



MEDIA RELEASE

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NCPC Provides Feedback on Georgetown Canal Plan and Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden Revitalization Concept

Commission Approves Preliminary Plans for the National Native American Veterans Memorial

Washington, DC—At its [Thursday, June 6 meeting](#) the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) provided feedback to the National Park Service (NPS) on the [Georgetown Canal Plan](#). The plan, developed by NPS in cooperation with the Georgetown Business Improvement District, Georgetown Heritage, and District of Columbia Office of Planning, would enhance a one-mile stretch of the C&O Canal from the zero-mile marker at 28th Street, NW to the Alexandria Aqueduct located at 36th Street, NW. The 184.5-mile long canal, constructed from 1828-1831, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Plans call for improvements to make it easier for people with limited mobility to use and access the towpath. One option would level the grade and remove existing vegetation within the available space. A second option would extend the towpath over the canal in certain locations where additional width is needed. Improvements are proposed at seven different locations along the one-mile stretch. Most locations have two different proposals, including options for modest improvements or more significant interventions. These locations include (going from east to west) the Mile Zero Marker, Rock Creek Confluence, Locks, Wisconsin Avenue Cutout, Market Plaza, Stone Yard, and Aqueduct. Plans also call for the reintroduction of an interpretive mule-drawn canal boat.

Commissioners noted their support for the National Park Service's goals to improve universal accessibility, the visitor experience, connections to the Georgetown community, and educational programming. During their discussion they noted that it is important to balance the visitor experience and universal accessibility with historic preservation, making sure that the Georgetown Canal is a place that everyone can access and enjoy. The Commission noted the access issues visitors face today and the towpath's poor condition. Commissioners generally liked the concept plans but suggested that over-programming the canal could be detrimental and that the proposals should first focus on historic and educational components.

"There's an opportunity to experience the canal in a way that most people can't today," said NCPC Vice Chairman Thomas Gallas. "If we can achieve this it will be an exciting intervention."

Commissioner Beth White added that the canal "is unlike any other place in the world and we really need to appreciate that."

NCPC then approved preliminary site development plans for the [National Native American Veterans Memorial](#) which would honor the tradition of service of Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces. Plans submitted by the Smithsonian Institution would locate the memorial in a 50-foot diameter plaza in an existing wooded area located on the northeast grounds of the National Museum of the American Indian. The memorial would occupy a total of 2,837 square feet. The design consists of a circular contemplative gathering space with a vertical sculpture as the memorial's centerpiece. Other components include an eight-foot wide approach walk; circular seat walls; four lances on top of the seat walls; a fountain with light fixtures; and a railing.

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Commissioners expressed support for the design and recommended that the railing design be simplified to minimize visual impacts to the memorial. For final review, anticipated to be sometime this fall, they requested a lightning plan showing night views; a landscape plan that includes replacement of trees lost to construction; and a stormwater management plan. The Smithsonian seeks to open the memorial by Veterans Day 2020.

The Commission then provided comments to the Smithsonian Institution on concept plans to revitalize the [Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden](#). The project seeks to rehabilitate and revitalize the sculpture garden to improve accessibility, showcase the existing collection, and accommodate new art, including larger pieces and performance art. The museum and sculpture garden opened in 1974. However, people visiting the garden found it too hot due to the expanse of gravel and lack of shade, while its lack of access other than stairs made it difficult to visit for some. Modifications were made in 1981 that added ramped walkways, shade trees, and grass, and other plants.

The concept proposes to further enhance the garden. Plans would improve connections to the museum and the National Mall, including reopening an underground passage to the museum; add seating and trees; provide areas for large-scale installations, as well as performance art; repair existing infrastructure, including walls; renovate and enlarge the reflecting pool as an integral component of the site.

Commissioners supported the Smithsonian's vision for the project, including making it a more inviting and accessible location for visitors. They liked the idea of adding more trees and plants; reopening the tunnel to the museum; and providing improved connections to the National Mall. They requested that the Smithsonian work with the National Park Service regarding alternatives for crossing Jefferson Drive to the Mall. Commissioners expressed concerns that the proposed stone walls may be too busy and not in keeping with the Hirshhorn design. While noting that the reflection pool is an important part of the garden design, they requested more details regarding proposed changes to it in the next submission, including an option that retains the dimensions of the current pool.

Before adjourning, NCPC deferred action on revised preliminary site and building plans submitted by the U.S. Navy for a [Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences Education and Research Building](#) to be located at the Naval Support Activity on Rockville Pike in Bethesda, Maryland. The proposed 477,966 square-foot, multi-story building would house education and research laboratory space. The applicant requested that NCPC defer action, giving them more time to address Commission's concerns regarding the building design and large paved plaza proposed as part of the project.

Video of the Commission meeting, Commission actions, and related materials are available [online](#) within five days after the meeting.

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This month's agenda included seven consent calendar items (no presentations were given):

1. Preliminary site and building plans for a tennis pavilion at the White House Complex, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. (8077)
2. Preliminary and final site development plans for an antenna on Building 52 at the United States Naval Observatory, 3450 Massachusetts Avenue, NW. (8076)
3. Final site and building plans for alterations to the entrance of Building 10, Naval Support Activity Bethesda, 8901 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Maryland. (8037)
4. Preliminary site and building plans for expansion of the Point Firing Range Facility at Joint Base Andrews, Camp Springs, Maryland. (8056)
5. Preliminary and final site development plans for installation of an antenna at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's South Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW. (8073)
6. Preliminary and final building plans for improvements to the Whittle School, 3700 Tilden Street, NW. (8068)
7. Preliminary site development plans for the addition of a photovoltaic facility and conversion of fuel oil boilers, U.S. Department of Homeland Security-Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, 9000 Commo Road, Cheltenham, Maryland. (8081)

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

1. Modifications to One Freedom Plaza, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (P7298)
2. Approval of comments to the Council of the District of Columbia regarding the closing of a public street in Square 660, Half Street and Potomac Avenue, SW. (8069)
3. Approval of a report to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia regarding a Consolidated Planned Unit Development and Related Map Amendment at Square 498, 501 C Street, SW. (ZC 17-21)

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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