

# COMMISSION ACTION

NCPC File No. 5087



## NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN PERIMETER SECURITY

The Mall, between Maryland Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Jefferson Drive and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC

Submitted by the Smithsonian Institution

July 10, 2003

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### *Commission Action Requested by Applicant*

Approval of preliminary and final site development plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722 (d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722 (b)(1)).

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### *Commission Action*

The Commission:

- Approves the preliminary site development plans for the perimeter security enhancements at the National Museum of the American Indian, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.41(38.00) 41198.
- Recommends that prior to submission of final site development plans, SI:
  - Provide additional breaks in the granite planter wall along 4<sup>th</sup> Street.
  - Relocate the bollard fence line, and boulders if feasible, from the outside edge of the two large planters on Independence and Maryland Avenues to the museum side of the planter.
  - Relocate the existing bollard line at the corner of Independence Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street toward the museum so that it does not impede pedestrian traffic.
  - Remove the raised bollards on the two easternmost planter boxes on Maryland Avenue because they are redundant security measures.

- Work with Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority on using a hardened bus stop along Independence Avenue instead of the existing bus stop with bollards behind.

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Deborah B. Young  
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

S. Sechrist

NCPC File No. 5087



## NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN PERIMETER SECURITY

The Mall, between Maryland Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Jefferson Drive and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC

Submitted by the Smithsonian Institution

July 3, 2003

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### *Abstract*

The Smithsonian Institution (SI) has requested approval of preliminary and final site development plans for perimeter security enhancements at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). The NMAI was approved by the Commission on June 1, 2000 and the building is approximately fifty-percent complete. SI is bringing the project forward so that the construction of the security features can be an integral part of the new building. The security improvements consist of granite-clad and bronze bollards, grandfather boulders and planter walls. Some elements of the approved building already serve to meet the security requirements of SI and are in general conformance with the Urban Design and Security Plan. Although SI has requested preliminary and final approval, staff recommends that only preliminary approval be given at this time because of recommended design modifications, including: (1) punctuating the granite planter wall along 4<sup>th</sup> Street, (2) relocating the bollard line at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Independence Avenue, and (3) setting back the security line along Maryland Avenue and Independence Avenue from the street side to the museum side. NCPC and SI are also still consulting with the DC SHPO through the Section 106 process.

### *Commission Action Requested by Applicant*

Approval of preliminary and final site development plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722 (d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722 (b)(1)).

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### *Executive Director's Recommendation*

The Commission:

- **Approves** the preliminary site development plans for the perimeter security enhancements at the National Museum of the American Indian, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.41(38.00) 41198.

- **Recommends** that prior to submission of final site development plans, SI:
  - Provide additional breaks in the granite planter wall along 4<sup>th</sup> Street.
  - Relocate the bollard fence line, and boulders if feasible, from the outside edge of the two large planters on Independence and Maryland Avenues to the museum side of the planter.
  - Relocate the existing bollard line at the corner of Independence Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street toward the museum so that it does not impede pedestrian traffic.
  - Remove the raised bollards on the two easternmost planter boxes on Maryland Avenue because they are redundant security measures.
  - Work with Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority on using a hardened bus stop along Independence Avenue instead of the existing bus stop with bollards behind.

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### *PROJECT DESCRIPTION*

SI has requested preliminary and final site development approval for perimeter security enhancements for the NMAI. NMAI is being constructed on the last available building site on the Mall. The building is over 50 percent complete and the museum is scheduled to open in September 2004. SI intends to have the perimeter security in place when the building opens to the public.

#### Site

The NMAI is located on the south side of the Mall and is bounded by Jefferson Drive on the north, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street on the east, Maryland and Independence Avenue on the south, and 4<sup>th</sup> Street on the west.

#### Design

Natural strata formations eroded by wind and water inspired the design of the National Museum of the American Indian, which includes several outdoor gathering and performance areas, water features and a native habitat landscape. The museum will have approximately 260,000 net square feet of space in five above grade levels, including two mechanical mezzanine levels (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors). The building will be clad with a buff colored Kasota limestone and a gray American Mist granite will be used for other site elements, such as the building's base, site walls and site paving.

Where feasible, existing site features will be used to provide the necessary security. For example, the approved 30-inch tribal recognition wall on Jefferson Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and for a short portion of Maryland Avenue will provide necessary security for the museum on the north and east. The design of the remainder of the security elements is intended to draw on the Native

American principles that drove the design of the museum, and use many of the same materials prevalent in the building site.

The proposed security enhancements consist of the following elements:

- *Grandfather boulders.* Existing grandfather rock arrangements will be enhanced with additional boulders at two entrances (4<sup>th</sup> Street and Jefferson Drive, and Maryland Avenue). The placement of the boulders is irregular to reflect how they might be found in nature. Where the boulders do not provide full coverage, security bollards will be added. Boulders are also being placed in one of the landscape beds along Maryland Avenue to lessen the impact to the root system of an existing mature elm tree.
- *NMAI bollards.* At each of the building's three entrances (the third entrance is the student entrance along Independence Avenue) custom designed NMAI bollards will be placed. The bollards will be clad in bronze with a woven copper band motif. Retractable bollards of a similar design will be placed at the entrance to the loading drive. The NMAI bollards measure 37 inches high and 13 inches in diameter and will be located roughly 4 feet on-center.
- *Planter walls.* Planter walls will be located on the outside edge of the planting bed along 4th Street. The 30-inch wall will be made from American Mist granite and will be punctuated at two locations where light poles will be located. The wall steps down as it moves from south to north.
- *Seating walls.* Approved seating walls on either side of the student entrance on Independence Avenue will be reinforced and raised in height to meet the necessary security requirements.
- *Granite bollards (either on a 6-inch granite curb or freestanding).* Like the planter wall, the granite bollards will also be constructed of American Mist granite. The bollards will be located on a raised granite curb when they are located around planters and will be freestanding in all other instances. The freestanding granite bollards will be located at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Independence Avenue, and east on Independence Avenue onto Maryland Avenue. The freestanding bollards measure approximately 37 inches high and almost 16 inches in diameter, and are reduced by 6 inches in height when located on the 6-inch granite curb. The granite bollards are placed just under 4 feet clear.
- *Guard booth.* A guard booth will be placed at the edge of a planter bed, behind the stone planter walls on the east and west elevations. The building will be constructed of metal panels painted the same gray color as the building's glazing system. SI selected a metal paneled building because the guard booth will be located on top of major utility lines and must be light enough to be removed, if necessary.

## *EVALUATION*

Staff supports SI's initiative to develop a security solution that draws upon design elements at the NMAI. The use of American Mist granite will visually tie many of the new elements to the building, making the security elements read as designed elements of the overall building complex. SI should be commended for using existing building elements to provide the required security setbacks – such as the tribal recognition wall on Jefferson and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, and the grandfather boulders at two of the three entrances.

### Urban Design and Security Plan

In general, many of the proposed improvements meet the intent of the Commission's Urban Design and Security Plan. The plan discusses Independence Avenue and Maryland Avenue as Monumental Avenues that are important streetscapes to be considered as a *whole*, rather than a series of different parts, but the plan acknowledges that there is significant variety in building setbacks, street trees and architecture, particularly on the north side of Independence. For the north side of Independence, the Plan identifies the most feasible solution being a combination of plinth walls and custom-designed solutions. (The use of the custom-designed bollard at the entrance feature meets this recommendation.)

Ideally the Commission would be reviewing NMAI in the context of the SI Mall-wide security plan, which is just getting underway now. However, there is an immediate need for SI to incorporate the security construction into the overall construction schedule for the NMAI museum. SI has indicated that the proposed security elements, including the granite bollards, are specifically related to the NMAI building and that they do not expect to use any of these designed elements at other museums on the Mall.

There are three main areas that staff believes SI should reevaluate prior to the Commission giving final approval – the location of the bollards at the corner of Independence Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, the planter wall along 4<sup>th</sup> Street and the security line along Independence and Maryland Avenues.

### Corner condition at Independence Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street

The proposed bollards at the corner of Independence and 4<sup>th</sup> Street are located within the public space, even bisecting the apron at the street corner. In the opinion of staff, SI should relocate these bollards closer to the museum to allow for adequate room for pedestrian movement at this corner. Staff recommends that SI consider hardening the proposed existing retaining wall at this corner to provide the necessary security.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Street planter wall

The proposed planter wall along 4<sup>th</sup> Street is located on the outer edge of the planting bed that lies between the sidewalk and the curb. The planter wall itself is set back approximately 3 feet from the curb. (There is metered street parking along this side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street). Staff originally proposed relocating the planter wall to a location that was more internal to the site, but SI has

indicated that the existence of major utilities in this area and the distance of the building to the street necessitate this outer security setback. However, staff believes that the continuity of the planter wall should be punctuated in additional locations to give a more permeable feeling to this edge of the site. SI has indicated that they believe the continuous massing of the wall can be further broken down without compromising building security. Through the Section 106 consultation process SI has also been asked to study curving the planter wall where it meets the drive aisle consistent with the curvilinear building and the other granite walls at the site.

### Maryland Avenue Planter Beds

Staff believes that the proposed location of the long line of bollards on the outside edge of the planters along Maryland Avenue is an instance where the security elements are projecting unnecessarily into the public space and that the museum entrance has expanded into the public realm.

Maryland Avenue is ultimately intended to be a prominent diagonal avenue on par with Pennsylvania Avenue as described in the Legacy plan and as originally envisioned by Pierre L'Enfant. With this in mind, the Urban Design and Security Plan recommends a landscape solution where bollards are placed within a hedge with street trees to reinforce the strong diagonal of the street and provide a green edge to soften the rather cold edges of Maryland Avenue through Southwest Washington. While the re-establishment of Maryland Avenue is a long-term goal – especially with the relocation of the railroad – in the short term the view corridor should be retained, or enhanced, where possible. Staff recommends that SI study moving the security line inward parallel to the Maryland Avenue right-of-way and out of the public space on the museum side of the planter. SI might consider either extending the seating wall on the inside edge of the planter, using boulders in both planters for a more natural solution, or relocating the curbed bollards.

### Additional recommendations

Staff also recommends that the bollards proposed on the north side of the planters at the eastern end of Maryland Avenue be removed because they are redundant – the tribal recognition wall provides the necessary security. In addition, staff encourages SI to work with WMATA to provide a hardened bus stop so that there is no need for bollards behind the structure.

## *CONSULTATION*

### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on June 18, 2003, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; Fire Department; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the District Department of Transportation; the General Services Administration; and the National Park Service.

### Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts gave conceptual approval to the security enhancements at the May 15/22, 2003 meeting. Prior to giving final approval, the Commission asked to see a mock up of the bollards at the site and suggested that where possible, the existing street furniture (bus shelter) be hardened to provide the necessary security.

### *CONFORMANCE*

#### National Historic Preservation Act

NCPC has initiated consultation with the DC State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO) on behalf of the Smithsonian, determining that the project overall has many commendable features but that the retaining wall on 4<sup>th</sup> Street would have an adverse effect on the character of the public space of the 4<sup>th</sup> Street right-of-way, a contributing element of the L'Enfant Plan. On 4<sup>th</sup> Street, the retaining wall near the curb, outside the tree line, adds a new and atypical feature and character at the cartway edge. The retaining wall is a higher and more solid form than the Urban Design and Security Plan generally anticipates so close to the curb. A consultation meeting among SI, NCPC and the DC SHPO was held on June 24, 2003 at the site. The parties agreed that creating additional breaks in the retaining wall could minimize the adverse effect. The SHPO made another suggestion, now being considered by the SI, to curve the outer edge of the retaining wall at the end next to the guard booth, consistent with the curb cut there and the curvilinear character of the building itself.

#### National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, the Smithsonian Institution determined that this proposal did not require an environmental impact statement. In lieu, thereof, the Smithsonian prepared and submitted an environmental assessment (EA) in September 1993. In May 1996, the Commission took responsibility for the scope and content of the environmental assessment in its review of the schematic development plans for the museum. This action completed the Commission's NEPA responsibility for the review of the project outside of any substantial change to the plans that would have a significant environmental impact. The staff finds the current submittal does not affect, in any significant way, the environmental conclusions of the 1996 NEPA determination.