

Bupp, Susan

From: Beverly_Burrowes@ao.uscourts.gov
Sent: Monday, May 05, 2008 3:50 PM
To: Bupp, Susan
Cc: Vincent_Huang@ao.uscourts.gov; Iris_Guerra@ao.uscourts.gov; Tom_Jenkins@ao.uscourts.gov
Subject: AO comments on Final Environmental Assessment &Section 4(f) Evaluation

Susan -- As requested in the letter dated April 25, 2008 from Parsons Transportation Group regarding subject, the Administrative Office has the following question we would like verification.

Will the 2 new pedestrian cross ways between Union Station and the Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building (at Columbus Circle) be constructed with **raised/elevated** stamped concrete and ramps?

This question relates to Figure 9 Roadway Plan, Columbus Circle/Columbus Plaza, page 2-2.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. Contact me if you wish to discuss.

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GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



Office of the Director

June 4, 2008

Susan Bupp
Parsons Transportation Group
1133 15th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20005

RE: Comments on Final Environmental Assessment/Section 4(f) Evaluation for Columbus Circle/Columbus Plaza Rehabilitation – Union Station, Washington, D.C.

Dear Ms. Bupp:

The Office of Planning has reviewed the Environmental Assessment/Section 4(f) Evaluation for Columbus Circle/Columbus Plaza Rehabilitation project. Thank you for considering the following comments.

APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF

- Applicant:** District Department of Transportation
- Location:** This project is located on Massachusetts Avenue, NE, at Columbus Plaza, a major urban arterial highway with seven through traffic lanes. It serves as a major cross-town connector and commuter route.
- Proposal:** The project includes roadway and sidewalk improvements for Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., from 200 feet west of the intersection of First Street, N.W., to 200 feet east of the intersection of First Street, N.E. Also included is the reconfiguration of Columbus Plaza between Massachusetts Avenue on the south and the Union Station service roadways on the north. The project includes removal of the existing interior circulation roadway, fence, and adjacent shrubs in Columbus Plaza and the construction of a new intersection at E Street, N.E. Massachusetts Avenue will be re-aligned to the north and will include wide median traffic islands/pedestrian refuges. The existing service roads in front of Union Station will be re-configured to provide better traffic control. The sidewalk at Union Station will be widened at strategic locations and extended to afford better accommodation of heavy pedestrian traffic. Brick walkways and granite curbs will be repaired and reset.

BACKGROUND

The DC Department of Transportation (DDOT), in conjunction with the National Park Service, the Union Station Redevelopment Corporation (USRC), and the Architect of the Capitol, and in cooperation with the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), is proposing to improve access and circulation patterns in and around Columbia Plaza for pedestrians, taxis, bicyclists, and permanent stops at Union Station. In September 2000, USRC prepared the Union Station Access and Circulation Study, completed by Parson Transportation Group. That document provided specific discussion of existing conditions, technical

analyses, and recommendations for improvements. In March 2008, DDOT completed the *Final Environmental Assessment and Section 4(f) Evaluation, Columbus Circle/Columbus Plaza Rehabilitation*, and released it for comment on April 25, 2008.

BASIS OF REPORT

The Office of Planning (OP) has reviewed the *Final Environmental Assessment and Section 4(f) Evaluation*. This review includes consideration of the CapitalSpace park and open space initiative, and the District of Columbia 2006 Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, staff has considered conditions to the existing site and adjacent areas, as well as visited the site to prepare this report.

KEY ISSUES

The proposed improvements that are part of the rehabilitation of Columbus Circle (roadway) and Columbus Plaza (open space) at Union Station are an improvement over existing conditions. The proposed plaza and related site improvements greatly improve traffic circulation and create additional green space in the plaza area for pedestrians to walk through. However, there are several concerns with pedestrian safety, the environment and urban design of which we would like further consideration as part of the *Environmental Assessment*.

Pedestrian Crossings

There are several comprehensive plan policies that the Office of Planning referenced when preparing comments on pedestrian safety:

Policy T-2.4.1: Pedestrian Network

Develop, maintain, and improve pedestrian facilities. Improve the city's sidewalk system to form a network that links residents across the city. 410.5

Policy T-2.4.2: Pedestrian Safety

Improve safety and security at key pedestrian nodes throughout the city. Use a variety of techniques to improve pedestrian safety. 410.6

Policy T-2.3.1: Better Integration of Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning

Integrate bicycle and pedestrian planning and safety considerations more fully into the planning and design of District roads, transit facilities, public buildings, and parks. 409.8

Based on these policies, we identified concerns related to the sections on "Proposed Action for Traffic and Transportation (3.2.1)" and the "Mitigation Measures for Traffic and Transportation (3.3.1)". Several radial walkways through Columbus Plaza (shown in Figure 10. LANDSCAPE PLAN, COLUMBUS CIRCLE/COLUMBUS PLAZA) direct pedestrians to cross Massachusetts Avenue at locations that may not have traffic controls (drawings do not include a signalization plan) presenting significant safety hazards. Given the width of the roadway and traffic volumes on Massachusetts Avenue, any crossing of pedestrians at places other than a signalized intersection are unsafe.

OP recommends the following modifications to the proposed rehabilitation:

- All walkways in Columbus Plaza should be aligned to encourage the use of controlled crossings only.
- Radial walkways between the Columbus monument and Massachusetts Avenue that do not extend to the street (as shown in Figure 12 CIRCULATION CONCEPT B) should have significant landscaping, open fencing, or other barriers that are consistent with the

open design intent of the plaza and that prevent worn paths through the lawn leading to unmarked and uncontrolled crossings.

- Median islands on Massachusetts Avenue should be designed with landscaping to discourage pedestrians from crossing at uncontrolled locations.
- Walkways on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue and immediately to the east and west of Union Station should be aligned to provide pedestrians with the most direct (straight-line) and safe route (controlled crossings and short crossing distance) to key entrances of Union Station.

Widening of Massachusetts Avenue

OP referred to the following Comprehensive Plan policy when preparing comments on the widening of Massachusetts Avenue:

Policy T-2.4.3: Traffic Calming

Continue to address traffic-related safety issues through carefully considered traffic calming measures. 410.

The following comments are relevant to the sections on “Proposed Action for Traffic and Transportation (3.2.1)” and the “Mitigation Measures for Traffic and Transportation (3.3.1)”. Recommendations in the study include widening Massachusetts Avenue south of Columbus Circle. However, a key issue identified in the study is excessive motor vehicle speeds along this segment. Widening Massachusetts Avenue is likely to increase motor vehicle speeds and therefore present additional safety hazards for pedestrians and bicyclists. This extremely wide street, combined with the adjacent open space and low building heights, encourages vehicular speeding. Studies from various cities have shown that narrower streets are safer streets. A study conducted in the City of Longmont, Colorado, found that street width was one of the top two criteria associated with a reduced number of injuries resulting from conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians. The study also found that narrower streets reduce the speed of vehicles, reducing the likelihood of a crash, as well as the severity of crash-induced injuries.

OP recommends that the following modification to the proposed rehabilitation be considered:

- Apply minimum lane widths (10’ – 11’) on Massachusetts Avenue, as well as other appropriate traffic calming measures.

On-Road Bicycle Facilities

OP referred to the following Comprehensive Plan policies when preparing comments for on-road bicycle facilities:

Policy T-2.3.3: Bicycle Safety

Increase bicycle safety through traffic calming measures, provision of public bicycle parking, enforcement of regulations requiring private bicycle parking, and improving bicycle access where barriers to bicycle travel now exist. 409.10

Policy T-2.3.2: Bicycle Network

Provide and maintain a safe, direct, and comprehensive bicycle network connecting neighborhoods, employment locations, public facilities, transit stations, parks and other key destinations. Eliminate system gaps to provide continuous bicycle facilities. 409.9

Policy T-2.5.1: Creating Multi-Modal Corridors

Transform key District arterials into multi-modal corridors that incorporate and balance a variety of mode choices including bus or streetcar, bicycle, pedestrian and auto. 411.11

The following comments are relevant to the sections on “Proposed Action for Traffic and Transportation (3.2.1)” and “Mitigation Measures for Traffic and Transportation (3.3.1)”. The planned bike station for Union Station (construction will begin in the summer of 2008) will provide parking for 150 bicycles, will house a bicycle repair shop and retail, and will be the first of its kind on the East Coast. It will generate significant bicycling activity and will be a symbol of the District’s commitment to multi-modal transportation.

OP recommends that the following modifications to the proposed rehabilitation be considered:

- Full consideration of access to the plaza by bicyclists.
- Provide striped bike lanes on all roadways leading to Union Station.
- Design crossings to accommodate significant pedestrian volumes, as well as bicyclists.
- Provide two locations at Union Station (an appropriate site on the east side and west side of Union Station) for the location of District SmartBike docking stations.

Design of Columbus Plaza

The Office of Planning referred to the preliminary findings and recommendations for Center City Parks in the CapitalSpace initiative when preparing these comments on Columbus Plaza:

- The downtown area is the focus of significant residential and workforce growth.
- It is projected that 30 percent of the City’s future housing growth and 70 percent of job growth will occur downtown and nearby along the Anacostia River.
- The area around Union Station is identified as one with overall limited access to parks, open spaces, and recreational amenities; pressure on existing park and open space resources is expected to rise.

There are several additional issues for Center City parks that CapitalSpace has also identified that relate directly to rehabilitation of Columbus Plaza:

- Some parts of the city are at or approaching build-out while other areas are undergoing transformation that could yield new park opportunities.
- Existing open space assets are not sufficiently maintained and enhanced to meet demand.
- Resources are insufficient to enhance and maintain our urban parks at the desired level.
- Ensure that existing parks, and in particular their active recreational amenities, can be used to their full potential.
- Use sustainable design features, including low impact development techniques and other greening practices, when developing new parks and park improvements.
- Consider sustainable building materials when refurbishing parks; where historical and cultural resources may be negatively affected, utilize adjacent rights-of-way to provide sustainable features around these parks.

OP referred to the following Urban Design and Environmental Protection policies from the Comprehensive Plan when preparing comments for the proposed plaza design:

Policy E-1.1.3: Landscaping

Encourage the use of landscaping to beautify the city, enhance streets and public spaces, reduce stormwater runoff, and create a stronger sense of character and identity. 603.7

Policy E-3.1.2: Using Landscaping and Green Roofs to Reduce Runoff

Promote an increase in tree planting and landscaping to reduce stormwater runoff, including the expanded use of green roofs in new construction and adaptive reuse, and the application of tree and landscaping standards for parking lots and other large paved surfaces. 613.3

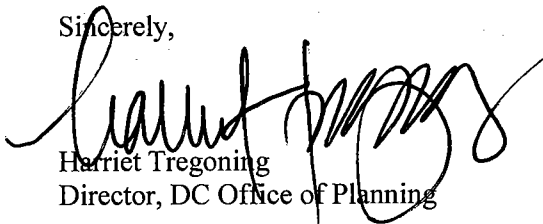
The following comments are relevant to the section "Proposed Action for Land Use and Socioeconomics (3.2.2)". Some components of this project address issues identified in the CapitalSpace initiative directly and should be recognized. However, several elements that had been included in earlier versions of the plan have been removed.

- Identify that the restoration of the plaza will be an enhancement to Center City parks.
- Determine the difference between the amount of paving and landscaping in existing conditions and proposed conditions, and acknowledge the addition of green space to the Center City.
- Restore the landscape in the median and to the large pedestrian islands to the east and west of Union Station to decrease paving and add additional landscaping; find alternative location for emergency vehicles and return those areas to landscaping.
- Restore seating to Columbus Plaza to ensure that the open space is used to its full potential.
- Incorporate sustainable design and low impact development features into the landscape and median to further reduce the amount of stormwater runoff from the project site.

We believe that the comments outlined above could have a significant impact on pedestrian safety and the use of the plaza. My office looks forward to better understanding how the pedestrian safety issues we have raised can be addressed, how the benefits of the additional park space and restoration of amenities add to the project, and how sustainable practices can be incorporated into the project.

Should you have any questions, please contact Patricia Zingsheim, Associate Director for Revitalization & Design, at (202) 442-8965. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Harriet Tregoning
Director, DC Office of Planning

HT/rh/cgb