.

9 | COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: So we're strongly
11 encouraging that approach. And we'll have to see
12 where we end up.

18 And I think it's beneficial to the public to be
19 able to have multiple carriers who can access the
20 system. Thank you.

21 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: You're welcome.

22 CHAIR SCHAFER: Thank you, Commissioner.

1 Commissioner Cash?

2 COMMISSIONER CASH: Oh, thanks. I just
3 want to thank the staff. I just want to point out,
4 on all these telecom, the 5G antennas and all that,
5 I think the Commission, and the staff especially,
6 is really a leader in this because they kind of push
7 the envelope and say this is how it should be done.

8 And it's a lot of kicking and screaming
9 on the front end, but I think it's always resulted
10 in installations that look nice that don't clutter
11 things. And it's really been kind of the Commission
12 taking the lead on this and kind of pushing the
13 envelope and getting the carriers to follow suit.

14 So I thank the staff for all the work they've done
15 on this, and thanks for the presentation.

16 CHAIR SCHARF: Thanks, Commissioner Cash.
17 Commissioner Henderson?

18 COMMISSIONER HENDERSON: Nothing to add
19 on this one. Thank you.

20 CHAIR SCHARF: Thanks, Commissioner. Do
21 we have Commissioner McGowan with us?

22 COMMISSIONER MCGOWAN: Yes. I don't any

1 comments or questions to add, but would just thank
2 staff for the time and the presentation.

3 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

4 Commissioner Cozart?

5 COMMISSIONER COZART: Yes. Thanks to the
6 staff for their presentation. And I'll associate
7 myself with Commissioner Cash's comments.

8 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

9 And Commissioner Schaefer?

10 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Nothing.

11 Nothing that no one else has already said. So,
12 great job.

13 CHAIR SCHARF: Well, speaking personally,
14 looking at the bandwidth demands, I think it's
15 somewhat sad that people are on their phones
16 streaming video and putting up Snapchats and
17 Instagrams instead of enjoying some of the most
18 beautiful monuments and living in the moment. But,
19 being that that's where we are, I commend our staff
20 and NPS on working through a difficult problem.
21 I think, particularly, the idea of essentially
22 repurposing the Olmsted and Washington Globe light

1 fixtures makes a lot of sense.

2 And I remember when this came before us
3 in July, and it's great to see the progress that's
4 been made since then. And, again, speaking for
5 myself, and I think probably most the Commission,
6 I'm excited to see how things develop in the months
7 ahead, especially given the bandwidth demands that
8 are going to be present because of America 250
9 celebrations, and really just going forward into
10 the future.

11 So, with that, I guess we need to vote to
12 approve comments. So, Meghan, can you please
13 confirm the motion and the second, and then we'll
14 take the vote by roll call?

15 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes. The motion was
16 made by Commissioner Dixon and seconded by
17 Commissioner Stidham. Commissioner Cozart?

18 COMMISSIONER COZART: Yes.

19 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Schaefer?

20 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Yes.

21 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

22 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: Yes.

1 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?

2 COMMISSIONER ARGO: Yes.

3 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach?

4 VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Yes.

5 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Chairman Scharf?

6 CHAIR SCHARF: Yes.

7 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Blair?

8 COMMISSIONER BLAIR: Yes.

9 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Administrator Forst?

10 COMMISSIONER FORST: Yes.

11 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

12 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

13 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

14 COMMISSIONER CASH: Yes.

15 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Henderson?

16 COMMISSIONER HENDERSON: Yes.

17 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner McGowan?

18 COMMISSIONER MCGOWAN: Yes.

19 MS. HOTTEL-COX: The motion carries

20 unanimously.

21 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you. With that, we

22 will move to Agenda Item 6B, which is a request to

1 approve final site development plans for the Long
2 Bridge Corridor Project, South Section. Michael
3 Weil, I believe, is with us.

4 Hey, Michael.

5 MR. WEIL: Thank you.

6 CHAIR SCHARF: Do you want to proceed?

7 LONG BRIDGE CORRIDOR PROJECT -

8 SOUTH SECTION

9 MR. WEIL: Yes. Thank you very much.

10 Okay. Good afternoon, again, Chairman
11 Scharf and members of the Commission. The National
12 Park Service, on behalf of the Virginia Passenger
13 Rail Authority, or VPRA, has submitted plans to
14 improve a half-mile-long section of the Long Bridge
15 Railway Corridor crossing over the George
16 Washington Memorial Parkway and Mount Vernon Trail
17 in Arlington, Virginia, and across the Potomac River
18 to East Potomac Park in the District of Columbia.

19 As background, the project would add two
20 new tracks to the Long Bridge Corridor, for a total
21 of four tracks, with the purpose of provided
22 additional rail capacity and improving travel

1 reliability into the city and through the region
2 with the direct benefit of passenger train service.

3 And this project is part of a larger plan by VPRA
4 to improve passenger rail service throughout the
5 state of Virginia.

6 The current Long Bridge Project is the
7 product of a multi-year alternates analysis and NEPA
8 study process which started back in 2011. And the
9 process concluded with a signed Federal Railroad
10 Administration record of decision and programmatic
11 agreement in 2020, with additional supplemental
12 NEPA analysis by the Park Service in 2024.

13 And then, finally, NCPC has written a
14 record of decision in order to conclude our NEPA
15 review responsibility as part of our final review
16 action here today. And we reflect this in our
17 Executive Director's recommendation comments.

18 The project would construct one new
19 separate, two-track rail bridge approximately 40
20 feet to the north of the existing Long Bridge, which
21 is outlined here in white, as well as a new separate
22 pedestrian and bicycle bridge to the north of that,

1 which is highlighted here in orange.

2 Previously, our Commission approved
3 previous preliminary plans for the full length of
4 the corridor improvements across federal National
5 Park Service land, back in July of 2022. And, more
6 recently, NCPC approved the final plans for the
7 North part of the corridor in April of 2025. And
8 today we are reviewing the final plans for the
9 remainder of the corridor, known as the South
10 Section, to complete our review process under the
11 National Capital Planning Act.

12 As a final submission package we are
13 considering issues like the project's final
14 landscape plans, its overall architectural
15 aesthetic, and how VPRA has responded to the
16 Commission's previous preliminary approval
17 comments.

18 Today, the South Section project area
19 extends from the western boundary of the National
20 Park Service property along the western side of the
21 George Washington Memorial Parkway, which is shown
22 here. And then, panning across the parkway, the

1 study area would extend along the north side of the
2 existing CSX Transportation railway bridge that you
3 can see here in this slide. And then extending to
4 the east toward the Potomac River, as seen here.

5 The new tracks will bridge over the Mount
6 Vernon Trail closer to the river. And then,
7 finally, over the Potomac River to the western side
8 of East Potomac Park.

9 The historic Long Bridge, which exists
10 today, was originally constructed in 1904 as a
11 through-girder structure for both passenger and
12 freight rail trains. And here we can see the Long
13 Bridge's distinctive swing truss section which was
14 once used to allow larger watercraft to move along
15 the river past the bridge. However, this section
16 is no longer operational and necessary for water
17 traffic today.

18 Here is some closer-up views of the
19 historic Long Bridge with its granite block piers,
20 ten-foot-high weathered steel parapet walls, and
21 girders today.

22 The Long Bridge is listed on the National

1 Register as a contributing element to both the East
2 and West Potomac Parks and George Washington
3 Memorial Parkway historic districts. And as such,
4 VPRA adopted the overarching design goal to
5 approximate the historic features of the existing
6 bridge in the design of the new bridge. And this
7 includes its structure, material, and form, thereby
8 minimizing future adverse effects to the area's
9 surrounding historic resources and character that
10 would arise from a different type of bridge here.

11 So, with that, I will now walk you through
12 the proposed South Section widening project
13 submission that is before our Commission here today
14 for review. Basic elements of the project are a
15 new separate half-mile-long through-girder rail
16 bridge that would span over the Parkway, Mount
17 Vernon Trail, and Potomac River; a new separate
18 pedestrian and bicycle bridge over the parkway and
19 river; and new landscaping and lighting.

20 Starting with the new rail bridge, the new
21 Long Bridge would be owned by VPRA and used to
22 prioritize passenger rail service, although either

1 bridge could be used for passenger or freight rail
2 service, as needed. The new Long Bridge would
3 resemble the existing historic Long Bridge, with
4 weathering steel parapet walls. However, the new
5 bridge would not include a swing span section, which
6 is unnecessary for river travel today.

7 The new bridge would have 25
8 granite-stone-cladded piers with cladding that
9 resembles the existing granite block piers. And
10 these specs remain largely unchanged since NCPC's
11 2022 preliminary design review.

12 To the west, the new rail bridge would
13 cross over the Mount Vernon Trail with the same
14 through-girder design, but with one notable
15 difference. The new bridge would have two
16 reinforced concrete multipoint piers located
17 adjacent to either side of the trail in order to
18 increase user visibility and safety along the trail.

19 And the rail bridge over the Parkway would
20 have broken Ashlar stone-cladded piers and slightly
21 arched spans in order to resemble the existing rail
22 bridge and to reflect the parkways rustic-looking

1 appearance and materials. And we expressed our
2 support for incorporating these features into the
3 new bridge over the parkway here as part of our
4 Executive Director's recommendation's comments.

5 In addition, we include a finding in the
6 Executive Director's recommendation comments that
7 the new bridge meets the VPRA goal of approximating
8 the design of the existing historic Long Bridge,
9 which was supported by our Commission as part of
10 its 2022 design review action comments.

11 Moving onto the new pedestrian and bicycle
12 bridge, VPRA would construct the new bridge
13 approximately 25 feet to the north of the new Long
14 Rail Bridge, with a prefabricated truss design that
15 is based on its necessary length, required
16 clearances, and intended use.

17 The new crossing would extend between Long
18 Bridge Park in Arlington, Virginia, and East Potomac
19 Park in the District of Columbia. And the bridge
20 was developed as mitigation for the project's need
21 to use federal parkland as part of the wider railway
22 corridor.

1 The new bike/ped bridge would be the only
2 freestanding crossing of its kind over the Potomac
3 River in the area and would serve as a valuable
4 connection within the larger Arlington District and
5 regional trail networks in the future.

6 The new bridge would extend over the
7 Parkway as a single-span with an arched truss for
8 support along the north side of the new rail bridge,
9 as shown here. The bridge would have direct ramp
10 and stair connections to the existing Mount Vernon
11 Trail. And the project would widen the trail to
12 the east and the west in order to create a larger
13 landing and plaza area here, so the trail users would
14 be able to make that connection out of the way of
15 faster-moving bicycle traffic traveling along the
16 Mount Vernon Trail.

17 The new bridge would measure 20-feet
18 across with an overlook area, as shown here on the
19 left, with circular reinforced concrete piers for
20 support, as shown on the right side of the slide.

21 And then the new bridge would land on the western
22 side of East Potomac Park, as shown here, adjacent

1 to Ohio Drive West.

2 Since NCPC's 2022 preliminary review, VPRA
3 has made several beneficial changes to the bridge
4 design, including widening the bridge deck to
5 facilitate bidirectional travel and passing
6 movements. And this was based on previous public
7 testimony and guidance by the Park Service, NCPC,
8 and other stakeholder agencies.

9 VPRA has simplified the bridge design,
10 both to reduce its visual appearance in the area
11 and to improve outward viewing opportunities for
12 the bridge users, as illustrated here in these
13 renderings.

14 And, finally, VPRA proposes to paint the
15 bridge truss in a Federal Standard brown, which is
16 the same color as other bridges in the Park Service
17 inventory. And the brown would also help blend the
18 bridge in with the other nearby railway bridges
19 visually.

20 And we support the wider bridge deck in
21 the Executive Director's recommendation comments,
22 and we also include a finding related to the proposed

1 changes to the bridge design, which were made in
2 response to our Commission's previous preliminary
3 review comments.

4 At night, the new bridge, which would be
5 maintained by DDOT, would use embedded lights within
6 the handrails in order to illuminate the bridge deck
7 and minimize light spillage from the bridge. The
8 applicant includes two different alternatives in
9 the project submission with lights spaced at either
10 four-foot or eight-foot intervals. Between the
11 two, staff recommends that VPRA use an eight-foot
12 spacing in order to lessen the future bridge
13 lighting.

14 In terms of landscaping, VPRA has
15 developed a plan that accomplishes several
16 different design goals, which include restoring the
17 corridor's natural look once the project
18 construction is complete, with filtered views and
19 preserving several critical viewsheds.

20 Plans show a wide mix of canopy,
21 ornamental, and evergreen trees, with mostly native
22 species used. But the plans also show some

1 non-native species, based on the Park's historic
2 planting plan, which NCPC guidance does allow as
3 long as the species are not invasive.

4 Here, you can see the new mix of trees on
5 the western side of the river in Virginia. And then
6 here is the proposed new landscaping on the east
7 side of the river and East Potomac Park. The new
8 trees would be different heights and positioned in
9 such a way that there would be filtered views of
10 the new retaining walls and bridges, with periodic
11 gaps in the new vegetation, as shown here in these
12 renderings in this elevation.

13 And staff comments include support for the
14 project's proposed planting palette, as well as a
15 note that the plans accomplish the project's design
16 goals of achieving a naturalized looking,
17 maintaining views of the corridor and river, and
18 integrating both pollinator and native plant
19 species into the future landscape in these areas.

20 So, that concludes my presentation. And,
21 before I conclude, I have incorporated many of these
22 comments into today's presentation, and they are

1 also included in our staff reports. And I also want
2 to note that we have drafted a record of decision
3 that applies to the portion of the project that is
4 located within the District of Columbia, as per the
5 National Capital Planning Act. And we are
6 recommending adoption of the ROD here today as part
7 of the final Commission review action.

8 And I would also like to note that, in
9 addition to Park Service representatives here at
10 today's meeting, we also have two consultants who
11 are in the meeting today virtually: the project's
12 landscape architect and project manager for the
13 design-build team. And we also have two
14 representatives here today in-person from VPRA: Ms.
15 Shirlene Cleveland and Ms. Naomi Klein. And they
16 are all available now to answer any questions
17 related to the project that you may have. Thank
18 you.

19 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Michael. Do
20 any Commissioners have any questions, comments, or
21 is there a motion on the floor? Ed?

22 COMMISSIONER FORST: Thank you very much

1 for the presentation. And I'm late to this, so I
2 apologize if you have handled these questions
3 before.

4 One comment. I think it's a great idea,
5 particularly with the return-to-office mandate that
6 the Federal Government has, to have more ways for
7 people to get to and from work and to get a little
8 bit of exercise I think is outstanding. So that's
9 Comment 1.

10 Question 2. Over that span, had you and
11 the consultants considered the inclusion of any
12 security cameras or anything over that 1.8 stretch?

13 MR. WEIL: Not to my knowledge. But I can
14 -- I'm happy to let VPRA speak to that.

15 MS. CLEVELAND: Yes, it's definitely been
16 discussed, though right now we don't have any plans
17 to install those. I mean, that would come in the
18 future, potentially, not in the current plan.

19 COMMISSIONER FORST: Was that just -- was
20 that decision reached in consultation with security
21 professionals?

22 MS. CLEVELAND: Oh, no, it's not like

1 we're not going to do it; we just haven't come to
2 that. I'm sorry if I wasn't clear. Yeah,
3 definitely a great idea.

4 COMMISSIONER FORST: What might be the
5 forcing function to include that in the future?

6 MS. CLEVELAND: Oh, forcing function?
7 Oh, we would be happy to do it. We would discuss
8 that with DDOT and we'd have to look -- I mean, we
9 already do have cameras in the corridor that are
10 tracking the construction, so it would be very easy
11 to convert those over to, you know, full-time
12 security surveillance in the future.

13 COMMISSIONER FORST: Made my point.
14 Thank you.

15 MS. CLEVELAND: Okay.

16 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Good point.

17 COMMISSIONER FORST: Thank you.

18 CHAIR SCHARF: Anything else?
19 Commissioner?

20 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Yeah, just a
21 question. First, fantastic lay-down. I guess the
22 only question I had, and I can't tell from the

1 charts, on the pedestrian bridge, on the overlook,
2 what exactly are you overlooking? Because it looks
3 like you're looking at the side of the bridge.
4 Maybe it's the way it's presenting.

5 CHAIR SCHARF: The historic Long Bridge.

6 (Laughter.)

7 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: No, no, I don't
8 think it's the historic Long Bridge.

9 CHAIR SCHARF: Right. It's actually the
10 new bridge. I stand corrected.

11 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: I'm not sure.

12 35. Yes, go back one. So I just can't tell.

13 MR. WEIL: So you're in the looking in the
14 direction of the Metrorail bridge, which is upstream
15 on the right. And I believe you can see, you know,
16 along the river, you know, under the spans. But
17 it's --

18 MS. CLEVELAND: It's not really meant to
19 be an overlook, but is really the ramp down to the
20 Mount Vernon Trail.

21 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Oh, is that --
22 okay.

1 MR. WEIL: Oh, sorry.

2 (Simultaneous speaking.)

3 MS. CLEVELAND: We were fairly limited
4 about how high we can make this bridge, because you
5 have to have, for ADA purposes, it can only slope
6 so much. We needed to get it high enough to clear
7 the navigation channel. So we're really kind of
8 boxed in about how high we can make this bridge.

9 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Okay.

10 MR. WEIL: Yeah, I apologize, I didn't
11 mean to make it sound like it was a separate -- it
12 was kind of the overlook --

13 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Got it.

14 MR. WEIL: It could also be used --

15 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Sorry.

16 MR. WEIL: -- as an overlook. Yes.

17 Sorry.

18 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Thank you.

19 That's helpful. Anything else?

20 COMMISSIONER CASH: Mr. Chairman?

21 CHAIR SCHARF: Yes, sir.

22 COMMISSIONER CASH: So one thing that kind

1 of jumped out to me, folks who have been around for
2 a while remember this, but I thought Ashlar stone
3 cladding, that's not formed stone, that's actual
4 stone?

5 MS. CLEVELAND: Actual stone.

6 COMMISSIONER CASH: Okay. Okay, that was
7 my question. Thanks.

8 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

9 Any other questions?

10 Seeing none, is there a motion to approve
11 final site development plans for the Long Bridge
12 Corridor Project South Section?

13 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: So moved.

14 CHAIR SCHARF: Is there a second?

15 COMMISSIONER FORST: Second.

16 CHAIR SCHARF: Madam Secretary, can you
17 confirm the motion and the second and -- or sorry,
18 let's open things up for formal discussion. We went
19 so far down questions that I lost myself again.
20 Let's start deliberations with Commissioner Cozart.

21 COMMISSIONER COZART: Thank you to the
22 Staff for their presentation. Glad to see the

1 project moving. No other questions or comments.

2 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

3 Commissioner Schaefer?

4 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Nothing further.

5 Thank you.

6 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

7 Commissioner Stidham?

8 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: We are very
9 thankful for this project and our work with VPRA
10 over many, many, many years --

11 (Laughter.)

12 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: -- to get to this
13 point. So we're really excited for this project
14 to move forward. The addition of a pedestrian
15 bridge will be a real change for everyone in the
16 area. So we appreciate all of the work from NCPG
17 and our work with VPRA to get us where we are.

18 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

19 Commissioner Argo?

20 COMMISSIONER ARGO: No additional
21 comments other than (audio interference). Thank
22 you very much.

1 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

2 Vice Chairman Levenbach?

3 VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: I have no comments.

4 Thanks for the great presentation, Mike.

5 MR. WEIL: Thank you.

6 CHAIR SCHARF: Commissioner Blair?

7 COMMISSIONER BLAIR: No comments. Thank
8 you.

9 CHAIR SCHARF: Commissioner -- or, excuse
10 me, Administrator Forst?

11 COMMISSIONER FORST: Satisfied,
12 Chairman.

13 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Mr.
14 Administrator. Commissioner Dixon?

15 COMMISSIONER DIXON: I'm very happy with
16 this. I would comment that, historically, off of
17 bridges, I think one of these bridges, there used
18 to be a swimming meet. And people would dive into
19 the river and swim. And now that the river is going
20 to become, hopefully, clean enough to swim in, who
21 knows, maybe we'll have another swimming meet from
22 these bridges. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

2 I, too, one day hope that the Potomac River is clean
3 enough for such activities. And hopefully it will
4 be warm enough for such activities.

5 (Laughter.)

6 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

7 CHAIR SCHARF: Commissioner Cash?

8 COMMISSIONER CASH: Thank you so much.

9 I did just want to make one comment. And this kind
10 of struck me at preliminary, too. So, the footings
11 that are over the Mount Vernon Trail, it does
12 actually kind of strike me that they're just the
13 piers, when everything else along there is the stone
14 cladding. It actually seems like, when you're
15 going along there, you're going to go from feeling
16 kind of historic, all the sudden see these very
17 modern piers that almost feel like a Metro pier.

18 So I know that you said it's for security,
19 or something like that. I didn't quite get that.

20 But I wouldn't object or anything, I just -- I
21 noticed in the photos that it's very striking, that
22 it's a very different style from everything else.

1 So I just wanted to put that out there. If there
2 is any opportunity to maybe add some other cladding
3 or something like that at some point. But, yeah,
4 thanks.

5 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
6 Commissioner Henderson?

7 COMMISSIONER HENDERSON: No further
8 questions or discussion.

9 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
10 Commissioner McGowan?

11 COMMISSIONER MCGOWAN: I don't have any
12 further comments or questions, but thank you so much
13 for the presentation.

14 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you. I'd just like
15 to thank VPRA, NPS, obviously, our Commission staff.
16 I think this is one of those projects where when
17 you look at the earlier renderings compared to where
18 we're at now you see a real noticeable improvement.
19 I think this is in a great place.

20 I'm also excited about both increased rail
21 access, given the return-to-office, as
22 Administrator Forst said, I think that's a vital

1 need. And also the pedestrian access. I'm not
2 much of a biker, but if I were, that might be a nice
3 route to have, and nice connectivity with other bike
4 trails.

5 So, with that having been said, I think
6 we can, if there are no further questions or comments
7 from any other Commissioners, Madam Secretary, can
8 you please confirm the motion and second, and take
9 the vote by roll call?

10 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes. The motion was
11 made by Commissioner Stidham and seconded by
12 Administrator Forst. Commissioner Cozart?

13 COMMISSIONER COZART: Yes.

14 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Schaefer?

15 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Yes.

16 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

17 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: Yes.

18 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?

19 COMMISSIONER ARGO: Yes.

20 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach?

21 VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Yes.

22 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Chairman Scharf?

1 CHAIR SCHARF: Yes.

2 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Blair?

3 COMMISSIONER BLAIR: Yes.

4 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Administrator Forst?

5 COMMISSIONER FORST: Yes.

6 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

7 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

8 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

9 COMMISSIONER CASH: Yes.

10 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Henderson?

11 COMMISSIONER HENDERSON: Yes.

12 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner McGowan?

13 COMMISSIONER MCGOWAN: Yes.

14 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Carries unanimously.

15 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Madam

16 Secretary. With that, thank you very much,

17 Michael. And I'm sorry, from --

18 MS. CLEVELAND: Shirlene.

19 CHAIR SCHARF: -- VPRA, Shirlene, thank

20 you.

21 And we'll proceed to Agenda Item 6C, which

22 I'm particularly excited about. This is a request

1 to approve comments on concept plans for the
2 National Zoological Park, Construct New Arabian
3 Leopard habitat. Laura Shipman is with us.

4 Laura, do you want to proceed?

5 NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK CONSTRUCT

6 NEW ARABIAN LEOPARD HABITAT

7 MS. SHIPMAN: Yes. Thank you. Great.
8 Good afternoon, Chairman Scharf and members of the
9 Commission. I will be presenting on behalf of the
10 project officer, Jamie Herr.

11 The Smithsonian Institution has submitted
12 concept plans to construct an Arabian leopard
13 habitat at the National Zoological Park in Northwest
14 Washington, D.C., for Commission comment. As this
15 is a concept review the focus of today's
16 presentation is to receive Commission comments and
17 feedback prior to preparing the next submission.

18 In this case, the focus of the review is
19 understanding the appropriateness of the project
20 for the context, and understanding any particularly
21 unique or complex issues that may need to be
22 addressed. As such, in today's presentation staff

1 has prepared comments on the concept plan for the
2 Commission consider and give the applicant guidance
3 for further project development.

4 The proposed project is located at the
5 northern end of the National Zoological Park
6 complex, close to the main entry on Connecticut
7 Avenue. Founded in 1889, the National Zoo is part
8 of the Smithsonian Institution and the National Zoo
9 and Conservation Biology Institute. The two
10 campuses are home to more than 2,200 animals,
11 including some of the planet's most critically
12 endangered species.

13 To that end, the Smithsonian Institution
14 has entered into a partnership to advance
15 conservation efforts for the critically endangered
16 Arabian Leopard. The proposed facility will
17 provide year-round public viewing of adult and cub
18 leopards that will support education around
19 conservation of this unique species.

20 The goals of the project are to include
21 a large open-air habitat, designed with the
22 flexibility to accommodate future species, and with

1 opportunities for the cats to display their natural
2 climbing behaviors; a new animal care facility with
3 day room, dens, and staff support space; and
4 accessible public viewing areas, including a VIP
5 viewing area designed within the context of the
6 existing site that will reuse the bison structures,
7 if possible.

8 In addition, the habitat needs to be
9 designed with the influence of the arid, rocky
10 mountain of the Arabian Peninsula, while taking into
11 consideration the historic environment of the
12 National Zoological Park Historic District and
13 Olmsted Walk. Staff supports these goals for the
14 new Arabian leopard habitat.

15 The project site is approximately 3/4 of
16 an acre and is prominently located at a north bend
17 in the Olmsted Walk. Situated between the Panda
18 habitat and the Elephant House exhibit, it is close
19 to the Connecticut Avenue entrance and across from
20 the bus group entry, the restroom facility, and the
21 Panda Plaza concessions area, all of which are
22 heavily used by visitors.

1 Two existing exhibits currently occupy the
2 site. The former bison habitat, closed since 2024,
3 and the Zoo in Your Backyard exhibit, which features
4 plants native to the Washington, D.C. area. The
5 site contains several facilities in support of the
6 two existing exhibits. None of these structures
7 are historic, and most will not be retained.

8 The site also includes a variety of
9 vegetation, as well as existing trees. Some trees
10 may need to be replaced if they cannot be preserved.

11 In addition, there is varied topography across the
12 site that must be addressed in the proposed design,
13 as shown in this existing site section.

14 The National Zoo is mostly covered by the
15 National Zoological Park Historic District, as
16 noted here. The map shown notes both the Olmsted
17 Walk and the other contributing resources in the
18 district. The proposed habitat site is adjacent
19 to the Olmsted Walk and Elephant House, which are
20 both contributing resources to the historic
21 district. The applicant has initiated the Section
22 106 process and more information will be included

1 with the next submission.

2 Pictured here are site elements that are
3 considered contributing to the historic district.

4 On the left is the historic Elephant House
5 building, and on the right are examples of Olmsted
6 Walk features, including the use of buffers and
7 berms at the edge, the primary and secondary pavers
8 and paving systems, and the large, mature tree
9 canopy. In addition, the use of stone, low-profile
10 roof lines, and consistent furnishings are other
11 examples.

12 The guiding principle at the creation of
13 the park was that architecture should empower the
14 landscape, subtly supporting the visitor's
15 encounters with nature. This helps outline the
16 goals of any new additions at the park to balance
17 the natural setting with the needs of contemporary
18 zoological care, conversation, and visitor
19 engagement.

20 In designing the new habitat, the
21 applicant wanted to reflect this through the
22 architectural language, with buildings designed as

1 part of the topography, framed by tree canopies and
2 woven into the context. Specifically, the
3 applicant has taken elements, such as the stone,
4 green-colored roofing, and brick as inspiration for
5 the new habitat building, as well as the shapes and
6 materials of the Arabian Peninsula.

7 There are three main elements of the
8 habitat that the applicant studied, including the
9 habitat, care building, and the enclosure. At the
10 beginning of the design process the applicant
11 evaluated three habitat concepts: oasis, wadi, and
12 oasis-wadi hybrid.

13 The oasis concept, on the left, had a
14 single point of entry from Olmsted Walk into a looped
15 accessible circulation path built around a central
16 pool, like you would find in the Arabia Desert.

17 The wadi concept, in the center, included
18 an accessible path through the exhibit from west
19 to east as a more linear experience, similar to the
20 meandering of a wadi riverbed.

21 The oasis-wadi hybrid, on the right,
22 combines both schemes to offer a meandering

1 accessible path organized around a central pool
2 oasis, creating multiple vantage points for
3 visitors as they proceed through the exhibit.

4 The oasis-wadi hybrid has been chosen as
5 the preferred scheme for this concept report, as
6 it provides multiple points of entry off the Olmsted
7 Walk at a very busy section. Visitors can view the
8 exhibit from multiple points throughout the exhibit
9 itself, as well as directly off of Olmsted Walk,
10 creating a variety of viewing experiences. The
11 developed building mass concepts the applicant
12 developed are based on the oasis-wadi hybrid as the
13 preferred site design.

14 As part of the design process, it was
15 necessary to add an enclosure, as Arabia leopards
16 are excellent climbers and use trees to escape
17 predators and scan their hunting territory. These
18 are existing precedents for such enclosures at the
19 National Zoo, that include the Great Flight Aviary
20 masted tensile structure with mesh and arches, the
21 Gibbon Enclosure with masted tensile mesh
22 structure, and the Orangutan O-Line exhibit.

1 The applicant studied options for the mesh
2 enclosure. The first option is an arched mesh,
3 shown here. An arched mesh would have no supports
4 within the habitat and allow for more flexibility
5 when changing the habitat later. I will note that
6 the applicant also is studying the exact form of
7 the arch, which may include something with a more
8 vertical or peaked form. These details will be
9 further developed for the next submission.

10 The applicant also studied a mast tensile
11 mesh structure for the habitat. This option wasn't
12 preferred due to the multi-planar nature of the
13 system and two separate forms, which cull undue
14 attention in the setting. This type of structure
15 would also create visual clutter adjacent to Olmsted
16 Walk and would limit the flexibility to modify the
17 exhibit elements in the future.

18 The proposed concept combines the oasis
19 and wadi hybrid habitat with a gabled sweep care
20 building and an arched mesh enclosure to meet the
21 goals for the habitat. As such, staff recommends
22 the Commission support the applicant's preferred

1 concept design, referred to as the oasis-wadi hybrid
2 concept, and, in particular, the arched clear span
3 form of the screen enclosure which will help
4 minimize its overall visibility; the simple low
5 massing for the leopard building, including the use
6 of curvilinear forms to integrate the building into
7 the landscape and reflect the architectural
8 heritage of the Arabian Peninsula; integrating the
9 use of stone and other natural materials that are
10 found throughout the zoo, which provide a sense of
11 continuity across the campus; providing areas for
12 landscaping and screening along Olmsted Walk; and
13 a circulation approach that avoids conflicts with
14 adjacent exhibits.

15 The applicant has included several
16 rendered views of the concept. The first view is
17 from the Olmsted Walk, where you can see some of
18 the recognizable features, including the tree
19 canopy and pavers, as you approach the habitat.

20 This view shows the west entry into the
21 habitat and the proposed arched mesh. The tree
22 canopy of the Olmsted Walk opens up here at the east

1 entry so visitors can see into the habitat, with
2 the upturned building roof drawing them into the
3 viewing area.

4 Staff recommends the applicant continue
5 to refine the preferred design to extend the
6 curvilinear language to other portions of the
7 building and simplify or lower the building roof
8 line where feasible, and explore alternative
9 profiles, such as thinner or rounded, for the main
10 structural members of the mesh enclosure to reduce
11 visual impacts.

12 From this view into the east entry you can
13 see the bridge that allows the animals to cross from
14 one side of the habitat to the other and over
15 visitors. This final rendered view shows the
16 eastern corner of the animal care facility, with
17 the service entrance on the left-hand side.

18 Staff recommends the Commission request
19 the applicant provide, as part of the next
20 submission, a landscape plan and further details
21 on the screening approach along the Olmsted Walk,
22 proposed signage and wayfinding that will help

1 identify the exhibit and guide visitors, and updated
2 site and building plans, along with renderings, that
3 are aligned with the preferred concept.

4 This concludes the presentation. The
5 recommendations have been integrated throughout the
6 presentation and are included here for your
7 reference. Overall, staff finds the proposed
8 concept design is consistent with the policies set
9 forth in the federal elements of the Comprehensive
10 Plan and meets the stated project goals. We look
11 forward to working with the applicant to refine the
12 application so this important project can be
13 implemented in a timely manner.

14 At this time, Brandie Smith, the National
15 Zoo and Conversation Biology Institute Director,
16 would like to say a few words about the project.

17 And the design team is here to help answer any
18 questions the Commission may have. Thank you.

19 CHAIR SCHARF: Thanks a lot, Laura.

20 Brandie, are you with us online or in
21 person? Online.

22 MS. SMITH: I'm here online. So, thank

1 you, Ms. Shipman, for your presentation. And,
2 thank you, Chairman Scharf and members of the
3 Commission.

4 On behalf of the Smithsonian National Zoo
5 and Conversation Biology Institute, we are pleased
6 to present the Construct Arabian Leopard Habitat
7 Project to the Commission. This project will
8 transform an empty animal habitat into a dynamic
9 public exhibit for the critically-endangered
10 Arabian leopard.

11 The Smithsonian's National Zoo is a global
12 leader in saving species from extinction. Our
13 scientists and animal care experts work across six
14 continents to protect wildlife, restore habitats,
15 and translate science into real-world conservation
16 action.

17 With fewer than an estimated 120
18 individuals remaining on the planet, the Arabian
19 leopard faces an extremely high risk of extinction.

20 And this exhibit is part of a broader conservation
21 and research program to help save one of the world's
22 most threatened big cats. Our expertise is

1 urgently needed.

2 As the nation's zoo, visitors travel from
3 across the region, the United States, and the world
4 to see animals, experience appreciation and awe,
5 and leave with a deeper understanding of the
6 challenges these species face. Through this
7 exhibit and conversation program, the public will
8 gain insight into the threats driving Arabian
9 leopard toward extinction and the role science plays
10 in preventing it.

11 We look forward to continuing design
12 develop on this project in coordination with NCPC
13 staff and through Section 106 consultation process.

14 This project as a compressed schedule, with
15 construction completion anticipated by late fall,
16 early winter of 2028, to allow time for the leopards
17 to adjust to their habitat prior to the public
18 opening. We will return to the Commission multiple
19 times throughout the year as we work collaboratively
20 on design development.

21 I'm joined today by the project team, with
22 design professionals from the Smith Group and the

1 Smithsonian's Office of Planning, Design, and
2 Construction, to address your comments and
3 questions. Thank you.

4 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Brandie. Do
5 any Commissioners have any questions?

6 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Mr. Chairman?

7 CHAIR SCHARF: Oh, yes, sir.

8 COMMISSIONER DIXON: I can't wait for this
9 to happen. And I have several reasons as well.

10 (Laughter.)

11 COMMISSIONER DIXON: First of all, you
12 know, we've had some breakouts on occasion, but I
13 feel this is being planned well enough that that
14 will not happen.

15 CHAIR SCHARF: If it does happen, the
16 pandas are in real danger. They just sit around
17 all day.

18 (Laughter.)

19 CHAIR SCHARF: These leopards, we're
20 building a whole structure to keep them in; it's
21 kind of crazy.

22 COMMISSIONER DIXON: So I'm going to make

1 a motion, I'll jump ahead, so we can vote and discuss
2 on it, on this issue. But I'd like to move that
3 we adopt this presentation.

4 CHAIR SCHARF: Okay. Is there a second
5 to Commissioner Dixon's motion?

6 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: I'll second.

7 CHAIR SCHARF: All right. Hearing a
8 motion and a second, let's proceed to discussion.

9 Commissioner Dixon, would you like to lead
10 things off, given your excitement of the project?

11 COMMISSIONER DIXON: I just -- I can't --
12 I just can't wait. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, sir.

14 Commissioner Cash?

15 COMMISSIONER CASH: Well, I just want to
16 say, I hope that we'll, obviously, hear a little
17 bit more about the mesh, because I'm not a big fan
18 of cats, but I've seen enough screen doors to know
19 that we need to make sure we have the right materials
20 --

21 (Laughter.)

22 COMMISSIONER CASH: -- not just the right

1 colors to save the pandas. So, thanks. I think
2 is actually a good project. I appreciate the
3 massing studies and everything else going into this,
4 especially since it's moving so quickly. I think
5 it gives us the information we need. So, thanks.

6 CHAIR SCHARF: Hopefully we'll have more
7 details on the mesh when they come back for prelim.

8 (Laughter.)

9 CHAIR SCHARF: But thank you, Commissioner.
10 Commissioner Henderson?

11 COMMISSIONER HENDERSON: I associate
12 myself with those remarks.

13 (Laughter.)

14 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
15 Commissioner McGowan?

16 COMMISSIONER MCGOWAN: I don't have any
17 additional comments or questions, but thank you so
18 much for the presentation. It was awesome.

19 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
20 Commissioner Cozart?

21 COMMISSIONER COZART: I appreciate the
22 staff's work on this project and the presentation.

1 No additional questions.

2 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

3 Commissioner Schaefer?

4 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: This is exciting.

5 Just the whole concept. And I look forward to the
6 next stage. Thank you.

7 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you. Commissioner
8 Stidham?

9 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: Thank you. I
10 think you've been really thoughtful about the
11 design. The hybrid approach definitely is the
12 right approach, looking at it in terms of its ability
13 to both have a great space for the leopard, but also
14 how it fits into the zoo as it exists now. So, a
15 really nice concept design. Look forward to seeing
16 it through.

17 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
18 Commissioner Argo?

19 COMMISSIONER ARGO: Yes. I echo your
20 comments. And this is thoughtful, this is
21 exciting. I've got nine grandchildren, which has
22 nothing to do with this, except, you know, we go

1 there all the time, because they all come at
2 different times.

3 And, you know, it's a challenge, and it
4 is so exciting to see something like this come --
5 we haven't seen anything really dramatic like this
6 come to the zoo that has changed the whole landscape
7 of the zoo for a long time. So, yay. Thank you.

8 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
9 Commissioner Blair? Or sorry, excuse me, Vice
10 Chairman Levenbach? I'm looking right at you.

11 VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Walking underneath
12 Arabian leopards is an experience you get in the
13 wild. And if you do it, you don't typically get
14 a second, I'm guessing.

15 (Laughter.)

16 VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: So I'm looking
17 forward to enjoying this when it gets built.

18 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Mr. Vice
19 Chairman. Commissioner Blair?

20 COMMISSIONER BLAIR: I will speak on
21 behalf of the three Blair children that were very
22 excited about this project and look forward to it.

1 (Laughter.)

2 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

3 Administrator Forst?

4 COMMISSIONER FORST: I feel compelled to
5 bring some balance to the conversation.

6 (Laughter.)

7 COMMISSIONER BLAIR: And I'm very
8 disappointed we don't have an Arabia leopard here.

9 But other than that, thank you very much.

10 (Laughter.)

22 I think it's incredibly exciting. I think

1 the location is perfect. That bison exhibit, or
2 the previous bison exhibit, what's now going to be
3 the leopard exhibit, you enter off Connecticut and
4 it's right there. I think it has the potential to
5 draw traffic away from the pandas, which is -- the
6 pandas, it's always overcrowded there. And the
7 pandas don't do much.

8 I think the leopard are going to be great.
9 And I love the design principles that we've seen
10 so far. So I think I share the excitement of the
11 rest of the Commission. I'm really excited to see
12 how this project develops; hopefully, quickly in
13 the next few months. And I'm excited to have you
14 all back again soon.

15 Thanks, as always, to our Commission staff
16 for their careful review, and to everybody involved
17 in this exciting project. I think it's going to
18 be really incredible.

19 With that, we have a motion on the floor.
20 Madam Secretary, can you confirm the motion and
21 second, and proceed to a roll call?

22 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes. The motion was

1 made by Commissioner Dixon and seconded by
2 Commissioner Schaefer. Commissioner Cozart?

3 COMMISSIONER COZART: Yes.

4 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Schaefer?

5 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: Yes.

6 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

7 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: Yes.

8 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?

9 COMMISSIONER ARGO: Yes.

10 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach?

11 VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Yes.

12 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Chairman Scharf?

13 CHAIR SCHARF: Yes.

14 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Blair?

15 COMMISSIONER BLAIR: Yes.

16 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Administrator Forst?

17 COMMISSIONER FORST: Yes.

18 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

19 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

20 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

21 COMMISSIONER CASH: Yes.

22 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Henderson?

1 COMMISSIONER HENDERSON: Yes.

2 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner McGowan?

3 COMMISSIONER MCGOWAN: Yes.

4 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Thank you. The motion
5 carries unanimously.

6 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you very much, Madam
7 Secretary. We're now moving on to Agenda Item 7A,
8 which is an informational presentation on the East
9 Wing Modernization Project.

10 Quick logistical item. My impression was
11 that Commissioner Cash was going to be leaving us
12 and that Commissioner Mendelson was going to be
13 taking his place virtually. Is he with us online
14 right now?

15 MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes.

16 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: Yes, I am.

17 CHAIR SCHARF: Okay, perfect. Thank you,
18 sir. With that, do you want to proceed?

19 INFORMATION PRESENTATION

20 EAST WING MODERNIZATION PROJECT

21 MR. FLIS: Hello. Thank you. Good
22 afternoon, members of the Commission. As was

1 mentioned, this is an informational presentation
2 and overview of the proposed White House East Wing
3 Modernization Project.

4 Before I turn it over to the applicant team
5 I'm just going to provide you a brief background.

6 The purpose of the project is to establish a
7 permanent secure event space within the White House
8 grounds that provides increased capacity for
9 official state functions.

10 I think everybody is familiar with the
11 location of the White House, but here on the screen
12 is a map view showing President's Park and the
13 surrounding context. The National Mall is located
14 here at the bottom of the screen. Pennsylvania
15 Avenue is located to the north of the White House.

16 And E Street is located to the south, just north
17 of the Ellipse. The project is proposed to be
18 located between the Executive Mansion and the
19 Treasury Building.

20 In addition to the Executive Residence,
21 the vicinity of President's Park obviously also
22 includes a number of significant buildings,

1 including the Eisenhower Executive Office Building,
2 which is to the west, shown on the image on the left,
3 and the main Treasury Building, which is located
4 to the east. Mixed used development frames the
5 entire area, as it is located within the central
6 core of Washington, D.C.

7 The project is located on federal land
8 within the District of Columbia. The National
9 Capital Planning Act requires Commission approval
10 for all federal buildings and open space around such
11 buildings within the District.

12 As you know, NCPC has reviewed several
13 other projects at the White House. Most recently,
14 the White House fence in 2016 and 2017, and the
15 tennis pavilion in 2019.

16 In terms of the review of projects, NCPC
17 uses guidance from the federal elements of the
18 Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital,
19 including policies related to urban design, parks,
20 and open space, as well as visitor experience, among
21 others. As you're aware, the Commission takes a
22 holistic approach when applying the Comprehensive

1 Plan policies in the context of each project's needs
2 and objectives.

3 One of the primary areas of interest for
4 the review of this project is how the public will
5 see and experience the Modernization Project from
6 the surrounding public spaces. Most notably, from
7 Pennsylvania Avenue to the North, as shown here on
8 this image, or from E Street to the south, as shown
9 here. These are really the only publicly
10 accessible streets in the vicinity, as others are
11 located within a secure perimeter.

12 The public experience extends to several
13 aspects of the proposed project, which will be
14 helpful to understand as the design advances,
15 including how the pedestrian level-views from the
16 north and the south may or may not change from
17 current conditions; how the connector or colonnade
18 between the Executive Mansion and the new East Wing
19 Modernization Project will be designed; how the
20 landscape will be designed, restored, or improved;
21 and how perimeter security and the associated
22 infrastructure might be beautified for the public

1 and guests to the White House and grounds.

2 As the design proceeds for review, NCPD
3 staff will work with the applicant to understand
4 these components, as well as any other comments
5 raised by the Commission today.

6 And so, with that, I am going to now turn
7 it over to Josh Fisher with the White House, who
8 will begin their presentation. Thank you.

9 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you.

10 MR. FISHER: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman
11 and Commission staff. My name is Josh Fisher. I'm
12 the Director of Management and Administration for
13 the White House. We appreciate y'all allowing us
14 the opportunity to discuss the East Wing
15 Modernization Project and the reason we believe it
16 to be so vitally important.

17 Every day, people from across the country
18 and around the globe visit the White House and
19 surrounding grounds. They look to it as a
20 representation of the values that we, as Americans,
21 stand for. It is our responsibility to ensure that
22 the guests, those given the opportunity to come

1 inside the fence and those viewing from Lafayette
2 Park or the Ellipse, experience the pride and the
3 powerful symbol of American democracy, leadership,
4 and history.

5 While we are only discussing the ballroom
6 today, our efforts extend beyond the 18 acres so
7 that every school group, family trip, marriage
8 proposal, or birthday photo allow people to enjoy
9 the beautiful pride of our nation's capital and the
10 White House complex.

11 As you all know, U.S. presidents have been
12 renovating, expanding, and modernizing the White
13 House to meet the needs of the present day, including
14 terraces built in the 1800s, the Truman Balcony in
15 1948, the original East Wing built in 1902 and
16 rebuilt in 1942, as well as numerous other projects.

17 When President Trump decided to build a
18 grand ballroom and modernize other aspects of the
19 East Wing, we began researching. After careful
20 study and consultation with engineers, architects,
21 historians, and other experts, we determined that
22 modifying or renovating the colonnade in the

1 existing East Wing was not feasible for many
2 reasons. We found significant deficiencies and
3 overall poor structural design and construction.

4 The colonnade was structurally unstable, the roof
5 systems had exceeded their service life, and the
6 underpinnings were not sufficient to support the
7 necessary upgrades.

8 In the East Wing, there was chronic water
9 intrusion, accelerated deterioration, and mold
10 contamination. The electrical infrastructure was
11 obsolete, deemed undersized and noncompliant with
12 current code. Facilities were also noncompliant
13 with both ADA and Secret Service requirements.

14 Because of this and other factors, the cost
15 analysis proved that demolition and reconstruction
16 provided the lowest total cost ownership and most
17 effective long-term strategy. As part of this
18 overall process, we also took great steps to ensure
19 that we preserved extraordinary history features,
20 including parts of the original colonnade, the
21 Kennedy Gardens, and the movie theater, amongst
22 other items.

1 In choosing to carry out the East Wing
2 Modernization Project, we are achieving life
3 safety, ADA, environmental, and federal compliance.

4 We are enhancing mission-critical functionality
5 and eliminating systematic infrastructure
6 failures. We are making necessary security
7 enhancements and delivering resilient, adaptative
8 infrastructure aligned with future mission needs.

9 Importantly, the addition of the
10 modernized facility also significant reduces
11 negative impacts on the truly historic Executive
12 Mansion and South Lawn. The hosting of large
13 events, the size of which were not contemplated when
14 it was designed and reconstructed, drastically
15 increases the rate of deterioration on the East Room
16 and the State Dining Rooms, stressing the aging
17 structural components of that specific building.

18 In addition to consequential structural
19 and safety considerations, the East Wing
20 Modernization Project will significantly improve
21 the experience of the American people and foreign
22 dignitaries when they visit the White House.

1 As I'm sure you're aware, historically,
2 when visitors come to the White House for events,
3 that tour begins at passing through temporary
4 double-wide trailers to gain entry onto complex.

5 State dinners or events with world leaders would
6 take place in a tent on the South Lawn. These tents
7 affected more than just the world leaders; their
8 use destroyed large portions of the South Lawn,
9 degrading its appearance for overall visitors and
10 creating a reoccurring expense to replace and
11 cultivate new grass.

12 Beyond the ballroom, we have plans for
13 beautifying visitors' experience in the area, such
14 as Lafayette Park, and creating a superior, more
15 efficient visitor security screening center. In
16 the coming weeks and month, both NPS and Secret
17 Service will be submitting their plans on those two
18 topics.

19 Inside the White Houses, spaces such as
20 the ballroom, are just as important as the grounds
21 outside. The ballroom is where leaders will
22 gather, important decisions will be discussed, and

1 history will be made. It is a place that will bring
2 people together for diplomacy, celebration, and
3 unity. A beautiful, well-maintained, and
4 historically-designed ballroom will show respect
5 for these moments and emphasize the significance
6 of collaboration and tradition in our government.

7 Now I will turn it over to Shalom, the
8 architect on this project, to discuss the ballroom.

9 As you guys know, Shalom is no stranger to this
10 Commission. His work has been transformative
11 across the D.C. region. So, we're excited to see
12 what he can bring to the table.

13 MR. BARANES: So, good afternoon. And
14 thank you for the opportunity to appear before the
15 Commission. Today I'll provide a very high-level
16 overview of the White House East Wing project. A
17 more detailed and fully developed submission will
18 be presented in one of your subsequent hearings.

19 And I'd like to begin here with a brief
20 discussion of the evolution of the current design
21 approach. I joined the project team approximately
22 60 days ago, in early November, following the

1 schematic design work that had been undertaken by
2 McCrery Architects.

3 That earlier phase, which spanned most of
4 2025, involved a fairly comprehensive evaluation
5 of programmatic needs and design alternatives,
6 including multiple massing configurations, and, of
7 course, a whole series of elevational studies.

8 Following the transition to my firm, we
9 continue to evaluate various sizes and
10 configurations for the project. Today, I'd like
11 to report that the ultimate decision in late
12 November was not to continue exploring options for
13 increasing the size of the project; instead, the
14 decision was made to advance one of the earlier
15 schemes that had been developed prior to our joining
16 the team.

17 That scheme is calibrated to respect key
18 contextual relationships. The addition's cornice
19 aligns and does not exceed with the cornice height
20 of the White House. And the building mass is set
21 back approximately ten-and-a-half feet from the
22 White House's primary north facade on Pennsylvania

1 Avenue. These measures, I think, are essential to
2 maintaining the visual primacy of the White House.

3 The program includes a ballroom of
4 approximately 22,000 square feet. It's designed
5 to accommodate approximately a thousand seated
6 guests at a formal dinner. The total area of the
7 two aboveground visible East Wing floors, that's
8 two floors, including the colonnade and the ballroom
9 structure, is just slightly over 89,000 square feet.

10 Below the ballroom, and included in the 89,000
11 square feet, the project incorporates a series of
12 functions, which I'll show you on the boards shortly
13 here.

14 One could generously describe the current
15 functioning of the White House support areas, such
16 as loading, waste handling, general deliveries,
17 food service, as being quite labyrinthian in
18 character. And I think that's a kind description.

19 These conditions reflect incremental adaptations
20 over time, and they place ongoing operational stress
21 on the historic structure.

22 The proposed East Wing Modernization seeks

1 to rationalize these functions in a manner that will
2 relieve the stress by increase connectivity,
3 operational efficiency, and by enhancing overall
4 security. The changes will allow the White House
5 to be experienced and to age, I think, at a much
6 more graceful way over time.

7 In advancing this proposal, we have aimed
8 to land in a thoughtful middle ground by adapting,
9 as I mentioned earlier, one of the earlier 2025
10 designs that meets the thousand-seat requirement
11 for the ballroom. And also, as I mentioned earlier,
12 further consideration of enlarging the size was
13 abandoned in late November.

14 Our primary focus has been on refining the
15 exterior facades through the re-proportioning of
16 windows, masonry detailing, revisiting the exterior
17 terraces, and further developing the interior
18 spaces, of course.

19 This scheme does require a two-story
20 colonnade connecting the East Wing -- I'm sorry,
21 connecting the East Room in the White House to the
22 new ballroom. We believe it's appropriate to

1 evaluate this condition within the context of the
2 broader White House campus.

3 The White House is, therefore, considering
4 the idea of a modest one-story addition to the West
5 Wing colonnade, which would serve to restore a sense
6 of symmetry around the original central pavilion.

7 It will be considered as part of a future overall
8 planning framework which will be presented at a
9 future hearing here.

10 So, with this context, I'll now just walk
11 you through, briefly, some of the boards that we
12 have here. So, here, of course, you have
13 Pennsylvania Avenue to the top here. Thank you.

14 You have Pennsylvania Avenue here; it's
15 at the upper part of the board. So the White House
16 complex. And, of course, the colonnades with the
17 (audio interference). There will be two priority
18 access points to the ballroom. And we are talking
19 about a large crowd here of a thousand people. One
20 of them will be through the White House, through
21 the colonnade, to a foyer that will serve the
22 ballroom. And then the other one will be one level

1 down.

2 The grade drops as we come around this way.

3 And there will be an entrance through a portico
4 here into a foyer with a grand stair that will take
5 you up one level to the ballroom, and essentially
6 meet where the other guests will be coming from the
7 other direction.

8 The new structure here has a series of
9 terraces on three sides of the building. On the
10 south side of the colonnade we have a terrace that's
11 about 12-feet wide with a stair that leads down to
12 the lawn panels. And then that terrace continues
13 around to the west side of the ballroom, along here.

14 And, actually, that's a very important life safety
15 egress point for the whole project.

16 And that leads down to a stair here, which
17 also lands at the lower level grade. Halfway down
18 that stair you can make a left and access a terrace,
19 which is underneath this colonnade roof. And that
20 also has a stair leading down to the lawn.

21 We will show you much more detailed
22 drawings next time with viewsheds, but, for today,

1 I'd just like to point out that there is a very dense
2 cluster of trees here, which will remain, which
3 really affects your view from the south, the public
4 view from the south looking at this, just as there
5 is a dense cluster of trees that protects the view
6 of the West Wing. And we also have the same
7 condition on the north side, where we have a dense
8 cluster of both evergreen and deciduous trees, which
9 will really frame the view of the central pavilion
10 of the White House.

11 These are very schematic drawings of the
12 two primary levels. On your right here is the
13 ballroom level, which is the upper level. And on
14 the left is the level below the ballroom.

15 So, well, let's start at the upper level
16 here. So if you're entering the ballroom from the
17 White House, the East Room is right here. You'll
18 come across the colonnade, adjacent to the stairs
19 here, enter this foyer area, and then make your way
20 into the ballroom, which has windows on three sides,
21 facing east, west, and south.

22 If you're entering from the other side,

1 as many of the guests will be entering from the other
2 side, you will come up a few stairs here through
3 a portico, and that would give you access -- you'll
4 be coming up here actually in a lower level -- that
5 will give you access to this hall here, the foyer,
6 and then up a grand stair which would land you right
7 in the same area here. And, again, giving you
8 access to the ballroom.

9 On the lower level, the other uses that
10 we have are this large space, which is devoted to
11 food service. That's basically a commercial
12 kitchen. And it will not only service the ballroom,
13 but also service events inside the White House
14 itself.

15 Opposite that, we have an office suite for
16 the First Lady. And then, on the lower level of
17 the colonnade itself, we are rebuilding the movie
18 theater that had been there.

19 These are north and south elevations of
20 the White House complex. We removed all three
21 trees. No landscaping at all is shown; just wanted
22 you to see the building very clearly. And I think

1 the most important thing here, perhaps, is what I
2 mentioned earlier, which is the alignment of the
3 cornice of the ballroom directly aligns with the
4 cornice and the balustrade of the White House. The
5 heights will match exactly.

6 Here you see the upper level of the East
7 Colonnade. And I did mention the potential for a
8 future addition, a one-story addition, to the West
9 Wing. And that would occur right here. And you
10 can see that the reason to think about that is so
11 that we would reinstate the symmetry around the
12 central pavilion of the White House. We have not
13 looked at that at all yet, but hope to do so in the
14 future.

15 So, here is the view from the south.
16 Again, you have the rear elevation of the White House
17 itself. We have the ballroom with the portico.
18 The terrace at the half-level. And then, of course,
19 here the West Wing, two-part with a colonnade.

20 These are larger elevations so you can
21 start to understand the character of the building.

22 So, what we have at the top here is the east

1 elevation of the ballroom, which is directly across
2 from the Treasury. This portico sits pretty much
3 directly across from a portico that abuts the
4 Treasury.

5 The floor of the ballroom is at this upper
6 level, right through here. And the eight windows
7 that you see here are basically centered on the
8 ballroom. On the opposite side we have the same
9 condition, with the eight windows there centered
10 on the ballroom.

11 This is the west elevation. And on the
12 lower level here you're seeing windows that face
13 into -- they serve the First Lady's office suite.

14 We intend to develop all of this with a
15 combination of stone and precast. It will all be
16 painted white to match the White House. A very
17 similar finish as you see on the White House. And,
18 of course, you know, the windows and all of the
19 masonry details are things we are working on right
20 now.

21 And then, finally, I just have one more
22 board. And this is just the north elevation, which

1 you saw a minute ago. But here we've added in the
2 street trees, which are shown as a darker green.

3 And then we've put in transparent outlines of the
4 larger trees, which are behind the street trees
5 inside the fence line. So the trees pretty much
6 match the height of the proposed ballroom. So
7 you'll start to get a sense, when I show you at your
8 next hearing some photographs, the extent to which
9 these will frame the view of the central pavilion.

10 So, that's all I have. And happy to open
11 it up to questions if you like.

12 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you very much for
13 that presentation and for showing us this diagrams
14 and images. I'll open it up to the Commission now
15 for questions and clarifications.

16 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: Mr. Chairman,
17 I'll have some questions. This is Commissioner
18 Mendelson.

19 CHAIR SCHARF: Please proceed,
20 Commissioner.

21 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: Oh, thank you.
22 I hope you can all hear me. I do want to just first

1 take a moment to thank my designee, Evan Cash, who
2 comes to all the meetings. And I just want to thank
3 him publicly. And I also want to thank those who
4 gave the presentation.

5 I do have a number of questions. The first
6 is, how is this proposal consistent with the
7 Comprehensive Plan's urban design requirements,
8 which include, I think it's B.1.4 in the Urban Design
9 Element, visually reinforce the permanents of the
10 Capitol Building, White House, and other
11 nationally-significant resources by protecting the
12 visual frame around them; and B.5.10, visually
13 reinforce the special importance of the White House
14 and its grounds by protecting the existing spatial
15 relationship of the White House and the mass and
16 scale of adjacent buildings?

17 So my question pertains to how this
18 proposal is consistent with those comments of the
19 Comprehensive Plan.

20 MR. BARANES: Thank you for those
21 questions, Mr. Mendelson. We are being very, very
22 careful, first of all, to maintain, I think, a fairly

1 sufficient distance from the central pavilion of
2 the White House. And by proposing that the
3 colonnades be developed in a matching way on both
4 sides of the central pavilion of the White House,
5 I think we will actually be in concurrence with the
6 paragraph that you just cited.

7 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: All right.

8 That probably will come up again at future
9 presentations.

10 Can the size, footprint, or location of
11 the ballroom, the location of the ballroom on the
12 site, be changed at this point?

13 MR. BARANES: I mean, certainly, anything
14 is possible. It all depends on schedule and money.
15 But this particular location has been studied
16 pretty carefully by the previous architect, as well
17 as myself. And it's been determined that this is
18 the best location in terms of getting access to it
19 from the East Room of the White House.

20 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: But part of my
21 question was the size or footprint. So, has
22 construction work on the ballroom foundation

1 already begun?

2 MR. BARANES: There's been excavation
3 work, there is some foundation work, but that's
4 really not the limiting issue in terms of whether
5 things can be changed or not.

6 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: Okay. So, as
7 this gets further refined, the footprint could
8 conceivably be reduced a little bit, the work on
9 the foundation, so far as not that significant?

10 MR. BARANES: Well, as I said, the
11 footprint has been studied fairly extensively
12 already, and many different massing options were
13 studied before we even came onboard. So, at this
14 point, we've continued working with that, with the
15 product of all those studies, and we are primarily
16 refining the scheme.

17 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: So, I appreciate
18 that the cornice line will not be higher than the
19 historic structure, but is it possible that the
20 height of the ballroom, which of course determines
21 the cornice line, that that could be reduced
22 somewhat? Because it still seems to me that it's

1 overwhelming the existing building.

2 MR. BARANES: You know, it's interesting.

3 I mean, it is the same height. I think you're
4 familiar with the addition that we built to the
5 Wilson Building that you're in?

6 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: Yes.

7 MR. BARANES: So, you know, I mean, I bring
8 it up because this size -- this question of size
9 and relationship of an addition to an historic
10 building comes up with almost every project I've
11 ever worked on over the last 40 years. And we're
12 essentially doing the same thing here we did at the
13 Wilson Building.

14 We're building an addition. Although at
15 the Wilson Building it really contrasts. It's a
16 very modern addition; it contrasts very strongly
17 to the neoclassical building. But, even there, we
18 matched the height. You know, we did match the
19 height of the existing building. And I think it
20 works quite well. And we've done that on many, many
21 other structures.

22 You know, we're just finishing up an

1 addition to the Cannon Building where we increased
2 the height by one story. That was reviewed pretty
3 extensively. And, you know, you could look at it.

4 I mean, I think that, too, works really well, you
5 know, with the original historic structure, despite
6 the additional height.

7 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: But my sense of
8 it is that there are two levels here. One is, I'm
9 going to say the lower level, and then there is the
10 ballroom level. And I can't remember what the
11 height. What is the height for the ballroom level?

12 MR. BARANES: Well, if you measure it off
13 the front driveway, where the portico is of the White
14 House, we're approximately 51 feet above that
15 elevation.

16 (Simultaneous speaking.)

17 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: That's roughly
18 the level of the ballroom?

19 (Simultaneously speaking.)

20 MR. BARANES: That's the roof of the
21 ballroom. That's the height -- I mean, that's the
22 height of the balustrade around our ballroom

1 structure. I'm sorry, is that what you're asking?

2 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: No. I think I'm
3 not asking it well. The ballroom is going to be
4 like a 20-foot ceiling or 40-foot ceiling?

5 MR. BARANES: It's about 38 to 40. Yes.

6 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: And could that
7 be reduced?

8 MR. BARANES: It's possible. Not
9 impossible.

10 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: I had one other
11 question, which I think is probably for Mr. Fisher
12 and not you. And that is, why didn't the project
13 come to us a whole instead of after the demolition?

14 MR. FISHER: Thank you for that question.

15 Yeah, we've been -- we've begun work on this
16 project. There are two phases to this project.
17 I think that you've alluded to it with Shalom here.

18 There are some things regarding this project that
19 are, frankly, of Top Secret nature that we are
20 currently working on. That does not preclude us
21 from changing the above-grade structure, but that
22 work needed to be considered when doing this

1 project, which was not part of the NCPC process.

2 CHAIR SCHARF: And let me note just for
3 the record, if it's okay with you, Commissioner,
4 it's long been the view of NCPC's Counsel's Office
5 that the National Capital Planning Act does not give
6 us authority to review demolition or site
7 preparation work. So, while many projects do come
8 before us at that stage, that's not a requirement
9 of the National Capital Planning Act, and review
10 of demolition is not something that we have the
11 authority to do as a Commission.

12 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: I appreciate
13 that. And I've actually read that legal opinion.
14 And I'm not arguing with it. It's just that I don't
15 know the last time that a project has been presented
16 before NCPC or Zoning Commission or any of the
17 planning agencies where it wasn't presented as a
18 whole: this is what we're going to do and we will
19 proceed with the demolition as we move forward.
20 As opposed to here, where the demolition occurred
21 first.

22 I don't have any other --

1 CHAIR SCHARF: The Air and Space Museum
2 addition is one example of that, where they
3 proceeded with demolition of the old addition, I
4 believe, prior to presenting plans for the new
5 addition to this Commission. I think that's the
6 nearest historical analogy. I could be wrong.

7 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: I just want to
8 conclude my -- I have a lot of respect for Shalom
9 Baranes. He's done a lot of great projects in the
10 city over the decades and I just want to acknowledge
11 that. Thank you.

12 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

13 Do any other Commissioners have questions
14 for the presentation team? Yes, Commissioner
15 Dixon.

16 COMMISSIONER DIXON: One. The stairway,
17 that's going to be handicapped accessible also, I'm
18 assuming? You had mentioned stairways on the
19 building, but they were -- they're going to be
20 handicapped accessible, obviously?

21 MR. BARANES: The primary handicapped
22 access into the ballroom will be through the front

1 door of the White House.

2 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Oh. So the other
3 entrances will not accommodate --

4 MR. BARANES: The other stairways are
5 there for egress purposes, for fire code purposes.

6 And they are stairways, so a wheelchair would have
7 to really go in the other direction.

8 COMMISSIONER DIXON: But I think that may
9 be a concern, I would think. I mean, we want
10 handicapped people to be able to egress, too.

11 MR. BARANES: Oh, absolutely. No, no,
12 believe me, we are looking very closely at all of
13 the codes.

14 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Secondly, there was
15 -- there hasn't been any discussion of the new
16 security process that we used to go through, that
17 we have gone through, with the labyrinth of
18 different corridors to get cleared to get into the
19 White House. How is that going to be addressed in
20 this process?

21 MR. BARANES: I'm sure they'd let you in
22 at any time, but --

1 COMMISSIONER DIXON: No, I doubt that.

2 (Laughter.)

3 COMMISSIONER DIXON: I haven't been back
4 for a while.

5 MR. FISHER: Thank you for the question,
6 sir. We are currently looking at a new visitors
7 entry facility that would be part of this project.

8 Again, as we look at this, it's not just the East
9 Wing Modernization, it's not the ballroom; we are
10 looking at a totality experience for the White House
11 complex.

12 As I mentioned earlier, historically, when
13 you come to the White House you go through
14 double-wide trailers, tents, out in the cold. We
15 don't think that that's befitting of what the White
16 House should be or could be, quite frankly. So
17 those plans are under review. We're trying to put
18 them together, make sure that we've got our i's
19 dotted and our t's crossed before we bring before
20 this Commission so that you guys can hopefully see
21 and enjoy what we've produced.

22 COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yeah, I think that

1 it's a sensitive area to even put it -- make it
2 public, how this process may work. But one of the
3 detractions from the historical structures was the
4 complicated clearance process and the hodgepodge,
5 if you will. So I'm assuming you will present to
6 us how that will be handled in the future --

7 MR. FISHER: Yes, sir.

8 COMMISSIONER DIXON: -- so we can look at
9 that? Good. And I do hope we do something with
10 the handicapped issue. Thank you.

11 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you. Do any other
12 Commissioners have questions for the project team?
13 Yes, Commissioner --

14 COMMISSIONER HENDERSON: Clarification
15 from something that was presented. There was talk
16 of adding, potentially, an additional level on the
17 West Wing side of the building. Is that to the West
18 Wing structure itself or just to the walkway or what
19 --

20 MR. BARANES: It would be just to the
21 colonnade.

22 COMMISSIONER HENDERSON: Okay.

1 CHAIR SCHARF: Any other questions before
2 we proceed to deliberations?

3 Hearing none, I'd like to thank, as always,
4 our Staff and the presentation team here. Vice
5 Chairman Levenbach, would you like to kick things
6 off?

7 VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: I think what
8 strikes me about is this, you know, some people here,
9 some of the Commissioners, have participated in
10 White House events more than I have, but I'm struck
11 at how much this expands the utility of the compound.

12 I mean, I think about the Hanukkah party
13 I just went to you. You start the north end of
14 Lafayette Park and you walk through one set of
15 trailers and you walk through another set of
16 trailers, and there's a coat check. And then when
17 you get inside it's pretty crowded and there aren't
18 that many people there. And this is going to just
19 open up access to people at a much higher level.

20 I think that it's going to be enjoyed for
21 generations to come, so I'm really excited to see
22 how this project develops.

1 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Vice Chairman
2 Levenbach. Commissioner Blair?

3 COMMISSIONER BLAIR: I would just say I
4 think that, you know, it looks like it's going to
5 be very beautiful, but the utility, I think, for
6 those of us that spend a lot of time there, is fairly
7 obviously. Winston Churchill said to the House of
8 Commons, when they were going to rebuild it, that
9 we shape our buildings and they shape us thereafter.

10 The White House is a special place, but
11 people come there to gather and to work. I would
12 tell you that we've seen times where simply doing
13 something like getting the Congress together to have
14 a meal and break bread is not something that the
15 current structure of the White House really
16 accommodates in any way with the President of the
17 United States. That's a problem.

18 When foreign dignitaries visit, you know,
19 the President of the United States, of any party,
20 is invited all over the world and goes and gets to
21 see the best of whatever the country has to offer.

22 And I think the President's view would be that he

1 would -- he thinks the American people deserve that
2 same opportunity to have grand gatherings for
3 visitors to our country and show them what American
4 has to offer.

5 So I think it has a obvious utility. I
6 think it's very considered in its design. And I
7 look forward to seeing the progress of the project,
8 and appreciate your presentation and look forward
9 to working with you.

10 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
11 Administrator Forst?

12 COMMISSIONER FORST: Thanks so much,
13 Chairman. James read from my notes, so I --

14 (Laughter.)

15 COMMISSIONER FORST: Thanks.

16 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Administrator
17 Forst. Commissioner Dixon?

18 COMMISSIONER DIXON: I appreciate the
19 presentation and look forward, as this moves
20 forward, to more deliberation. Thank you, Mr.
21 Chairman.

22 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

1 Commissioner Mendelson?

2 COMMISSIONER MENDELSON: Yes. Sorry, I
3 was muted. Let me say that I think that elevation
4 we saw from Pennsylvania Avenue was not as
5 disturbing to me as the elevation from the Ellipse.

6 And as I said in my questions, I'm concerned about
7 this addition overwhelming the original historic
8 building.

9 I appreciate that the architect, Shalom
10 Baranes, has really good taste with regard to
11 dealing with historic structures, but I do think
12 that -- it sounds to me like the height could be
13 lowered without jeopardizing the footprint. I
14 don't think that the footprint -- that is, 89,000
15 square feet -- should be the goal in and of itself.

16 So maybe it can be and needs to be shrunk a little
17 bit more. Again, looking at the elevations from
18 the south, it's just so -- it's just so imbalanced.

19 The other observation I have is that it
20 is disturbing to me that we are looking at an
21 addition to this historic structure, but we're
22 looking at what appears to be an overall plan in

1 a very segmented approach. So is there going to
2 be some changes with the visitor center? Is there
3 going to be some changes with Lafayette Park? Is
4 there going to be some changes with the West Wing?
5 But rather than looking at this as a whole, we're
6 going to be looking at it piecemeal, and that's
7 concerning as well.

8 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
9 Commissioner Henderson?

10 COMMISSIONER HENDERSON: I would just
11 suggest, to those of us who don't work in that
12 complex every day, that it would be probably be
13 worthwhile and beneficial to our consideration to
14 take some opportunities to go and see the site, see
15 the facilities as they are, between now and future
16 considerations.

17 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
18 Commissioner McGowan?

19 COMMISSIONER MCGOWAN: I don't have any
20 additional comments or questions, but thank you all
21 so much for the presentation. It was very
22 informative.

1 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

2 Commissioner Cozart?

3 COMMISSIONER COZART: Yes. Thanks to the
4 staff for their work on this and for the
5 presentation. And I look forward to when it comes
6 before the Commission again.

7 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

8 Commissioner Schaefer?

9 COMMISSIONER SCHAEFER: So, again, my
10 thank you as well. This is -- it's exciting. It's
11 a great job overall with the architectural features.
12 And looking forward to see how this progresses,
13 since I echo the same comments as has come before
14 me, as well, because I think this is a great
15 opportunity for us to continue to expand upon the
16 importance of our entire nation. So, thank you.

17 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

18 Commissioner Stidham?

19 COMMISSIONER STIDHAM: Thank you. And
20 thank you for the overview. It is really helpful
21 to get a sense of the project.

22 And I should lead with that Secretary

1 Burgum, who I sit as a delegated position here, and
2 the Department of the Interior, supports the East
3 Wing Modernization without reservation. We
4 appreciate the designs that were shown here today
5 and we look forward to seeing more detail,
6 especially when it comes to the landscaping and
7 understanding how the temporary facilities will be
8 -- how the uses that currently happen in this
9 temporary facilities are taking shape in the new
10 facility, to really understand how that replacement
11 is taking place.

12 As well as understanding clearly, you
13 know, it's important in those views, you know,
14 anyone who is coming to visit who does not have the
15 opportunity to be inside the fence to be able to
16 understand and to view the White House. And so
17 understanding those views will be really helpful
18 when you come back, as well as the design choices
19 you make and the materiality. So we look forward
20 to much more detail and appreciate the overview.

21 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.
22 Commissioner Argo?

1 COMMISSIONER ARGO: Yeah. I want to
2 associate myself with my next door neighbor's
3 comments. And seeing, you know, how seeing how this
4 progresses. I have some concern about size and
5 scale in a number of ways, but we can talk more about
6 that, as I said, as the design and the work on this
7 progresses. Thank you.

8 CHAIR SCHARF: Thank you, Commissioner.

9 Speaking for myself, just a few things that
10 I'd say. First of all, Commissioners, if you want
11 to come over to lunch, you're welcome anytime. I'm
12 happy to show you around.

13 More seriously, though, I think every
14 project that comes before this Commission is
15 ultimately determined, in large part -- or is
16 shaped, in large part, by its function. And I think
17 it's worth emphasizing a point that Commissioner
18 Blair made, which is the vital nature of the function
19 that I believe this project is intended to advance.

20 It's been a distinct honor for me to get
21 to, frankly, travel around the world with the
22 President and visit foreign countries and be hosted

1 by the leaders of foreign countries. And I think
2 it's notable that when the President of the United
3 States of American flies to the United Kingdom he's
4 hosted at Windsor Castle. And when, next year, the
5 King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and North
6 Ireland comes to the United States, more likely than
7 not, he will be hosted in a tent on the South Lawn
8 with porta-potties.

9 That, to me, is not a good look for the
10 United States of America. And I think that, when
11 you think about the long history of planning for
12 a state ballroom on White House grounds, if you think
13 about the number of times this project has been
14 suggested historically, it speaks to that
15 programmatic need. This isn't a new idea.

16 I've been interested to see that even in
17 the press reports that have been -- or the press
18 articles that have been very, I'd say, agitated
19 about the way that this project has progressed,
20 there has been a recognition by previous occupants
21 of the White House from both parties, people who
22 have worked in the White House from both parties,

1 that there is a real programmatic need for a building
2 like this.

3 So I think what we're really talking about,
4 then, is a lot of the issues that Shalom in
5 particular was addressing in his presentation,
6 which is, given the programmatic need, given this
7 size that that programmatic need necessarily
8 requires for this project, how do we ensure that
9 this project accords with what we, as a Commission,
10 care about? How do we ensure that the viewsheds,
11 the way that the public will experience this
12 building, won't detract from the way that the public
13 experiences what I believe is one of the, really,
14 two or three most important buildings in Washington,
15 D.C., and in the region that we have jurisdiction
16 over, which is the White House.

17 I'd be interested to see more detailed
18 elevations, particular from the south, in light of
19 Commissioner Mendelson's comments, what this would
20 look like with the tree line, because I think that
21 the elevation that we see there, just based on my
22 knowledge of that the property looks like, that's

1 very stark and I don't think really represents how
2 the public would experience this building.

3 I think it's important that this is framed
4 between the White House and the Treasury Building,
5 which is a building of significant massing. And
6 I'd be interested to see an elevation that extends,
7 essentially, further to the left, or further to the
8 east, to encompass sort of the full viewing
9 experience from Pennsylvania Avenue.

10 And, as many Commissioners have said, I
11 just look forward to seeing more details in the weeks
12 and months ahead. And I'd like to thank, as always,
13 our staff for the collaboration, the work they're
14 already put in on this issue. I think they can be
15 a real resource to the project team, particularly
16 as you start thinking about the visitor experience,
17 visitor entrance, other aspects of the broader
18 modernization of the White House complex. In
19 particular, how the public interacts with it.

20 But, again, just speaking personally, I'm
21 really excited to see how this project develops.

22 And I'm excited to, hopefully, see more detailed

1 planning materials in the weeks and months ahead.

2 So, thank you.

3 Are there any other Commissioners that
4 have questions or comments before we adjourn for
5 the day?

6 (No response.)

7 CHAIR SCHARF: In that case, unless there
8 is anything else for us to address today, if there
9 is no other business, that concludes the open
10 session agenda for this meeting of the National
11 Capital Planning Commission. Our next regular
12 Commission meeting will be on Thursday, February
13 5th, at 1:00 p.m.

14 I believe the Commissioners are now going
15 to exit the chambers. If you can please hold your
16 seats while they do so, that would be a great help.

17 And thank you all for being here today.

18 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter
19 went off the record at 3:10 p.m.)

20

21

22

1 C E R T I F I C A T E

2 This is to certify that the foregoing transcript
3 was duly recorded and accurately transcribed under
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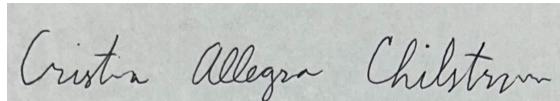
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cristina Allegra Chilstrom".

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Cristina Allegra Chilstrom

1	2016 93:14	5	abuts 109:3
1 22:9 25:18 26:4 30:13 59:9	2017 93:14	5 22:9 25:19 27:4 30:12 31:3	accelerated 97:9
1.8 59:12	2019 18:11 93:15	51 115:14	acceptable 20:13 30:11
106 31:22 73:22 82:13	2020 48:11	5G 43:4	access 42:19 67:21 68:1 104:18 105:18 107:3,5, 8 112:18 118:22 122:19
12-feet 105:11	2022 49:5 52:11 53:10 55:2	5th 133:13	accessible 72:4 75:15,18 76:1 94:10 118:17,20
120 81:17	2024 48:12 73:2	6	accommodate 21:20 30:2 71:22 102:5 119:3
17th 29:12	2025 16:15 49:7 101:4 103:9	60 100:22	accommodates 123:16
18 96:6	2028 82:16	6A 15:10	accomplish 57:15
1800s 96:14	22,000 102:4	6B 46:22	accomplishes 56:15
1889 71:7	25 52:7 53:13	6C 69:21	accords 131:9
1902 96:15	250 45:8	7	achieve 16:6 20:12
1904 50:10	3	7A 91:7	achieving 57:16 98:2
1942 96:16	3/4 72:15	8	acknowledge 118:10
1948 96:15	35 61:12	89,000 102:9,10 125:14	acre 72:16
1:00 133:13	38 116:5	A	acres 96:6
2	3:10 133:19	abandoned 103:13	Act 49:11 58:5 93:9 117:5,9
2 25:22 28:11 30:12 59:10	4	ability 86:12	action 48:16 53:10 58:7 81:16
2,200 71:10	4 25:22 29:16	above-entitled 133:18	activities 66:3,4
20-feet 54:17	40 48:19 114:11 116:5	above-grade 116:21	actual 63:3,5
20-foot 116:4	40-foot 116:4	aboveground 102:7	ADA 62:5 97:13 98:3
2011 48:8		absolutely 119:11	adaptations

102:19	82:17	48:11	animal 72:2 79:16 81:8,13
adaptative 98:7	Administration 48:10 95:12	ahead 45:7 84:1 132:12 133:1	animals 71:10 79:13 82:4
adapted 23:13 24:1	Administrator 38:19 39:8 46:9 65:10, 14 67:22 68:12 69:4	aimed 103:7	antenna 17:5,10 21:8,10 22:11 23:2,5 24:19 25:3,11,13 28:22 30:18 31:11,15, 18 32:1,12
adapting 103:8	88:3 90:16 124:11,16	aiming 34:10	antennas 19:22 21:18 25:11,14 30:14,17,20 32:15 43:4
add 43:18 44:1 47:19 67:2 76:15	adopt 84:3	Air 118:1	anticipated 82:15
added 31:17 110:1	adopted 51:4	aligned 26:20 80:3 98:8	anytime 129:11
adding 121:16	adoption 58:6	alignment 108:2	apologize 59:2 62:10
addition 23:1 30:14 53:5 58:9 64:14 72:8 73:11 74:9 92:20 98:9,18 104:4 108:8 114:4,9,14,16 115:1 118:2,3,5 125:7, 21	adult 71:17	aligns 101:19 108:3	appearance 29:8 53:1 55:10 99:9
addition's 101:18	advance 71:14 101:14 129:19	allowing 95:13	appears 125:22
additional 31:2,7,22 37:13 47:22 48:11 64:20 85:17 86:1 115:6 121:16 126:20	advances 94:14	alluded 116:17	applicable 34:19 35:7
additions 74:16	advancing 103:7	altered 24:10 30:5	applicant 29:4 30:19 56:8 71:2 73:21 74:21 75:3,8,10 76:11 77:1,6,10 78:15 79:4,19 80:11 92:4 95:3
address 39:3 83:2 133:8	adverse 51:8	altering 29:8	applicant's 77:22
addressed 70:22 73:12 119:19	aesthetic 39:7 49:15	alternates 48:7	application 17:6 21:10 80:12
addresses 31:7 41:2	affected 99:7	alternative 79:8	applies 58:3
addressing 131:5	affects 106:3	alternatives 29:5 30:20 56:8 101:5	applying 93:22
adjacency 29:3	afternoon 15:19 33:11,16 47:10 70:8 91:22 95:10 100:13	America 45:8 130:10	appreciates 34:3
adjacent 22:13 31:11,16 52:17 54:22 73:18 77:15 78:14 106:18 111:16	age 103:5	American 96:3 98:21 124:1,3 130:3	appreciation 82:4
adjourn 133:4	agencies 55:8 117:17	Americans 95:20	approach 17:6 21:9 24:5,8,22 30:1 42:11 78:13,19 79:21 86:11,12 93:22 100:21 126:1
adjust	agenda 15:10 46:22 69:21 91:7 133:10	amount 31:14 38:2	
	aging 98:16	analogy 118:6	
	agitated 130:18	analysis 25:18 48:7,12 97:15	
	agreement	analyzed 25:19	

approaches 21:14 32:11	28:21	118:18 121:5	105:5,13 106:13,14,16, 20 107:8,12 108:3,17
appropriately 21:3	74:13	attached 25:15 30:14	109:1,5,8,10 110:6
appropriateness 16:11 70:19	area 18:10,12,16,22 19:7,10 20:2,5 22:3 23:19 24:13 25:6,17 27:9 30:16,17 32:2 34:6 38:2 49:18 50:1 54:3,13,18 55:10 64:16 72:5,21 73:4 79:3 93:5 99:13 102:6 106:19 107:7 121:1	attention 77:14	112:11,22 113:20
approval 49:16 93:9	audio 37:14 64:21 104:17	115:10,11,18,21,22 116:3 118:22 120:9 130:12	balustrade 108:4 115:22
approve 15:10 45:12 47:1 63:10 70:1	authority 47:13 117:6,11	bandwidth 44:14 45:7	
approved 18:11 49:2,6	Avenue 71:7 72:19 92:15 94:7 102:1 104:13,14 125:4 132:9	Baranes 100:13 111:20 112:13 113:2,10 114:2,7 115:12,20 116:5,8 118:9,21 119:4,11,21 121:20 125:10	
approximate 51:5	area's 51:8	based 53:15 55:6 57:1 76:12 131:21	
approximately 48:19 53:13 72:15 100:21 101:21 102:4,5 115:14	area-wide 20:19	baseline 19:5	
approximating 53:7	areas 34:1 40:20 57:19 72:4 78:11 94:3 102:15	Basic 51:14	
April 49:7	Argo 37:12,13 46:1,2 64:19, 20 68:18,19 86:18,19 90:8,9 128:22 129:1	basically 107:11 109:7	
Arabia 75:16 76:15 88:8,13	arguing 117:14	Basin 22:7 28:5 29:17,19	
Arabian 70:2,6,12 71:16 72:10, 14 75:6 78:8 81:6,10,18 82:8 87:12	arid 72:9	basis 25:10	
arch 77:7	arise 51:10	beautified 94:22	
arched 52:21 54:7 77:2,3,20 78:2,21	Arlington 47:17 53:18 54:4	beautiful 44:18 96:9 100:3 123:5	
arches 76:20	Arrington 36:13	beautifying 99:13	
architect 58:12 100:8 112:16 125:9	articles 130:18	beauty 20:7	
architects 96:20 101:2	Arts 23:16	befitting 120:15	
architectural 21:4,5 22:17 23:4 25:4 49:14 74:22 78:7 127:11	Ash 29:13	began 96:19	
architecturally	Ashlar 52:20 63:2	begin 26:4 95:8 100:19	
	aspects 94:13 96:18 132:17	beginning 75:10	
	associate 44:6 85:11 129:2		
	assuming		

begins 99:3	20,21 88:7 90:14,15 123:2,3 129:18	Britain 130:5	C
begun 113:1 116:15	blend 55:17	broader 81:20 104:2 132:17	cabinetry 21:22 23:15 31:1
behalf 47:12 70:9 81:4 87:21	block 50:19 52:9	broken 52:20	calibrated 101:17
behaviors 72:2	board 104:15 109:22	brown 55:15,17	call 45:14 68:9 89:21
believed 39:12	boards 102:12 104:11	buffers 74:6	camera 33:15
below-grade 19:20	bottom 92:14	build 96:17	cameras 59:12 60:9
bend 72:16	boundary 49:19	build-out 16:6	campus 78:11 104:2
beneficial 42:18 55:3 126:13	boxed 62:8	building 23:1 31:17 74:5 75:5,9 76:11 77:20 78:5,6 79:2,7 80:2 83:20 92:19 93:1,3 98:17 101:20	campuses 71:10
benefit 48:2	Brandie 80:14,20 83:4	105:9 107:22 108:21 111:10 114:1,5,10,13, 14,15,17,19 115:1 118:19 121:17 125:8 131:1,12 132:2,4,5	Cannon 115:1
berms 74:7	bread 123:14	building's 29:1	canopies 75:1
bicycle 48:22 51:18 53:11 54:15	break 123:14	building-mounted 30:17	canopy 19:20 56:20 74:9 78:19, 22
bidirectional 55:5	breakouts 83:12	buildings 18:3,5 20:8 25:7 27:11 31:18 74:22 92:22 93:10,11 111:16 123:9 131:14	capacity 16:7 19:15 20:12 21:6 27:11 29:7 31:13 34:6 37:4 47:22 92:8
big 81:22 84:17	brick 75:4	built 75:15 87:17 96:14,15 114:4	capital 17:12 27:7 49:11 58:5 93:9,18 96:9 117:5,9 133:11
bike 68:3	bridge 47:2,7,14,20 48:6,19, 20,22 50:2,5,9,15,19,22 51:6,10,16,18,20,21 52:1,2,3,5,7,12,15,19, 22 53:3,7,8,12,14,18,19	Buren 88:17	Capitol 26:10 111:10
bike/ped 54:1	54:1,6,8,9,17,21 55:3,4, 9,12,15,18,20 56:1,4,6, 7,12 61:1,3,5,8,10,14 62:4,8 63:11 64:15 79:13	Burgum 128:1	care 72:2 74:18 75:9 77:19 79:16 81:13 131:10
biker 68:2	bridges 55:16,18 57:10 65:17, 22	bus 72:20	careful 89:16 96:19 111:22
Biology 71:9 80:15 81:5	briefly 104:11	business 133:9	carefully 112:16
birthday 96:8	bring 37:10 88:5 100:1,12 114:7 120:19	busy 76:7	carrier 37:8 41:5 42:16,17
bison 72:6 73:2 89:1,2			carriers 23:11 40:9 41:18,19,20 42:2,6,19 43:13
bit 59:8 84:17 113:8 125:17			
Blair 38:15,16,19 46:7,8 65:6,7 69:2,3 87:9,19,			

carries 46:19 69:14 91:5	62:21 63:8,14,16 64:2, 6,18 65:1,3,6,9,13 66:1, 7 67:5,9,14 68:21 69:1, 15,19 80:19 83:4,7,15, 19 84:4,7,13 85:6,9,14, 19 86:2,7,17 87:8,11, 16,18 88:2,11 90:11,13 91:6,17 95:9 110:12,19 117:2 118:1,12 121:11 122:1,7 123:1 124:10, 16,22 126:8,17 127:1,7, 17 128:21 129:8 133:7	choosing 98:1	closer 50:6
carry 98:1	chosen 76:4	closer-up 50:18	
case 70:18 133:7	chronic 97:8	cluster 106:2,5,8	
case-by-case 25:10	Churchill 123:7	clutter 43:10 77:15	
Cash 43:1,2,16 46:13,14 62:20,22 63:6 66:7,8 69:8,9 84:14,15,22 90:20,21 91:11 111:1	circular 54:19	cluttered 23:7	
Cash's 44:7	Chairman 15:19 35:21 37:18 38:14 46:3,5 47:10 62:20 65:2,12,22 68:20, 22 70:8 81:2 83:6 84:12 87:10,19 90:10,12 95:10 110:16 122:5 123:1 124:13,21	circulation 75:15 78:13	co-locating 22:16
Castle 130:4	cited 112:6	coat 122:16	
cats 72:1 81:22 84:18 88:15	city 48:1 118:10	code 97:12 119:5	
ceiling 116:4	cladding 52:8 63:3 66:14 67:2	codes 119:13	
celebration 100:2	Clarification 121:14	cohesively-designed 23:9	
celebrations 45:9	clarifications 110:15	cold 120:14	
cell 18:13,15 42:15	change 64:15 94:16	collaboration 100:6 132:13	
cells 21:12	changed 42:17 87:6 112:12 113:5	collaboratively 82:19	
cellular 19:5	changing 77:5 116:21	collectively 25:22	
center 26:18 75:17 99:15 126:2	channel 62:7	colonnade 94:17 96:22 97:4,20 102:8 103:20 104:5,21 105:10,19 106:18 107:17 108:7,19 121:21	
centered 109:7,9	character 24:20 26:14 34:7 37:3,4 51:9 102:18 108:21	colonnades 104:16 112:3	
central 26:7 75:15 76:1 93:5 104:6 106:9 108:12 110:9 112:1,4	charts 61:1	color 55:16	
CHAIR 15:5,16 33:7,13 35:17, 22 36:6,8,12,15 37:11, 17,19 38:14,18 39:8,14, 18 40:1 42:22 43:16,20 44:3,8,13 46:4,6,21 47:6 58:19 60:18 61:5,9	check 122:16	colors 85:1	
	Chief 33:2,17	Columbia 18:13 47:18 53:19 58:4 93:8	
	children 87:21	Columbia-owned 17:13	
	choices 128:18	combination	

21:15 109:15	17,19,20 61:7,11,21 62:9,13,15,18,20,22 63:6,8,13,15,20,21 64:2,3,4,6,7,8,12,18,19, 20 65:1,6,7,9,11,14,15 66:1,6,7,8 67:5,6,7,9, 10,11 68:11,12,13,14, 15,16,17,18,19 69:2,3, 5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13 83:6,8,11,22 84:5,6,9, 11,14,15,22 85:9,10,11, 14,15,16,19,20,21 86:2, 3,4,7,9,17,18,19 87:8,9, 19,20 88:2,4,7 90:1,2,3, 4,5,6,7,8,9,14,15,17,18, 19,20,21,22 91:1,2,3, 11,12,16 110:16,17,20, 21 112:7,20 113:6,17 114:6 115:7,17 116:2,6, 10 117:3,12 118:7,12, 14,16 119:2,8,14 120:1, 3,22 121:8,13,14,22 123:2,3 124:10,12,15, 17,18,22 125:1,2 126:8, 9,10,17,18,19 127:1,2, 3,7,8,9,17,18,19 128:21,22 129:1,8,17 131:19	19:4	concerned 40:22 41:3 125:6
combines 75:22 77:18	completion 82:15	concessions 72:21	
comfortable 25:8	complex 16:13 70:21 71:6 96:10 99:4 104:16 107:20 120:11 126:12 132:18	conclude 17:7 48:14 57:21 118:8	
commemorative 24:12	compliance 98:3	concluded 19:7 48:9	
commend 44:19	complicated 121:4	concludes 32:19 57:20 80:4 133:9	
comment 33:5,9 38:3 59:4,9 65:16 66:9 70:14	comply 30:18	concrete 52:16 54:19	
comments 15:11 16:18 34:3 35:5 37:14 38:6,17 44:1,7 45:12 48:17 49:17 53:4, 6,10 55:21 56:3 57:13, 22 58:20 64:1,21 65:3,7 67:12 68:6 70:1,16 71:1 83:2 85:17 86:20 95:4 111:18 126:20 127:13 129:3 131:19 133:4	components 95:4 98:17	concurrence 112:5	
commercial 107:11	compound 122:11	condition 104:1 106:7 109:9	
Commission 16:8,14,19 17:1,9 18:11 23:16 36:10 37:10 43:5, 11 45:5 47:11 49:2 51:13 53:9 58:7 67:15 70:9,14,16 71:2 77:22 79:18 80:18 81:3,7 82:18 89:11,15 91:22 93:9,21 95:5,11 100:10, 15 110:14 117:11,16 118:5 120:20 127:6 129:14 131:9 133:11,12	comprehensive 16:10 18:20 25:13 32:12 33:19 38:22 80:9 93:18,22 101:4 111:7, 19	conditions 94:17 102:19	
Commission's 17:14 34:4 49:16 56:2	compressed 82:14	configurations 101:6,10	
Commissioner 15:1,2,3 35:21 36:1,7, 11,15,17 37:11,12,13, 17 38:15,16,17,18,20 39:9,10,15 40:2 41:9, 11,12,17,18 42:9,10,13, 21,22 43:1,2,16,17,18, 20,21,22 44:3,4,5,7,8,9, 10 45:16,17,18,19,20, 21,22 46:1,2,7,8,10,11, 12,13,14,15,16,17,18 58:22 59:19 60:4,13,16,	conceal 22:12 28:21	confirm 45:13 63:17 68:8 89:20	
	concealed 31:2	conflicts 78:13	
	conceivably 113:8	Congress 123:13	
	concept 123:8	Connecticut 71:6 72:19 89:3	
	company 40:6	connecting 103:20,21	
	compared 67:17	connection 54:4,14	
	compelled 88:4	connections 54:10	
	compelling 37:20	connectivity 34:12 68:3 103:2	
	competing 42:7	connector 94:17	
	complete 49:10 56:18	consequential 98:18	
	completed	conservation 71:9,15,19 81:15,20	
		consideration 35:12,13 36:4 41:22 72:11 103:12 126:13	

considerations 98:19 126:16	continue 31:21 41:14 79:4 101:9, 12 127:15	cost 97:14,16	104:19
considered 23:18 25:10 59:11 74:3 104:7 116:22 124:6	continued 37:7 113:14	Counsel's 117:4	crowded 122:17
consistency 16:9	continues 105:12	countries 129:22 130:1	CSX 50:2
consistent 35:1 74:10 80:8 111:6, 18	continuing 82:11	country 95:17 123:21 124:3	cub 71:17
consistently 19:9	continuity 78:11	couple 40:2	cull 77:13
Constitution 29:14	contrasts 114:15,16	coverage 18:20 19:5,8,15 31:13 34:6 37:4,21	cultivate 99:11
constraints 19:18	contributing 23:21 24:15 51:1 73:17, 20 74:3	covered 73:14	cultural 20:1 22:19
construct 48:18 53:12 70:2,5,12 81:6	conversation 74:18 80:15 81:5 82:7 88:5	Cozart 44:4,5 45:17,18 63:20, 21 68:12,13 85:20,21 90:2,3 127:2,3	current 20:6 48:6 59:18 88:19 94:17 97:12 100:20 102:14 123:15
constructed 50:10	convert 60:11	crazy 83:21	curvilinear 78:6 79:6
construction 56:18 60:10 82:15 83:2 97:3 112:22	coordinate 42:3	create 31:12 54:12 77:15	<hr/> D <hr/>
consultants 58:10 59:11	coordinated 32:6 35:1	creating 76:2,10 99:10,14	D.C. 17:14 34:2 70:14 73:4 93:6 100:11 131:15
consultation 23:15 31:21 59:20 82:13 96:20	coordinating 32:13	creation 74:12	daily 16:7
consulting 31:22	coordination 17:8 31:8 82:12	creatively 22:15 31:1	danger 83:16
contamination 97:10	core 18:12 93:6	criteria 16:21 20:20,21 25:14 34:20 42:2,5	dark 40:20
contemplated 98:13	corner 79:16	critical 56:19	darker 110:2
contemporary 74:17	cornice 101:18,19 108:3,4 113:18,21	critically 71:11,15	data 37:20
context 21:3 22:10 70:20 72:5 75:2 92:13 94:1 104:1, 10	corrected 61:10	critically-endangered 81:9	day 37:6 66:2 72:3 83:17 95:17 96:13 126:12 133:5
contextual 101:18	corridor 47:2,7,15,20 49:4,7,9 53:22 57:17 60:9 63:12	cross 52:13 79:13	days 100:22
continents 81:14	corridor's 56:17	crossed 120:19	DDOT 56:5 60:8
	corridors 119:18	crossing 47:15 53:17 54:2	dealing 125:11
		crowd	

decades 118:10	19,20 118:3	detailed 100:17 105:21 131:17 132:22	dignity 20:7
decided 96:17	72:3	doling 103:16	Dining 98:16
deciduous 106:8	106:1,5,7	details 77:8 79:20 85:7 109:19 132:11	dinner 102:6
decision 48:10,14 58:2 59:20 101:11,14	Department 35:2 128:2	deterioration 97:9 98:15	dinners 99:5
decisions 99:22	depends 112:14	determined 96:21 112:17 129:15	diplomacy 100:2
deck 55:4,20 56:6	describe 34:17 102:14	determines 113:20	direct 48:2 54:9
deemed 97:11	description 102:18	detract 131:12	direction 61:14 105:7 119:7
deeper 82:5	Desert 75:16	detractions 121:3	directly 76:9 108:3 109:1,3
deficiencies 97:2	deserve 124:1	develop 16:20 23:12 42:1,4 45:6 82:12 109:14	Director 80:15 95:12
define 26:14	design 20:17,19 32:6 34:19 35:11,13 37:9 39:7 51:4,6 52:11,14 53:8, 10,14 55:4,9 56:1,16	developed 18:21 53:20 56:15 76:11,12 77:9 100:17 101:15 112:3	Director's 48:17 53:4,6 55:21
defined 26:6	57:15 73:12 75:10 76:13,14 78:1 79:5 80:8,17 82:11,20,22 83:1 86:11,15 89:9	developing 37:8 103:17	disappointed 88:8
degrading 99:9	93:19 94:14 95:2 97:3 100:20 101:1,5 111:7,8 124:6 128:18 129:6	development 24:7 30:1,8 47:1 63:11 71:3 82:20 93:4	discovery 88:16
delay 33:16	design-build 58:13	developments 22:18	discuss 17:5 21:8 27:4 39:13 60:7 84:1 95:14 100:8
delegated 128:1	designed 32:2 71:21 72:5,9 74:22 94:19,20 98:14 102:4	develops 89:12 122:22 132:21	discussed 25:22 59:16 99:22
deliberation 124:20	designee 111:1	device 40:10	discussing 96:5
deliberations 63:20 122:2	designers 23:11	devoted 107:10	discussion 36:2,4,10 39:20 40:5 41:16 63:18 67:8 84:8 100:20 119:15
deliveries 102:16	designing 74:20	diagrams 110:13	disjointed 23:7
delivering 98:7	designs 23:6,12 103:10 128:4	difference 52:15	display 72:1
demand 19:11,12 27:11	destroyed 99:8	difficult 22:12 28:20 44:20	distance 112:1
demands 44:14 45:7	detail 128:5,20	dignitaries 98:22 123:18	distinct 129:20
democracy 96:3			distinctive 50:13
demolition 97:15 116:13 117:6,10,			

district 17:12,13 18:3,13,15 47:18 53:19 54:4 58:4 72:12 73:15,18,21 74:3 93:8,11	DRAN-4 21:13	79:16	elevations 107:19 108:20 125:17 131:18
District's 23:16	DRANS 21:12	easy 41:13 60:10	eliminating 98:5
districts 51:3	drastically 98:14	echo 38:16 86:19 127:13	Ellipse 28:14 37:1 92:17 96:2 125:5
disturbing 125:5,20	draw 89:5	Ed 58:21	embedded 56:5
dive 65:18	drawing 79:2	edge 26:18 74:7	eminently 38:7
divide 22:3 25:16	drawings 105:22 106:11	education 71:18	emphasize 100:5
Dixon 35:21 36:1,11 39:9,10, 15 40:2 41:11,17 42:9, 13 45:16 46:11,12 60:16 65:14,15 66:6 69:6,7 83:6,8,11,22 84:9,11 90:1,18,19 118:15,16 119:2,8,14 120:1,3,22 121:8 124:17,18	Drive 27:21 29:13,20 55:1	effective 97:17	emphasizing 129:17
Dixon's 84:5	driveway 115:13	effects 51:8	empower 74:13
door 119:1 129:2	driving 82:8	efficiency 103:3	empty 81:8
doors 84:18	drops 105:2	efficient 99:15	encircling 28:14
dots 18:8 26:20	dual-mno 21:12	effort 17:4 33:19	enclosure 75:9 76:15,21 77:2,20 78:3 79:10
dotted 120:19	due 19:10 26:13 29:1 77:12	efforts 71:15 96:6	enclosures 22:12 76:18
double-wide 99:4 120:14	dynamic 81:8	egress 105:15 119:5,10	encompass 132:8
doubt 120:1		eight-foot 56:10,11	encounters 74:15
drafted 58:2	E	Eisenhower 93:1	encouraging 42:11
dramatic 87:5	earlier 25:16 67:17 101:3,14 103:9,11 108:2 120:12	electrical 97:10	end 27:10 42:12 43:9 71:5, 13 122:13
DRAN 21:12	early 82:16 100:22	element 51:1 111:9	endangered 71:12,15
DRAN-2 21:12	east 22:4,7,9 25:18,19 26:5 27:4,6 31:3 40:12 41:13 47:18 50:4,8 51:1 53:18 54:12,22 57:6,7 75:19 78:22 79:12 91:8,20 92:2 93:4 94:18 95:14 96:15,19 97:1,8 98:1, 15,19 100:16 102:7,22 103:20,21 106:17,21 108:6,22 112:19 120:8 128:2 132:8	elements 21:4 25:2 51:14 74:2 75:3,7 77:17 80:9 93:17	engagement 74:19
	eastern	Elephant 72:18 73:19 74:4	engineers 96:20
		elevation 57:12 108:16 109:1,11, 22 115:15 125:3,5 131:21 132:6	enhance 19:17 34:11
		elevational 101:7	enhancements

98:7	19:16 102:1	84:10 89:10	expense 99:10
enhancing 98:4 103:3	essentially 44:21 105:5 114:12 132:7	exciting 86:4,21 87:4 88:22 89:17 127:10	experience 19:17 34:12 75:19 82:4 87:12 93:20 94:5,12 96:2 98:21 99:13 120:10 131:11 132:2,9, 16
enjoy 96:8 120:21	establish 19:5 92:6	excluded 18:18	experienced 103:5
enjoyed 122:20	estimated 81:17	excuse 65:9 87:9	experiences 76:10 131:13
enjoying 44:17 87:17	evaluate 101:9 104:1	Executive 32:20 48:17 53:4,6 55:21 92:18,20 93:1 94:18 98:11	expertise 81:22
enlarging 103:12	evaluated 21:8,11 34:21 75:11	exercise 59:8	experts 81:13 96:21
ensure 19:16 32:5 95:21 97:18 131:8,10	evaluation 16:20 18:20 19:2,4 20:13 101:4	exhibit 72:18 73:3 75:18 76:3, 8,22 77:17 80:1 81:9,20 82:7 89:1,2,3	explore 30:19 31:21 79:8
enter 89:3 106:19	Evan 111:1	exhibits 73:1,6 78:14	exploring 101:12
entered 71:14	evening 40:18	exist 23:4 25:1 40:21	expressed 53:1
entering 106:16,22 107:1	event 40:19 92:7	existing 18:7 19:6,15 21:4 22:16,21 24:18 25:4 26:21,22 27:20 38:8 48:20 50:2 51:5 52:3,9, 21 53:8 54:10 72:6 73:1,6,9,13 76:18 97:1 111:14 114:1,19	extend 50:1 53:17 54:6 79:5 96:6
entire 93:5 127:16	events 37:5 98:13 99:2,5 107:13 122:10	exists 50:9 86:14	extending 50:3
entrance 72:19 79:17 105:3 132:17	evergreen 56:21 106:8	exit 133:15	extends 49:19 94:12 132:6
entrances 119:3	evolution 100:20	expand 127:15	extensively 113:11 115:3
entry 71:6 72:20 75:14 76:6 78:20 79:1,12 99:4 120:7	exact 77:6	expanding 96:12	extent 110:8
envelope 43:7,13	examples 18:1 24:21 74:5,11	expands 122:11	exterior 103:15,16
environment 40:7 72:11	excavation 113:2	expectations 32:15	externally 30:14
environmental 98:3	exceed 101:19	expected 30:18	extinction 81:12,19 82:9
equipment 20:1 21:3,19,22 22:2, 12,15 23:15 31:1,3	exceeded 97:5	expeditious 38:5	extraordinary 97:19
equitable 34:22	excellent 76:16		extremely 81:19
escape 76:16	excited 45:6 64:13 67:20 69:22 87:22 89:11,13 100:11 122:21 132:21,22		eye-level 32:8
essential	excitement		

F			
facade 29:2 101:22	feasible 79:8 97:1	finding 53:5 55:22	63:1
facades 103:15	features 22:17 23:4,21 24:15 25:5 26:1,14 51:5 53:2 73:3 74:6 78:18 97:19 127:11	finds 20:3 21:17 22:11 23:5 24:5 26:11 27:13 28:20 30:10 31:14 80:7	follow 43:13
face 82:6 109:12	February 133:12	Fine 23:16	food 25:8 102:17 107:11
faces 81:19	federal 17:11 18:12,16 48:9 49:4 53:21 55:15 59:6 80:9 93:7,10,17 98:3	finish 109:17	footings 66:10
facilitate 55:5	feedback 70:17	finishing 114:22	footprint 112:10,21 113:7,11 125:13,14
facilities 18:15,21 22:16 73:5 97:12 126:15 128:7,9	feel 66:17 83:13 88:4	fire 119:5	forcing 60:5,6
facility 28:19 29:1,7,8 30:21 71:16 72:2,20 79:16 98:10 120:7 128:10	feeling 66:15	firm 101:8	foreign 98:21 123:18 129:22 130:1
facing 106:21	feet 48:20 53:13 101:21 102:4,9,11 115:14 125:15	Fisher 95:7,10,11 116:11,14 120:5 121:7	form 26:13 29:2 51:7 77:6,8 78:3
fact 39:4	fence 93:14 96:1 110:5 128:15	fits 86:14	formal 26:6,14 27:16 34:16 63:18 102:6
factors 97:14	fewer 21:21 22:1 24:6 31:4 81:17	fivefold 16:6	formed 63:3
failures 98:6	figure 40:16	fixtures 23:13,20 24:10 26:8 30:2,5,15 31:5 45:1	forms 77:13 78:6
fairly 62:3 101:4 111:22 113:11 123:6	filtered 56:18 57:9	flexibility 31:3 71:22 77:4,16	Forst 38:19,20 39:9 46:9,10 58:22 59:19 60:4,13,17 63:15 65:10,11 67:22 68:12 69:4,5 88:3,4 90:16,17 124:11,12,15, 17
fall 82:15	final 17:2 35:12 47:1 48:15 49:6,8,12,13 58:7 63:11	Flight 76:19	forward 37:7,16 38:5 39:6 41:14 45:9 64:14 80:11 82:11 86:5,15 87:17,22
familiar 92:10 114:4	finalize 34:10	FLIS 91:21	117:19 124:7,8,19,20 127:5,12 128:5,19 132:11
family 96:7	finalizing 33:21	flood 19:21	found 78:10 97:2
fan 84:17	finally 48:13 50:7 55:14 109:21	floor 58:21 89:19 109:5	foundation 112:22 113:3,9
fantastic 60:21	find 75:16	floors 102:7,8	Founded 71:7
faster-moving 54:15		focus 70:15,18 103:14	four-foot 56:10
FDR 29:20		focused 16:9	
		folks	

four-mno 21:12	74:10	glass 29:2	green-colored 75:4
foyer 104:21 105:4 106:19 107:5	future 32:18 45:10 51:8 54:5 56:12 57:19 59:18 60:5, 12 71:22 77:17 98:8 104:7,9 108:8,14 112:8 121:6 126:15	global 81:11	ground 103:8
frame 26:8 106:9 110:9 111:12		globe 23:20 27:20,22 28:8,15 44:22 95:18	grounds 22:5 28:3,16 92:8 95:1, 19 99:20 111:14 130:12
framed 75:1 132:3	G	goal 16:5 51:4 53:7 125:15	group 72:20 82:22 96:7
frames 93:4	gabled 77:19	goals 20:12 21:6 31:13 56:16 57:16 71:20 72:13 74:16 77:21 80:10	growing 19:12
framework 16:3 20:11,16 36:21 37:9 104:8	gain 82:8 99:4	Golf 27:6	guess 45:11 60:21
frankly 37:5 116:19 120:16 129:21	gap 18:9	good 15:6,19 33:11,16 41:17 47:10 60:16 70:8 85:2 91:21 95:10 100:13 121:9 125:10 130:9	guessing 87:14
FREE 15:15,19 33:6,8	Gardens 29:14 97:21	government 59:6 100:6	guests 95:1,22 102:6 105:6 107:1
freestanding 54:2	gather 99:22 123:11	graceful 103:6	guidance 35:3 55:7 57:2 71:2 93:17
freight 50:12 52:1	gatherings 124:2	grade 22:18 105:2,17	guide 16:3 20:20 80:1
friction 38:12	gave 111:4	grand 96:18 105:4 107:6 124:2	guidelines 18:13 30:19 32:13
front 43:9 115:13 118:22	general 20:11 102:16	grandchildren 86:21	Guidelines' 25:14
full 49:3 132:8	generations 122:21	granite 50:19 52:9	guiding 74:12
full-time 60:11	generously 102:14	granite-stone-cladded 52:8	guys 100:9 120:20
fully 28:21 100:17	George 47:15 49:21 51:2		H
function 60:5,6 129:16,18	Gibbon 76:21	grass 99:11	habitat 70:3,6,13 71:21 72:8, 14,18 73:2,18 74:20 75:5,8,9,11 77:4,5,11, 19,21 78:19,21 79:1,14 81:6,8 82:17
functionality 24:18 98:4	gifted 88:17,18	great 33:15,19 36:18 39:2 42:3 44:12 45:3 59:4 60:3 65:4 67:19 70:7	habitats 81:14
functioning 102:15	girders 50:21	give 76:19 86:13 88:14 89:8 97:18 118:9 127:11,14 130:5 133:16	Hains 27:5
functions 92:9 102:12 103:1	giving 107:7	green 26:19 110:2	half-level 108:18
fundamental 20:3	Glad 63:22		
furnishings			

half-mile-long 47:14 51:15	helps 74:15	hodgepodge 121:4	House's 101:22
Halfway 105:17	Henderson 15:1 43:17,18 46:15,16 67:6,7 69:10,11 85:10, 11 90:22 91:1 121:14, 22 126:9,10	hold 133:15	Houses 99:19
hall 107:5	holistic 93:22	home 71:10	hunting 76:17
handicapped 118:17,20,21 119:10 121:10	heritage 78:8	honor 129:20	hybrid 75:12,21 76:4,12 77:19 78:1 86:11
handled 59:2 121:6	Herr 70:10	hope 66:2 84:16 108:13 110:22 121:9	I
handling 102:16	Hey 47:4	hoping 37:15	i's 120:18
handrails 56:6	high 19:10 62:4,6,8 81:19	horizontal 29:2	idea 44:21 59:4 60:3 104:4 130:15
Hanukkah 122:12	high-level 100:15	host 21:13 34:16	identified 34:18
happen 83:9,14,15 128:8	higher 113:18 122:19	hosted 129:22 130:4,7	identifies 18:14 34:5
happy 35:15 59:14 60:7 65:15 110:10 129:12	highest 18:16 25:20 26:12	hosting 98:12	identify 26:16 27:18 29:11,17 80:1
Headquarters 27:8	highlighted 49:1	hoteling 40:8 41:19	illuminate 56:6
hear 33:12 84:16 110:22	historians 96:21	HOTTEL-COX 15:2,4 45:15,19,21 46:1,3,5,7,9,11,13,15, 17,19 68:10,14,16,18, 20,22 69:2,4,6,8,10,12, 14 89:22 90:4,6,8,10, 12,14,16,18,20,22 91:2, 4,15	illustrated 55:12
hearing 36:8 84:7 104:9 110:8 122:3	historic 17:22 23:17,21 24:9,16 26:7 30:2 31:4,19 34:8 37:3 50:9,19 51:3,5,9 52:3 53:8 57:1 61:5,8 66:16 72:11,12 73:7,15, 20 74:3,4 98:11 102:21 113:19 114:9 115:5 125:7,11,21	house 17:20 24:18 72:18 73:19 74:4 92:2,7,11,15 93:13,14 95:1,7,13,18 96:10,13 98:22 99:2 100:16 101:20 102:2,15 103:4,21 104:2,3,15,20 106:10,17 107:13,20 108:4,12,16 109:16,17 111:10,13,15 112:2,4, 19 115:14 119:1,19 120:10,13,16 122:10 123:7,10,15 128:16 130:12,21,22 131:16 132:4,18	illustrative 24:21
hearings 100:18	historical 118:6 121:3	impact 17:16,19	image 93:2 94:8
heart 20:9	historically 65:16 99:1 120:12 130:14	impacted 31:5	images 110:14
heavily 72:22	historically-designed 100:4	impacts 20:15 22:19 24:6 25:21 26:13 27:15 30:10 79:11 98:11	imbalanced 125:18
heavy 42:16	history 88:14,20 96:4 97:19 100:1 130:11	implement 34:10	impact 17:16,19
height 101:19 110:6 113:20 114:3,18,19 115:2,6,11, 21,22 125:12	hit 41:9		
heights 57:8 108:5			
helpful 62:19 94:14 127:20 128:17			

implementation 17:8 31:8 32:7	includes 20:22 27:5 51:7 56:8 73:8 92:22 102:3	informational 15:8 16:14 91:8 92:1	integration 23:19
implemented 37:1 38:13 80:13	including 19:19 25:7 29:15 55:4 71:11 72:4 74:6 75:8 78:5,18 93:1,19 94:15	informative 126:22	intend 109:14
implementing 19:19	96:13 97:20 101:6 102:8	infrastructure 15:12,18 16:1 17:15 18:2,4 19:1,14 20:4,14, 17 22:21 24:3,19 26:18 27:2,19 28:6,17 29:6, 12,18 31:9,15 32:4,10 35:4 36:22 38:8 94:22 97:10 98:5,8	intended 18:19 19:2 53:16 129:19
implications 31:19	inclusion 59:11	initiated 73:21	intent 20:10
importance 111:13 127:16	incorporate 24:2,18 27:1 35:5,6 38:7	input 34:4	intentional 18:9
important 20:8 37:22 38:1,4 41:6 80:12 95:16 99:20,22 105:14 108:1 128:13 131:14 132:3	incorporated 32:20 57:21	inserted 23:8	interacts 132:19
importantly 19:14 98:9	incorporates 102:11	inside 96:1 99:19 107:13 110:5 122:17 128:15	interest 17:14 18:12 40:8 94:3
impossible 116:9	incorporating 53:2	insight 82:8	interested 40:11 88:16 130:16 131:17 132:6
impression 91:10	increase 16:6 52:18 103:2	inspiration 75:4	interesting 114:2
improve 19:13 29:7 34:6 47:14 48:4 55:11 98:20	increased 67:20 92:8 115:1	Instagrams 44:17	interests 18:16
improved 94:20	increases 98:15	install 59:17	interference 19:20 37:14,15 64:21 104:17
improvement 67:18	increasing 101:13	installation 25:12	interior 35:3 103:17 128:2
improvements 15:13,18 16:1,3 17:15, 19 19:1,19 31:10 34:9, 18 35:5 49:4	incredible 89:18	installations 18:2,8,10 23:5 25:4 31:18 32:16 43:10	intervals 56:10
improving 19:15 47:22	incremental 102:19	installed 32:15	introduce 33:1
in-person 58:14	individually 25:20	Institute 71:9 80:15 81:5	intrusion 97:9
inadequate 19:10	individuals 81:18	Institution 70:11 71:8,13	invasive 57:3
include 21:15 28:2 32:8 52:5 53:5 55:22 56:16 57:13 60:5 71:20 76:19 77:7 111:8	industrial 23:11	integrate 20:4 21:5 28:21 78:6	inventory 55:17
included 20:17,19 58:1 73:22 75:17 78:15 80:6 102:10	influence 72:9	integrated 22:18 80:5	invited 123:20
	inform 16:5	integrating 19:21 22:20 57:18 78:8	involved 89:16 101:4
	information 25:9 73:22 85:5 91:19		Ireland 130:6
			issuance 35:3

issue 34:14 40:13 41:2 84:2 113:4 121:10 132:14	122:5	lands 105:17	leads 105:11,16
issues 16:9,12,13 49:13 70:21 131:4	kicking 43:8	landscape 21:5 23:9 25:2 26:6 27:16 31:10,16 49:14 57:19 58:12 74:14 78:7 79:20 87:6 94:20	leave 82:5
item 15:10 36:9 46:22 69:21 91:7,10	kind 39:11,15 41:4 43:6,11, 12 54:2 62:7,12,22 66:9,12,16 83:21 102:18	landscaping 51:19 56:14 57:6 78:12 107:21 128:6	leaving 91:11
items 15:7 97:22	King 130:5	language 74:22 79:6	left 24:15 54:19 74:4 75:13 93:2 105:18 106:14 132:7
J		large 22:11 71:21 74:8 98:12 99:8 104:19 107:10 129:15,16	left-hand 79:17
James 88:12 124:13	kiosks 25:9	largely 52:10	legal 117:13
Jamie 70:10	kitchen 107:12	larger 21:22 31:3 48:3 50:14 54:4,12 108:20 110:4	length 49:3 53:15
Jefferson 29:20	Klein 58:15	late 59:1 82:15 101:11 103:13	leopard 70:3,6,12 71:16 72:14 78:5 81:6,10,19 82:9 86:13 88:8 89:3,8
jeopardizing 125:13	knowledge 59:13 131:22	Laughter 36:14 61:6 64:11 66:5 83:10,18 84:21 85:8,13 87:15 88:1,6,10 120:2 124:14	leopards 71:18 76:15 82:16 83:19 87:12 88:13
job 44:12 127:11	Krista 33:1,16 35:17	Laura 70:3,4 80:19	lessen 56:12
L		lawn 26:7,19 98:12 99:6,8 105:12,20 130:7	level 104:22 105:5,17 106:13,14,15 107:4,9, 16 108:6 109:6,12 115:9,10,11,18 121:16 122:19
joined 82:21 100:21	labeled 22:8	lay-down 60:21	level-views 94:15
joining 101:15	labyrinth 119:17	lead 43:12 84:9 127:22	levels 106:12 115:8
Josh 95:7,11	labyrinthian 102:17	leader 43:6 81:12	Levenbach 37:18,19 46:3,4 65:2,3 68:20,21 87:10,11,16 90:10,11 122:5,7 123:2
July 16:15 45:3 49:5	Lady 107:16	leaders 99:5,7,21 130:1	Levenbach's 38:17
jump 84:1	Lady's 109:13	leadership 96:3	life 97:5 98:2 105:14
jumped 63:1	Lafayette 96:1 99:14 122:14 126:3	leading 105:20	light 18:4 22:22 23:13,18 24:1,10,17 26:8,21,22 27:20 28:15,18 29:20
jurisdiction 131:15	land 17:11,12,13 19:2 49:5 54:21 93:7 103:8 107:6		
K			
Kennedy 97:21	landing 54:13		
key 101:17			
kick			

30:2,4,7,15 31:4 44:22 56:7 131:18	logistical 91:10	68:11 90:1 100:1 101:14 129:18	96:7
lighted 40:20	long 36:19 47:1,7,14,20 48:6,20 50:9,12,19,22 51:21 52:2,3 53:8,13,17 57:3 61:5,8 63:11 87:7 88:14,20 117:4 130:11	main 71:6 75:7 79:9 93:3	Martin 88:16
lighting 22:22 24:4,14 27:3 28:10 29:15 38:8 40:13, 17 41:13 51:19 56:13	maintain 111:22	masonry 103:16 109:19	mass 76:11 101:20 111:15
lights 56:5,9	maintained 56:5	massing 78:5 85:3 101:6 113:12 132:5	
limit 20:22 77:16	long-term 97:17	mast 77:10	
limitations 19:20	longer 39:21 50:16	masted 76:20,21	
limited 27:9 34:17 40:20 62:3	looked 108:13	match 108:5 109:16 110:6 114:18	
limiting 113:4	looped 75:14	matched 114:18	
Lincoln 29:14	lost 63:19	matching 112:3	
linear 75:19	lot 38:11,12 43:8 45:1 80:19 118:8,9 123:6 131:4	material 51:7	
lined 26:7	love 89:9	materiality 128:19	
lines 74:10	low 78:4	materials 53:1 75:6 78:9 84:19 133:1	
listed 32:22 50:22	low-profile 74:9	matter 133:18	
living 44:18	lower 79:7 105:17 107:4,9,16 109:12 115:9	mature 74:8	
loading 102:16	lowered 125:13	McCrary 101:2	
lobby 42:16	lowest 25:20 97:16	McGowan 15:2,3 43:21,22 46:17, 18 67:10,11 69:12,13 85:15,16 91:2,3 126:18, 19	
locally 39:4	lunch 129:11	meal 123:14	
located 27:11,16 28:17 52:16 58:4 71:4 72:16 92:13, 15,16,18 93:3,5,7 94:11	M	meandering 75:20,22	
location 89:1 92:11 112:10,11, 15,18	macro 27:9 31:11,16 32:1	means 31:4	
locations 18:14 26:17 27:18 29:11,18	Madam 63:16 68:7 69:15 89:20 91:6		
	made 45:4,16 55:3 56:1 60:13		

meant 61:18	methodology 32:14	120:9 128:3 132:18	move 31:6 36:3 37:16 38:4
measure 54:17 115:12	methods 24:7	modernize 96:18	41:14 46:22 50:14
measures 102:1	Metro 42:14 66:17	modernized 98:10	64:14 84:2 117:19
meet 20:6 21:6 38:10 42:1 65:18,21 77:20 96:13 105:6	Metrorail 61:14	modernizing 96:12	moved 63:13
meeting 58:10,11 133:10,12	Michael 47:2,4 58:19 69:17	modest 104:4	movements 55:6
meetings 111:2	middle 103:8	modify 77:16	moves 124:19
meets 42:4 53:7 80:10 103:10	Mike 65:4	modifying 96:22	movie 97:21 107:17
Meghan 45:12	minimize 22:19 56:7 78:4	mold 97:9	moving 15:7 53:11 64:1 85:4
members 47:11 70:8 79:10 81:2 91:22	minimizes 20:15 30:9	moment 44:18 111:1	91:7
memorial 15:12,17,22 22:6,22 26:2 28:4,10 29:11,15 33:2,18 47:16 49:21 51:3	minimizing 51:8	moments 100:5	multi-carriers 41:3
memorials 22:14 24:12 29:21	minimum 16:5	money 112:14	multi-host 41:1
Mendelson 91:12,16 110:16,18,21 111:21 112:7,20 113:6, 17 114:6 115:7,17 116:2,6,10 117:12 118:7 125:1,2	minute 110:1	month 99:16	multi-planar 77:12
Mendelson's 131:19	mission 98:8	months 45:6 89:13 132:12 133:1	multi-vendor 40:4
mention 108:7	mission-critical 98:4	monument 22:5 26:10 28:3,16,18, 22 29:4,9 30:21	multi-year 48:7
mentioned 16:16 92:1 103:9,11 108:2 118:18 120:12	mitigation 53:20	monuments 22:13 26:2 44:18	multiple 23:6 25:6,8 26:8 40:9
mesh 76:20,21 77:1,2,3,11,20 78:21 79:10 84:17 85:7	mix 56:20 57:4	motion 15:4 36:8 45:13,15 46:19 58:21 63:10,17 68:8,10 84:1,5,8 89:19, 20,22 91:4	41:19 42:19 76:2,6,8 82:18 101:6
method 23:3 27:3 28:1,9 30:9	Mixed 93:4	Mount 47:16 50:5 51:16 52:13 54:10,16 61:20 66:11	multipoint 52:16
	mobile 34:15	mountain 72:10	Muscat 88:18
	model 41:20	mounted 18:4	Museum 118:1
	models 39:6	mounting 25:11 30:20	muted 125:3
	modern 20:5 66:17 114:16		<hr/> N <hr/>
	modernization 91:9,20 92:3 94:5,19 95:15 98:2,20 102:22		NAMA 15:22 18:22

nation's 20:7 82:2 96:9	98:11	noted 25:16 73:16	occur 108:9
National 15:11,17,20,21 16:4 17:11,20,22 18:10,17, 18 19:2,17 22:4,10 23:10 25:2,15,18 26:4 27:7 31:10,15 32:4 33:2,17,21 34:1 35:2 37:1 41:21 47:11 49:4, 11,19 50:22 58:5 70:2, 5,13 71:5,7,8 72:12 73:14,15 76:19 80:14 81:4,11 88:15,19 92:13 93:8,18 117:5,9 133:10	129:2	notes 73:16 124:13	occurred 117:20
	neoclassical 114:17	noticeable 25:3 67:18	off-microphone 33:5,9
	NEPA 48:7,12,14	noticed 66:21	offer 75:22 123:21 124:4
	network 16:7,21 19:6,13 20:12, 18 21:2,21 22:1 23:7 27:8 31:12 32:16 34:15	noting 31:9	offering 24:4 27:3
	networks 19:16 54:5	November 100:22 101:12 103:13	office 23:17 83:1 93:1 107:15 109:13 117:4
	neutral 21:13 34:16	NPS 16:17,22 19:2,4 20:19 23:10 27:7,10 34:1,2,14 35:9 44:20 67:15 99:16	officer 70:10
	nice 43:10 68:2,3 86:15	number 30:4 92:22 111:5 129:5 130:13	official 92:9
	night 40:14 56:4	numerous 96:16	Ohio 27:20 29:19 55:1
	nighttime 40:15	<hr/> O <hr/>	Olmsted 23:20 26:7,21,22 44:22 72:13,17 73:16,19 74:5 75:14 76:6,9 77:15 78:12,17,22 79:21
	nodes 21:1,2,5 28:13	O-LINE 76:22	Oman 88:17
	non-contributing 25:7	oasis 75:11,13 76:2 77:18	onboard 113:13
	non-native 57:1	oasis-wadi 75:12,21 76:4,12 78:1	one-story 104:4 108:8
	noncompliant 97:11,12	object 66:20	ongoing 102:20
	north 27:10 48:20,22 49:7 50:1 53:13 54:8 72:16 92:15,16 94:7,16 101:22 106:7 107:19 109:22 122:13 130:5	objectives 94:2	online 33:6 80:20,21,22 91:13
	northern 71:5	observation 125:19	open 15:8 36:9 39:5,18 63:18 93:10,20 110:10,14 122:19 133:9
	Northwest 70:13	obsolete 97:11	open-air 71:21
	notable 52:14 130:2	obvious 124:5	opening 82:18
	notably 94:6	occasion 83:12	opens 78:22
	note 57:15 58:2,8 77:5 117:2	occupants 130:20	operational 50:16 102:20 103:3
negative		occupy 73:1	

operators 34:15	overarching 51:4	37:2 40:12 41:14,21 47:12,18 48:12 49:5,20 50:8 53:18,19 54:22 55:7,16 57:7 58:9 70:2, 5,13 71:5 72:12 73:15 74:13,16 92:12,21 96:2 99:14 122:14 126:3	51:22 52:1
opinion 117:13	overcrowded 89:6		passes 15:4
opportunities 34:5,11,18 55:11 72:1 126:14	overlook 54:18 61:1,19 62:12,16		passing 55:5 99:3
opportunity 32:5 33:20 40:4 42:1,3 67:2 95:14,22 100:14 124:2 127:15 128:15	overlooking 61:2		past 50:15
opposed 38:11 117:20	overview 17:4 33:19 36:18 92:2 100:16 127:20 128:20		path 75:15,18 76:1
opposite 107:15 109:8	overwhelming 114:1 125:7		paths 29:19
option 77:2,11	owned 51:21		Pause 33:10
options 77:1 101:12 113:12	ownership 97:16		pavers 74:7 78:19
orange 49:1	P		pavilion 93:15 104:6 106:9 108:12 110:9 112:1,4
Orangutan 76:22	p.m. 133:13,19		paving 74:8
order 48:14 52:17,21 54:12 56:6,12	package 49:12		peaked 77:8
organized 76:1	paint 55:14		pedestrian 48:22 51:18 53:11 61:1 64:14 68:1 94:15
original 96:15 97:20 104:6 115:5 125:7	painted 109:16		Peninsula 72:10 75:6 78:8
originally 50:10	palette 57:14		Pennsylvania 92:14 94:7 101:22 104:13,14 125:4 132:9
ornamental 56:21	Panda 72:17,21		people 44:15 59:7 65:18 95:17 96:8 98:21 100:2 104:19 119:10 122:8, 18,19 123:11 124:1 130:21
outline 74:15	pandas 83:16 85:1 89:5,6,7		perfect 89:1 91:17
outlined 48:21	panels 26:7,19 105:12		performance 19:6 38:9
outlines 32:14 110:3	panning 49:22		perimeter 94:11,21
outstanding 59:8	paragraph 112:6		periodic 57:10
outward 55:11	parapet 50:20 52:4		permanent 92:7
	park 15:20 17:21 22:5,7 25:19 27:5,6,10 28:3,11 31:4 33:21 34:1,8 35:2		

permaments 111:9	place 24:20 67:19 91:13 99:6 100:1 102:20 123:10 128:11	plants 73:4	positioned 57:8
permissible 18:14	placement 17:10 18:21	plays 82:9	potential 17:16,19 25:21 26:12, 16 27:15 89:4 108:7
permits 35:4	Places 17:22	plaza 54:13 72:21	potentially 20:13 59:18 121:16
person 80:21	placing 29:5	pleased 81:5	Potomac 22:6,7 25:19 27:5,6 28:4,5 29:10,16 31:4 40:12 41:14 47:17,18 50:4,7,8 51:2,17 53:18 54:2,22 57:7 66:2
personally 44:13 132:20	plain 19:21	point 27:5 43:3 60:13,16 64:13 67:3 75:14 105:15 106:1 112:12 113:14 129:17	powerful 96:3
persuaded 39:4	Plaining 83:1	points 38:12 76:2,6,8 104:18	practices 25:12
pertains 111:17	plan 16:10,11,16 17:21 25:13 26:20 32:12 33:22 34:3,4,5,10,19 35:5 36:19 48:3 56:15 57:2 59:18 71:1 79:20 80:10 93:18 94:1 111:19 125:22	pole 23:18	precast 109:15
phase 101:3	Plan's 111:7	poles 18:5,6 22:22 23:2,6,12 24:1 26:21,22 27:20,21 28:8,15 30:10	precedents 76:18
phases 116:16	planet 81:18	Police 27:7,10	preclude 116:20
phasing 32:13	planet's 71:11	policies 16:10 25:12 80:8 93:19 94:1	predators 76:17
phone 41:5	planned 83:13	policy 35:2	predecessor 88:19
phones 42:15 44:15	planning 16:2 49:11 58:5 93:9 104:8 117:5,9,17 130:11 133:1,11	pollinator 57:18	preeminent 26:3,9 30:11
photo 96:8	plans 15:11,21 16:2,18 20:11 21:9,11,13 22:3,20 23:22 24:16 25:16 26:16,21 27:18 28:12 29:11,17 47:1,13 49:3, 6,8,14 56:20,22 57:15 59:16 63:11 70:1,12 80:2 99:12,17 118:4 120:17	pool 75:16 76:1	prefabricated 53:14
photographs 110:8	plant 57:18	poor 97:3	preference 20:22
photorealistic 32:9	planting 57:2,14	porta-potties 130:8	preferred 76:5,13 77:12,22 79:5 80:3
photos 66:21		portico 105:3 107:3 108:17 109:2,3 115:13	prelim 85:7
physical 19:22		portion 58:3	preliminary 17:1 35:11 49:3,16 52:11 55:2 56:2 66:10
Pictured 74:2		portions 79:6 99:8	preparation 117:7
piece 41:13		position 128:1	prepared 71:1
piecemeal 126:6			
pier 66:17			
piers 50:19 52:8,9,16,20 54:19 66:13,17			

preparing 70:17	112:16 130:20	professionals 59:21 82:22	16:15,22 35:10 37:9 96:8 103:7 111:6,18
present 45:8 81:6 96:13 121:5	Previously 49:2	profiles 79:9	proposals 16:20,22 20:20,22 34:15,17,21 35:8 41:21 42:1
presentation 15:8 16:15 17:3 21:7 22:8 31:7 32:19,21 36:18 37:14 38:21 43:15 44:2,6 57:20,22 59:1 63:22 65:4 67:13 70:16,22 80:4,6 81:1 84:3 85:18,22 91:8,19 92:1 95:8 110:13 111:4 118:14 122:4 124:8,19 126:21 127:5 131:5	pride 96:2,9	program 81:21 82:7 102:3	proposed 18:22 24:8 26:11 27:13 32:9 35:10 51:12 55:22 57:6,14 71:4,16 73:12, 18 77:18 78:21 79:22 80:7 92:2,17 94:13 102:22 110:6
presentations 112:9	primacy 102:2	programmatic 48:10 101:5 130:15 131:1,6,7	proposes 55:14
presented 100:18 104:8 117:15,17 121:15	primarily 113:15	progress 45:3 124:7	proposing 112:2
presenters 35:20 39:19	primary 16:5 17:14 32:11 74:7 94:3 101:22 103:14 106:12 118:21	progressed 130:19	prospectus 41:20
presenting 61:4 70:9 118:4	principle 74:12	progresses 127:12 129:4,7	protect 81:14
preservation 23:17 31:19	principles 89:9	project 37:22 38:12 47:2,7,19 48:3,6,18 49:18 51:12, 14 54:11 56:9,17 58:3, 12,17 63:12 64:1,9,13 70:10,19 71:3,4,20	protecting 34:7 111:11,14
preserved 73:10 97:19	prior 70:17 82:17 101:15 118:4	prioritize 51:22	protects 106:5
preserving 20:6 56:19	priority 104:17	problem 100:8,16,21 101:10,13 102:11 105:15 114:10 116:12,16,18 117:1,15	proved 97:15
President 28:3 88:12,16 96:17 123:16,19 129:22 130:2	proceed 15:14 47:6 69:21 70:4 76:3 84:8 89:21 91:18 110:19 117:19 122:2	proceed 120:7 121:12 122:22 124:7 127:21 129:14,19 130:13,19 131:8,9 132:15,21	provide 16:2 17:4 19:1 20:11 35:12 41:20 71:17 78:10 79:19 92:5 100:15
President's 17:21 22:5 28:11 37:2 92:12,21 123:22	proceeded 118:3	project's 49:13 53:20 57:14,15 58:11 94:1	provided 47:21 97:16
presidents 88:15 96:11	proceeds 95:2	projects 41:15 67:16 93:13,16 96:16 117:7 118:9	provider 21:21 32:16
press 130:17	process 36:21 48:8,9 49:10 73:22 75:10 76:14 82:13 97:18 117:1 119:16,20 121:2,4	prominently 72:16	providers 16:21 20:18 21:2 22:2 23:7 31:21 34:16
pretty 37:20 109:2 110:5 112:16 115:2 122:17	processes 32:7	promised 88:14	providing 78:11
preventing 82:10	produced 120:21	properties 19:22 23:22 24:16	provision 41:1
previous 49:3,16 55:6 56:2 89:2	product 48:7 113:15	property 49:20 131:22	public 16:19 19:16 20:8,15 34:11 38:1 42:5,18 55:6 71:17 72:4 81:9 82:7,17

94:4,6,12,22 106:3 121:2 131:11,12 132:2, 19	R	rebuilding 107:17	redesigned 24:17
publicly 94:9 111:3	rail 47:13,22 48:4,19 50:12 51:15,20,22 52:1,12,19, 21 53:14 54:8 67:20	rebuilt 96:16	redo 40:16
pull 39:11	Railroad 48:9	receive 70:16	reduce 32:3 55:10 79:10
purpose 17:4 47:21 92:6	railway 47:15 50:2 53:21 55:18	received 16:14 35:6	reduced 113:8,21 116:7
purposes 22:8 62:5 119:5	raised 95:5	recently 49:6 93:13	reduces 98:10
push 43:6	ramp 54:9 61:19	reciprocal 26:9	reference 32:11 80:7
pushing 43:12	rank 39:11	recognition 130:20	referred 78:1
put 40:16 67:1 110:3 120:17 121:1 132:14	rate 98:15	recognizable 78:18	refine 79:5 80:11
putting 44:16	rationalize 103:1	recognize 34:8	refined 113:7
pylons 18:5	re-proportioning 103:15	recognizes 19:12 31:2	refining 103:14 113:16
<hr/>			
Q			
quality 17:17 19:9	reach 31:13	recommend 21:14 22:20	reflect 48:16 52:22 74:21 78:7 102:19
quantity 21:1,18 24:9 32:3	reached 24:9 59:20	recommendation 48:17 53:6 55:21	regard 125:10
question 38:22 40:5 59:10 60:21, 22 63:7 111:17 112:21 114:8 116:11,14 120:5	read 117:13 124:13	recommendation's 53:4	region 17:12 27:7 48:1 82:3 100:11 131:15
questions 35:16,19 36:2 39:19 40:3 41:10 44:1 58:16, 20 59:2 63:9,19 64:1 67:8,12 68:6 80:18 83:3,5 85:17 86:1 110:11,15,17 111:5,21 118:13 121:12 122:1 125:6 126:20 133:4	real 64:15 67:18 83:16 131:1 132:15	recommending 58:6	regional 54:5
Quick 91:10	real-world 81:15	recommends 22:14 31:20 56:11 77:21 79:4,18	Register 17:22 51:1
quickly 34:13 37:16 85:4 89:12	realm 20:8,15	reconstructed 98:14	regular 133:11
	rear 108:16	reconstruction 97:15	reinforce 111:9,13
	reason 95:15 108:10	record 48:10,14 58:2 117:3 133:19	reinforced 52:16 54:19
	reasonable 38:7	rectilinear 26:13 29:2	reinstate 108:11
	reasons 83:9 97:2	red 18:8	related 23:14 55:22 58:17 93:19
	rebuild 123:8		relationship 111:15 114:9

relationships 101:18	Report's 32:20	resource 132:15	review 16:17 17:2,10 25:14
reliability 48:1	reporting 38:6	resources 20:1 22:19 34:8 51:9 73:17,20 111:11	34:3 35:8,13 48:15 49:10 51:14 52:11 53:10 55:2 56:3 58:7 70:15,18 89:16 93:16 94:4 95:2 117:6,9 120:17
relieve 103:2	reports 58:1 130:17	respect 39:2 100:4 101:17 118:8	reviewed 93:12 115:2
remain 52:10 106:2	representation 95:20	respectful 37:2	reviewing 49:8
remainder 49:9	representatives 58:9,14	responded 49:15	revisiting 103:16
remaining 28:2 81:18	represents 132:1	response 56:2 133:6	RFP 32:5,8 34:17 35:7
remarks 85:12	reproduce 21:4	responsibility 20:18 48:15 95:21	right-of-way 35:3
remember 45:2 63:2 115:10	repurposing 44:22	responsible 17:10	rights-of-way 18:15
reminder 17:9	request 15:10 16:20 32:8 34:15 46:22 69:22 79:18	rest 89:11	risk 81:19
removed 32:17 107:20	requests 23:10 29:4 30:19 32:8	restoration 32:17	river 47:17 50:4,6,7,15 51:17,19 52:6 54:3 57:5,7,17 61:16 65:19 66:2
rendered 78:16 79:15	require 21:21 103:19	restore 81:14 104:5	riverbed 75:20
renderings 55:13 57:12 67:17 80:2	required 53:15	restored 94:20	Road 29:13
renovating 96:12,22	requirement 103:10 117:8	restoring 56:16	roadway 28:14
reoccurring 99:10	requirements 97:13 111:7	restricted 40:14	rocky 72:9
replace 99:10	requires 93:9 131:8	restroom 72:20	ROD 58:6
replaced 24:1,10 30:5 73:10	research 81:21	resulted 43:9	role 82:9
replacement 128:10	researching 96:19	retained 30:5 73:7	roll 45:14 68:9 89:21
replacing 26:22	resemble 52:3,21	retaining 57:10	roof 29:2 74:10 79:2,7 97:4 105:19 115:20
replicas 24:2 27:1,22 28:9	resembles 52:9	return 35:9 82:18	roofing 75:4
replicate 30:1	reservation 128:3	return-to-office 59:5 67:21	
replicated 23:13	Residence 92:20	reuse 72:6	
report 19:5 32:22 76:5 101:11	resilient 98:7		

rooftop 32:1	35:17,22 36:6,8,12,15 37:11,17 38:14,18 39:8, 14,18 40:1 42:22 43:16, 20 44:3,8,13 46:5,6,21 47:6,11 58:19 60:18	secondary 74:7	97:5,13 99:17 102:17 107:11,12,13
rooftops 31:11,17		seconded 45:16 68:11 90:1	services 41:4
room 72:3 98:15 103:21 106:17 112:19	61:5,9 62:21 63:8,14,16 64:2,6,18 65:1,6,9,13 66:1,7 67:5,9,14 68:22 69:1,15,19 70:8 80:19 81:2 83:4,7,15,19 84:4, 7,13 85:6,9,14,19 86:2,	Secret 97:13 99:16 116:19	session 15:8 133:10
Rooms 98:16	12:1 21:11 22:1 23:1 124:10,16,22 126:8,17	Secretary 63:16 68:7 69:16 89:20 91:7 127:22	set 36:21 80:8 101:20 122:14,15
roughly 26:20 115:17	7,17 87:8,18 88:2,11 90:12,13 91:6,17 95:9 110:12,19 117:2 118:1, 12 121:11 122:1 123:1	section 21:7 31:22 39:20 47:2, 8,14 49:10,18 50:13,15 51:12 52:5 63:12 73:13, 21 76:7 82:13	setting 17:17 38:9 74:17 77:14
rounded 79:9	127:1,7,17 128:21	secure 92:7 94:11	Shalom 100:7,9 116:17 118:8 125:9 131:4
route 68:3	129:8 133:7	security 59:12,20 60:12 66:18 94:21 98:6 99:15 103:4 119:16	shape 28:7 123:9 128:9
rows 26:8		seeks 102:22	shaped 129:16
rustic-looking 52:22		segment 31:6	shapes 75:5
S			
sad 44:15		segmented 126:1	share 21:1 89:10
safety 19:16 34:11 38:1 42:6 52:18 98:3,19 105:14		selected 16:22 35:10	Sherwood 33:1,11,14,17
Satisfied 65:11		sense 45:1 78:10 104:5 110:7 115:7 127:21	shifting 39:19
Saudi 88:13		sensitive 39:6 121:1	Shipman 70:3,7 81:1
save 81:21 85:1		sensitively 32:2	Shirlene 58:15 69:18,19
saving 81:12		separate 48:19,21 51:15,17 62:11 77:13	short-circuiting 36:12
scale 21:2 111:16 129:5		series 101:7 102:11 105:8	shortly 102:12
scan 76:17		serve 54:3 104:5,21 109:13	show 39:2 56:20,22 100:4 102:12 105:21 110:7 124:3 129:12
Schaefer 44:9,10 45:19,20 60:20 61:7,11,21 62:9,13,15, 18 64:3,4 68:14,15 84:6 86:3,4 90:2,4,5 127:8,9		service 15:21 27:8 33:21 35:2 41:21 47:12 48:2,4,12 49:5,20 51:22 52:2 55:7,16 58:9 79:17	showing 92:12 110:13
Scharf 15:5,16,20 33:7,13	133:16		shown 49:21 54:9,18,20,22 57:11 73:13,16 77:3 93:2 94:7,8 107:21 110:2 128:4

shows 78:20 79:15	single 40:4 42:17 75:14	88:20	132:20
shrouded 23:2	single-span 54:7	Smithsonian's 81:11 83:1	speaks 130:14
shrunk 125:16	sir 35:22 40:1 62:21 83:7 84:13 91:18 120:6 121:7	Snapchats 44:16	special 24:14 111:13 123:10
side 49:20 50:1,7 52:17 54:8,20,22 57:5,7 61:3 79:14,17 105:10,13 106:7,22 107:2 109:8 121:17	sit 83:16 128:1	solution 21:15 42:4	species 56:22 57:1,3,19 71:12, 19,22 81:12 82:6
sides 105:9 106:20 112:4	site 16:11 47:1 63:11 72:6, 15 73:2,5,8,12,13,18 74:2 76:13 80:2 112:12 117:6 126:14	solutions 23:14	specific 21:14 98:17
sidewalks 29:19	sites 21:21 22:2 26:2 27:9 31:11,16 32:1	sort 132:8	Specifically 75:2
signage 79:22	siting 34:19	sound 62:11	specs 52:10
signal 19:9	sits 109:2	sounds 125:12	spend 123:6
signed 48:9	Situated 72:17	south 22:6 28:4,11 47:2,8 49:9,18 51:12 63:12	spillage 56:7
significance 100:5	size 21:18 98:13 101:13 103:12 112:10,21 114:8 129:4 131:7	92:16 94:8,16 98:12 99:6,8 105:10 106:3,4, 21 107:19 108:15 125:18 130:7 131:18	spring 16:17
significant 26:2 27:16 32:10 92:22 97:2 98:10 113:9 132:5	sizes 101:9	souvenir 25:9	square 102:4,9,11 125:15
significantly 98:20	slide 50:3 54:20	space 72:3 86:13 92:7 93:10, 20 107:10 118:1	staff 19:12 20:3,10,21 21:17
similar 18:5 24:19 26:1 75:19 109:17	slightly 52:20 102:9	spaced 56:9	22:11 23:5,10 24:5,22
simple 78:4	slope 62:5	spaces 94:6 99:19 103:18	25:11 26:10 27:13
simplified 55:9	small 18:13,15 21:11	spacing 56:12	28:20 29:4,22 30:7,10, 19,22 31:14,20 32:7,22
simplify 79:7	small-scale 22:17	span 51:16 52:5 59:10 78:2	33:2,17,18 43:3,5,14
simply 123:12	smaller 22:2	spanned 101:3	44:2,6,19 56:11 57:13
simulations 32:9	Smith 80:14,22 82:22	spans 52:21 61:16	58:1 63:22 67:15 70:22
simultaneous 39:22 62:2 115:16	Smithsonian 70:11 71:8,13 81:4	spatial 111:14	72:3,13 77:21 79:4,18
simultaneously 115:19		speak 33:20 59:14 87:20	80:7 82:13 89:15 95:3, 11 122:4 127:4 132:13
		speaking 39:22 44:13 45:4 62:2 88:11 115:16,19 129:9	staff's 25:17 85:22

stakeholder 55:8	12,18 42:10,21 45:17, 21,22 63:13 64:7,8,12	97:4	66:16
stakeholders 16:19 32:6	68:11,16,17 86:8,9 90:6,7 127:18,19	structure 50:11 51:7 76:20,22 77:11,14 83:20 102:9, 21 105:8 113:19 115:5 116:1,21 121:18 123:15 125:21	sufficient 97:6 112:1
stanchions 22:22 24:14,17 25:1 28:10,18 29:15,20 30:8	stone 63:2,3,4,5 66:13 74:9 75:3 78:9 109:15	structures 17:11 18:6 23:1 25:15 72:6 73:6 114:21 121:3 125:11	suggest 26:22 126:11
stand 61:10 95:21	stone-cladded 52:20	studied 75:8 77:1,10 112:15 113:11,13	suggested 130:14
standalone 18:6 21:11 23:1,12 25:8 27:21 28:7 30:10	story 115:2	studies 85:3 101:7 113:15	suit 43:13
Standard 55:15	stranger 100:9	study 19:7,10 22:3 23:19 24:13 25:6,17 30:16,17 32:2 48:8 50:1 96:20	suite 107:15 109:13
standards 38:10,11	strategy 32:13 38:7 97:17	studying 77:6	Sultan 88:17
stark 132:1	streaming 44:16	style 66:22	summary 29:22
start 41:12,15 63:20 106:15 108:21 110:7 122:13 132:16	street 29:13 92:16 94:8 110:2, 4	sub-area 17:7 25:18,19 26:4,5,12 27:4,5,14 28:11 29:10, 16 30:6,13 31:3	superior 99:14
started 48:8	streets 94:10	sub-areas 22:4,9 24:11 25:17,22 27:12 28:2,7 30:3,12,22	supplemental 48:11
Starting 51:20	streetscapes 18:3	submission 25:13 32:12 49:12 51:13 56:9 70:17 74:1 77:9 79:20 100:17	support 53:2 54:8,20 55:20 57:13 71:18 72:3 73:5 77:22 97:6 102:15
state 23:17 48:5 92:9 98:16 99:5 130:12	stress 102:20 103:2	submit 16:21 34:16 35:11	supported 53:9
stated 80:10	stressing 98:16	submitted 15:21 17:1 34:2 47:13 70:11	supporting 74:14
States 82:3 123:17,19 130:3,6, 10	stretch 59:12	submitting 99:17	supports 20:10,21 22:1 24:7,22 29:22 30:7,22 72:13 77:3 128:2
stations 25:8	strike 66:12	subsequent 100:18	supposed 40:6
status 17:20	strikes 122:8	subtly 74:14	surrounding 32:1 34:1 51:9 92:13 94:6 95:19
steel 50:20 52:4	striking 66:21	sudden	surveillance 60:12
Stephanie 15:14 35:18	strong 20:22		sweep 77:19
steps 97:18	strongly 42:10 114:16		swim 65:19,20
Stidham 36:7,16,17 37:12 41:9,	struck 66:10 122:10		swimming 65:18,21
	structural 79:10 97:3 98:17,18		swing
	structurally		

50:13 52:5	telecommunications 15:12,18 16:4 17:15 18:2,22 19:13 20:14 22:21 24:3 26:11,17 27:2,14,19 28:6,13,17 29:6,12 30:3 31:9 32:3 33:22 35:4	113:5 116:18 122:5 129:9	133:8,17
symbol 96:3	thinking 132:16	today's 17:3 57:22 58:10 70:15, 22	
symbolic 20:8	thinks 124:1	top 23:2 104:13 108:22 116:19	
symmetrical 26:13	thinner 79:9	topics 99:18	
symmetry 29:1 104:6 108:11	thought 37:19 38:21 63:2	topography 73:11 75:1	
system 36:13 42:14,20 77:13	thoughtful 86:10,20 103:8	total 47:20 97:16 102:6	
systematic 98:5	thousand 102:5 104:19	totality 120:10	
systems 31:12 74:8 97:5	thousand-seat 103:10	touch 38:11	
<hr/>			
T			
table 100:12	tensile 76:20,21 77:10	threatened 81:22	tour 99:3
takes 93:21	tent 99:6 130:7	threats 82:8	tracking 60:10
taking 43:12 72:10 91:13 128:9,11	tents 99:6 120:14	through-girder 50:11 51:15 52:14	tracks 47:20,21 50:5
talk 121:15 129:5	terms 56:14 86:12 93:16 112:18 113:4	Thursday 133:12	tradeoffs 21:18
talking 104:18 131:3	terrace 105:10,12,18 108:18	Tidal 29:19	tradition 100:6
taste 125:10	terraces 96:14 103:17 105:9	tigers 88:17	traditional 27:9
team 58:13 80:17 82:21 92:4 100:21 101:16 118:14 121:12 122:4 132:15	territories 39:3	time 18:19 35:14 36:19 39:7 44:2 80:14 82:16 87:1,7 102:20 103:6 105:22 117:15 119:22 123:6	traffic 50:17 54:15 89:5
technical 16:3	territory 76:17	timeline 32:14	trail 47:16 50:6 51:17 52:13, 17,18 54:5,11,13,16 61:20 66:11
technically 34:22	testimony 55:7	timely 80:13	trailers 99:4 120:14 122:15,16
technology 20:6	thankful 36:20 64:9	times 82:19 87:2 123:12 130:13	trails 68:4
telecom 43:4	theater 97:21 107:18	today 15:9 24:20 33:20 48:16 49:8,18 50:10,17,21 51:13 52:6 58:6,11,14 82:21 95:5 96:6 100:15 101:10 105:22 128:4	train 48:2
telecommunication 15:22 29:18 31:20 36:22	things 39:18 40:16 43:11 45:6 63:18 84:10 109:19		trains 50:12
			transform 81:8

transformative 100:10	type 51:10 77:14	unified 23:12	utilizing 30:7
transition 101:8	types 21:10 23:18 25:7	unique 16:12,13 17:17 20:5 22:10 70:21 71:19	V
translate 81:15	typically 18:4 21:22 87:13	United 82:3 123:17,19 130:2,3, 5,6,10	valuable 54:3
transparent 34:22 110:3	typologies 17:5 20:14 21:8,16,19, 20 22:11	unity 100:3	values 95:20
Transportation 50:2	typology 21:14 22:1 28:22	unnecessary 52:6	Van 88:16
travel 47:22 52:6 55:5 82:2 129:21	U	unstable 97:4	vantage 76:2
traveling 54:15	U.S. 23:16 26:9 27:6,10 96:11	updated 80:1	varied 73:11
Treasury 92:19 93:3 109:2,4 132:4	ultimate 21:15 101:11	upgraded 31:17 32:1	variety 41:15 73:8 76:10
tree 19:19 74:8 75:1 78:18, 21 131:20	ultimately 31:12 129:15	upgrades 97:7	vary 24:11 30:6
trees 26:8 56:21 57:4,8 73:9 76:16 106:2,5,8 107:21 110:2,4,5	unable 42:14	upper 104:15 106:13,15 108:6 109:5	varying 23:6
trip 96:7	unanimously 15:5 46:20 69:14 91:5	upstream 61:14	vaulted 22:17
Truman 96:14	unchanged 52:10	upturned 79:2	vegetation 57:11 73:9
Trump 96:17	underneath 87:11 105:19	urban 93:19 111:7,8	vendors 38:10
truss 50:13 53:14 55:15	underpinnings 97:6	urgency 34:9	Vernon 47:16 50:6 51:17 52:13 54:10,16 61:20 66:11
trust 54:7	undersized 97:11	urgently 82:1	vertical 18:5 77:8
turn 33:14 36:2 92:4 95:6 100:7	understand 94:14 95:3 108:21 128:10,16	user 19:10 52:18	Vice 37:18,19 38:14 46:3,4 65:2,3 68:20,21 87:9, 11,16,18 90:10,11 122:4,7 123:1
Twin 23:20 28:8	understanding 70:19,20 82:5 128:7,12, 17	users 54:13 55:12	vicinity 92:21 94:10
two-part 108:19	undertaken 101:1	utilitarian 25:1	video 44:16
two-story 103:19	undue 77:13	utility 122:11 123:5 124:5	view 29:9 76:7 78:16,20 79:12,15 92:12 106:3,4, 5,9 108:15 110:9 117:4 123:22 128:16
two-track 48:19	unfavorable 22:13	utilize 24:13 25:11	
		utilized 29:21	

viewing 55:11 71:17 72:4,5 76:10 79:3 96:1 132:8	vitally 95:16	79:22	54:11
views 34:7 50:18 56:18 57:9, 17 78:16 128:13,17	vote 45:11,14 68:9 84:1	ways 59:6 129:5	widening 51:12 55:4
viewshed 26:9,15 31:19	voting 15:7	weathered 50:20	wider 53:21 55:20
viewsheds 17:18 26:3 27:17 30:11 32:10 56:19 105:22 131:10	VPRA 47:13 48:3 49:15 51:4, 21 53:7,12 55:2,9,14 56:11,14 58:14 59:14 64:9,17 67:15 69:19	weathering 52:4	wild 87:13
VIP 72:4	W	weeks 34:14 99:16 132:11 133:1	wildlife 81:14
Virginia 47:12,17 48:5 53:18 57:5	wadi 75:11,17,20 77:19	Weil 47:3,5,9 59:13 61:13 62:1,10,14,16 65:5	Wilson 114:5,13,15
virtually 58:11 91:13	wait 83:8 84:12	well-maintained 100:3	win 39:16
visibility 52:18 78:4	walk 51:11 72:13,17 73:17, 19 74:6 75:14 76:7,9 77:16 78:12,17,22	west 22:6,9 28:4,5 29:10,16 51:2 52:12 54:12 55:1 75:18 78:20 93:2 104:4 105:13 106:6,21 108:8, 19 109:11 121:17 126:4	windows 103:16 106:20 109:6,9, 12,18
visible 102:7	Walking 87:11	western 49:19,20 50:7 54:21 57:5	Windsor 130:4
visit 95:18 98:22 123:18 128:14 129:22	walkway 121:18	wheelchair 119:6	Wing 91:9,20 92:2 94:18 95:14 96:15,19 97:1,8 98:1,19 100:16 102:7, 22 103:20 104:5 106:6 108:9,19 120:9 121:17, 18 126:4 128:3
visitor 19:17 34:12 37:6 74:18 93:20 99:15 126:2 132:16,17	walls 50:20 52:4 57:10	white 17:20 48:21 92:2,7,11, 15 93:13,14 95:1,7,13, 18 96:10,12 98:22 99:2, 19 100:16 101:20,22 102:2,15 103:4,21 104:2,3,15,20 106:10, 17 107:13,20 108:4,12, 16 109:16,17 111:10, 13,15 112:2,4,19 115:13 119:1,19	Winston 123:7
visitor's 74:14	wanted 67:1 74:21 107:21	120:10,13,15 122:10 123:10,15 128:16 130:12,21,22 131:16 132:4,18	winter 82:16
visitors 72:22 76:3,7 79:1,15 80:1 82:2 99:2,9 120:6 124:3	warm 66:4	wireless 16:4 19:6,13 31:12 34:6	
visitors' 99:13	Washington 17:13 22:5 23:19,20 26:10 27:20,22 28:3,8, 15,16,22 29:3 30:20 34:2 44:22 47:16 49:21 51:2 70:14 73:4 93:6 131:14	123:10,15 128:16 130:12,21,22 131:16 132:4,18	Wonderful 33:15
visual 17:16 24:6,19 25:21 26:12 27:15 30:10 55:10 77:15 79:11 102:2 111:12	waste 102:16	wi-fi 41:4	words 33:3 80:16
visually 19:21 55:19 111:9,12	water 50:16 97:8	wide 56:20 105:11	work 23:11 31:13 37:8 42:3,8 43:14 59:7 64:9,16,17 81:13 82:19 85:22 95:3
vital 67:22 129:18	watercraft 50:14	wide-scale 37:5	100:10 101:1 112:22 113:3,8 116:15,22 117:7 121:2 123:11 126:11 127:4 129:6 132:13
	wayfinding	widen	worked 114:11 130:22

working
44:20 80:11 109:19
113:14 116:20 124:9

works
24:13 114:20 115:4

world
82:3 99:5,7 123:20
129:21

world's
81:21

worth
31:8 129:17

worthwhile
126:13

woven
75:2

written
48:13

wrong
118:6

Y

y'all
95:13

yay
87:7

year
38:1 82:19 130:4

year-round
71:17

years
42:14 64:10 114:11

yellow
26:19

yet-to-be-developed
23:3,14 27:3,22 28:9
30:9 39:5

Z

Zoning
117:16

zoo
71:7,8 73:3,14 76:19
78:10 80:15 81:4,11
82:2 86:14 87:6,7