

March 17, 2009

National Mall Plan - Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting Notes

Classroom B, National Capital Region Headquarters Building, 1100 Ohio Drive, SW, Washington DC 20242; 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Attendees: Alan Spears - NCPA, John Fondersmith – Committee of 100, Edwin Fountain – DC Preservation League, Richard Westbrook – Committee of 100 and Guild of Professional Tour Guides, Cynthia Field – Latrobe Chapter Society of Architectural Historians, Judy Scott Feldman – Coalition to Save Our Mall, Linda Doyle – Tourmobile, Kelly Fanizzo – Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Nell Ziehl, Betsy Merritt and Lane Pearson – National Trust Historic Preservation, Daniel Maillet – Guest Services Inc., Nancy Witherell – National Capital Planning Commission, Andrew Lewis – DC State Historic Preservation Office, Alan Harwood – EDAW, Donn Cohen – American Civil Liberties Union – National Capital Area

NPS: Darwina Neal – NCR Chief of Cultural Resources; Glenn Demarr – Park Ranger; Jennifer Talken- Spaulding – Cultural Resource Mgr; Gary Scott – Historian; Maureen Joseph – Historic LA; Perry Wheelock – Chief of Resource Mgt.; Peter May – Associate Regional Director for Lands, Resources and Planning; Doug Jacobs – Deputy Assoc Regional Director – National Capital Region; Steve Lorenzetti – Deputy Superintendent; Dr. Stephanie Toothman – Acting Supt; Susan Spain – Project Exec – National Mall Plan

Introductions / Announcements

Discussion Goals: Introduce the preliminary preferred alternative, discuss portions of the sign plan that is outside the nationwide programmatic agreement with the ACHP and National Conference of SHPOs (NCSHPO), and begin consultations about specific areas.

Presentation

Susan Spain opened the meeting noting that there were copies of multiple graphics and text in the rear of the room, including new items such as NPS Newsletter #4, and a map identifying of McMillan Plan Mall Systems. The meeting today follows a period of 9 months since the last meeting was held to discuss Section 106 issues related to the National Mall Plan.

Susan Spain provided a power point presentation that was previously shared with the Commission of Fine Arts, other public meetings and with cooperating agencies.

It was noted that NPS Newsletter #3 provided Mall Plan Alternatives A, B, C and a No-Action plan. Components of these and responses to their review by the public (22,000 comments) resulted in the preparation of a Preliminary Preferred Alternative shown in Newsletter # 4, Map Number 802/20014, December 2008. At least eight ideas from each of the Newsletter 3 alternatives were included in the preliminary preferred alternative.

The plan was presented to the Commission of Fine Arts in a February 2009 informational presentation and will be presented to the National Capital Planning Commission on April 2, along with the NCPC/CFA Framework Plan.

The National Mall Plan is not recommending visitor centers, encourages instead visitors lingering at several memorial stops where there would be uniform selection of paving materials, lights, orientation and information. The plan provides greater opportunities for informal recreation and less emphasis on organized field sports. More boating choices in the Tidal Basin may be made available. Model sail boating in the Constitution Gardens lake basin is recommended. Greater use or conversion to all non-potable water in the man-made water features is recommended so that a substantial savings of millions of gallons of potable water will be realized.

A summary was presented of six important areas to accomplish the following plan goals: restored National Mall beauty; improve our national civic space; and improve the visitor experience.

Union Square – reflecting pool would be removed to provide flexible multi-purpose visitor facilities. It would become a lively, active destination. The Grant memorial, planned views and historic trees would be protected and a smaller water feature incorporated into the area.

The Mall – a welcoming historic landscape would sustainably accommodate civic activities and special events. No events would be permitted within the tree panels. Activities would only be permitted in the grass panels. Staffed information/orientation locations would be available, cooling water features would be incorporated. The center grass panels would be reengineered with the intention of providing improved growing conditions for the turf and regraded to provide a subtle crowning that provides for visual continuity of the greensward. Facilities would be located outside of the primary views. Museum connections would be emphasized.

Washington Monument – a multi- purpose visitor services facility would be provided in the area of the Sylvan Theater and the theater function would continue. The Survey Lodge would be adapted to provide improved visitor services and additional parking for people with disabilities. Longer hours of operation of the Washington Monument would be provided.

Constitution Gardens – The east end of the garden would be restored and rehabilitated to provide a restaurant and performance opportunities. Water conditions in the lake would be improved.

Ash Woods / DC World War Memorial – designed to be a bandstand, this structure and its grounds would be rehabilitated for sustaining its use as a bandstand, and would be promoted for higher visibility. The USPP Stables would be rebuilt.

Tidal Basin – a new wall would be built several feet out into the basin to promote walking , accommodate the level of use and protect the flowering cherry trees. Separate bike lanes would be provided and circulation pinch points addressed.

Background Information

There are 3 consultation meetings scheduled for the month of March in Classroom B. Public comments on the Preliminary Preferred Alternative is due by April 20, 2009 at www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan. The plan is to publish a Preferred Alternative plan during the summer of 2009, followed by public meetings around the United States, leading to a final approved plan in winter 2010. The importance of an approved plan was noted as necessary to be successful in future funding cycles.

It was noted to all that there were several authorized projects that were on- going in the area:

- 1.) The Potomac Park Levee Improvement Project; 2.) The Smithsonian Institution's African American Museum of History and Culture; 3.) The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial; and 4.) The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center,

Break 2:25

Resume 2:40

Authorized Projects

Perry Wheelock provided an update on the progress of the authorized projects mentioned before the break. 1.) The Potomac Park Levee: nearing completion of the EA and a Programmatic Agreement; 2.) the Smithsonian is progressing slowly; 3.) the MLK

Memorial has completed Section 106, and is being refined, the construction details are being addressed so that the project may move forward to construction; 4.) the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center is preparing a revised concept. Finally, the restoration project at the Tidal Basin Seawall/Thomas Jefferson Memorial (a repair project under the Secretary of the Interior standards) has been submitted to the DCSHPO, there soon will be an EA for review.

Wayfinding and Sign Plan

Perry Wheelock then introduced the subject of the Way finding Plan and its presentation to both the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission.

A representative of the National Trust for Historic Preservation inquired if the definition of the sign undertaking had been accomplished.

Perry – there is only one aspect of the sign and wayfinding plan that is subject to additional Section 106 consultation. Most of the signs are covered under a nationwide Programmatic Agreement with the Advisory Council and NCSHPO. Pedestrian guides are the only component that varies from the NPS system. *(Note - in most national park units the similar need would be for trail guide signs, which is not considered appropriate for this urban historic landscape. Pedestrian guides would need to be differentiated yet compatible with the character of the historic landscape according to NPS policy.)*

Judy Scott Feldman indicated that the plan seemed to have 2 routes a Blue and Red route, and was either on the order of a route for Tourmobile. The point being offered that the 1966 and 1976 plans were aimed at a “Tourmobile system” that in turn drove the location for pedestrian destinations. Furthering her point, the transportation destinations drive where step- outs are located, and that they should have similar design features.

Susan Spain responded that NPS had provided a policy paper on Park Facilities (available at the meeting and emailed to participants in the fall) that talked about locating facilities to stimulate use of alternate transportation, bicycling and walking.

Steve Lorenzetti responded that understanding current circulation patterns and the top destination were considered (in the Visitor Transportation Study 2005). Further, when drop off locations were developed under an implementation of a transportation plan – the design for how they would look would then be considered.

Betsy Merritt asked if the Trust and others would be part of the consultation on the transportation component as part of the National Mall Plan.

Nell Ziehl asked if transportation would be part of the final plan in 2010?

Perry Wheelock responded that the National Mall Plan is broad based and as the undertaking became more involved, consultation would occur.

Susan Spain interjected that at this point the National Mall Plan is thinking globally not in specific detail and is incorporating the alternate transportation preferred alternative as common to every alternative.

Judy Scott Feldman: The whole civic stage concept is good. The transportation system that exists now is limited, and cautioned that a new plan could entail use of new spaces on the mall that could then be the recipient of dramatic change.

Perry: The Way finding plan is all about improving the pedestrian experience. The concepts are based upon the NPS uni- guide system, except for the pedestrian guides which include two pylon styles – a tall pylon with a grey granite base and a shorter pylon. The subject of the pedestrian guides does come under Section 106 consultations, but the remainder of the system is being accomplished under the fall 2008 Programmatic Agreement. Further, the intent of the system is to reduce sign clutter.

Dr. Toothman stated that the frequency of pedestrian guides would be open to Section 106 discussion and that NPS had been working with the Smithsonian Institution.

Perry: There are two styles of pedestrian guides - a tall pylon (10 feet) and a shorter pylon. The lower shorter guides would be used nearer the destinations where they would impart necessary directional and regulatory information – the improved visibility of tall guides at those locations would not necessary. The tall guide would be located farther from the destinations, generally around the perimeter, to provide pedestrian direction and would include simple, iconic graphic images with a color coordinated background to represent the type of destination (museums, memorials, off National Mall destinations would be blue to coordinate with the blue BID sign system). Many of the graphic icons originally came from plans prepared for the 1976 Bicentennial and NPS has worked with the Smithsonian Institution to update graphics for their newer facilities. The system would be installed in phases: I @ Lincoln; II in West and East Potomac Park, and III on the Mall and Union Square (14th Street to 1st Street). Phase II and III might be reversed.

Perry: 550 signs would replace 424 existing signs – however this number includes new signs that are now missing in areas of the park that need signs. Many of the signs are things like restroom symbols, ball field numbering or regulations in East Potomac Park. The end result again will be to reduce sign clutter.

NPS: Comparatively – WMATA uses a 13 foot tall pylon. (Illustrations of a number of types of signs were shown.)

Nancy Witherall reported that NCPC overall liked the signing scheme, and concurred that the tall pedestrian guides should include information to off the National Mall destinations.

Andrew Lewis added that the DCSHPO has concurred with the NPS determination of no adverse effect and conditioned its acceptance on the coordination of the plan with the CFA and NCPC and the provision of additional opportunities for public comment.

Judy Scott Feldman offered concern that there were too many signs, they in themselves will have an impact, and that over signing could turn the Mall into a theme park. It was suggested that the location be coordinated with the Smithsonian system – that NPS signs could be located outside the mall area – before one made a decision on a particular route. Further, she suggested that the icons (US Capitol, The White House, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, and the Thomas Jefferson Memorial) might have a special background color to better identify them.

NPS: It was explained that the tall pedestrian guides need to be visible from within a crowds. Color doesn't necessarily require NPS colors (green or brown) since they are entirely pedestrian orientation guides to improve the visitor experience.

In response to a concern by Cynthia about tall signs affecting vistas, Dr. Toothman noted that the tall guides would be located on the perimeter and not within the center of the grass panels or vistas.

Nell Ziehl asked for information on site furnishings that might be in the vicinity of the pedestrian guides (seats, trash cans, lights) as the combination of these elements can have a cumulative impact. She wondered about whether these could be shown on maps.

(Note: the guides will be lit by ambient light. Since they are primarily at intersections they are not likely to be appropriate sites for park furniture).

It was suggested that the pylons be guides so that they do not interfere with the initial visitor view of the Mall and its vistas. Judy Scott Feldman commented that the granite base looks clunky and that perhaps other designs and materials be considered. Steve

Lorenzetti responded that the NPS was looking for a base that was tasteful and maintainable, and durable.

(Note: a letter sent via email following the meeting from Judy Scott Feldman proposed "historic signs" and that some consulting parties could be involved with design. Acting Supt. Stephanie Toothman replied via email thanking Judy Scott Feldman for her comments and urged her to enter them online on the PEPC website for consideration along with other public comments on wayfinding.)

Go to <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/publicHome.cfm>. Choose a Park: National Mall & Memorial Parks. Find the project, "National Mall Wayfinding and New Pedestrian Guides," You'll see the project intro, then click "document list" to get the files.
Or try the direct link
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?parkID=427&projectId=24465>

Nancy Witherall imparted to the group that the base mock- up is very neutral and was viewed by NCPC as being successful. The scale of the base is comparable with trees. Andrew Lewis did not see the pylon base as a 106 issue, but noted that CFA wanted the base to be smaller.

Maureen Joseph asked if the guides were going to use different languages for foreign visitors. The NPS responded that the use of graphics was to provide universal style direction and that interactive technology (a demonstration project) may be the best way to address different languages.

Nancy Witherall added that NCPC was encouraging the addition of directions to more downtown areas, and again reiterated that the guides need not be illuminated. *(Note: Lighting is not planned by the NPS.)*

Finally, it was noted that the next meeting on Friday March 20 would discuss 106 issues related to the Union Square, the Mall and Washington Monument areas of the National Mall Plan.