

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 6910



NATIONAL MALL AND MEMORIAL PARKS WAYFINDING AND SIGN PROGRAM - PEDESTRIAN GUIDES AND MAP KIOSKS

National Mall and East Potomac Park
Washington, DC

Submitted by the National Park Service

May 28, 2009

Abstract

The National Park Service has submitted a proposed wayfinding and sign program for National Park Service-managed land on the National Mall and in East Potomac Park. The proposed program includes several categories of signs, including National Park Service (NPS) operational signs, orientation and wayfinding signs, and monument identification signs. The Service-wide sign program is known as the UniGuide System. The Commission approved preliminary and final site development plans for the installation of operational signs at its May 7, 2009 meeting. The current submission proposes the installation of pedestrian guide wayfinding pylons in two heights, and the replacement of the maps and bulletin boards currently on the Mall with UniGuide map kiosks in two heights. The third component of the sign program, monument identification signs, has not been submitted for review. The signs are funded through NPS's Centennial Fund with a match from the Trust for the National Mall. All alternatives in the National Mall Plan, now in progress, include a new wayfinding and sign program.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary site development plans, pursuant to § 8722(b)(1) and (d).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves preliminary site development plans for the installation of pedestrian guide wayfinding pylons in two heights, and of map kiosks in two heights, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.41(78.00)42704, as a coordinated system of providing information to visitors to the National Mall and East Potomac Park, and to the Monumental Core and adjacent areas.

Recommends, in the preparation of final site development plans, that the taller pylon form be simplified by eliminating the base and fabricated at the proposed revised height of 9’2”.

Notes:

- That the National Park Service is consulting with the District of Columbia and others on the content of the pedestrian guide wayfinding pylons and maps to provide coordinated information to visitors.
- That the Commission has previously approved the installation of operational signs on the National Mall, and that monument identification signs have not been submitted.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes the installation of pedestrian guide pylons and the replacement of map kiosks on the National Mall and in East Potomac Park.



Background

The signs currently on the Mall reflect several eras of sign design and *ad hoc* installation. National Mall and Memorial Parks was successful in being awarded NPS Centennial Funds, which have been matched by funds from the Trust for the National Mall. The National Park Service has received comments from many visitors about the need for clearer and better coordinated signage on the National Mall. An improved sign program is included in all alternatives for the National Mall Plan, currently in development.

At the May 7, 2009 meeting, the Commission approved the replacement of 327 operational signs on the Mall and in East Potomac Park with approximately 305 new signs in the Park Service's UniGuide sign system, with the condition that NPS consult with staff and the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer in determining the final placement and number of signs proposed in the vicinity of the memorials.

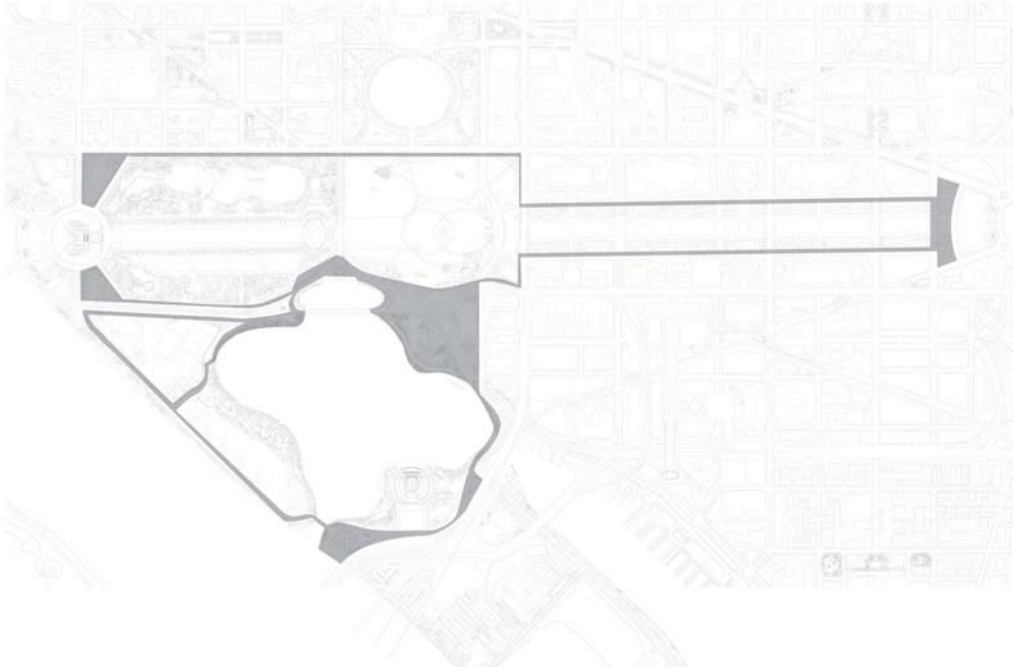
Proposal

The second proposed component of the comprehensive sign program includes wayfinding and orientation signs. Although there are currently map kiosks, bulletin boards, and directional signs on the Mall, there is no comprehensive wayfinding sign program for the Mall and East Potomac Park, an area visited by 25 million visitors annually. There are currently 102 map and directional signs on the Mall serving those purposes. NPS proposes removing them and installing approximately 113 new pedestrian guide pylons and map kiosks. The final number will be determined after further consultation with Commission staff and the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer staff in the field.

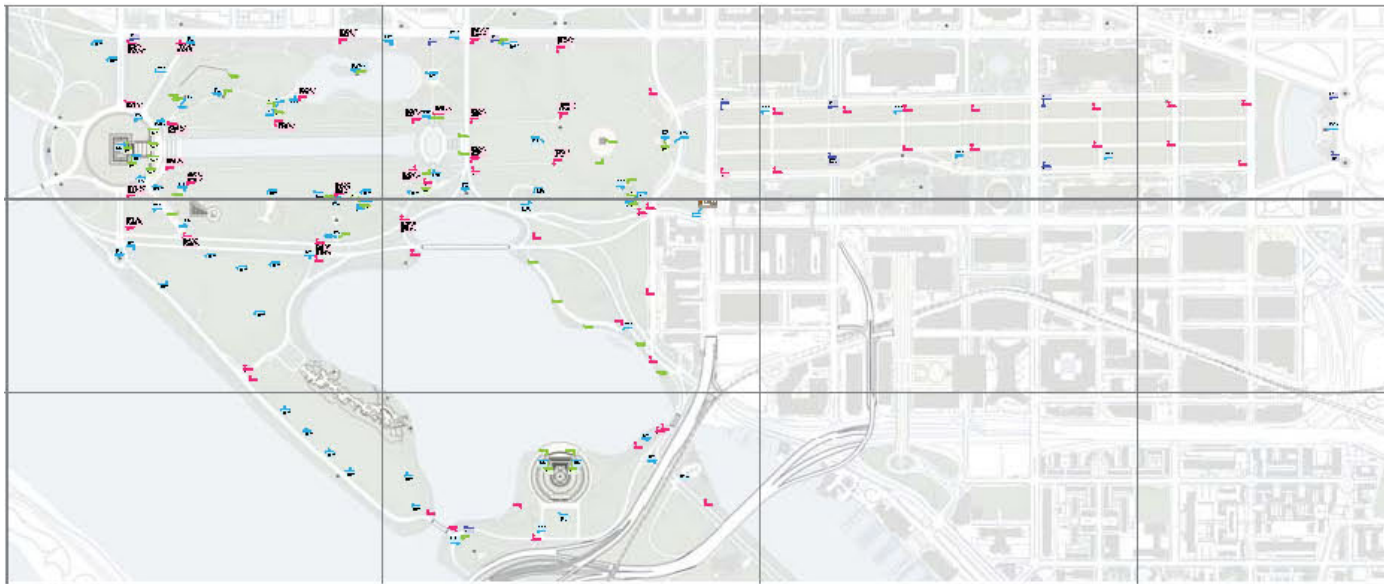
The Smithsonian Institution has installed museum identification signs as well as signs (with maps of a portion of the National Mall) that convey information about its programs, exhibits, and visitor services, but the Smithsonian Institution signs do not provide wayfinding for the National Mall. The Architect of the Capitol has installed signs that provide maps and identification of buildings in the U.S. Capitol complex. The blue District Department of Transportation (DDOT) signs found on sidewalks throughout much of the District comprise the familiar and successful wayfinding system used by residents and visitors alike.

NPS proposes installing a comprehensive wayfinding and orientation system for all the visitor attractions on the National Mall and in East Potomac Park, as well as for institutions and services near the National Mall, that will provide coordinated layers of information for visitors.

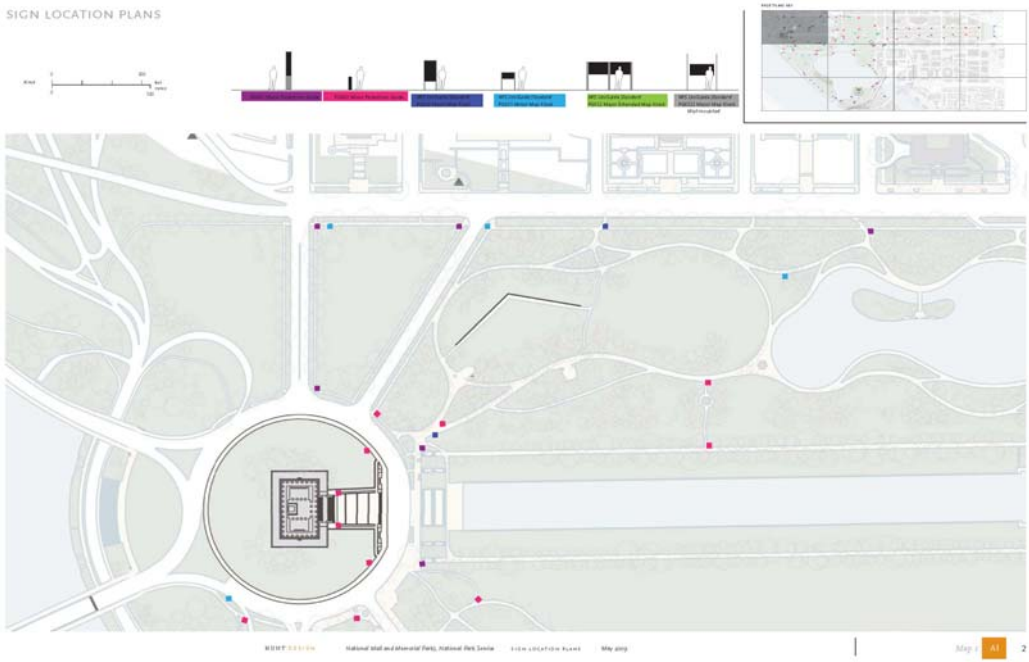
In developing the sign program, NPS determined that wayfinding and orientation are needed where few or no signs currently exist (primarily at the periphery of the Mall), as indicated in the shaded area in the illustration on page 4 of this report, and that the signs should provide clearer orientation, wayfinding, and identification throughout the National Mall and East Potomac Park. The site plans on pages 4 - 6 of the report indicate the proposed locations (prior to additional field checking with staff and others before installation) of the pedestrian guide wayfinding pylons in two heights and the map kiosks, also in two heights.



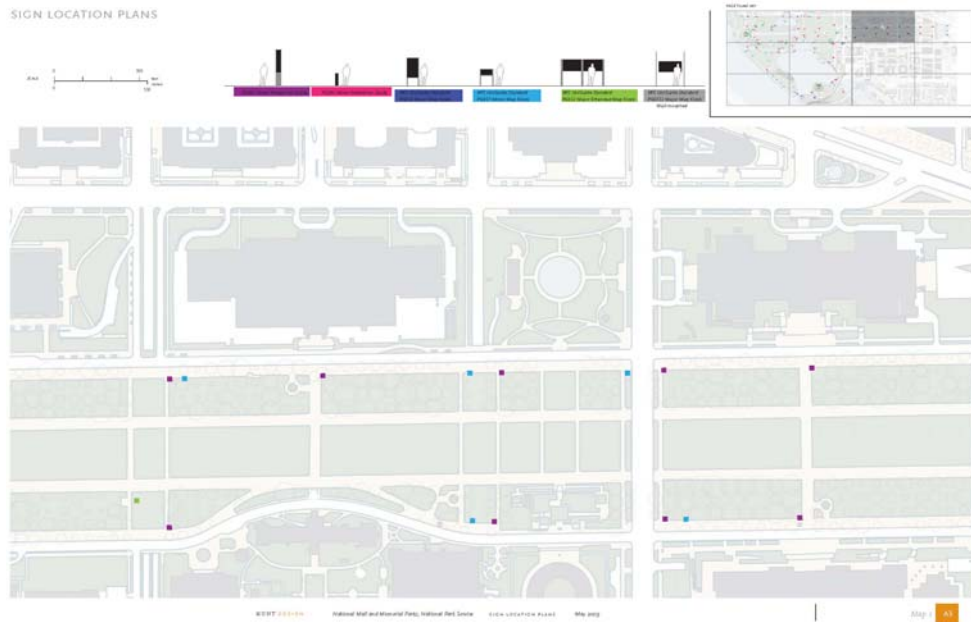
The wayfinding pylons and maps will be placed along circulation paths around the Mall.



Immediately above and below: Site plan showing proposed locations (prior to additional field checking with staff and others before installation) of the pedestrian guide wayfinding pylons in two heights and the map kiosks, also in two heights. Pylons are indicated in red; map kiosks are indicated in blue.



Immediately above, detail showing proposed wayfinding pylons in two heights (dark and bright red) and maps in two heights (dark and bright blue) in the northwest corner of the National Mall.



Above, detail showing proposed wayfinding pylons and maps near the Smithsonian Castle and museums. This plan indicates tall pylons placed at path intersections with the Elm panels, the smaller wayside maps placed along the paths at or near intersections, and the only proposed location for a tall double map (shown in green) near the Smithsonian Metrorail exit.



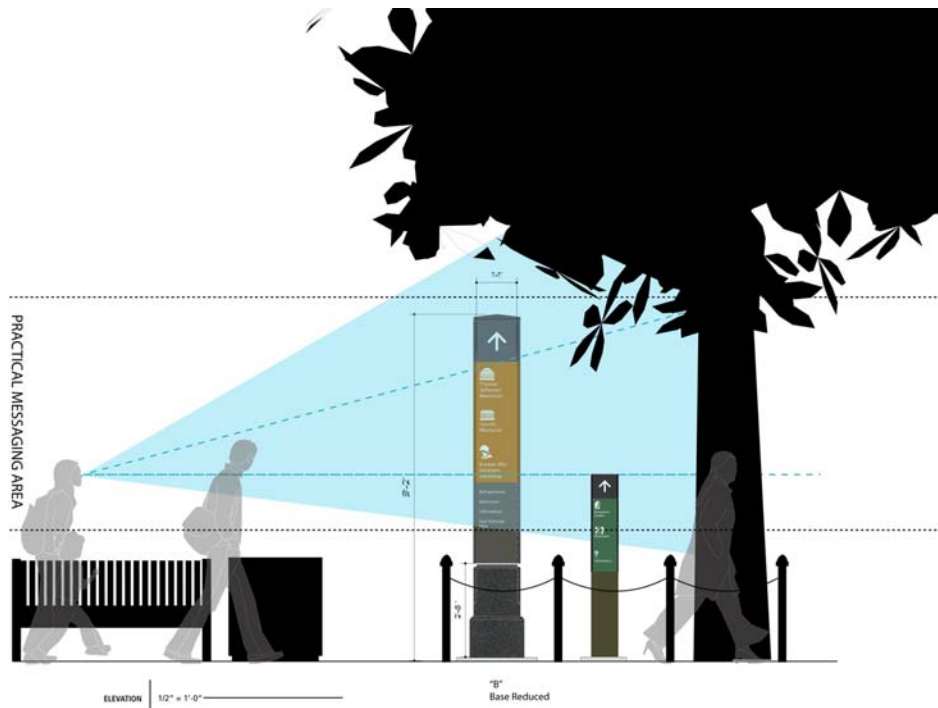
The four sign types proposed in the current submission. The map includes visitor destinations on, near, and beyond the National Mall. The pylons will direct visitors to memorials and museums on the Mall, off-Mall destinations, and to Metrorail stations.

Wayfinding Pedestrian Guides

NPS proposes a four-sided pylon as the best means of providing wayfinding to major destinations on and off the Mall. Two sizes of pylons are proposed; the taller pylon to be used at major path intersections would be 9'2" in height and 13" in width and depth. A shorter four-sided pylon measuring five feet in height would be used at intermediate paths and intersections as deemed necessary at some locations. Of dark metal (with a dark granite base for the taller pylon), and sitting on a small concrete pad, the pylons would include up to three pictograms on tiles arranged vertically on each side, with additional destinations indicated in text below the pictograms and an arrow above. The pictogram panels will be of colored porcelain enamel. Pictograms for off-Mall destinations will be shown on blue panels to indicate the interface with the blue DDOT signs.

Placed at path intersections, primarily at the corners of the Mall Elm panels and decision points where several paths converge, the pylons are intended to inform or reassure pedestrians that they are walking in the desired direction. While the map kiosks provide a great deal of information about attractions throughout the National Mall and the surrounding city, and orient the visitor in relation to them, the pylons with their pictograms and destination names serve as a means of wayfinding and are intended to be seen at a glance so that the visitor can continue or correct course while walking.

The smaller pylon (5 feet in height) will provide wayfinding information at closer visual range for attractions and services such as restrooms and food, especially in the vicinity of memorials.



Above, the proposed pedestrian guide wayfinding pylon in two heights: at 9'2" (the revised height of the taller pylon) and at 5 feet.

Map Kiosks

The maps, which provide information and orientation, are elements of NPS’s national UniGuide system. These maps will replace the Bicentennial-era map kiosks on the Mall. Measuring approximately four feet across in two heights, the maps would be placed where pedestrians frequently enter the National Mall, including the Smithsonian Metrorail exit on the Mall. The maps are oriented to the visitor’s view in order to minimize confusion. Because the proposed new maps are larger than the current map, destinations will be represented at a more legible scale.

The shorter of the two map kiosks is a “wayside” – a sign that is slanted so that visitors can stand over it and see in all directions. It is about four feet in height. The taller map is 7’8” in height and contains additional information. On the reverse of the taller map kiosk is “planning your trip” information that includes photographs and contact information for a broad range of destinations on and near the Mall.

The map illustrates the National Mall and surrounding areas, including city blocks to the north, east, and south. Non-NPS institutions and visitor attractions, many of them also represented by pictograms on the pylons, are indicated and labeled. Ranger and emergency information is provided. The map also contains a key with destinations shown in average walking times. NPS states that the maps will be replaced about every five years or more frequently as needed.



Above, left, are the bulletin boards and map kiosks (a total of 26) currently on the National Mall. Above, right, are the two types of map kiosks (a total of 34) proposed to replace them.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

During the ongoing development of the National Mall Plan, the National Park Service has received thousands of comments from the public about visitor services. The need for a coordinated, consistent, coherent, and informative sign program is among the top requests and recommendations of the public. A good sign program can improve the quality and comfort of the experience for visitors. It also improves the image and appearance of the National Mall. The installation of a new sign and wayfinding program is a high priority for the National Park Service and is included in all alternatives of the National Mall Plan, which will be released in draft later this year.

Staff recommends approval of preliminary site development plans for the pedestrian guide wayfinding pylons and the map kiosks. Staff commends the National Park Service for proposing a comprehensive sign program that includes wayfinding, a sign function that has not heretofore been implemented on the National Mall.

NPS is continuing to refine the form, height, and detailing of the pylon and to develop the color scheme for the tiles. *The staff recommends that the pylon form be simplified by eliminating the base and that it be fabricated at the revised height of 9'2".*

In addition, NPS is continuing to work with the District of Columbia Office of Planning, business improvement districts, D.C. Visitors Center, Cultural Tourism DC, staff, and others in developing and refining the content of the signs and maps, particularly the list of destinations that will appear on the pylons. Another meeting and a test of a mock-up on site with sample destinations are anticipated.

Staff supports the use of coordinated orientation and wayfinding signs, particularly in areas where little or no information is currently provided. The existing map kiosks are few and far between across the length and width of the National Mall and can be difficult to comprehend in the absence of wayfinding signs. The proposed wayfinding pylons are not only located at decision points at path intersections but can be understood by international visitors through the use of pictograms. The provision of information near the edges of the National Mall may also encourage visitors to enter and enjoy the Mall from additional points, which is a goal of the National Mall Plan. The proposed sign locations were selected to avoid the prominent viewsheds on the center of the National Mall and are scaled appropriately for their purpose and placement.

NPS's sign program has been designed to augment and complement the existing sign programs in place on and near the National Mall. The best sign systems provide and integrate layers of information that direct the visitor to a range of information sources, including other sign programs, people who provide information, and websites.

The NPS signs have been coordinated with the signs erected by other entities on and near the National Mall so that the visitor's experience is enhanced by knowing the location of Smithsonian museums or buildings in the U.S. Capitol Complex, for example, as well as public and private-sector visitor attractions, services, and institutions on and off the Mall. The District's

blue DDOT signs already appear along the north-south streets of the National Mall, as well as along Constitution and Independence Avenues, introducing visitors to their appearance and function. The pylons direct visitors to some of the destinations named on the DDOT signs on the Mall. NPS has also reached agreement with the Smithsonian Institution on the design of the museum pictograms.

NPS continues to consult with the staff of the District of Columbia Office of Planning to finalize the wayfinding content, which would include such destinations as the D.C. Visitor Center, the Kennedy Center, Georgetown and Georgetown Waterfront Park, The George Washington University Hospital, the Library of Congress, the Reynolds Center, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, the Newseum, the National Aquarium, Union Station, and Metrorail stations, and the availability of food. The extent and specificity of signage for restaurants and entertainment and more distant attractions is still in discussion. Further meetings and a site visit are anticipated.

The maps kiosks are an improvement on the current map kiosks because they are larger, and are oriented to the visitors' view. Measuring approximately three feet in width, the maps will show the Mall and surrounding area and be easier for several people to read than the maps now in use on the Mall. The map provides the context for the National Mall within its surrounding precincts, marking emergency, transportation, amenities, visitor services, and related information. Many off-Mall destinations are indicated by building footprints and labels on the map. The content of the map is still being finalized.

The wayfinding pylons were developed specifically for use on the Mall. The pylons are proposed for installation in two heights. The taller pylon was originally proposed at 10 feet but has been revised to be somewhat lower at 9'2". The shorter pylon is five feet in height. A dark gray granite shaft and base are proposed. Discussion among NPS, NCPC staff, and Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) staff in recent weeks has included a recommendation to simplify the pylon form by eliminating the base.

Staff supports the use of the four-sided pylon form for wayfinding at intersections. The pylons will usually be located near trees, and their tall, slender form will be more visually compatible than rectangular signs on posts with the trees. *The staff supports the use of a contemporary form rather than a historicized sign. The staff recommends that the profile of the granite base be simplified further by eliminating the base and that the 9'2" pylon be approved.*

The pylons are typically spaced hundreds of feet apart, at path intersections, and are intended to inform visitors of their walking direction without the visitors having to stop at a map kiosk to confirm their way. The pictograms will assist non-English speakers and children and will allow visitors to see the pylon content without necessarily needing to read the text. The zone of the pictograms and text on the pylons are placed correctly for wheelchair users.

Staff notes that NPS has not submitted one remaining category of signs for review by the Commission at this time. NPS will continue to study, in consultation with staff and others, how to accommodate its desire to identify memorials.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The following are applicable policies from the *Preservation and Historic Features Element* of the Comprehensive Plan:

National Capital Image

1. Express the dignity befitting the image of the federal government in the national capital.
5. Protect and enhance the vistas and views, both natural and designed, that are an integral part of the national capital's image.

Stewardship of Historic Properties

5. Identify and protect both the significant historic design integrity and the use of historic landscapes and open spaces.

The Historic Plan of Washington, DC

2. Promote continuity in the historic design framework of the nation's capital by protecting and enhancing the elements, views, and principles of the L'Enfant Plan.
5. Protect the reservations that contain historic landscapes and features from incompatible changes or incursions.

Relevant Federal Facility Master Plan

Since 2006, NPS has been engaged in consultation and study leading to the development of the National Mall Plan, which will be released in draft later this year. All alternatives in the Plan include the removal of the existing signs on the National Mall and their replacement with a comprehensive wayfinding and sign program. NPS has received thousands of comments from the public since 2006 stating that the current sign confusion and visual clutter are concerns.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NPS has undertaken its own internal analysis for its NEPA compliance and has determined that the installation of the proposed signs meets NPS' Categorical Exclusion C.5., as specified in NPS Director's Order 12, because it is NPS' view that the sign program replaces the existing signs on the National Mall and in East Potomac Park, does not disturb previously undisturbed soil, and will have minimal visual impact, as also determined by the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer through the Section 106 consultation.

Under NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, staff has determined that it is relying on categorical exclusion at Section 8(c)2. Staff has made this determination in the context of Section 106 consultation with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, other federal and District of Columbia agencies, and the consulting parties for the National Mall Plan.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) has determined that the undertaking will have *No Adverse Effect*, conditioned on field-checking final locations for pylons near memorials.

The DC SHPO concurred with NPS that the proposed UniGuide sign types (which includes the map kiosks in the current submission as well as the operational signs approved by the Commission in May 2009) used throughout the National Park System are covered by a nationwide Programmatic Agreement that requires an internal analysis of the proposed sign installation for appropriateness. The signs were reviewed by the DC SHPO, who found them consistent with the nationwide Programmatic Agreement.

The wayfinding pylon is a design developed specifically for the Mall and is not part of the palette of the UniGuide system. As such, it is not covered by the nationwide Programmatic Agreement and has been reviewed for design and location by the DC SHPO. In a letter dated March 9, 2009, the DC SHPO concurred that the signs would have *No Adverse Effect* on the National Mall or East Potomac Park. The DC SHPO found the wayfinding project:

. . . commendable because the standardization of inconsistent signage will greatly improve the mismatched conditions that currently exist. The total number of signs may ultimately increase, but the need for additional signage has long been recognized and the relatively modest size of most of the proposed signs will result in negligible visual effect when compared to the monumental scale of the National Mall. Locating the signage along the perimeter of the National Mall will help to minimize visual impacts by ensuring that primary views and vistas are not interrupted

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation also wrote the National Park Service to concur that the installation of the UniGuide sign system was consistent with the nationwide Programmatic Agreement and request that the wayfinding pylons be discussed at a Mall Plan consultation meeting.

NPS provided program and design information to organizations and individuals participating in the National Mall Plan Section 106 consultation and posted information on its Planning, Environment and public Comment (PEPC) website. The sign program was discussed at Mall Plan Section 106 consultation meetings. Parties generally agreed with the sign program with the exception of the Coalition to Save Our Mall, which in letters to NPS dated March 3, 2009 and March 18, 2009 expressed its concern about three aspects of the sign program: the frequency and logic of the signs; the location and representation of the Mall boundaries; and the need to define the National Mall before a sign program is implemented. The letter of March 3rd was provided to

Commissioners prior to NPS's Information Presentation on the sign program at the Commission's March 5, 2009 meeting. The letter of March 18th referred to the proposed design of the pylons and was submitted following a consultation meeting on the subject the previous day, March 17th. The Coalition believed the "signs could adversely affect both the Mall's historic character and visitors' experience of it" and suggests, in lieu of the pylons, a different pedestrian wayfinding design of a "historic character consistent with the Mall's landscape from the 1902 McMillan Commission Plan."

The DC SHPO, in its letter of March 9th, determined that the signs would have *No Adverse Effect* on the historic properties of the Mall provided that NPS: 1) consult further with the DC SHPO during the CFA and NCPC review processes regarding the final type, location and number of pedestrian guide pylons near the major monuments and memorials (noting concern for use of the tall pylons near the Washington Monument); 2) provide additional opportunities for public review and comment such as the National Mall Plan meeting forum; and 3) assess the potential for archaeological impacts for signage located outside of East and West Potomac Parks where the soil is not entirely composed primarily of fill.

NPS acknowledged the Coalition's correspondence and has presented the sign program for discussion during Mall Plan Section 106 consultation. NPS has considered and revised the sign and map content in response to the Commission and staff, the DC SHPO, the D.C. Office of Planning staff, the Downtown BID staff, the Commission of Fine Arts staff, and the Coalition.

NPS continues to believe that the pylons are an appropriate form for wayfinding signs on the National Mall. The DC SHPO concurred, finding their "streamlined" form appropriate. Commission staff also concurs, noting that the taller pylon is typically proposed for use near trees and that its slender vertical form is compatible in profile and height with tree trunks and is a significant improvement on broad, flat directional signs on posts. The use of a contemporary, or non-historicized, form is also the best design response, in the staff's view, and is consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Staff recommends that the pylon be simplified further by eliminating the base. Staff also recommends that the revised 9'2" pylon be approved.

NPS has acknowledged the DC SHPO's conditions in its March 9, 2009 letter and will continue to consult with the DC SHPO and others as design and installation proceed. NPS has also stated that it has assessed all areas where the signs are proposed for installation, that all are on previously disturbed soil, and that potential for archaeological discovery is unlikely.

NCPC staff believes that NPS has met or is in the process of meeting the terms of the DC SHPO's conditions, that it has demonstrated to date the frequency and logic of the signs in its site plans, and that it has responded to comments by Commission staff and others (including the Coalition in its correspondence) about the location and representation of the Mall on the map.

NCPC's Section 106 responsibilities incorporate the consultation with the DC SHPO (which will continue with review in the field), the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, other federal and District agencies, and consulting parties. The comments have focused primarily on the

design and placement of the taller pylons, the content of the signs, and on the overall number of signs.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the wayfinding and sign program at its meeting on February 11, 2009. All agencies present coordinated the project.

Commission of Fine Arts

At its February 19, 2009 meeting the Commission gave concept approval for the sign program, with the exception of the taller pylons, which were not approved.

NPS returned to CFA on May 21, 2009 and received final approval for the operational signs and *revised concept approval for the pylons and maps*. The Commission delegated final approval of the pylons and maps to the staff, *with the exception of the proposed colors for the pictogram tiles on the pylons*.

Following their site visit to view mock-ups of the pylon and map near the Lincoln Memorial and the Air and Space Museum, Commissioners specifically reversed their earlier position on the use of the tall pylon, concluding it was appropriate for the scale of the National Mall.

Referral to relevant local planning agencies

NPS continues to consult with the District of Columbia Office of Planning (DC OP) staff, business improvement districts, D.C. Visitor Center, and other entities on both the content of the information proposed for the wayfinding pylons and the coordinated placement of the pylons in relation to the blue DDOT wayfinding signs. DC OP staff, in consulting with its community partners, has compiled a list of destinations for discussion. Further meetings and a site visit will be scheduled.