

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

REVISED – July 7, 2005
N. Witherell
NCPC File No. 6265



LINCOLN MEMORIAL LINCOLN MEMORIAL CIRCLE SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS, EAST SIDE – BARRIER LOCATION WASHINGTON, DC

Submission by the National Park Service

June 30, 2005

Abstract

The National Park Service has submitted revised concept plans for a proposed vehicle barrier on the east (Mall) side of the Lincoln Memorial. The National Park Service has submitted a different proposal for the barrier line than that approved in concept by the Commission at its April 2005 meeting. The principal difference is that the barrier line descends below Memorial Circle and includes all of the lower stairs. This proposal follows a reexamination of the close-in location previously adopted and a fresh review of other concepts previously studied. The current submission is a variation of the “landscape” scheme approved in concept by the Commission in 2002 and included in the Urban Design and Security Plan. The Commission staff has consulted intensively with the staffs of the National Park Service, the Commission of Fine Arts, the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in developing this proposed location for the barrier line.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of revised concept design, pursuant to 40 U.S.C. §8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. §8722(b)(1))) as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.44(38.40) 41628.

Executive Director’s Recommendation

The Commission:

Commends the National Park Service for proposing a security barrier location that revises an earlier concept for the historic landscape below Memorial Circle, that minimizes alteration to

historic building fabric, and that would preserve to the extent possible the open vista between the Lincoln Memorial and the National Mall.

Approves a security barrier line location (the design is not yet fully determined) that crosses Memorial Circle at Bacon and French Drives and that descends the lower stairs to the level of the Reflecting Pool, as shown in Option 4 of NCPC Map File No. 1.44(38.40)41628.

Recommends that the National Park Service, in its further development of a design:

- Use a cable fence or other barrier with paired hedges parallel to the lower stairs.
- Develop a barrier design for the base of the lower stairs that will preserve the integrity of the grass terraces in relation to the stairs.
- Terminate the retaining wall (now under construction around Memorial Circle) at a point east of Bacon and French Drives but before reaching the access ramps.
- Study a pavement pattern that combines a radial layout of 4-foot by 4-foot pavers around the eastern portion of Memorial Circle and an orthogonal pattern in the central axis.
- Develop and test in the field a bollard design for the approved barrier location that is appropriate for the setting—austere in design, in a dark color or finish.

Notes that:

- Prior to any subsequent submission of the project for Commission review, the National Park Service should respond to any substantive comments from the public on the environmental effects of the proposal and accomplish a completed NEPA review of the revised proposal in conformance with the Commission's requirements.
- The Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) dated October 31, 2003 stipulates that the bollard line "be placed at the outer edge of the plaza and circle on the east side of the Memorial" but allows further consultation and review of alternatives, as described in the attached June 3, 2005 letter from the State Historic Preservation Officer to the National Park Service.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The Lincoln Memorial was sited by the McMillan Commission and designed by one of Charles McKim's protégés, architect Henry Bacon. Built between 1914 and 1922, the national memorial to President Lincoln is the western terminus of the extended Mall and the focal point of West

Potomac Park. The Reflecting Pool and Rainbow Pool were designed by Bacon, who collaborated closely with Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. They were constructed between 1922 and 1924. Olmsted had been a member of the McMillan Commission and was sitting as the landscape architect on the Commission of Fine Arts during that time. Olmsted later served as a member of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission from 1926 to 1932.

Background and Previous Commission Action

The current submission by the National Park Service (NPS) is a component of a larger improvement project at the Lincoln Memorial that includes roadway and sidewalk reconstruction; the installation of vehicle barriers around the memorial, including a 35-inch retaining wall around the inner edge of Memorial Circle; and the construction of two concession buildings to improve visitor services. The other components of the project were approved by the Commission in December 2003, February 2004, and January 2005.

In July 2002, for the east side vehicle barrier, the Commission approved a barrier location (proposed by Laurie Olin, sometimes referred to as “the landscape solution” and illustrated in the Urban Design and Security Plan) that consisted of bollards and retaining walls below Memorial Circle descending the lower stairs to the Reflecting Pool level. Following a reassessment of this 2002 scheme, aspects of this proposal are contained in the current submission.

In December 2003 NPS changed its preferred barrier location and submitted a bollard line at the outer edge of Memorial Circle. The Commission did not approve this location, instead recommending the development of an alternative that minimized the visibility and extent of the unbroken line of bollards.

In March 2005 the Commissioners made a site visit to study a mock-up of bollards in various locations on the plaza—the inner and outer edges of Memorial Circle crossing the Mall axis, as well as locations for the barrier line to cross the circle. The juncture of the retaining walls with the access ramps was also studied.

At its April 2005 meeting the Commission approved a revised concept for a bollard line near the base of the memorial stairs (at the level of Memorial Circle, near the inner edge of the circle).

(The Commission of Fine Arts had also endorsed this scheme, but reconsidered at its next meeting and urged a barrier line that descended to the first landing of the lower stairs. NPS submitted this proposed barrier line to the Commission this month (Options 1 and 2), but another option (Option 3) was subsequently developed in consultation with NPS and other agency staffs during the current review cycle. The Commission of Fine Arts endorsed the lower barrier line at its June 16 meeting and requested further study of options for crossing Memorial Circle.)

Option 4, the staff-recommended option for the barrier location, was developed on July 6, 2005 by the staffs of the National Park Service, the Commission, the Commission of Fine Arts, and the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office.

Proposal

The current revised concept proposal from the National Park Service (NPS) is called Option 4. The submission of multiple options and subsequent changes underscores the difficulty of establishing a barrier location and design at the Lincoln Memorial.

The most significant recommendation in Option 4 is the barrier location that incorporates the lower stairs inside the barrier line. This is similar to the “landscape” scheme proposed by NPS and Laurie Olin and approved in concept by the Commission in July 2002. The current submission proposes that the barrier line descending the lower stairs be encased in a yew hedge to soften the descending line adjacent to the stairs.

Option 4 was developed in a meeting on site with the staffs of NPS, NCPC, CFA and DCSHPO on Wednesday, July 6, 2005. In Option 4, the barrier line crosses Memorial Circle at Bacon and French Drives, continues along the current curb line at the outer edge of the circle until turning to descend the lower stairs, and continues across the Mall axis at the level of the Reflecting Pool. The retaining wall currently under construction around Memorial Circle terminates just to the east of Bacon and French Drives, before reaching the accessible ramps. This terminus, and the design for the return of the retaining wall, was approved as final site and building plans by the Commission at its February 2004 meeting.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Although the National Mall and West Potomac Park were altered many times in the last century, the formal setting of the Lincoln Memorial at the western terminus of the Mall is recognized and revered as a consummate architectural and landscape design statement about our national democratic principles. Because of the importance of the continuity of access and ascendance, as well as the views of the memorial and its setting, the insertion of a vertical barrier has been especially difficult to conceive, much less design.

Underlying the discussion of this project for the past several years is the fundamental necessity of treating the memorial setting as a whole and the project as a well-integrated landscape design. The proposed security design must be commensurate with the setting of the Lincoln Memorial and the western terminus of the Mall. The security design should avoid alterations to historic building fabric and historic landscape design. Although Option 4 alters the appearance of the landscape by the addition of bollards and hedges, it avoids alteration of the historic granite elements and therefore is reversible. (The concrete plaza at the base of the lower stairs is not historic.)

Staff recommends that the Commission endorse and approve the revised concept design designated as “Option 4.” NPS will study the bollard placement in detail, the bollard design, and the pavement pattern and prepare a new submission for the Commission to review at a future meeting.

Recent development of additional schemes

Three general locations for crossing the Mall axis have been studied: the inner edge of Memorial Circle, the outer edge of Memorial Circle, and the “landscape solution”. Variations on these schemes also have been proposed, including the barrier line crossing Memorial Circle to close the security perimeter near the memorial. Further, the design for the retaining wall around the memorial and its relationship to the access ramps has evolved.

All agree that the proposed solutions would strongly and negatively affect the memorial’s architectural and landscape setting and the National Mall’s axis. All agree that an intervention would affect the symbolic open access to the memorial, possibly original historic fabric, and new elements in the landscape that would alter the original character of the memorial and its setting. The degree of change at the site would be significant.

At the April 2005 meeting the Commission approved a concept for the shortest line of bollards that would also be below the vistas from the top of the memorial and the Reflecting Pool--near the inner edge of Memorial Circle. The retaining walls would be brought forward to the access ramps, and the Circle would be crossed at Bacon and French Drives, outside of the primary viewshed. The Commission of Fine Arts had also endorsed this scheme. As Commissioners will recall, the D.C. SHPO had opposed this scheme for its close-in placement of the barrier line and for some anticipated damage to the granite sidewalk where the bollard lines were returned.

Subsequently, the Commission of Fine Arts at its May meeting recommended against this scheme and suggested instead a barrier line across the lower set of stairs at the level of the first landing, in order to minimize the extension of the barrier lines on either side of the stairs and also to depress the bollard line from full view in the Mall axis when seen from the top of the memorial. NPS subsequently submitted two variations (Options 1 and 2) on that scheme for review by the Commission of Fine Arts and the Commission. At the Commission of Fine Arts meeting on June 16, NPS conveyed a third option (Option 3) that was endorsed for further development. A fourth option (Option 4) was proposed by NPS in a meeting with the staffs of CFA, NCPC and DCSPPO on site on Wednesday, July 6, 2005.

Barrier Line at Lower Stairs

The current proposal recommended by the staff is “Option 4.” This scheme has a longer barrier line than the Commission has seen in recent submissions, although it is similar to the original 2002 design concept. It acknowledges that the landscape will be altered regardless of the scheme selected, and emphasizes that the principal objectives are to avoid the alteration of original fabric and to treat the lower stairs as integral to the original design of the memorial. Option 4 does add elements to the landscape below the circle, something that had been previously deliberately avoided. Option 4 has the benefit of avoiding as much as possible the appearance of bollards in the viewshed from the top of the memorial. It does increase the visibility of the barrier line from the Reflecting Pool. Staff notes that the material at the base of the lower stairs, between them and the Reflecting Pool, is concrete and non-historic (rather than granite). The alteration of granite surfaces for bollards has been a concern with other schemes, including the scheme recommended by the staff at the April meeting.

It adds barrier lines to the landscape in an improved manner from that seen in 2002 (a cable fence in hedges that is an improvement on the stepped line of bollards). Although it is a significant intervention in the historic landscape design, it is one that is reversible, since it avoids interference with historic building fabric.

On June 3, 2005 the DC SHPO staff wrote to the Park Service suggesting, in part, a restudy of the “landscape” solution first seen by the Commission in 2002. (Letter attached.) This was the scheme proposed by NPS and Laurie Olin and included in the Commission’s Urban Design and Security Plan. While the scheme merited serious consideration and received concept approval from both commissions at the time, a principal drawback of the scheme was the appearance of bollards descending the stairs from Memorial Circle to the Reflecting Pool. An apparent advantage of the current submission is that instead of stepped bollards, a straight barrier of some kind (likely a cable system) would be used in conjunction with a hedge. This would not only soften the vertical barrier line adjacent to the steps but would create a cleaner and straighter (as opposed to stepped) descending line.

While recommending this lower barrier line, the staff has very serious reservations about the proposed use of retaining walls at the base of the terraces (Option 3, approved by CFA), since the retaining walls would have a significant adverse effect on the physical historic landscape design as well as on its design intent, in particular the relationship of the grass terraces both to the Mall and to the lower stairs. The sweep of the greensward from the Mall up to Memorial Circle and the Lincoln Memorial by means of grassy terraces is a defining feature of the historic landscape plan. The Executive Director does not recommend approval of the retaining walls.

Instead, Option 4 was developed on July 6, 2005. Staff suggested to the National Park Service the extension of the bollard line (proposed for the center stairs) across the fronts of the grass terraces as well. This proposal was discussed at length at the site visit on July 6; NPS will design the option and present it to the Commission at a future meeting. The Commission of Fine Arts will consider it at its July 21 meeting. Although a longer bollard line at the base of the lower stairs is created in Option 4, the bollards would be seen against the grass terraces, which would minimize their visual impact. Further, the terraces would be seen in their entirety without alteration from the Mall level (through the bollards), thus preserving their symbolic relationship to the Mall, the stairs, and the memorial itself. A retaining wall, planters, or a cable-and-hedge system would fundamentally alter this design intent. The bollards would be installed in front of the grass terraces in non-historic concrete pavement. And, significantly, the terraces themselves and the sides of the lower stairs would not require alteration.

Barrier Line Across Memorial Circle

Staff continues to believe that the bollards crossing the Circle at Bacon and French Drives are the most natural and logical locations for the separation of vehicles and pedestrians, and this is the location proposed by NPS on July 6 as Option 4. Staff acknowledges that this location creates longer barrier segments around the outer edge of the Circle, but notes that these segments are not in the primary axial vista from the top of the memorial and are far enough to the north and south

to reduce their impact from the plaza. NPS has proposed that these segments consist of bollards at the current curb location (and the DC SHPO has endorsed the use of bollards), but further design development is needed so that the visual effect can be assessed.

The extension of the retaining wall around the circle beyond Bacon and French Drives to the rear of the access ramps is unnecessary for security reasons and creates a difficult construction detail at the transition between the wall and the ramps. Staff therefore supports the proposal made by NPS on July 6 (Option 4) to terminate the wall currently under construction at a point east of Bacon and French but before reaching the access ramps. The Commission approved (for final site and building plans, at its February 2004 meeting) a design for the terminus of the wall. NPS requests that this approved design be integrated in Option 4, since the bollard lines would once more be located at Bacon and French Drives.

The pavement pattern has been the subject of some discussion. There appears to be consensus among the agency staffs for a radial layout around the eastern portion of the circle with an orthogonal pattern in front of the memorial. The orthogonal layout of 4-foot by 4-foot pavers is not only easier to achieve against the straight line of the inner curb, but it would subtly mark the east-west axis of the Mall. Again, this layout requires detailed design study.

Staff recommends that NPS focus on the design of the bollard prior to its next submission to the Commission. This subject has not yet been adequately discussed among the agencies and interested consulting parties.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The following are the applicable policies in the *Preservation and Historic Features Element* of the Comprehensive Plan:

National Capital Image

1. Express the dignity befitting the image of the federal government in the national capital.
5. Protect and enhance the vistas and views, both natural and designed, that are an integral part of the national capital's image.

Stewardship of Historic Properties

5. Identify and protect both the significant historic design integrity and the use of historic landscapes and open spaces.

The Historic Plan of Washington, DC

2. Promote continuity in the historic design framework of the nation's capital by protecting and enhancing the elements, views, and principles of the L'Enfant Plan.

5. Protect the reservations that contain historic landscapes and features from incompatible changes or incursions.

Federal Capital Improvements Plan

NPS submitted a budget estimate of \$6.3 million for a vehicular barrier system around the perimeter of the Lincoln Memorial in spring 2002 for FY 2003.

National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

The proposed security barrier for the Lincoln Memorial in the *Urban Design and Security Plan* indicates a retaining wall around the north, west, and south sides of the inner edge of Lincoln Memorial Circle. It also proposes a barrier line on the east side that is similar to the current "Option 3" scheme recommended by staff. The major change is in the use of a cable and hedge long the lower stair and the continuation of the retaining wall around the circle.

National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)

The current submission, as a concept design proposal, does not require the Commission to complete its NEPA determination at this stage of project review. NPS will act as the lead federal agency for any environmental review and will update its previous environmental conclusions regarding the action. NPS should respond to any substantive comments on the environmental effects of the proposal prior to submission of the preliminary phase of the project for Commission review.

Staffs emphasizes that NPS must determine the findings of its environmental review and develop a conclusion and mitigation of any adverse impacts from the revised design plan.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

Architecture, landscape, topography, and location combine to create the Lincoln Memorial as the western terminus of the National Mall and the centerpiece of West Potomac Park. The memorial and its setting are of high historic significance and designed to be seen and experienced as a whole, creating a symbolic and commemorative landscape setting for the Lincoln Memorial within the spacious precinct of West Potomac Park and the Mall itself, and extending westward across the Memorial Bridge to Arlington National Cemetery.

The memorial itself, the circle, and the series of steps and turf and stone terraces leading to the memorial from the level of the Mall at the Reflecting Pool form a significant historic designed landscape that deliberately evokes through calibrated levels of ascendance a reverence for Lincoln as the savior of the Union. In addition, however, the site is heavily visited and over the years the Park Service has incorporated alterations for handicapped accessibility, visitor services, and construction for temporary events. Lincoln Circle used to be a true traffic circle, and even though the eastern portion has been closed to general traffic since 1976, the rest of the circle continues to serve as a commuter route for traffic entering and leaving the District of Columbia via Memorial Bridge.

NPS initiated consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) and with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) on July 1, 2002, determining that the proposed security alterations and the loss of the roadway in the eastern portion of the traffic circle would have an adverse effect on the National Register qualities of the Lincoln Memorial. The consultation has included both of the above agencies, as well as NCPC staff and public groups and individuals such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Committee of 100, the National Coalition to Save Our Mall, and the ANC representative.

NPS executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on October 31, 2004 with the DC SHPO and the ACHP. All the parties have been operating under the MOA in the ongoing consideration of a barrier line for the east side of the Lincoln Memorial. The MOA stipulates that the bollard line “be placed at the outer edge of the plaza and circle on the east side of the Memorial.”

Consultation on the east side security measures resumed in October 2004 after a hiatus of ten months. NPS held the most recent meeting with all the parties on March 24, 2005, and a further meeting with agency staffs on June 14, 2005. NCPC staff convened a meeting of the agency staffs on June 23 and met with NPS on June 24, 2005. Subsequently the July 6 site meeting was organized by NPS. NPS will need to continue consultation with the other parties as well as the agencies as the design is refined.

The DC SHPO has informed NPS that it can proceed with consultation to consider an alternative scheme under a provision of the MOA. *See the attached June 3, 2005 letter.*

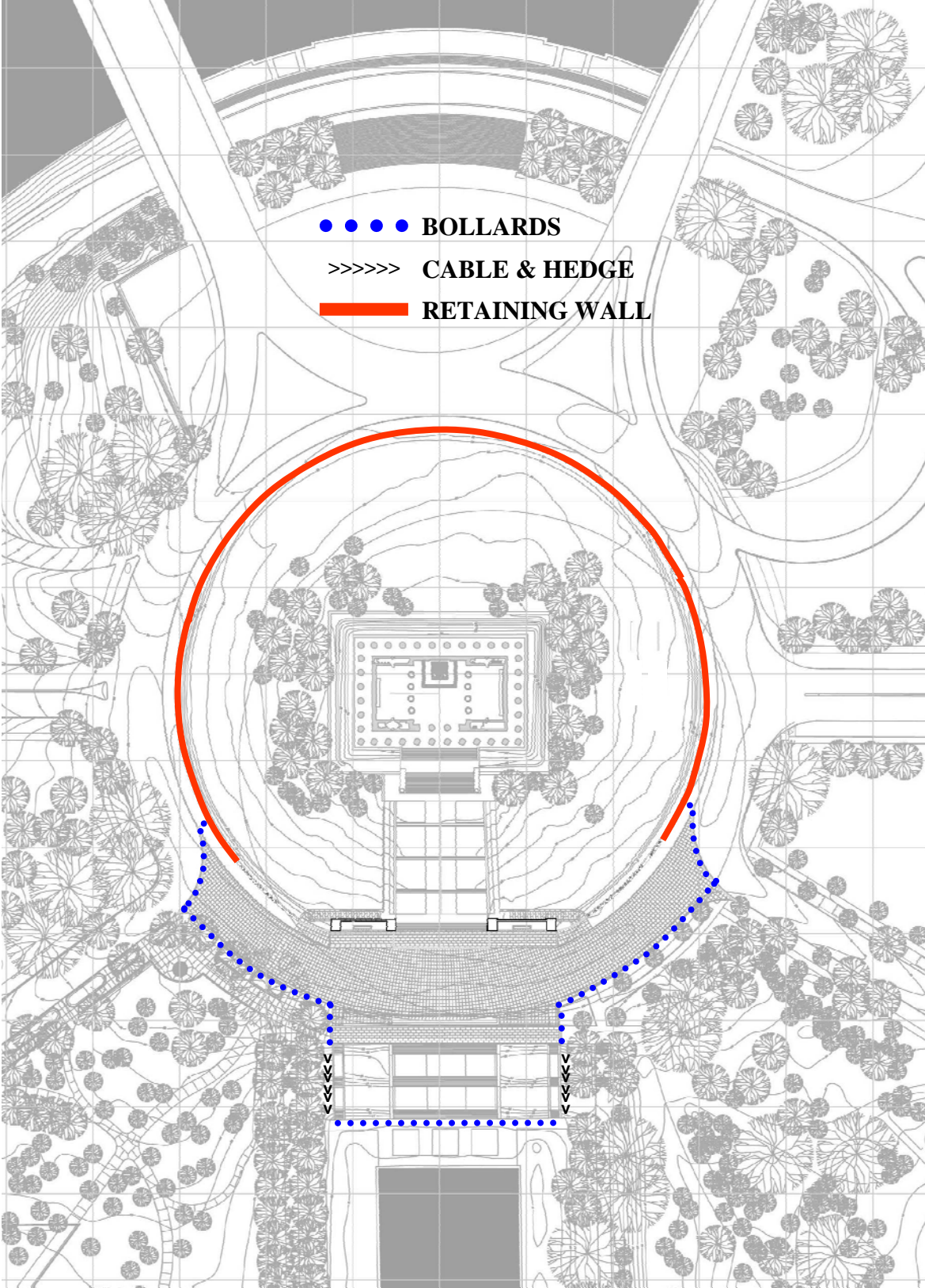
CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee has reviewed various iterations on this project on different occasions since June 2002, most recently on February 9, 2005. The project was coordinated with all agencies represented.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission’s June 17, 2005 letter in response to its deliberations at its June 16, 2005 meeting is attached. The commission endorsed the lower stair location and the use of a hedge along the stairs. The commission approved a scheme with retaining walls at the base of the grass terraces. *The letter is attached.*



OPTION 4



2002 “LANDSCAPE” SCHEME SIMULATION