



# Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: June 4, 2026

<b>PROJECT</b> <b>New Monumental Arch</b> George Washington Memorial Parkway Memorial Avenue Washington, DC	<b>NCPC FILE NUMBER</b> 8778
<b>SUBMITTED BY</b> United States Department of the Interior	<b>NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER</b> 1.45(73.10)46209
<b>REVIEW AUTHORITY</b> Federal Projects in the District per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)	<b>APPLICANT'S REQUEST</b> Approval of comments on concept plans
	<b>PROPOSED ACTION</b> Approve comments on concept plans
	<b>ACTION ITEM TYPE</b> Staff Presentation

## PROJECT SUMMARY

The U.S. Department of the Interior (the “applicant”) has submitted concept plans for a new monumental arch to be located in Memorial Circle for Commission comment. The applicant proposes an arch topped with gilded, winged statuary. The overall height from the base to the top of the statuary is 250 feet.

Memorial Circle is located on Columbia Island, which is within the boundary channel of Washington, DC. Construction of the circle began in 1940. It sits at the west terminus of Arlington Memorial Bridge, which was designed by the architectural firm McKim, Mead, & White and opened in 1932. In 2018, the Commission approved rehabilitation of the bridge, which was completed in 2023.

The concept submission provides the Commission with an early opportunity to provide comments to the applicant, both to help guide the project’s planning and development, and to also request additional information the Commission will need for future project review.

## KEY INFORMATION

- Arlington Memorial Bridge (Memorial Bridge) spans the Potomac River and provides a connection between the Lincoln Memorial on the east and Arlington National Cemetery on the west via Memorial Circle and Memorial Avenue. The bridge, including Memorial Circle, was designed to create a physical and symbolic connection between the North and South.
- Prior to construction, the design of Memorial Circle went through multiple design iterations that began as a formal space with decorative pillars on either side of the axial view to the current design of a traffic circle within oval loops connecting it to area roadways.

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- Memorial Bridge was restored between 2019-2023 to address structural, aesthetic and functional issues. Memorial Circle was not included in this restoration.
  - In 1980 the bridge, including Memorial Circle, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural characteristics and innovative engineering.
  - The sight line, design, and landscape features of Memorial Avenue, which includes Memorial Circle, are contributing elements of the National Register-listed Arlington National Cemetery Historic District and Arlington Memorial Bridge.
  - The Memorial Circle is administered and maintained by the George Washington Memorial Parkway, a unit of the National Park Service (NPS).
  - The proposed project includes a 166-foot-tall arch structure topped with three gilded winged figures which extend to an overall height of 250 feet.
  - Access to the arch is proposed by the applicant at ground level using new pedestrian refuge island areas, crosswalks, and traffic signals.
  - The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts approved the concept plan for the proposed arch with comments at the April 16, 2026 meeting. The final design was approved at their May 21, 2026 meeting.
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## RECOMMENDATION

The Commission:

**Approves** the following concept comments on the proposed monumental arch located in Memorial Circle, on Columbia Island in Washington, DC.

**Notes** at the concept review stage, the Commission provides comments and requests additional information from the applicant that will inform the preliminary and final reviews by the Commission.

**Notes** that according to the applicant, the purpose of the arch is to celebrate the triumphs of the American people, inspire patriotism and love of country, and beautify our nation's capital.

### *Vehicular and Pedestrian Accessibility*

**Notes** that Memorial Circle is an integral part of the vehicular access between the Arlington Memorial Bridge and the George Washington Memorial Parkway, Washington Boulevard, and Memorial Avenue with significant vehicular traffic, especially on the eastern side of the circle.

**Notes** that visitors cannot currently access the center of Memorial Circle, and the applicant proposes to alter the east triangular island and provide crosswalks on the east and west sides of the circle. However, the plans do not provide details regarding visitor parking, loading/unloading, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access.

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**Notes** the project introduces a visitor attraction to Memorial Circle, and as such, additional information is necessary to ensure the safety of those accessing the site and minimizing impacts to vehicular travel around the site; and therefore,

**Requests** the applicant submit for the next review:

- A transportation or traffic study that identifies any potential impacts of the proposed project on the road network and level of service, and evaluates the proposed pedestrian access to ensure that visitors can avoid pedestrian and vehicular conflicts; and
- Information regarding parking and loading/unloading for visitors to the arch to ensure safe access for those of all abilities and minimize disruption to the traffic network.

#### *Visitor Safety*

**Notes** the arch sits within an at-grade plaza surrounded by a seat wall and openings with bollards for pedestrian access aligned with the openings of the arch.

**Supports** the use of the seat wall as a designed security feature around the arch plaza.

**Requests** the applicant provide, as part of the next review, a risk assessment and evaluation of the project to ensure that the proposed design will address security considerations.

#### *Aviation Safety*

**Notes** the applicant is currently working with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to evaluate whether the proposed project would impact air navigation given its proximity to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

**Recommends** the applicant continue consultation with the FAA to evaluate potential impacts of the proposed project on air navigation and provide an update to the Commission as part of the next review.

**Advises** that any design recommendations provided by the FAA should be incorporated into the proposed project prior to the Commission's final action.

#### *Viewsheds*

**Notes** the sight line, design, and landscape features of Memorial Avenue, which includes Memorial Circle, are contributing elements of the National Register-listed Arlington National Cemetery Historic District and Arlington Memorial Bridge.

**Notes** the panoramic views from Arlington House at Arlington National Cemetery to the west, and the Lincoln Memorial to the east, have been in place since the 1920s and reflect the visual connectivity characteristic of the McMillan Plan, as noted in the National Register of Historic Places registration form for Arlington National Cemetery.

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**Notes** that, according to the submission materials, the view of the Lincoln Memorial from Arlington House will be blocked by the proposed arch, and views from the Lincoln Memorial to the Arlington House will be altered.

**Encourages** the applicant to provide, as part of the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, any design options that were explored to avoid or minimize impacts on the visual connection between Arlington House and the Lincoln Memorial.

**Requests** the applicant provide, as part of the next review, updated photo-visualizations (renderings) of existing and proposed pedestrian-level views from the additional locations noted below:

- View from north steps of the Jefferson Memorial looking toward the Lincoln Memorial; and
- Views from the George Washington Memorial Parkway, one looking south toward the circle from a point immediately south of I-66, and one looking north toward the circle from a point near the LBJ Memorial Grove.

#### *Project Design and Materials*

**Notes** that NCPC has consistently taken the position that the Height of Buildings Act applies to all habitable structures in the District of Columbia, including federal projects, which is consistent with Comprehensive Plan Policy UD.B.1.3, highlighting the focus on preserving Washington's picturesque, horizontal character, and reinforcing the Height of Buildings Act.

**Requests** the applicant provide, as part of the next submission, an analysis and justification for the project's height in light of the Height of Buildings Act.

**Notes** that the submission does not include information on the site and building materials, the proposed lighting, or the stormwater management compliance.

**Requests** the applicant provide, as part of the next submission, information regarding the following information:

- The proposed arch and site materials palette, including cladding, paving, pedestrian features, and security elements.
- The proposed lighting strategy, including nighttime renderings from key views demonstrating the lighting concept in context.
- The proposed stormwater management strategy.

#### *Project Coordination and Next Steps*

**Recommends** the applicant work with the Federal Highway Administration, District Department of Transportation, Arlington County, and other agencies as appropriate regarding any proposed changes or impacts to the surface transportation network.

**Recommends** the applicant work with the District Department of Energy & Environment regarding the proposed stormwater management approach.

**Recommends** the applicant work with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office and other consulting parties regarding the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 process.

**Requests** the applicant provide, as part of the next submission, updates on the Section 106 process and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) evaluation process, as completion of both processes are required for NCPC final action.

### PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

<b>Previous actions</b>	<b>None.</b>
<b>Remaining actions</b> (anticipated)	– Review of preliminary and final site and building plans

### PROJECT ANALYSIS

#### Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of the Interior has submitted concept plans for a new monumental arch in Memorial Circle, located on Columbia Island in Washington, DC. Per the submission, the proposed arch is 250 feet in height and consists of an arch structure which is 166 feet in height, topped with gilded winged statuary. The arch sits within a plaza that consists of granite pavers and is surrounded by a seat wall with bollards aligning with the openings of the arch. The arch submission details the interior space that includes elevators, stairs, ticketing and security, back of house space, restrooms, programming space, and an observation deck below the statuary. The proposed plan includes changes to Memorial Circle with new pedestrian refuge island areas, new pedestrian crosswalks, and traffic signals. At the concept review stage, the Commission provides comments and requests additional information from the applicant that will inform subsequent Commission review. As such, staff recommends the **Commission approve the following concept comments on the proposed monumental arch located in Memorial Circle, on Columbia Island in Washington, DC.**

#### Overview

##### *History and Background of Site*

The need for a bridge connecting the northern and southern shores of the Potomac River in the area of the Arlington Memorial Bridge was documented as early as the mid-1800s. According to the Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) published by the National Park Service in 2024, the Memorial Avenue Corridor was designed as a symbolic and physical link between the Lincoln Memorial, a tribute to the 16th American President; the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery;

and Arlington House, the former plantation home of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. The concept for a memorial bridge and avenue first emerged after the Civil War and gained momentum when it was included within the McMillan Plan, which proposed improvements to the Washington, DC park system. The design of the corridor took shape amidst the City Beautiful Movement, which promoted formal and classical treatments for architectural, engineering, sculptural, and landscape features—all of which were incorporated into the evolving designs for the Arlington Memorial Bridge and the Memorial Avenue Corridor. Architect William Mitchell Kendall, of renowned firm McKim, Mead & White, was responsible for the corridor's overall design. The corridor was built in phases: Arlington Memorial Bridge was constructed between 1926 and 1932; the Boundary Channel Bridge was built between 1929 and 1930; Memorial Circle was constructed on Columbia Island beginning in 1940; and Memorial Avenue was built beginning in 1930. Memorial Circle was designed as part of the western terminus of the Arlington Memorial Bridge as a means to connect to the George Washington Memorial Parkway, Arlington Boulevard, and Memorial Avenue.

According to the CLR, early designs for the area on Columbia Island that would become Memorial Circle included the bridge roadway meeting at an ellipse plaza where the cross arms would extend north and south from the ellipse. This elliptical plaza design also featured two columns, each 166 feet in height, each topped with a sculpture, intended to represent the post-Civil War reunion of the North and South, on either side of the Memorial Avenue roadway viewshed. The north and south arms of the ellipse plaza ended in small traffic circles, each with a circular Greek temple in the center. The designs for this area changed significantly before construction began on the single large traffic circle known today as Memorial Circle. The Circle has had other minor modifications over the years including reducing the travel lanes around the Circle to one, changing the paving materials, modifications to connecting roadways, and changes to pedestrian access and roadway efficiency as recently as 2020.

### *Project Description*

According to the applicant, the purpose of the arch is to celebrate the triumphs of the American people, inspire patriotism and love of country, and beautify our nation's capital. The proposed arch consists of an arch structure with two legs at a height of 166 feet. The arch sits within a plaza that includes granite pavers encircled by a seat wall and two pedestrian access points lined with bollards. The two access points face east and west, aligned with the opening of the arch. The circle is shown with new pedestrian crosswalks connecting visitors via pedestrian refuge islands next to the traffic circle.

The exterior of the proposed arch will be primarily clad in stone. The vertical faces of the arch include several recessed or framed spaces that would typically house statuary or relief sculpture, though no specific details on the future use of these spaces has yet been identified. The top area of the arch structure that includes the mezzanine, below the observation deck and statuary plinth, includes gilded lettering quoting the American Pledge of Allegiance on both east and west facing sides. Above the primary arch structure and mezzanine is a recessed area housing the observation deck interior space and, above that, the proposed statuary. The proposed statues include a 60-foot-tall central gilded, winged Lady Liberty flanked by a gilded flying eagle on each side. All the

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statuary is facing east toward the Lincoln Memorial. There are also additional gold decorative elements on the underside of the arch and on each vertical face.

The proposed interior of the arch at the ground floor level includes ticketing and security, back of house space, stairwells, and elevators in the south leg, with an exit hall, back of house space, stairwells, and elevators in the north leg. The submission plans include a stair hall, restrooms, program spaces, and stair and elevator lobbies that connect up from the legs in the mezzanine. The stair hall includes two additional staircases and an elevator in the center to provide access to the observation deck above.

### *Vehicular and Pedestrian Accessibility*

Memorial Circle safety improvements completed in 2006 and 2007 reduced the number of lanes around the traffic rotary. Along the north and south sides of Memorial Circle, the outermost travel lanes were replaced with concrete shoulder lanes. The concrete lanes were converted to Belgian block several years later during rehabilitation work completed in 2020. After years of vehicular and pedestrian collisions, NPS in 2020 implemented safety measures to Memorial Circle that included higher visibility crosswalks, new signage and rapid flashing beacons, clearer lane markings, lane reductions, and repaved surfaces. A segment of road on the north side of Memorial Circle that connected South Arlington Boulevard and South Washington Boulevard was closed to vehicular traffic. These changes did restrict pedestrian access around the circle and currently visitors cannot cross Memorial Avenue on the east side of the circle or access the center of Memorial Circle.

The arch is intended to be a visitor destination and includes an observation deck. Memorial Circle is an integral part of the vehicular access between the Arlington Memorial Bridge and the George Washington Memorial Parkway, Washington Boulevard, and Memorial Avenue with significant traffic volume, especially on the eastern side of the circle. As such, it will be important to ensure the continued safe operation of the traffic network, as well as the safe passage of visitors.

The plans include new pedestrian crosswalks from the west at Memorial Avenue which meet as a traffic refuge, before proceeding across the Circle into the arch plaza. From the east, two new crosswalks will start at the landing of the Memorial Bridge, also merging into a traffic island before crossing the Circle into the arch plaza. The applicant has stated that signals will be used to control vehicular traffic and allow pedestrians to use the various crosswalks.

The applicant has indicated that it is working with several agencies to evaluate the transportation network to accommodate visitor access and minimize impacts to the road network. As such staff suggests the **Commission recommend the applicant work with the Federal Highway Administration, District Department of Transportation, Arlington County, and other agencies as appropriate regarding any proposed changes or impacts to the surface transportation network.**

The plans do not provide details regarding visitor parking, loading/unloading, and ADA access. As the project introduces a visitor attraction to Memorial Circle, additional information is

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necessary to ensure the safety of those accessing the site and the minimizing impact to vehicular travel around the site. As such, staff recommends the **Commission request the applicant submit for the next review:**

- **A transportation or traffic study that identifies any potential impacts of the proposed project on the road network and level of service, and evaluates the proposed pedestrian access to ensure visitors can avoid pedestrian and vehicular conflicts; and**
- **Information regarding parking and loading/unloading for visitors to the arch to ensure safe access for those of all abilities and minimize disruption to the traffic network.**

#### *Visitor Safety*

The proposed arch sits within an at-grade plaza surrounded by a seat wall with openings with bollards for pedestrian access aligned with the openings of the arch. The submission includes some security elements including the seat wall, bollards, and security in the ticketing space. The seat wall as a security element is consistent with integrated design elements that NCPC policies support. As such, staff recommends the **Commission support the use of the seat wall as a designed security around the arch plaza.** Additional information regarding the overall risk and security approach will be helpful as part of the next review. Therefore, staff recommends the **Commission request the applicant provide, as part of the next review, a risk assessment and evaluation of the project to ensure the proposed design will address security considerations.**

#### *Aviation Safety*

The proposed project is shown at a height of 250 feet and the location along the Potomac River is 3,000 feet from Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, near landing approaches for two runways (01/19 and 15/33). According to Title 14, Chapter I, Subchapter E, Part 77 of the Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Safe, Efficient Use and Preservation of the Navigable Airspace outlines requirements for any construction that is more than 200 feet above ground level to file notice with the Federal Aviation Administration for determination of whether the proposed construction would be a hazard to air navigation. The applicant indicated they are currently working with the Federal Aviation Administration to evaluate whether the proposed project would impact air navigation given its proximity to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. This coordination should continue, and staff suggests the **Commission recommend the applicant continue consultation with the FAA to evaluate potential impacts of the proposed project on air navigation and provide an update to the Commission as part of the next review.** Any recommendations that are identified by the FAA review process should be incorporated into the design prior to the Commission's final action. As such, staff suggests the **Commission advise that any design recommendations provided by the FAA should be incorporated into the proposed project prior to the Commission's final action.**

### *Viewsheds*

The proposed location of the arch is at the center of Memorial Avenue and the sight line, design, and landscape features of Memorial Avenue, which includes Memorial Circle, are contributing elements of the National Register-listed Arlington National Cemetery Historic District and Arlington Memorial Bridge. The panoramic views from Arlington House at Arlington National Cemetery to the west and the Lincoln Memorial to the east have been in place since the 1920s and reflect the visual connectivity characteristic of the McMillan Plan. This alignment from the Lincoln Memorial to Arlington House was originally designed as a memorial symbolizing reunification of the North and South after the Civil War. The bridge and Memorial Avenue serve as the ceremonial entrance to Arlington National Cemetery, the nation's most hallowed ground and the final resting place for more than 400,000 service members, veterans, and family members.

According to the renderings in the submission materials, the proposed arch will block the view of the Lincoln Memorial from Arlington House and alter the view from the Lincoln Memorial to Arlington House. Given the importance of this view, staff suggests the **Commission encourage the applicant provide, as part of the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, any design options that were explored to avoid or minimize impacts on the visual connection between Arlington House and the Lincoln Memorial.** In addition, staff suggests the **Commission request the applicant provide, as part of the next review, updated photo-visualizations (renderings) of existing and proposed pedestrian-level views from the additional locations noted below:**

- **View from the north steps of the Jefferson Memorial looking toward the Lincoln Memorial; and**
- **Views from the George Washington Memorial Parkway, one looking south toward the circle from a point immediately south of I-66, and one looking north toward the circle from a point near the LBJ Memorial Grove.**

### *Design*

Consistent with Comprehensive Plan Policy UD.B.1.3, the Commission has historically focused on preserving Washington's picturesque, horizontal character, and reinforcing the Height of Buildings Act. The Height of Buildings Act of 1910 (amended 2014) is a federal law that limits building height, and NCPC has always applied the Height of Buildings Act to federal projects. The project appears to include a combination of habitable space and architectural embellishments. As such, further information will be necessary to understand how the project comports with the Height of Buildings Act. As such, staff suggests the **Commission request the applicant provide, as part of the next submission, an analysis and justification for the project's height in light of the Height of Buildings Act.**

Finally, the submission does not yet include information on any proposed lighting, the stormwater management approach, and most of the site and building materials. These are necessary elements for the Commission to review as the design advances. Therefore, staff suggests the **Commission recommends that the applicant work with the District Department of Energy &**

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**Environment regarding the proposed stormwater management approach and requests the applicant provide, as part of the next submission, information regarding the following information:**

- **The proposed arch and site materials palette, including cladding, paving, pedestrian features, and security elements.**
- **The proposed lighting strategy, including nighttime renderings from key views demonstrating the lighting concept in context.**
- **The proposed stormwater management strategy.**

## **CONFORMANCE TO EXISTING PLANS, POLICIES AND RELATED GUIDANCE**

### **Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital**

Staff reviewed the project considering the policies set forth in the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*, particularly those found in the Historic Preservation, Transportation, Visitors & Commemoration, Parks & Open Space, and Urban Design Elements. As a reminder, the Commission takes a holistic approach when applying the Comprehensive Plan policies within the context of the project's needs and objectives when making a consistency determination. Staff will fully analyze the proposed project in accordance with NCPC's policies once it receives the requested information.

### **National Historic Preservation Act**

NCPC has an independent responsibility to comply with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) process. NCPC intends to designate the applicant as the lead federal agency for the purposes of compliance with the Section 106 process of the NHPA. NCPC will not take a final review action until the Section 106 process has been completed. Further, staff suggests the **Commission recommend that the applicant work with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office and other consulting parties regarding the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 process.**

### **National Environmental Policy Act**

NCPC has a responsibility to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) based on its approval role for federal projects within the District of Columbia. The applicant has indicated an Environmental Assessment (EA) will be prepared for the project. NCPC will not take a final review action until the NEPA process has been completed.

Updates on both NHPA and NEPA compliance will be helpful as part of the next review. Therefore, staff recommends the **Commission request that the applicant provide, as part of the next submission, updates on the Section 106 process and the NEPA evaluation process, as completion of both processes are required for NCPC final action.**

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## CONSULTATION

### Coordinating Committee

The Committee forwarded the proposed comments on concept plans to the Commission with the statement that the proposal was coordinated with some, but not all, participating agencies at its May 13, 2026 meeting. The District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DCSHPO) is not coordinated and noted that the NHPA, Section 106 process had not yet been initiated. They highlighted the adverse visual effects on the east-west axis of the National Mall, as well as the corridor between the Arlington National Cemetery and Lincoln Memorial. The District Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) stated coordination is still needed. They recommended the applicant contact DOEE to schedule a preliminary design review meeting (PDRM) as the work will trigger stormwater management requirements. The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) staff noted their Commission had previously reviewed concept plans for the project and will review a revised concept at their May meeting. Participating agencies included NCPC, the U.S. General Services Administration, NPS, CFA, the DCSHPO, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the District Departments of Transportation and Energy & the Environment, and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

### U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, at their April 16, 2026 meeting, approved the concept plans for the monumental arch with comments for the applicant to consider. At their May 21, 2026 meeting, the Commission approved the final design.

## ONLINE REFERENCE

The following supporting documents for this project are available online at [www.ncpc.gov](http://www.ncpc.gov):

- Submission Package

Prepared by NCPC Staff  
05/29/2026

## POWERPOINT (ATTACHED)

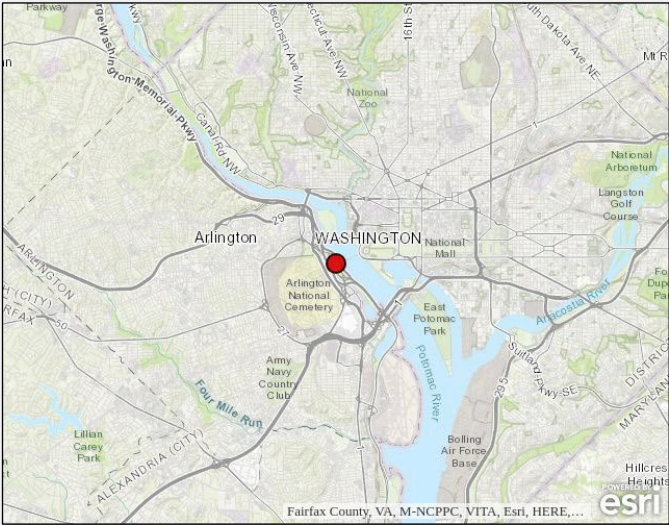
# New Monumental Arch

Memorial Avenue, Washington, DC

Approval of Comments on Concept Plans

United States Department of the Interior

# Site Location

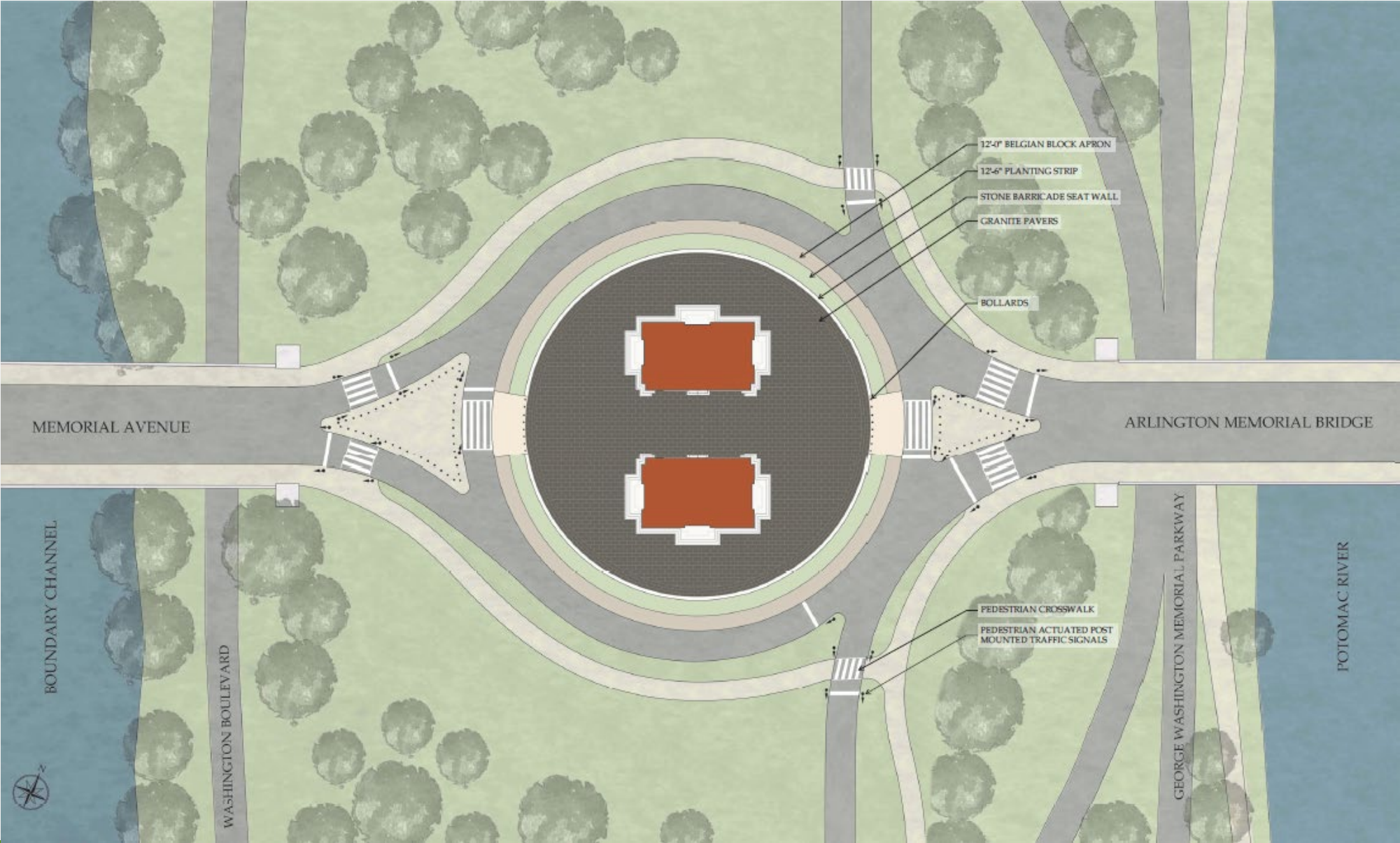


Location Map

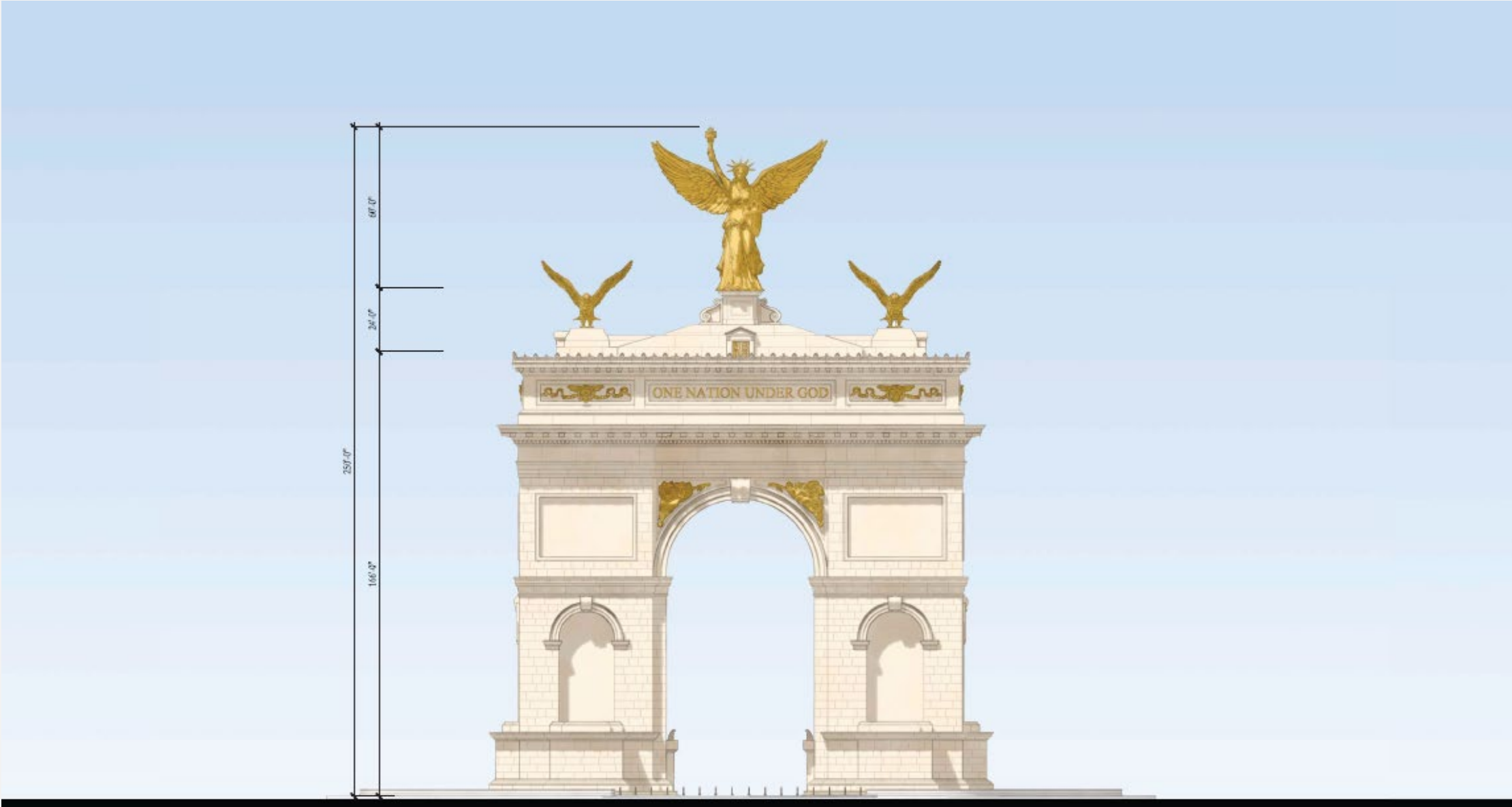
# Monumental Arch: Ceremonial Axis Site Plan



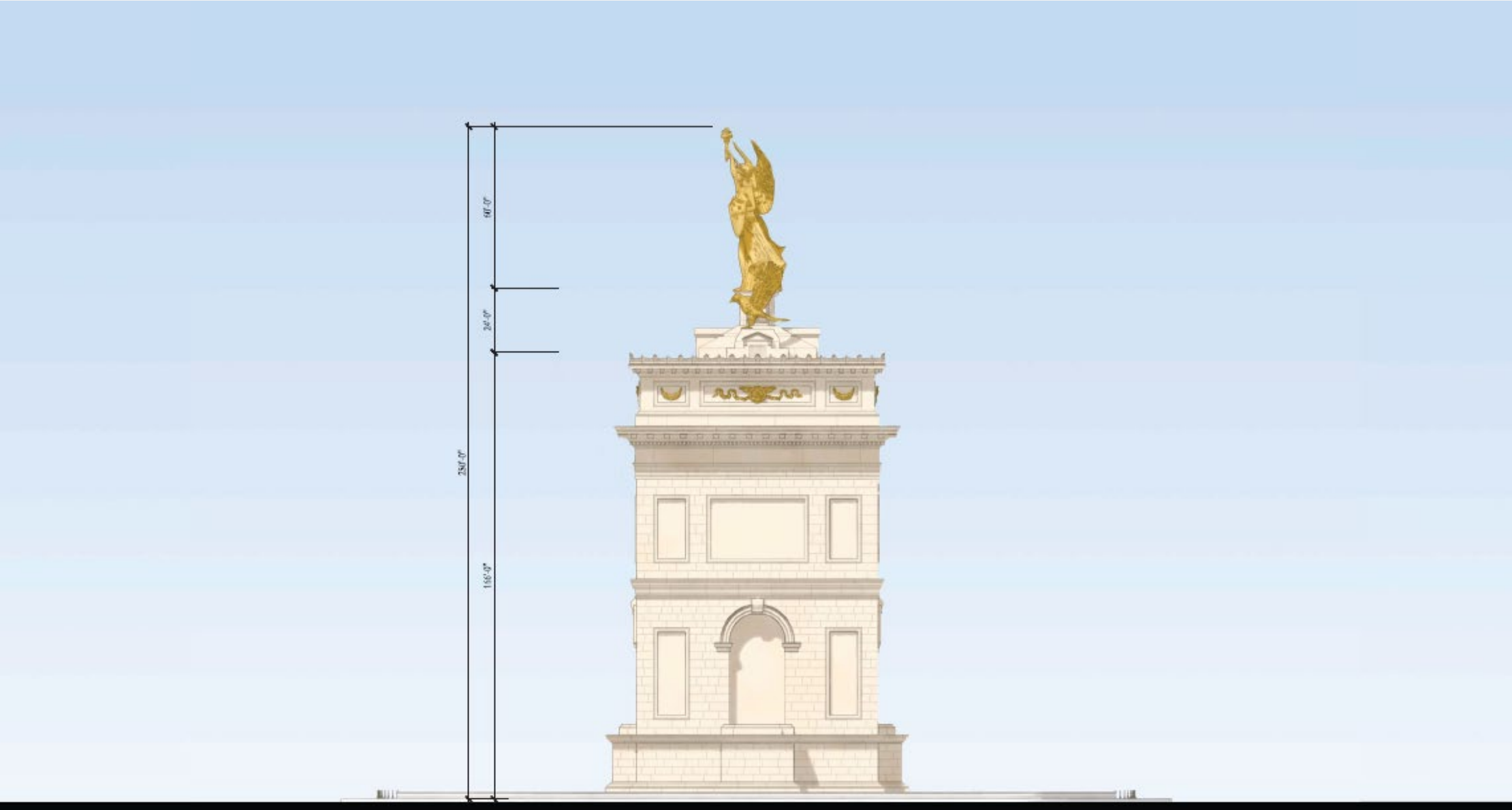
# Monumental Arch: Enlarged Site Plan



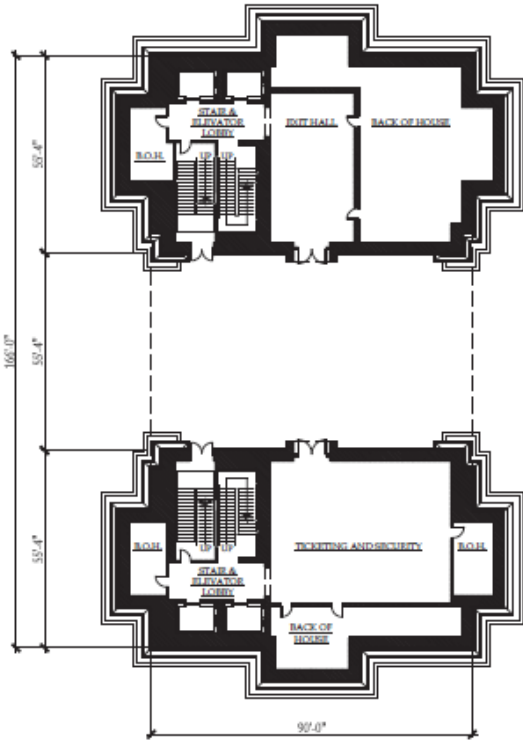
# Monumental Arch: Front Elevation



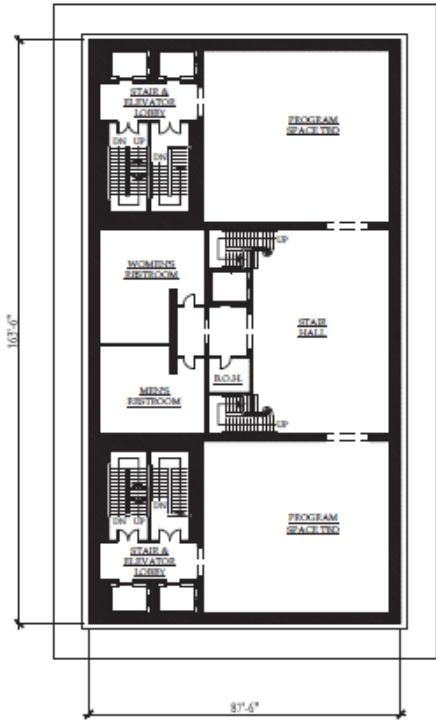
# Monumental Arch: Side Elevation



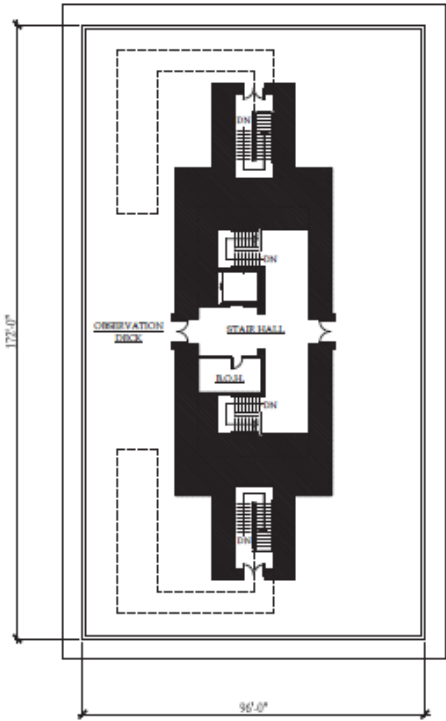
# Monumental Arch: Floor Plans



1. GROUND FLOOR LEVEL



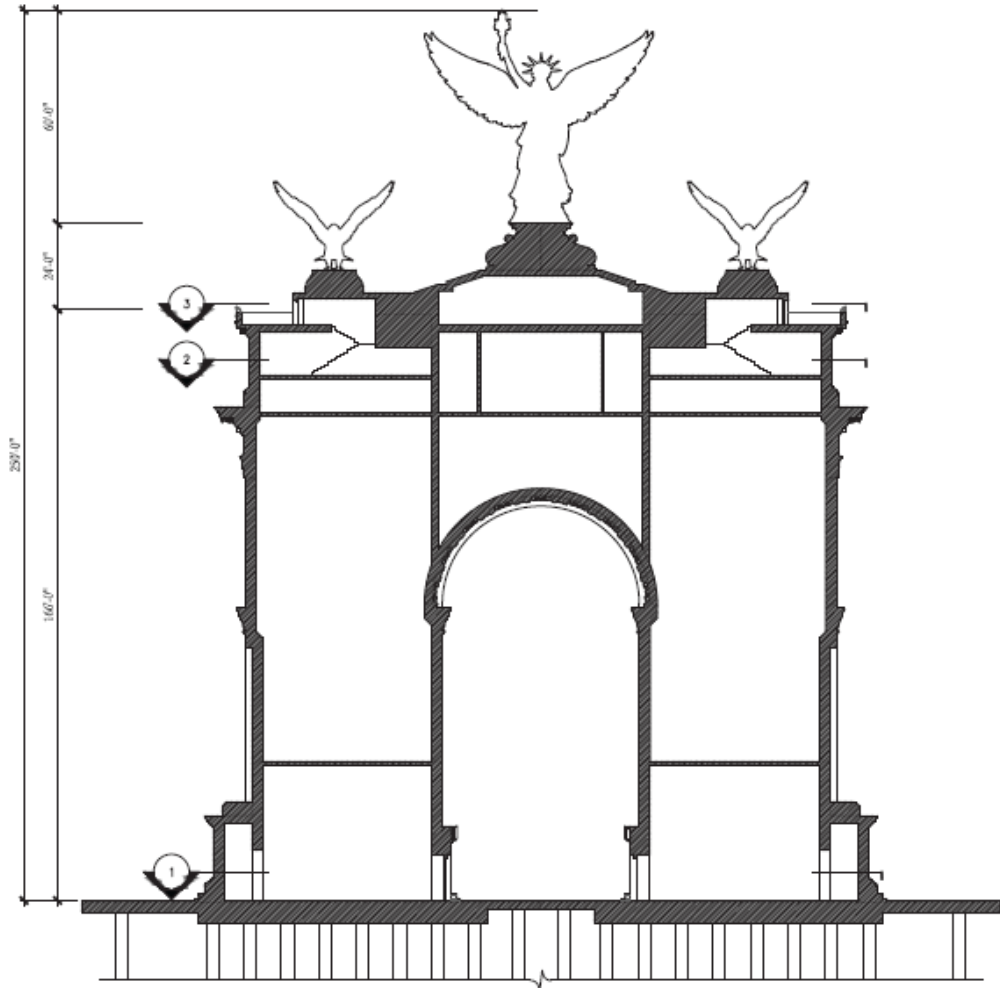
2. MEZZANINE LEVEL



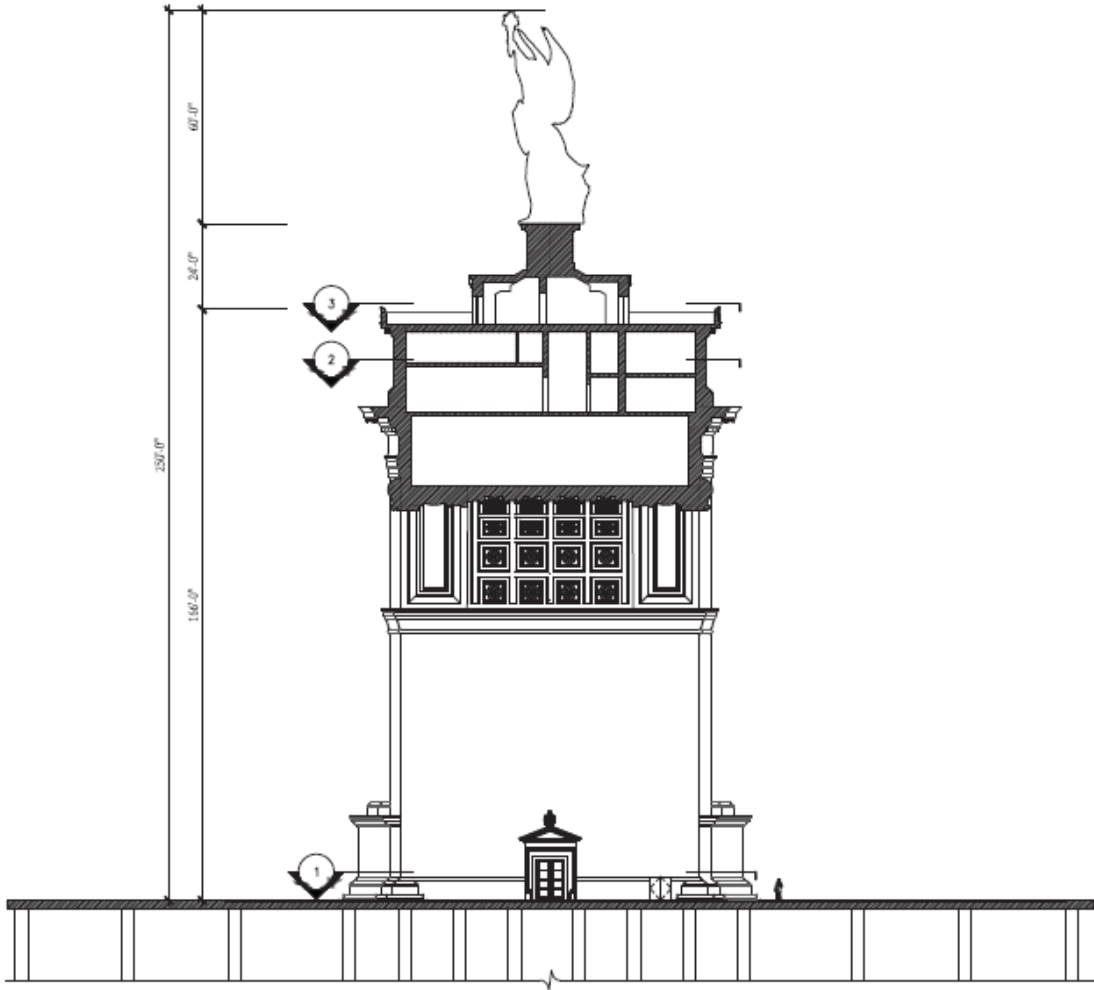
3. OBSERVATION DECK



# Monumental Arch: Longitudinal Section



# Monumental Arch: Transverse Section



# Monumental Arch: Rendering



Rendering: street level view of proposed Arch looking west

# Monumental Arch: Rendering



Rendering: street level view of proposed Arch looking southwest

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from  
Arlington House -  
Before

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from  
Arlington House -  
After

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from  
Parkway Drive NW  
- Before

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from  
Parkway Drive NW  
- After

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from Lincoln Memorial Circle- Before

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from Lincoln Memorial Circle- Before

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from Lincoln Memorial

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from Lincoln Memorial - Before

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from Lincoln Memorial - After

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from  
Washington  
Monument -  
Before

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from  
Washington  
Monument - After

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from  
Washington  
Monument -  
Before

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from  
Washington  
Monument - After

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from Capitol Hill - Before

# Monumental Arch: Views



View from Capitol Hill – After

# U.S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS 17 MAY 1910

401 F STREET NW SUITE 312 WASHINGTON DC 20001-2728 202-504-2200 FAX 202-504-2195 WWW.CFA.GOV

23 April 2026

Dear Secretary Burgum:

In its meeting of 16 April, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a concept design submission for a new monumental arch to be constructed within Memorial Circle on the George Washington Memorial Parkway, on the axis of Arlington Memorial Bridge. The Commission expressed appreciation for your comments in introducing the proposal at the meeting and approved the submission with the following comments.

The Commission members commented that a proposed monumental arch—a feature characteristic of many national capital cities—would contribute positively to the honorific landscape of Washington, D.C., for many generations. Citing the history of monumental planning for the city to include a large marker in Memorial Circle, they expressed support for the location on this important axis between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery, and they endorsed the 166-foot height of the arch itself as appropriate for this setting. However, they noted that the great scale and solidity of the proposed structure, while framing axial views between the memorials, may block oblique views within this monumental setting. They therefore recommended creating secondary open archways within the legs of the central arch in order to make it more open; they also suggested creating a more appropriately grand entry sequence into the interior public spaces of the arch.

For the 84-foot-high monumental grouping of a gilded, winged allegorical figure and flanking eagles on a stepped base proposed for the top of the arch, the Commission members suggested removing these from the design, observing that the project would appear more compatible with Washington's monumental context without these elements. Regarding the proposed program of sculpture generally, the Commission members requested more information on the various artworks intended for the project, including those for the arched niches, panels, friezes, keystones, and other areas of the arch. They discouraged the inclusion of lions at the base of the arch, which they noted are not native to the United States, but they encouraged substituting native North American examples of heroic, mighty creatures such as animals as bison, horses, or grizzly bears. They also suggested removing the wingless bust of an eagle at the keystone of the central arch.

Regarding the treatment of the site, the Commission members acknowledged the difficulty of providing pedestrian access to the arch, which is proposed to be located within a traffic circle. Rather than constructing a tunnel hundreds of feet long to provide this pedestrian access, they recommended adding a surface crosswalk on the western side of the traffic circle, which would allow a symmetrical composition for the ramps that lead from the street level to the elevated plinth at the base of the arch. They also recommended refining the relationship of the site to the traffic circle itself,

extending the landscape design outward to the greatest extent possible, as well as limiting the use of asphalt pavement to the minimum required for traffic and using a different material, such as stone cobbles, for the restricted areas of the circle instead of applied graphic striping as presented.

In its action of concept approval, the Commission requested that the project be reviewed next as a revised concept submission that responds to these comments. The submission should include: more detailed information should be provided about the intended program of sculptures; an extension of the site model to illustrate the axis of the National Mall eastward from the Lincoln Memorial; the illustration of views to the arch from Arlington House, the Hemicycle, and the Lincoln Memorial; and documentation of the absolute heights of the major monuments within this symbolic landscape as measured from sea level.

The Commission of Fine Arts looks forward to the continued review of this substantial addition to the monumental composition of the national capital. Please coordinate the next submission with the staff which, as always, is available to assist you.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA  
Secretary

The Honorable Doug Burgum  
Secretary of the Interior  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

cc: Nicolas Leo Charbonneau, Harrison Design  
Robin Rode, Les Métalliers Champenois  
Josh Fisher, Executive Office of the President  
Marcel Acosta, National Capital Planning Commission

# U.S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS 17 MAY 1910

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28 May 2026

Dear Secretary Burgum:

In its meeting of 21 May, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a revised concept design proposal for a new monumental arch to be constructed within Memorial Circle on the George Washington Memorial Parkway, on the axis of Arlington Memorial Bridge. The Commission approved the submission as a final proposal for the architectural design with the following comments, requesting further information about the arch's program of sculpture.

The Commission members expressed appreciation for the presentation, which included additional information about the structure's interior, a more extensive site model, rendered views of the proposed arch within the larger monumental context, and the simplification of various decorative features. They cited the history of heroic architecture proposed for this site in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including several arches and a pair of 166-foot-tall columns; they commented that this proposal builds on the legacy of the McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C., and would extend the symbolic landscape beyond the National Mall. They noted that the city and its narrative of monuments is not static, and this project provides an opportunity for new national stories. In their discussion, the Commission members noted the numerous objections to the project and advised that many of these issues are not part of the Commission's purview. Instead, they characterized the project as beautiful, and they found that the presentation shows the arch would be visually open and would not block views toward the significant landmarks in this context. They concluded that the arch is appropriately scaled to frame and enhance Arlington House as the landmark that terminates the long ceremonial axis from the Lincoln Memorial, and that it would give the historic home of General Robert E. Lee the visual prominence it deserves as the endpoint of the monumental McMillan Plan sequence extending from the Capitol to Arlington National Cemetery.

In their support for the architectural design of the arch as presented, the Commission members resolved to approve this revised concept submission as a final design, with the exception of the sculpture, bas-relief panels, and statuary in the arched niches, which should be submitted when these elements have been designed. Noting the spare character of arch's inner surfaces, they also suggested adding articulation, such as panels, surface relief, or inscriptions to complete the development of the design.

With this action of final approval, the Commission has concluded its review of the architectural components of this project and looks forward to the review of the comprehensive sculptural program.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA  
Secretary

The Honorable Doug Burgum  
Secretary of the Interior  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

cc: Nicolas Leo Charbonneau, Harrison Design  
Joshua Fisher, Executive Office of the President  
Marcel Acosta, National Capital Planning Commission