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Commission Votes on Smithsonian's Mall-Wide Security Plan

Members Also Receive Briefing on Potential Design Plans for K Street

Washington, DC – At its monthly public meeting today, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) will vote on preliminary security design plans for nine Smithsonian museums located on the National Mall. The Commission will also hear an informational presentation on potential design scenarios for the K Street corridor, which is home to many of Washington’s prominent businesses, restaurants, and shops.

The Smithsonian’s proposed security plan features a variety of landscape elements and site amenities to replace the temporary security measures that are currently in place. The Smithsonian’s proposal includes cast bronze posts, decorative metal fence panels, free-standing low walls, fixed and retractable bollards, custom-designed benches, and custom-designed guard booths.

The project site encompasses the portion of the National Mall between Constitution Avenue, NW and Independence Avenue, SW and 7th and 14th Streets (NW and SW) and includes nine facilities: the National Museum of American History, the National Museum of Natural History, the Smithsonian Castle, the S. Dillion Ripley Center, the Freer Gallery of Art, the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of Art, the Museum of African Art, the Arts and Industries Building, and the Hirshhorn Museum.

NCPC approved the concept design for the Smithsonian’s Mall-wide plan in February 2004. Since that time, the Smithsonian design team has refined the design and further developed site details and security elements. NCPC staff is recommending that the Commission today approve the Smithsonian’s preliminary plans to install perimeter security.

“The preliminary design meets the overall intent of the Commission’s National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan,” said NCPC Executive Director Patricia Gallagher. “While some modifications are necessary, the overall preliminary design is creative, thoughtful, and well executed, and substantially meets the goals of our plan.”

The proposal accomplishes consistency with the plan by incorporating building perimeter security into existing site features to the maximum extent possible, minimizing the placement of barriers in the public realm, and incorporating security into well designed landscape features and site amenities in a manner that enhances the public realm, rather than placing foreign and redundant objects in the landscape and streetscape.

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The Smithsonian's submission is also consistent with NCPC's Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements, in particular the Federal Facilities and the Visitors Elements. The design balances security requirements with visitor accessibility and integrates security into the existing landscape, thus preserving the natural landscape wherever possible.

Development of the Smithsonian's plan has proceeded with considerable input from numerous stakeholders within the Smithsonian Institution, the Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the National Park Service. The Smithsonian Institution has also coordinated with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the District Department of Transportation, and the District of Columbia Fire Department.

Of the remaining Smithsonian Institution buildings, the National Museum of the American Indian obtained final approval for perimeter security from the Commission in July 2003 and the National Air and Space Museum obtained preliminary and final approval from the Commission in September 2004.

Also at today's meeting, the Commission will hear an informational presentation on potential design scenarios for the K Street corridor. The chair of the K Street Urban Design Charrette—a panel of experts convened in July by NCPC and the Downtown D.C. Business Improvement District—will release the team's official report today and brief the Commission on their findings.

The charrette team, comprising design and transportation experts from around the country, met for three days in July to examine possible design solutions for K Street. Although a major street in Washington and an important east-west thoroughfare, K Street suffers from serious traffic congestion and a lack of amenities appropriate for such a major transit corridor. The numerous connections, bus routes, and stops can be confusing to those not accustomed to using them and despite its prominence as home to many of Washington's best known businesses, restaurants, and shops, the street does not evoke a strong presence appropriate for its importance to the city.

After attending briefing sessions, taking walking and driving tours of the street, and meeting with K Street stakeholders, the panel is prescribing a bus-only transitway bordered by two tree-lined medians down the middle of K Street from 11th to 21st Streets. In addition, the panel recommends creating two traffic-oriented lanes in each direction on either side of the transitway, widening the sidewalks, planting trees on the sidewalks, and eliminating the existing medians, service lanes, and on-street parking. The team determined that K Street should be a great street, a green boulevard, a transit corridor, a civic place, and a prominent address.

"K Street presents a very important opportunity for the city of Washington, D.C.," said panel chair Philip Enquist. "An opportunity to create a true main street for this area of the city. Our vision for K Street presents a bold, green, and transit-oriented plan. It is a balanced view but a bold concept with a clear vision and a community focus."

Overall panel recommendations include the following:

- Create a 24-foot-wide transitway in the middle of the street that would initially provide dedicated lanes for buses, including the new Downtown Circulator, but could later be converted to light rail.
- Develop 15-foot-wide medians on either side of the transitway that would be landscaped with trees, providing a green canopy down the center of the street and a secure waiting area for transit passengers.
- Provide two lanes of one-way traffic in 22-foot-wide sections on either side of the medians, and next to the sidewalks.
- Eliminate existing service lanes, side islands, and on-street parking. Current alley uses and delivery functions would be transitioned to side streets.
- Widen sidewalks on both sides of the street to 25 feet, allowing for a row of trees on both sides, and more room for pedestrians and other activities, such as sidewalk cafes.

“This concept enhances the pedestrian environment. Right now the sidewalks are too narrow to provide an effective buffer. Widening them provides the opportunity to expand restaurants and shops and add amenities such as trees, shade, and sidewalk seating,” stated panel member Don Miles with the Zimmer, Gunsul, and Frasca Partnership.

At the request of the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), NCPC and the Downtown BID convened the charrette panel to review the findings of DDOT’s K Street Transitway Study. The charrette panel’s recommendations will now be considered by the District Department of Transportation during its K Street redesign planning.

The charrette panel included the following design and transportation experts:

Philip Enquist - Panel Chair, Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill (Chicago)
Linda Fuller - Chicago Transit Authority (Chicago)
Lou Slade - Gorove/Slade Associates, Inc. (Washington, D.C.)
Alistair McIntosh - Sasaki Associates, Inc. (Boston)
Don Miles - Zimmer, Gunsul, and Frasca Partnership (Seattle)
Theodore Wolff - Wolff Clements & Associates (Chicago)

The National Capital Planning Commission is the federal government’s central 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 projects and memorials, oversees long-range planning for future development, and monitors capital investment by federal agencies.

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