

## UPDATE ON THE NEWS

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## UPDATE ON THE NEWS

### Still Waiting for Money For Washington Monument

It was to be one of the most extensive face lifts of the Washington Monument grounds since the marble obelisk was completed in 1884. There were to be new walkways, a visitors center, an improved road system and an end to the long lines that snake around the city's most visible monument.

But the National Park Service's ambitious plan is languishing because Congress has not appropriated the initial \$3.1 million needed to get the project going.

The plan was conceived 12 years ago, and four years ago tomorrow the National Capital Planning Commission, the federal government's planning agency for the region, gave the Park Service its blessing to go ahead.

"Our image as the nation's capital is of great importance to the many visitors and tourists who frequent that area daily," commission Chairman Glen T. Urquhart said at that time. "Our commission's policy calls for the ever-improving maintenance of high quality visitor attractions in a manner that is appropriate to Washington."

But the optimism expressed that day has faded. Park Service spokeswoman Sandra Alley said agency officials have asked a House subcommittee for permission to proceed with the project but have so far been turned down each time.

"It just didn't make the list in terms of being a priority," Alley said.

One reason may be that the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials are involved in an extensive 10-year, \$22 million renovation project.

In the meantime, Park Service officials have revised the plan, though the concept is the same. Among other things, the Park Service wants to improve control of pedestrian traffic on the 106-acre grounds so the grass east of the monument plaza won't be trampled by

people walking to the monument from Tourmobiles and the Mall.

The existing monument lodge would be used as the entrance to a new underground visitors center, where tourists would gather for orientation before being taken in small groups by a ranger to the monument. In this way, the lines at the monument would be eliminated. The concrete and asphalt paving at the base of the monument would be replaced with grass.

The snack bar and gift shop would be torn down and rebuilt on the north side of Madison Drive and the south side of Jefferson Drive between 14th and 15th streets. Parts of Madison and Jefferson drives and 15th Street would be realigned.

— Stephen C. Fehr

### Warehouses to Go Elsewhere

■ The Library of Congress no longer is a threat to the birds and furry animals on 100 acres of meadow land in Prince William County.

Not that the library—nor Congress, for that matter—bears the wildlife any malice.

The land is part of a 577-acre tract that over the years has had a variety of Defense Department installations (a secret listening post and later an electronic testing ground where certain effects of nuclear blasts were simulated).

Now known as the Woodbridge Research Facility, it is to close next September, and all but the 100 acres will go to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a wildlife preserve.

What will happen to the 100 acres is still unresolved, but the land won't go to the Library of Congress, which wanted it as a site for warehouses.

In October, President Clinton signed legislation containing an amendment proposed by Rep. Leslie L. Byrne (D-Va.) that gives the library surplus military land near Laurel for the warehouses it was thinking of building in Northern Virginia.

The future of the 100 acres is still unre-

solved. The Audubon Naturalist Society is leading a drive to add the land to the wildlife preserve.

A local citizens group, working with the Army, will decide what to do with the site, said Todd A. Waltemyer, Defense Department base coordinator.

— Spencer S. Hsu

### Churches Defend Help for Homeless

■ About 20 members of religious organizations have mobilized in response to moves by the D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment to curtail some church programs that help the homeless.

Noting that three churches have been fined or been prevented from starting long-planned programs, members of the group said they feared government interference in their programs too.

The group met last week with city officials to convey its concerns. City Administrator Robert L. Mallett gave assurances that the city respects and appreciates the work of all the religious bodies that care for the poor.

But Mallett said he emphasized that the city's role is to serve as "fair referee" between religious institutions and residents concerned that the homeless are encroaching on their neighborhoods.

"Our concern," said the Rev. Rodney Young, executive director of the Council of Churches of Greater Washington and one of those at the meeting, "is that we have the right to say that feeding homeless persons in our churches is our decision, not the decision of government."

It was decided to form a group of city officials and representatives of the religious community to help mediate disputes between religious institutions and their neighbors.

Young said city officials are invited to a prayer service Dec. 13 at First Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church to see the strength of the religious community's commitment to serving the poor.

— Laurie Goodstein