

The National Mall Plan (NMP) – Section 106 Meeting Notes

Monday April 13, 2009

Handouts: No new handouts were provided.

NPS has provided response at the end of the discussion.

Attendees: Cynthia Field – Latrobe Society of Architectural Historians; Richard Westbrook – Guild of Professional Tour Guides / Committee of 100; Linda Doyle – Tourmobile; Russell Preble - Guild of Professional Tour Guides; Kelly Fanizzo – Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP); Andrew Lewis – DC State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO); Nell Ziehl – National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP); Andrew Gorman – NTHP; Pete McCall - Guild of Professional Tour Guides; Nancy Witherell – National Capital Planning Commission; Judy Feldman – National Coalition to Save Our Mall; Kent Cooper - National Coalition to Save Our Mall

NPS: Jennifer Talken- Spaulding – Cultural Resource Mgr; Perry Wheelock – Chief of Resource Mgt.; Steve Lorenzetti – Deputy Superintendent; Dr. Stephanie Toothman – Acting Supt; Susan Spain – Project Exec – National Mall Plan

Announcements and General Information:

Susan S: The public comment period for NEPA has been extended to May 15. This does not affect the Section 106 process which includes your comments related to preserving historic features - this is ongoing. NPS is currently trying to schedule some public walking tours at the recommendation of individuals, organizations and groups. NPS has recently posted a great many section 106 and other materials online – handouts, agendas. Current round of meeting notes will be posted soon. Just a reminder - on March 30, 2009 the group agreed to keep on schedule with the agenda and could provide additional comments via email that were not able to be covered in the meetings.

Susan provided an overview of the joint presentation slides about how the Framework Plan and the NMP coordinate from the April 2, 2009 NCPC meeting where the Framework Plan was approved, and the NMP introduced. Common approaches, coordinated destinations, and connections were illustrated.

Nancy W reiterated the coordination between plans and pointed out that the size of the destination circles in the joint graphic related to priorities – for example the 10th Street overlook, Kennedy Center and Union Square are high priorities. Some of the blue connection lines relate to L’Enfant circulation and others relate to connections with downtown areas – both to the north and the south of the National Mall.

Stephanie T gave some background about the section 106 process based upon her many years of experience as a Section 106 coordinator and participant in planning. The National Mall Plan is a very complicated and a transparent effort. It includes a multi- disciplinary approach with a large number of cooperating agencies and a great deal of coordination between agencies. This section 106 process is to define and mitigate impacts on historic preservation. The landscape has evolved and will continue to evolve. What is proposed is adaptive rehabilitation. (Perry later read the definition). There can be impacts to historic resources, but an impact is not necessarily or always an adverse effect.

Cynthia F: The landscape changes – but there is a constant.

Stephanie T – the National Mall has good bones. Like the Constitution it provides a framework - but it needs to adapt to the different kinds of use that we have today. It is evolving – that is what adaptive rehabilitation is about. Change is not always bad.

Cynthia: We are dealing with a set of ideas – not just designs.

See note 1.

Stephanie: Design gets into details. Planning proposals are not exact nor illustrate the way it will be. It might be worth remembering that the 1978 amendment to the NPS Organic Act of 1916 established primacy of resource protection over use.

See note 2.

Kent C: I'm trying to ask a simple question of Susan. Are you trying to change usage?

Susan: We are trying to better meet the level and types of use we have. There are uses that require permits – mandatory uses include First Amendment gatherings and national celebrations. The other permitted uses include special events (*and commercial filming*).

THE MALL DISCUSSION

Cynthia F: I propose joint work on the part of NPS and Smithsonian Institution (SI).

Susan: This is occurring. SI has been very active participant as a cooperating agency to the National Mall Plan.

See Note 3:

Nell Z: I'd like to ask about current vs. proposed facilities. There are three proposed facilities.

Susan: That is correct. The proposed facilities include one restroom near the Air and Space museum; a lodge- like facility with temporary office and public restrooms on the 12th street corridor just south of Madison; and an NPS welcome facility with restrooms and orientation/information near the Smithsonian Metro stop. At the same time NPS proposes removing three facilities (small Tourmobile facilities).

Linda Doyle confirmed that these facilities are no longer needed by Tourmobile and have been transferred to the NPS.

Richard W: The problem is overuse of the grass. The adverse effect is use.

Perry: reminded people that the NMP proposes a modest increase in pavement in some areas with the removal of paving in some areas. She referenced the discussions about buildings at the last meeting.

Cynthia F: All structures violate the character and use of the McMillan Plan. Put facilities in the middle (8th street corridor). Hardscape would be adverse!

Kent C: 1930s Olmsted work was a violation of McMillan.

Stephanie T: McMillan was not implemented. We begin with what was implemented. We are not doing a restoration. In adaptive rehabilitation we can look to the past for information and inspiration.

Kent: What are the studies related to trees? And soil? Need to see the science.

NPS: There have been 6 or 7 studies, and with the exception of one study commissioned by a user of tree panels they all confirmed that continued use is having an adverse impact.

Kent: Can I see those studies?

NPS: They began in the 1980s and predated digital copies. Many were commissioned by the Center for Urban Ecology (CUE). One was peer reviewed.

See note 3.

Stephanie: NPS proposed to the Smithsonian Institution that instead of dueling studies, we undertake a new scientific study by an agreed upon expert(s) organization such as the National Science Foundation or some horticultural group. At the same time NPS has proposed a two-year transition period during which the Festival of American Folklife would move all temporary event facilities to the center grass panels.

NPS: NPS is seeking to reduce heavy impacts to soils and vegetation throughout the National Mall. In no way does this approach mean that people could not enjoy the shade of tree panels – for sitting, picnicking, and general recreation. But NPS is proposing that no temporary facilities, vehicles, stages be placed within the elm tree panels in order to protect the natural resources that define historic vistas and landscapes.

See note 4.

Jennifer TS: What does the group feel about proposing removal of existing facilities?

Perry W: The alternative presents proposals that would alter resources – but remember we focus on what got built.

Andrew L: The NMP is diagrammatic but that provides potential for us. It is important not to use McMillan as the only guide. We look at the cumulative effect of all that has happened over time.

Richard W: The problem is overuse!

Judy: This approach is a fundamental misconception – adaptive rehabilitation. If we accept the Mall “as is” we desecrate McMillan. With signs, under trees, older thinking. Science has changed – we can continue to use tree panels. We need to reverse the major planning – such as the location of food from a 1960s Mall plan. This is 30 years later and we need modern food service – better and more like the National Gallery of Art. We need to think about what will draw people. The administration is into using science as the basis of decision making. What is the basis for the food service – this is conflicting but well- intentioned.

Susan: Last summer we did studies to examine for example where people were eating. The raw data is being examined. The NMP does propose facilities like the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden – at Constitution Gardens. Multi- purpose facilities would provide food, restrooms, and flexible program space. Some of these proposed facilities include indoor and outdoor seating that you have been calling for.

Perry W: Perry read the definition of rehabilitation. This definition had been provided previously.

See note 5.

Kelly: I believe that disconnect is that we are starting with proposals (ideas). Starting at this point is not what you are familiar with (design) but it does offer an opportunity to affect what happens by starting very early. The Section 106 analysis starts with the historic property as is, what was built, existing conditions, etc.

Andrew: What is the concern?

Judy: public gatherings and programming are affected (by restricting use of elm tree panels).

Susan: adequate space is available for special events and national celebrations in the center grass panels.

Kent: people need seating and shade. Grass is a terrible surface to have under trees.

Susan: The NMP proposes increasing seating, providing group seating and seating in shade in areas leading to the museums.

See note 6.

Perry W: Section 106 sections on the Mall would also address cumulative effects. What are the effects of food service? What are the effects of buildings?

Kent: shifts in use

Cynthia: You should plant trees vs adding buildings. “No new buildings” is what the quote from the Legacy Plan said.

See note 7.

Kent: we ought to be thinking of gateways; and the possibility that tree areas provide for in- fill buildings.

NPS concurs.

15 minute break.

WASHINGTON MONUMENT (WAMO) GROUNDS

Jennifer reminded the group that previous handouts addressed contributing elements of WAMO grounds and Sylvan Theater. She showed some slides of the grounds as they exist today. She said there was one major proposal that affected the Sylvan Theater area.

Andrew: What has NPS thought about replacement (of the theater)?

Jennifer: The function of the theater is what is listed as contributing. She showed slides of the theater at various times. Originally in 1916 the seating was permanent and formalized in a balloon shape that included aisles and many rows of benches that stretched nearly to the monument. Facilities directly related to the stage have changed over time. The current Sylvan Theater structures are from the 70s and include the stage and two dressing rooms. A public restroom (4 stalls each side) and small access road are nearby.

See note 8.

Perry: The area is in a lowered dell – surrounded by trees.

Cynthia: What is the history of a theater? Maybe we no longer actually need a theater – which was created more as a whim because some actress wanted it.

Judy: it was a great theater in the old days, but stopped possibly because of airplane noise. National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) may have an outdoor performance space – so Sylvan Theater might be redundant. The NMAAHC site would be more accessible. The point is that the WAMO grounds were supposed to be the great cross- axis landscape. If we want to make sense of the space, then we need to refocus the focal point on the monument. Maybe the gathering space should be at the top.

Kelly: so what could the plan do better to refocus the primacy of the Washington Monument in terms of development?

See note 9.

Cynthia: Recreation. Do not redevelop the Sylvan Theater area – remove it.

Kelly: Maybe relocate the performance space to another area?

Perry: remember the functions proposed for that area – bathrooms, concession food/ retail and visitor services (information, orientation). NPS feels these needs have to be addressed.

General discussion about the concession facility currently located in several trailers under a big blue tent in the future location of the NMAAHC. The facility has been the most popular location over the years – it includes food and retail (souvenirs and convenience items). The concession function was previously located behind the Monument Lodge, which has been rehabilitated to become a small bookstore and WAMO ticket location as well as providing public restrooms.

Judy: you could renovate the bathrooms. But at WAMO we are talking about the concept of McMillan and the concept of refocusing on the symbolism of the landscape.

Andrew: In this case – this seems outside the bounds of this planning area – from a 106 standpoint. NPS is looking for facility space.

See note 10.

Judy: emphasis of the cross- axis is critical. OK with bathrooms etc especially if you have buses. She described the formal design, lookouts and emphasis on the view. The Washington Monument is a desert and not an oasis. Design professional agree this is a failed space.

See note 11.

Cynthia: water was important in McMillan, cascades and fountains.

Kent: Sylvan Theater area is good for concessions – that is the right direction, as long as they are minimal and reversible.

General discussion concluded that it is a good proposal to move concessions to the Sylvan Theater area.

Judy: The area between 14th and 15th Streets is very broken up – needs to be improved with circulation, etc. Feels disconnected and needs improvement.

See note 12.

Group discussion. This could go any number of ways depending upon the National Museum of African American History and Culture. It will be impossible to determine the impact until the design is farther along.

NPS: The mound was built to screen traffic. Is the concern about views and historic trees?

General discussion focused on the 14th street tunnel planning being done by a multi- agency group. A tunnel which would have simplified pedestrian access did not make it into the preliminary preferred alternative at the recommendation of SI in order to allow maximum underground connections to the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Cynthia: Connection between the museums is no longer under consideration by SI.

See note 13.

General discussion. Survey Lodge (SW of the Monument) had been previously the location for power to a WAMO elevator. Currently Survey Lodge is used for ranger offices and parking; it has a small information area and two unisex restrooms. The proposal is to remove ranger offices and parking and adaptively reuse the historic building / area for visitor services, recreation rentals, parking and equipment for people with disabilities, as well as supplementary transit.

Andrew: What about the helicopter pad?

Steve: that is not a structure but a use that occurs on the west side of the Washington Monument grounds.

Perry: A planting plan approved for WAMO includes fingers of trees coming in from the edges.

Steve: NPS will continue to work on the planting plan as funding becomes available.

Susan: there are permitted ball fields on WAMO – without backstops. The area is used for general recreation. It is popular for kite flying because the high knoll is frequently windy.)

Judy: requested copies of concession contracts for Tourmobile and GSI.

NPS: This material cannot be made available. Supt. Toothman indicated it contained proprietary information, but suggested anyone would be free to read a Request for Proposals for new concessions when they are issued in around 14 months.

The meeting ended at 4:10pm. The next meeting will be April 24, 2009.

NPS RESPONSE OR NOTES

1. *SI has sent multiple people to around a dozen workshops and crafted the range of alternatives and the preliminary preferred alternative. NPS and SI have regularly scheduled meetings to discuss common interests and issues.*
2. *First Amendment activities are the one exception to the primacy of resource protection.*
3. *The Sustainable Site Initiative (U.S. Botanic Gardens, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, and the American Society of Landscape Architects) stresses the importance of restoring soils to healthy conditions as part of a healthy urban ecosystem where water percolates into the soil supporting healthy plant growth and reducing runoff. The NMP preferred alternative recommends incorporating the initiative standards for landscapes, which is similar and complementary to the green building council LEED standards. Both of these standards help achieve NPS policy mandates to be green and sustainable.*
4. *Holding events such as the National Cherry Blossom Festival (NCBF) on hard surface spaces minimizes impacts. Changes in the last several years that located NCBF facilities and support activities on hard surface spaces have been very successful. The problem areas are*

adjacent to the narrow walkways that get impacted from the size of crowds. NPS has been installing more post and chain to redirect people to walks. In most cases that is successful.

5. *Please see NPS Management Policies 2006 - Chapter 5 addresses Cultural Resource Management; Section 5.3.5.2 and related sections that describe preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, reconstruction of obliterated landscapes, and new construction. Policy can be read online at <http://www.nps.gov/policy>. Please note that reconstruction of obliterated landscapes means the landscape that was actually in place, not what was envisioned or planned.*
6. *The elm trees are moderately drought tolerant and grass provides a cool and comfortable sitting surface.*
7. *The updates to the Commemorative Works Act (2003) – based on the Legacy Plan (1997) stated no new memorials or visitor centers. In the six years between Legacy and the CWA amendment it became clear that visitor services need to be provided and periodically updated. In the 1960s and 70s NCPC rejected proposals to add trees of new variety of trees along the grass panels that would change the 1930s tree planting scheme based upon the McMillan Plan. The existing spatial organization of trees and turf are contributing features of the cultural landscape.*
8. *Three types of uses are listed as historic – performance/theater, public gathering/events, and recreation. These have been compatible with the open lawn character of the landscape. Public gatherings/events/performances take place all over the WAMO grounds. Locations for permitted events are generally determined by the size of the expected crowds. While the Shakespeare in the Parks no longer takes place at the Sylvan Theater, smaller programs, ranger programs, performances and concerts continue to take place there with crowds up to 5,000. This includes popular annual performances of the 1812 Overture at the Sylvan Theater.*
9. *The preliminary preferred alternative is seeking to preserve vistas and the importance of the cross- axial views. It describes the monument as a historic character defining feature that is a visual orientation point for Washington D.C.*
10. *Public comment never brought up any need to alter the Washington Monument area; therefore the idea of changing the Washington Monument in the mode of McMillan illustration was not brought up in the range of alternatives or a preliminary preferred alternative.*
11. *The award winning design by Laurie Olin, the cover story in the March 2009 Landscape Architecture magazine, was approved by both commissions, who include design professionals. It is regularly held up as a model of design that minimizes the impact of security components. The design has been inspired by historic designs.*
12. *The suggestion is an alternative idea to address this area as a transition or connection between the Mall and WAMO. Currently the plan talks about improving the pedestrian environment in this area (crosswalks, circulation etc). This function can be addressed within the preliminary preferred alternative. It is recommended that specific comment be posted on the National Mall Plan website to better define the desired function.*
13. *According to Smithsonian Institution staff (4/14/09) SI still wants to retain flexibility and not preclude an underground connection.*