

MEDIA RELEASE



401 9th Street, NW
North Lobby, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20004
Tel: 202 482-7200
Fax: 202 482-7272
www.ncpc.gov

For Immediate Release
Thursday, September 04, 2003

Lisa MacSpadden
202-482-7263 or lisa@ncpc.gov

Commission Approves Final Design for Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House

Approval clears the way for construction to begin on America's Avenue for the People

Washington, DC – The National Capital Planning Commission today gave unanimous approval to final plans to redesign the stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. The plan will rid the famous street of the ad hoc security barriers currently scattered on Pennsylvania Avenue and on Jackson and Madison Places, and will improve the quality of President's Park. The design, created by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, also received unanimous approval by the Commission at the concept and preliminary stages earlier this year.

The 12-member Commission reviewed final site and building plans addressing the security components, landscape design, site furnishings, and pedestrian and vehicular circulation. Critical elements include new paving materials and tree planting within the civic space; new security booths; a combination of retractable, removable, and fixed bollards; and a route for a planned transit system. The project is intended to create a beautiful civic space worthy of one of America's most visited tourist destinations.

Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House has been closed to vehicular traffic and cluttered with temporary security barriers ranging from large concrete planter pots to jersey barriers and makeshift guard huts since the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. Prior to September 11, NCPC's Interagency Security Task Force examined the feasibility of reopening the Avenue, but following the deadly terrorist attack, the task force concluded the street should stay closed for the foreseeable future due to legitimate security concerns.

“This plan allows us to breathe new life into America's Main Street,” said Commission Chairman John Cogbill. “Throughout history Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House has been a gathering place for Americans, whether to celebrate the end of a world war, to watch a presidential inaugural, or simply to stroll in front of the White House – one of the most visible symbols of our democratic society. This project lends us an extraordinary opportunity to restore beauty and dignity to this important civic space.”

—MORE—

The project area encompasses Pennsylvania Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets, and Jackson and Madison Places adjacent to Lafayette Park. The effort, managed by the Federal Highway Administration, addresses several key criteria, including satisfying existing security requirements; reflecting a clear memory of the Avenue's historic use; accommodating a Downtown Circulator, a proposed transit shuttle service; staging of the Inaugural Parade; and allowing for the future reopening of the street to vehicular traffic.

In approving the project, the Commission requested that samples of the following paving materials be submitted for review and approval prior to construction:

- The granite that will define the curb's edge of the southern gutter along the Avenue.
- The aggregate pavement to be used on the center portion of the Avenue and on Jackson and Madison Places.
- The pavement for use on the expanded sidewalks on Jackson and Madison Places.

"Pennsylvania Avenue has been a national disgrace for the past eight years and it is the most complex urban planning problem I have seen in my 40 years of professional practice," said Richard Friedman, Chairman of NCPC's Security Task Force. "It took enormous dedication and consultation among some extremely diverse constituencies to build consensus, and I am pleased that America's Main Street will once again be worthy of this great nation."

District of Columbia Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton called the plan a good step in the right direction. "This design represents an important step toward the future reopening of Pennsylvania Avenue because it is reversible and allows access by the Downtown Circulator," said Congresswoman Norton. "This Avenue belongs to the people and I support a plan that will make it once again usable for the residents of the District and for citizens of our country."

Congress has already allocated \$11.1 million for the planning and design, for the initiation of construction, and for transportation studies to address the feasibility of a tunnel and to address other traffic problems resulting from street closures in the immediate vicinity of the White House. The President's 2004 Budget also includes \$15 million for construction of improvements. The Federal Highway Administration will manage the construction effort, scheduled to begin in January 2004 and draw to a finish in October 2004 – in time to begin preparation for the 2005 Inaugural Parade.

The plan to redo this stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue is one of the first projects being undertaken in conjunction with the Commission's National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan. The plan addresses the alarming proliferation of makeshift security measures that have cropped up throughout Washington's Monumental Core in recent years.

The plan proposes a variety of security measures to balance the need for security with the preservation of Washington's historic streets and landscapes. The plan is the result of a wide-reaching collaboration of numerous federal and city government agencies, the professional planning and urban design community and the public.

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.

Final Design for Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House

Project Details

Paving. To help unify Lafayette Park with the White House, a more natural looking paving material is proposed for the central portion of Pennsylvania Avenue and Jackson and Madison Places. The eastern and western ends of Pennsylvania Avenue will be paved with 2-foot x 5-foot granite slabs in the cartway and 4-foot x 10-foot granite slabs within the sidewalk area. The 4-foot x 10-foot granite slabs will continue along the length of the south sidewalk in front of the White House. A mix of gray- and pink-toned granites is proposed.

Lighting. All of the existing light fixtures along the length of Pennsylvania Avenue will be replaced with new Washington D.C. twin-headed lamps originally designed by Henry Bacon in 1923. They will be painted light gray-green to match their original color.

Tree Planting. A new planting scheme of American Elms spaced approximately 30 feet on center is proposed along the length of Pennsylvania Avenue. The trees, when planted, will be approximately 22 to 24 feet tall and 6 to 8 inches in caliper. The proposed planting scheme of more than 85 trees will consist of: a single row of street trees along the north and south curbs of Pennsylvania Avenue between Jackson and Madison Places; a double row of trees along the south curb of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building (EEOB) and the Treasury Department; and a single row of trees along a portion of the north curb line of the Avenue west of Jackson Place and east of Madison Place.

Benches. A series of slender granite benches, of the same granite as the paving, are proposed to be placed along the southern tier of trees within the bosques in front of the EEOB and the Treasury Department.

Booths. Security booths and a "sally port" (a secure area formed by two lines of bollards) are proposed to secure each of four entry points.

The “sally port” improves security and prevents tailgating vehicles to gain access. The security booths at each checkpoint are proposed to be the same design, with base dimensions of approximately 9 feet by 12 feet. The design of the booth reflects the classical architecture found along the Avenue, yet it is more modern in style because the proportion of glass to stone and metal is more contemporary, and the lines and detailing are clean and simple. The booths will have a granite base, cast iron columns painted to match the Henry Bacon light standards, and a lead-coated copper roof. With limited exceptions, vehicular access will be accommodated at checkpoints at Jackson and Madison Places. Checkpoints on Pennsylvania Avenue will be limited to pre-screened or cleared motorcades, emergency vehicles, and the Downtown Circulator.

Pennsylvania Avenue Bollards. Newly designed and simple fluted, 36-inch bollards, painted to match the light poles are proposed on Pennsylvania Avenue at 15th and 17th Streets. A similar design will be used for the retractable bollard. The bollard will provide continuity, allow for free pedestrian movement, maintain a visually open environment, and respect the character of the street. Removable bollards will allow for the Inaugural Parade.

Jackson and Madison Places Bollards. The bollards that form the “sally ports” at Jackson and Madison Places will match the existing 42-inch-high Presidential bollard in shape and color and will tie into the existing bollard lines in Lafayette Park. The same retractable bollard design as used on Pennsylvania Avenue will be used in these locations as well; however, they will be painted the same dark color as the Presidential bollard.

Removal of Existing Bollards. The large, pre-cast concrete bollards located along the curb line in front of the White House, and the concrete masonry bollards at the northern terminus of Jackson and Madison Places will be removed as part of the proposed design. The thin, black steel bollards at the south terminus of Jackson Place can be removed as needed during preparation for the Inaugural Parade.

Lafayette Park. Lafayette Park will not be disturbed, except for the southern sidewalk and those locations necessary to tie into the existing bollard line at Jackson and Madison Places. The brick and granite curbs along the south sidewalk of Lafayette Park will be removed and stockpiled to re-grade and plant new trees and then will be reinstalled.

Reversibility. The plan is simple and flexible and can be easily retrofitted to accommodate a vehicular thoroughfare, or modified to accommodate larger public gatherings. If and when the security threat changes or technologies improve to remove vehicular restrictions, only the security booths and bollards will need to be removed. All landscape planting, lighting, and benches are located outside of the 84-foot right-of-way and therefore would not be disturbed or negatively impacted by any change in roadway use.

Pedestrian Activity. Removing the large bollards from the sidewalk in front of the White House, and removing the numerous planter pots and small trees from the cartway will significantly improve pedestrian access. The area in front of the White House is flexible and will accommodate various public gatherings. While the entire Avenue can accommodate free movement of pedestrians, the openness of the area in front of the White House, between Jackson and Madison Places, creates a grand and dignified memorial place to view the office and home of the President, and conduct appropriate public activities.

Downtown Circulator. Multiple routes for the proposed Downtown Circulator are accommodated without detracting from the pedestrian character of the Avenue. The Circulator could traverse the Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets, either via a direct route along Pennsylvania Avenue, or an alternative route south on Jackson Place, east along Pennsylvania Avenue, and north on Madison Place. The Circulator, a supplement to the downtown transit system, is an important component to re-establish limited cross-town connectivity.

Ceremonial Events. The proposed design accommodates the Inaugural Parade and other ceremonial events including official functions of the White House and Blair House.

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.

###