
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District: **L’Enfant Plan** () Agenda
Addresses: **Proposed Closing of L’Enfant Streets
for the DC United Soccer Stadium** (x) Consent Calendar
Meeting Date: **April 23, 2015**
S.O. Number: **S.O. 13-14605**
Staff Reviewer: **Andrew Lewis** (x) Street Closing
David Maloney

The Office of the Surveyor has forwarded an application by the District of Columbia Department of General Services (DGS) to close portions of three L’Enfant streets and two reservations. The streets to be closed include portions of First, R and S Streets, SW and Potomac Avenue, SW. Reservations 243 and 244 along Potomac Avenue are also proposed for jurisdictional transfer.

DGS has requested the street closings and jurisdictional transfer for the purposes of constructing a new soccer stadium for DC United near Buzzard Point. Legislation adopted by the D.C. Council in December 2014 establishes the financing and terms for the construction of the stadium. The Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development is responsible for concluding an agreement that provides for the District to convey the site under a long-term lease. DGS has been charged with implementing the street and alley closing process.

Under the District’s street and alley closing procedures (Section 9-202.02 (4) of the D.C. Official Code), the Historic Preservation Review Board is given an opportunity to comment on L’Enfant Plan street closings before action by the D.C. Council. Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, abutting property owners, and other review agencies, including the Office of Planning, District Department of Transportation, and National Capital Planning Commission, are also given the opportunity to submit comments to the Council.

The Review Board provides its comments within the context of preservation policies adopted by the Council. The Historic Preservation element of the District’s Comprehensive Plan establishes specific policies for the protection of the city’s historic plan (see attached).

As was the case for the Washington Nationals Ballpark, which involved similar street closures, the context for the Board’s review also includes the Council’s action enabling the construction of the sports stadium on the selected site. The Council has in effect directed a balancing of preservation concerns with other public policies.

Evaluation

The attached graphics illustrate the specific areas to be closed and transferred under the lease. A conceptual site plan and overlay of the potential stadium footprint are also included for reference.

All of the above-referenced streets were established by the Plan of the City of Washington (L'Enfant Plan), a property that is listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places. The designation describes the L'Enfant plan as defining "...the physical character of the national capital, through a symbolic and commemorative arrangement of buildings, structures and views." The streets, parks, reservations and other public open spaces of the plan are the elements that largely create these characteristic arrangements and views.

The closure and construction across public streets, and the elimination of triangular park reservations, are considered adverse effects on the L'Enfant Plan. In 2006, for example, the Board cited these effects when reviewing the Nationals Ballpark. As was the case with the ballpark, however, the DC United stadium also supports the revitalization of a part of the L'Enfant city that has been underutilized and largely devoid of urban design character. Through sensitive siting and design, these new civic structures present an opportunity to reinforce the urban design principles and patterns of the historic city plan.

Historic Urban Design Considerations

Despite adverse effects caused by the street closings, the selected site is otherwise generally suitable for building a large stadium within the L'Enfant Plan. It is removed a respectful distance from the central, symbolic composition of major government buildings around the Mall. It is located close to the Anacostia riverfront, where L'Enfant himself interrupted the street grid to accommodate large facilities like docks, markets, and military installations, and where the McMillan Commission envisioned recreational uses. It is also a use that is compatible with the gritty industrial and maritime heritage of the waterfront. If sensitively designed, the new stadium, together with the Nationals Ballpark and a redesigned Frederick Douglass Bridge, can help to create a dignified urban gateway to the original city at the symbolic location where the Capitol axis meets the river.

As the plan for the stadium and its supporting facilities progresses, careful attention to the site layout, building massing, and architectural treatment can help mitigate the street closures and promote a harmonious relationship with the L'Enfant Plan context. The following key urban design principles that underlie the plan should be considered:

1: Designed Vistas

The designed reciprocal vista is the most fundamental organizing device of the L'Enfant Plan. Vistas throughout the city provide orientation, establish commanding views to and from civic structures, and symbolize the structure of civic and community life. The most important vistas lead frontally to the major public buildings, but equally important are the oblique vistas along the diagonal avenues. These oblique views provide visual interaction between major public buildings, which typically command key sites that are a half-mile or mile apart. Thus, long-distance views of these buildings are critical.

Potomac Avenue (originally Georgia Avenue) is one of L'Enfant's major diagonal avenues. With the public sanitation improvements following the McMillan Commission Plan at the turn of the 20th century, the elaborate Main Sewerage Pumping Station (now a historic landmark) built at

the junction of Potomac and New Jersey Avenues created a visual terminus where the avenue is interrupted by the Navy Yard. In the 1960s this view was obstructed by an adjacent new pumping station, but DC Water now plans to construct an iconic headquarters over that pumping station—a new civic landmark—that will reinstitute a visual terminus to the avenue at this location. The Nationals Ballpark marks the intersection of Potomac Avenue with South Capitol Street, and similarly, the DC United stadium will mark the western end of the avenue. A conscious design effort should ensure that the stadium creates an appropriate visual terminus to enhance the urban design of Potomac Avenue.

2: Public Buildings Related to Parks

Another fundamental characteristic of L’Enfant’s plan is that major civic buildings are typically offset by public squares or parks. This interaction between civic buildings and public grounds elevates the setting of both. Along the diagonal avenues, triangular park reservations establish a similar relationship between the public space and surrounding buildings.

The triangular reservations along Potomac Avenue, now devoted to service uses, were given specific attention during the planning for the new Frederick Douglass Bridge, with the intent to recapture them as park space. A new landscaped traffic oval at the end of the rebuilt Frederick Douglass Bridge will add another usable public space in the urban design of the area. The proposal to transfer jurisdiction over one of the triangular reservations to DC United should be seen as an opportunity to create a managed public space that serves as a public front yard to the Stadium, and not as a building location. The design of this space should be coordinated with the other new public parks created with the transportation improvements in the area.

3: Boulevards

A third defining characteristic of the L’Enfant Plan is the character of the avenues that connect major buildings, monuments, and public places. Civic buildings gain stature from the sweep of the avenues and their more generous streetscape, just as the view of them lends grandeur to the entire length of the avenue. The building design, street furniture, landscaping, and public art installed in conjunction with the stadium should be designed to help reinforce the stature of Potomac Avenue as a boulevard.

4: Integration with the Grid

As a final consideration, the continuous L’Enfant street grid is the characteristic that helps maintain the scale of city streetscapes, promotes pedestrian circulation, and preserves an open visual character. As the design progresses, this should be another important consideration for the project architects.

The effect of blocking grid streets should be minimized to the extent possible, though it is clear that construction across both First and S Streets is unavoidable. On the other hand, the Office of Planning’s Buzzard Point urban design framework plan study shows how R Street could potentially serve as a pedestrianized street between Half and First Streets, providing necessary open space at the stadium entrance. The framework plan also shows how the disposition of ancillary buildings in the stadium complex can reinforce the street walls of the urban grid. Similarly, major entrances and attractive, suitably scaled building elements should mark the locations where the stadium crosses the grid streets.

Attention to long-distance views along grid streets is also important. Preliminary concepts show that at First Street, one side of the stadium seating bowl will be prominent along the street corridor from the north and south, where it will be visible from the Anacostia River. This is an opportunity for a memorable shape to announce the presence of the stadium from afar, in the same way that the vault of Union Station can be seen from far away along F Street to the east and west. Similarly, S Street provides an opportunity to establish a prominent frontal entrance that draws pedestrians from the heart of new development to come at the foot of South Capitol Street.

Recommendations

The staff recommends that the Board refer the following comments to the Council of the District of Columbia for its consideration:

- The proposed street closures should be contingent upon development of the site for the DC United stadium;
- The adverse effect of the street and park reservation closures should be mitigated through building and public space design that follows the fundamental organizing principles of the L'Enfant Plan;
- Further design of the project should be undertaken in consultation with the SHPO, as provided in the DC historic preservation law, as well as other interested agencies and groups; and
- Agreements should provide for the restoration of streets to their historic pattern if the stadium is removed.

Comprehensive Plan Sections Addressing the L'Enfant Plan

HP-2.3 The Historic Plan of Washington

The Plan of the City of Washington drawn by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791 has served as an enduring symbol and armature for growth of the national capital. More than two centuries of public and private building construction have given shape to the plan. Great civic works and public art have embellished it. After its first hundred years, the plan was reinvigorated according to City Beautiful principles in the McMillan Plan of 1901. Regulated building heights and mandated design review by agencies like the Commission of Fine Arts further supported its enhancement and embellishment.

The design principles of the Plan informed the platting of streets and parks in new neighborhoods as the city expanded beyond its initial boundaries. Despite alterations and intrusions, it still serves as the basis for the Legacy Plan adopted in 1997 by the National Capital Planning Commission for the 21st Century.

Policy HP-2.3.1: The Plan of the City of Washington

Preserve the defining features of the L'Enfant and McMillan plans for Washington. Work jointly with federal agencies to maintain the public squares, circles, and major reservations as landscaped open spaces that provide a means to experience the legacy of the city plan. Preserve the historic pattern of streets and associated minor reservations, and protect these historic rights-of-way from incompatible incursions and intrusions.

Policy HP-2.3.2: Historic Image of the City

Protect and enhance the views and vistas, both natural and designed, which are an integral part of Washington's historic image. Preserve the historic skyline formed by the region's natural features and topography and its historically significant buildings and monuments from intrusions such as communication antennas and water towers. Preserve the horizontal character of the national capital through enforcement of the 1910 Height of Buildings Act. 1010.4

Policy HP-2.3.3: Spatial Character of L'Enfant Plan Streets

Protect the generous open space and reciprocal views of the L'Enfant Plan streets, avenues, and reservations. Protect the integrity and form of the L'Enfant system of streets and reservations from inappropriate new buildings and physical incursions. Support public and private efforts to provide and maintain street trees to help frame axial views and reinforce the city's historic landscape character.

Policy HP-2.3.4: Public Space Design in the L'Enfant Plan

Reinforce the historic importance and continuity of the streets as public thoroughfares through sensitive design of sidewalks and roadways. Avoid inappropriate traffic channelization, obtrusive signage and security features, and other physical intrusions that obscure the character of the

historic street network. Work jointly with federal agencies to preserve the historic statuary and other civic embellishments of the L'Enfant Plan parks, and where appropriate extend this tradition with new civic art and landscape enhancements of the public reservations.

Policy HP-2.3.5: Enhancing Washington's Urban Design Legacy

Adhere to the design principles of the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans in any improvements or alterations to the city street plan. Where the character of the historic plan has been damaged by intrusions and disruptions, promote restoration of the plan through coordinated redevelopment and improvement of the transportation network and public space.

Action HP-2.3.A: Review of Alterations to the Historic City Plan

Ensure early consultation with the Historic Preservation Review Board and other preservation officials whenever master plans or proposed redevelopment projects envision alterations to the features of the historic city plan.

Action HP-2.3.B: Review of Public Improvements

Ensure an appropriate level of consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer before undertaking the design and construction of public space improvements in the L'Enfant Plan area and the public parks of the McMillan Plan.