

Public Plazas to Enhance Southwest Federal Center Area

BY WILLIAM RICH

The streetscape along two blocks of C Street, SW will soon be enhanced with public plazas and an increase of green space, if the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) approves the landscaping plans by the General Services Administration (GSA) for the Mary E. Switzer Building at its September meeting. Interior renovations are ongoing at the Switzer Building, which is owned by the federal government, and which is occupied by the U.S. Department of Education, Department of Health & Human Services, and the GSA. The renovations are scheduled to be complete by July 2011 and include the modernization of 311,000 square feet of space and the construction of an 18,000 square foot addition that will add office space to the 6th & 7th floors. Currently, the C Street, SW frontage of the Switzer Building contains a 114-space surface parking lot and narrow sidewalks. The Cohen Building, which is similar in design to the Switzer Building and is located on the north side of C Street, SW also has a large surface parking lot.

There are three design alternatives under consideration for the Switzer Building, but all three alternatives will bring the following improvements: C Street, SW from 3rd Street, SW to 4th Street, SW, will be reduced to one lane in each direction, which will allow the sidewalks on both sides of the street to be widened; bulb-outs at the corners of 4th & C Street, SW and 3rd & C Street, SW; the installation of curb cuts and wheelchair ramps to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act

If approved by the National Capital Planning Commission, the C Street, SW frontage of the Mary E. Switzer building will no longer have a large parking lot, but will be replaced with a landscaped plaza and wide sidewalks. Photo: Andrew Lightman.



regulations; a landscaped plaza on the north side of the building; street trees; a concession/coffee stand; public art to hide vent shafts; permanent perimeter security measures; install a back-up generator below-grade; provide Level IV security for the building; and use sustainable practices. The GSA prefers Alternative B, which is described below from the Environmental Assessment submitted for the project:

Alternative B proposes to convert the existing surface parking lot to a landscaped plaza. The landscaped plaza design would include open lawn panels opposite the two entrances with fully planted landscaped panels flanking the lawns on the east and west ends. Surface park-

ing for approximately 11 vehicles would be located at the center of the plaza and would be bordered on four sides by planting beds. The lot would be designed such that it could serve as an additional outdoor venue when not used for parking. A coffee/concession stand and small seating area would be installed at the east end of the plaza adjacent to the 3rd Street, SW sidewalk.

These proposed improvements come on the heels of plans for Federal Building #8, also known as 200 C Street, SW, which is currently under renovation and will also incorporate elements of the Switzer Building landscaping plan. The NCPC approved plans for 200 C Street, SW in March 2010 and will seek LEED-

Gold certification. Other new developments in the Southwest Federal Center area include the planned Eisenhower Square memorial designed by famed architect Frank Gehry at 4th Street, SW and Independence Avenue, SW, the planned American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial at 2nd Street, SW and Washington Avenue, SW, as well as the new Consolidated Forensic Laboratory under construction at 4th Street, SW and E Street, SW and the planned Engine 13 firehouse across the street.

Interview with a New Southwester

Over the past few years, thousands of new and renovated homes have been built in the Near Southwest/Southeast neighborhood, bringing with them a large influx of new residents to the area. Below is an interview with John Nigro, a new resident of Southwest who moved to the District from Northern Virginia in June 2010.

South by West: What made you decide to move to Southwest?

John: I was recommended to Southwest by a coworker who lives in Potomac Place Tower. I took the Metro to the Federal Center SW station over lunch one day and took my own mini-tour. I immediately realized how convenient it is to virtually anywhere I would want to go in the city. Plus, it has a true “up and coming” if not “almost-there” feel.

South by West: What do you like most about living in Southwest?

John: I have such a short commute to downtown that I barely even



One of the places that new District resident John Nigro recently discovered in Southwest is the popular Capitol Skyline Hotel pool, which hosts pool parties every weekend during the summer months. Photo: William Rich

factor it into my day. The proximity to three Metro stations (L'Enfant, Federal Center, and Waterfront) is ideal. I also love that I can walk four blocks to the National Mall and six or so blocks to the Capitol.

South by West: What bothers you most about living in Southwest?

John: I wish 4th Street, SW and M Street, SW had more retail. I love the new Safeway and Starbucks, but a few more restaurants would be nice. I hope Southwest turns into more of a night-time destination.

South by West: Does living in Southwest remind you of any other place you've lived before?

John: It has a little bit in common with this one area of Pittsburgh known as "East Side," but East Side has no subway access. Southwest is certainly unique.

South by West: If there was one thing you would want done to make Southwest a better place to live, what would that be?

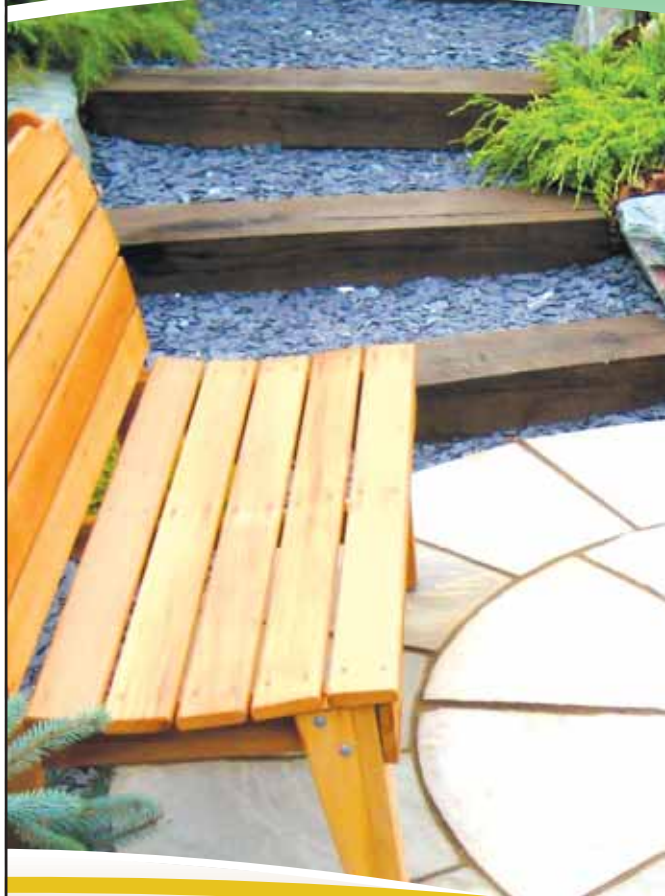
John: The Potomac River waterfront has great potential, but it is sadly underutilized. I hope to see some public-private partnerships invest in the area over the next few years. It is DC's only "coastal" area. I think Baltimore's Inner Harbor is a good model for the making the waterfront area into a real attraction.

South by West: Any other comments you would like to share?

John: Southwest is the best bargain in the city.

If you are a long-time resident of the near Southwest/Southeast neighborhood and would like to be interviewed for an upcoming South by West article, please contact me, William rich, by email: southwest.tlqt@gmail.com. And check out my blog at Southwest... The Little Quadrant that Could (www.southwestquadrant.blogspot.com) ★

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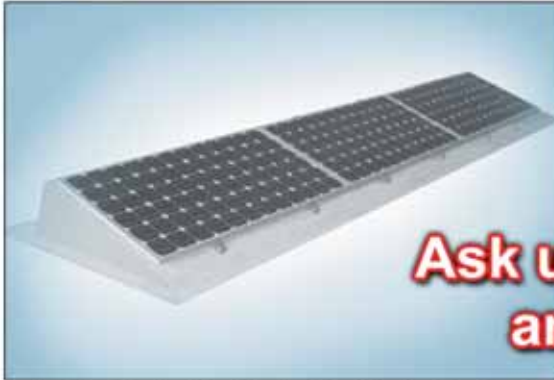
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