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NCPC Approves Final Smithsonian South Mall Campus Master Plan
Commission Provides Feedback on FDA White Oak Master Plan

Washington, DC—At its Thursday, June 7 meeting the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) approved the final master plan for the Smithsonian Institution's 17-acre [South Mall Campus](#) that stretches from the Freer Gallery of Art to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. In its approval NCPC found that the master plan will increase campus functionality, improve the visitor experience, and enhance connectivity both within the site and to the surrounding city and neighborhoods, while balancing planning, urban design, and historic preservation goals. The Commission noted that the Smithsonian acknowledged they will use the Commission's recommendations to inform the planning and design of individual projects on the South Mall Campus at the time of their development. NCPC will review individual projects from the master plan as the Smithsonian submits them.

The master plan process began in 2012 when the Smithsonian first identified comprehensive goals and priorities for the campus. The plan will guide future short- and long-term renovation and development at the site over the next 20-30 years, and identifies projects for implementation over time as funding becomes available. The final master plan incorporated feedback obtained through this planning process, including public comments, and includes the following objectives:

- Restore the Smithsonian Castle as the main visitor center and the physical and symbolic center of the Smithsonian's museums on the National Mall.
- Make the underground Quadrangle Building more functional and modern, consolidate its public spaces, and replace its 30-year old roof.
- Create two new pavilions to improve accessibility and provide better entries into the Sackler Gallery and National Museum of African Art.
- Locate a new Haupt Garden, maintaining many of the current garden's characteristics, on the Quadrangle Building's reconstructed roof.
- Restore the Arts and Industries Building, which will host events and exhibits, consistent with its original purpose.
- Restore the Hirshhorn Museum and provide a new pedestrian opening that will improve connectivity between the buildings and through the campus.

NCPC then provided comments on a draft master plan submitted by the General Service Administrations (GSA) for the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\) Headquarters](#) at the 662-acre Federal Research Center at White Oak in Silver Spring, Maryland, of which FDA occupies 130 acres. These comments will help inform the final master plan, including which development option goes forward. The master plan, which will be implemented in phases, will support an increase of approximately 7,000 employees (from an existing 10,987) and 1.6 million square feet of development (currently 3.8 million gross square feet of offices and labs) by 2035.

GSA proposed three different alternatives to host the future population of approximately 18,000 employees. Option A has five new buildings up to 10-stories tall. Option B has four new office buildings, including a 20-story tower. Option C proposes five new office buildings, including two 14-story buildings. Among its comments, the Commission noted its support of option C because it would result in a balanced approach that generates the least amount of adverse environmental impacts, extends the campus' original character and urban design

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framework, minimizes adverse effects to its historic setting, and responds to the surrounding context. For this option they also recommended making several changes including changing the massing of the two 14-story buildings, eliminating a proposed sky bridge, and considering methods to make the space between them more lively.

The Commission did not support option A. Regarding option B, they requested that if it became the applicant's preferred alternative, that they describe the benefits of the single tower approach and whether the additional program in this alternative could be accommodated in the other alternatives. NCPC also deferred support for the size and footprint of the parking garage proposed for phase 4 until the impacts of future regional infrastructure improvements could be assessed at the time of design and construction.

NCPC then commented on concept plans submitted by the Smithsonian Institution for supplemental perimeter fencing at the [National Zoological Park](#) in Northwest, Washington. The National Zoo seeks to ensure visitor safety and secure the facility perimeter. NCPC noted its support of the project which will secure the zoo's perimeter through the addition of 4,347 linear feet of new fencing (ornamental, ornamental vehicular-rated, and chain-link), and the reduction of pedestrian entrances from 13 to three. The proposed ornamental fencing would be consistent with existing fencing. Among its comments, the Commission requested additional information on potential impacts of fencing on existing trees, and a site plan that shows the types of proposed gates and their placement. The project's second phase, which NCPC will review in the future, will add security checkpoints at the three pedestrian entrances.

The Commission approved preliminary and final site development plans submitted by the National Park Service to rehabilitate the [Arlington Memorial Bridge](#), supporting its plans to renew the bridge as a commemorative work, important regional transportation connection, and significant gateway to the nation's capital. The project will restore the historic bridge's structural integrity, which will allow it to remain open to the public, while protecting its memorial character and unique design elements. Plans call for repairing deteriorated components, replacing the concrete deck, and resurfacing all travel lanes. The steel bascule span, that no longer opens, will be replaced with a new fixed span made of arched steel girders.

Completed in 1932 and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, the Memorial Bridge spans the Potomac River, connecting Washington, DC with Virginia. Bridge designers intended for it to function as a symbolic connection between the North and South and as an important link in Washington's monumental core. It is also a vital part of the region's transportation network, and the Commission encouraged continued coordination with local and regional agencies to address potential mobility impacts during construction. NCPC recommended that the National Park Service continue to evaluate both short-and long-term opportunities to improve pedestrian and bicycle connections to and from the bridge.

Before adjourning, the Commission commented favorably on the concept design for a new [Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences Education and Research Building](#) submitted by the Department of the Navy, noting that its design is consistent with the Naval Support Activity Bethesda's architectural standards. The 477,966 square-foot, multi-story education and research laboratory would include a 250-parking space underground parking facility and a new plaza with landscaping and green spaces that will form a quadrangle with existing campus buildings. NCPC commended the applicant for picking a location that will have minimal impacts on the natural environment, which responded to previous Commission comments, and requested improved pedestrian connections to the building's western entrance and additional trees and vegetation at the entry plaza to provide more shade.

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

1. Preliminary and final site development plans for improvements to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial In Memory Plaque, West Potomac Park. (7375)
2. The final master plan for an addendum to the Naval Support Facility Carderock Master Plan, 9500 MacArthur Boulevard, Bethesda, MD. (MP98)
3. Preliminary and final site and building plans for the National Institutes of Health National Cancer Institute Cell Processing Facility, NIH Gateway Center, Bethesda, MD. (7981)

The Executive Director approved three items, under authority delegated by the Commission.

1. Final site development plans for the proposed relocation of Gate 3 at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Headquarters consolidation at St. Elizabeths West Campus, 2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, SE. (7930)
2. Preliminary and final building plans for rooftop improvements at Market Square West, 801 Pennsylvania Ave NW. (P7988)
3. A report to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia regarding a Text Amendment to Subtitle B for Definitions and Rules of Measurement and Related Rules in Subtitles D, E, F, J and K. (ZC 17-18)

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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