NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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COMMISSION MEETING

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OPEN SESSION

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THURSDAY,
SEPTEMBER 3, 2026

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The meeting convened via Videoconference, at 1:00 p.m. EDT, Mark Paoletta, Chair, presiding.

NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

MARK PAOLETTA, Chair,
Presidential Appointee (At-Large)
STUART LEVENBACH, Vice Chair, Mayoral Appointee
LINDA ARGO, Mayoral Appointee
STEPHEN BRUCH, Department of War
EVAN CASH, Office of the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia
ARRINGTON DIXON, Mayoral Appointee
DANIEL FALCONE, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Accountability
RADHIKA MOHAN, Office of the Mayor of the District of Columbia
TAMMY STIDHAM, Department of the Interior
KRISTI TUNSTALL-WILLIAMS, General Services Administration

NCPC STAFF PRESENT:

MARCEL C. ACOSTA, Executive Director
STEPHANIE FREE, Urban Planner
JAMIE HERR, Urban Planner
MEGHAN HOTTEL-COX, General Counsel & Secretariat
TAMARA LEWIS, Director, Operations & Administration Division
DIANE SULLIVAN, Director, Current Planning Division
LEE WEBB, Historic Preservation Specialist

T-A-B-L-E O-F C-O-N-T-E-N-T-S

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

1:01 p.m.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: For those who do not know me, I am Mark Paoletta. And I'm honored that President Trump appointed me as the new NCPC Chairman on August 26th to take over after my good friend and colleague Will Scharf stepped down to take on his new role as White House Counsel. I'm looking forward to working with my fellow Commissioners and the NCPC's terrific staff. With that, first, Secretary Hottel-Cox, can you please take the roll call?

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes.

COMMISSION ROLL CALL

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Mohan?

COMMISSIONER MOHAN: Present.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Bruch?

COMMISSIONER BRUCH: Present.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

MEMBER STIDHAM: Here.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?

COMMISSIONER ARGO: Here.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Here.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Chairman Paoletta?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Here.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Tunstall Williams?

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Present.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Here.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

COMMISSIONER CASH: Present.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Falcone?

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: Here.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Marcel Acosta, Executive Director, and Diane Sullivan, current Planning Division Director, are also in the meeting. With those present, Mr. Chairman, we have a quorum to proceed.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Noting the presence of

a quorum, I'd like to call this meeting to order. Today's meeting is livestreamed and will be available in a few days, the video on NCPC's website. If there's no objection, the agenda as posted is adopted as the order of business. Please stand for the pledge of allegiance.

ALL: I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: As I said, I'm honored to serve as the new Chairman of NCPC. I'm deeply honored that President Trump appointed me. I where many hats in President Trump's administration, including General Counsel of OMB, head of OIRA, Acting Director and Chief Legal Officer of CFPB, Chief Legal Officer at USAID.

I'm particularly excited to serve as the chairman of this commission. I have lived in the National Capital Region for more than 40

years living on Capitol Hill in southwest, upper northwest and Del Ray, Alexandria. For the past 26 years, my wife and I have lived in Falls Church, Virginia, where the stone marker that was set in 1791 at the direction of President George Washington to mark the westernmost point of the original boundary of the District of Columbia set forth in the Constitution.

I met my wife at Georgetown Law School in 1986. We have both worked in private practice here in D.C., in the executive branch, and Congress. And my wife is a current appointee at the Department of Commerce.

We've raised four kids here, and we have taken advantage of nearly every museum, park, and monument in this beautiful capital city. I love the National Capital Region, the people here, the architecture and its history, and I'm excited to serve on this commission. The Commission's work has never been more important than at present.

President Trump has recognized that a

great nation needs a great capital city. The President's restoration of our seat of government in our nation's 250th year has been spectacular such as Meridian Hill Park, this water fountain running again, and the stunning restoration of the Christopher Columbus fountain at Union Stations. This award winning commission has been at the forefront of accomplishing the mission of beautifying National Capital Region for its residents and scores of visitors from around our nation and around the world.

I look forward to leading this key agency during President Trump's renaissance in D.C.'s civic architecture and planning. Second, I want to report that pursuant to the Commission's delegation to me as Chairman and on the advice of staff I have approved an application from the National Park Service for a transfer jurisdiction of property on the Georgetown Waterfront. I'm honored to report the NCPC's Executive Director Marcel Acosta, a

wonderful man, has informed the Commission that he will be retiring from federal service on September 18th, 2026.

I've just started as Chairman. I've spent a little time with Marcel. The reputation of almost two decades as NCPC's Executive Director has preceded him. And I want to thank him for facilitating my transition here even as you're preparing for your next chapter.

My good friend and colleague, Will Scharf, the former Chairman, had this to say. Over 25 years of service to the National Capital Planning Commission, including almost two decades as Executive Director, Marcel Acosta has left an indelible mark on the architectural landscape of Washington, D.C. and the entire capital regional. Under his steady leadership, the NCPC has served as -- a vital role in countless significant projects and has safeguarded the architectural integrity and vitality of our nation's capital.

Marcel was truly a cherished colleague

during my tenure as chairman. Although it is difficult to imagine the Commission without Marcel, in his retirement from federal service, I wish him nothing but success in his future endeavors. That's from Will Scharf.

In addition to the Commission's sincere thanks and congratulations to Marcel on his retirement, I know the staff he has stewarded has some remarks, as well. So I'll turn it over to the Director of Current Planning, Diane Sullivan. Diane?

MS. SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is hard to imagine the National Capital Planning Commission without Marcel Acosta. In fact, for almost all of us, he's the only Executive Director we've ever known.

As someone who has worked under Marcel's leadership for almost 20 years, I am honored to talk about the undeniable impact he has had on Washington, D.C., and more personally the type of leader he has been for this agency. Washington D.C. and the region have grown

significantly since Marcel began at NCPC in 2001. And what he and this agency under his leadership have accomplished during this time is evident everywhere you look.

Imagine he has sat at this commission dais for over 275 commission meetings. Putting forward recommendations on thousands of projects. I'd like to highlight a few: the entire Department of Homeland Security campus at St. Elizabeth's, the World War I Memorial, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, the seamlessly integrated perimeter security around the Washington Monument.

From early on, Marcel championed the idea that physical security while necessary could be thoughtfully designed in landscapes and building yards, National Museum of African American History and Culture, and more recently, the new RFK Stadium, the Capital One Arena renovation, and the Bezos Learning Center at the National Air and Space Museum. These projects alone have shaped so much of the monumental core

in downtown that we know today and there have been so many others. Marcel has, also, guided staff's review of hundreds of master plans, including notes for Smithsonian facility, the National Institute of Health, the Pentagon, and all of the military installations in the region.

But perhaps even more importantly, he has been a visionary in planning for the future of our nation's capital. During his tenure, he led signature agency planning efforts, including the Monumental Core Framework Plan, the D.C. Height of Buildings Master Plan, the Beyond Granite temporary commemoration demonstration, planning for Southwest D.C., and the Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative. The Monumental Core Framework Plan adopted in 2009 laid out a 20-year vision for revitalizing the areas around the National Mall.

And we are currently watching that vision come to life with the redevelopment of the federal office district in Southwest and the upcoming master plan for Pennsylvania Avenue.

And while the Forrestal Building is still standing, Marcel's leadership has taken us to where we are today and we are so close. For this work and other key initiatives, this agency has won countless awards which decorate our hallway.

And Marcel himself has won many awards, including most recently the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's Ronald Kirby Award for Collaborative Leadership and the American Institute of Architects' Donald Meyer Public Service Award. And now, Marcel, I would like to reflect for a moment on your legacy as leader and mentor at this agency for over two decades. You have provided stability and continuity over the course of four Presidents and seven NCPC chairs with an unwavering focus on this agency's mission.

You have cared tremendously about mentorship and professional growth which is why so many of us have spent the better part of our careers here at NCPC. You have pushed us over

the years to have more than just technical skills, to think strategically, communicate clearly, and act collaboratively. You have held us to high standards, but we have felt supported the entire way.

I hope that when you walk around this city, you truly recognize how much of an impact you have had during your 25 years with the National Capital Planning Commission. We, on behalf of all of our staff, want to thank you for your leadership and dedication to our nation's capital, this region, and this agency. And we wish you the absolute best. And now I would like to invite Tamara Lewis, NCPC's Director of Operations and Administration and Marcel up here to the podium.

(Off-microphone comments.)

MS. LEWIS: So, Marcel, on behalf of the National Capital Planning Commission's Chairman, on behalf of the staff and federal government, we would like to acknowledge your 25 years of service with this plaque and your 25-

year pin at the top. And so, we've displayed it in its most beautiful fashion. And we appreciate your dedication to the National Capital Planning Commission's mission for the last 25 years. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Do Commissioners have any comments?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes, I do. First of all, Marcel, I've been here as long as you've been here, a little longer actually. And I've seen many folks in your role.

And I will share that you have been beyond outstanding in this role in comparison with others. You've done such a wonderful job. And I particularly want to reflect on how sensitive you are, in your quiet way sometimes, but in a forceful and strong way in giving leadership and direction.

I consider you not only a professional contact, but a personal friend given all these years. And I wish you, of course, as we all do, the best in whatever you do in your future. And

stay tuned and we'll stay tuned, as well, I hope. Take care.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Any comments? Agenda Item 4, it's a legislative update. Meghan Hottel-Cox?

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Sorry. I think we need to go back to Agenda Item 3, the Executive Director's report.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Sorry about that.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: No problem.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Keeping me on the straight and narrow. Agenda Item 3 is the report of the Executive Director Marcel Acosta.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MR. ACOSTA: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And welcome to NCPC and congratulations on your appointment as Chair of the Commission. On behalf of staff, I'd like to welcome you to this agency.

This is my final meeting before retiring from federal service and taking on a new role in the private sector, I'd like to

offer a few words of thanks. First, I want to thank this commission for the opportunity to contribute to the planning of the nation's capital for more than two decades serving as the Director of NCPC one of the most unique planning commissions in this country. And it's actually been the honor of my career.

Also appreciate your trust in this team and me. I'd also like to thank our partner agencies, the National Park Service, the TSA, Commission of Fine Arts, the Council of Government, and the District of Columbia government for their collegiality and cooperation. For the past 25 years, we've accomplished a lot together.

And to the members of the public and stakeholder groups that took the time to participate on our planning efforts and to testify at these meetings over those years, I appreciate your input and contribution. Finally, the Commission is in great hands with my superb colleagues on the NCPC staff with

Diane Sullivan taking the helm as the Acting Executive Director. Every month, they come to this commission meeting thoroughly prepared and they are by far the finest professional planning staff in this country and this will not change. I thank the staff for their outstanding work. It's been a privilege to serve with all of you.

Just a few more items. We welcome Crystal Rice who brings more than 35 years of experience across IRS, FAA, FCC, that's a bit of alphabet soup, and Department of Interior. She previously served at the Department of Interior as a management analyst and executive assistant. Welcome, Crystal.

I, also, extend our thanks to Ann Stockton who joined the agency in 2016 and retired last month after ten years of dedicated service to this agency and, also, served as a federal contractor for six years and held other roles in the private sector. So, we wish her all the best in Florida. And I'm sure that I'll be joining her for the early bird specials.

Finally, I'm pleased to announce the NCPC partnership with the Urban Land Institute and the Public Buildings Reform Board has received a 2025 honor award from the American Planning Association Federal Planning Division for the Forrestal Building Technical Assistance Panel report. Many thanks to our partners, panel members, and the NCPC staff. I'd like to call them out, Angela Dupont, Melissa Lindsjo, Diane Sullivan, Stephanie Free, Laura Shipman, and Jeff Jamawat.

Thank you for a great job. And after 25 years, this concludes my final report. I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Congratulations, Marcel. Your retirement from federal service is well deserved. We look forward to following you in your next chapter.

MR. ACOSTA: Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Do any Commissioners have any official comments?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Okay. Item 4, the legislative update, Meghan Hottel-Cox.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Thank you, Chairman Paoletta. I have two legislative items to report on this month, both on legislation that we've previously reported on to the Commission that have now passed both the House and Senate and are pending the President's review and signature before becoming law. The first is House Bill 2196, the National Emergency Medical Services Memorial Extension Act which would extend the National Emergency Medical Services Memorial Foundation's authorization for another seven years.

The bill passed the House on March 17th of this year and the Senate on August 7th and is now pending with the President. The second item is the Herschel Woody Williams National Medal of Honor Monument Location Act which requires national Medal of Honor monuments be located

within the Reserve. The House originally passed a version of the bill in January of 2025 which the Senate amended and passed on March 25th of this year.

And the House passed that amended version on August 31st. And that is, also, now pending with the President. That concludes my legislative report, but I am happy to answer any questions on pending legislation the Commission may have.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thanks, Meghan. Any comments from Commissioners?

(No audible response.)

VOTE TO APPROVE 2027 MEETING SCHEDULE

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Agenda Item 5 is a vote to approve the 2027 meeting schedule with meetings every month except for August. Is there a motion to approve the Commission's 2027 meeting schedule?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: So moved.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Is there a second?

MEMBER STIDHAM: Second.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Is there any discussion on the item?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Will the secretary please confirm the motion and the second and take the vote by roll call?

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes. The motion was made by Commissioner Dixon and seconded by Commissioner Stidham. Commissioner Mohan?

COMMISSIONER MOHAN: Approve.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Bruch?

COMMISSIONER BRUCH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

MEMBER STIDHAM: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?

COMMISSIONER ARGO: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach? Mr. Vice Chairman, are you with us?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Yes, yes. I am with you, yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Thank you. Chairman Paoletta?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Tunstall Williams?

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

COMMISSIONER CASH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Falcone?

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: The motion passes unanimously.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. The motion is carried.

CONSENT CALENDAR ITEMS

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Agenda Item 6 is the consent calendar. There are two items on this month's consent calendar.

The first is an application for the National Park Service for approval of a transferred jurisdiction for the D.C. Armory site at 2001 East Capitol Street, Southeast.

The second and final item is an application from the Department of Navy for the approval of the final master plan for the Olney Support Center Area Development. Are there any questions or discussion on the consent calendar from Commissioners?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Is there a motion to approve the consent calendar?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: So moved.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Is there a second?

MEMBER STIDHAM: Second.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Can Secretary please confirm the motion and second and take a roll call?

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes. The motion was made by Commissioner Dixon and seconded by Commissioner Stidham. Commissioner Mohan?

COMMISSIONER MOHAN: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Bruch?

COMMISSIONER BRUCH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

MEMBER STIDHAM: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo? Commissioner Argo, are you here with us?

COMMISSIONER ARGO: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Thank you. Vice Chairman Levenbach?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Chairman Paoletta?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Tunstall Williams?

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

COMMISSIONER CASH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Falcone?

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: The motion carries unanimously.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. The motion is carried. We have three items in open session

today.

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: Mr. Chairman, this is Commissioner Falcone. I just wish to make a brief comment on the D.C. Armory transfer.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Sure.

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: So I just want to say that I'm very supportive of the D.C. Armory land transfer. And Chairman Comer is very proud to have led the bipartisan initiative to transfer the RFK site. And I just want to add that we would like to see any work closely near the RFK master plan as we now see these two to be closely linked. And we see that this is a step to realizing the full vision of the RFK campus which is a step that will bring new jobs, economic opportunity, and at long last the commanders back to the District.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Excellent. Thank you for your comments.

LAFAYETTE PARK SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Okay. Agenda Item 7,

a request to approve comments on concept plans for the Lafayette Park security improvements. Stephanie Free?

MS. FREE: Good afternoon, Chairman Paoletta and Commissioners. The United States Secret Service and the executive office of the President in coordination with the Department of the Interior National Park Service requests comments on concept plans for a program of security improvements -- security and access improvements at Lafayette Park and its surrounding streets in northwest Washington, D.C. The proposal includes a permanent 8 to 10 foot height fence and gates around the perimeter of the park and paving improvements.

As a reminder, the Commission is approving comments on concept plans today. At the concept review stage, the Commission provides comments and requests additional information that will inform the Commission's action at its future preliminary and final review stages. The comprehensive plan for the

National Capital includes policies related to physical security that preserve the characteristic openness of Washington's public spaces.

Therefore, the Commission's primary interest in the security improvements at Lafayette Park are related to the visitor experience, including visual impacts, historic preservation, and protecting public access. For today's presentation, I'm going to start with a little bit of history of the site and the existing conditions, walk through the project background, and then provide an overview of the conceptual fence and gate alignment alternatives and designs. I'll conclude with an analysis of how this project relates to the larger context of perimeter security and President's Park.

Lafayette Park is an eight-acre park that occupies a full block north of the White House bound by H Street, Madison and Jackson Places, and Pennsylvania Avenue. It is generally open to the public. And due to its

proximity to and reciprocal views with the White House, the park is a popular visitor destination and an important location for First Amendment activities.

The parcel was included in the 1791 L'Enfant plan and first designed as a park by Andrew Jackson Downing in 1851. The park was redesigned during the 1930's. And additional changes were made in the 1960's.

The area was then listed in the National Register of Historic Places and designated a national historic landmark in 1970. Lafayette Park allows vehicular, pedestrian, and bike traffic on H Street while vehicular access is restricted on Pennsylvania Avenue. And while there are several entrances to the park, visitors typically enter the park from the north center entrance where H and 16th streets intersect.

There are also several historic businesses throughout Lafayette Park from the surrounding streets as you can see here with

the yellow arrows. And physical security measures have been implemented over time at the park and the larger White House complex in response to heightened security events since the early 20th century resulting in some permanent but mostly piecemeal temporary methods to secure the area. As seen here, temporary measures used today include formal White House fencing, bike racks and concrete barriers, and large scale fencing.

Here we have a look at some images of these temporary measures and placed along H Street looking toward the White House and some additional photos taken on Pennsylvania Avenue south of the park show layered installations of bicycle racks and concrete barriers. And as such, staff finds the current use of temporary security elements around the White House complex as well as Lafayette Park continue to detract, from the visitor experience and should be improved to help beautify President's Park. So, in this next section of the presentation, I will

discuss the purpose of the project and its general program.

The U.S. Secret Service has indicated Lafayette Park currently faces some risks through the existing barriers, fencing, and paving during times of heightened security. The proposed security improvements are intended to reduce these risks by replacing temporary security installations with a permanent solution, thereby avoiding disruptions to public access for installation and removal and the associated costs and providing a holistic design solution that reflects the historic character of the site. As such, staff supports the applicant's stated goals to protect park resources and preserve the park's openness with a flexible approach that maintains public access with temporary partial closures when necessary for situational security needs.

According to the applicant, there is no intended change to the process for determining when closure is necessary with the proposed

improvements. The applicant will also include data on the number of park closures and durations over the past few years for reference in the environmental assessment. During temporary partial closures, the entirety of the eight-acre park and sidewalks on 15th, 17th, and H Street would be open to the public as seen here with the green areas with restricted access on Pennsylvania Avenue and Jackson and Madison Places only.

As gates will be needed for egress during temporary partial closures, staff recommends the environmental assessment also evaluate the proposed enclosure's potential to impact occupant capacity within the park based upon egress needs during temporary partial closures. And during temporary full closures, the Lafayette Park itself would also be closed to the public. The applicant has also considered several paving options and ultimately determined the resetting of the brick is preferred to replacing it.

And staff supports the applicant's preferred approach at this time to reuse the existing pavers with an enhanced depth of placement to ensure a more stable installation and recommend continued coordination on the paving with the Section 106 consulting parties. In this next section of the presentation, I will review the conceptual fence alignment alternatives. Overall, the greatest difference between the alternatives is the alignment of the fence along H Street and the treatment of the center entry gates.

So, now we'll take a look at the proposed alternatives. Alignment 1 which is the applicant's preferred option places the fence along the perimeter of Lafayette Park in line with the existing stone curbs and bollards, providing a creative solution to consolidating security measures, encompasses the park's corner statues following the curve of the bases, requires rebuilding the north wall of the Lafayette Lodge so that it is inboard of the

fence line. And it creates a hardscape plaza at H Street in front of the park's north center entry gates which would be set back from the existing perimeter to allow for First Amendment gathering activities when the park is fully closed.

And here we have a look at the impact on public access during the various condition. You can see that during a temporary partial closure, the entirety of the park is open to the public. And a plaza area for gatherings is maintained on H Street during temporary full closures.

And here we have an oblique view of the north center entry gates at H and 16th Streets in Alignment 1. You can see here that the fence would return south and terminate at a set of piers on either side of the entrance, creating a plaza area. There is, also, a series of gates and posts that span the distance between the piers.

And another look here at Alignment 1

and the plaza created at the H Street entrance from eye level. The applicant identified Alignment 1 as the preferred option because it allows for wider openings in the north center entry gates, maintains First Amendment gathering spaces during temporary full closures, maintains internal park circulation during temporary partial closures, limits potential vandalism of the corner statues in the Lafayette Lodge, and has zero operational issues. The applicant, also, provided two sub-alternatives to Alignment 1 focused on an altered north center gate configuration.

Alignment 1A as seen here proposes a center fence panel framed by metal gates with white masonry piers on either side. Multiple metal posts and gate openings are located between the piers. And Alignment 1B proposes a center gate section with 10 metal posts and 11 gate openings framed by additional gates and posts on either side with the white masonry piers.

Alignment 2 places the fence along the internal edge of the park's north curbed walkway, allows the park's corner statues in Lafayette Lodge to be open to the public regardless of closures, creates a larger area -- gathering area along H Street for First Amendment activities when the park is fully closed, and it locates the north center entry gates in line with the fence, framing the central lawn panel. And here we have a look at the impacts on public access during the various conditions in Alignment 2. You can see that during the temporary partial closures the entirety of the park is open to the public, and during temporary full closures, a portion of the park along H Street is maintained for gatherings.

And here we have an oblique view of the north center entry gates at H and 16th Street from Alignment 2. You can see here the fence line is set back along the inside edge of the curbed walkway. Two sets of piers connected by

a center fence panel frame the entrances on either side of the lawn panel, each with a series of metal gates and posts.

And here we have an eye level view of the north center entry gates at H and 16th Streets in Alignment 2. Alignment 3 places the fence straight along H Street in line with the existing stone curbs and bollards and forward of the existing bollards at the north center entry gates, encompasses the park's corner statues at 90 degree angles, requires rebuilding the north wall of the Lafayette Lodge so that it is inboard of the fence line, and does not provide a plaza at H Street for First Amendment gathering activities when the park is fully closed. And overall, staff finds that Alignment 1 effectively integrates the existing perimeter, preserves the continuous elliptical walkway within the park, and has the most physical and visual porosity.

However, it encloses the entirety of the park and the multitude of metal posts and

gates across the H Street entrance lacks a welcoming arrival experience. The center fence panel in Alignment 1 creates a more welcoming entrance than the center gate section in Alignment 1B. However, the multiple gate posts between the white masonry piers in both options reduce the perceived and functional entry width, creating a more constrained arrival experience.

Alignment 2 provides more space for First Amendment gatherings along H Street during temporary full closures. However, much of the unenclosed space is landscaped with mature trees that may be affected by soil compaction from pedestrian activity. It also introduces an additional fence line, inboard of the existing bollards, and interrupts the continuous elliptical pathway within the park with fencing and gates.

And Alignment 3 reduces spatial constraints around the corner statues with the right angle fence alignment. However, it provides limited space for First Amendment

gatherings at the north center entry which is inconsistent with the park's character and use. So, based on these findings, staff supports the applicant's preference for fence Alignment 1 as it is the most integrated with the existing perimeter, creates a plaza space for First Amendment gatherings along H Street during temporary full closures, and maintains uninterrupted circulation within the park.

However, there are aspects of Alignment 1 that could be refined to improve the visitor experience. Therefore, staff recommends further development of the fence alignment at the corner statues and the approach for the center entry gates to achieve a balance between physical and visual openness with a design that is inviting to the public. In addition, the concept plans include three options for the fence alignment on Jackson Place at the White House Historical Society.

Option A as seen here on the left has the fence further set back from H Street. And

it will be the least visible from the public right of way. Options B and C would be more visible as they locate the fence along H Street.

Option C is reflected in the submission's drawings of the applicant's preferred alternative in Alignment 1. And next, we will discuss the proposed fence and gate designs. As seen here, there are a number of examples of public parks and gardens with permanent perimeter fencing around the world.

Overall, staff finds that the perimeter public park fences that are the most integrated with the surrounding context demonstrate the following characteristics. They have quality design and decorative detailing used to create civic identity, high transparency with thin picket profiles, numerous wide and easily identifiable access points that create high pedestrian permeability despite full enclosure, and active edges that reduce the feeling of exclusion. The proposed perimeter fence at Lafayette Park is described in the submission as

a black 8 to 10-foot tall fence with 4-inch picket spacing.

The applicant prefers the 4-inch spacing as this is the minimum distance allowed per code and provides more transparency than the 3-inch spacing option. The applicant studied several post options and identified a solid post above a rounded integrated base as it's preferred highlighted here in red. However, staff find that the option -- this option emphasizes the height of the fence and creates visual density at the 4-foot bollard spacing.

Alternatively, the open double picket post design above the rounded tapered fence post space, as seen here on the right, visually integrates the post with the panels and adds transparency. The applicant is also exploring a design pallet for fence finials, bases, and knuckles that meet security standards and accentuate the post finials which could reflect the park setting as a key feature. Other decorative elements are also considered in the

submission.

And overall, staff supports the use of the decorative double arched space, alternating diamond shaped knuckles, teardrop picket finials, and the approach to accentuate the post finials as together they convey a park-like character that is appropriate for the site and complement the White House fence. This submission also includes a comparison of the Lafayette Park fence with the White House fence, scaled to meet the park's security needs. And as such, staff finds that the proposed Lafayette Park fence design achieves visual continuity with the White House fence through its overall form, picket spacing, and incorporation of columns at the center entry gates.

However, additional renderings are needed to understand the impact of the proposed fence on the visitor experience. As outlined in the EDR, staff requests that the next submission include photorealistic renderings of the proposed conditions with the park gates both

open and closed from the vantage point shown here in comparison with the existing conditions at eye level. And the last few slides in this section will focus on the center entry gates.

As the north center entry as a primary access point into the park and a popular place for visitors to experience the use of the White House and Andrew Jackson's statue, staff finds the north center entry gates will be a prominent feature and an opportunity to further establish Lafayette Park's civic identity and sense of place through their design. The north center entry is defined by its central rectangular lawn panel flanked by two approximately 15-foot wide brick walkways that align with the 16th Street right of way. As such, staff supports aligning the north center entry gates with the primary north-south pedestrian walkways that are within the park stepped back from H Street along the outside edge of the elliptical walkway.

In addition, the south center entry gates are intended to mirror the north entry

gates but straight along Pennsylvania Avenue as seen here in the bottom right image. And while the submission includes photorealistic renderings of the north center entry, it does not include details on the design of the entry gates themselves. Therefore, staff recommends the north center entry gates be designed to create an inviting threshold that becomes an easily identifiable primary access point distinctive to Lafayette Park and that the applicant develop related designs for the remainder of the gates that correspond to their hierarchy of access points and on the perimeter of the park.

And as such, staff requests that the next submission include detailed elevations and photorealistic renderings of the proposed center entry gates, both when they're open and closed. And in this last section of the presentation, I will discuss how the Lafayette Park security improvements are integral to the overall solution to perimeter security at President's

Park. As discussed earlier, security measures at Lafayette Park in the White House complex have evolved over time, resulting in reactionary temporary measures that lack a holistic framework.

This was also recognized by the Commission in its recent reviews of other projects in the area, including the East Wing modernization project and the White House visitors screening facility. Within the Lafayette Park boundary where Pennsylvania Avenue meets 15th and 17th Streets, there have been multiple fencing types over time. Here we have photos at 17th Street where bike racks, bollards, cones, caution tape, and parking demarcate the secure perimeter.

And additional photos here of Pennsylvania Avene and 15th Street, also within the project boundary, demonstrates layers of bike racks and signage placed near the guard booths. As such, staff find that it is imperative to address security and access on

Pennsylvania Avenue at 15th and 17th Streets as this location is part of the project study area and will require coordination with the Lafayette Park security improvements. And while the applicant intends to study these locations in the future, staff requests the applicant provide as part of the next submission a schematic design approach that addresses security and access on Pennsylvania Avenue at 15th and 17th Streets, including public access to the Renwick Gallery.

The approach should identify how the potential fence alignment, access points, and design pallet will integrate with the Lafayette Park security improvements and the existing security features of the White House complex. And since Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House has been closed to traffic -- vehicular traffic since 1995, the proposed security design solution will need to consider whether the street will reopen to vehicles in the future or be treated as an extension of the

park for pedestrians. So, this concludes my presentation.

Overall, staff recommends that the Commission approves the comments on concept plans for the Lafayette Park security improvements as they have been incorporated into my presentation and the Executive Director's report. They are also listed here for your reference. I will end by noting that staff also recommends the applicant continue to work with the Section 106 consulting parties, District agencies, and adjacent property owners to address potential on and offsite impacts of the project, as well as provide updates on the Section 106 and NEPA processes as part of the next submission.

So, thank you. I'd like to now include -- or introduce Mr. Richard Macauley, Chief of U.S. Secret Service Police who would like to provide a few remarks. And the applicant team and myself are available to answer your questions.

MR. MACAULEY: Good afternoon, Chairman and members of National Capital Planning Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm Richard Macauley, the Chief of the United States Secret Service Police.

The mission of the Secret Service is to provide a safe and secure environment for the President, First Family, protectees, designated facilities, guests, and the public. The dedicated men and women of the Secret Service are constantly leveraging innovative methodologies and cutting edge resources to ensure we meet our protective needs. We are, also, happily engaging with the public every day while they are visiting the White House from all around the world.

We work with our partners at U.S. Park Police and the D.C. Metro Police Department to ensure the safety in the areas around the White House zone. Our police officers are engaging with kids, giving them stickers, coins, badges, and posing in numerous family pictures all while

maintaining our protective mission. We love to see the kids come and enjoy the park and the White House.

The purpose of the fence around Lafayette Park is not to restrict lawful demonstrations or prevent the public from enjoying the park or viewing the iconic residence. Quite the opposite. It creates several clearly defined access points and establishes a predictable separation between public space.

In more than -- my 27 years of law enforcement experience, I've learned that the best use of force is often the force that never becomes necessary. A well designed fixed barrier can help us achieve that objective by preventing situations from reaching a point where officers must physically intervene to establish or maintain a secure boundary. A permanent, aesthetically appropriate barrier with gates therefore provides more than a benefit of physical security.

It is a de-escalation tool. It establishes predictable boundaries, facilitates communication, preserves public access, and reduces unnecessary officer-citizen physical contact and gives officers greater ability to manage crowds peacefully and safely. Our goal always is to make sure the public are enjoying the White House and Park.

Ultimately, the Secret Service's goal is to provide a safe and secure environment for protectees, our facilities, the public, and the personnel while respecting the public's rights to peacefully exercise their First Amendment freedoms. We believe a thoughtful design fixed barrier with controlled access points will help us accomplish both objectives with the least amount of physical intervention necessary. Thank you very much for your time and for hearing our perspective. We are here to answer any questions. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you, Stephanie, for a superb presentation. Chief Macauley,

thank you for your terrific presentation. And as somebody who works at the White House and have for many years, in two administrations, thank you for your service and all of the Secret Service officers because they protect us and you do a great job doing that. So thank you. Do Commissioners have any questions?

COMMISSIONER CASH: I'm wondering if you could tell us the last time that Pennsylvania Avenue or the park were actually opened? I walk by there all the time. They seemed to have been closed for a long time. So, like, when's the last time the public could go onto Pennsylvania Avenue?

MR. MACAULEY: So, the park was closed due to some of the construction work which was on the north side of the complex and also some of the heightened threats. We've had multiple shootings on the north side, on the west side, and on the south side on -- around the White House complex in the last couple months. And so, the park has been closed for some of those

critical incidents and, also, due to the construction vehicles on the north side.

COMMISSIONER CASH: I'm trying -- which -- so, you have Renwick on the west side. You have --

MR. MACAULEY: Construction on the northeast.

COMMISSIONER CASH: On the northeast which is what? I can't remember. It's the old Riggs Bank building or whatever that is. But I thought that construction was largely complete.

MR. MACAULEY: There's, also, construction on the north side of the White House structure itself right now.

COMMISSIONER CASH: The ballroom. But that was in the last year. Because I'm trying to recall. I mean, I walk that way every day. I'm trying to recall the last time the public was able to actually get into the park or Pennsylvania Avenue. They're slightly different because there's -- the construction has been more towards Pennsylvania. But when was the

last time either has been open?

MR. MACAULEY: It's been for quite a while because also there were -- they also had to reconstruct the park itself. So the park has been -- the fountains are running again. So, the -- Park Service just finished construction of the park right before July 4th. So, the park has been closed for at least six months, I can recall.

COMMISSIONER CASH: Okay, thanks.

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: This is Stu Levenbach. I have a couple questions here. Could you walk me through exactly, it looks like there's some internal gates and I'm suspecting that's where, for example, White House staff or staff in the new executive office building or the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, they can access the park. But can you walk me through how these other gates work?

MR. STOHS: Yes, absolutely. Do you have the circulation slide?

MS. FREE: Yes.

PARTICIPANT: I think it's early in the presentation.

MS. FREE: It didn't feel that long going through it the first time. Almost there. There we are. Okay.

MR. STOHS: Yeah, so there'll be gates along the Jackson and Madison sides, also have gates into the park from the Jackson-Madison corners north and south, also. So, White House staff could approach or anyone who has a work pass can approach from 15th, 17th, or Madison-Jackson preceding down. Again, the park as its envisioned instead of having a fence line straight across the north and none on the north-south sides for Madison, Jackson, or the south face, it -- that leads us to an all or nothing closure.

And so I think if you go further down, you see we have three levels predominately open -- or all open and then predominately open where the park proper is completely open, but the roadways are restricted. And that's where staff

would process through those gates. Does that make sense?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Yeah, it does. Thanks. And then the other question I have and it's just, I'm looking at probably the same diagram that you're on. Sorry, I'm on -- I can't see the video at the moment. But the thick red line, is that a second gate that goes around essentially the entire block?

MR. STOHS: I'm not seeing -- which slide are you on?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: I'm on Slide -- it's called alternative Alignment 1 -- fencing on alternative Alignment 1 preferred -- Slide 13.

MR. STOHS: Just a moment. Okay. Repeat your question, sir, Commissioner.

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: So, just so I understand it, I see two fences here, one that looks like it goes around what in effect is the entire block and then a second fence which is enclosing Lafayette Park and then the roadways

obviously leading into the Pennsylvania Avenue. So, that -- am I right in interpreting the red line is a second fence?

MR. STOHS: So there's -- at the very north end, there's a set of bollards. And then what we do is we drop down to have a set of gates at the very center of the park. If you're talking about over to the left and right at the avenues, those are fences that connect the fence that goes all the way around the park over to the building so that there's a continuous line from building to building if that's what you're referring to.

(Simultaneous speaking.)

MR. STOHS: What Mr. Levenbach is saying is --

PARTICIPANT: Went all the way around in the online packet that we have.

MS. FREE: I believe, Commissioner Levenbach, you might be referring to the study area boundary.

MR. STOHS: Oh, that's not --

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: That might be it. The legend says an 8 to 9-foot tall non-climbing fence is the red line which is why I thought that this was a double fence setup. And that's what I'm trying to understand. Are we looking at once fence or are we looking at two with one going around what is essentially the entire block? So you're saying the study area of this red line, this is not according to the legend a second fence?

MR. STOHS: Correct.

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Okay. Thank you.

MS. FREE: And if you could just state your name for the record.

MR. STOHS: Oh, I apologize. Andy Stohs, Senior Technical Advisor, Secret Service project lead for this project.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: At the north central entry, you show there's a lot of bollards that I believe are existing.

MR. STOHS: Correct.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: And then you're going to have a fence to the south of it. Is there a need when you introduce the fence to retain that line of bollards? Or could they be removed to kind of open up that landing plaza?

MR. STOHS: So we still have to have a vehicle perimeter. And so, we maintained that. We --

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: And the fence itself couldn't serve as --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

MR. STOHS: The fence wouldn't serve itself if you wanted to keep it very porous. It would be more on the order of what we have around the White House, so much thicker pickets, much more --

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Got it.

MR. STOHS: -- posts. And so, we were trying to keep that view shed as transparent as possible. So, that's why we tried to keep the

bollards as the vehicle barrier and keep them low and then at everybody's line of sight it's as thin as possible as we can get. But again, that was the concept development.

As we go through, you know, consulting parties, we're open to people's suggestions. We've studied dozens of alignments in a variety of configurations. These are the ones that have risen to the top with the least amount of detraction.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Thank you.

MR. MACAULEY: Ma'am, if I may just add, a couple years ago, we had an individual with a U-Haul truck tried to ram towards the White House. And actually --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

MR. MACAULEY: Yeah, at 16th Street. So, that's why --

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Okay.

MR. MACAULEY: -- I designed this.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Thank

you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Chief, how long is the Secret Service recommending some sort of permanent structure that would protect the park?

MR. STOHS: So prior to the fence jumper in 2014, we had done studies about the existing White House fence. So we had deployed at a point temporary barriers along those times. Once that occurred, that became our priority -- I apologize. That became the priority.

And we came to the Commission of Fine Arts and went through that entire process to develop the White House fence. During that time, we continued to look at what our needs are. Some of those needs have evolved in the last eight years.

So our plans that we had in 2012, 2014 have kind of grown. We went through another exercise in 2021, '22, and developed several different alignments in this park that we looked at. And then, as you alluded to, we've come to the Commission for temporary measures in 2024

and 2026, EEOB, Treasury, and First Division.

Those are providing us capability that we need as we continue to develop our master plan to come back to you to say these are the fences we envision. We need to be able to go from day to day to create delay as things elevate with security incidents around the complex. Again, these fences are open in these outer barriers -- outer layers. It's then when there's an incident or situation or intelligence that tells us we need to then close them temporarily.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. Chief?

MR. MACAULEY: Chairman, if I may just add. On May 29th, 2020, a 500-person peaceful demonstration started about 7:21 p.m., 500-person peaceful demonstration. Within two hours, it's over a couple thousands, Molotov cocktails, rocks, frozen water bottles had been thrown. Twenty-four officers going to the hospital by midnight.

We had to -- we needed assistance from

about five to ten other agencies just to help clear thousands of people. It took two days to push beyond H Street and then contractors put up anti-scale fence. So, the issue which we deal is a peaceful demonstration with crowd dynamics changing so rapidly.

And having again kids from all over the world, all over this great country come to enjoy the park and now having to create safety for the families who were down there. And, also, folks who are now going from that peaceful demonstration to that unlawful activity. And that's why now we have to go -- where law enforcement and demonstrators have to go face to face all while protecting the White House complex.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: I thought your comment about having these as de-escalation tools is -- was spot on. I have your press release actually from that incident. And it says, just for the record, some demonstrators repeatedly attempted to knock over security barriers and vandalize

six Secret Service vehicles between Friday night and Sunday morning.

More than 60 Secret Service uniform division officers and special agents sustained multiple injuries from projectiles such as bricks, rocks, bottles, fireworks, and other items. Secret Service personnel were, also, directly physically assaulted as they were kicked, punched, and exposed to bodily fluids. A total of 11 injured employees were transported to a local hospital and treated for non-life threatening injuries.

The Secret Service respects the right to assemble. We ask individuals to do so peacefully for the safety of all. So this is what we're facing. This is why you're recommending this.

MR. MACAULEY: Yes, sir. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Yes, sir.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I have a couple questions. First of all, I want to say that

folks are realizing you guys are doing your job. And going at you physically and personally is not really responsive to making their case, I don't believe. But people do things. I don't know what to say about that. It's just unfortunate and wrong. But anyhow, I have a question about the idea about -- I'm concerned about graffiti and whether or not some of the structures that are being put in place, so, kind of the pillars, can be treated in some manner to help us reduce or eliminate graffiti if put in place because you know they're going to be spraying it with spray cans and what have you.

MR. STOHS: They will. And as we have seen in previous demonstrations that go unlawful, security measures can get damaged. Our friends at the Park Service would love to protect their resources. So, that's why we recommended a barrier that goes around them so at least the treasured statues and resources are protected. Again, we'll construct it in accordance so that it blends in with the

historic district. That's the priority. We'll have to get --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yeah, I just wondered are there any finishes that can be put on it, coatings that will help us get it off once it goes on. But I just --

MR. STOHS: It's counter to the historic fabric. We kind of -- we balance that.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I understand. Also, I'm interested in the lighting. Is there any focus on lighting whether it be permanent or needed -- as needed in that area?

MR. STOHS: We will work with the Park Service as we look at any utilities that could stand --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

COMMISSIONER DIXON: -- the lighting of the park.

MR. STOHS: We have an evaluation of the lighting in the area.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Good, good. The

other question has to do with the -- and I want to tell the Chief, too, Chief Macauley. I -- we often had five, four stars going up in front of us. I moved by there. I like the image. It's good. I also got caught up in your discussion about these coins that you give to the kids. So I guess I got to get in line as an older kid.

MR. MACAULEY: A special one just for yourself.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Oh, no, I can't do it, I got to be careful with that. I'm also curious. The flag -- and I don't know. I saw the flag in your images. And the flag is on the right side of the White House grounds, I think. I'm not sure.

PARTICIPANT: One in the front, one in the back.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yeah. But as I recall, my rules of flag hanging, it should be on the left side -- I mean, I'm not asking you to move the pole, but I'm just curious because normally it's on the left side of an entrance,

not on the right side.

MR. STOHS: It is on the left side looking out from the White House.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: When you face the building, the flag typically is on the left side, not on the right side. I'm not sure it's very critical. But I got involved in this, because I go to Providence, has one of the oldest 4th of July festivals. And they have a committee that monitors the people hanging flags. And it has to be done or they will be fined.

And I remember that they always suggest on an entrance, it's on the left side, not the right side as you face it. My house has it on the left side. So I didn't want to -- you can dial them if it's true or not. I don't know. Also, I think that pretty much covers my questions and thoughts. Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER CASH: So you elicited a question when you mentioned master plan. Why are we getting this now? If security needs and

all the other stuff at 15th and 17th Street, if it's all integral, why are we getting this piece before we get the master plan? Why isn't this being integrated into a master plan and then moving forward?

MR. STOHS: It is integrated in the master plan. We started this project before we got approval to start finalizing our master plan. Our master plan touches a number of other areas. And our in-house prioritization of those has been dragging on a master plan officially coming to you all. So, it -- as I mentioned to the staff, you will be seeing a submission for a master plan in the coming month or two. It's just it's been delayed.

(Simultaneous speaking.)

COMMISSIONER CASH: If we move forward with this, have we kind of baked it in? Like, what if we disagree with this and the master plan we approve this. And you guys say, well, you already approved this.

MR. STOHS: Well, I think we'll come to

you with the master plan as part of this and parallel to it. And if this process has to wait another month or two to get through the master plan, that's what we'll have to do.

COMMISSIONER CASH: And then going back to security and I worked on the Hill and the Homeland Security Committee for many years. So I understand. I'm not asking for specifics.

But I'm looking at this damage right here. Yes, I think of May of 2020, and there were some extenuating circumstances. And I'm guessing if the same thing were to happen right now in the climate there, the same people that were in Lafayette Park would instead be on H Street.

So, you're protecting the Jackson statue and the bricks and I guess the brick projectile. I guess my point is you're moving protesters, whether peaceful or peaceful that turns into violent, out onto H Street. Is that actually easier to manage?

I mean, when we're talking about

protecting people which is what the whole ball game is here, making sure people don't get hurt, making sure people don't get hit by projectiles, the same protestors are going to be there. They're just either going to be stuck in a plaza within 50 feet that's probably a lot more dangerous or they're going to be in the park hopefully doing peaceful protesting things.

And I -- just understanding how government works, I'm imagining back, when was it, June 26th when gay marriage was approved by the Supreme Court. There was a spontaneous walk to the White House that had a bunch of lights on them and stuff. And it was a happy celebration for hours and hours and hours out there.

If these tools are at the Secret Service's and the administration's disposal, whatever administration it is, security, I know how it's going to be. They're going to say we're going to close off the park. I'm just not understanding what you gain in terms of protecting the public by having every

demonstration that's going to continue to happen, happening 100 feet back rather than in the park. You'll protect the grounds. But when you talk about thought process about how backing people farther away accomplishes the security goals that you mentioned.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to join in with his comment and I agree. I also support the idea of a larger First Amendment ability and area. One of your plans has a curbed area which gives more space because I understand. I agree with you.

You're pushing people into the street, H Street which is -- creates traffic issues, all kinds of issues. And you probably can't accommodate a larger crowd. It gets bigger and bigger, I guess. But certainly the more First Amendment space within that area I think would be beneficial.

MR. STOHS: Understood. And these are all conversations that we've had throughout the years about this. And again, it gets into

people's ideas about what should be the proper barrier around a park. Keep it -- define it a park or do we bisect the park in a way that then that makes it where it's almost two parks in a sense.

And so that's part of the conversation why you are actually seeing these two alignments. Because that was a very in or out kind of situation as we've discussed with consulting parties, the park and everything like that. So again, that's been one of the areas that's been -- I'm not going to say contentious. But it depends which side of it you're on.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Just because -- just because there's a gathering -- I just want to make sure if there's a gathering, there's a protest, it's not necessarily being close, right? So what is -- so what is your anticipation of how many times you would be closing this park throughout the course of the year?

MR. STOHS: Well, so I don't think we

can give a projection on that. It's all threat based. Again, as you've seen, when you -- if you have experienced the White House outside because of the construction the last year, it's a little different.

But before that time, we would close Pennsylvania Avenue for a period of time depending something was going on, on the north face of the complex, not telegraphed to the public. But we know where people are and where we need to then provide a little bit more standoff from the fence line. So the road gets closed regularly throughout the day.

Under normal circumstances, 15 minutes, 20 minutes. Then there are times where we push people all the way up past the park. Again, those are based on security needs and so forth.

So the number, I can't tell you. But I believe organic demonstrations that occur, if we're open, we're open. It's been as the chief had mentioned when they turn.

MR. MACAULEY: If I may just add. So

we may give 100-plus demonstrations with permits a month. And then we may have 30, 40, 50 spontaneous demonstrations, no registration. It could be from 10 to 1,000.

Now we also had back in 2023 50,000 demonstrators in Lafayette Park, peaceful. Everything was excellent. Then all of a sudden, in seconds, pressure gets pushed on the White House gate and then everything changed.

And now we have to push them further out. And H Street is the next hardline boundary, right? Because we may all agree and say the line is in the center of this room. But then it becomes a seesaw line. And you need a fixed line for lawful direction and order.

COMMISSIONER CASH: And again, I'm not going to get into a security debate here. But if the tools seen out here to close the entirety of the park down at a minute's notice, seeing how the avenue has been, I mean, I kind of see where this is going. And I think that you actually bring up a great example where

something just suddenly goes south.

You have to disperse because it's now gone south geographically. But you're actually going to have, I think, in this design if there's 50,000 people in the park and things start getting violent, someone pulls out a gun, something like that, I'd much rather have no fences so I can get out of there. You've now like created a situation where I think it actually makes it harder to evacuate what was an otherwise peaceful protest.

So I understand the idea behind security. If I were in your position, I would be advocating for the same thing. But I'm not in your position.

I'm a member of the public that up until 18 months ago was able to walk through this park pretty freely every single day. But now because we're restoring some fountains, I guess we have to close it all off. It's just -- I think this is a slippery slope.

And as soon as this is a tool you have,

it's a tool that's going to be used. This is just part of what life is like in D.C. And it's part of the pact that we made back when we agreed to a really, really high fence that because of a lot of Commission review went really well. But -- so, I guess I've asked the questions. But actually, I would ask, how would you respond to the idea that if you have these fences, it's actually going to make it harder to get a large group of 50,000 people out of the park when things go violent?

MR. STOHS: So I think we would not allow 50,000 people back into that park. Fifty thousand, there are numbers that are appropriate in the gating as in the assembly area if it is an arena. There are doors designed so you can evacuate --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

COMMISSIONER CASH: Didn't we just say that there were 50,000 people?

MR. STOHS: There were. I'm saying if we built a fence. I don't know that it would be

the right thing to do for public safety to allow 50,000 people.

COMMISSIONER CASH: So we're floating First Amendment? You're limiting the -- because you now have a fence, you're going to limit the size of things that would've otherwise been allowed because we have a fence?

MR. STOHS: I don't know that 50,000 people were safe in that park to begin with. I mean, you can look at that and there are not enough avenues to approach to be able to get out of there for 50,000. They would not meet the egress code.

COMMISSIONER CASH: Were the fences up when that happened?

MR. STOHS: No, they weren't. But I'm saying today where would those people go if there was a shooting. There's only --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

COMMISSIONER CASH: Over the chains that are three feet above the ground?

MR. STOHS: I mean, I'm just saying,

50,000, if we do the math and we look at the open space, it's probably a public safety issue. I'm saying it needs to be looked at. Our team has looked at the number of gate openings. That's actually why the north and south gates are so wide.

We'd actually prefer to make that plaza wider. We'd have to double up the gates at every corner. Like, again, we've started doing calculations and we're look at it. We're conscious of that. Again, I totally agree we need to look at public safety as a big part of this and also, you know, be careful of the First Amendment.

MR. MACAULEY: Sir, if I might just add. Lastly, one thing which the Secret Services prioritizes de-escalation, treating tools and tactics. So crowd management, again, just like July 4th, we screened over 55,000 people, had to evacuate them because of bad weather.

And we screen 65,000-plus in a couple

hours. Our dynamic was changing. But again, due to prioritizing crowd psychology and how to mitigate and de-escalate so we do not use -- elevate the use of force to safely -- again, we have to prioritize the guest experience.

Well that's one thing to say because Secret Service prioritizes in every space. Because we constantly are dealing with large crowds where we go with the President. And so the guest experience and security is a priority of the agency.

So we do ensure that our folks are well trained first. And this is just another tool for de-escalation and to create an open space and a controlled environment. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you for this discussion. We will now turn to public testimony. We have seven people signed up on this matter today. Shelbey Blasdel attending virtually, you're representing Blasdel Barn Reclamation and will have five minutes to provide your testimony. Please proceed when you

are ready.

MS. BLASDEL: Thank you, sir. Chair, Commissioners, and members of the public, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I appreciate the work this Commission does to ensure the construction projects meet the highest standards of safety, compliance, and long term public benefit. Your role is essentially, and I'm grateful to contribute to this process.

Per the proposed planning and the preference of Alignment 1, I believe this alignment to be less efficient as per security and more efficient with flow of human traffic and aesthetics. Looking at the security factors here is my -- sorry, is in my opinion on the matter, I will only be speaking of Alignment 1 and Alignment 2 because the rest are null and void in my opinion. Alignment 1 has a wider span and navigate for security forces and our camera personnel.

Alignment 2 per the pillared entry is

what I'm going to call it seems to be more secure but also less to navigate for a security standpoint. Once the park operates are closed -- -operations are closed, Alignment 2, let us call this is the pillared entry, makes the fencing more structurally sound, even if it is bulkier in appearance. If there were an issue within the gates, pillared entry Alignment 2 as per we were speaking on, would make it so the escapee could, one, be easily apprehend and one -- the two main -- at one of the two main exits. The pillared points would be harder for the average American to jump over.

And if there were a failure in closing the gate, electrical issue, redundancy issue, and/or speed of closure issue, the remaining exit points could be brought by one bigger security personnel given the normal human dynamic of a counter. The same instance inside the gates also pertains, so if there were a bunch of outside -- sorry, a breach outside of the gate. Three, if a camera fails by hacking

electro-optical redundancy issues, interference, and there is some other camera interference to less span -- for the less span between the checkpoints, the pillars.

For civilian traffic to navigate better, therefore making the interference less of an extreme issue and more of an issue that needs to be dealt with immediately. When the initial Alignment 1, although aesthetically pleasing and less issue of crowding during busy hours, this option poses a bigger issue due to the wider point of entry. It has a higher percentage rate of missing facial recognition scans, terrorist entry, and/or at any other security risk here.

With more ability to group together, it gives one more way a terrorist could be hidden and/or hide from a camera and less ability for security personnel to be viably due to their job, efficiency -- sorry, they have less viability due to having efficiency and effectively of doing their job. For instance,

in Alignment 1, let us call this aesthetically pleasing option. There is a very tight group of 15 people easily entering in Alignment 1, wide area. Whereas in Alignment 2, less aesthetically pleasing but harder to group people when entering.

You could cut the grouping to comfortably five or six people and facial scans, all of them equally, even if some of were behind others. Take a moment and think of things from a complete non-biased and outside perspective. Which of these options would be, one, more secure upon entering, two, less likely to miss a scan, three, easier for security personnel and/or security devices to detect a threat.

Just ponder this for a moment. No answer needed. But think to yourself for a few minutes, is this project truly about security or is the project more about getting less complaints from the civilians by taking down the temporary fencing through the neighborhoods, making the park more inviting to the tourists

and regular civilian public and to make the park more aesthetically pleasing to the eye on which of the two alignments, Alignment 1 and Alignment 2 that I mentioned, truly give the security overall.

I want to emphasize that I respect the Commission's responsibility to evaluate this project thoroughly and objectively. If at any point you determine that there's deeper technical insight or project support would be helpful, whether during review, commissioning, implementation, I'm fully prepared to contribute directly through the appropriate channels. And I'm more than happy to answer any questions you might have.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you for your testimony. Do Commissioners have any statements or comments?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you very much.

MS. BLASDEL: Thank you, sir.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Next we have Pam

Fessler who's attending in person. You will have three minutes to provide your testimony. Please proceed when you are ready.

MS. FESSLER: Good afternoon. My name is Pam Fessler, and I'm speaking to you today as a 47-year resident of the Washington, D.C. area. I spent many of those years working on or near Lafayette Park. And I like many Americans cherish the special role it plays in our history.

I came to Washington in 1979 to work at the Office of Management and Budget. And I used to love to sit in that park at lunchtime and watch life of the Capitol unfold before me. Tourists excited to have their pictures taken in front of the White House, park workers planting beautiful tulip beds, men and women in suits rushing to important meetings, and the almost constant presence of someone holding a sign petitioning their government.

This was the America I loved, democracy, freedom, hope all on display. That

year, the park was the site of protests supporting and opposing the Shah of Iran. Later when I was a White House reporter I watched others demonstrate for and against our involvement in overseas wars. I was there the night thousands of Americans flocked to the park to celebrate the election of our first Black President. People came there because they knew this was our country's town square where they could gather to express their feelings about the direction of our nation as so many others have done before them, suffragettes, civil rights advocates, Vietnam War protestors.

But by far the most profound gathering I witnessed in Lafayette Square was almost exactly 25 years ago. In the dark days following the September 11th attacks when the city was largely silent, students from nearby universities spontaneously gathered in front of the White House and began to sing patriotic songs. It still sends chills up my spine thinking of these kids.

Their world had been upended as never before. But here they could connect not only with each other but with the nation looking for answers and for once united. I understand the need for security. But I have no doubt that if this plan goes through, the gates will be closed, the park sealed off, and public access whenever situations like those I've described occur again.

It will undoubtedly become routine to shut down the park whenever a protest or mass gathering is expected on the grounds that it might be disruptive. But I ask you, what are we protecting? The White House is building a state of the art complex that has been described as one of the most secure facilities in the world.

A fence around Lafayette Park will do little to enhance those protections. The measures have also been justified to protect the park from vandalism. If so, why protect a park by no longer allowing it to serve the purpose that makes it so important to preserve in the

first place?

What we are really doing is putting another barrier between Americans and their government when people most need to come together to express their joy, fear, anger, or patriotism. This is what we need to secure, the freedom to gather, the freedom to speak. Thank you very much.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you for your testimony. Do Commissioners have any questions for this witness?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I just want to thank her for a couple of things --

(Audio interference.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thanks, Commissioner. Thank you. Next we have Betsy Merritt. You are representing the National Trust for Historic Preservation and will have five minutes to provide your testimony. Please proceed when you are ready.

MS. MERRITT: Good afternoon. I'm Betsy Merritt, Deputy General Counsel at the

National Trust for Historic Preservation. And thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

As the owner of Decatur House immediately adjacent to Lafayette Park, the National Trust has a direct interest in continue -- in ensuring continued public access that is important to historic property, especially in light of the National Trust's congressional charter requiring us to facilitate public participation in historic preservation. We appreciate the security needs around the White House complex, and we support the goal of replacing the current temporary barriers which are awful with a carefully planned holistic solution that's thoughtfully designed and sensitive to the historic character of this nationally significant landmark. However, more work needs to be done, and more alternatives need to be considered before rushing to build a permanent barricade.

Lafayette Park is a nationally

significant public gathering space. The park has played a central role in the civil life -- civic life of the nation. And its history is deeply intertwined with the history of the preservation movement itself. In the 1960's, Jacqueline Kennedy and the National Trust founder, David Finley, were among those who helped lead the effort to preserve the historic brick townhouses surrounding the park rather than demolishing them for government office buildings.

The resulting solution preserved the distinctive historic character of the square while accommodating the needs of the visiting public in the federal government. That history underscores why security improvements here demand a thoughtful, cohesive, integrated planning approach. The existing collection of security measures, including bollards and jersey barriers and bike rack barriers and high metal fencing and constantly repositioned lines of police tape has detracted from the historic

character of the park.

We need a more coherent and visually compatible solution. Other organizations have also voiced their concerns about ensuring that the longstanding tradition of peaceful public assembly in Lafayette Park can continue without unnecessary impediments. We believe those concerns should act as a north star throughout the design and operational planning for the park. It's also important to ensure that the review of this project under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act is based on a complete and accurate understanding of Lafayette Park's historic significance.

As the Cultural Landscape Foundation and the State Historic Preservation Office have pointed out, the Section 106 review currently underway for this project is based on severely outdated information from 1970. That's more than 55 years ago. The Park Service needs to incorporate a 2022 update of Lafayette Square's national register and national historic landmark

listing which includes substantive changes to both the time period and the area of significance. Without this accurate information, it raises questions about how NCPC and the Park Service can adequately take into account the proposal's adverse effects or consider appropriate ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate them.

Making a decision based on fencing from the 1800s fails to take into account this additional, more current information. Since NCPC cannot grant final approval for a project until the Section 106 process has been properly completed, we encourage you to (audio interference) reach a consideration of plans for Lafayette Park until more consultation has occurred under Section 106 regarding alternatives and modifications to the proposal that would reduce its adverse effects.

We need to make more progress toward a consensus about the best way to balance public access and security. The National Trust remains

committed to working constructively with the NCPC, the National Park Service, and all other parties to achieve security improvements that protect the White House complex but also the historic, civic, and democratic functions of this extraordinary outdoor public space. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these issues.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you for your testimony. Do the Commissioners have any questions for this witness?

MEMBER STIDHAM: Chairman, if I could just add, we heard you at the -- we heard everyone at the consulting parties meeting related to the national register nomination, the fact that it was outdated and that the update had not moved forward. And we have since moved that forward. So we have also updated the AOE to reflect that --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

MS. MERRITT: That's great news.

MEMBER STIDHAM: So I just wanted to

share that.

MS. MERRITT: Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Next we have Julia Koster. You are representing St. John's Church, Lafayette Square, and will have five minutes to provide your testimony. Please proceed when you are ready.

MS. KOSTER: Thank you, Chair Paoletta and members of the Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments. My name is Julia Koster. I'm the junior warden at St. John's Church, Lafayette Square. My remarks summarize a longer letter provided to the Commission.

St. John's Church is located at the northeast corner of 16th and H Street and faces one-third of the north boundary of Lafayette Square. The church and the adjoining parish house are both national historic landmarks. Permanent fencing will fundamentally change the historic use and experience of Lafayette Square as a location for the public to see the White

House, conduct First Amendment activities, and enjoy this urban park. We have significant concerns about the impacts of the proposed permanent fencing on St. John's and the adjacent neighborhood, informed by what we are experiencing with the current temporary fencing.

We recognize the important security requirements within this area, including our own need to provide a safe location for congregants and visitors while fulfilling our mission to be welcome and open, a place of grace here in the nation's capital. It's important to us that our spiritual function is not negatively impacted by the proposals for Lafayette Square. Ideally, we prefer to see an open Lafayette Square that can be freely accessed by the public consistent with its symbolic and historic use.

St. John's favors of the presented alternatives those that move White House visitors and First Amendment activities away from H and 16th Streets and those areas near St. John's and reducing harmful impacts on the

church and parish house. Between the alternatives offered, Alternative 2 with the fence adjacent to the oval offers more space for visitor and First Amendment activities during full closures. Alternatives 1 and 3 only offer a small plaza area on the north which provides limited space.

We encourage exploration of other alternatives that might leave more of Lafayette Square open to the public permanently and move activities away from H. This includes options that only fence the square on the south side or providing more protection at Pennsylvania Avenue as part of a comprehensive security approach. We request through this process greater analysis of the impacts to the church, the parish house, and our neighbors.

We encourage explaining this proposal in the larger context of recent and proposed projects so the public can understand use, design, and security objectives. There is no information on the criteria for and the

frequency of partial or full closures of Lafayette Square and Pennsylvania Avenue which have an impact on our facilities. I want to highlight just a few more of our concerns.

As we noted, the proposed fencing negatively alters the historic use and context of Lafayette Square and negatively impacts views and vistas from the square, H, and 16th Street as well as views to and from the church properties affecting the experience, setting, and context of St. John's historic buildings. It affects the historic use and pedestrian travel patterns throughout the square and around St. John's, limits access to our facility, increases noise and trash, and creates security and safety threats for St. John's buildings and those using our facilities. St. John's is known as the church of the President's and is nationally recognized as a symbolic and historic building.

While we are proud to be stewards of this important civic legacy, this also makes the

church a potential target for protest, violence, and terrorist activities in its own right as well as indirectly through our proximity to the White House. We have experienced a variety of safety and security incidents in recent years, including arson. Temporary fencing in Lafayette Square has increased the number of people on or adjacent to the public spaces around St. John's.

Permanent fencing with the possibility of frequently closed gates will continue to push activities north and impact St. John's. This increases our vulnerability as a soft target and has the potential to intimidate visitors or create physical barriers to access. St. John's is committed to working with federal and district agencies and our neighbors to fully explore alternatives, find good solutions, and consider measures to address impacts. Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you for your testimony. Commissioners, do you have any

questions or comments?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Yes, sir.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I'd just like to welcome our former secretary of NCPC back and see that she's still proceeding with her activism. And we appreciate your testimony and just seeing you again.

MS. KOSTER: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be back here although not something I had on my bingo card.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. Next we have Zachary Burt. You are representing the D.C. Preservation League and will have five minutes to provide your testimony. Please proceed when you are ready. Zachary Burt? Oh.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: It looks like he joined online. If you can give us just one second to get.

MR. BURT: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Paoletta and Commissioners. My name is Zachary Burt, and I am the community outreach

and grants manager for the D.C. Preservation League.

We are a Washington citywide nonprofit advocate for preserving and protecting our city's historic resources. And I would just like to thank you for the opportunity to present our views on the proposed security modifications. DCPL would first like express its support for the comments submitted by the Cultural Landscape Foundation and the National Trust.

The proposal to erect a permanent 10-foot tall metal fence around Lafayette Park threatens to irreparably sever the historically significant visual physical and symbolic connection between the American public and the Executive Mansion. The Commission should pause this proposal because it relies on incomplete historic information as mentioned by the testimony from the National Trust. The National Park Service, Secret Service, and the consultant have evaluated adverse effects using the 1970

national historic landmark designation, omitting the 2022 boundary increase and additional documentation that expands the park's period and area of significance that includes the park's role as the nation's premier site for first assembly -- First Amendment assemblies.

Proceeding with that, incorporating this updated documentation risks irreversible harm to a national cultural landscape. And I'm happy to hear the recent announcement from the Park Service that it will be relying on this more updated information. Lafayette Park's history is linked to peaceful public assembly and democratic expression.

Alice Paul, of the National Women's Party, established the tradition of protesting directly in front of the White House in January 1917. Notice the Silent Sentinels, these women picketed in Lafayette Park and along the White House fence line for two years to secure women's right to vote via the Nineteenth Amendment. Decades before widespread national recognition,

Dr. Franklin Kameny and the Mattachine Society of Washington led the first organized White House gay rights pickets in Lafayette Park in April 1965 protesting federal employment discrimination during the Lavender Scare.

Throughout the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, the Park Service gathering space for civil rights marches, anti-Vietnam War rallies, and anti-nuclear vigils, most notably the peace vigil started by William Thomas and Concepcion Picciotto in 1981 which became a decades long symbol of free speech. People also gathered in Lafayette Park to express shared national joy which has been mentioned many times today, to mark momentous political shifts, and celebrate historic milestones for our country. Spontaneous celebrations regularly erupt in the park following Presidential elections, civil rights, victories, and the end of major conflicts.

Designing a security solution for Lafayette Park requires an innovative, site

specific approach that honors its solemnity and safeguards its extended historical significance. Permanent restrictive fencing strips the site of its essence as the people's yard. DCPL urges the Commission to require NPS to provide complete updated documentation before making any design decisions. Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the D.C. Preservation League.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you for your testimony. Commissioners, do you have any questions, comments?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you.

MR. BURT: Thank you.

ADMIN. JUDGE HALE: Next, we have Charles Birnbaum. You are representing the Cultural Landscape Foundation and will have five minutes to provide your testimony. Please proceed when you are ready.

MR. BIRNBAUM: Thank you, Commissioner Paoletta and the Commissioners and also thank

you for the opportunity to comment today on Lafayette Park security modifications. A proposal to permanently enclose Lafayette Park, as we know, a national historic landmark that is ground zero in this nation for First Amendment protected rights with the proposed 8 to 10-foot metal fencing which would forever alter the site's historically significant visual and spatial relationships. The Cultural Landscape Foundation is a national Washington, D.C. nonprofit.

We're an education and advocacy organization and are serving as an official consulting party in the current Section 106 review for this undertaking. In my 15 years with the National Park Service, I also served as the primary author of the guidelines for the treatment of cultural landscapes which applies to the Secretary of the Interior standards, foundational to the 106 process. Located directly across from Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House, Lafayette Park has been the

nation's premier site for free speech and public assembly.

In the cultural landscape report some years ago, prepared by the National Park Service, it compared this space to London's Hyde Park Speakers' Corner. And it seems appropriate today with the passing of Gloria Steinem who famously emphasized the physical presence and action in protest noting, quote, sometimes we have to put our bodies where our beliefs are. The current report notes that the proposed perimeter fence at Lafayette Park is needed to address public access during times of heightened security in a holistic manner and I underscore that for you.

That reflects the historic character of the site and improves the visitor use and experience. The word holistic appears numerous times in the staff report which is encouraging. Also notable is the report statement that NCPC's primary interest in security improvements in Lafayette Park are related to the visitor

experience, including visual impacts, historic preservation, and public access.

I won't read what I have submitted in writing in regards to the 1970 designation and the amendment. We're delighted to learn today that the Park Service is revisiting that as we wrote to them back on August 17th and August 25th having not heard anything until today. To repeat, the design proposals presented here today are based on the earlier data which limits their value and threatens the resource.

The key information section of the NCPC staff report notes the designation of 1970 as we heard earlier today but makes no mention of this amendment until just moments ago, leaving us all in the dark. And since the NPS, the Secret Service, and AECOM have been apprised and have acknowledged that stunning lack of information, we're pleased to know that this will be considered going forward before considering alternatives. How can we possibly introduce permanent fencing and assess adverse effects if

we don't recognize the updated period of significance and what the areas of significance are.

Is this conversation the cart before the horse? The Secret Service, NPS, and AECOM have proposed a response that may address security concerns but does little to address the District's designated expanded areas of significance. Today's Commission meeting began with Diane Sullivan's recognition of Marcel Acosta's myriad accomplishments that included the security hardening work at the Washington Monument by noting, security can be managed thoroughly -- I'm sorry, can be thoroughly integrated. Excuse me. The nation's premier site for First Amendment protected rights requires an innovative, site specific design response that is respectful of its solemnity and dignity and reflects an up-to-date understanding of the parks and Lafayette Square's historic district expanded period of significance. Thank you so much.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Birnbaum. Commissioners, do you have any questions or comments?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. Finally, we have Laura Follansbee. You are representing the American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia. You'll have five minutes to provide your testimony. Please proceed when you are ready.

MS. FOLLANSBEE: Good afternoon. My name is Laura Follansbee, and I am an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Throughout the ACLU of D.C.'s 65-year history, it has focused on protecting First Amendment rights in the nation's capital, including in Lafayette Park and the White House area. The Secret Service has repeatedly pressed for greater limitations on public access to Lafayette Park as it is here. Now when such

limitations have been rejected by the courts, Presidential safety has now been compromised.

The Secret Service's assertions about Presidential security are not scripture. It is the responsibility of the National Capital Planning Commission to weigh them against countervailing considerations like the park's storied history of expressive activity and make independent evidence-based judgments about the need for a fence. As NPS and the Secret Service recognize, Lafayette Park and the White House are unique historic sites for First Amendment protected protest activity.

People routinely come to those areas to demonstrate or to celebrate because of the expressive significance of making their voice heard at the front door of the People's House within sight and sound of the President. Demonstrations in Lafayette Park have almost always been peaceful. From the suffragist to the spontaneous celebration of the killing of Osama bin Laden to the peace vigil that stood in

the park for more 40 years.

None of the many assassinations and attempted assassinations of Presidents have had a link to Lafayette Park. The proposed permanent fence will significantly interfere with the park's value as one of the most important if not the most important locations in the nation for First Amendment activity. The proposed modifications claim the fence will, quote, preserve day-to-day openness.

But it will do just the opposite. Even when the gates are open, the very presence of a fence will send a message to the public that the park is only open by permission. People who wish to exercise First Amendment rights in the park will sensibly fear that NPS and the Secret Service ultimately directed by the President will have essentially unfettered discretion to close the park at will.

We echo the concerns expressed here today that we will be on a slippery slope. For more than eight months, this administration has

closed Lafayette Park entirely. There is every reason to anticipate that this administration and potentially future administrations will choose to close the gates of a fence indefinitely to avoid hearing the public's voices on matters of public concern.

Both NPS and NCPC staff seem to take the position that leaving the current temporary fencing in place forever is the default option. But it is not. Pretending that the temporary fencing around Lafayette Park is the no-action alternative improperly avoids considering the park's historically open character which offered freedom of movement and visual connectivity to the White House as the basis of comparison.

The proposed modifications also fail to explain why the proposed new fence is necessary for Presidential security. Why isn't the existing White House fence recently rebuilt and the manifold other security measures in place around the White House adequate? Wouldn't a fence along the south side of Lafayette Park

address any lingering concerns?

The Commission should ask such questions and consider their responses carefully before approving any proposal. Construction of the proposed fence would also violate an act of Congress. Congress has explicitly prohibited the construction of any, quote, building or structure on any reservation, park, or public grounds of the federal government in the District of Columbia without express authority of Congress, 40 USC Section 8106.

The proposed fence is such a structure. Yet Congress has not passed any law providing express authority for its construction. We also disagree the proposed Alignment 1, quote, creates a plaza space for First Amendment gatherings along H Street Northwest during temporary full closures.

The so-called plaza space would be tiny, about double the width of a sidewalk, and is far removed from the White House as possible. We urge the Commission not to support any plan

that would relegate demonstrators to such a remote, tiny sliver of property. The White House is a very safe place for the President.

Safety is constantly balanced against other interests desirable to the President and the American people such as attending far flung political rallies and sporting events. And the right of the American people to engage in free assembly and expression in proximity to the White House is a greater constitutional value. This Commission should remind the Park Service that it must give, quote, the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for redress of grievances greater weight than adding unexplained improvement to the safety of the President when he is safely in the White House. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thanks for your testimony. Commissioners, do you have any questions or comments?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you.

MS. FOLLANSBEE: Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: That concludes public testimony. Thank you all for testifying today. Is there a motion to approve comments and concept plans for the Lafayette Park security improvements?

MEMBER STIDHAM: So moved.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask (audio interference) if we could -- (audio interference) what impact are we talking about in terms of the process. Is it -- what action would that (audio interference).

MS. HOTTEL-COX: So, the action that the applicant is seeking today is comments on concept plans. So this is the earliest in NCPC's review. And so the -- there will be subsequent times that the project comes back to NCPC.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I thought that would be the case. So therefore moving forward now doesn't lock us in?

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Correct.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Okay. I appreciate that. I think that we all have been trying to tweak this. At least I have been thinking tweaking it so it might work.

And they keep talking about this is an assembly in place for the First Amendment for the government. I think it really has more to do with executive branch of the government often than it does the legislative branch. If that's the case, we might want to put fences around the Mall so we can prevent folks from coming there and doing their presentations just so the Capitol is safe.

I don't think this makes any -- that makes any sense to do this. I think the buildings on either side, east and west of this facility, of this park, need to be protected. If that's the issue, then let's address that issue.

But to try to say this is going to protect the White House is kind of crazy because -- you know, but it doesn't really. And I'm

concerned about the Secret Service. It creates the management situation for them to handle potentially a locked in, tie down folks if something hostile happens rather than having a way for folks to move out easily in an open space, open garden where they can come and speak freely and form their First Amendment rights.

So I think that we can -- I would start moving forward but not moving forward with any commitment that will approve this totality in the future. I mean, I think it creates more problems than it really helps. And certainly it doesn't protect the White House.

I mean, they're going to throw a brick from there to the White House? The White House, they're going to come in with armament. They're going to shoot the White House -- shoot at the White House? Doesn't make any sense.

Just restricts us more and limits us more. And I think we should really think seriously about whether we even need to do this. But if we want to protect folks on either side,

let's be clear. But in terms of the park, protecting the White House, I don't think it really sells. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you, Commissioner.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Mr. Chairman, before we move to full deliberations, I have that the motion was made by Commissioner Stidham. But I didn't hear a second.

(Simultaneous speaking.)

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I'll second.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: And I'll open up the Commission for discussion. I'll start with the deliberations of Commissioner Bruch.

COMMISSIONER BRUCH: Thank you. I appreciate the presentations and the thorough discussion today. It's been very informative. I would think as the project moves forward in its planning, if there are options to just on the southern side of the park or the south and east-west side of the park, maybe a complete

enclosure would be achieving both objectives of the public, the First Amendment space but also of course the protection of the People's House which is a critically important role and something that we've got the right people looking at and protecting today.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Other comments, discussion?

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Usually we just go around the dais and each Commissioner has the opportunity to provide a comment.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Okay. Sorry about that.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: No worries.

MEMBER STIDHAM: I just want to reiterate that this project is at the very early stages. While it has been considered for a really long time internally between the Park Service and the Secret Service, there's a lot to balance here. There's public use.

There's visitor experience. There's resource protection. During those times, our

lodge house was burnt down, statues were defaced. So it's a fine balance to find a solution that meets all of these requirements in such a way that it still makes the park opening very open feeling, welcoming to visitors, welcoming to the public, and welcoming for peaceful protest that are not damaging.

So we are at the beginning stages. We're at the start of the Section 106 process. We look forward to hearing from everyone's ideas, your input. And we will take that to heart and move forward. So thank you for your presentation.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo? Commissioner Argo, are you with us?

COMMISSIONER ARGO: Yes, I am. Can you hear me?

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes. Do you have any additional deliberations to share?

COMMISSIONER ARGO: No, not at this time. I really appreciate the folks that have come forward today. I think this has -- I'm

sorry. I'm getting -- can you still hear me?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Yes.

COMMISSIONER ARGO: Actually, I'm sorry about that. I think the implications of the proposal on the table are profound in a number of ways. And I appreciate the tack that we're taking time and will take all the time that we need to come to the right decision on this subject.

I think there's nothing more important than the right of free assembly and speech. And it's a cornerstone of our history and we have to keep this in mind. Thank you so much.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Thank you. Vice Chairman Levenbach?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: I think that anyone walking by Lafayette Park, they understand that there's a problem that needs to be solved because you have layers of these temporary barriers and security measures that I think make clear that we need a more permanent approach. So I strongly support this project

and the objective of providing an effective and efficient security for the White House compound and all the federal employees that work around it. And I don't think people necessarily realize that you have federal employees, not just in the White House, not just in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

You have 500 employees in the new executive office building and also additional employees in the townhouses that align Lafayette Park. And so I've worked in this corner for 14 years. And so it's also quite personal.

I saw the protests in 2020. They were literally right outside my window. And I was concerned about my personal safety, the potential protesters that jumped the fence into the EOB.

And I was concerned about that. I was concerned about the safety of my colleagues. So I appreciate the problem that the Secret Service is trying to solve right now.

And I look really closely at the

fencing because I'm not thinking about expanding the White House protective area at Lafayette Park. I'm thinking about what do we need to do to keep people safe that work all around this park and unfortunately have had to go through some of them, very disconcerting experiences with some of the protests in 2020. So at the same time, I'm sympathetic to the concerns that were raised in terms of expanding White House perimeter.

When I first started working in the new executive office building, I remember walking right up in the front door and going into the EEOB. And people haven't been able to do that for over a decade or maybe more. So appreciate those concerns about the expanding security perimeter.

Lafayette Park, it just looks beautiful. I'm appreciative of what President Trump, Secretary Burgum of the National Park Service has done with Lafayette Park. It certainly is a -- it looks wonderful.

But at the same time, we're not trying to protect the park. We're trying to protect all the federal employees that work around the park. And one thing that I do want to mention is I want to emphasize the staff comments about understanding the temporary barriers.

I mean, I think my hope is that all the temporary barriers get removed. But is this going to solve the problem that it's intended to solve that doesn't result in removal of the temporary barriers or at least some of the barriers? And I'd like to understand why to make sure that we have an efficient and elegant solution that's worthy of this amazing space right next to the White House. Thanks.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Thank you. Commissioner Tunstall Williams?

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Thank you. Thank you for the presentation, Ms. Free. And thank you to everyone who has testified here today.

There's been some compelling testimony.

But I also understand that the reality that we live in is that there is a need for some layers of security. My comments are going to be on what is presented today, but I don't want them to preclude consideration of some of the suggestions that have been made about perhaps securing the south end and the east and west.

GSA controls both the east and west side of the park. I would like to partner with you and our operations folks to make sure that whatever changes proposed still allow us and the employees that Commissioner Levenbach referenced to safety access those properties. So looking at what was presented today, I would agree if we're taking the approach that, yes, the park does need to be secured, I believe Option 1 from a preservation perspective is the most elegant solution.

I do think we need a comprehensive, seamless solution. I think Ms. Free's presentation included some very compelling precedent photographs of other great parks

around the country that showed this working. The comments that Commissioner Cash raised about if you're enclosing this, then do we have a different type of security issue I think are very valid and need to be looked at on how if an event occurs, you can safely egress people from that park I think should be fully considered before anything moves forward.

I do like the A1 approach to -- I'm sorry, 1A approach to the north central entry. I think to the extent that you have the pillars and to the most part a clear transparent fence that allows you to look through and still get that iconic view of the White House. If we're just thinking about public experience, I believe that is the stronger approach.

The corners I believe still need some analysis and whether we're protecting the statues or the park. As it's shown in Option 1, I'm not quite sure how the fence is going to engage with the plinth of that statuary. I actually think maybe in Alignment 2 where you're

looking at the southern edge and you've pulled it away from the statues kind of to the north side of the sidewalk there gives those sculptures a little bit more breathing room if the goal was to protect the park and not the surrounding area.

So I think there are some things to look at. I think as you evaluate this providing the greatest degree of transparency and welcoming to the design as it evolves is really important. And I would like to acknowledge that this is very nascent in the design. And I appreciate you all bringing it through.

I look forward to the consulting party meeting where we're going to meet on site. I think that will help us to analyze this. And I also would like to echo which I said in the consulting party meeting that I'm glad that the NCPC staff picked up the importance of considering what's happening on Pennsylvania Avenue to 15th and 17th Street. This is a precinct, and it should be addressed sort of as

a whole, even if you can't implement every phase at this space. So thank you very much for the product, and I look forward to working with you to evolve it.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Mr. Chairman and members, I feel like we're tweaking a bad idea. But something may need to be done for the east and west side where these folks are employed in these buildings that need to be safe. But in terms of building something that someone can cut off at will, shut down at will if they don't want to hear a position that they feel is hot.

That's, like, let's cut off the mic, close off the park. That makes a statement to the public and to the world that somebody decided they don't want to hear what the folks have to say. Even folks are going to say what they want to say, they'll find their way.

But to give some authority to be able to lock the door, close off the park when they decide to do it for whatever reason is basically

a statement saying we don't want to hear from you. And we're going to stop that. But it'll just make a statement.

It's like send up a flag saying, mic is cut off. We don't want to hear you. And I don't think that's a good thing to do or be able to do.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

COMMISSIONER CASH: Thanks. In case you couldn't tell, I have some concerns about this project. I've just got to say building upon some of the questions I had earlier and the more that I've been able to sit here and think about it, we're talking 800 feet away from the north portico of the entrance to the White House which is about a couple hundred feet away from a 12-foot high or however it is high fence that we already built when we were promised this won't need to happen.

If you build us this fence with these wide pickets that will, like, do all these things, we'll never need to do this. I feel

like -- not a lot of us on this dais have been sitting at this dais for that long. I sat here through the entire White House fence project.

I swallowed a lot of stuff there that I never would've swallowed if I knew that we were going to be coming back and pushing people another block away from the White House and for security reasons that I think are just security theater. If you really want -- if we're that worried that the fountains in the park or that future protests or anything else are that big of a problem that we've had to have temporary fencing up since I believe around January 6, 2000 -- or 2020, that's -- these are the things we're talking about. We got 2,000 National Guard here.

They're not doing a lot. Maybe instead of going through a Metro station, they'd be better off in the park. Someone could enjoy it at least.

So I'm just saying I don't get the security stuff here. We built a huge fence.

We're talking about one and a half -- I wish I had one of those posters -- one and a half Washington monuments away from the White House on all sides now.

If we did that in the Capitol, you wouldn't be able to go to 3rd Street, to 2nd Street, to Constitution and Independence. And they actually got attacked and we haven't done this. So I'm sorry.

I don't want to minimize the predicament that law enforcement is in when you have big crowds. We're in D.C. We talked about these crowds that go around that are permanent versus unpermanent.

We do a pretty darn good job without a giant fence. And I don't see why we can't continue. And I agree. Take down the temporary fencing. It's not necessary.

We did for hundreds of years without it. And even after a lot of the most recent stuff, we were fine without it. This is just -- if I were in law enforcement, I'd be asking for

this too.

But I think that the balance here is just way, way off. I don't want to be on the wrong side of the church. I don't want to be on the wrong side of the public. And I just -- I think the problem we're trying to solve here is way overstated and that there are better policing tactics that can be done to protect both the property and the people and also preserve First Amendment rights. So a couple of meetings ago, I voted to say I want to hear the comments on the EEOB painting because I thought that would be useful. I'm over that here.

If I knew I had the votes, I would move right now to strike the entire beginning of the EDR and replace it with a comment that says, this is not necessary. We already built a fence. But knowing that I would not win on that motion and not wanting to make the Secretary take a vote that I would know the outcome of, I'm just going to sit here. Once again, I'm going to oppose this. If I'm the only one doing

it again, so be it. But especially on this one, I just don't get it. So I'll be opposing this, and thank you.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Falcone?

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: I just simply want to thank the staff and the Secret Service for their presentations and for their considerations of safety and accessibility. And as well I want to thank the members of the public for testifying.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: And Commissioner Mohan?

COMMISSIONER MOHAN: I echo the thank yous and staff for the great presentation. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thanks. Look, I think the Secret Service has been asking for something like this for 14 years, 2014, 12 years. And I don't want to lose the momentum. The status quo cannot continue in my view in terms of the security assessment.

It's become a more violent world.

People gather in the park. I don't think the Secret Service has any intention of shutting this park when there's peaceful protests. So this idea that if there's a fence up, we're losing our First Amendment rights, I don't accept.

Okay. Time, place, manner, people can come to the park. They can protest. They can make their views known. But there is a threat in my view to the White House.

And people can enter those parks with guns. And you can have a clear line of sight to the White House from the park, okay, and to the Eisenhower Building. In the first term, I was sitting up on the balcony.

I had an office on the second floor and there was a protest out in Lafayette. And I could hardly see it because of the trees. But a Secret Service officer came up to my balcony and said, you need to get off the balcony.

There's a threat level there. You need to go inside. Now if it were closed all the

time, that'd be one thing. I don't think that's going to happen.

I think it's a Secret Service in terms of having a barrier to have some crowd control if it gets out of hand. So I support this measure. The assassination attempts on President Trump are unprecedented.

And having that park open without any -- I guess if the park gets out of control, you can still clear the park, right? I mean, that's the thing that's -- like, if they need to get protesters off that park because it's become a riot, they are going to clear the park. And so this is something which I think is a de-escalation device.

People can still go to the park. They can still protest 95 percent of the time -- probably 99 percent of the time. And there's been no progress on doing something.

We have this terrible piecemeal, ugly mess of protecting the park right now. We're protecting that area so that the threat level I

think is addressed. So I'd like to -- my support moving forward with adopting the comments.

And I want to thank the applicant team and staff for their thorough review of the proposed security improvements at Lafayette Park. I think we can all agree that the temporary installations, they are cumbersome both operationally and visually and have a negative impact on the visitors' impression of the White House complex. As a valued historic and cultural resource, any permanent security measures implemented here must be thoughtfully designed and executed in a manner that is inviting and integrated with the surrounding context.

Thank you to the public for your comments today and also to the Commissioners for the discussion. The applicant team, I thank you for some good feedback and to consider as these plans advance. Are there any other further comments or questions?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Okay. Can the Secretary please confirm the motion and the second and take the roll by roll call?

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes, a motion was made by Commissioner Stidham and seconded by Commissioner Dixon. Commissioner Mohan?

COMMISSIONER MOHAN: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Bruch?

COMMISSIONER BRUCH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

MEMBER STIDHAM: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo? Commissioner Argo?

(No audible response.)

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Chairman Paoletta?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Tunstall Williams?

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

COMMISSIONER CASH: No.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Falcone?

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?

(No audible response.)

MS. HOTTEL-COX: The motion passes.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. The motion is carried.

WHITE HOUSE VISITOR SCREENING FACILITY

CHAIR PAOLETTA: We'll move to the next agenda item which is 7B which is a request to approve preliminary site and building plan for the White House visitors screening facility. Lee Webb, you are recognized.

MR. WEBB: Thank you. One second as I pull up the presentation. Okay. Great, thank you. So good afternoon, Chairman Paoletta and Commissioners. The Executive Office of the

President in conjunction with the United States Secret Service and the National Park Service has submitted preliminary site and building plans for the construction of a new permanent security screening facility for visitors to the White House complex in downtown Washington, D.C.

As you can see here on this image, the project will be located within the White House grounds and President's Park north of the National Mall. Within President's Park, the project is located primarily in Sherman Park. The Commission provided comments on a concept design for the project at its April 2nd, 2026 meeting.

Since that time following additional agency discussions, further Section 106 consultation regarding alternatives as well as further site engineering, the entrance to the facility was moved from the south side of Sherman Park to the west quadrant as indicated on this image. The below grade and exit components remain in generally the same

locations as identified in the concept review. As such, staff supports the project goals to provide a permanent White House visitor screening facility that can support security screening needs for visitors arriving to the White House complex for tours and large scale events as well as White House staff and contractors.

As a reminder, for the preliminary review stage, the Commission is focused on topics such as any revisions to the architectural and landscape strategy since the concept review, the project's consistency with the federal elements of the comprehensive plan, and are there any new impacts to key views or historic resources. As I shared in the concept review, President's Park is an 82-acre park that serves as the setting for the White House and other federal buildings as well as memorials and monuments. It is nationally significant cultural landscape in the monumental core of Washington, D.C. and is listed in the National

Register of Historic Places.

Here are a few images and views of Sherman Park as it looks today. Currently, there are no trespass signs and layers of bike racks are being used to prevent pedestrian access to Sherman Park because the previous temporary fencing on the west side has been removed due to the East Wing modernization construction. Once this screening facility project is completed, the Secret Service intends to reopen access to the park via the stairs and walkways that are off 15th Street.

As a reminder, these images show that today the Secret Service uses temporary trailers on East Executive Avenue to screen visitors following an initial identification screening on Hamilton Place in temporary tents. Now let's look at the preliminary design for the new visitor screening facility. As I mentioned, the Commission provided comments on the concept plans for the new facility at its April meeting.

And at that time, the applicant's

approach included a below ground entrance plaza on the south side of Sherman Park that would lead visitors to the underground screening facility. Since concept review, the applicant has developed a new design approach for the screening facility consisting of an entrance pavilion sided along the western most edge of Sherman Park where the quadrant is significantly wider than the north, south, and east sides. The east facade of the new entrance building is a line to match the distance between the Sherman monument and the existing retaining wall along 15th Street on the opposite side which establishes a strong visual relationship between the new structure and the surrounding historic landscape.

With the change in location of the new above ground entrance pavilion, visitors will be instructed to arrive at the west side of the Sherman monument from either Hamilton Place and 15th Street or E Street and 15th Street corners of the park as shown on this image. The

accessible route into the park is from the Hamilton Place and 15th Street corner. Queuing will begin in the plaza at the center of the park and then visitors will enter the facility via a new walkway on access with the monument.

The entrance pavilion will provide indoor queuing, pre-function space, Secret Service support, and stairs and elevators to descend to the screening area below. Upon entering the below grade portion of the facility, visitors will process through pre-screening and primary screening. And once visitors have completed primary screening, they proceed through a tunnel where the tour office may provide informational displays to enhance the visitor experience.

Escalators and elevators then return the screened visitors to grade level north of the secure fence line along East Executive Avenue. From there, the visitors can then continue to their scheduled White House tour or event. I'll note that a stairwell is located at

the southeast corner of the park as you can see here on the image that immediately adjacent to the south gate of East Executive Avenue. It will function as a badge access point for the Secret Service and facility personnel as well as an emergency egress from the below grade building.

In its new location, the entrance pavilion preserves key public viewsheds of the Sherman monument and the Treasury building while providing a dignified central entry point to the White House from the park. Staff finds the new location much improvement. And therefore, staff suggests that the Commission express support for the revised location for the entrance pavilion to the facility on the western quadrant of Sherman Park as it helps minimize visual impacts and allows the park to function as a welcoming arrival space to the White House complex.

The approximately 7,000 square foot entrance pavilion is conceived as a classically

inspired composition that reinforces the formal character and significance of the setting. A rhythmic colonnade of ten columns supports a carefully proportioned tablature and balustrade creating a dignified architectural presence. And to further define the entry and the facade, the doors are recessed behind the primary colonnade while plasters are positioned between the door openings to continue the cadence and the proportions established by the exterior columns.

The entrance pavilion and the corresponding exit building are unified through the use of Sierra White granite which is selected for its durability, its timeless appearance, and compatibility with the surrounding granite of the park. Presidential seals are carved into the granite panels flanking the colonnade and serve as a visual expression of the building's purpose. The 33,000 square foot below grade component of the project is intentionally positioned beneath the

park's west quadrant to reduce the visual impacts and to avoid infrastructure conflicts that exist in the southeast corner of the park.

The depth of the building accounts for a 12-foot clear floor to underside of structure and 2 feet are allocated for concrete structure with a minimum of 3 feet ground cover above. The facility will include the necessary security procedures, the technology and support space to meet the Secret Service's protective mission for screening all visitors entering the White House. The primary screening area is sized to accommodate the equipment and spatial requirements necessary to achieve the throughput capacities established by the Secret Service for large events.

The space is organized as an open floor plan to provide maximum flexibility with six lanes to accommodate current screening processes and equipment and to support adaptation to evolving screening technologies and capabilities. Once screened, visitors will use

elevators and escalators to go back to the ground level through the exit pavilion which we'll look at now. The new ground level exit pavilion is 4,000 square feet and is located on East Executive Avenue.

Badged White House staff and contractors will be able to enter the complex via this ground level building. And the building since the concept review has been evolved to have a flat metal roof. And the parapet has been simplified to enhance the prominence of the adjacent entrance pavilion within the park while the two buildings are united with their continued use of the Sierra White granite which strengthens their visual relationship.

Continuous plaster elements establish a rhythmic order across the east and west facades, accommodating glazed openings where appropriate, and solid infill panels as required. Glazing systems are detailed using traditional moldings and trim consistent with the project's classical

character. The north side of the exit pavilion will enclose the escalators and elevators from the below grade program serving as the exit point from the facility into the cleared side of the campus.

The architectural design of the exit building incorporates freestanding columns at the north entrance and engaged columns in the balance of the building. The applicant has continued to refine the architectural details of both the entrance and the exit pavilions to reflect the setting adjacent to the classically designed Treasury building and the White House in response to the architectural direction and the executive order related to classical architecture for federal buildings. As such, staff recommends the applicant explore opportunities to refine the design details for both the entrance and the exit pavilions to ensure that they're classically -- they are architecturally compatible but deferential to the adjacent Treasury building and the White

House grounds if possible.

In terms of the landscaping, the applicant has indicated that 18 existing trees across the site in Sherman Park are identified for removal to accommodate the project. Following NCPC's tree preservation and replacement resource guide, the removal of the trees to accommodate the project will require 40 trees to be installed to mitigate the loss of the existing trees. The applicant is proposing to replace the new trees will include -- replacement trees will include willow oaks, Princeton elms, and flowering dogwoods.

For the preliminary review, the applicant has submitted a partial landscape plan. And the proposed landscape plan identifies some new trees, plantings, and grass areas planned within the scope of this project. Plantings around existing and new site walls will be selected and coordinated with the National Park Service to provide a cohesive design that includes all four sides of the

monument.

For the landscape portion within the project scope, the landscape plan identifying a specific tree and planting locations will still be needed. This will help ensure the appropriate shade and screening are provided within and around the park consistent with the existing conditions. Therefore, staff requests the applicant provide as part of the final submission a landscape plan that identifies the proposed locations and species for all replacement trees and other plantings.

As I mentioned earlier, currently, there are no trespass signs and layers of bike racks are being used to present pedestrian access to Sherman Park because the prior temporary fencing on the west side of the park has been removed due to the East Wing modernization construction. Staff notes that the applicant intends upon project completion to remove all existing temporary security barriers, including the bike rack barriers, the currently

lined northern perimeter of Sherman Park, and the walkway along the south side of Hamilton Place at 15th Street Northwest. And no temporary barriers will block public accessible walkways in Sherman Park.

Posts and chains will be used to control access on the existing western walkways in the park that flank the new walkway that will be leading to the entrance pavilion. In conclusion, the applicant has worked to improve both the site plan and building design in coordination with the review agencies and the Section 106 consulting parties. As such, staff recommends that the Commission approve the preliminary site and building plans for the new White House visitor screening facility located at President's Park in downtown Washington, D.C.

And as the applicant refines the design, staff recommends the applicant continue to work with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer, the National Park Service, NCPC, and the other Section 106

consulting parties to resolve the potential impacts of the new screening facility on historic resources and execute the draft memorandum of agreement to codify agreed upon mitigation measures. As I've covered the Executive Director's recommendations in my presentation, I will not repeat them. But they're here for your reference. And I'd like to note that both Andy Stohs and Jeff Harner with the applicant team are here to represent the application and can help assist in answering any questions the Commission may have. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you, Lee. Great presentation.

MR. LEE: Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Do Commissioners have any questions?

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: I have a question. Do you have a section looking through the park? Because as I recall, the park kind of peaks in the center under the statue. I

was just curious at what elevation the pavilion is. Like, if I'm on 15th Street, what am I seeing?

MR. HARNER: I don't think we have one that goes back to 15th Street. I think this is looking west. But it's --

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Am I correct that it's slightly depressed from the top of the park? Or is it going to be --

MR. HARNER: The topography does fall from north to south. The finished floor elevation here for the entrance is at 32. And I believe it's at 18 elevation on the southeast corner. So it drops --

PARTICIPANT: On the E Street side?

MR. HARNER: Yeah, E and 15th Street, correct.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: So it is kind of -- you're going to be looking up at it?

MR. HARNER: Correct.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Okay.

MR. HARNER: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: One other question. Was any consideration given to combining the two pavilions? Right now, we're starting to see a proliferation of buildings on the site.

I mean, obviously, we've got the large ballroom. But we've got the exit, this, this. You're competing with Treasury. Just curious if programmatically that would be something that could work.

MR. HARNER: Could you repeat it? Sorry.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Yeah, was any consideration given to a single pavilion, right? Now you've got the separate exit pavilion and then you've got this pavilion to kind of reduce the impact that structures in this area which is largely a green space, right?

MR. STOHS: Yeah, so as far as the circulation of folks coming for tours and visits, we're going to provided access from the

public 15th Street. And the operational requirement is that they exit into E Street at that northern building inside that perimeter. So that kind of created where we looked at those with the space that we needed to conduct all the screening.

We had to go subterranean. And then this became a circulation problem that we really couldn't allow unscreened people to go up to that building, drop down, go south, come back around, and then go up. I mean, the below-grade structure is the --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Right. And it's quite large. That's why I was curious.

MR. STOHS: And it's driven by electrical and the screening processes that need to occur down below.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: This is a good image where you see both pavilions.

MR. HARNER: Also to note the pathway

driveway down to the moat of the Treasury is right along our proposed building there. So that needs to be maintained as well from a circulation standpoint.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: So it's a space constraint, right? You couldn't --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

MR. HARNER: Correct, yeah. And then also with the building, there's also the Secretary of the Treasury's bridge just north of our proposed building that we can't move the building any further north.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Yeah, I mean, I love that north building to go away honestly and there just to be one. I understand that may not be. Okay. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Mr. Chairman, I have some questions. It's all underground. When you exit finally to get into the White House as a guest or you have to come above grade. You're outside now. You leave coverage.

MR. HARNER: Correct.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Okay. So it's not a protected transition from the --

MR. HARNER: No, it's not protected. You would walk up East Executive Ave along the Treasury building. And your view would be of the new ballroom.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yeah.

MR. HARNER: And then you would come across into the east side of the ballroom to enter as a tourist.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I understand. Also, whenever see a roof, I think solar. I know you said they got a metal roof. And I understand the aesthetics of it.

But I always like to make a pitch for solar when I can. You've got a lot of electronics in there. Maybe you could help save some money for the government if you add solar on top of some of those roofs.

MR. HARNER: So right now, the roof is --

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Metal flat.

MR. HARNER: Yeah, that's a soldered metal roof that's consistent with the one that's being proposed and being installed for the new colonnade. So as you look down on that roof from the White House, you would have the similar appearance from looking down on that room from the ballroom.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I always make a pitch for solar whenever I can. And I'm serious about it, but I understand. At least I made the point maybe. Also, is there going to be a card drop off slot, so cards that have to drop off people won't have to drop off in the middle of the street? It can be a curb. Is that going to be accommodated?

MR. HARNER: No. I mean, right now the public will proceed from 15th Street.

(Simultaneous speaking.)

MR. HARNER: If they're going to be dropped off, they'll be dropped off at Freedom Plaza across the street --

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Right.

MR. HARNER: -- or along the 15th Street. There's a bike lane. It's a very busy area --

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yeah, I know it is.

MR. HARNER: -- to drop off honestly. Most people should go to Commerce or Freedom Plaza and then walk across is the safest route.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Size is important. I just thought there might be accommodation for the drop off. Lastly, I want to go to Slide 12 -- Slide 24, please. And also post a distance. When you go through this whole process, what distances are we talking about walking to get into the White House or get into the ballroom?

MR. HARNER: Really good question. I think from, like, the actual screening to the escalators, the length of the building is about 300 feet. So now you're adding another 300 once you get out there. So maybe about 600 once you get down through the building and out.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: So you take off

your heels and you put on some walking shoes to get in.

MR. STOHS: It's similar to what you'd walk now going to the park and then you'd walk up. There's probably an added 100 feet, 150 feet by going south.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I'm thinking about older people who need to walk and they're not wheelchair bound yet or motorized. But they have to walk.

MR. STOHS: No, but it's ADA. I mean, we have elevators --

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I understand that.

MR. STOHS: -- going down and elevators coming up.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: I asked that question many months ago about that. Lastly, I have this image up to make a point. What side of the building is the flag on?

MR. STOHS: Left side.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Okay. And go to 24. I think it's the same image. But what side

is 24? What side is it on just to be sure? Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: I have one additional question. The discharge stair there, is it protected from the weather at all? Or is just going to be well that people came out? Is there going to be some sort of penthouse structure?

MR. HARNER: No, this would just be a well. And the reason we did that was to just reduce any visibility because it essentially will not be used other than emergency egress and Secret Service personnel.

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Great, thank you.

COMMISSIONER CASH: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Sir.

COMMISSIONER CASH: I decided to ask a question. I mean, I like this design. I think that compared to the last one, I think that this is going through some good iterations. And I understand some of the changes that are made.

I do have to ask, though. I feel like the entire conversation we just had didn't happen when I look at this and how close we are to 15th Street and stuff. Is this going to be -- and seriously, is this going to be addressed in the master plan going forward with the security around here?

Because by the logic that we've been using and there was a lot of talk about the east and the west side about how we need to balance that. I mean, this is a part of the White House grounds that I haven't been able to get to for quite a while because this is where you go for the garden tours and all that stuff. I just see a few bollards here. But realistically based on the whole last conversation, is this going to become part of the security envelope?

MR. STOHS: Solutions in this park are part of the master plan that we are going to review.

COMMISSIONER CASH: Okay.

MR. STOHS: And that's because we're

going to keep that as a -- this is the building. The holistic approach we've been discussing, this is what we all need to have.

COMMISSIONER CASH: So it's probably not super likely I'll be able to go on the grass there and have lunch anytime soon.

MR. STOHS: Again, we're treating the park to be the park and the face of the building back to be more of a secure area. You currently can't walk along E Street because that's part of our security screening apparatus. That's where we use canines to make sure vehicles are safe to enter into the complex. So everything along that sidewalk there has been shut down for a very long time. Same as parts of Hamilton like the sidewalk up there, but again --

COMMISSIONER CASH: First, the vehicular drive with this then because I've always kind of considered vehicular access there to be one of the bigger reasons for security. Like, I always see the party planning trucks going in there and all that stuff. That's why

there's so much security there. But you will be able to remove a lot of that even with the vehicular still here without major improvements.

MR. STOHS: The E Street sidewalk will remain closed. That's not changing because of this because that is vehicle screening only. This is all visitor screening pedestrians. Again, we're trying to make it where we have key location where you enter the complex as a person. And key locations as you enter the complex as a vehicle now kind of is put on a map for you all to understand.

COMMISSIONER CASH: I do have a question, though, because this is something that's been fairly new I noticed around the White House because I was walking back from a doctor's appointment in West End. And I very stupidly decided, oh, I can walk down Pennsylvania avenue and cut through the Ellipse and be able to get back. And that seemed to have been closed off now for a long time, the entire -- the parking lot.

Like, 17th and Constitution, 215, there's no way to get in unless you go up to H. Is that similar to what you were saying earlier about the ballroom construction. Is that the parking lot now?

MR. STOHS: So the Ellipse has been shut off due to that is where we're doing our -- the Ellipse.

COMMISSIONER CASH: Okay.

MR. STOHS: So when that project is over, that will be opened back up. So again, there's an expansion due to projects that are ongoing where we're utilizing the Ellipse in a different manner now than we have traditionally. When that completes, then we will fall back to where --

COMMISSIONER CASH: In time for the Christmas tree?

MR. STOHS: Hopefully sooner than that.

COMMISSIONER CASH: Thanks.

MR. STOHS: And again, if you have certain questions that are sensitive, we're open

to come to you all in a closed session to discuss some of that. Again, we can't discuss everything in an open manner.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. Any other questions or comments?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: I have one more. This is Stu Levenbach. So one of the things that we talked about at the initial presentation was the amount of time it takes to process people through the screening facility, the extent to which you're going to have lines.

One of the unfortunate factors right now is that as you know there are long lines to get into White House events. And I'm sure from a security perspective is a concern for people who are visiting the White House. They're exposed to the elements and it's not a great experience. Is this new design -- does it change the processing times at all? Have you looked at how many people you can move through the screening process at a given point and how that's going to potentially benefit the lines

that are currently created?

MR. STOHS: Yeah, absolutely. If you noticed, there are five doors on the front which allows us to conduct ID checks in parallel. There's enough circulation inside that as you're getting your ID checked, you proceed right into the facility and you go down two elevators or two large stair halls.

To be able to go downstairs, there'll be three to four pre-checks and six lanes of primary screening. So it'll be literally five to six times more than what we had previously. Again, also deploying the most modern technology, we try to follow all of TSA's standards because they drive the industry. So the type of equipment that you're seeing that TSA is deploying now is what we envision to deploy now.

And again, the processing time will be rather quickly. There'll be a learning curve. Again, with all new technology that you'll experience when TSA deploys some other things,

you'll dress differently. You'll process differently just because certain types of garments or certain types of things will alert different technology. But that's just a process that we'll try to put out in the invite for people who are attending.

MR. HARNER: Also, to address that, I think the size of the facility itself is much bigger. Before, everyone was queuing outside under tents. And then the amount of time that you are inside was however long it takes to get through a double-wide trailer. So in this case, we're bringing people in to a beautiful interior. You're queuing downstairs and it's going to be a much better user experience throughout the entire process of entering the White House.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: And there'll be information about the White House in the EOP, right?

MR. HARNER: Correct.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: So the visitor while

they're waiting instead of standing out in the freezing rain or cold, they're able to learn about what they're going to see?

MR. HARNER: Yes, correct.

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: And I think that from my perspective, I just want to make sure you solve the right problem. From my perspective, it's the number of people that have to wait outside not only exposed to the elements but exposed just in general to the street and other traffic. To take a look at it maybe in a more quantitative way, like, this is how many people we can screen per minute in the current temporary set up.

This is what we can do with this structure that we're proposing. I'd like to see a more quantitative approach here so that I make sure is five or six or seven the right number of points at which you can -- channels in which you can move visitors. How much space you need for people to wait while they're going through the security checkpoint and just making sure there's

not a missed opportunity here where a small modification to the design might result in a much better visitor experience.

MR. STOHS: Duly noted. I think we've looked at it from sidewalk through doorway through stairwell through everything. As the invitations are put out, a staggered arrival is going to also be key in that we don't -- they're not going to want X number of people all showing up at 4:30.

It needs to be 4:15, 4:30, 4:45 because as you get into the facility, the facility can accommodate everything. It's just that first funnel is honestly the doors. So as long as ID check is meeting -- and there should not be delays because there's the capability with space to be able to rapidly re-clear somebody if there's problem. There's actually a waiting area off to the right that allows -- it's ID check where you move over there or you're turned away.

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Thank you.

MR. HARNER: Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: We will now turn to public testimony. We have one person signed up to speak on this matter today. Robert Harris, you will have three minutes to provide your testimony. Please proceed when you are ready.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: I believe Mr. Harris ended up leaving. So I don't think he's going to testify. So we can move straight into a motion and deliberations if you're ready.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Okay, yes. That concludes the public testimony. Thank you for testifying today. Is there a motion to approve preliminary site and building plans for the White House visitor screening facility?

MEMBER STIDHAM: So moved.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Second?

COMMISSIONER BRUCH: I second.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. I'll now open it up for the Commission for discussion. I will start deliberations with Commissioner Stidham.

MEMBER STIDHAM: Thank you. And thank you for the presentation. We are getting close to the end of this project, and we've had great feedback which has resulted, I think, in a much better facility location and look and feel. So we look forward to the project moving forward.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?

(No audible response.)

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: I just have two points here. One is just far more significant than the other. I wanted to take a look at quantitatively are you maximizing the opportunity here to keep guests covered from the elements protected from any potential street exposure and obviously moving them through an appropriate pace through the security checkpoint and taking a look at that and making sure that ultimately you don't result in a situation where you continue to have long lines and people snaking around the corner along 15th Street.

So that's one thing that I encourage you to look at. The other one, it's a small point. It's kind of a little silly, but I'm an ecologist. So when you think about the planting, there's this tree I wanted to plant at the White House in the first term.

It's called American Yellowwood. Take a look at it. It's iconic. It has significance with respect to President John Quincy Adams. He planted it at Peacefield.

It's a great tree. It's native to the U.S. as well. So look at American Yellowwood. Just a plug for the tree. And I appreciate everything you're doing with the project.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Tunstall Williams?

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Thank you. It's nice to see how this design has evolved. I think the location is much better, much more welcoming.

I'd like to take a word from Mr. Webb's presentation, though. I would like to see the

design be a little bit more deferential to the adjacent buildings, right? The classical expression is great.

I'd like to see a little maybe stripped classical. It feels a little overly grand for a security pavilion. Acknowledging that this is the White House and it should have a certain amount of presence, it's more I just hate to see it detract from the White House structure itself as well as the Treasury Department. But otherwise, I think it's headed in the right direction and is greatly improved.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon? Commissioner Cash?

COMMISSIONER CASH: Again, as I said during my questions, I just want to thank the team, thank staff, thank the team for the thoughtful choice that had been made here. Moving this design forward, I think that it's a great example of the regular order of things coming through here and how the project becomes better, actually probably cheaper and a little

bit more effective in how it's going to work. So I just want to thank everyone for that.

Mr. Levenbach mentioned the yellowwood. I had to just check. Apparently, it's a great pollinator. So I would second putting the yellowwood. We want to have the bees. Mr. Berne, I've just got to put in a plug for the pollinator. So thank you.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Falcone?

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: I just want to thank Mr. Lee for his presentation. And I can concur the yellowwood is a beautiful, magnificent tree.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Mohan?

COMMISSIONER MOHAN: Same. Thank you for the presentation, and I agree with the tree. No other comments. Thank you.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: And Commissioner Bruch?

COMMISSIONER BRUCH: Thank you for the presentation and the development of this. I do think that the -- back to emphasize the

throughput and the exposure of the folks who would potentially be waiting outdoors in line, I know there are plenty ways to deal with that. But I don't think that as you get closer that's something not to overlook in the design of the construction aspect. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Great presentation, Lee. Thank you. I associate myself with the comments of my colleague, Stu Levenbach at OMB and particularly what is the called the American yellowwood coming from John Quincy Adams, one of our great Americans. I completely support that.

I wasn't here at the beginning when they first considered the first design. But it was beautiful and does a great job in getting the throughput to having people inside I think is great. So I want to thank you to the applicant and for a well conceived preliminary design for a new permanent White House visitor screening facility.

As noted in the presentation, if Secret Service uses temporary trailers and tents to

screen visitors on East Executive Avenue which detracts from the beauty and character of this important and symbolic setting for our country. It's evident that a more permanent, thoughtfully designed facility is much needed to welcome visitors to the White House complex. We look forward to working with the applicant to finalize the design details and landscape plan. Are there any other further comments or questions?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Can the Secretary please confirm the motion and the second and take the vote by roll call?

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes, the motion was made by Commissioner Stidham and seconded by Commissioner Bruch. Commissioner Mohan?

COMMISSIONER MOHAN: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Bruch?

COMMISSIONER BRUCH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

MEMBER STIDHAM: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?

(No audible response.)

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Chairman Paoletta?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Tunstall Williams?

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

COMMISSIONER CASH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Falcone?

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: The motion carries unanimously.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. The motion has carried. Thank you, Lee.

NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK CONSTRUCT NEW ARABIAN LEOPARD HABITAT

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Agenda Item 7C is a request to approve final site and building plans for the National Zoological Park Construct New Arabian Leopard Habitat.

MS. HERR: Yes.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Jamie Herr.

MS. HERR: Yes, thank you. All right. Good afternoon, Chairman and members of the Commission. The Smithsonian Institution has submitted final site and building plans to construct and Arabian leopard habitat at the National Zoological Park in northwestern Washington, D.C. for Commission approval.

As a reminder for the final review stage, the Commission should be focused on topics such as if the comments provided during the preliminary review were adequately addressed, landscaping, signage, and lighting details, and ensuring confidence that the plans will not substantially change. The Commission provided comments on the design at the January meeting and approved the preliminary design at

the April meeting. The proposed project is located at the northern end of the National Zoological Park complex close to the main entry on Connecticut Avenue.

The zoo founded in 1889 is part of the Smithsonian Institution and the National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute. The two campuses are home to more than 2,200 animals, including some of the planet's most critically endangered species. As a reminder, the goals of the project are to include a large habitat designed with the flexibility to accommodate future species and with opportunities for the cats to display their natural climbing behaviors, a new animal care facility with day room dens and staff support spaces, accessible public viewing areas including a VIP viewing area designed within the context of the existing site.

And in addition, the habitat needs to be designed with the influence of the arid rocky mountains of the Arabian Peninsula while taking

into consideration the historic environment of the National Zoo and Olmsted Walk. The project site is approximately three-quarters of an acre and is prominently located at the north bend in the Olmsted Walk situated between the panda habitat and the Elephant House exhibit. It is closest to the Connecticut Avenue entrance and across from the bus group entry, a restroom facility, and the panda plaza concessions area, all of which are heavily used by visitors.

The two previous exhibits occupy the site, the former bison habitat which closed in 2024, and the zoo in your backyard exhibit which featured plants native to the Washington, D.C. area. The site contains several facilities on the left in support of the previous exhibits. These structures are not historic and will not be retained.

The site also includes a variety of vegetation as well as existing trees shown on the right, some of which will be preserved and several will be replaced. The National Zoo is

covered by the National Zoological Park Historic District as noted here. The map notes both the Olmsted Walk and other contributing resources in the District.

The proposed habitat site is adjacent to the Olmsted Walk and Elephant House, both of which are contributing resources to the historic district. The applicant has concluded the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation process with assigned memorandum of agreement back in August. The oasis/wadi hybrid design shown here was chosen as the preferred design as it will provide multiple points of entry off the Olmsted Walk and unique viewing opportunities for visitors.

The first entry as visitors approach from Connecticut Avenue entrance on the left leads into a meandering walk and then through a tunnel into the central viewing area. The central viewing area is also accessible from the Olmsted Walk next to the animal care building. Visitors will also walk under a mesh enclosed

bridge that connects the habitat to the animal care building.

The site also includes a service area that is accessed from the Asia trail. The animal care building has changed since the prior review with a focus on the roof profile and building materials. The final design has a lower roof profile and materials that are more compatible with the existing zoo facilities, including the Carderock stone and the ashlar coursing and green roofing material.

The final landscape plan has four main landscape types. The Olmsted Walk and the bioretention and Asia trail on the exterior of the habitat and the oasis and wadi landscaping inside the habitat. All plant species were selected to reflect these landscape areas and requirements while ensuring their suitability for the Washington, D.C. climate and their ability to thrive within the specific conditions of the National Zoo.

The Olmsted landscape, pictured on the

left, is intended to blend with the existing Olmsted Walk, trees, shrubs, and perennials of Rock Creek Park. The bioretention areas pictured on the right will be planted based on tolerance to wet and dry conditions and to comply with the District's stormwater requirements. In addition, the Asia trail landscape is a continuation of the existing landscape in the area, including the existing bamboo.

The landscape of the oasis area of the habitat it left is intended to represent the lush vegetation found around water sources in the leopard's native habitat. The wadi landscape at right are dry river beds and valleys with drought tolerant plants. To the extent practical, the applicant has chosen native species.

But some nonnative plants were chosen to satisfy the combined requirements of design intent, site constraints, and animal safety. The goal of the planting strategy, especially

within the habitat, was to create a landscape that is authentically representative of the leopard's native environment. The applicant has received public comment about the planting plan that objects to several of the proposed species.

The applicant has responded and staff concurs with the applicant's response. At the previous review, the Commission recommended the applicant coordinate with staff to improve the tree replacement plan for the project as not all replacement trees were accounted for. The final design has been updated and includes five existing trees remaining on site with the addition of 56 new trees.

The remaining 12 replacement trees will be planted within the zoo complex. The applicant has included several rendered views of the proposed habitat. This view shows the west entry into the habitat and the proposed arch mesh.

The applicant has included additional plantings to better frame this entry as

recommended by the Commission. This view is of the west entry of the habitat and includes one of the two shade structures proposed to improve visitor comfort. The mesh enclosure will have narrower bronze supports and black mesh to reduce the visual impact of the enclosure as supported by the Commission.

This view shows the east entry to the habitat in the updated animal care building. This view is from within the main viewing area of the habitat with the animal care building on the left and the habitat enclosure on the right. The applicant is also including a shade structure here to improve visitor comfort.

This view shows the animal care building and the enclosed animal bridge that connects the habitat to the care building over the main entry for visitors offering a unique animal viewing experience. This view shows the extent of the animal care building from the Olmsted Walk with a mesh enclosure of the habitat in the background. And finally, this is

the view of the southern end of the site and shows the service area of the animal care building.

This concludes the presentation. The recommendations have been integrated throughout and included here for your reference. Overall, staff finds the design is consistent with the policy set forth in the federal elements of the comprehensive plan and meets the stated project goals.

As such, staff recommends the Commission approve the final site and building plans for the Smithsonian Institution's to construct an Arabian leopard habitat at the National Zoological Park in northwest Washington, D.C. The design team and I are here to answer any questions the Commission may have. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you, Jamie, for your presentation. Do Commissioners have any questions or comments? Yes.

COMMISSIONER CASH: So I'm glad we're

here at one of the final review periods. And we kind of get some more detail. Could you go back a couple slides when you were showing, like, all the brick?

Yeah, so has there always been that much -- I guess I wasn't paying attention outside the building. Has there always been this much brick envisioned out there? Is that what's kind of the existing condition? It just seems like for something that we approve a lot of, like, impervious surface. Or is this impervious?

MS. HERR: You mean the -- oh, that's existing. That's the existing --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

COMMISSIONER CASH: So there's not actually that's being added. I guess I never noticed, like, how much -- it seems like a lot of impervious surface for the walk.

MS. HERR: So that's the existing Olmsted Walk. Where there are areas where the Olmsted Walk goes into the habitat, that

material will be continued. Otherwise, the Habitat will have a different material similar to other zoo habitats.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: We'll now turn to public testimony. We have one person signed up. Mr. Bernard Berne, you will have three minutes to provide your testimony. Please proceed when you are ready.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Mr. Berne, are you with us?

MR. BERNE: Yes, I just was allowed in. Can you hear me?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Yes, sir. Thank you.

MR. BERNE: This project does not adequately conform to recommendations in your project best practice guidelines, regardless it is acceptable to use some nonnative plants as long as they're not considered evasive. However, this project will add two species of bamboo to the population of nonnative plants. The zoo installed bamboo along the Asian trail near the panda exhibit.

However, bamboo can spread by seed. Bamboo is on the evasive plant list in the National Park Service, the county and city of Alexandria, among others. It's been reported in Rock Creek Park. It's close to the Zoo. The Rock Creek Conservancy states that bamboo is one of the most problematic evasive plants that is found around that waterway.

In response to my comments, Zoo officials told your staff at any evaluation of plant power must account for the zoo's historic landscape precedent. And lastly, surrounding our exhibit areas, the buildings are designed to affect each animal's native habitat. However, any so-called historic landscape precedence cannot possibly justify the installation of highly evasive native plants near a national park. I've discussed it before, but by state staff, common milkweed is an important species that is critical to the survival of monarch butterflies.

The guide further states that common

milkweed should be planted on federal landscape plans to the fullest extent possible and is appropriate for site conditions. Zoo officials told your staff that common milkweed is toxic to some animals while acknowledging the caged animals would not have access to those planted areas. They claimed that enclosure walls or any wall cannot satisfy the zoo's animal safety protocols.

This is not correct. A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service publication states that milkweed does not taste good and that animals do not eat the plants unless food forage is scarce or in such conditions when food plants freeze. Further and most importantly, many zoos have modern waste stations containing milkweed.

These include those at Louisville, Kentucky; Kansas City, Missouri; Madison, Wisconsin; Abilene, Texas; Akron, Ohio; Asheboro, North Carolina. That's the short list. Please vote to ask the zoo to follow your guide's recommendations and above all to start

planting common milkweed and to stop planting bamboo. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you, sir, for your testimony. Do Commissioners have any questions for the witness?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. That concludes public testimony. Thank you all for testifying. Is there a motion to approve final site and building plans for the National Zoological Park Construct New Arabian Leopard Habitat?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to vote -- make a motion on behalf of Will Scharf. This is one of his favorite projects. He said that he was hoping to come maybe to testify. So I make the motion. I move that we do this on his behalf.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. Is there second?

COMMISSIONER ARGO: Second.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Okay. I'll open it up

to the Commission for discussion. I will start the deliberations with Vice Chairman Levenbach.

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: This is a remarkable project for a couple reasons. One is that you can actually walk underneath an Arabian leopard and live to tell about it. But the other one is this is the only place outside the Arabian Peninsula, I think, where you can see an Arabian leopard.

This is a remarkable partnership between the Smithsonian and the Saudi government and the Crown Prince who I believe gave about 50 million dollars to construct this. So I'm really excited about this project. And I'm looking forward to it being built. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thanks, Stu.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Tunstall Williams?

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: No, just great to see how the project has evolved and look forward to visiting that when it's ready.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

COMMISSIONER CASH: No questions or comments.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Falcone?

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: I just want to thank the staff. I have never actually seen this leopard. So I'm looking forward to visiting when the project is completed so I can see my first one.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Mohan?

COMMISSIONER MOHAN: Thank you to staff for the presentation, and I can't wait to visit.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Bruch?

COMMISSIONER BRUCH: Just thank you for the presentation. Very well done. No other comments. Thank you.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

MEMBER STIDHAM: Thank you. The design has progressed very nicely. It is much more refined and will be an elegant addition to the

zoo. I was going to comment on the green roof until I went back and read and all of them are green. And I googled it, and sure enough, yeah, they are.

It was just surprising. It doesn't stick out at you when you're there but very much in mind. But anyway, it looks great. I look forward to visiting.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: And Commissioner Argo?

COMMISSIONER ARGO: Very excited about this. I love that it's progressing and can't wait to take my kids and grandkids to see Arabian leopards at our wonderful National Zoo. Thank you.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: I don't think I've ever heard of an Arabian leopard before this project or this hearing. So I'm very excited. It sounds like a great project, and I look forward to seeing my first Arabian leopard.

COMMISSIONER DIXON: We have to have a tour at least. I was going to say we need a tour. I didn't ask about a solo on this, you

understand.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: I want to thank the applicant for finalizing the plans for this important project. I understand the Commission has previously reviewed and provided comments. It appears the project is better because of NCPC's feedback. I want to thank Mr. Berne for his testimony and comments on the planting plan and the applicant's response given their expertise with animal care. Are there any other further comments or questions?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Can the Secretary please confirm the motion and the second and take the vote by roll call.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Yes, the motion was made by Commissioner Dixon and seconded by Commissioner Argo. Commissioner Mohan?

COMMISSIONER MOHAN: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Bruch?

COMMISSIONER BRUCH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Stidham?

MEMBER STIDHAM: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Argo?

COMMISSIONER ARGO: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Vice Chairman Levenbach?

VICE CHAIR LEVENBACH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Chairman Paoletta?

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Tunstall Williams?

COMMISSIONER TUNSTALL WILLIAMS: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Dixon?

COMMISSIONER DIXON: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Cash?

COMMISSIONER CASH: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: Commissioner Falcone?

COMMISSIONER FALCONE: Yes.

MS. HOTTEL-COX: The motion carries unanimously.

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Thank you. The motion has carried. Are there any other further comments or questions?

(No audible response.)

CHAIR PAOLETTA: Okay. Before we conclude our session, I just want to again extend our thanks for Marcel Acosta. You finished your last meeting. You've left an indelible mark on this National Capital Region and we are grateful for it.

And we will miss you. I will miss you and working with you in the brief time we have. But thank you for everything. Thank you for your service -- extraordinary service. Good luck on your next venture.

ADJOURN

CHAIR PAOLETTA: This concludes our open session. Our next regular Commission meeting will be on Thursday, October 1st at 1:00 p.m. If there's no other business, the session is now adjourned.

(Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off the record at 4:02 p.m)

C E R T I F I C A T E

This is to certify that the foregoing transcript was duly recorded and accurately transcribed under my direction; further, that said transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings; and that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action in which this matter was taken; and further that I am not a relative nor an employee of any of the parties nor counsel employed by the parties, and I am not financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.

Michael Morris

Michael Morris

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