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NCPC Advances Memorial and Museum Projects

Comments offered on World War I and Desert Storm Memorials, Lincoln Memorial Rehabilitation, and National Air and Space Museum Cladding Option

Washington, DC—At its July 13 meeting the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) reviewed and provided direction for several major commemoration and transportation projects that are in early development. The Commission provided comments on a revised concept design submitted by the National Park Service for the National World War I Memorial, to be located in downtown Washington's 1.75-acre Pershing Park.

The revamped design maintains more of the existing park design than previously proposed. The memorial's main components include a 65-foot long bronze bas-relief wall on the site's western edge featuring images from the war along with a water feature. The park's pool is retained, although a path would be added across the pool to access the commemorative wall. A flagpole would replace an existing kiosk.

The Commission requested that the applicant consider reducing the commemorative wall to improve views across the park and look for ways to better integrate it into the park's existing features. They also requested that the applicant evaluate how the water features would look when not operating, and study ways to improve pedestrian access and visibility from the site's southern perimeter along Pennsylvania Avenue.

The Commission provided comments on two possible sites for the Congressionally-authorized National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial. The first area is located near Memorial Circle east of Arlington National Cemetery. The second is near the terminus of Constitution Avenue by 23rd Street, NW, north of the Lincoln Memorial. Both are locations identified in the *Memorials and Museums Master Plan* as prime memorial candidate sites.

NCPC requested that the applicant provide one or more alternative design concepts for both sites for the next stage of review that include variations in scale, placement, and orientation. NCPC noted that the Memorial Circle site has a thematic connection to Arlington National Cemetery and nearby military memorials, but access is currently challenged by pedestrian-vehicular conflicts. The second site is near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial with which it has a strong thematic connection. NCPC recommended that designs for this site also consider current and future vehicular and pedestrian transportation infrastructure. The applicant was asked to coordinate the project design with two infrastructure improvements also proposed at this site.

The Commission provided comments on two concept design alternatives for a plaque with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's prayer from D-Day (June 6, 1944) to be located within the Circle of Remembrance, near the World War II Memorial. Alternative A, which the Commission had previously reviewed, is a freestanding plaque with a symmetrical design with entry/exit locations on either side. Alternative B installs an asymmetrical plaque with a more contemporary design into a repositioned Circle of Remembrance with one entry/exit point. Both concepts provide direct visual access from the plaque towards the National World War II Memorial.

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The Commission found that both alternatives have positive qualities and are appropriate designs. The Commission had previously supported Alternative A. They could also support the new Alternative B, provided several design issues were addressed, including improved universal accessibility, ensuring ample seating, and improved plaque design for legibility and use.

The National Park Service also submitted concept designs to widen two doors at the terrace level flanking the stairs of the Lincoln Memorial, which was completed and dedicated in 1922. The widened doors, originally added to the memorial in 1927, will provide better access to existing and expanded visitor services and are part of a larger rehabilitation project in the memorial's undercroft and chamber. Widths under consideration include 36, 50, or 72 inches. Plans call for the relocation of the memorial bookstore to the undercroft, expanding exhibit space and restroom facilities, adding visual access to the memorial's underground support, and adding an elevator to the former bookstore space. The interior components of the rehabilitation are not subject to NCPC review.

The Commission noted its support for increasing the door widths. They found that the 36-inch option does not fit with the National Park Service's desired goals, and recommended that the National Park Service continue exploring the benefits and challenges of widening the two doors up to 72 inches for accessibility and egress while minimizing impacts to the historic fabric and views to the memorial.

NCPC then provided comments on a revised concept design for new exterior cladding for the National Air and Space Museum submitted by the Smithsonian Institution. The National Air and Space Museum opened in 1976 in conjunction with the Bicentennial. The existing limestone cladding is in need of a durable replacement with a material compatible with the museum's original design, which used the cladding materials' color and texture to provide visual interest and is in symmetry with the surrounding buildings on the National Mall. This material would replace the cladding on the museum's entire 198,450 square feet stone exterior. The interior stone would remain.

While the Commission found that Tennessee Pink limestone, the current cladding, is the most appropriate option based purely upon aesthetic and historical preservation criteria, they recognized that these are not the only criteria informing the decision. They noted that the Smithsonian Institution conducted additional technical analyses that considered durability, and that the Smithsonian selected Colonial Rose granite as their preferred alternative because it provides the best long-term solution. NCPC noted its support of Colonial Rose, but strongly encouraged increasing the percentage of stone panels with color variation and horizontal pattern in the design specification to avoid a monolithic façade. The Smithsonian anticipates returning for preliminary approval in December.

The Commission approved preliminary and final building plans submitted by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority for the Terminal B/C redevelopment project at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. In its approval, they noted that the removal of existing hangers and an office building would have a positive impact on the airport's skyline as seen from the George Washington Memorial Parkway and East Potomac Park, and would not have any negative impacts on nearby federal lands. Plans call for securing the North Hall with new checkpoints, tearing down two existing hangers and an office building, and constructing a new North Concourse in their place. The new concourse will provide arrival/departure gates for regional airlines that already serve the airport but load/unload passengers via external staircases.

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Before adjourning, the Commission heard two information presentations. In the first, Federal Railroad Administration representatives discussed plans to expand and modernize the multimodal transportation facilities at Washington's Union Station with a focus on replacing the existing bus terminal and parking deck and allowing for expanded intercity and regional rail service. Alternatives will be available this fall, and they anticipate coming to NCPC for preliminary review in early winter of 2019.

In the second presentation, NCPC staff and representatives from the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center provided an update on the National Capital Region Parking Study. The study is assessing the agency's current parking ratio policies for federal facilities in light of industry best practices and future forecasts land use patterns, transportation network improvements, and project regional population changes. The Commission does not take official action on information presentations.

This month's agenda also included three consent calendar items (no presentations given):

- Final site development plans for rehabilitation of the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial, Arlington, Virginia. (7892)
- Preliminary site and building plans for the rehabilitation of, and addition to, Building 245 Radiation Physics Laboratory at the National Institute of Standards and Technology, 100 Bureau Drive, Gaithersburg, Maryland. (7893)
- Preliminary and final site and building plans for an addition to the P6000 Vehicle Operations Building at Joint Base Andrews, Camp Springs, Maryland. (7874)

In addition, the Executive Director approved seven items, under authority delegated by the Commission. The final agenda, project materials, and staff recommendations are available on [NCPC's website](#).

The National Capital Planning Commission is the federal government's central planning agency in Washington, DC and surrounding counties of Maryland and Virginia. The Commission provides overall guidance for federal land and buildings in the region. It also reviews the design of federal projects and memorials, oversees long-range planning for future development, and monitors capital investment by federal agencies.

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