

# Review of Projects from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority

## Overview

The Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA) holds operating responsibility for both Washington Dulles International Airport (Dulles Airport) and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (National Airport) in Virginia under a long-term lease from the United States. The law that authorized this transfer of responsibility, the Metropolitan Washington Airports Act of 1986 (49 U.S.C. §§ 49101-49112), recognized the historic importance of these facilities and/or their visual prominence, and accordingly required that MWAA consult with the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) before undertaking any major alterations to the exterior of the main terminal at Dulles Airport (Below, left), and development that would alter the skyline of National Airport (Below, right) when viewed from the opposing shoreline on the Potomac River or from the George Washington Memorial Parkway. In 1988 NCPC and MWAA entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to guide the consultation process between the two agencies. This guide is intended to outline the specifics of the MOU and clarify NCPC's review interest. This resource guide is for general information purposes, and is not a regulatory document.



Dulles Airport Main Terminal



National Airport skyline

## MWAA Memorandum of Understanding

The MOU between MWAA and NCPC details a process for advisory NCPC review of certain projects at Dulles and National Airports consistent with the legal requirements in 49 U.S.C. § 49111(d). The MOU notes the historic significance of the main terminal at Dulles Airport, the visual character and quality of the Dulles Access Road, the highly visible location of National Airport on the Potomac River, as well as the Commission's interest in determining potential impacts of plans on federal activities or interests in the nation's capital. It also describes the shared interest between MWAA and NCPC to establish an effective working relationship and coordinate their respective planning activities and concerns.

To meet the long-term needs of both agencies, and in recognition of the significance of the airports, the MOU establishes a framework for the review of several projects by NCPC, including the following:

- Development proposals in certain defined areas within or adjacent to the Dulles Access Road with major views of the tower and main terminal building, as described in the MOU;
- Proposed revisions to the master plans for both airports, and
- Preliminary site and building plans for construction projects at Dulles Airport that would alter the exterior or significantly impact views of the terminal building, and at National Airport for any project that would alter the airport skyline when viewed from the opposing shoreline on the Potomac River or from the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

The MOU also provides for NCPC review of final site and building plans if there have been any changes in the plans, or upon Commission request.<sup>1</sup>

## NCPC Review Interest

Per the MOU, in review of applicable development proposals, master plans, and site and building plans, the Commission will focus specifically on the impacts to views of Dulles Airport's tower and main terminal building, and the impacts of the National Airport skyline on views from the George Washington Memorial Parkway and the opposing shoreline of the Potomac River. Federal sites along the opposing shoreline with the most direct visual connection to National Airport include the Monumental Core, East Potomac Park, and Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling. Depending on the nature of the proposals and plans, these federal sites may also include portions of Shepherd Parkway, Oxon Cove Park & Oxon Hill Farm, and possible others. Accordingly, NCPC review will focus closely on the impacts to these areas. Because NCPC's review purview relates only to the main terminal and tower at Dulles, NCPC review at this airport will be more targeted to sites on airport property, such as the future Dulles International Airport Metrorail station.<sup>2</sup>

## Applicant Resources

NCPC Review Authorities: <https://www.ncpc.gov/review/authorities/misc/>

Memorandum of Understanding by and between NCPC and MWAA:  
[https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/MOU\\_NCPC\\_MWAA\\_November\\_8\\_1988.pdf](https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/MOU_NCPC_MWAA_November_8_1988.pdf)

Metropolitan Washington Airports Act of 1986: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/5398>

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- 1 The MOU provides more extensive guidance regarding collaboration between MWAA and NCPC, including amendments to the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements*. The intent of this guide is to focus on the review implications, so some unrelated stipulations were excluded.
  - 2 Note that NCPC's review authority for MWAA projects as described in the MOU is independent of its review authority on Metrorail projects under the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Compact or other separate authorities. While MWAA is leading construction of Phase II of the Silver Line (with a Dulles Airport station), once completed, the transit line will be operated as part of the Metrorail system.