

MEDIA RELEASE



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Commission Reviews Designs for Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House, the Washington Monument, and the Pentagon Memorial Honoring 9-11 Victims

Washington, DC – The National Capital Planning Commission today gave preliminary approval to a plan to give a facelift to Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. The Commission also gave final site approval for the landscape plan for the Washington Monument Grounds, and gave concept approval to a memorial design honoring those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001 at the Pentagon.

“The proposals that the Commission has before it today are the kind of important projects that will define the face and character of the nation's capital in the 21st century,” said NCPC Chairman John Cogbill. “The Commission and its staff have been extraordinarily thorough in their analysis and review. We are acutely aware of our stewardship responsibilities and recognize that the decisions we make today shape the legacy we leave to future generations of Americans.” The 12-member Commission reviewed an updated version of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates’ Pennsylvania Avenue design to create a beautiful civic space worthy of America’s Main Street. The plan addresses security components, landscape treatment, site furnishings, and pedestrian and vehicular circulation. Commissioners reviewed the preliminary or second stage of design – concept approval was previously given in March.

Starting with the Oklahoma City bombing, the stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House has been closed to vehicular traffic and scattered with ad-hoc security barriers ranging from large concrete planter pots to jersey barriers and guard huts. The Van Valkenburgh design will remove all of the makeshift security measures and leave in their place new paving materials and tree planting within the civic space; a route for a planned transit system; a combination of retractable, removable, and fixed bollards; and new security booths.

The plan includes a new bollard, designed specifically for use on Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House. The bollard has a simple fluted surface, an oval cross-section, and is a light gray-green color. It reflects the classical character of the monumental building facing the Avenue. The pre-cast bollards along the sidewalk in front of the White House will be removed and a line of American elms that used to be in this location will be restored.

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Large American elms will also be planted along the Avenue at the entry thresholds. The Avenue and Jackson and Madison Places will be paved with granite, and a durable, stabilized pavement with an aggregate stone finish with a range of gray, brown and pink tones.

“The Van Valkenburgh design will give this important civic space the dignity it deserves,” said chairman of the Interagency Security Task Force, Richard Friedman. “In place of the unsightly and appalling security elements that currently exist, Americans and visitors from around the world will be able to view this famous stretch of Avenue as it should be – a beautiful and dignified place for viewing the White House grounds.”

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, which are expected to be completed in time for the 2005 Inaugural Parade.

The Commission today also reviewed the final site development plans for the landscape plan for the Washington Monument Grounds. The National Park Service received preliminary approval from the Commission in January. This month’s submission includes construction details for the retaining walls and paths, the tree planting and grading plans, and improvements to the plaza.

Plan elements include:

- Retaining walls, 30 inches in height, will serve as vehicle barriers .
- Existing path locations will be adjusted and some new paths will be constructed in dark gray exposed aggregate concrete, and all will be fully accessible to the handicapped .
- Eight curved, backless benches of white granite will be installed at the outer edge of the plaza .
- Approximately 800 shade and flowering trees will be planted to augment the 400 or so trees already on the grounds.
- New lighting will include recessed uplights in the plaza to illuminate the base of the monument; high intensity floodlights to illuminate the monument shaft and peak; and low profile, low wattage lights will wash the paths with dim light.

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“The proposed landscape plan will create a welcoming and inviting environment,” said Executive Director Patti Gallagher. “Laurie Olin’s design will integrate the necessary security measures, without being overly intrusive, and will help preserve the site as an open space for the enjoyment of the millions of visitors the Monument sees in any given year. I have recommended that the Commission endorse the landscape plan and grant the Park Service final site approval for this aspect of the project.”

In April of this year, the Commission gave preliminary approval for the lodge addition and skylight, and last year it gave concept approval for the below-grade visitors’ facility and concourse to the monument. Plans for the Washington Monument, as well as for Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House are among the first projects being undertaken in conjunction with the Commission’s National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan. The plan proposes a variety of security measures to balance the need for security with good urban design in Washington’s Monumental Core.

A third high profile project also voted on today by the Commission is the Pentagon Memorial to the victims of September 11, 2001. The Commission voted in favor of granting concept approval to the chosen design. Family members of the victims helped select the plan, which features 184 memorial units (cantilevered benches), a perimeter bench, and memorial gateway. The Memorial will be built on the grounds of the Pentagon.

The site of the memorial encompasses 1.93 acres and is located roughly 165 feet from the face of the Pentagon. 184 benches will be placed in the park, each dedicated to a victim lost on September 11, ranging in age from a 3 year old to a 71 year old. A perimeter bench will be placed on the eastern edge of the park and trees will be clustered around each memorial unit.

In approving the plan, the Commission encouraged the Department of Defense to include the following information when it returns for preliminary and final approval:

- Submit a plan showing pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation around and to the memorial site.
- Include details on parking, hours of operation, and access during times of increased security .
- A design for the memorial gateway that won’t overwhelm or infringe on the memorial.

The Department of Defense is expected to award the design-build contract in early summer and construction is expected to be complete by the fall of 2004.

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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