

From the Washington Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/news/2019/06/07/the-hirshhorns-sculpture-garden-is-moving-closer.html>

The Hirshhorn's sculpture garden is moving closer to a full overhaul

Jun 7, 2019, 12:24pm EDT

The Hirshhorn Museum's Sculpture Garden is now one step closer to a full overhaul, as planners just signed off on the outlines of a proposed redesign.

The National Capital Planning Commission gave the green light Thursday to a concept plan for the new Sculpture Garden, joining the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, which lent the project its approval last month.

The Smithsonian Institute first pitched the redesign back in March, as part of a comprehensive effort to refresh the museum system's entire South Mall campus. It'll be the garden's first major renovation since 1981, and Smithsonian officials hope to transform it into a second "front door" to the Hirshhorn from the National Mall.

"The plans we have developed with artist and architect Hiroshi Sugimoto are the result of a thoughtful process over the last two years, involving input from dozens of important stakeholders," Hirshhorn Director Melissa Chiu wrote in a statement. "Sugimoto has studied the Sculpture Garden's history and has carefully considered every aspect of how visitors will experience the revitalized garden. We look forward to moving to the next phases of planning, as we continue to receive public feedback."

The garden, located where Jefferson Drive SW meets 7th Street SW, will benefit primarily from new accessibility upgrades.

Namely, the plans call for reopening an underground tunnel connecting the garden and museum plaza, which was closed back in 1993. "The tunnel's closure has impeded the original flow of visitors ever since, requiring visitors to exit the sculpture garden and cross Jefferson Drive to access the Hirshhorn Museum," NCPA staff wrote in a report for the commission.

The new design will not only make it easier for visitors to travel between the museum and the garden, but will also transform the tunnel into "an immersive art experience."



THE HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND SCULPTURE GARDEN

The preliminary design concept for the Hirshhorn Museum's sculpture garden is made by architect Hiroshi Sugimoto.

Plans for the garden's overhaul also include the addition of more ramps and other accessibility upgrades to help visitors of all abilities reach the sunken garden, with new overlooks on both sides of the space connected by such ramps.

As for the garden itself, the designs call for an expanded east garden with room for the Hirshhorn's bronze sculptures and a west garden with an open lawn space allowing for performances and temporary exhibitions. The plans also feature a redesigned reflecting pool, which will also have space for performers.

"Sugimoto's concept integrates a performance stage, a stacked stone backdrop, and shaded amphitheater seating to form an inviting venue for the performative arts, including music, dance, and participatory art," staff wrote.

Sugimoto recently revamped the Hirshhorn's lobby.

Smithsonian officials still need to finalize the exact development details, with another public meeting on the project to collect feedback on Sept. 6. The museum has yet to determine funding details for the construction.

The sculpture garden will remain open as the planning process continues.

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