

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. MP03/6805



**THE YARDS AT THE SOUTHEAST FEDERAL CENTER
WATERFRONT PARK**
M Street and New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the General Services Administration

January 31, 2008

Abstract

The General Services Administration (GSA) has submitted preliminary (35%) plans for the Waterfront Park to be created on the north bank of the Anacostia River in the former Southeast Federal Center. Now named The Yards, the site is being developed by Forest City SEFC, LLC. The park is part of a mixed-use development that will include new construction and a new public street and amenity plan as well as the rehabilitation of former Navy industrial buildings. The Southeast Federal Center (formerly the annex to the Washington Navy Yard) is situated between the Navy Yard and the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority's pumping facilities.

The Commission's design review procedures for each development parcel at the site were agreed upon in a 2003 Memorandum of Understanding between GSA and NCPC. It provides for the Commission's one-time advisory review at the 35% design stage. The current submission is for the Waterfront Park itself. Buildings within the park as well as piers projecting into the river are *not* before the Commission at this meeting and are shown for illustrative context only. They will be the subject of future submissions. The staff finds that the current submission for the Waterfront Park is consistent with the revised Southeast Federal Center Master Plan and with the Commission's previous guidance.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of the 35% design submission pursuant to the Memorandum of Understanding between the General Services Administration and the National Capital Planning Commission regarding the fee simple transfer of land within the Southeast Federal Center by GSA to Forest City Washington, and the mixed-use development of the Southeast Federal Center.

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the 35% design submission for the Waterfront Park, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 41.11(38.00)42455, and finds the 35% design plans to be consistent with the approved revised Master Plan.

Commends GSA and Forest City Washington and the team's designers for the quality of the site design to date, especially the variety of park features and the range of park activities that will be encouraged.

Recommends the following guidance as the design of the Waterfront Park is advanced:

- Design the pedestrian bridge to be lighter in form and character, and so that sufficient space is created between it and the boardwalk trail on the bulkhead beneath it; and design the bridge supports on either end so that the trail appears open and inviting.
- Design the pedestrian bridge and the vertical element on the pier to be architecturally complementary iconic structures.
- Develop an accessible path leading westward from the bulkhead trail along or near the river's edge.

Notes that the applicant must return to the Commission for an amendment to the Southeast Federal Center Master Plan if the waterfront Site #37 in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan is proposed for relocation or removal.

Notes that GSA will return to the Commission with a revised 35% design submission if material changes to the plan become necessary in response to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's proposed revised flood plain maps.

* * *

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The Southeast Federal Center (SEFC) was a 55-acre annex to the Washington Navy Yard. Excluding the U.S. Department of Transportation buildings, the remaining 42 acres are now known as The Yards and have been zoned for development according to an approved Master Plan.

The Waterfront Park, which will have 1,100 linear feet of river frontage, will be created between the north bank of the Anacostia River and Water Street, SE, which is envisioned as a “festival street” with retail uses. Pedestrians will be able to enter the park from many points, including Water Street, the north-south streets, the river trail, and by boat from the river. The Master Plan calls for 5.5 acres of open park space; the current plan proposes slightly more open acreage (5.87 net open space). The park will also incorporate a historic structure and new retail structures built to the requirements of the W-O zone), public piers and a marina, and the festival streets when they are used for an event. The Lumber Shed (historic Building 173) will be adapted for retail use. *The buildings and piers shown in the accompanying plans and renderings are not part of the current submission and will be submitted in the future for the Commission’s comments.*

The Master Plan envisions a mixed-use neighborhood where the higher density and intensity of use is concentrated along M Street, SE, with lower buildings toward the Waterfront Park. The extant historic buildings will be adapted for residential, retail or cultural purposes. New buildings will be constructed to bring the total number of residents at The Yards to 5,000. Within the immediate vicinity, 10,000 residents and 10 million square feet of office space are planned.

Street trees and public art will be placed throughout the site. Streets will be paved with asphalt and a wide range of trees will be planted, all with current low-impact methods for protecting and irrigating tree roots. Site circulation includes a bicycle network and the Anacostia Riverwalk and Trail, planned to extend from the National Arboretum to the Southwest Waterfront.

The development will be implemented in three major phases. The Commission reviewed the first phase of construction in July 2007. The second phase is the Waterfront Park and the remaining residential components. The third phase consists of office, mixed-use and residential space situated on the western part of the site.

Guidelines for development of the site include the preservation of views and vistas to and from the waterfront, as well as to federal monumental buildings. High-density residential and mixed uses are encouraged and plazas and open space destinations are an integral part of the site. The guidelines recommend an appropriate mix of neighborhood and waterfront-oriented retail, and service and cultural uses located at ground level along major streets and buildings that face the Waterfront Park.

Background and Previous Commission Actions

The Southeast Federal Center Public-Private Development Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-407, the Act) authorized GSA to enter into agreements with a private entity for the redevelopment of the SEFC, in consultation with the National Capital Planning Commission. In implementing the Act, GSA selected Forest City Washington to develop the site.

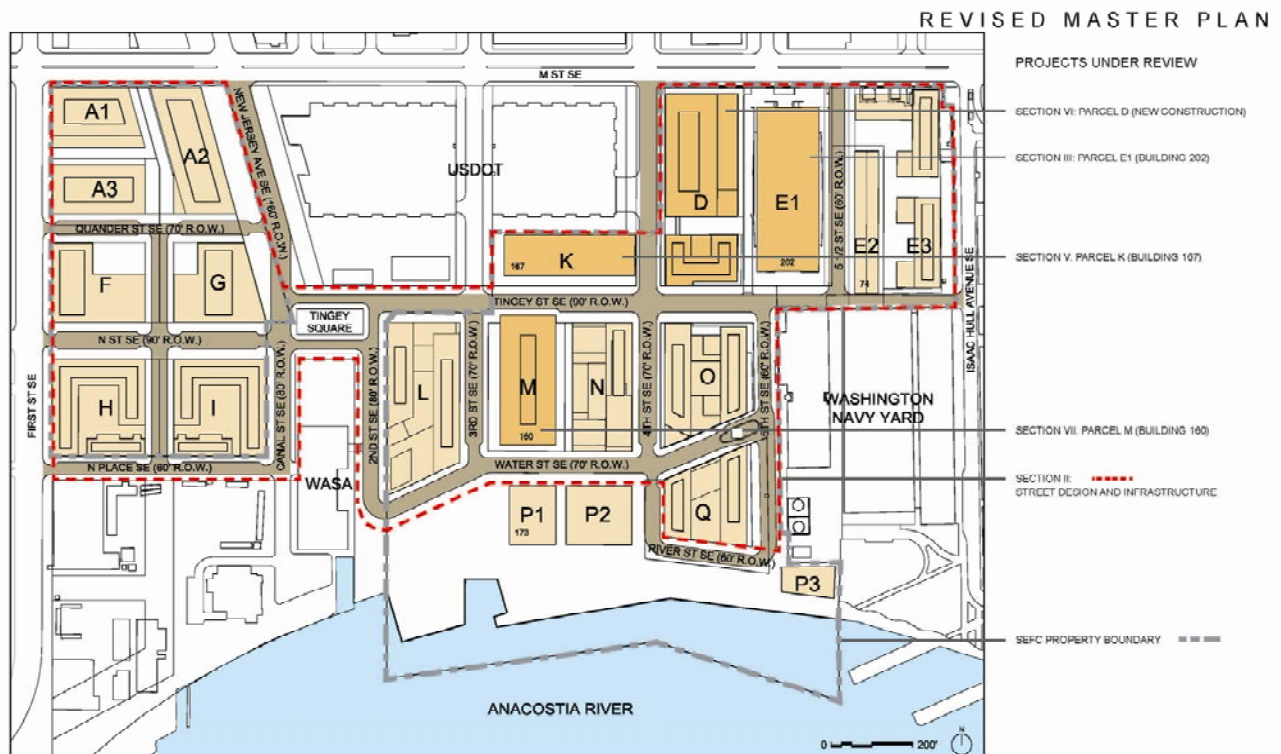
In January, 2004, the Commission approved comments to GSA on the redevelopment plan, pursuant to Section 3(f) of the Act. The Commission also submitted its comments to the Zoning Commission in response to a referral of text and map amendments to add the Southeast Federal Center Overlay to the District of Columbia Zoning Regulations.

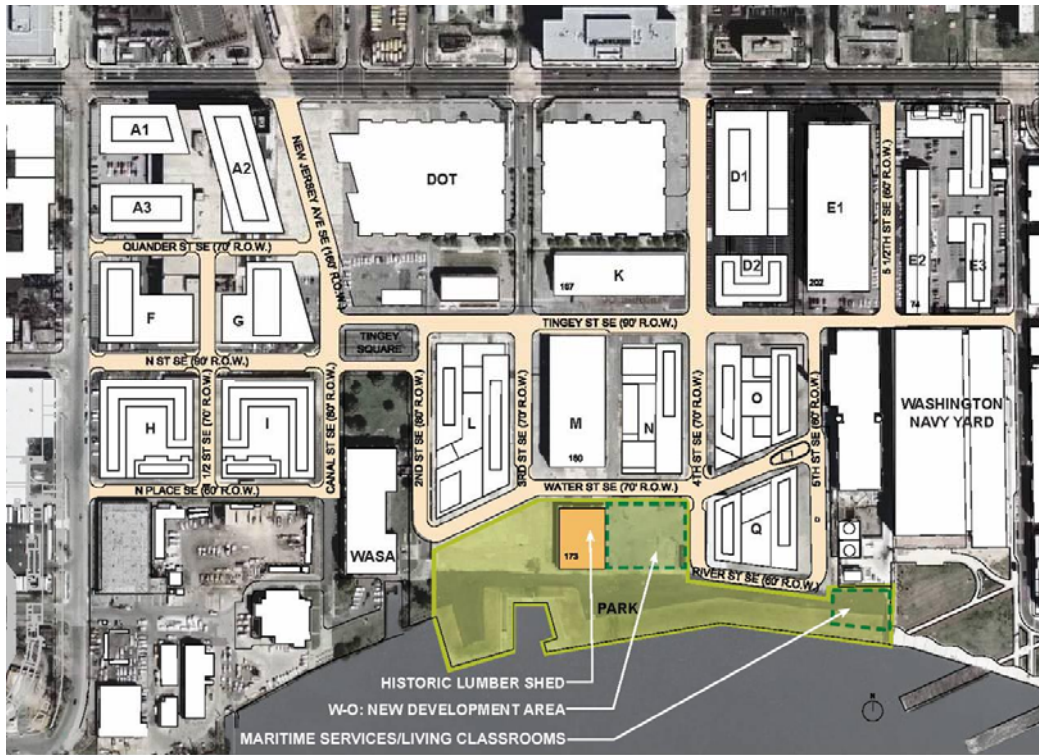
In May, 2004, the Commission approved the Southeast Federal Center Master Plan, recommending (among other elements) that GSA include or maintain a commemorative work site, in a location consistent with the Memorials and Museums Master Plan, and that the Plan draw pedestrians through the site to the Anacostia River waterfront. The Master Plan will require amendment if the memorial site is removed or relocated.

In July, 2007, the Commission commented on Phase I of the development, which included streetscape plans and site amenities, as well as four of the development parcels.

At the September, 2007, meeting, the Commission approved street closings and openings associated with the security perimeter of the WASA pumping station. The possibility of using or reusing cobblestone paving was discussed. The park site plan indicates that cobblestones will be used to pave the southernmost portion of 2nd Street, which will be a pedestrian street to the waterfront.

In addition to the Waterfront Park, the Commission has received this month a referral from the D.C. Office of Zoning for map and text amendments that reflect some corrections and changes to the Master Plan. At the time the Master Plan was approved, it was noted that some amendments would be likely as the design development proceeded. The proposed amendments are mostly technical in nature, but both Water and River Streets are realigned slightly as a result of further planning review and design development. The site plan submitted to the Commission in 2007 already reflected the proposed street realignments, which were developed following consultation with the D.C. Office of Planning and the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office.





Proposal

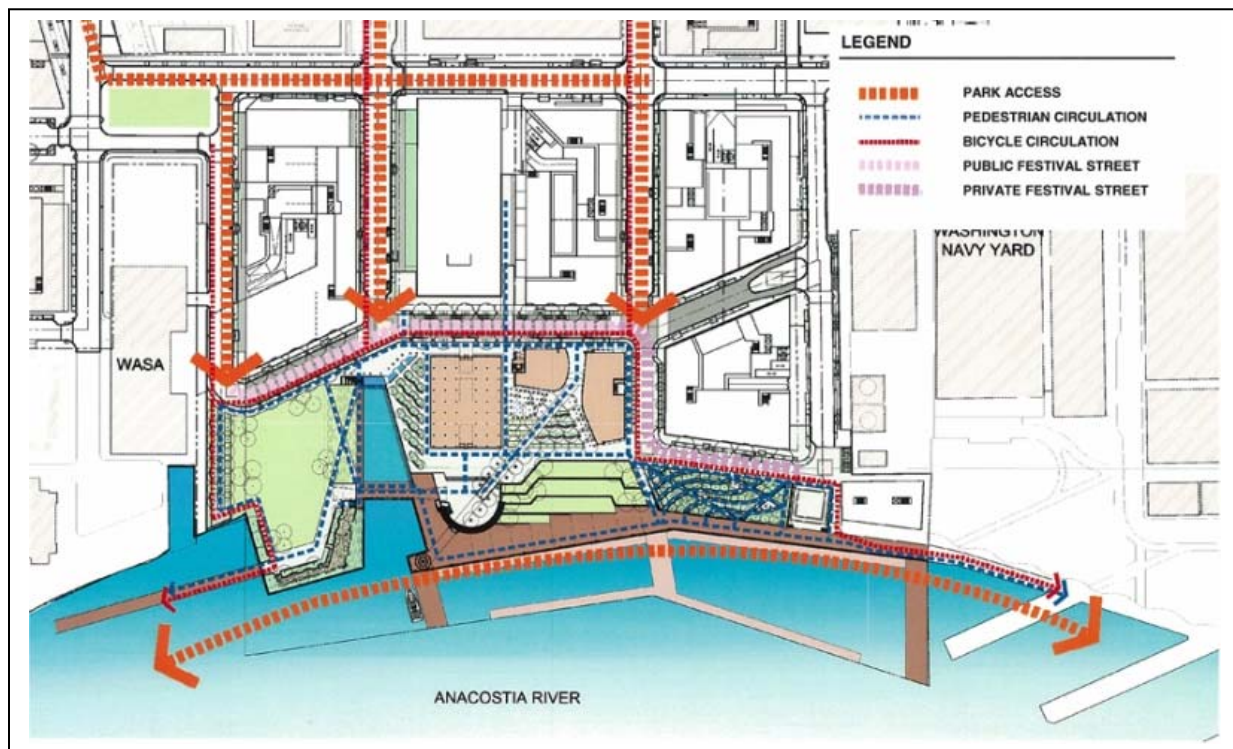
The Waterfront Park will serve as both a passive and active outdoor recreation area, with retail uses and entertainment programming. It is designed to draw those who live and work in the immediate area as well as residents from throughout the city and region and tourists to the Anacostia River. The park is a link of the Anacostia Riverwalk and Trail along the river's edge.

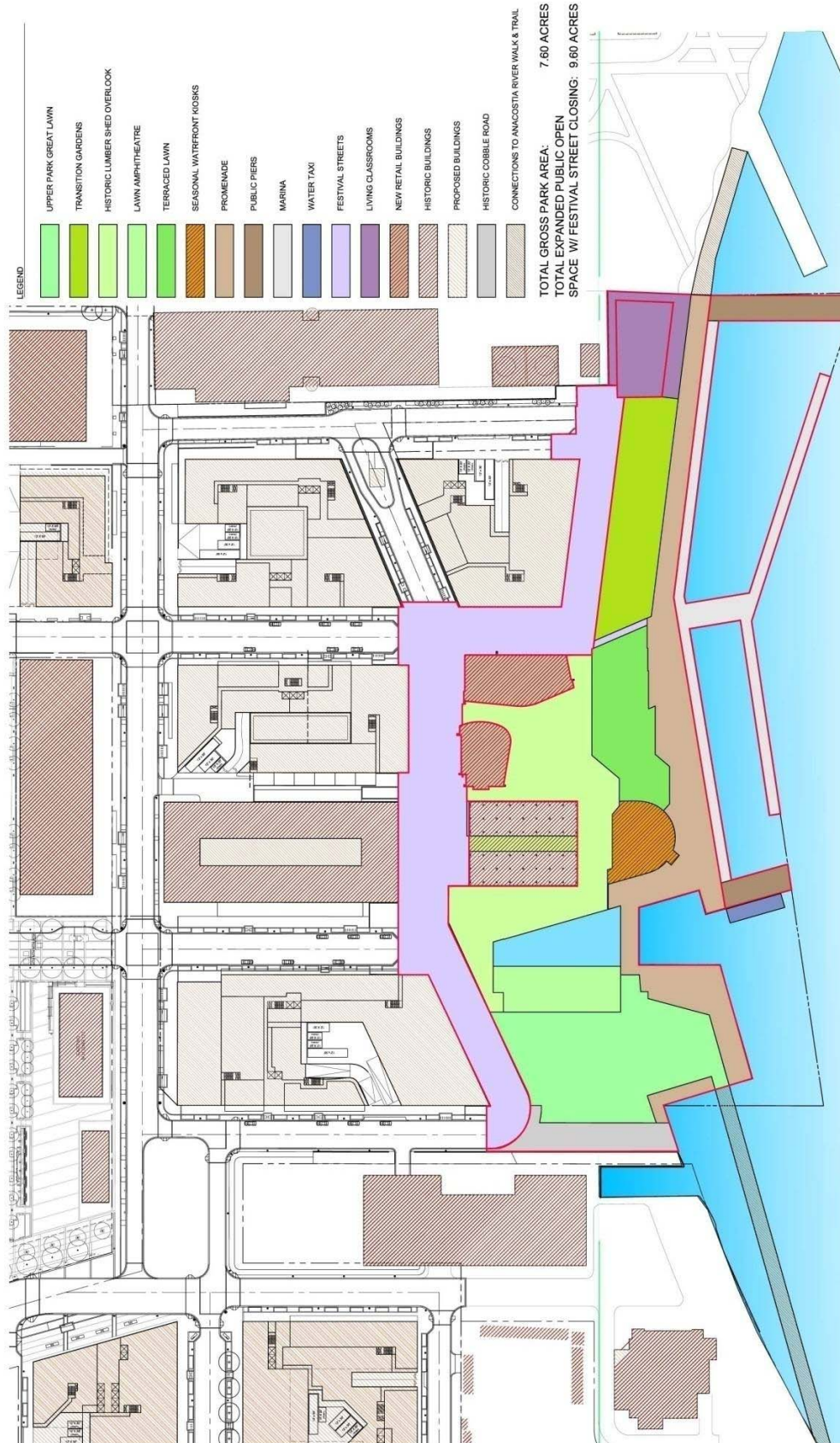
Plans and renderings on the following pages illustrate the proposed park elements (listed roughly from west to east):

- Paved and landscaped plazas providing entry to the park from Water Street and adjacent north-south streets;
- The Great Lawn;
- A water feature (a shallow canal basin and a waterfall, a visible draw for pedestrians into the park plaza); the canal basin is separated from the river by the bulkhead;
- A signature pedestrian bridge above the bulkhead at the south end of the canal basin, connecting the Overlook and the Great Lawn;
- The Overlook (a high vantage point for viewing);
- A boardwalk along the river's edge (that will also serve as the focal point for some events);
- A vertical iconic element on a pier on axis with 3rd Street, SE (not yet designed);

- A terraced lawn providing views of the marina and river, as well as seating for programmed events on the boardwalk;
- The River Garden (a garden designed to provide a greater degree of private contemplation or conversation).

Bicyclists will be able to walk their bikes through the park and along the boardwalk; the bike path will be diverted to run on River and Water Streets north of the park. The circulation paths for both pedestrians and bicyclists are shown below. Water Street and River Street are also indicated as festival streets that can be temporarily closed, thus expanding the available open space of the park for large events.





Use Plan



Landscape
Plan



Water Street is planned as a public “festival street”



Entering the park plaza from the north, at 3rd Street. Fountain is in the foreground; bridge is in the middle ground; the vertical iconic element (to be designed) is in the background; former lumber shed is to the left



The Great Lawn, looking south toward the river, with the pedestrian bridge at left



The Great Lawn, looking east toward the canal basin and the waterfall. The former lumber shed is beyond an area of benches and trees.



The horticultural garden is the landscaped southern edge of the Great Lawn, at the Anacostia River, looking east in this rendering.



The pedestrian bridge crossing the canal basin, above the bulkhead, looking west from the boardwalk. Tables and chairs can create a café area here. Note the bridge support at the western end of the bulkhead trail: staff recommends that this be restudied to improve improved visual and physical connections as the bridge design is also restudied.



Views from the Overlook (looking west toward the terraced lawn and boardwalk)



A suggested form for a temporary performance venue on the boardwalk



The River Garden is designed to allow an area for quieter activities

On the current flood plain maps, the southern third of the site is within the 100-year floodplain. The park is in the southern edge of the fill line and its elements have been designed to accommodate the possibility of flooding. Most of the boardwalk is below the floodplain level. The overlook (orange), the plaza (yellow), the historic and proposed buildings, and the great lawn (shown in green at left) are above the floodplain level. A proposed strategy of filling the areas north of the waterfront park is currently being pursued with the D.C. Department of the Environment and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.



PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

The staff recognizes GSA and Forest City Washington and the team's designers for the quality of the site design to date, especially for its visual and physical connections, its inventive adaptation to ground elevation constraints, and for the range of park activities that will be encouraged. The park will be a signature element of The Yards and indeed of the entire Anacostia waterfront. The park will invigorate the Anacostia riverfront, drawing people to it as envisioned in the Master Plan, and will create open space and recreational venues that will enhance the city and the quality of life of its residents. The park plan, in size and in its planning and design goals, is consistent with the Commission's 2004 reviews of the site, including the Master Plan and zoning actions.

The guidance summarized in the proposed Commission Action has been shared by staff with the applicant and development team in meetings in recent months and will help to inform the design team's ongoing design development. The team has stated that it intends to design the pedestrian bridge to be lighter in form. Staff has noted that the bulkhead path does not have an inviting connection under the bridge's western abutment.

Staff also recommends that the applicant provide an accessible path at that location that would continue more directly along the riverfront. The design team has studied a path along the waterfront (both prior to and subsequent to staff comment) and does not find it feasible, given the grade changes. The staff continues to recommend it as a favorable feature of the park and the team has pledged to continue studying it.

The vertical iconic element proposed for the pier is not yet developed and will be the subject of future review by the Commission (as will the piers and marina). The vertical element and the pedestrian bridge have the potential to become widely recognized riverfront landmarks of the District of Columbia and should be notable works of architecture. The team intends that it be an artistically strong feature.

The staff reminds the applicant that the Master Plan for the Southeast Federal Center reflects the designation in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan for a commemorative work (Site 37) aligned with the New Jersey axis and the waterfront within the Southeast Federal Center. The staff recommends that this site be provisionally located, relocated, or removed when further elements of the Waterfront Park are submitted to the Commission for review or be proposed for removal. *The Southeast Federal Center Master Plan will require amendment if the memorial site is removed or relocated. The current proposal for a tall, iconic element on a pier is intended to create the strong visual link along the New Jersey Avenue axis toward the waterfront envisioned in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan.*

The bicycle path will divert from the boardwalk to River and Water Streets. While this is a deviation from the bike path elsewhere along the riverfront, it was deemed necessary to separate bicyclists from other park users, even when events aren't planned for the boardwalk. Bicyclists will be able to walk their bikes along the boardwalk crossing through the park.

The Waterfront Park plan may need revision if the Federal Emergency Management Agency's proposed revised flood plain maps are adopted. The design team is now studying that issue. If any necessary revisions make a material change to the plaza grade and its relationship to Water Street, the historic lumber shed, and the proposed new buildings, GSA will return to the Commission with a revised 35% design submission for guidance on the proposed changes resulting from revised flood plain maps.

The staff looks forward to reviewing future construction phases at The Yards and to the development of a vibrant, mixed-use waterfront community that will soon enhance and benefit the entire city. Forest City Washington has committed to completing the park in the summer of 2009.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The following policies in the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements* apply, in particular the following policies in the Preservation and Historic Features Element:

Express the dignity befitting the image of the federal government in the national capital. Federal development should adhere to the high aesthetic standards already established by the planning and design legacy of the nation's capital. This legacy encompasses both the old and the new—the capital's rich architectural heritage, continually augmented by the design contributions of each generation. (National Capital Image: #1)

Plan carefully for appropriate uses and compatible design in and near the monumental core to reinforce and enhance its special role in the image of the nation's capital. (National Capital Image: #2)

Protect the settings of historic properties, including views to and from the sites where significant, and integral parts of the historic character of the property. (Stewardship of Historic Properties: #6)

Ensure the continued preservation of federal historic properties through ongoing maintenance and transfer to an appropriate new steward when disposal of historic properties is appropriate. (Stewardship of Historic Properties: #10)

Plan, where feasible, for federal historic properties to serve as catalysts for local economic development and tourism. (Stewardship of Historic Properties: #15)

and the following policies in the Parks and Open Space Element:

Maintain and conserve federal open space as a means of shaping and enhancing urban areas. (Preservation and Maintenance: #2)

Promote public access along the region's waterfronts (Connectivity and Access: #1)

Plan, complete, and maintain connection between public parks and open space (Connectivity and Access: #2)

Provide facilities and areas for events such as concerts, fairs, and displays throughout the National Capital Region (Parks and Landscapes: #3)

Link open space along the waterfront to provide a continuous public open space system (Parks and Landscapes, Waterfront Parks: #1)

Develop the banks of the Anacostia River as a high-quality urban park with a mix of active and passive recreational opportunities. (Parks and Landscapes, Waterfront Parks: #2)

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Pursuant to Section 3(f) of the Southeast Federal Center Public-Private Development Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-407), the Commission is acting in its capacity to comment on a proposal involving the Southeast Federal Center. Since NCPC comments are to advise on Southeast Federal Center proposals, the Commission has no independent NEPA obligation regarding this review.

The applicant is the General Services Administration (GSA), a federal agency that has its own NEPA obligations and has completed an Environmental Impact Statement on the planned development of the Southeast Federal Center, which was finalized in June 2004. The GSA 2004 Record of Decision (ROD), concluding the Environmental Impact Statement process, identifies the actions and those activities that are now submitted to NCPC in agreement with the stipulations of the public law. Staff reviewed the EIS and took it into account in the current review. The submitted actions conform to the GSA ROD, and do not vary from the specified actions or conditions of GSA's ROD. Pursuant to its obligations for review of final EIS documents, the U.S. EPA on June 18, 2004 indicated it had no objections to implementation of the action.

National Historic Preservation Act

GSA has executed a Programmatic Agreement (PA) with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for the treatment of the Navy Yard Annex Historic District and the remaining historic buildings. Design and treatment guidelines have been developed in consultation with the other signatories and with consulting parties (including NCPC). In addition, GSA has undertaken archaeological investigations at the site.

The PA will guide further and future review of proposals for the historic buildings on the site and for treatment of archaeological features and other site conditions and characteristics of the setting, which is a historic district eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The PA's guidelines call for new design to be contemporary and to complement the historic industrial character of the site. At the same time, that character should serve as a departure point for inviting architecture that represents current practice and that will serve as a catalyst for development and public activity.

GSA's Section 106 consultation included a wide range of parties, including the D.C. SHPO, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, NCPC, and the Commission of Fine Arts, adjacent and nearby federal and District agency representatives, community representatives, and interested planning and historic preservation organizations.

The Washington Navy Yard Annex was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places by the Register's Keeper on December 7, 1977. The annex (subsequently the SEFC, now The Yards) includes six historic structures, one of which is within the boundaries of the Waterfront Park and will be adapted for development. In addition, the historic district includes street rights-of-way that will serve as public spaces providing access, long axial views, and the opportunity for vistas to the waterfront.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the Waterfront Park proposal on January 16, 2008, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project had been coordinated with all agencies represented. The participating agencies were: NCPC, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the District Department of Transportation, the General Services Administration, the National Park Service, and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts has the same advisory role as NCPC and reviewed the project at its January 17, 2008 meeting. The letter is attached.