

QUARTERLY

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | 2005

NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Commission Task Force Unveils Exciting Vision for South Capitol Street

Area Will Feature Grand Urban Boulevard and Waterfront Gateway

A grand urban boulevard and waterfront gateway with spectacular views to and from the U.S. Capitol would serve as the centerpiece of the South Capitol Street corridor, as envisioned by the National Capital Planning Commission's South Capitol Street Task Force. Open green space, mixed-use development, new commemorative works, and a beautiful new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge would help turn the area into a vibrant boulevard bustling with life and activity.

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Aerial rendering of NCPC's vision for South Capitol Street.

“Your South Capitol Street vision is just what we have been waiting for as we continue our work on the Southeast Federal Center. Your vision will make the work now underway along M Street and Anacostia truly transformational.”

Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)



South Capitol Street today

For more than a decade, NCPC has set its sights on a long-range vision for this neglected corridor—a vision that will transform the avenue into a grand boulevard with magnificent spaces for public plazas, parkland, national monuments, and commercial and residential uses. After months of study with federal and local partners, NCPC’s task force presented its recommendations at the March Commission meeting to transform South Capitol Street into a signature address in the nation’s capital.

The task force envisions the development of an oval traffic rotary, with a green common featuring a memorial site and civic art where the new bridge would intersect South Capitol Street and Potomac Avenue. A South Capitol Waterfront Park would be located between the rotary and the river with a possible new major memorial or signature cultural building on the banks of the Anacostia River.

The plan, which includes three potential scenarios, is the result of collaboration with numerous government and local entities, including the National Park Service, the General Services Administration, the Department of Defense, and the District of Columbia. Representatives from the U.S. House of Representatives, the Commission of Fine Arts, the office of the Architect of the Capitol, and the Smithsonian Institution also participated.

The task force’s key recommendations include:

- ❑ Transform South Capitol Street into a grand urban boulevard.
- ❑ Develop an oval traffic rotary and South Capitol Commons (major public open space and memorial site), where the new bridge intersects South Capitol Street and Potomac Avenue.
- ❑ Create a South Capitol Waterfront Park (major public open space and memorial site) between the traffic rotary and the terminus of the South Capitol Street viewshed on the Anacostia River.
- ❑ Establish a mixed-use cultural development zone adjacent to the common and waterfront gateway.
- ❑ Support federal facilities as part of a broader mixed-use development along the corridor predominantly north of M Street.

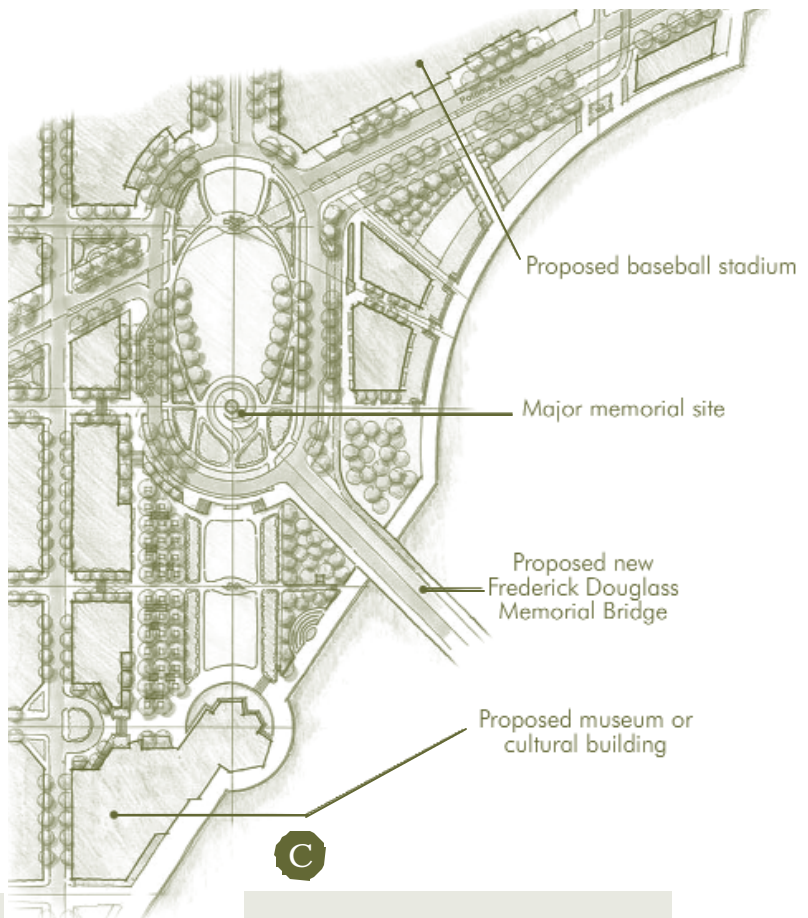
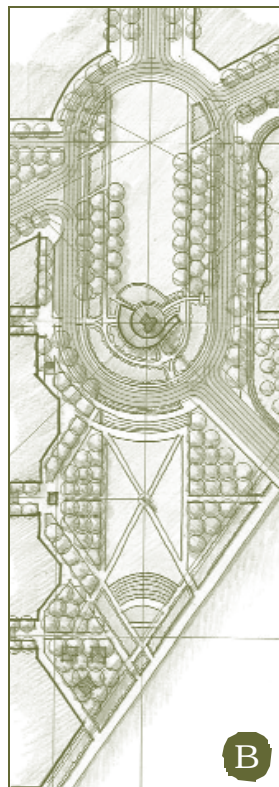
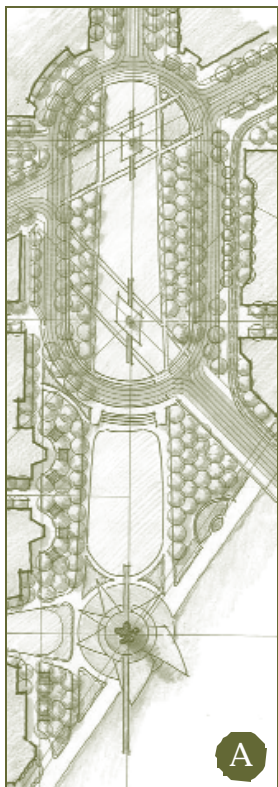
In its current condition, the street is a bleak stretch of thoroughfare that is strewn with empty lots and abandoned businesses. But this past year saw a remarkable number of developments related to this important gateway, including plans for a ballpark for the Washington Nationals and the signing of an important agreement pledging the federal government’s commitment to facilitate construction of a new bridge. The task force proposal would build on the momentum of the baseball stadium and better connect the area with the rest of the city.

To create a great urban boulevard and maintain an open view of the U.S. Capitol, South Capitol Street would maintain its current width of 130 feet, accommodate six lanes of traffic, and provide parking lanes on each side of the street. New construction would be set back an additional 15 feet from the property line and open space would be preserved along the street’s major intersections.

The approach to the South Capitol Street rotary from the new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge



POTENTIAL SCENARIOS



The central memorial alternative: a major memorial and smaller civic art in the common and an amphitheater or other active public space on the waterfront terminus.

The waterfront memorial alternative: a major memorial on the waterfront terminus and smaller civic art/memorials and major public gatherings and events in the common.

The major cultural facility alternative: a significant cultural building such as a new museum at the waterfront terminus and a major memorial and civic art in the common.

To improve traffic flow, the task force recommends creating an oval traffic rotary at the intersection of the bridge with South Capitol Street and Potomac Avenue. The traffic rotary would create the opportunity to develop South Capitol Commons, a new seven-acre green space in the oval rotary's interior. This lively space would be a perfect location for public gatherings, commemorative works, civic art, and landscaping. It would also serve as the stadium's front door and an inter-modal transit site, with two levels of underground parking for up to 1,000 cars, with a future light rail station at grade to the east of the rotary.

The design and development of a South Capitol Waterfront Park would provide a direct connection from the common to the waterfront and create opportunities for open recreational space, public events, a major memorial site, or key cultural facility such as a national aquarium. The area immediately around the common and waterfront gateway would be developed as a mixed-use cultural development zone, where new museums and cultural institutions could be integrated with shops and restaurants to create a vibrant and bustling environment day and night.

The South Capitol Street corridor, waterfront park, and new Anacostia River crossing all represent important federal interests. NCPC is committed to building on the momentum generated by recent events to keep this project moving forward. We look forward to the day when South Capitol Street is transformed into a signature address in the nation's capital, as NCPC first envisioned a decade ago.

"In the coming days I look forward to working with NCPC...to keep this process moving forward so that we can ensure that the South Capitol Street corridor becomes the magnificent gateway to our nation's capital that we have long envisioned."

U.S. Congressman
Steny Hoyer (D-MD)

NCPC Plans Win National Awards

The American Planning Association (APA) honored the National Capital Planning Commission with two national awards this year. A distinguished judging panel selected NCPC's National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan for the Current Topic Award, which recognizes planning efforts that promote Safe Growth. The co-chairs of the awards committee said that NCPC's plan "takes the planning of physically secure environments to a whole other level," and that it is applicable "throughout the country for structures and important places."

In the competition for federal projects, APA selected NCPC's Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements as the Outstanding Sustainable Planning entry. This long-range plan offers a blueprint for development in the region over the next 20 years.

In describing the plan, the judges said, "this project gets a perfect score... The document itself is great... Best of all, the plan approaches sustainability not simply as a buzzword, but through the careful integration of urban and environmental planning at the metropolitan scale."

APA presented NCPC with these distinguished awards during its national conference in San Francisco in March. While attending the conference, Executive Director Patricia Gallagher and Senior Planner Elizabeth Miller presented two of NCPC's signature planning initiatives. In the session "Creating Gateways Through Infrastructure Removal," Ms. Gallagher described NCPC's concepts for revitalizing Washington, D.C.'s South Capitol Street. In "New Urban Corporate Campus," Elizabeth Miller shared how federal entities are designing new facilities to meet homeland security requirements.

NCPC's Patricia Gallagher and Elizabeth Miller accepted the APA awards



Museum Exhibit Showcases NCPC's Security Design Plan

The National Building Museum selected NCPC's National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan as a featured project in its current exhibit "OPEN: New Designs for Public Space." The exhibit presents innovative projects from around the world that demonstrate how cities and towns are developing public space during this era of heightened security. The examples show that despite security concerns, public spaces can evoke power and vitality.

A segment of the exhibit displays successful security projects from NCPC's groundbreaking urban design and security plan, including a redesigned Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House and concepts for integrating security at the Smithsonian Castle. Also showcased in the gallery are projects by renowned designers, including Zaha Hadid, Walter Hood, and Rafael Vinoly. The exhibit opened on January 15, 2005 and runs through May 15, 2005.

The Nation's Capital Gets a "Reality Check"

Today, the Washington region is experiencing a robust job market, a shortage of affordable housing, and crowded highways and public transit. If that's the situation today, what can the region expect over the next 25 years, as the job rate grows by 50 to 60 percent?

In February, the Urban Land Institute's Washington District Council and Washington Smart Growth Alliance held a "Reality Check" conference to discuss how the numerous jurisdictions within the nation's capital will handle such skyrocketing growth. NCPC Chairman John V. Cogbill, III, Executive Director Patricia Gallagher, and staff participated in the event, which attracted nearly 300 elected officials from more than 20 regional jurisdictions. Attendees took part in exercises that challenged them to accommodate the projected population while providing for necessary infrastructure.

Officials identified coordination between jurisdictions as a vital element in planning for the future. Other principles emphasized during the conference included: the preservation of open space; development near transit centers; and mixed-use developments. NCPC's Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements provides guidance on how to achieve these and other "smart growth" goals. The plan is available online at www.ncpc.gov.



Commission Approves New Garage at FDA Campus

The Commission reviewed no action items during the month of March but it did approve final plans for a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) parking garage that was on the Commission's consent calendar. The Commission gave final approval for an 844-space garage at the FDA's consolidated campus in White Oak, Maryland. Since the Commission's approval of preliminary site and building plans in February 2005, the garage was revised to include aluminum cladding on the north elevation, river birch trees planted along the west facade, and eastern red cedar trees planted along the north facade. In its approval, the Commission reminded the FDA that it must submit a revised transportation management plan that includes an updated employee survey, a commitment to undertake transportation demand management strategies, and updated data on the feasibility and frequency of public bus service to the site.

Online Submissions

In addition to the consent calendar, the March meeting included several informational presentations, including one on recommendations for the South Capitol Street corridor (see story on page one for details). Staff also provided an update on plans to begin accepting electronic submissions. Testing of online submissions will begin in April. The process will simplify submission procedures for agencies and will also greatly enhance NCPC's electronic-government services.

Conservancy Shares its Vision for the National Mall

The Commission received a briefing by the National Mall Conservancy on that group's vision for the future of the National Mall. The group is a volunteer organization that is focused on strengthening the Mall as the "people's place." The Conservancy is developing several task forces with an emphasis on several projects, including production of a Mall brochure and map. The group also plans to examine the possibility of holding an annual National Mall day and assisting in the development of a long-range vision for the Mall.



February

February 3, 2005

Design Standards Will Help Bring Coordinated Look to Anacostia Waterfront

NCPC's 1997 Legacy Plan stated that streetscape improvements could vastly enhance the look and atmosphere along the South Capitol Street corridor. Such improvements have already begun to transform M Street and now have the potential to revitalize the area covered by the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative. At its February meeting, the Commission approved the D.C. Department of Transportation's draft Anacostia Transportation Architecture Design Manual, and made several recommendations for further improving and coordinating this important effort.

The manual provides recommendations for future transportation projects and offers specific standards on many elements, including paving materials, street lighting, seating, and public art. Although the standards do not apply to federal land, the themes that they advance do support goals that NCPC established in its Legacy Plan and its Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements. Those themes include providing environmental stewardship; increasing waterfront access; promoting pedestrian, bike, and transit-friendly rights of way; enhancing the identity of neighborhoods; and integrating the waterfront with the Monumental Core and the U.S. Capitol.

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Concept renderings of GSA National Headquarters Building showing new construction



Building Improvements Planned for GSA Headquarters

The General Services Administration plans to modernize its national headquarters at 1800 F Street, NW, in Washington, D.C. Built for the Department of the Interior, the facility was the early home of the National Park Service. The E-shaped building, constructed in 1917 as the first in what became a federal office enclave west of the White House, features three long wings and two courtyards. A significant aspect of the improvement plans will add more than 100,000 square feet of new office space by connecting the wings on the building's E Street façade with a glass and steel frame addition. The addition, facing Rawlins Park to the south, will have Modern-style sunscreens.

The major modernization program includes new and upgraded building systems, the removal of mechanical equipment from the courtyards, and interior layout and space alterations. GSA anticipates that perimeter security, window alterations, and the construction of a new formal entrance on E Street will be aspects of future submissions.

The Commission approved concept plans for this project—including the proposal to create a formal entrance on the E Street façade—but did not approve a specific entrance design because GSA is still studying design schemes. The Commission also required that the preliminary site and building plans include a perimeter security design.



Former Washington Convention Center Site To Serve as Temporary Parking Lot

The Commission approved concept design plans to develop the former site of the Washington Convention Center as a temporary lot that will accommodate short-term parking for 1,000 vehicles. The design is intended to be flexible, making the space a potential venue for events such as festivals, markets, and displays. In its action, the Commission requested additional information on several elements of the proposal and stipulated a five-year limit on its approval. The Washington Convention Center Authority expects that after three to five years in operation, the lot will be redeveloped with a permanent solution that reopens 10th and I Streets to vehicles.

National Defense University To Expand

The Department of the Army plans to expand classroom, meeting, and conference space at the National Defense University, located at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Southwest Washington, D.C. The Commission approved preliminary site and building plans and final foundation plans for Lincoln Hall, the new three-level brick and stone building that will accommodate these uses. The Commission did not approve the submitted concept sketch for the new east gate area and asked that the Army continue developing that element in a way that provides a focal point along Potomac Avenue, preserves the street wall along 2nd Street, and accommodates the Anacostia Riverwalk.



Renderings of the Lincoln Hall entrance



January

January 6, 2005



Rendering of new concession building

New Concession Buildings To Go Up Near Lincoln Memorial

The National Park Service will soon construct two new concession buildings near the Lincoln Memorial to accommodate visitor needs. The new buildings are one aspect of a broader project for improving traffic, security, and visitor services near the memorial. At its January meeting, the Commission approved final site and building plans for the new facilities—one north and one south of the memorial, on the west side of Henry Bacon Drive and Daniel French Drive.

One of the concession buildings will bring food and retail to a location that does not currently offer these services; and the other building will replace existing concession trailers. Measuring 34 feet by 34 feet, the new 18-foot-high structures are designed to look similar to the four smaller concession kiosks already in place on the Mall. In so doing, the National Park Service intended to make the buildings easily recognizable to visitors.

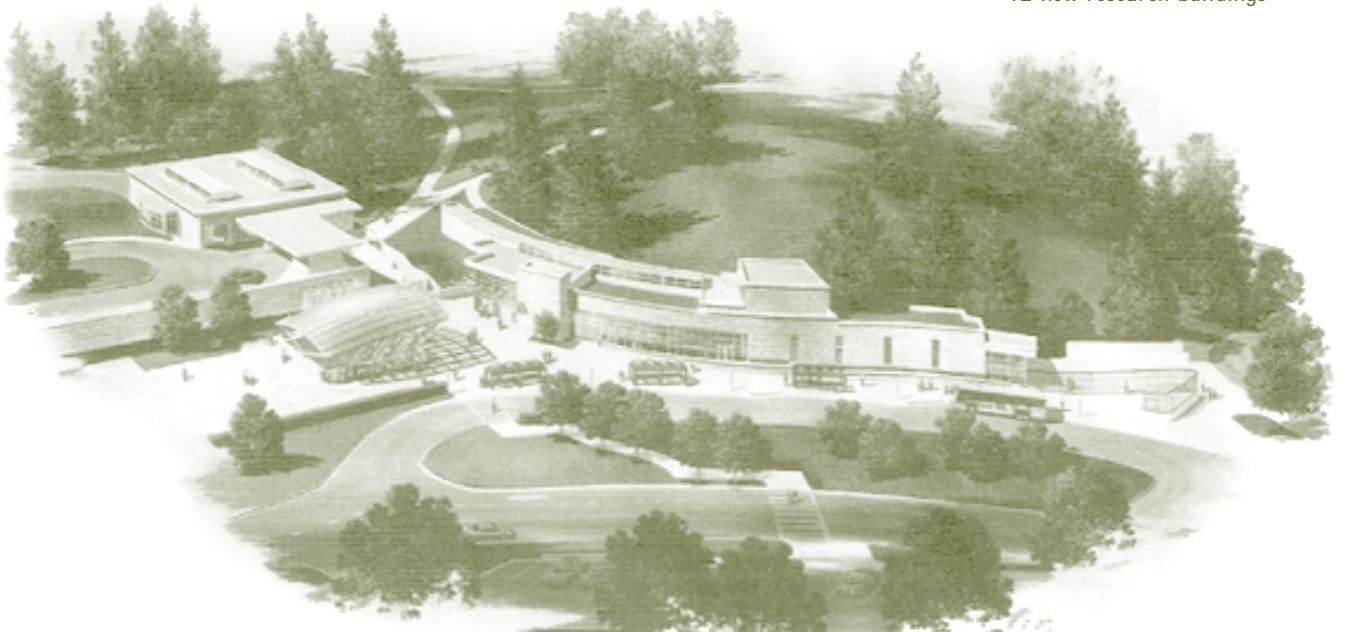
The new concession buildings will have stucco walls and wood trim, neutral-colored paint, and copper roofs. Paved seating areas will surround each of the new concession buildings and offer 23 tables with seating for nearly 100.

NIH Updates Its Master Plan for the Bethesda Campus

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) updated its master plan for the Bethesda campus to account for projects that have been planned or implemented since the 1995 master plan. Just a few of the updates include a proposal for 12 new research buildings; the consolidation of surface parking into multi-level and underground structures; the proposal to expand childcare facilities, retail activities, and other employee amenities; and the enhancement of the buffer around the campus periphery through increased landscaping.

The Commission approved the 2003 Master Plan Update, but requested that NIH revise its parking ratio to conform to NCPC's Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements; and submit a Forest Conservation Plan, addressing numerous issues outlined by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The Commission also approved preliminary and final site and building plans for the Commercial Vehicle Inspection Facility and Gateway Center, which will be used to check in and screen campus visitors.

NIH master plan proposes 12 new research buildings





South stairway of the Patent Office Building

Smithsonian To Reconstruct Old Stair at the Patent Office Building

The south staircase of the Patent Office Building, located on F Street, between 7th and 9th, has gone through several transformations since its construction almost two centuries ago and may undergo renovation once again. The Smithsonian Institution has proposed to reconstruct the stairs as mitigation for the adverse effects of the canopy enclosure planned for the Patent Office Building’s courtyard.

The proposed design, which NCPC approved in concept, was based on historical photos and other evidence of the grand staircase as it was first constructed and then subsequently modified in the nineteenth century. The staircase was removed in 1935 when F Street was moved closer to the building. Now that F Street has been realigned in its previous location, there is sufficient sidewalk depth to reconstruct the staircase. Like the historic one, the new staircase will consist of flights of stairs flanking the central block and meeting at a landing before rising to the portico level. However, the new structure, while similar to the historic stair, will include present-day requirements such as an entrance at the sidewalk level and the incorporation of an interior handicapped ramp.

In its approval, the Commission commended the Smithsonian for submitting a proposal that complements the architecture of the Patent Office Building, restores an appropriate base to the portico, and contributes to the prominence of the Patent Office Building in the L’Enfant Plan and the life of downtown Washington.

New Riverwalk Will Improve Access Along Anacostia Waterfront

The National Capital Planning Commission’s grand vision for a beautiful and accessible waterfront moved another step closer to reality in January when the Commission approved concept site development plans for the new Anacostia Riverwalk Multi-Use Trail.

After the Commission first outlined a new direction for the waterfront in its 1997 Legacy Plan, NCPC produced Washington’s Waterfronts (1999), an analysis of opportunities along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. The District of Columbia, in coordination with NCPC and other federal partners, built upon NCPC’s concepts in preparing The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI), a framework for revitalizing the waterfront.

The Anacostia Riverwalk Trail serves as a key component of AWI, which calls for a comprehensive 48-mile trail system. The riverwalk provides pedestrians and bicyclists with continuous access to the west side of the river from 11th Street to Benning Road; nearly continuous access to the east side of the river from South Capitol Street to the Bladensburg Trail in Maryland; and safe and convenient entrances to Anacostia Park from surrounding neighborhoods. NCPC’s Legacy Plan goals of increasing access to and activity along the waterfront are greatly advanced by this new trail system.

Walter Reed To Construct Military Amputee Training Center

In response to a rising number of amputees, Walter Reed Army Medical Center is constructing a state-of-the-art training center to help restore physical, psychological, and emotional health to patients who have suffered the loss of limbs. After reviewing the proposal, the Commission approved preliminary and final site and building plans for the Military Amputee Training Center.

The new three-level facility will be an addition to the existing hospital on the Walter Reed campus in Northwest Washington, D.C. The mostly underground structure will include clinic, therapy, and training spaces; a gymnasium; a running track; administrative and office areas; and a healing garden. In its approval, the Commission stipulated that the temporary modular structure currently in place must be removed once the new center has opened.



Rendering of entrance to the Military Amputee Training Center on the Walter Reed campus



Site of the new Saint Elizabeths Hospital



New Hospital Planned for Saint Elizabeths

The Commission approved preliminary and final site and building plans for a new Saint Elizabeths Hospital in Southeast Washington, D.C. The 293-bed facility, to be located on approximately 54 acres in the eastern portion of the historic campus, will be equipped with state-of-the-art features to serve patients, caregivers, employees, and visitors. Designed as three interconnected wings, the new hospital will handle secure and non-secure patients and provide space for programmatic functions. The secured building wing will be surrounded by perimeter fencing and wall elements. In its approval, the Commission requested that the District of Columbia submit a campus framework plan, which will provide parking direction for all of the east campus.

Electrical Switching Boxes To Be Installed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center

The Commission approved preliminary and final site plans to install electrical switching boxes at several locations throughout the post. The boxes will provide short circuit/overload protection. Measuring five feet square, the switch boxes will be located below ground where feasible. In cases where the boxes are located above ground, landscape screening can be used to alleviate their visual impact on the environment.

Center for Drug Evaluation and Research To Build New Facility at FDA's White Oak Campus

The Commission approved concept site and building plans for the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, to be located at FDA's consolidated campus at the White Oak Federal Research Center in Montgomery County, Maryland. Mostly brick with punched windows, the six-story building will be comprised of three wings that share a main entrance through an atrium, which will maximize natural lighting of interior spaces. As part of Phase IIIB of the campus build-out, the new 300,000-square-foot structure will be the fifth building located at the campus. The Commission did not approve the parking summary submitted with the project and called for the completion of a revised transportation management plan for the FDA campus.

FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research



CommissionNotes

Outreach



Patricia Gallagher

Over the past several months, Executive Director Patricia Gallagher participated in numerous events to talk about NCPC's special initiatives with diverse audiences.

In December, Ms. Gallagher presented NCPC's National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan at the Safe Growth Symposium, sponsored by the American Institute of Certified Planners. The event, held at the National Building Museum, explored various hazards and encouraged planners to take a holistic approach to improving safety in their communities. Ms. Gallagher also presented the security plan at the 14th Annual Symposium on Contemporary Urban Challenges, held in February at Fordham University's School of Law in New York City. The focus of this year's conference was "Post 9/11 Cities: The Terrorist Threat and Its Implications for Planning and Policing Urban Areas." Ms. Gallagher described the Washington experience and NCPC's design solutions and participated in a panel discussion on the national issue of designing for security.

In March, Executive Director Patricia Gallagher participated in a panel session at George Washington University, sponsored by the Association of General Contractors of the District of Columbia. The session, "Bold Initiatives in the Nation's Capital," focused on the transformation of the Anacostia waterfront and the revitalization of South Capitol Street.

Ms. Gallagher also spoke to the Architect of the Capitol's Expert Advisory Panel for the Capitol Complex Master Plan. The panel met to discuss their draft vision for the Capitol Complex Master Plan, including important elements such as security and the scale and scope of new developments near the U.S. Capitol. Ms. Gallagher discussed the role of the Commission and its key initiatives, including the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan and NCPC's decade-long focus on the South Capitol Street corridor.



During the evening of March 30, NCPC Commission members and staff had the opportunity to discuss the agency's vision for South Capitol Street during a special public meeting. More than 50 people attended two consecutive sessions during which many of the attendees provided thoughtful comments on NCPC's proposals to transform the corridor into a vibrant waterfront gateway. Those who were unable to attend the meeting are welcome to submit their comments or questions in writing to southcapitol@ncpc.gov. The Commission looks forward to further public involvement as plans for South Capitol Street continue to evolve. Details on NCPC's vision for the corridor are described in this issue's feature story, starting on page 1.

Staff Changes

Marlene P. Burke retired after more than 30 years of federal service. From 1990 until her retirement, Ms. Burke served as the management assistant for the Urban Design and Plan Review Division at NCPC.

Connie M. Harshaw retired after 29 years of federal service. Ms. Harshaw began her tenure at NCPC in 1988 as assistant administrative officer and rose to the position of chief operating officer in 1998.

Samantha Williams began her career at NCPC in 1998 as a student and advanced to the position of administrative assistant in the Office of Administration. Ms. Williams is now working for the National Mediation Board.

Joy Wren, who served as an accountant with NCPC since 2002, accepted a position as an accounting consultant in the private sector.

QUARTERLY

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

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