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Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, awards \$4.6 million contract to help protect National Mall from river flooding

BALTIMORE -- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, awarded a \$4.6 million contract Sept. 16 to construct an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act-funded levee closure across 17th Street N.W. just south of Constitution Avenue N.W. to help protect downtown Washington, D.C., and the National Mall from river flooding.

Hirani Engineering & Land Surveying, P.C. of Jericho, N.Y., was awarded the contract and is scheduled to begin work in October 2010 and to complete work in summer 2011.

The contract award follows an unprecedented collaboration among federal and District agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service, the National Capital Planning Commission, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and District of Columbia agencies.

The existing levee, which runs parallel to the Lincoln Reflecting Pool, has been in place since the late 1930s, as have the emergency procedures for closing 17th Street,



N.W., between the levee and the Washington Monument. These procedures involve bringing in “Jersey barriers” and sand bags, as well as removing soil from the Washington Monument grounds to build a temporary earthen levee. They are labor intensive and not completely reliable. Post-Katrina federal standards require a more reliable levee system be in place.



The improved levee will consist of a removable post-and-panel barrier system connected to permanent masonry walls and earthen berms designed to seamlessly blend with the setting of the National Mall.

Without upgrades to its system of temporary closures, major federal and private sector offices, cultural institutions, and critical infrastructure in the downtown core are at risk of flooding. In addition, much of Washington’s downtown and monumental core would lie within the 100-year floodplain, according to proposed flood maps issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 2007.

"The Baltimore District is proud to be part of this important project. It will benefit both the citizens of Washington, D.C., and the millions of annual visitors to the National Mall. We are eager to get started," said Col. Dave Anderson, Commander and District Engineer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District.

The National Capital Planning Commission took the lead in coordinating the various agencies. The National Park Service contributed funding to complete the NEPA and NHPA

compliance and initiate the project design, and will provide an additional \$1 million for finishes, surface treatments, and landscaping to complete the project. The District of Columbia Government managed the design process and provided the funding for the design phase of the project. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided technical guidance and secured ARRA funding to complete the design and fund the construction of the project. The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the DC Historic Preservation Office and FEMA provided technical guidance vital to the success of the project.

“Completion of this important flood protection project is a critical step in ensuring that significant portions of downtown Washington are protected against river flooding and are not identified on FEMA maps as flood plains,” said National Capital Planning Commission Executive Director Marcel Acosta.



Compounding the complexity of this project is the levee’s location on the National Mall, America’s front yard. Due to the significance of the structures at risk, as well as the significance of the landscape itself into which a new flood control structure needs to be inserted, numerous agencies worked together and contributed critical resources.

“The levee’s location on the National Mall required extensive review and collaboration among partnering stakeholders to be sure the design meets both engineering requirements and is appropriate for one of the nation’s most important historic landscapes,” said Harriet Tregoning, director of the DC Office of Planning. “At the same time, this structure provides essential flood protection to local property owners as well as iconic federal buildings and institutions. This is a great example of local and federal cooperation.”

The curvilinear design of the levee and the reconfiguration of what were once diagonal walkways on the west side of 17th Street will better integrate the levee into the existing topography.

“The levee was sited very carefully in order to minimize the visual effects on the National Mall,” said Peggy O’Dell, regional director, National Capital Region, National Park Service. “It will also forge a new relationship between two adjacent, but previously disconnected, cultural landscapes – Constitution Gardens and the Washington Monument Grounds – and will preserve important views along 17th Street N.W. and of the Washington Monument Grounds from Virginia Avenue, N.W., one of the main diagonal avenues conceived in the L’Enfant Plan.”



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