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NCPC Provides Feedback on Smithsonian South Mall Campus Historic Core Revitalization

Commission approves final plans for Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Headquarters

Washington, DC—At its [July 1, 2021 meeting](#) the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) adopted a resolution that the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: District Elements—Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2021 would not have a negative impact on the interests or functions of the federal establishment in the National Capital. Per the National Capital Planning Act, which is NCPC's enabling legislation, NCPC's federal interest review of the District Elements must focus on this. Federal Elements include federal land, buildings, and operations, as well as those related to Washington's role as the nation's capital including form, character and experience, especially within the historic L'Enfant City.

The District Elements are prepared by the DC Office of Planning, on behalf of the Mayor of the District of Columbia and adopted by the Council of the District of Columbia. The District Elements are organized around three Context Elements, twelve Citywide Elements and ten Area Elements, and address traditional city planning issues, such as land use, housing, and economic development.

The Commission commended Mayor Bowser, the DC Office of Planning, and the Council of the District of Columbia for their significant effort in amending the District Elements and appreciated the collaboration with NCPC staff over the past five years to address federal interest concerns. They also appreciated the testimony provided by members of the public at the meeting.

NCPC approved preliminary and final building plans submitted by the General Services Administration (GSA) for a new 600,00 square foot Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Headquarters Building to be located on the St. Elizabeths West Campus in Southeast Washington, DC. While the new building will necessitate the removal of three historic buildings, several nearby historic structures (including Building 64 and the icehouse, power plant, and smokestacks) will be retained. The 176-acre St. Elizabeths West Campus is the location of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) consolidated headquarters.

In its approval Commissioners supported the building's massing design because it balanced the need for a new headquarters building with historic preservation considerations on the National Historic Landmark-listed campus. They supported the building's simple roofline and flat penthouse design, which allows it to better blend into the landscape, as well as a new walkway, and noted that GSA responded to previous NCPC comments and requests. NCPC requested that GSA submit a rooftop antenna plan for review once a plan is finalized. Commissioners urged GSA and DHS to continue to focus on rehabilitating and adaptively reusing the campus' historic buildings.

NCPC then provided feedback to the Smithsonian Institution on concept plans for the revitalization of the South Mall Campus' historic core to increase public access and use, as well as improve building systems and building exteriors. Components include improvements to the Smithsonian Institution Building (the Castle) and Arts and Industries Building, as well as a new central utility plant, underground facilities, and cooling towers. The project also includes accessibility improvements, garden rehabilitation, and new perimeter security. Renovation of the Haupt Garden and new entry pavilions are not included in this project. The Castle (completed in 1855 and last remodeled in 1968/69) and the Arts and Industries Building (opened in 1881 and last renovated in 2014) are both National Historic Landmarks.

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As part of the project, the Castle's main floor visitor center would be expanded to the building's basement which will require some excavation for the additional space and relocated mechanical systems. Repairs will be made to the building's masonry and exterior; the roof and non-historic windows will be replaced; a new rooftop connection added; and the building will be protected against earthquakes. Excavation would also take place under the Arts and Industries Building to relocate back of house uses and mechanical systems. New air intake and exhaust areaways, and doors would be added, taking into consideration the building's historic features.

A new underground central utility plant would serve the South Mall Campus and decrease energy consumption and costs. A proposed new cooling tower would be located adjacent to the National Museum of Natural History and potentially require a new connection under the National Mall. Existing vegetation would be replaced in the same character as what is there now after all the underground work is completed. Perimeter security features would be added around both the Castle and Arts and Industries Building.

NCPC noted its support for the project's goals to rehabilitate the Castle and the Arts and Industries Building and increase public access and use, including using the Castle as a Smithsonian Institution visitor center. They requested that the Smithsonian further refine the overall proposal and provide more details in the next review phase. The Commission also requested to see views and renderings of the proposed Castle rooftop connection to gauge potential viewshed and historic impacts. They asked for additional details about how a new central utility plant would decrease energy use and costs, and that the Smithsonian coordinate with the National Park Service about any underground construction that might take place below the National Mall. They also asked the Smithsonian to prepare a threat assessment for the proposed perimeter security and provide more details about the proposed security along Independence Avenue.

NCPC heard two information presentations (no official action is taken on information presentations). In the first, representatives of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing provided an update on a new one-story building proposed for a 100-acre site owned by the federal government in Beltsville, Maryland. The new facility would replace one in downtown Washington, DC. The new building would reduce the carbon footprint of the current one by 50 percent. Part of the presentation focused on why building surface parking, instead of underground parking or a parking deck, would be more environmentally friendly.

Representatives of Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling then provided a virtual tour of the installation before the Commission's initial review of the draft master plan at its September 2, 2021 meeting. The 966-acre base is located in Southeast Washington on the Potomac River and supports various presidential, ceremonial, homeland security, and defense missions. The installation was established as a joint base in 2010 with the merging of Naval Support Facility Anacostia and Bolling Air Force Base. Some of the draft master plan's goals are to make the installation more sustainable, provide guidance for the development of a central business district, preserve the installation's historic district, and consider how to improve traffic operations at the installation's main gate.

This month's agenda included three consent calendar items (no presentations were given). Unless otherwise noted, all projects are in Washington, DC.

1. Comments to the Mayor of the District of Columbia regarding the District of Columbia Capital Improvement Plan FY 2022 - 2027. (0348)
2. Final site development plans for replacement of lighting at the United States Air Force Memorial, 1 Air Force Memorial Drive, Arlington, VA. (8085)
3. Preliminary site development plans for Temporary Surface Parking Lot 18 at the National Institutes of Health, 9000 Rockville Pike Bethesda, Maryland. (8281)

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The Executive Director approved seven items under authority delegated by the Commission. Unless otherwise noted, all projects are in Washington, DC.

1. Final site and building plans for the renovation of Building 60 at Fort McNair, 100 C Street, SW. (8252)
2. Preliminary site development plans for the New Jersey Avenue and O Street Park, 423 O Street, NW. (8289)
3. Comments to the Council of the District of Columbia for an alley closing in Square 5466 - S.O. 21-04487, 606 31st Street, SE. (8285)
4. Preliminary and final site and building plans for roof repair of the Pentagon Remote Delivery Facility, 6606 Pentagon Access Road, Arlington, Virginia. (8286)
5. Preliminary and final site development plans for relocation of the AT&T antenna on the water tower at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, 10300 Baltimore Avenue, Beltsville, Maryland. (8283)
6. A report to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia for a Text Amendment for Inclusionary Zoning. (ZC 21-02) 7. A report to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia for a Consolidated PUD and Related Map Amendment at Square 445, 1501-1503 7th Street, NW. (ZC 20-27)

Commission actions and related materials are 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.