



MEDIA RELEASE

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NCPC Advances Plans, Requests Additional Information, for Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden Revitalization

Pentagon Reservation Stormwater Management and Security Upgrades Approved

Washington, DC—At its Thursday, December 3 meeting, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) approved preliminary site development plans, with the exception of proposed changes to the garden's reflecting pool and inner partition wall, submitted by the Smithsonian Institution to revitalize the [Hirshhorn Museum's Sculpture Garden](#).

Located on the National Mall and designed by Gordon Bunshaft, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, opened in 1974 and featured a sunken garden bordered by concrete retaining walls on three sides, a planted berm opening to the National Mall, and a central reflecting pool. Visitors accessed the sunken garden from several sets of stairs and sculpture was displayed in a series of gravel-paved austere terraces framed by internal concrete walls and hedges. However, the lack of shade and gravel surface made it very hot in the summer. To alleviate this, in 1981 landscape architect Lester Collins modified the design to improve accessibility and visitor comfort by adding ramped walkways (now brick paved and defined by planting beds and lawn), trees, and ground cover plantings to the design. The museum and sculpture garden are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (including design features in the original design). The garden elements added by Collins were recently determined to also contribute to the garden's significance.

The Smithsonian seeks to upgrade the Sculpture Garden to better showcase its sculpture collection, enhance the visitor experience, improve connections with the National Mall and the museum, create flexible space for artists and new programming, replace failing infrastructure, and meet current codes. Proposed changes include a flexible lawn space for performances and temporary exhibitions (West Gallery); a series of interconnected open "galleries" for the museum's bronze sculptures (East Gallery); expanded reflecting pools and a performance stage (Central Gallery); improved entrances and new overlooks; replacement of the original perimeter concrete walls with new concrete walls; replacement of the interior concrete partition wall with one of stacked stone; new stacked stone walls; new accessibility ramps; new planter walls that also function as seating; new accessibility ramps to make it easier for people to reach the gardens; and reopening and modernizing an underground tunnel that connects the museum with the garden.

An extensive public comment session took place before the Commission deliberated, with people expressing both support for the proposal and concern about its impact on the garden's historic elements. A theme throughout the testimonies was how important and special the museum and garden are to people. Commissioners noted this and expressed their support for the Smithsonian's efforts to revitalize the garden, expand exhibit space, and improve accessibility and connections to the National Mall and Hirshhorn Museum. They highlighted the importance of balancing the visitor experience with changing programming needs and historic preservation.

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However, Commissioners had concerns with two of the proposed components and asked for further input and work to solve design challenges, including helping them better understand the programmatic need driving changes to the historic pool design. They recommended that the Smithsonian explore an alternative to the expanded pool design that retains the historic character-defining dimensions of the existing pool. They also recommended that the Smithsonian try to find a way to make the new stone walls more compatible with, while still differentiated from, the historic perimeter materials. Suggestions for how to do this included material, color tone, or stacking pattern.

“We are witnessing an exciting design process to rehabilitate the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden. The debate is between the balance of historic significance and design ideas,” noted NCPC Vice Chair Thomas Gallas.

Commissioners then approved preliminary and final site development plans for stormwater management design and security upgrades at the [Pentagon Reservation](#) submitted by the U.S. Department of Defense’s Washington Headquarters Service. Consisting of six projects, the first five upgrades will reduce the reservation’s discharge of pollutants in stormwater runoff. These include adding bioretention areas and tree boxes in several parking lots, resulting in an increase in stormwater management facilities (13 to 33), an increase in the number of tree boxes (14 to 41), and the removal of 190 parking spaces.

The sixth project focuses on security and safety upgrades at the campus, including along a 1,200-foot-long walkway between the Pentagon Transit Center (including the Metro station) and the National 9/11 Pentagon Memorial. Components include an 8-foot-high fence on the side facing the Pentagon that would complete the building’s perimeter security, new entry points for employees, a cable and rail system on the side of the street to protect pedestrians, landscaping, and trees.

Previously, the Commission found that the proposed design was not welcoming to pedestrians and suggested several ways to alleviate this. In response to these comments, the design was altered to include a planting strip along the entire fence line, the walkway widened, stone pillars added into the fence and gate design, two of the entrance gates widened, the number and size of the stone-clad bollards reduced (seven to five, from 54” to 40”), and landscaping added to the tree strips. The Commission requested confirmation of a 42” height for a security fence. Commissioners thanked the design team for addressing their earlier comments, noting that this design is a significant improvement.

The Commission also approved preliminary site and building plans submitted by the [National Institutes of Health](#) for a nine story (with two additional below grade levels) 547,290 gross square feet Surgery, Radiology and Laboratory Medicine addition to the existing Clinical Research Center. However, they noted significant concerns regarding the building size related to the site. The new addition will house the relocation of several medical departments and further the Clinical Center Complex as a premier, world-class research facility.

While appreciating the importance of the proposed addition and the need to locate adjacent to the Clinical Research Center, Commissioners had many concerns about the proposed addition’s size and scale, expressing that the building was too large for the site. At issue was how to properly fit the needed program into a building on the limited site. While approving the preliminary plans, NCPC wants to see significant changes in the proposed design by the next review phase, including a façade that addresses the numerous design considerations raised by the Commissioners.

The Commission adopted proposed updates to the agency’s [Antenna Submissions Guidelines](#). First adopted by NCPC in 1988 and last updated in 2001, the guidelines seek to protect the skyline, historic resources, and scenic character of the nation’s capital and provide a safe environment for employees, visitors, and residents. However, they needed an upgrade to in response to advances in technology and an increased demand for multiple types of telecommunication infrastructure.

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The new guidance will address the impacts of new telecommunication infrastructure on federal buildings and land. The updates will become effective 60 days after a notice is placed in the Federal Register and will then be used by the Commission and staff when reviewing antenna projects. The guidelines do not pertain to small cell infrastructure in the public right-of-way as this is regulated by the District of Columbia. Commissioners appreciated the work that went into the update and believe that it will make a big difference in the agency's review of antennas and the impact of this on the city.

A scheduled information presentation by NCPC staff on the development of [Streetscape Design Guidelines](#) for Washington's monumental core was postponed to the January 7, 2021 Commission meeting.

The Commission voted Commissioner Beth White (Presidential Appointee-At Large) as the new Vice Chair.

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

1. Approval of a transfer of jurisdiction for the 11th Street Bridge Park, 11th Street, SE at Anacostia Drive, SE. (8230)
2. Preliminary and final site and building plans for the Data Storage Center Phase 3, Fort Belvoir, Virginia. (8233)

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

1. Preliminary and final site development plans for a flagpole installation and site improvements at the Internal Revenue Service Federal Building, 1111 Constitution Avenue, NW. (8229)
2. Preliminary and final site and building plans for redevelopment of Parcel F at the Southeast Federal Center per the Memorandum of Understanding, dated June 6, 2005, between the General Services Administration and the National Capital Planning Commission regarding the transfer by sale and/or long-term ground lease to Brookfield Properties and the mixed-use development of the Southeast Federal Center- The Yards, First Street, SE and N Street, SE. (8231)
3. Preliminary and final site and building plans for restoration of the Capital Crescent Trailhead and Staircase, 3600 Water Street, NW. (8232)
4. Preliminary and final site development plans for rehabilitation of the Carnegie Library, including window glazing replacement and a new fence, 801 K Street, NW. (8234)
5. Final site and building plans for military working dog kennels at Joint Base Andrews, Camp Springs, Maryland. (8087)
6. A report to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia for a Text Amendment to Subtitle Z to Suspend Certain Types of Conditions for Approved Campus Plans during the 2020-2021 Academic Year Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, City-Wide. (ZC 20-17)
7. A report to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia for a Text Amendment to Reorganize Subtitles D, E, and F, City-Wide. (ZC 19-27)
8. A report to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia for a Text Amendment to Reorganize Subtitles G and H, City-Wide. (ZC 19-27A)
9. A report to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia for a Text Amendment to Subtitle K, Section 238.3 to Allow Office Uses in the SEFC-3 Zone. (ZC 20-13)
10. A report to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia for Text Amendments to Subtitles B, C, F, G, I, K, U, X, and Z for Inclusionary Zoning, City-Wide. (ZC 20-02)
11. A report to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia for a Text Amendment to Subtitles Y and Z for Administrative Approvals of Validity Period of Approvals During COVID-19 Pandemic City-wide. (ZC 20-06)

Commission actions and related materials will be available [online](#).

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.