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Commission Comments on Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center and Gives Preliminary Approval to Second Phase of National Mall Sign Program *Commission also hears findings of Greater Washington 2050 Coalition survey of area residents*

Washington, DC – At its June meeting today the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) commented on revised concept designs submitted by the National Park Service (NPS) for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center. The Center will be located underground on the Lincoln Memorial grounds across Henry Bacon Drive from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Congress authorized a Visitor Center to educate the public about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Vietnam War.

The project is required to meet 14 specific design guidelines jointly developed by NCPC and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts to comply with the Commemorative Works Act requirement to “ensure that the proposed work shall be so located as to prevent interference with, or encroachment upon, any existing commemorative work and to protect, to the maximum extent practicable, open space and existing public use.”

These guidelines and one additional requirement also serve as mitigation for the NCPC Executive Director’s Finding of No Significant Impact for the site selection under the National Environmental Policy Act. NCPC approved the Center’s 5.2 acre site on August 3, 2006 conditioned upon these mitigation measures being met.

Today’s submission was a revised version of the concept design reviewed by NCPC in December 2007. In the submission, the applicant proposed to adjust the Center’s position on the site, raise the grade of the site, and eliminate one of the proposed skylights. The overall building size was reduced by approximately 2,850 square feet.

In its review today, the Commission acknowledged the project’s significance and the difficult challenge in designing a Visitor Center at this historically significant and sensitive site on the National Mall. They confirmed that the submitted design met seven of the 14 requirements developed by NCPC and CFA, did not meet four of the design guideline requirements, and did not address three remaining design guidelines. The Commission also noted that the National Park Service has not responded to the Executive Director’s Finding of No Significant Impact which required NPS to identify a site within a ½ mile of the current location for a displaced ball field.

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In approving the Executive Director's Recommendation, the Commission required the applicant to modify the building design to comply with the four design guidelines they failed to meet, and advised them to focus on the following revisions:

- Eliminate the walk from Constitution Avenue and associated berms so that the Center is less visible from Constitution Avenue and Henry Bacon Drive. This will also allow for more multi-recreational use on the site.
- Eliminate the skylights to minimize the Center's intrusion on the landscape and to allow for multi-recreational use on the site.
- Reduce the size of the open courtyard and the length of needed guardrails to minimize visibility from the Lincoln Memorial.

During the public comment session, a design-team architect responded to the Commission's requirements and agreed to eliminate the skylights, remove the walkway from Constitution Avenue, NW, and reduce the size of the Center's courtyard. A NPS representative acknowledged the difficulty in finding an appropriate location within a ½ mile for the displaced ball field and mentioned the possibility of relocating a field somewhere on the existing site.

The next item before the Commission at today's meeting was preliminary site development plans for new pedestrian guide pylons and map kiosks for the National Mall and East Potomac Park. As part of its wayfinding and sign program, the National Park Service proposes to replace 102 existing signs with approximately the same number of new pedestrian guide pylons and map kiosks in a coordinated design scheme.

Plans call for two different sizes of four-sided pylons with pictographs to serve as orientation and directional devices. Two different sized map kiosks with more comprehensive information will be placed at key Mall entrances. The new sign program seeks to better communicate information to a variety of audiences ranging from international visitors to children.

The Commission approved the preliminary site development plans and recommended that in preparation for its final site development submission the Park Service simplify the taller pylon by eliminating its base to reach a proposed revised height of 9 feet two inches. The Commission approved plans for the installation of NPS operational signs at its May meeting. A future review will address identification signs at memorials.

The final items on today's action agenda were two reports to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia. In the first the NCPC advised the Zoning Commission that proposed modifications to the proposed second stage Consolidated Planned Unit Development Capper/Carrollsborg Hope VI Redevelopment Project in Southeast, DC would not be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital nor would it adversely affect any other identified federal interests subject to the Zoning Commission including in its final action the conditions set forth in the June 1, 2009 letters from the Department of the Navy and Holland and Knight, and the June 4, 2009 letter from Holland and Knight.

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In the second report the Commission advised the Zoning Commission that a proposed zoning change and Consolidated Planned Unit Development for the American Institute of Architects headquarters on New York Avenue, NW would not be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital nor have an adverse impact on any other identified federal interests. The zoning change would allow for first floor retail in the building and the Consolidated Planned Unit development would allow for elements that would assist the AIA headquarters to become LEED platinum certified.

Before adjourning the Commission heard an information presentation (no action taken) from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments on findings from the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition survey, "Priorities for a Growing Region." Through four focus groups and more than 1,300 telephone interviews survey conductors aimed to develop a comprehensive study of what local residents view as regional concerns and priorities.

They learned that area residents are both engaged and connected, and that seventy –seven percent rated the Washington region as an "excellent or good" place to live. Regionalism was an important concern, especially to the 59 percent of survey participants that cross state or District boundaries at least once a week. Residents indicated that traffic/transportation, economy/jobs, and education/schools were the three most important long-term issues. Interestingly enough, when asked to rank the top priorities, transportation was not ranked as high. The top three ranked items were "higher quality public schools," "safer streets and neighborhoods," and "more good jobs."

This month's agenda also included three consent calendar items (no presentation given): plans for construction of roadway and security access improvements at Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County, Virginia; installation of 21 wireless telecommunication antennas and supporting equipment at the United States Postal Service William F. Bolger Conference Center in Potomac, Maryland; and a proposal by the District of Columbia Surveyor to amend the Plan of Permanent System of Highways to create and extend two roads in order to implement the Pollin Memorial Community Development project.

Information regarding actions taken at the Commission meeting can be accessed at www.ncpc.gov.

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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