

Date of Meeting: March 9, 2010
Project: Turf and Soil Reconstruction on the National Mall EA and Section 106
Location of Meeting: National Capital Region, Cafeteria, 1100 Ohio Drive SW, Washington, DC, 20024
Time of Meeting: 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm
Purpose of Meeting: EA Public Scoping Meeting #1

Attendees: Louise D. Brodnitz, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
Courtney Spearman, AECOM
Liz Guthrie, American Society of Landscape Architects
Nancy Witherell, National Capital Planning Commission
Henry Arnold, National Coalition to Save Our Mall
Kent Cooper, National Coalition to Save Our Mall
Judy Scott Feldman, National Coalition to Save Our Mall
Stephen Kidd, Smithsonian Institution

NPS Team: John Piltzecker, NPS NAMA
Stephen Lorenzetti, NPS NAMA
Jennifer Talken-Spaulding, NPS NAMA
Perry Wheelock, NPS NCR
Andrea Lind, NPS DSC
Patrick Macdonald, NPS DSC
Michael Kelly, NPS NAMA
Alice McLarty, NPS NAMA
Susan Spain, NPS NAMA
Grace Stephens, NPS NAMA
Mary Wileford Bair, NPS NAMA

Consultant Team: Jill Cavanaugh, Berger
Larry Earle, Berger
Julie Eitner, Berger
Patricia O'Donnell, Heritage Landscapes
Suzette Goldstein, HOK
Teresa Durkin, HOK

From 6:00 pm to 6:45, the consultant team (Jill Cavanaugh from the Louis Berger Group, Inc. [Berger] and Suzette Goldstein from HOK Architects) presented the background and overview of the project. Berger presented the environmental planning process and HOK presented the proposed actions.

The project is divided into three sections: (1) lawn panels, (2) tree panels, and (3) street trees. There are three options for the layout, curb details, and soil profiles of the lawn panels.

Lawn panel layout options:

- Layout Option 1 will maintain 90 degree corners around the turf panels.
- Layout Option 2 will have 13 foot radius corners around the turf panels that will encourage visitors stay on the walkways.
- Layout Option 3 will have 25 foot radius corners around the turf panels that reflect the current visitor desire paths, but will have a much different aesthetic to the present turf panels.

Lawn panel curb options:

- Curb Option 1 will be the standard DC granite curbs with granite gutters and a raised lawn panel (six inches). Granite is the proposed material, but other materials will be considered throughout the design process.
- Curb Option 2 will be a three foot wide granite “checkmark” curb with a gutter and raised lawn panel (five inches). This option is a less dramatic physical impediment to a standard curb.
- Curb Option 3 will be a “V” granite curb/edge with a small gutter. This option does not raise the lawn panels, but has a small depression to aid with drainage.
- The designer noted that raising the panels by five to six inches will help keep gravel from migrating to the panels and will help manage drainage.

Lawn panel soil profile options:

- Soil profile Option 1 will involve fractioning the existing sub-base, installing drainage deep into the soil, taking a percentage of existing top soil and amending with new organic soils.
- Soil profile Option 2 will utilize existing soil, but amending with a high percentage of sand, which will help with the overall soil compaction over time.
- Soil profile Option 3 will utilize sand soil, a very high percentage sand soil concentration similar to athletic field soil, on the surface with gravel below. A barrier of clay material will be placed below the gravel layer as a barrier to keep water in the upper soil profile.
- The designer noted that all soil profile alternatives will include irrigation because the current irrigation system is non-functioning. The design team is evaluating different sources of water for the irrigation system to meet sustainability goals including using cisterns and rainwater capture from the adjacent roadways and buildings.

Tree panel layout options:

- Option 1 will maintain 90 degree corners with the existing metal edging. This option will have the least disturbance to the trees and their root area.
- Option 2 will utilize a 13 foot radius for the tree panel corners with a flush curb and edge of 2% pitch. This option will have minimal disturbance to the trees and their root area.

Street Tree options:

- Option 1 will maximize gravel surface and will offer a continuous tree trench that will result in the least disturbance to the trees and their root area and will seek to improve the conditions under the soil. However, this option will not protect at the base of the trees and will offer no aesthetic relief.
- Option 1A will reintroduce a soft-scape with a six inch raised granite curb surrounding the tree base to discourage visitors from walking in this area.
- Option 2 will utilize a Low impact development (LID) system, a sustainable stormwater management system, including tree wells, high soil volume, and new turf-like vegetation. This system will connect to street stormwater runoff to help with water filtration and conservation. Six inch granite curbs will surround the tree base to discourage visitors from walking in this area.

The consultant team emphasized that comments are essential to the design process and can be submitted up until April 8, 2010 at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website (PEPC) at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/NAMA> or via mail to Jennifer Talken-Spaulding at 900 Ohio Drive SW, Washington, DC, 20024 or via e-mail at Mall_Turf_Soil@nps.gov.

Between 6:45pm to 7:30pm following the presentation, there was a question and answer session between the attendees and the NPS.

Q. Henry Arnold expressed the need for an overall design plan to ensure all options and alternatives are cohesive and give consideration to restoration, historic resources, and sustainability. He explained that the proposed actions as separate options represent a “band aid solution” to the problems. He noted that each of the tree panel options have very different design implications.

A. The NPS responded that the National Mall Plan (NMP) is the overall design plan that this project will follow. The NMP addresses areas where specific uses can take place, the implementation of best management practices, and design standards. For this project, the funding has been directed towards the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the turf and soil. Therefore, this project is considered an opportunity to move forward with the turf and soil elements using this funding despite the fact that the NMP has not been completed yet.

Q. Louise D. Brodnitz asked for clarification on the reasons for implementing the proposed actions. She stated that if the gravel on the pathways on the Mall is the main concern, alternative walkway materials could solve the problem.

A. The project team responded that the problem is intense soil compaction, turf degradation, and overall soil system failure. Therefore, the goal of the project is to make the turf a more resilient medium. The walkway surface is undetermined at this time, but both gravel and hardscape options are being considered for the walkways.

Q. Kent Cooper asked about the specific details of the turf and trees in the project area such as the number of trees in the project area, their age, condition and average attrition rate. He also suggested that the project should consider a long term strategy of changing the species to something more suited to the project area.

A. The NPS responded that they are trying to create a design that be successful no matter what tree species is present, although the elm tree is one of the best suited species for the conditions in the project area and is also considered a historic resource. The NPS noted that currently, 60-70% of street trees are in failing health, but there are NPS nurseries with Jefferson elm clones and Princeton elm clones that can replace trees within the project area.

Q. Judy Scott Feldman asked if the project team has considered replacing the turf on the tree panels with a permeable material that would enable public use under the trees.

A. The NPS responded that historically, turf has grown under the trees, and noted that the area under the trees provides shade and is well used for passive recreation by the public.

Q. Stephen Kidd stated that the history of the Mall demonstrates its evolving nature. All of the new memorials, new museums, new protests, and new events, speak to the Mall’s evolving landscape and address how people want to use the Mall now. He expressed concern for the proposed curbs on both the turf panels and tree panels and their potential to act as tripping hazards. He stated that the Mall should have a more welcoming message that encourages visitor use.

A. The project team responded that they are not seeking to inhibit public use of the area and public safety and universal accessibility will be the highest priority when considering curbing options.

Q. Judy Scott Feldman stated that in the past, the Mall had a more east to west axis. She explained that by separating the street trees from the other three rows of trees, the Mall will lose the sense that all of the trees are part of an architectural component that runs east to west.

A. The project team responded that the larger design scheme of the Mall will be considered throughout this project. However, other resource areas in addition to aesthetics will be considered including visitor use, sustainability, and vegetation.

Q. Nancy Witherell asked if the project team could clarify if the project is more short-term or long-term and also if it will be implemented prior to or following the NMP.

A. The NPS responded that the project is short-term and the goal is to repair the soils and turf in the project area. However, the project is considering long term implications and goals.

Louise D. Brodnitz suggested that the NPS propose an adverse effect for the Section 106 process from the outset because any addition of curbing to the Mall will change the profile of the grass.

Q. Stephen Kidd explained that in the early 1990's the NPS asked the Smithsonian to install utilities beneath the central turf panels, which they did. He asked if these utilities would be impacted by the proposed actions.

A. The NPS responded that utilities will be taken into account and impacts to utilities will be avoided.

Judy Scott Feldman stated that the project is labeled as a repair project, yet many of the actions go beyond merely repair. She asked if the project can simply be called a reconstruction project. She suggested that it would be better to narrow the scope of the project and actions and expressed concern that with the present proposed actions, the project could be considered an EIS.

At 7:30 pm, the meeting concluded.