

# QUARTERLY

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | 2006

NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION

*Rail Realignment  
Study Kicks Off*

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# Rail Realignment Study Kicks Off



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**A new alignment would help resolve security concerns, improve passenger and freight traffic throughout the East Coast, and provide the opportunity to reconnect the southern half of the nation's capital to the rest of the city.**

A \$1 million study to evaluate relocation alternatives for a rail line that transports passengers and freight through the nation's capital is now underway. The rail line, one of the most heavily traveled rail corridors in the country, passes through the heart of Washington, D.C. and poses security, accessibility, and development challenges. The District Department of Transportation and the National Capital Planning Commission are coordinating with a consultant to prepare the Railroad Realignment Feasibility Study. It will expand on NCPC's Freight and Passenger Rail Lines Existing Conditions Study, providing a detailed analysis of transportation and infrastructure issues that affect the seven-mile stretch of rail that runs from the Potomac River to the Maryland border.

Hazardous freight material passes within blocks of the U.S. Capitol, near a large concentration of federal and private office buildings. The antiquated rail system also cuts off Southeast and Southwest Washington, separates Capitol Hill from the Anacostia River, and limits public access to the waterfront. A new alignment would help resolve security concerns, improve passenger and freight traffic throughout the East Coast, and provide the opportunity to reconnect the southern half of the nation's capital to the rest of the city, as proposed in NCPC's long-range vision plan, *Extending the Legacy*.

The Railroad Realignment Feasibility Study will address several issues, including the risks that the current rail imposes on the federal government, residents, workers, and the general public; the limitations and infrastructure problems that plague the existing alignment; and the future demands for both passenger and freight services.

The study will provide evaluations on three to five alternative alignments based on proximity to residential and employment centers, connection to potential river crossings, environmental impacts, and other factors. Security needs will be critical to the evaluation of each alternative. Based on the outcome of this analysis, two or three viable corridors will be selected for a cost/benefit analysis on each. The cost analysis will provide

“The existing rail line interrupts Maryland Avenue and carries hazardous materials near populated and symbolic buildings. This study will allow us to identify a more appropriate alignment.”

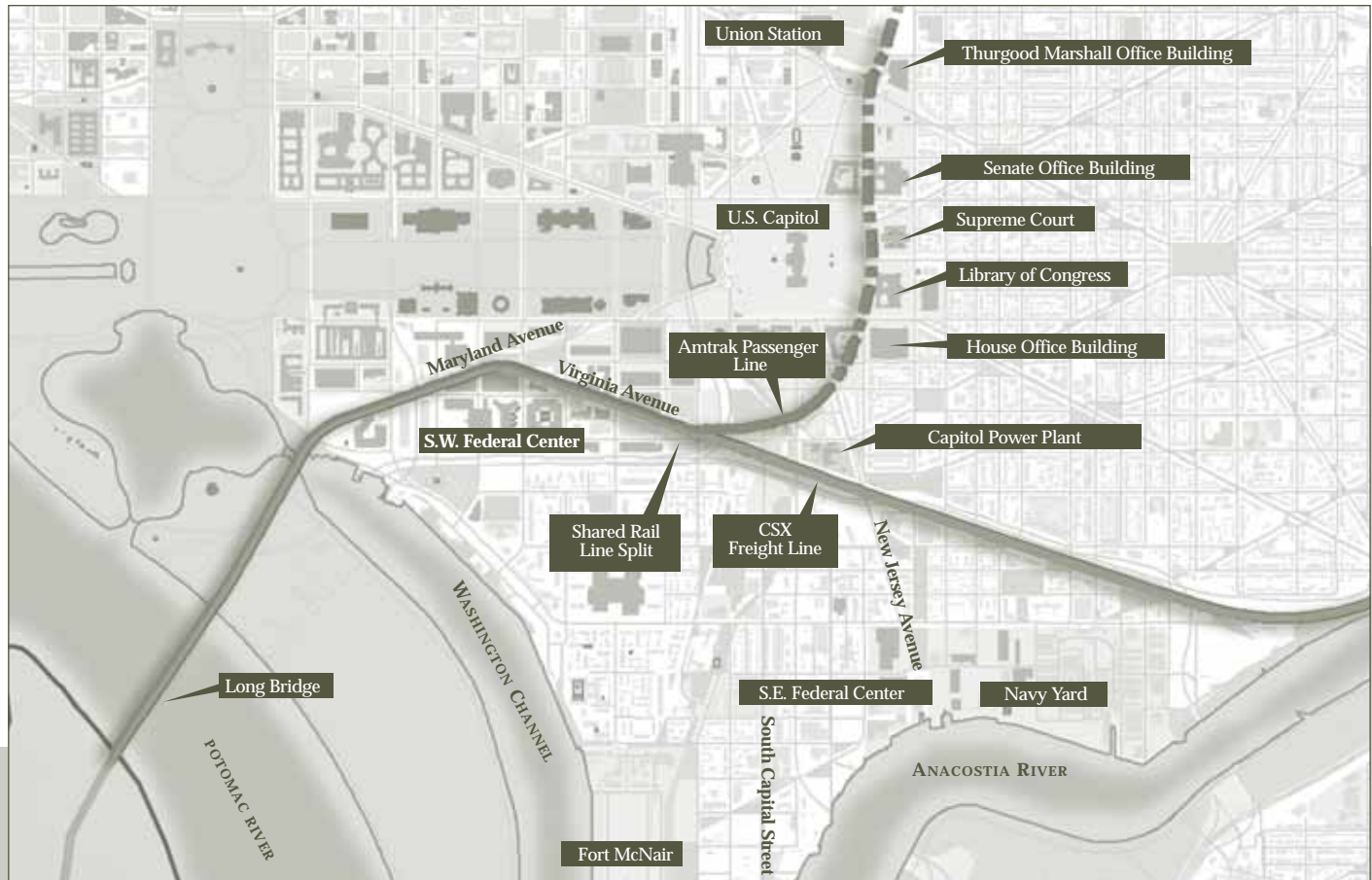
NCPC Executive Director Patricia Gallagher



Maryland Avenue existing conditions

general estimates for engineering and design, property acquisition, and construction while the benefit analysis will address land value, the potential increase in operating efficiency, and other positive impacts. After considering the advantages and disadvantages of the top three viable corridors, NCPC, the Interagency Security Task Force, and the Railroad Working Group will select a preferred corridor.

Because any realignment would represent a long-range effort, the Railroad Realignment Feasibility Study will identify short-term solutions to correct the most detrimental problems that affect the existing rail. Changes in operational policy, for example, could help sustain the system through the coming decade. The Railroad Realignment Feasibility Study is being funded by a \$1 million grant from the Department of Homeland Security and is expected to be completed in early 2007.







## ***Worthy of the Nation* Second Edition To Be Released in Fall 2006**

The National Capital Planning Commission eagerly awaits the release of the second edition of *Worthy of the Nation*, a unique publication chronicling the history of planning in the nation's capital. Like the first edition—published in 1977 as a tribute to America's Bicentennial—NCPC expects this updated version to serve as a reliable source on the evolution of the capital city.

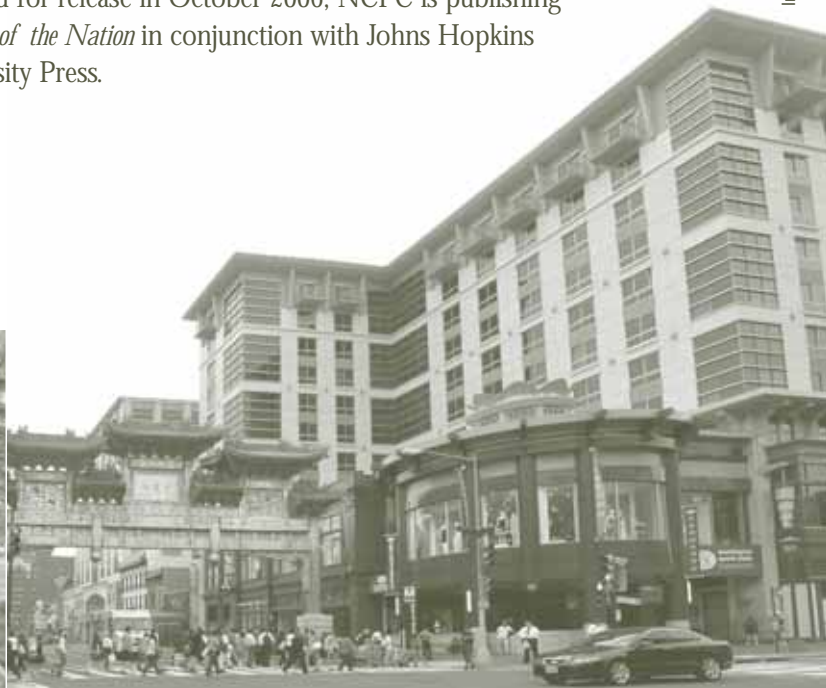
*Worthy of the Nation* has been recognized as an authoritative source on Washington's planning history since it was published in 1977. The revised 2005 edition covers events that have unfolded in the last quarter century, giving us insight into the most recent chapter of this fascinating story.

NCPC Commissioner John Parsons

The second edition updates the original text, written by Washington historian and planner Frederick Gutheim, and features new material by Dr. Antoinette Lee, a Washington historian who collaborated on the first edition. Much has changed in Washington, D.C. in the 30 years since its first publication. In the soon-to-be released book, Dr. Lee details the development of the National Capital Region from the 1970s through the present, focusing on the important role of NCPC and the federal government in the region's development; the dramatic growth of the suburbs; the impact of the Metro system; the revitalization of Washington's neighborhoods and central city; and the addition of numerous memorials and museums.

The new book, *Worthy of the Nation: Washington, D.C. from L'Enfant to the National Capital Planning Commission*, features a foreword by First Lady Laura Bush and a new design with more than 250 contemporary and historic photos, maps, images, and illustrative site plans. The book offers a rare view into the development of America's capital from a small village into one of the world's most beautiful and admired cities. Planned for release in October 2006, NCPC is publishing *Worthy of the Nation* in conjunction with Johns Hopkins University Press.

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## Public Forums on D.C. Growth Attract Large Audiences

During the past six months, the National Capital Planning Commission hosted nearly 300 attendees in four public forums to discuss the region's dynamic growth. The Washington Regional Network (WRN)—a nonprofit group of diverse communities—sponsored these events to promote investments, policies, and designs that enhance existing communities and protect the environment.

The following four public meetings featured expert presenters, followed by an open discussion:

- ◆ **Planning D.C.'s Transportation Future: Transit, Streets, Traffic and Parking for a Livable City**, September 7, 2005. Dan Tangherlini, then director of the D.C. Department of Transportation, outlined the policies and programs that will be addressed in D.C.'s new transportation plan.
- ◆ **How Should D.C. Grow?** October 24, 2005. Three experts discussed how growth is affecting the cultural, economic, and social fabric of the nation's capital. The audience offered numerous suggestions for enhancing neighborhoods and sharing the benefits of a growing city with vulnerable residents.
- ◆ **A Housing Strategy for D.C.'s Future**, December 7, 2005. Members of the D.C. Comprehensive Housing Strategy Task Force presented their recommendations for resolving the city's most critical housing concerns. Solutions included streamlining existing housing policies and pursuing new sources of revenue for affordable housing.

- ◆ **Designing D.C.'s Future: Shaping Buildings and Public Spaces to Enhance Community Identity and Protect the Environment**, January 30, 2006. Leading urban designers discussed ways in which D.C. can enhance its neighborhoods, reclaim auto-oriented commercial strips, restore neglected parks and public spaces, make transit stations vibrant village centers, and build greener communities.

The series of talks coincided with the continuing development of the District of Columbia's Comprehensive Plan, a policy document that guides city development, much as NCPC's *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements* guides federal development in the city and the region. NCPC considers the meetings a valuable tool for involving the public and influencing policy development.



# March

March 2, 2006

## COMMISSION COMMENTS ON RESIDENTIAL AND RETAIL DEVELOPMENT NEAR UNION STATION

The Commission reviewed a project that will rezone a 2.3-acre site at 200 K Street in Northeast Washington, D.C. to allow for a mixed-use project with residential and retail components two blocks south of the New York Avenue Metro Station. A Consolidated Planned Unit Development (PUD) on the eastern portion of the site consists of 202 residential units over 5,234 square feet of retail space, while a First Stage PUD on the western portion of the site provides 500 residential units over amenities, including 9,000 square feet of retail space and 3,000 square feet for a daycare center. At least 10 percent of the residential space will be reserved as affordable housing.

The Commission concluded that the Consolidated PUD would not adversely affect federal interests; however, the Commission found that the proposed First Stage PUD would adversely affect federal interests and be inconsistent with NCPC's *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements* and the Height of Buildings Act of 1910. The Commission recommended reducing the height of the First Stage PUD so that it would not exceed 130 feet. The Commission also recommended that the applicant clearly demonstrate that the First Stage PUD is functionally one building—as currently designed, it consists of two separate structures and, therefore, affects allowable height.

## ANTENNAS TO BE INSTALLED ON OPM HEADQUARTERS

For a period not to exceed five years, the Commission approved preliminary and final plans for the installation of nine antennas, one GPS antenna, and an associated equipment cabinet at the Office of Personnel Management headquarters building. The Commission recommended that access to the building roof be controlled and that radiofrequency warning signs be placed at all rooftop access areas.

# February

February 2, 2006

## COMMISSION COMMENTS ON DRAFT MASTER PLAN FOR ARMED FORCES RETIREMENT HOME

The Commission commented on a draft master plan that will provide a framework for development at the Armed Forces Retirement Home campus in Northwest Washington, D.C.

The historic campus served as a retreat for American presidents, including Abraham Lincoln, and as a refuge for veterans of conflict, beginning with the Mexican-American War. Given the wealth of historic buildings and resources on the campus, development must be carefully reviewed to ensure that harm to a National Historic Landmark is minimized.

The Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) is overdue for a new master plan—the last one was prepared in 1970. The 272-acre campus, which occupies one of the highest elevations within the District and provides historic views of Washington, is surrounded by the Petworth residential neighborhood, the Catholic University of America, the Washington Hospital Center, the Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital, and the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery. Established in 1851, AFRH provides shelter, healthcare, recreation, and other services to some 1,400 military veterans. In 2002, Congress authorized AFRH to sell or lease a portion of its property to supplement its long-term operation. The master plan will guide this effort.

AFRH's submission to NCPC outlines a general development plan that addresses land use, open space, and density within different sub-areas of the campus. The draft proposal establishes six zones where expansion would occur. AFRH would retain the use of Zones 1 and 2, which encompass the central area and the northeastern section of the campus. Development in Zones 1 and 2 may include areas for recreational activities and a combination of single- and multi-family housing. The highest concentration of development would occur in Zones 3 and 4, which are located in the southeastern section of the campus. These zones could potentially include research and development, office, residential, hotel, and educational uses.



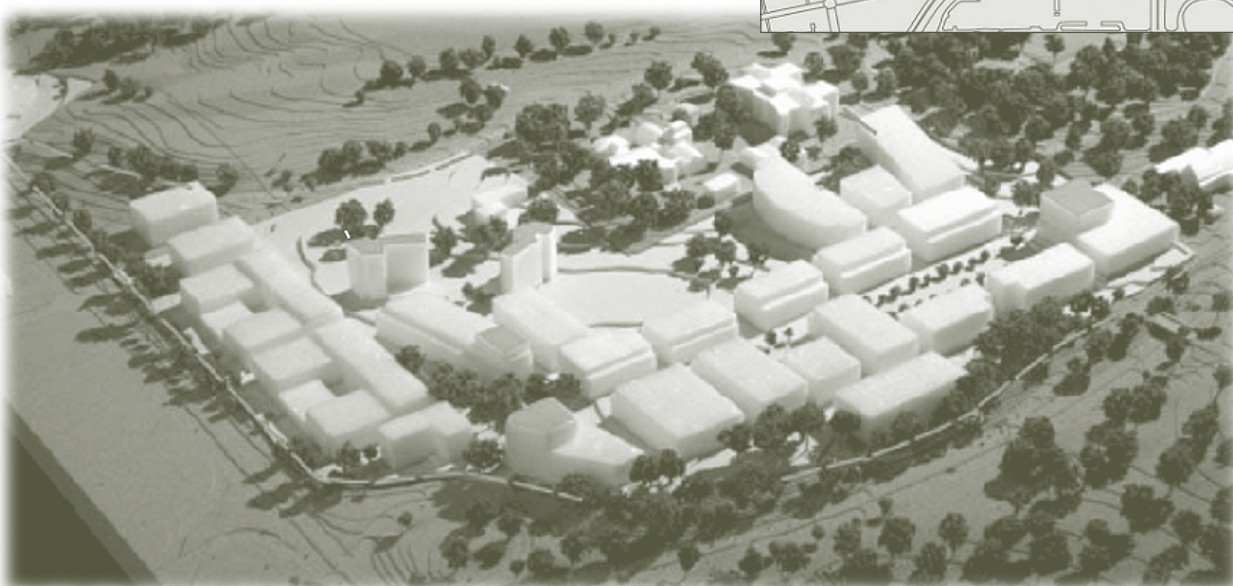
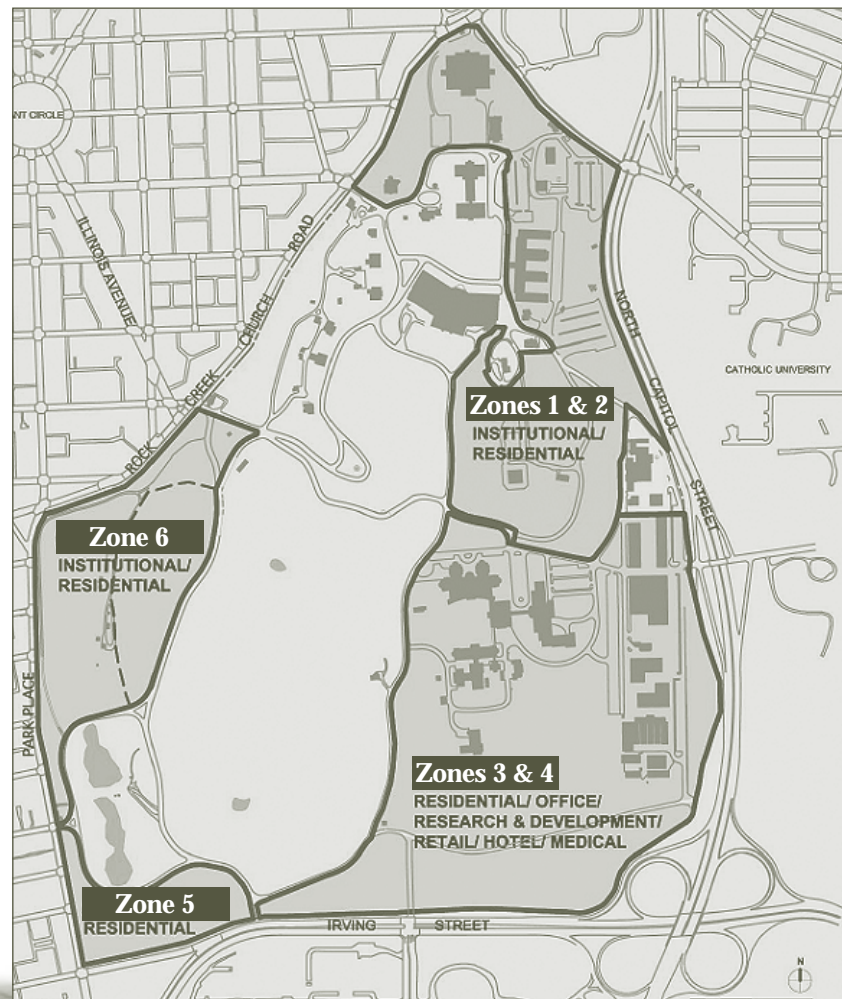
According to the proposal, Zone 5, located at the southwestern edge of the campus, would accommodate residential development with some retail on the ground floor. Zone 6, along the western side of the campus, is intended to reflect the residential character of the nearby Park View neighborhood, while including some small-scale retail. Open space could also be provided in this zone for new residents and for existing residents of the Park View neighborhood.

The Commission provided several comments on the plan that should help AFRH develop a master plan that will better preserve the campus and complement the surrounding area. The Commission's recommendations include the following:

- ◆ Reduce the amount of development. The Commission does not support the applicant's proposal to develop up to 9 million square feet of new space on the campus. The maximum amount of new construction should not exceed the moderate range, as specified in the draft Environmental Impact Statement.
- ◆ Ensure that building heights will be compatible with the character and scale of the surrounding area, the topography and other natural conditions of the site, and the historic assets on the site, thus protecting historic views. In determining building heights, surrounding residential patterns should also be recognized.
- ◆ Include publicly accessible recreational open space in several areas of the campus; and coordinate open space development with the community and NCPC staff.

- ◆ Prepare a Transportation Management Plan.
- ◆ Before submitting the master plan, provide NCPC staff with a revised draft plan that addresses the Commission's comments.

While new development could make the Armed Forces Retirement Home accessible in some locations, it is currently a secured site, not open to the public.



A draft master plan establishes six zones within the Armed Forces Retirement Home campus (above). The rendering (left) depicts potential development in Zones 3 & 4.

## NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM TO BE FITTED WITH CUSTOMIZED SECURITY DESIGN

The Commission approved final plans for a new perimeter security design at the National Museum of Natural History. In reviewing this project, the Commission noted that the design is compatible with the Mall-wide perimeter security program approved in October 2004 and that the revised scheme reflects direction from the Commission and consultation with NCPD staff.

The Smithsonian's design scheme for the museum responds to the unique site conditions that exist along Constitution Avenue, Madison Drive, 12th Street, and 9th Street, NW. On Constitution Avenue, a free-standing wall of open-cast stainless steel panels interspersed with granite slabs will provide visually open security. Bollards and two new granite-faced guard booths will secure the Constitution Avenue driveways while new landscaping, an ADA-compliant entrance, and new signs will improve the entry's appearance and function.

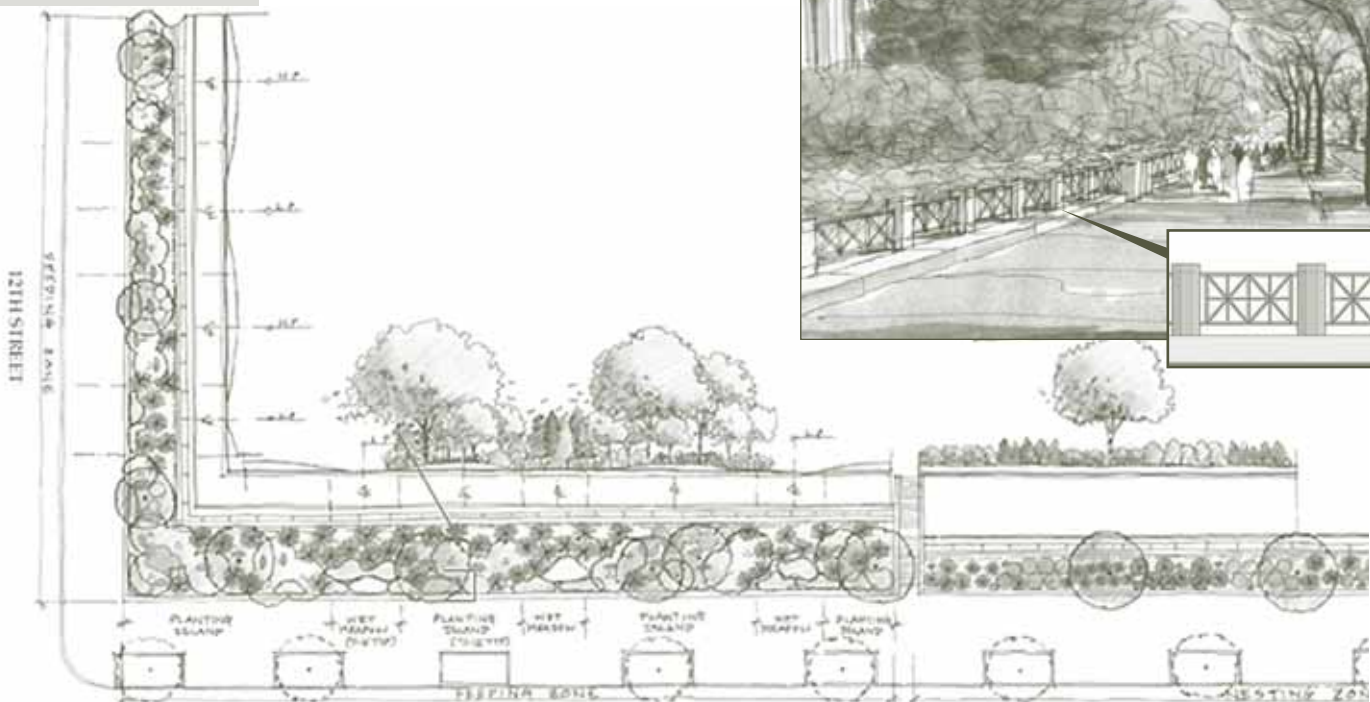
On Madison Drive, existing retaining walls will be raised to create a security barrier, leaving the

curbs and sidewalks unimpeded. Regraded planting beds will create a garden—similar to the garden established along 9th Street—and make the barriers less visible to pedestrians. In addition, the Smithsonian Institution will use stainless steel bollards and granite pavers in front of the entrance. The bollards will run parallel to the street curb; the sidewalk will slope toward the street; and the handicapped ramp will be widened to provide a more formal and integrated sidewalk design. The Commission recommends an alternate scheme for the south façade that raises the level of Madison Drive in front of the museum in order to eliminate the curb. With this option, the bollards would be installed in the same location.

Security along 12th Street will extend elements from Madison Drive and Constitution Avenue while security along 9th Street will blend with the existing Butterfly Garden. The Smithsonian also will create a Geological Specimen Garden with boulders along the northeast and southeast corners of 9th Street.

The Commission commended the Smithsonian for developing a thoughtful, well-designed security scheme at this prominent location.

**A new security plan for the National History Museum will include landscape elements (below) and an open-cast steel wall (right).**





Rendering of canopy design for Cleveland Park metro entrances



## **CUSTOMIZED CANOPIES TO COVER THE CLEVELAND PARK METRO ENTRANCES**

The Commission approved preliminary and final site and building plans for a customized canopy design at the east and west entrances of the Cleveland Park Metro Station.

Due to new requirements to enclose all exterior escalators, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) developed a standard canopy design for the Metrorail system. The Commission approved that design in December 2003, but exempted eight Metro entrances that called for modified designs, including the two at Cleveland Park.

The standard canopy form is reminiscent of the well-recognized coffered ceiling vaults of the interior of the Metro stations. Other than a slight difference in the curve of the vault, the customized Cleveland Park canopies will appear similar to other metro canopies in material, structure, and installation. The Cleveland Park design is smaller and narrower, in keeping with the scale of the entrances and with the narrow sidewalks and small-scale buildings on the east and west sides of Connecticut Avenue. The Metro entrances lie within the Cleveland Park Historic District and neighbor a Park and Shop that was built in 1930 and stands as one of the nation's earliest shopping centers with parking.

As part of its review, the Commission noted that the newspaper dispensers surrounding the Metro entrances at Cleveland Park were cluttering the station's appearance and congesting the sidewalk along Connecticut Avenue. The Commission asked WMATA to arrange for their removal.

## **PROPOSED STREET AND ALLEY CLOSINGS ALLOW FOR STADIUM**

The District of Columbia is proposing the closure of several L'Enfant streets in Southeast Washington, D.C. to permit the construction of a new ballpark facility for the Washington Nationals baseball team. The involved streets include Half Street, O Street, P Street, Potomac Avenue, and all public alleys in Squares 702-706 and in U.S. Reservation 247.

The Commission determined that the proposed closures would adversely affect the L'Enfant Plan and federal interests that relate to protecting and maintaining the L'Enfant Plan. The Commission forwarded the following additional comments to the Council of the District of Columbia:

- ◆ Closing portions of Half Street, O Street, P Street, and Potomac Avenue should take effect only if the ballpark is located within the 19.75-acre property situated adjacent to South Capitol Street and Potomac Avenue.
- ◆ The D.C. Sports and Entertainment Commission should consult with the Historic Preservation Review Board and adopt any mitigation recommendations by the Board.
- ◆ The stadium design should maintain and enhance ground-level pedestrian views along Potomac Avenue; and pedestrian entrances to the stadium should be located at the terminal points of O and P Streets along South Capitol Street. To minimize unbroken expanses of the stadium wall, retail space should be used along the South Capitol Street side of the stadium.
- ◆ Before the land is transferred for the purpose of establishing a ballpark, the District should agree on a covenant to re-establish Half Street, O Street, P Street, and Potomac Avenue in their original locations and with full rights-of-way according to the L'Enfant Plan at such time as the site no longer serves as a ballpark. NCPD will record that covenant.

# January

continued

## ZONING AMENDMENT TO ALLOW RELOCATION OF ASPHALT PLANT

The D.C. Zoning Commission submitted to NCPC a proposal that would allow—subject to special exception review—asphalt plants as a permitted use within districts that are zoned for commercial use and light manufacturing and heavy industry.

The proposed amendment would allow a plant located on P Street, SE to relocate to a parcel within D.C. Village, which is located west of Shepherd Parkway, SW, and east of the Anacostia Freeway. The plant is currently located on land that will be needed for the construction of the proposed baseball stadium.

As part of its review, the Commission advised the District to undertake an environmental review under the D.C. Environmental Policy Act of 1989 and add a definition to the text for "asphalt plant." The Commission recommended that the text amendment include a protection of the vista from the Anacostia Freeway and its views to the north by minimizing visibility of any portion of the asphalt plant facility or its equipment from the freeway. The Commission noted that evergreen trees could provide screening at the western and southern edges of the site.

## ANNUAL REPORT

NCPC released its 2005 annual report, *Shaping a City for the 21st Century*, in December. Produced by the Office of Public Affairs, the publication outlines NCPC's major planning initiatives and accomplishments, including the launch of the new Circulator transit system, proposed redevelopment scenarios for South Capitol Street, and NCPC's work to replace unsightly security barriers with elements befitting the nation's capital. The report also includes a financial report and outlines the agency's plans for 2006. The 2005 Annual Report is available online at [www.ncpc.gov](http://www.ncpc.gov) and print copies can be requested by emailing [info@ncpc.gov](mailto:info@ncpc.gov) or calling 202-482-7200.



## INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

In January, NCPC hosted international visitor Leonie Burke, a top adviser to the Minister for Local Government, Territories, and Roads in Canberra, Australia. The minister's office has oversight authority for the National Capital Authority (NCA), NCPC's Capitals Alliance counterpart in Australia.

During Ms. Burke's visit to Washington, she met with senior staff from NCPC and toured the National Mall with a Park Service representative. Ms. Burke also joined Executive Director Patricia Gallagher in a meeting with Tim Priest, the new executive director of the Greater Washington Initiative, an affiliate of the Greater Washington Board of Trade. Ms. Burke expressed great interest in NCPC's public meeting process and indicated that she would advise members of Australia's Parliament of NCPC's structure as plans to reorganize the NCA in Canberra are developed.



Australian government adviser Leonie Burke (center) visits with NCPC staff.

## POTOMAC CONFERENCE

In February, Executive Director Patricia Gallagher participated in a two-day roundtable on the future of the National Capital Region. Hosted by the Greater Washington Board of Trade, "A Conversation about Our Region's Future" attracted more than 125 top executives from the private, public, and non-profit sectors. The attendees gathered in Chantilly, Virginia to explore and develop strategies for addressing the region's tremendous growth. Since 2000, the Washington area has grown rapidly, gaining more jobs than any other place in the country. The unprecedented growth is fueling demand for affordable housing and solutions to ease the area's congested roadways.

## STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS

In January, NCPC named **Barry Socks** its Chief Operating Officer and newest member of the Senior Executive Service. Mr. Socks joined NCPC in February 2004, after serving with the Federal Emergency Management Agency for 15 years. During the past two years, he has restructured and streamlined the agency's administrative, human resources, and financial management programs. NCPC congratulates Mr. Socks on his new appointment.



**Angela Roach**, who began her service with NCPC in 2000 and served as a key member of NCPC's Office of Administration, left NCPC in February for an opportunity with the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission. At NCPC, Ms. Roach assisted in formulating the agency's budget, administering the contracting and procurement program, and overseeing reporting requirements. NCPC wishes Ms. Roach well in her new position.

## IN THE MONTHS AHEAD

NCPC is making progress on several projects that will significantly impact the city and the region.

- ◆ NCPC is examining potential reuses for the **Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium (RFK)**. While RFK currently serves as home field to the D.C. United soccer team and temporary ballpark to the Washington Nationals, plans are underway for new sports facilities for both teams. Given the potential for RFK's eventual demolition, planners at NCPC are examining possible future uses for this valuable site and expect to release their recommendations in the coming months.
- ◆ **Walter Reed Army Medical Center** in Northwest Washington, D.C. will close by 2011 as a result of the Department of Defense's Base Realignment and Closure decisions. To help plan for this property's future, NCPC is analyzing various portions of the site for possible reuse by federal agencies, including the General Services Administration and the State Department. Some of the issues NCPC staff is evaluating include the compatibility of possible uses with the surrounding neighborhood and the potential impact of different uses on the site's historic features. NCPC expects to issue a report on its findings by summer 2006.
- ◆ NCPC, in partnership with the National Park Service and the D.C. government, selected a consulting team to advance the **CapitalSpace** initiative—a long-range plan for managing the region's many parks and open spaces. EDAW, Inc. along with Greenplay, LLC, the Trust for Public Land, and Justice and Sustainability Associates, will help assess current and future open space needs and develop strategies to protect and enhance Washington's green spaces.





NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
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# 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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The Honorable Anthony A. Williams  
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The Honorable Linda W. Cropp  
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Executive Director  
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