

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, October 06, 2005

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

National Capital Planning Commission Reviews Memorial to Victims of Communism, Vietnam Veterans Visitor Center, Lincoln Memorial, and Proposed National Museum of African American History and Culture

Washington, DC – At its monthly public meeting today, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) reviewed three memorial projects submitted by the National Park Service (NPS). First on the agenda was a preliminary site plan for a new international memorial that will honor the memory of the more than 100 million victims of communism worldwide.

The Victims of Communism Memorial will be located in northwest Washington, D.C. on a nearly 3500-square-foot triangular site situated at the intersection of Massachusetts and New Jersey Avenues. The location, approved by the Commission in April, provides a direct view to the U.S. Capitol and is one of 100 memorial or museum sites proposed in NCPC's 2001 Memorials and Museums Master Plan.

The preliminary site plan, which the Commission unanimously approved today, features a 900-square-foot paved plaza with a 10-foot-high sculpture atop a stone pedestal. The sculpture, a bronze female figure, is modeled after the "Goddess of Democracy" statue built in Beijing's Tieneman Square in 1989 by pro-democracy students. The statue will stand in front of a low curved granite seating area, and three ornamental trees, located southeast of the statue, will provide a shady grove for visitors. The unpaved portion of the site will remain a green space.

"We are very pleased that our Memorials and Museums Master Plan proved to be a valuable resource in identifying an appropriate site for this memorial," said NCPC Chairman John V. Cogbill, III. "Its location, with views of the U.S. Capitol—a world-renowned symbol of democracy—is an appropriate setting in which to remember the victims of tyranny."

The Commission also reviewed the National Park Service's proposed site for a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center. The center is authorized to be built underground at or near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on federal land, under Public Law 108-126, which amended the Commemorative Works Act (CWA) in 2003. The legislation requires that applicants seek site and design approval from both the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission.

—MORE—

The CWA directs NCPC to ensure submitted works do not encroach—to the extent possible—with existing commemorative works or open space. The CWA also authorizes NCPC to develop criteria or guidelines regarding the siting, design, construction, and maintenance of a commemorative work as necessary to ensure a project's compliance with the legislation.

The National Park Service indicated the project will occupy more than 25,000 square feet on one level, and its exhibits will be designed to educate visitors about the Vietnam War and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The requested site, identified as Site A, is slightly northeast of the Lincoln Memorial on a plot of land that is currently open parkland and includes three softball fields. The Park Service's proposed design guidelines would allow an increase in the elevation at Site A of up to 18 feet and, in addition to the grade changes, would introduce building elements such as skylights and paved areas above ground.

NCPC staff recommended that the Commission disapprove the Park Service's requested site after determining that the proposed visitor center would most likely have a significant negative impact on the vistas and landscape of the Lincoln Memorial, one of our country's most visited monuments. Staff noted that elements such as skylights, paved areas, and grade changes would be clearly visible from the steps and terrace of the Lincoln Memorial.

Further, excavation and grade changes, along with the increase in traffic from pedestrians and vehicles would likely negatively affect the physical setting and visitor experience at the western end of the Mall and could damage the tree roots of historic surrounding elms. In addition, staff noted that the proposed location would likely be a detriment to the setting of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial itself, contrary to the legislative requirement to "prevent interference or encroachment upon" the memorial.

Rather than vote on the staff recommendation, the Commission first voted on a substitute motion to conditionally approve Site A and require more information on the visitor center's impact on the Lincoln and Vietnam Veterans memorials. The motion stipulated that the Commission could revoke approval if the applicant did not sufficiently demonstrate that the site's development would not adversely affect the nearby monuments. The motion failed to carry after the Commission split, with six votes in favor and six opposed.

The Commission then reached a further impasse when it split on a second motion to carry the staff recommendation to disapprove Site A and request further analysis of other potential sites. A third motion unanimously passed that requires that the Park Service evaluate the building yard that lies between the Interior South Building and Constitution Avenue as a potential site; reconsider Site G, located at 23rd Street and Constitution Avenue across from Site A; and provide information on the center's proposed program. The Commission also allowed for the Park Service to evaluate any other sites it wished to consider.

“It is our responsibility under the Commemorative Works Act to ensure that the proposed visitor center does not adversely impact the National Mall or its existing memorials,” said NCPC Executive Director Patricia Gallagher. “We are confident that the National Park Service can identify a site that addresses the needs of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, while respecting the integrity of the National Mall.”

In a third memorial project submitted by the Park Service, the Commission reviewed development plans for the location and design of a vehicle security barrier on the east (National Mall) side of the Lincoln Memorial. The plans include a bollard line that crosses Memorial Circle near its intersection with French and Bacon Drives, descends the outer sides of the memorial’s lower stairs inside four-foot-high hedges, and then continues across the memorial’s lower stairs in front of the Reflecting Pool.

The Park Service requested final plan approval. The Commission, however, was unable to give final approval at this time because NPS has not concluded consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, as required under the terms of a memorandum of agreement. Therefore, the Commission approved preliminary plans and required that the NPS provide actual examples of the proposed security elements on site, prior to returning for final approval.

The proposed security solution for the Lincoln Memorial is based on a design by landscape architect Laurie Olin, first proposed in NCPC’s 2002 National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan. Changes from the original idea include relocating the barrier line and using different security elements including bollards and hedges. The submission is part of a larger Lincoln Memorial project previously approved by the Commission that includes roadway and sidewalk reconstruction and the addition of two concession buildings.

After reviewing project proposals, Commission members heard an informational presentation on the proposed National Museum of African American History and Culture. Public Law 108-184, which authorizes the museum, directs the Smithsonian’s Board of Regents to consult with the chairman of NCPC in selecting a location for the museum.

The Smithsonian Institution is considering four sites for the proposed facility:

- The Arts and Industries Building located on the National Mall between the Smithsonian Castle and the Hirshhorn Museum;
- The Washington Monument site bounded by Constitution Avenue, Madison Drive, and 14th and 15th Streets, NW;

—MORE—

- The Liberty Loan site at 14th Street, SW at the base of the 14th Street Bridge; and
- The Banneker Overlook site, adjacent to the Southwest Waterfront at 10th Street, SW at the base of the L'Enfant Plaza promenade.

The Smithsonian Institution also plans to present its findings to the Commission of Fine Arts before forwarding its analysis to the Smithsonian Board of Regents. It will also forward NCPC Chairman Cogbill's input on its site analysis to the Regents for consideration. The Board of Regents is expected to make public its site selection in early 2006.

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.

###