

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

E. Keller
NCPC File No. 6383



GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK
WISCONSIN AVENUE TERMINUS,
Wisconsin Avenue to 31st Street, NW,
Washington, DC

Submission by the National Park Service

June 30, 2005

Abstract

The National Park Service (NPS) has submitted a preliminary site development plans for the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus portion of the Georgetown Waterfront Park that was conceptually approved in July 2004. Refinement of the proposal has occurred but maintains all features approved by the Commission in its concept review.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of the preliminary site development plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1))

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves:

- The preliminary site development plans for the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus, as shown on the NCPC Map File No. 72.00(38.00)-41626, but

Excepts from approval:

- The proposed design of the pergola structure and its attendant seating, which is deferred until more detailed information is provided by the National Park Service on the structure's material composition, exact structuring layout, and complete description and detail of the overarching roof material.
- The pedestrian sidewalk north extension at Wisconsin Avenue, which should be either further revised as a receptive and refinedly designed entry point, or eliminated from the park sidewalk design entirely.
- Use of the multiple-lamp Washington Globe at the Wisconsin Avenue park entrance.

* * *

PROJECT SUMMARY

Site Description

The National Park Service's preliminary submission involves a limited portion of the waterfront in the vicinity of the Wisconsin Avenue entry terminus. This area of the Park contains approximately 2.3 acres and is the most eastern section of the Park. The design takes in an area that extends back from the shoreline approximately 185 feet to K Street, NW, and essentially under the Whitehurst elevated roadway. The Whitehurst Expressway, above K Street, defines the length of the northern edge of the site and creates a visual barrier between Georgetown and the planned park. However, the Wisconsin Avenue view-corridor leads directly into the park and is oriented north/south under the elevated road. The preservation of the vista from Wisconsin Avenue to the Potomac River and a pedestrian connection along the river's edge at this area of the Park, which links to the shoreline from Rock Creek, are major attributes established by the preliminary design.



VICINITY LOCATION OF GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK



BOUNDARY OF OVERALL GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK CONCEPT

Background

The Commission last reviewed aspects of the Georgetown Waterfront Park, Wisconsin Avenue Terminus, in July 2004. At that time the Commission approved the revised design concept for Georgetown Waterfront Park at the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus, as illustrated and described in the report titled: *Georgetown Waterfront Park-Wisconsin Avenue Plaza*, dated June 2004.

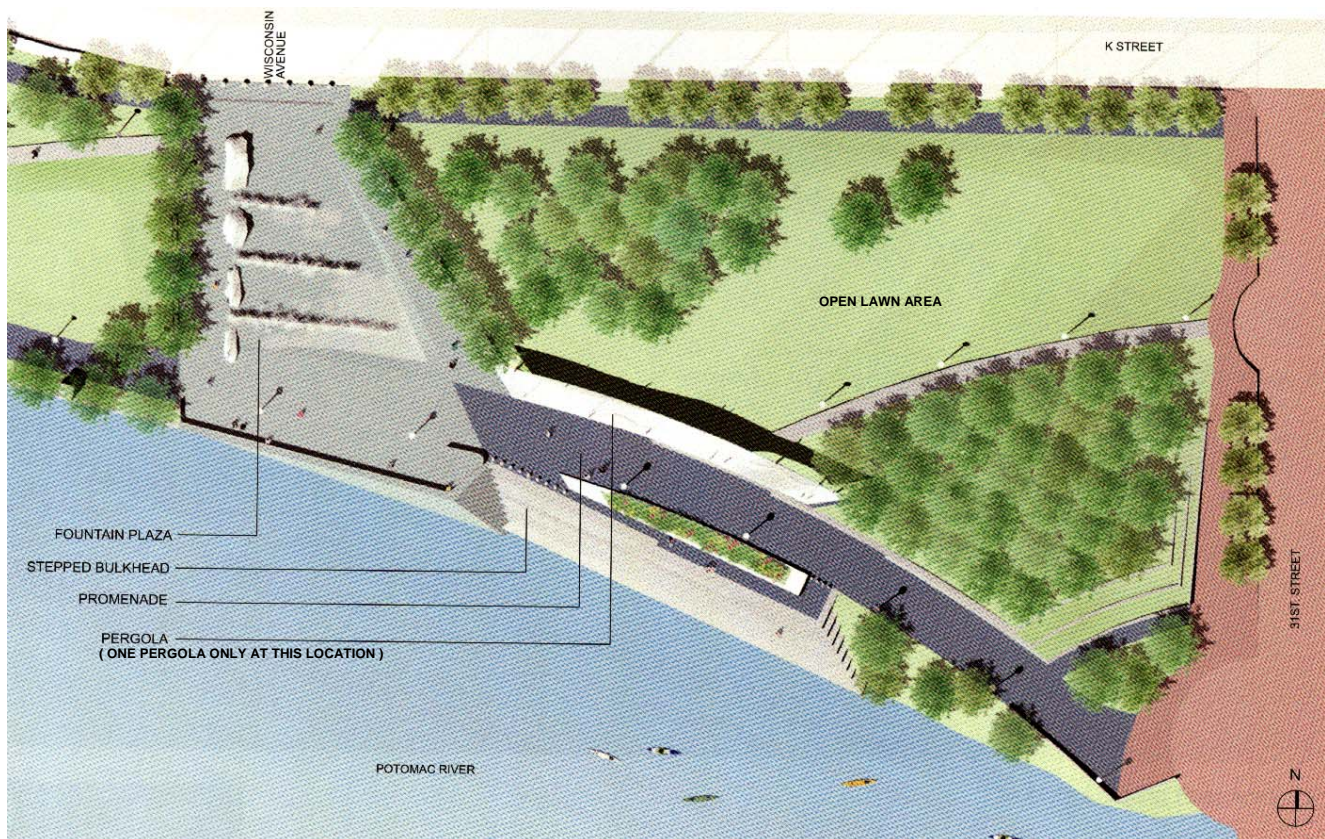
Proposal

The currently submitted Wisconsin Terminus preliminary site development plans include the following activity areas:

- A promenade paralleling the river's edge.
- Opportunities for interpretive displays and interpretation.
- Alignment of a regional trail component (Crescent Bike Trail) at the section's north edge.
- Open lawn areas for passive recreation.

- A shelter/pavilion (pergola) for shade, sitting and viewing.
- A primary plaza space at the foot of Wisconsin Avenue as the major gathering space of the park.
- An interactive water feature with no standing water pool.
- Opportunities to be in proximity to the water.

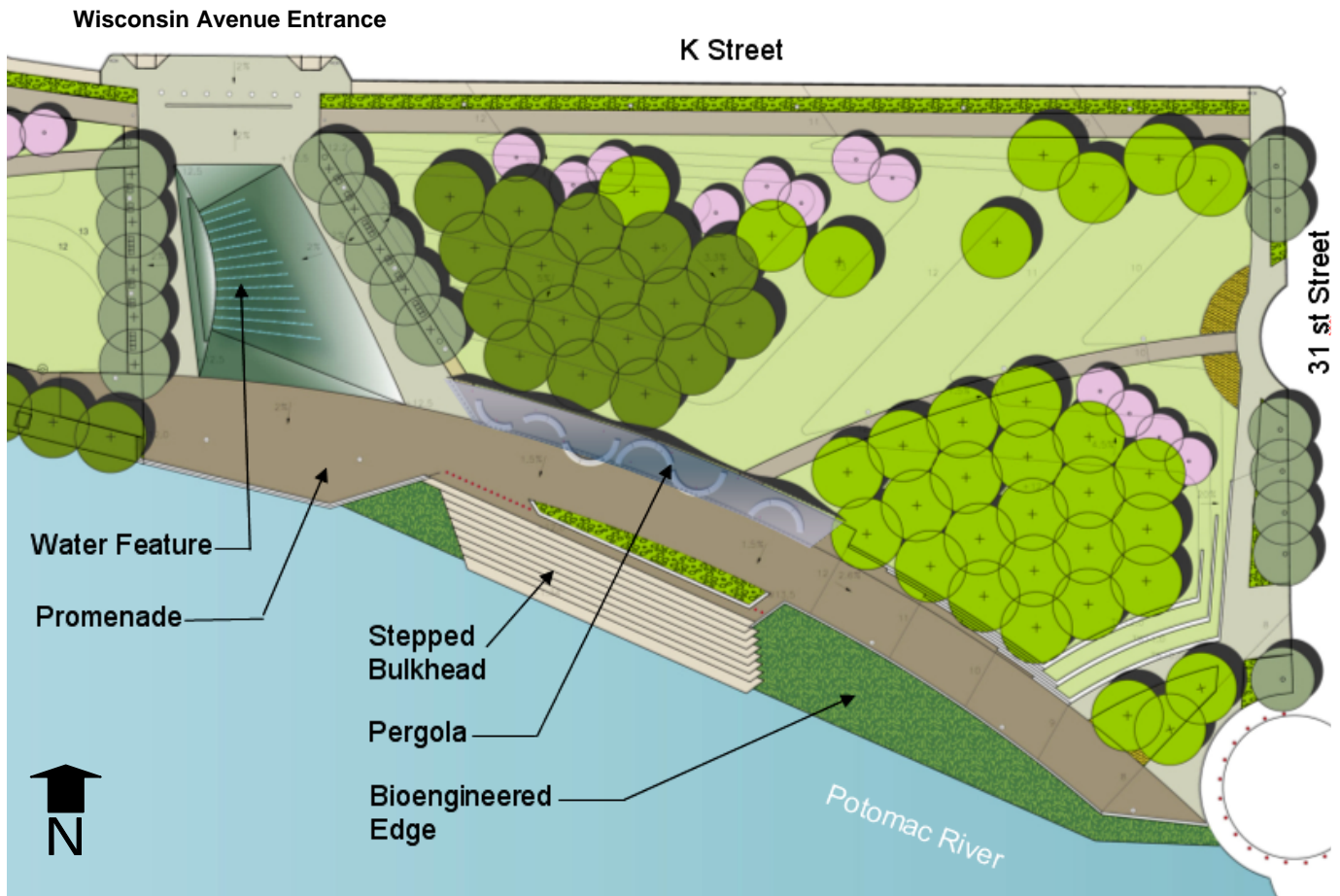
The preliminary plans continue to build upon the concept design provided to the Commission. The one remaining pergola at the Wisconsin Avenue central plaza area has been refined in its geometry and height. Additionally, the park pedestrian pavement has expanded areas of granite pavers as a consistent treatment of the ground plane within areas adjacent to tree-shaded sitting areas. Also, the submitted design has clearly established the fountain area as a more conventional arrangement utilizing a large low-height seating area, with readily controlled and low-angle jet streams, within a defined internally draining water basin.



WISCONSIN AVENUE TERMINUS CONCEPT PLAN APPROVED IN JULY 2004

The major change to the fountain design is the low-angle jet verses the previous concept of vertical jets that were arranged in three lines and about four feet in height. The jets are now generated from a surface fountain located within the bench area that is slightly submerged within a green granite base and splashes onto the plaza that is now defined by the use of the green

granite. The design also provides a more conventional approach to seating around the fountain by introducing the large granite bench which serves the purpose of also enclosing a portion of the mechanical elements of the fountain itself. The slight depression (basin) in the paving collects the water. Pedestrians can either walk through the fountain or around it toward the stepped bulkhead or the shoreline promenade.

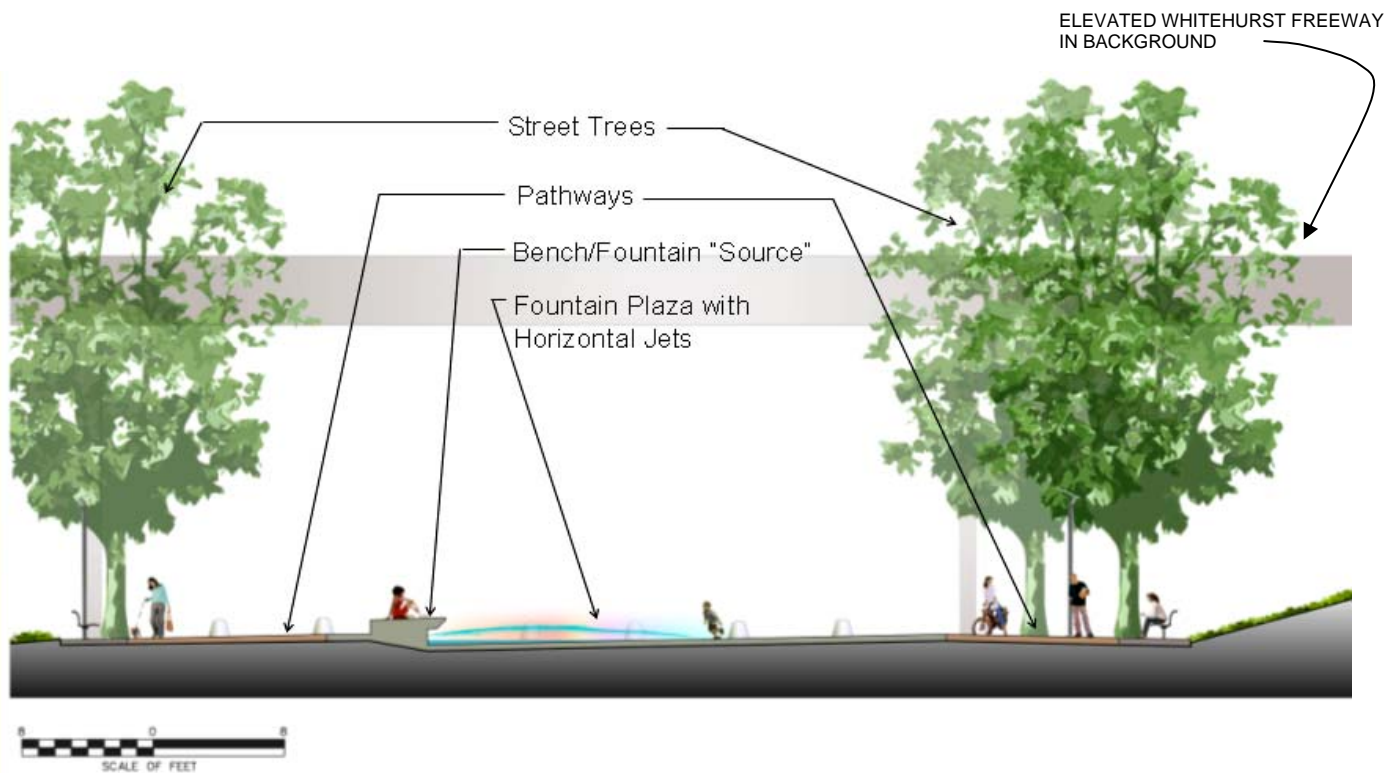


SUBMITTED PRELIMINARY SITE PLAN OF GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK, WISCONSIN AVENUE TERMINUS

Other elements of the preliminary plan include:

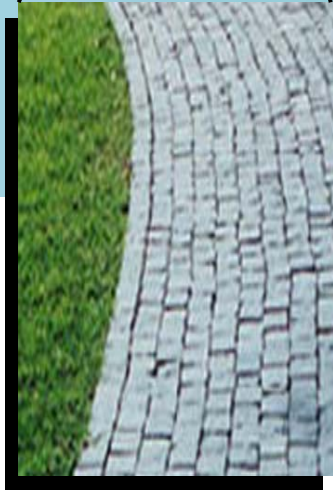
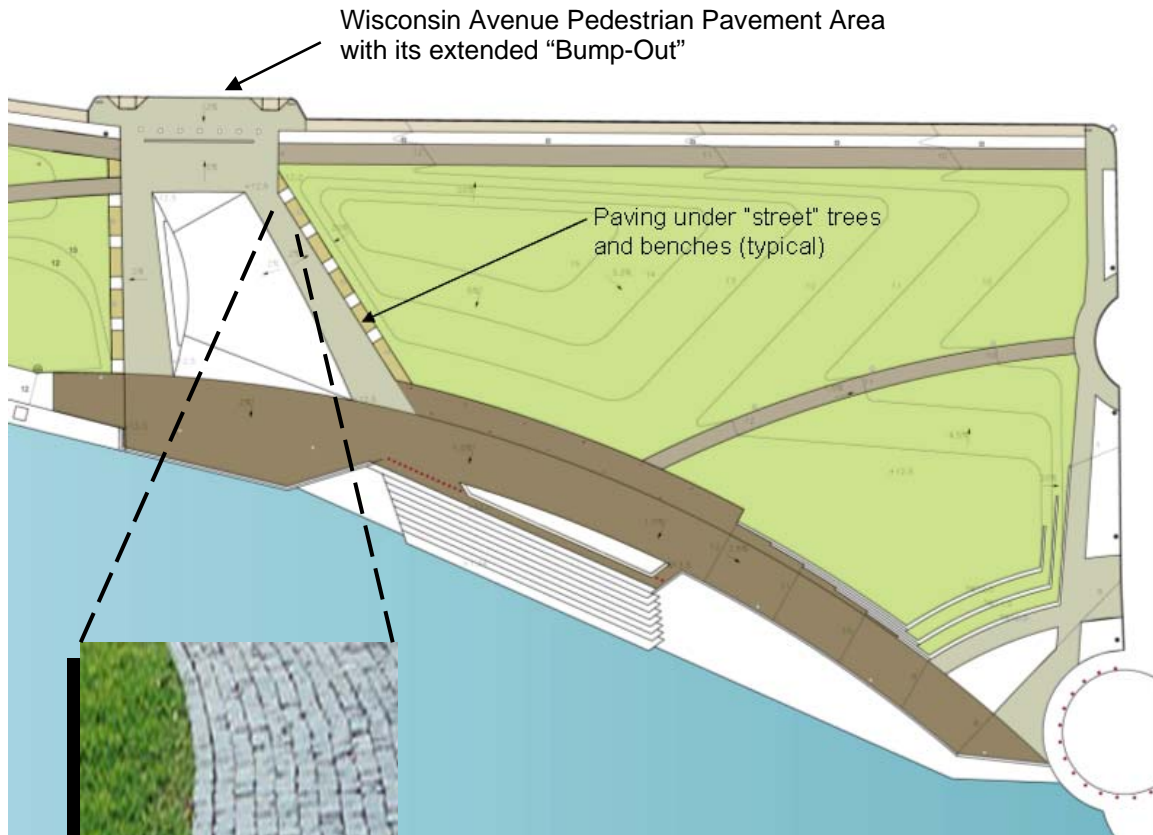
- Grading and contouring of the riverbank shoreline to better accommodate variations of water levels and maintenance of a vegetated soil bioengineering system in the design plan at this location.
- Shortening of the river stairs (stepped bulkhead) for better maintenance and effective containment at the water's edge during fluctuating river levels.
- Design of the promenade that passes through the plaza between the fountain and the river.

- Refined configuration of the plaza at the river's edge that permits pedestrians to view the river directly from a railing. All walking surfaces are completely accessible.
- Adapting design elements to make the pedestrian walking areas handicapped accessible and to preclude wheelchairs from accidentally going over the bulkhead edges.



SECTION OF THE GEORGETOWN PARK WISCONSIN AVENUE TERMINUS CENTRAL PLAZA AND FOUNTAIN

The landscape plant materials for the park area have been further developed to transition various species and plant forms into the whole composition of the north central green space. More trees have now been grouped into groves of high-canopy trees with grass beneath them. Additional trees have been added at the southeast corner and at the intermediate canopy area as a view-framing element. Additionally, provision is now made for low-impact surface water drainage in the Terminus portion of the Georgetown Waterfront Park that provides sustainable and environmentally appropriate surface water retention and filtering of water runoff. These features match those of the approved west portion of the park at Potomac Place to 34th Street.



CENTRAL PLAZA PAVEMENT WHERE GRANITE CUBE SETS ARE UTILIZED BENEATH STREET TREE BENCH AREAS

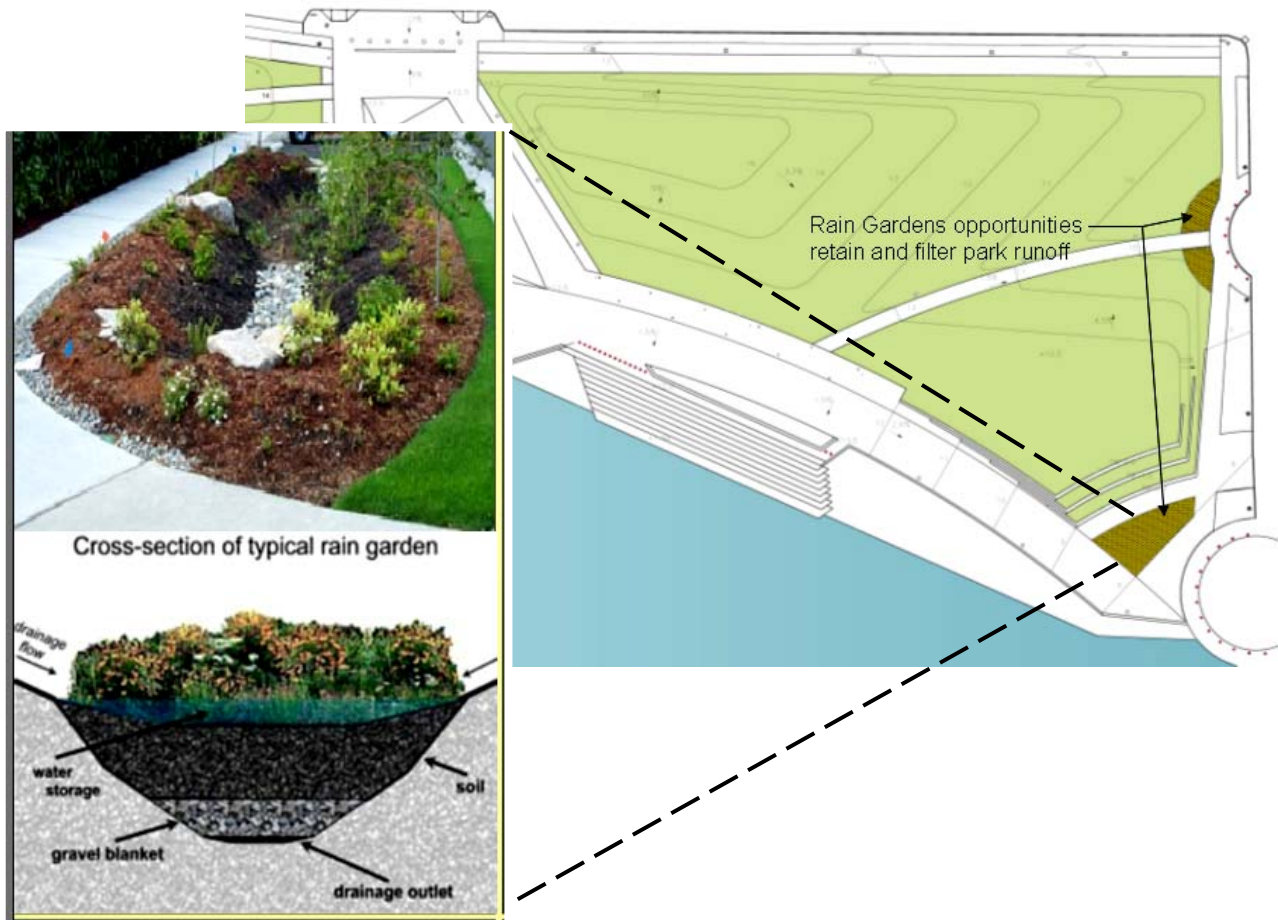
Development Program

Applicant: The National Park Service

Architect: Wallace, Roberts and Todd, LLC, landscape architects
Jody Pinto Studios, landscape sculpture structures
Parson, Brinckerhoff, Quade, and Douglas, site engineering
With support of Robbin B. Sotir & Assoc., Delon Hampton & Assoc.,
Grenald Waldron Assoc. and Oehrlein Assoc.

Square Footage: 2.3± Acres

Estimated Cost: Approximately \$12-15 million, based on estimated current scope for full 10 acre park development.



SITE DEVELOPMENT USES LOW IMPACT STORMWATER MANAGEMENT IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE PARK DESIGN

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Staff **recommends approval of the preliminary plans** for the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus, ***except*** for the proposed design of the pergola structure and its attendant seating, which should be deferred until more detailed information is provided on the structure’s material composition, exact structuring layout, and complete description and detail of the overarching roof material.

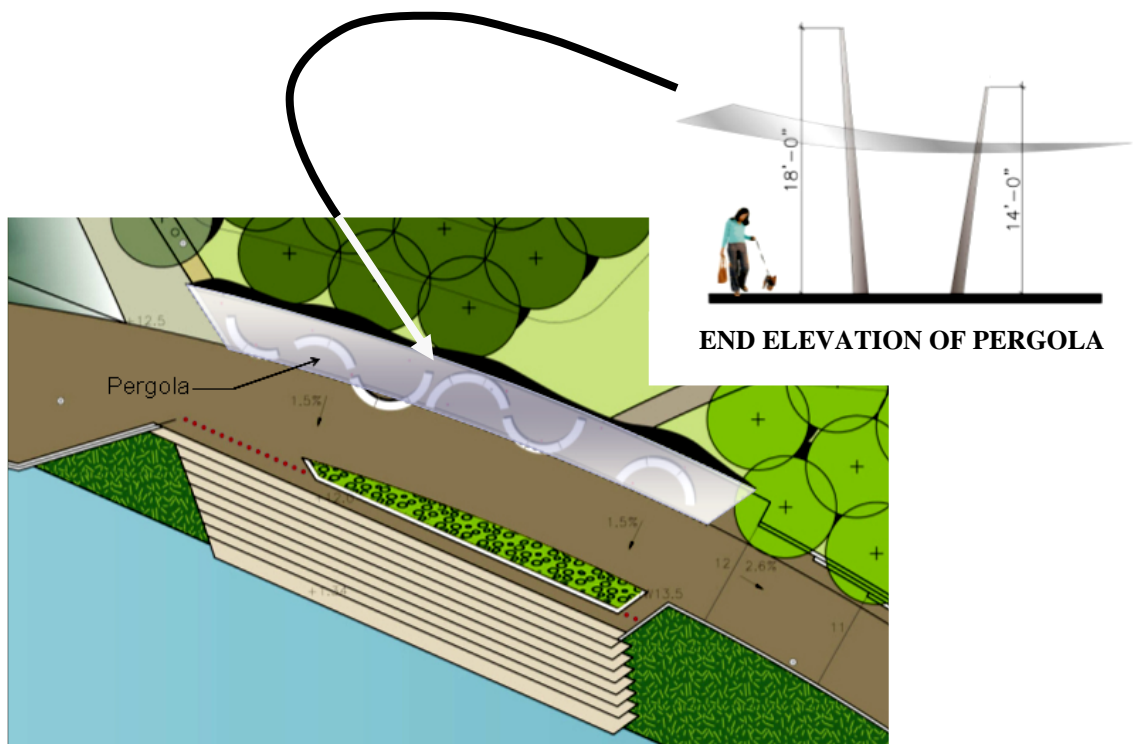
Additionally, staff finds the pedestrian sidewalk area at the Wisconsin Avenue entrance to the park should be further revised as a receptive and refinedly designed entry point or eliminated from the park sidewalk design entirely.

The preliminary design incorporates the Commission's direction to the Park Service regarding the following concerns:

- Better integration of the central water feature area with the Wisconsin Avenue terminal focal point.
- Improved transition between the water features of the central park area and the open spaces of the promenade and descending steps.

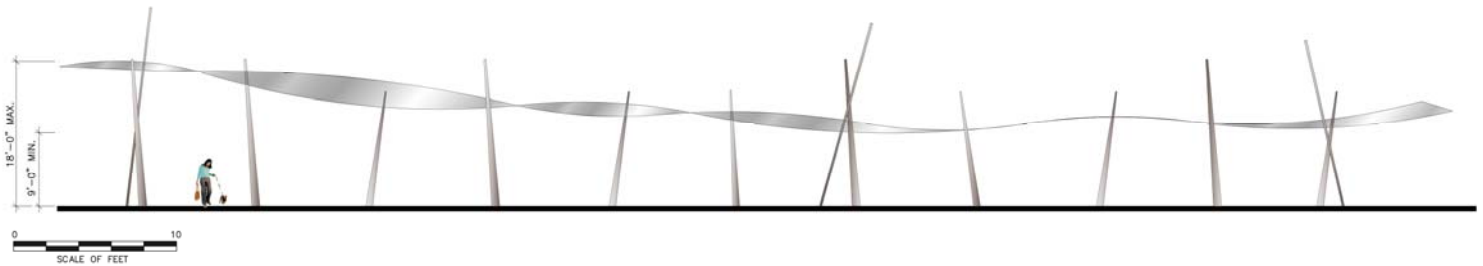
The preliminary design also continues to provide the contrast, view arrangement, and openness sought by the Commission's earlier review in 2003 and 2004. The design's improvements maintain the Crescent Trail alignment through the park at K Street, affording the connection and access to the wider regional trail network. The plans also present a main central focal overlook at the immediate river shoreline.

However, the staff is disappointed in the provided documentation concerning the evolving design of the pergola structure and its seating areas. No material details or defining design details have

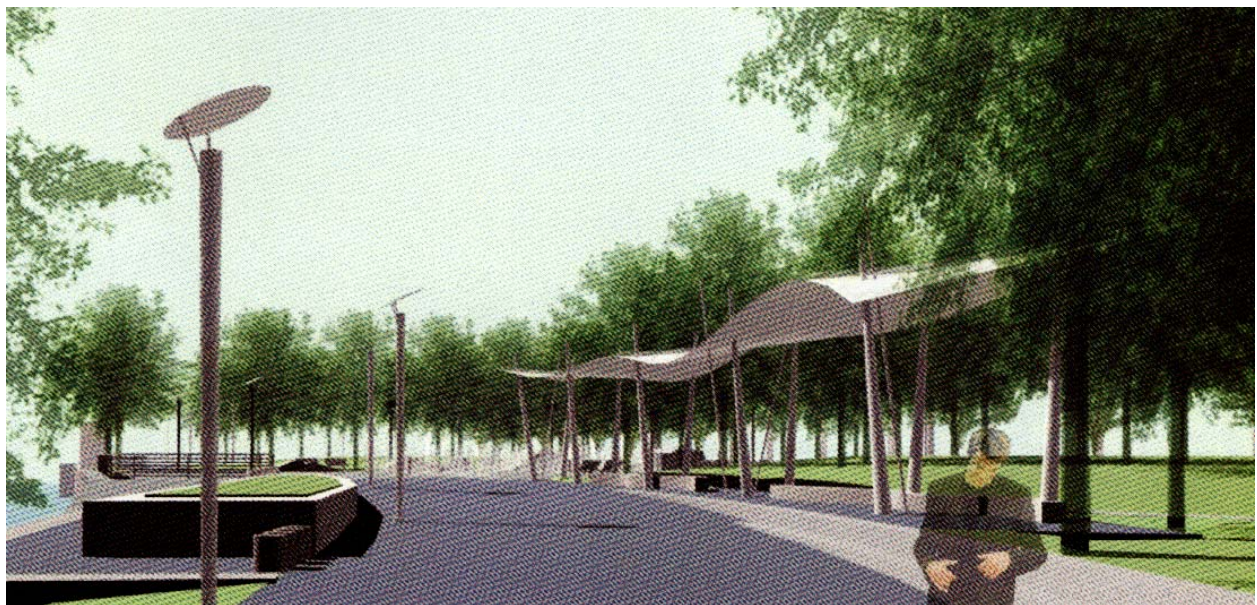


ENLARGEMENT SHOWING PERGOLA LOCATION IN PARK

been submitted by the Park Service regarding specifics of height of the various vertical supports or their material composition. Furthermore, no information was provided regarding the seating materials of the pergola area or the nature of the canopy material. No specifics are noted giving any written description of the lighting scheme contemplated beneath the structure. Given the lack of detail, staff was unable to evaluate in a preliminary fashion the relevance of the pergola's design progression toward its integration with the concept of an open, light, and contemporized shade element. With the omission of any details about the structure, staff recommends deferral of its preliminary design approval.



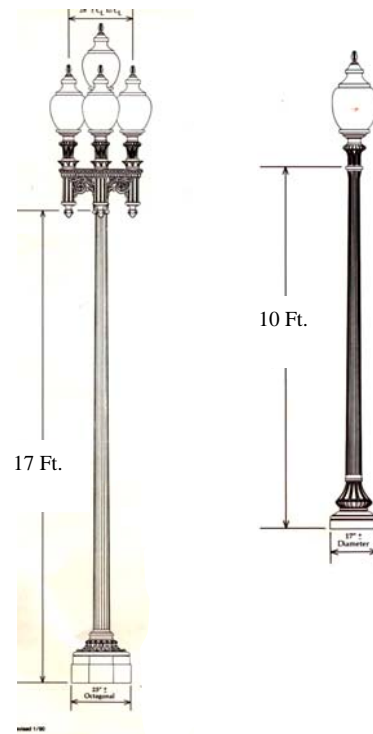
PERGOLA ELEVATION



PERGOLA AS VIEWED LOOKING WEST ALONG THE WATERFRONT PROMENADE

As an additional point, the staff believes the Wisconsin Avenue entry sidewalk at the K Street edge presents itself as a half-attempted effort to represent a sidewalk focal point. A simplified but refined sidewalk pavement layout plan containing the accessible ramps is considered to be more appropriate. A single comprehensive form for the walk pavement is necessary versus the current compound geometric configuration. Short of that; the staff review finds the small sidewalk bump-out should be removed if it can not be modified.

Staff also recommends just a single Washington Globe streetlight should be utilized to adhere to the sympathetic design established within the western section of the approved park, which uses only the single globe fixture along K Street, NW. The more massive and taller multi-globe fixtures, placed at each side of the entry point, compete with the nearby tall piers of the Whitehurst Freeway and would cast additional light toward the freeway structure itself.



PROJECT CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposal for the Wisconsin Avenue Terminus section of the Georgetown Waterfront Park is consistent with policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. The Parks and Open Space Element designates river and waterfront settings of the Nation's Capital. The Comprehensive Plan policies state:

The federal government should:

1. Plan for new parks as part of the park system of the region.
2. Acquire parks and open space as necessary to augment the open space system.
3. Use easements, donations, purchases, exchanges, or other means to acquire land or to enhance parks and open space. Examples of areas or park systems where further acquisition is desirable include:

- South Capitol Street,
- Anacostia River waterfront and tributaries,
- Georgetown Waterfront Park ...

(Expansion and Enhancement Policies p.103)

Furthermore, the Comprehensive Plan notes in its August 2004 update that:

WASHINGTON MULTI-GLOBE AND SINGLE GLOBE STREETLIGHT

The federal government should:

1. Link open space along the waterfront to provide a continuous public open space system.
4. Complete the waterfront parks in Georgetown and Alexandria.

(Parks and Landscapes Policies; Waterfront Parks p. 111)

Additional Plan objectives noted include:

The federal government should:

1. Enhance parks and preserve open green space for future generations.
2. Maintain and conserve federal open space as a means of shaping and enhancing urban areas.
3. Preserve open space that is crucial to the long-term quality of life of a neighborhood or the region.

(Preservation and Maintenance Policies; p. 104)

Other objectives dealing with rivers and waterways of the Plan include:

The federal government should:

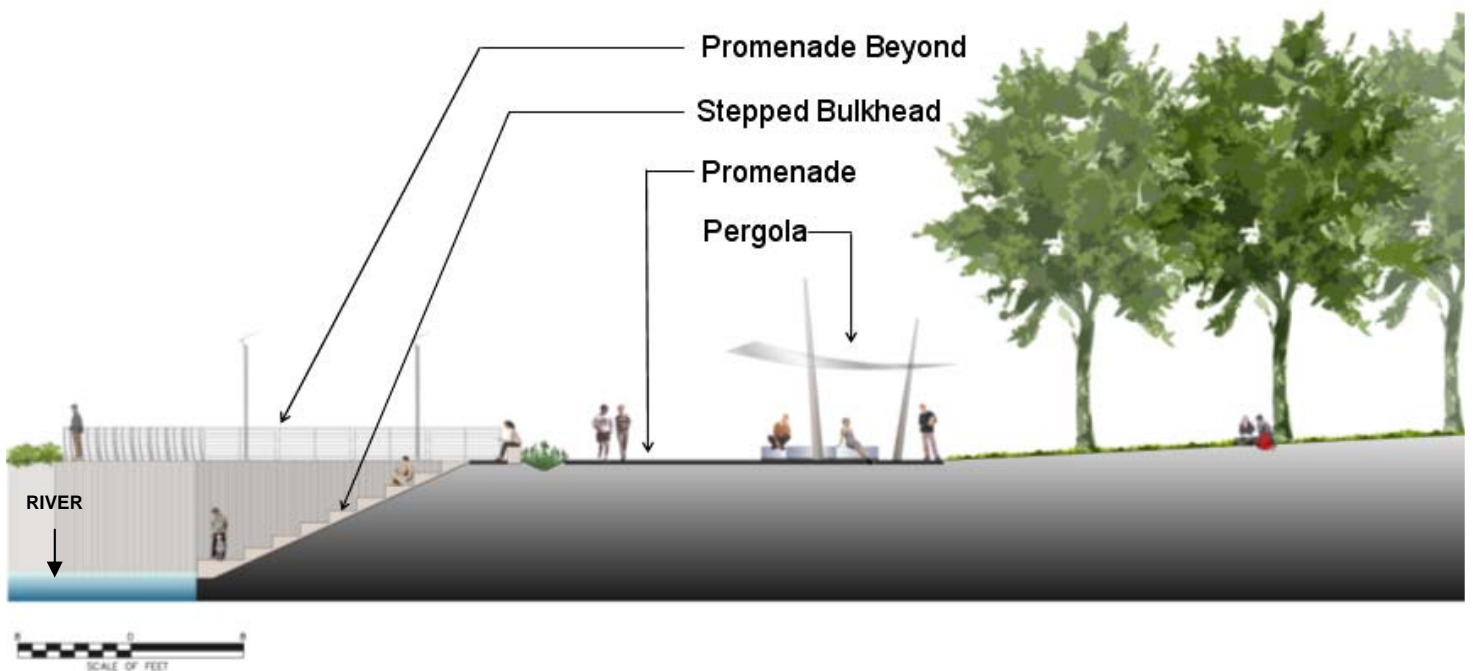
4. Protect, restore, and enhance the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers as great open space resources and as recreational amenities, including shorelines and waterfront areas along rivers.
5. Improve the quality of water in the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers to allow for both restored natural habitats and increased recreational use.
6. Retain shoreline areas in their natural condition or appropriately landscape the water's edge.
7. Manage all lands along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers in a manner that encourages the enjoyment and recreational use of water resources, while protecting the scenic and ecological values of the waterways.
8. Retain both privately and publicly owned land along waterways in a natural state, except in areas that are determined appropriate for development.
9. In urban waterfront areas that are determined appropriate for development:
 - Avoid construction in environmentally sensitive areas.
 - Restore, stabilize, and/or improve and landscape degraded areas of shorelines.
 - Limit development along or near the shoreline and integrate it with the generally low and continuous line of river embankments.
10. Avoid physical barriers to the waterfront, and long, unbroken stretches of buildings or walls along waterfronts.
11. Determine building height along or near the shoreline based on the building's proximity to the shoreline.
12. Design and locate bridges so that they minimally affect local riverine habitat, waterways, shorelines, and valleys.
13. Encourage swimming, boating, and fishing facilities, as well as water-oriented tourist activities, on the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers.

(Rivers and Waterways Policies; p. 121)

National Historic Preservation Act

The Park Service has completed its Section 106 responsibilities for the revised plan, determining that the implementation of the concept and preliminary design would have no adverse effect on the historic or architectural character of the waterfront area.

The D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) determined that the 1986 concept plan for the Georgetown Waterfront Park would have no adverse effect on the National Register qualities of the Georgetown Historic District or the C&O Canal National Historical Park. The project was also reviewed by the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board at that time. The effect determination was reached with two conditions: that each request for demolition be considered individually, and that the location and design of future boathouses be reviewed. The level of archaeological assessment was commended, as was the “sensitive landscape design, which avoids archaeological resources.”



CROSS SECTION OF THE PARK PROMENADE AND BULKHEAD STEPS LOOKING WEST TOWARD THE PERGOLA

The current proposal does not extend nor significantly deviate from the area of that reviewed design. Most of the park can be installed without digging significantly beneath the disturbed top layer. For tree plantings and some other features, archaeological monitoring will take place during construction to ensure that artifacts remain *in situ* and are not disturbed. The landscape design was developed to avoid disturbance.

NPS conferred again with the DC SHPO about the concept plan in the summer 2003. The current plans implement that proposal. The 1986 determination of no adverse effect is still considered valid, given the similarity of the plans, as well as the review protection for any demolitions and the archaeological monitoring. As the design to be implemented is developed beyond the concept stage, further consultation may be warranted.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation also commented on the concept plan in 1986, stating that the implementation of the plan would improve the appearance of the waterfront and enhance the public's enjoyment of the river as a major recreation area.

National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Park Service and the Commission arrived at a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) through the completion of an Environmental Assessment in June 1984.

Staff has reviewed the current preliminary design plans and finds them fully consistent with the analysis and conclusions found in the original evaluation. Staff has reviewed the action for extraordinary circumstances as sanctioned by NEPA and determined the FONSI remains valid in accordance with the Commission's procedures.

Federal Capital Improvements Program

In the Commission's recent FCIP report, fiscal years 2003-2008, the Commission recommended the project for future programming.

A portion of the Georgetown Waterfront Park project is included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program (FCIP) fiscal years 2001 – 2005, adopted by the Commission on August 3, 2000. The costs associated with restoration of canal and seawall areas are estimated at approximately \$1.7 million. The need for funding of the overall Park has been identified by the Commission since 1981.

The Park Service's overall focus for development costs of the Georgetown Waterfront Park is through public/private funding initiatives as major portions of the park are finalized in design. A part of this funding effort involves The Georgetown Waterfront Park Fund that is managed by the National Park Foundation, a 501(c) (3) organization, chartered by Congress in 1967 as the official non-profit partner of National Parks to encourage the tradition of private philanthropy for our national parks.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the concept design revisions for the park at its meeting on August 13, 2003 and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The current submission does not significantly deviate from that concept or its essential elements that were reviewed and approved.

The participating agencies of the review were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; Fire Department; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission, at its meeting of June 16, 2005, approved the preliminary design of the Wisconsin Terminus section of the park, but requested further details on final material finishes on the pedestrian pavement areas and possibly on the pergola element seating area.

The Commission did not approve the revised final design of the Overlook structures that are located further west of the Terminus section and that were never formally submitted to NCPC beyond their conceptual location in August 2003 for the Georgetown Waterfront Park. The Park Service had anticipated their submission in the coming months.

Some of the concerns expressed by CFA Commissioners about the Overlook structures primarily focused on the height of the mast element at the Overlooks and on the seating area materials under the mast. This same type or similar seating is submitted to NCPC for preliminary approval of the pergola, but again staff believes little exact description has been specifically provided by the Park Service submission to NCPC that allows any form of material evaluation by the staff at this time. But in light of the protracted and diverse opinions expressed about the type of seating by the Commission of Fine Arts, and ultimately disapproved the Overlook structures and their seating, staff recommends that NCPC acquire more information on the pergola seating design in concert with the pergola planning.