



FREER GALLERY OF ART

IMPROVE COURTYARD ACCESSIBILITY

Applicant

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

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Project Address

National Mall
Jefferson Drive and 12th Street, SW

Concept Review Submission U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

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VICINITY MAP

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Summary

This project proposes the addition of an ADA-compliant sloped walkway to the courtyard of the Smithsonian Institution’s Freer Gallery of Art, providing an accessible route from the west loggia down to the lower courtyard level. The project will also renew the waterproofing system that underlies the courtyard which necessitates the replacement of the existing plantings.

Construction of the original museum building began in 1916 and concluded in 1923 when it was opened to the public. The musuem is located on the National Mall southwest of the Smithsonian Castle at the intersection Jefferson Drive and 12th Street SW.

Currently the courtyard is closed to the public because there is not an accessible route that allows visitors to reach the courtyard. Although both the east and west loggia are open, the steps leading down to the courtyard are blocked. The proposed sloped walkway begins its descent from an extended stair landing on the west loggia and terminates at a landing on the north side of the courtyard.

The design and approval process will be ongoing through January of 2021. Construction will begin in May of 2021 and the Courtyard will reopen in the Spring of 2022 in time for the museum’s 2023 centennial celebrations.



Existing Conditions

The Freer Gallery of Art is a contributing resource to the National Mall Historic District and was listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites in 1964. It was listed in National Register of Historic Places in 1969.

The museum is described by the Smithsonian Institution as follows:

The Freer Gallery of Art was designed by architect Charles Platt between 1912 and 1916. Platt collaborated closely on the building design with collector and museum founder Charles Lang Freer, whose original design concept for the museum included natural illumination of interior exhibition galleries and a courtyard. The completed building opened to the public in May, 1923 with top-lit exhibition galleries connected by circulation corridors that overlook a garden courtyard. The courtyard was constructed at a slightly lower elevation than the main exhibition gallery level, and is connected by granite steps to covered east and west side loggias and to interior doors on the north and south sides. All of the original bronze and glass courtyard perimeter doors and windows remain intact and operational, but they are too fragile to sustain regular use.

In conjunction with the development of the quadrangle site in the late 1980s, a number of additions and alterations were implemented that included an underground connection from the Quadrangle Building and an infill of the unexcavated area beneath the courtyard on the Ground Floor and Basement levels. This work entailed the reconstruction and renewal of the courtyard’s landscaping treatments at which time the existing waterproofing systems were installed.

In the late 1990s, a modification was made to the existing courtyard perimeter doors to add (2) contemporary glass door inserts at south corridor loggia door locations. The historic doors at these locations were retained and are left in the open position. The new doors were intended to provide improved visitor access to the exterior loggias, and each door is configured in a single leaf that swings in both directions and can be secured with a cylinder lock with bolt that inserts into the door threshold. There are no secondary doors to prevent outside air infiltration when the insert doors are in use, but observation suggests that the impact of the new doors on museum climate control has been minimal (except when doors are held or propped open for after-hours event staging).



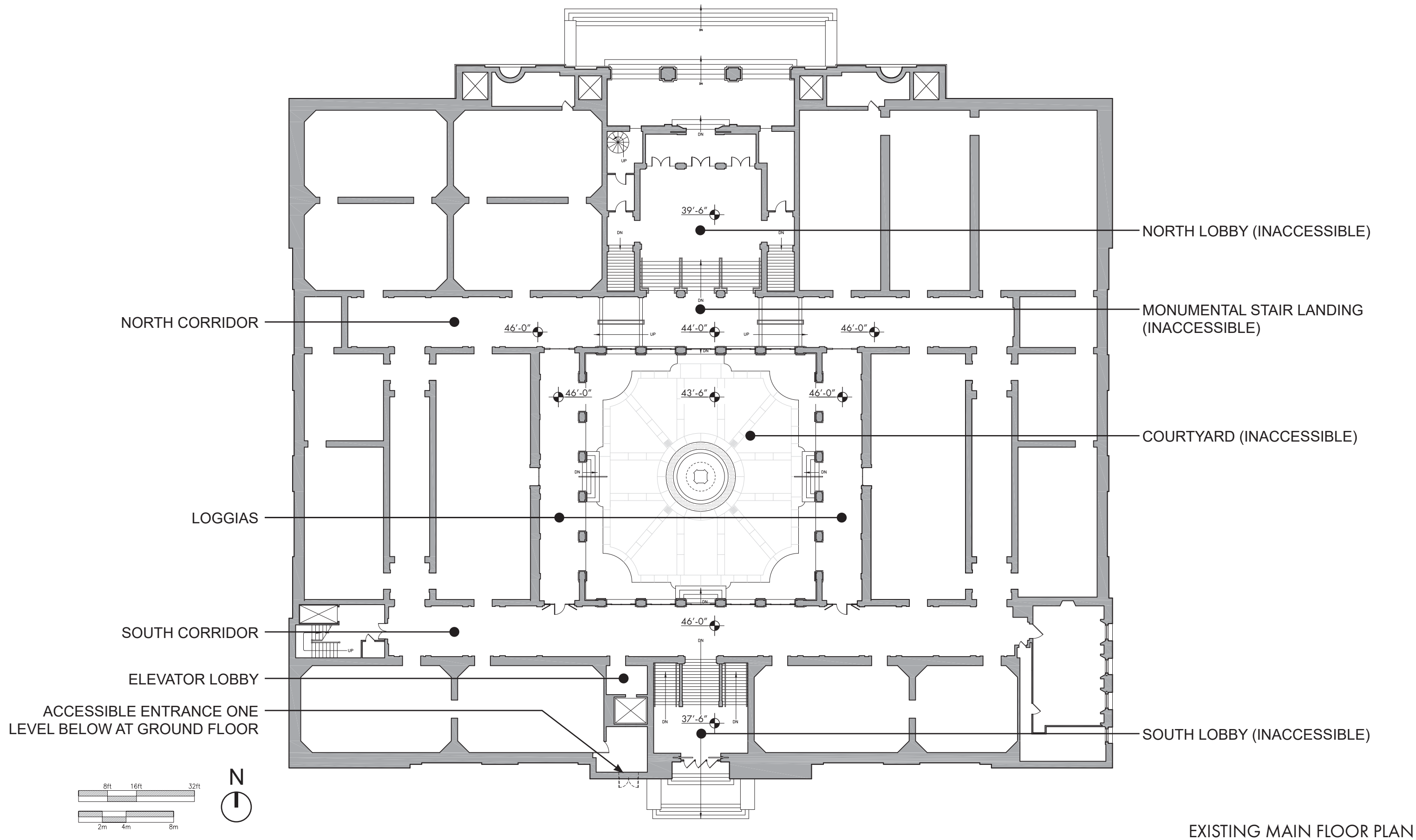
COURTYARD ENTRANCE FROM SOUTH CORRIDOR



WEST LOGGIA LOOKING SOUTH



COURTYARD LOOKING NORTH



EXISTING MAIN FLOOR PLAN

Current Usage

Steps connect down to the main courtyard and present an obstacle to access that fails to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility Guidelines and compels the Smithsonian to keep the space closed to the public. The east and west side loggia steps are roped off with bronze chains during normal museum public hours, and although visitors can enjoy views of the fountain and the garden courtyard from the accessible covered loggias, they are not permitted beyond the steps.

Design Concept

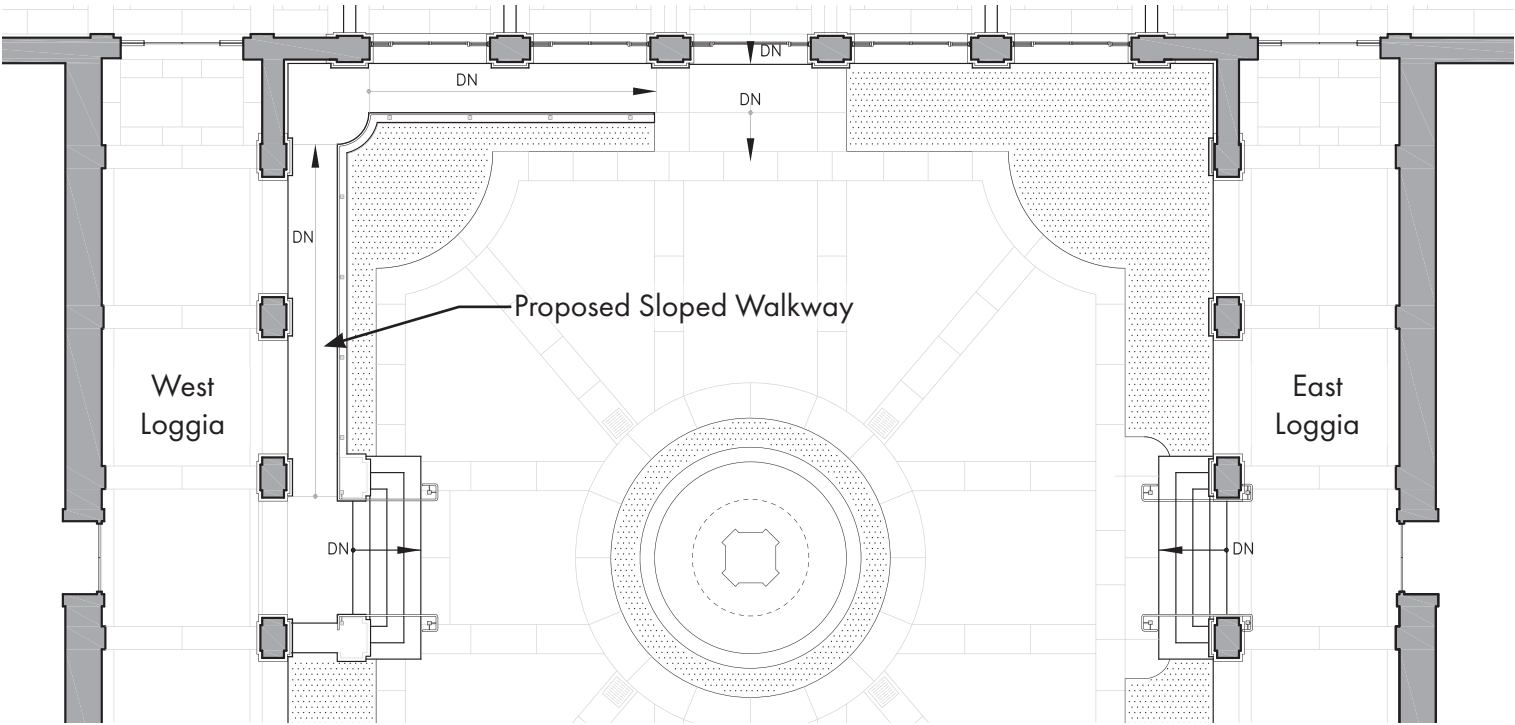
After careful consideration, the proposed solution presented in this submission is a connection from the west loggia to the north end of the courtyard with a sloped walkway that borrows its detailing from the original building fabric. Of the two loggias, the west loggia is preferred because of its proximity to the Main Floor’s accessible entrance, and the walkway descends toward the north side of the courtyard where more space exists to accommodate the bottom landing. A necessary minimum of planter width is provided adjacent to the new walkway and the planted areas in the other three quadrants are slightly widened to maintain bilateral alignments with pavement edges. Integration of the proposed walkway into the planted area maintains the overall biaxial symmetry of the space and resolves the change in level at a slope of less than 5% providing gracious entry to the courtyard for visitors requiring mobility assistance.

The new paving and wall will be constructed of the same stone types used in the original work: sanded Tennessee Pink marble for the wall panels, cap stones and plinths; flamed Milford Pink granite for the paving at the new walkway. To the greatest extent possible, existing stonework will be salvaged and reinstalled including the steps at the West Loggia which will be relocated slightly so they can double as an upper landing for the new walkway. New handrails will be dark bronze to match the vocabulary of the building’s original architectural metalwork and will be as slender and diminutive as possible while still meeting minimum criteria for graspability and structural stability. Although not required by accessibility regulations, the Smithsonian is proposing to include a single handrail adjacent to the new walkway as an additional accessibility aid for their visitors. The majority of the courtyard’s paving is red clay brick placed in a herring-bone pattern and arranged in eight symmetrical panels surrounded by granite borders. This paving treatment will be replaced exactly as it exists with only minor adjustments in slope at the north end where it transitions with the bottom landing of the new walkway. A minimum of new lighting will be added at the base of the rail stanchions to illuminate walking surfaces and provide for safe egress during evening usage. All other existing decorative landscape illumination will be replaced in like kind but with fixtures utilizing contemporary LED lighting technology.

In addition to the primary objective of improving access to the courtyard, the Smithsonian also plans to renew the crucial waterproofing systems beneath the courtyard’s landscaping treatments. It has been more than 30 years since these waterproofing systems were first installed when the courtyard was reconstructed in 1990 and renewing the systems will protect the underlying spaces at the level below.

Historical Considerations

The Smithsonian will adhere to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (Section 106). Section 106 consultation schedule will be aligned with the design development schedule and targeted NCPC Commission meeting dates.



PARTIAL PLAN OF COURTYARD SHOWING PROPOSED RAMP - Not to Scale



VIEW LOOKING NORTHWEST FROM SOUTHEAST CORNER OF COURTYARD

Landscape Design Concept

The design concept for the courtyard’s landscape revitalization strives to capture the spirit of Platt’s original design while also embracing the Smithsonian’s desire to establish an interpretive connection with the museum’s collection of Asian antiquities that are influenced by horticulture. With this approach, the planting treatments can accomplish two important goals. They can serve as an exhibit to extend the themes and subject matter of the museum’s collection into the courtyard, and they can reflect the character, texture and scale of Platt’s original design as documented by historical photographs taken shortly after the museum was built. With a thoughtfully selected palette of Asian plants, the proposed concept includes specimen trees to anchor the corners of the courtyard and a mix of low evergreen and deciduous shrubs and groundcovers interwoven with a mosaic layer of seasonal color and movement around the perimeter of the courtyard and water fountain. The proposed plantings will include species seen in the collections such as Hydrangea, Peony, Camellia, grasses and Iris, to name a few. A preliminary list of species has been developed with Smithsonian Gardens and the design team will continue to work closely with them to select an appropriate plant palette to create a carefully curated, museum-quality landscape that is also sustainable and supportive of urban wildlife.

Preliminary Plant List

(E) denotes evergreen (N) denotes native

Species	Common Name
<u>Specimen Trees as Anchor Plants (list of alternatives to be considered - one will be selected)</u>	
Acer palmatum var. dissectum ‘Seiryu’	Japanese Maple (10-12’)
Ginkgo biloba ‘Sky Tower’	Maidenhair Tree (upright dwarf)
Phyllostachys nigra	‘Black Bamboo’(clump form) (E)
Sciadopitys verticillata	Japanese Umbrella Pine (E)
<u>Shrubs</u>	
Camellia sasanqua ‘Lauren’	‘Lauren’ Camellia (late winter-early spring bloom) (E)
Cryptomeria ‘Elegans Nana’/’Globosa Nana’	Dwarf Japanese Cedar (E)
Danae racemose	Poet’s Laurel (spring bloom/fall-winter red berries) (E)
Hydrangea serrata	Lacecap Hydrangea (late spring bloom)
Pinus densiflora ‘Globosa’	Japanese Red Pine (E)
Sarcococca hookeriana var. humilis	Fragrant Sweet Box (Mar. to Apr. fragrant bloom) (E)
Sciadopitys verticillate ‘Picola’ (dwarf)	Dwarf Japanese Umbrella Pine (E)
Viburnum carlesii compactum	Korean Spice Viburnum (early spring)
Viburnum davidii	David Viburnum (Apr. to May bloom) (E)

Perennials/Grasses/Groundcovers

Amsonia tabernaemontana	‘Blue Ice’ Eastern Bluestar (May bloom) (N)
Anemone canadensis	Windflower (Apr-June bloom) (N)
Erythronium ‘Pagoda’	Trout Lily
Fargesia rufa	Hardy Bamboo (Non-running bamboo) (E)
Hakonechloa macra	Hakone Grass
Helleborus	Hellobores-Lenten Rose (Dec. to Apr. bloom) (E)
Iris siberica ‘Snow Queen’	Siberian Iris (May/June bloom)
Iris cristata	Dwarf Crested Iris (N)
Ophiopogon japonicus nana	Dwarf Mondo Grass (E)
Paeonia ‘Cora Louise’	Itoh Peony ‘Cora Louise’ (Early summer bloom)
Polystichum polyblepharum	Tassle Fern (E)
Sasa veitchii	Dwarf Kuma Bamboo Grass
Tiarella cordifolia	Foamflower (May bloom) (N)

Plants in the Freer Gallery of Art Collections



Hydrangea (11 objects)



Peony (179 objects)



Bamboo (284 objects)



Pine (304 objects)



Iris (68 objects)



Maple (44 objects)



Camellia (42 objects)



COLUMN BASE AT LOGGIA STEPS



VIEW OF COURTYARD LOOKING EAST FROM WEST LOGGIA



LOGGIA STEPS



COURTYARD FOUNTAIN



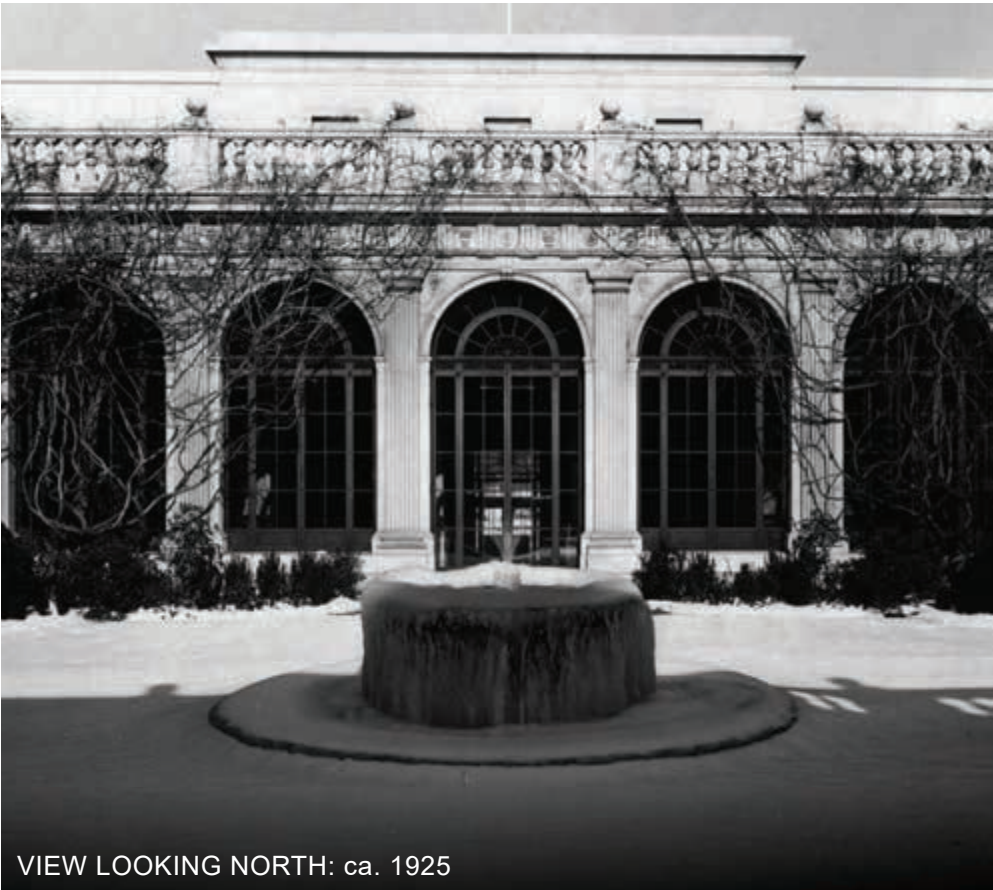
TYPICAL CORNER OF COURTYARD

EXISTING PHOTOGRAPHS

Evolution of Courtyard Planting

The character of the courtyard planting has evolved over time since the museum’s opening in May 1923. In the absence of any original planting plan or plant lists prepared at that time, there are many historic photographs taken over the 20th century and at various times of the year that suggests the character of the landscape took in terms of shape and texture. The earliest photo, dated 1923 when the plantings were new, suggests a rather subdued planting character with perhaps a mix of evergreen species. Wisteria appears in the 1925 photo on the south facing wall.

In 1928, shortly after the museum opened, (8) brick panels within the paving where removed and replaced with turf to help reduce the solar heat gain during the summer. The turf grass areas were returned to brick paving around 1990 when the courtyard and plantings were removed and reinstalled as part of the museum’s subgrade renovations. The plantings were most likely changed throughout the 20th century as shrubs and plantings became overgrown and season perennials were added and maintained. After 1990, more trees were introduced along with a variety of plantings within the borders resulting in the current day character described in the existing landscape conditions section.



VIEW LOOKING NORTH: ca. 1925



VIEW LOOKING NORTH: ca. 1974



VIEW LOOKING NORTH: ca. 1923



VIEW LOOKING NORTH: ca. 1942



VIEW LOOKING NORTH: ca. 2018

Existing Landscape Conditions

Currently the planting character of the courtyard is defined by predominantly tree planting and minimal understory planting that were installed as part of the major rehabilitation in the early 1990’s when the courtyard was reconstructed. Based on review of historical photographs, the courtyard planting treatments have been replaced throughout the museum’s history and the current plantings are not original nor historical. The tree plantings have outgrown the space, and despite significant maintenance effort, they obscure the architectural facades and block views into the courtyard from the loggias. Even if there were no need to replace the waterproofing under the courtyard, the existing landscaping is arguably overdue for substantial revitalization.

There are eight Persian Ironwood, *Parrotia persica* trees on the north and south facades. The trees have been limbed up and pruned into formal oval shape to mimic the arches of the windows, and significantly block the views into the courtyard from the internal corridors. Four Japanese Maples, *Acer palmatum* trees flank the loggias, which provide some shade, but significantly obscure views into the courtyard from the loggias.

The understory plantings are minimal, with small clipped boxwood, *Buxus* hedges in the planters of each quadrant and a Hinoki False cypress - *Chamaecyparis obtuse* ‘compacta’ holding each corner. There are small round boxwood shrubs around the base of the fountain, and a pair free standing planter pots at each set of stairs planted with seasonal plantings.

There are four steel surface drains in the stone radial pavement bands that capture drainage from the pavement surface. The courtyard planters are currently irrigated and the existence of underdrainage for the planters is unknown. Based on record documents, the soil depth is approximately 12 inches on a gravel base but may vary slightly throughout as some slight mounding is visible up to the edge of the building.

The paving consists of red clay brick pavers in a herringbone pattern bordered and divided by granite bands, with a granite border framing the central paved space. The central fountain basin and coping are granite. It is expected the fountain will remain in place and protected during the waterproofing repairs unless further issues are discovered during the initial evaluation that would require removal and reinstallation of the fountain system.



ROUND BOXWOODS AT BASE OF FOUNTAIN



JAPANESE MAPLES FLANKING LOGGIA



HINOKI FALSE CYPRESS IN EACH OF THE FOUR CORNERS



PERSIAN IRONWOOD ALONG NORTH AND SOUTH FACADES

Accessible Route

There are presently two accessible routes to the Main Floor of the Freer Gallery. One begins at a street level entrance from Independence Avenue into a mid-floor elevator lobby where an elevator can be taken to the Main Floor above or the Ground Floor below. The other accessible route originates from the Sackler pavilion through the Lower Level connection into the Freer via an elevator located adjacent to the open stair near the Meyer Auditorium. From there, the route continues through the South Corridor toward the Independence Avenue Lobby to the Ground Floor elevator lobby at which point a separate elevator (the same elevator serving the Independence Avenue entrance) can be taken to the Main Floor.

In either route, the visitor arrives at the South Corridor of the Main Floor on its south side from an elevator lobby located next to the Independence Avenue Lobby and stair.

With the exception of the Courtyard, the Main Floor is almost fully accessible except for where the North Corridor is interrupted by two pair of steps in series. While this sunken section of Corridor is itself inaccessible, the more significant limitation is that it prevents many visitors from circulating continuously through the Gallery resulting in a horseshoe-shaped circulation pattern.

LEGEND

HORIZONTAL PORTION OF ACCESSIBLE PATH

VERTICAL PORTION OF ACCESSIBLE PATH

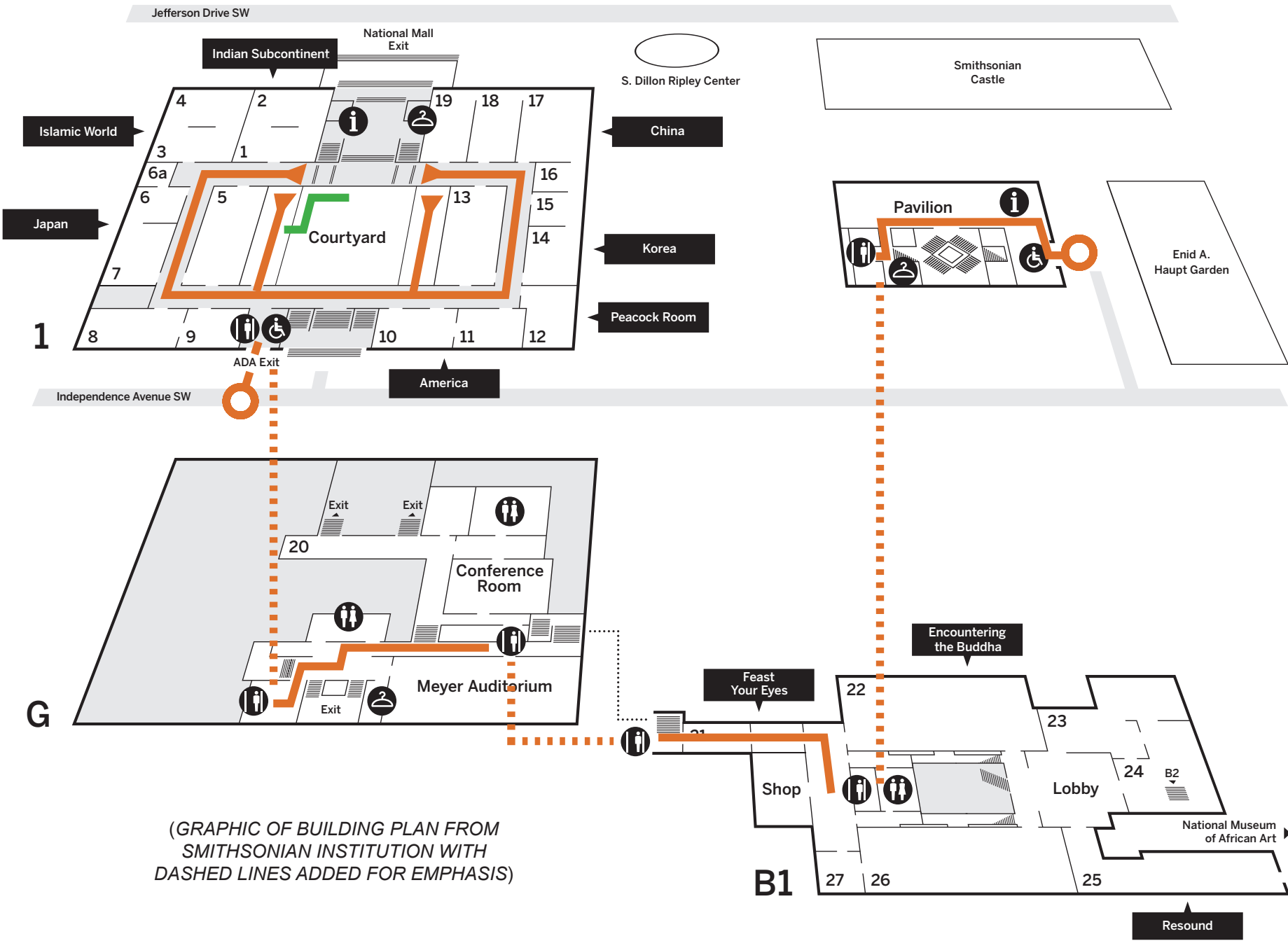
DEADEND OF ACCESSIBLE PATH

ACCESSIBLE MUSUEM ENTRY/EXIT

PROPOSED SLOPED WALKWAY

FREER GALLERY OF ART

ARTHUR M. SACKLER GALLERY



ACCESSIBLE ROUTES



DOOR FROM WEST LOGGIA TO SOUTH CORRIDOR

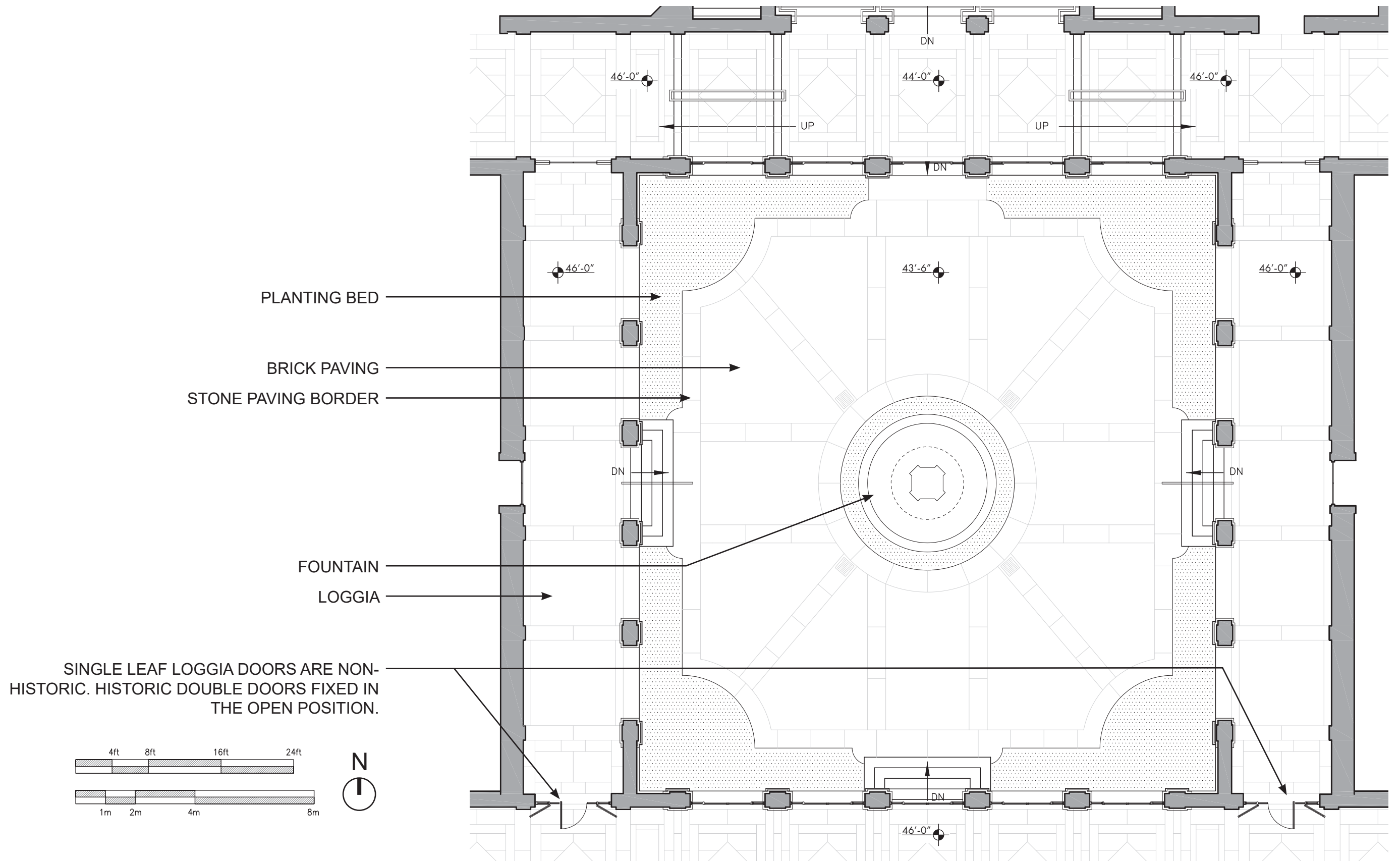


SOUTH CORRIDOR AND DOOR TO WEST LOGGIA



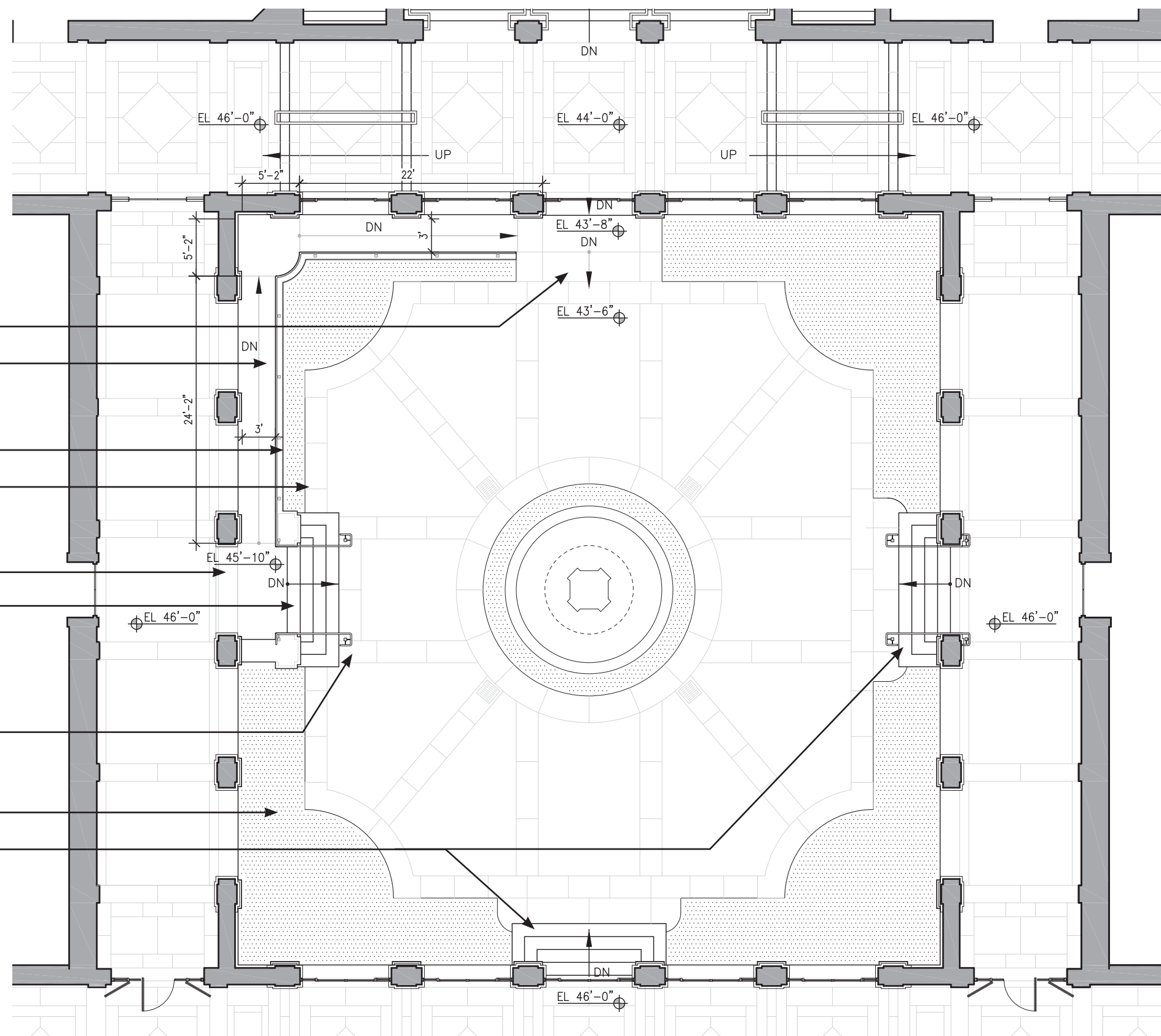
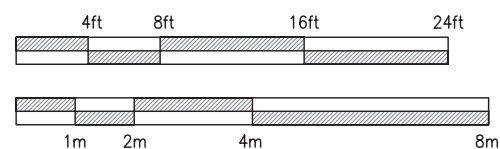
STEPS FROM WEST LOGGIA TO COURTYARD

EXISTING PHOTOGRAPHS ALONG ROUTE TO COURTYARD

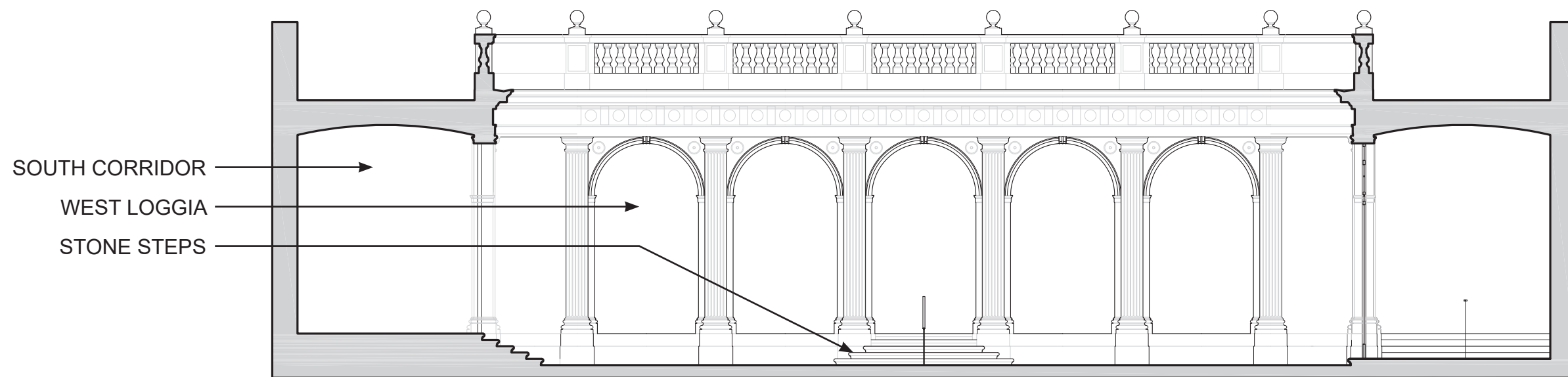


EXISTING COURTYARD PLAN

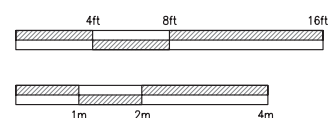
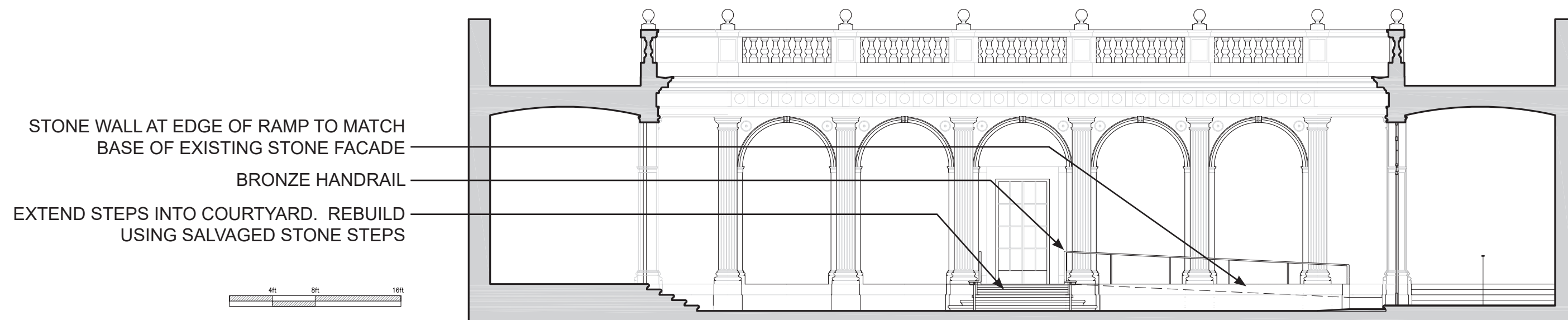
- RAMP FROM LANDING TO COURTYARD LEVEL
- 4.8% SLOPED WALKWAY WITH STONE PAVING
- STONE WALL AT EDGE OF RAMP
- STONE BORDERS SALVAGED AND REINSTALLED
CLOSER TO CENTER OF COURTYARD
- SHORT RAMP FROM LOGGIA TO STEP/RAMP LANDING
- EXTEND STEPS INTO COURTYARD.
REBUILD USING SALVAGED STONE STEPS
- REWORK COURTYARD PAVING WHERE
STEPS EXTEND INTO COURTYARD SPACE
- REPLACE ALL COURTYARD PLANTINGS
AND UNDERLYING WATERPROOFING
- SALVAGE AND REINSTALL EXISTING STONE STEPS



PROPOSED COURTYARD PLAN

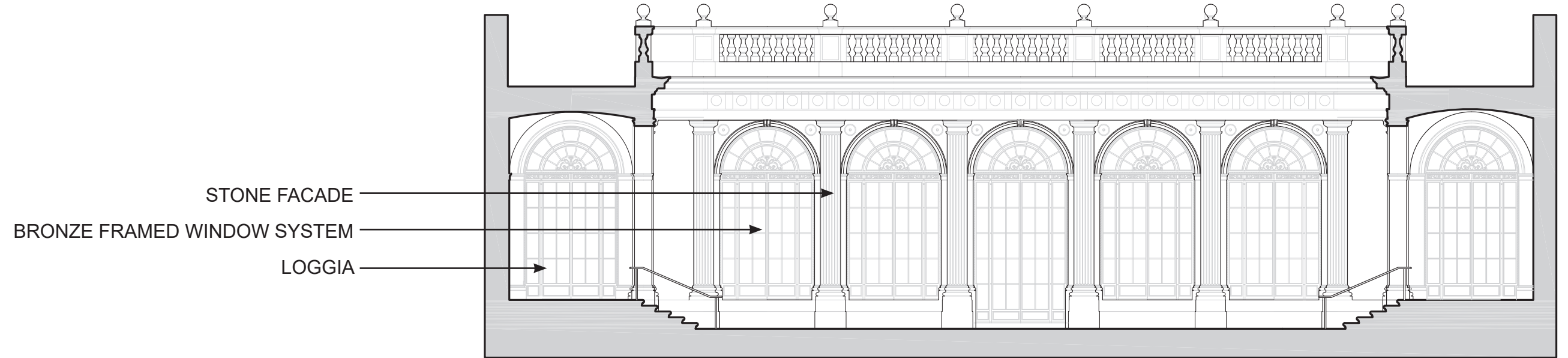


EXISTING

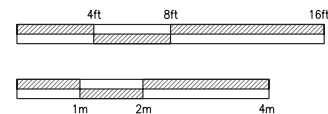
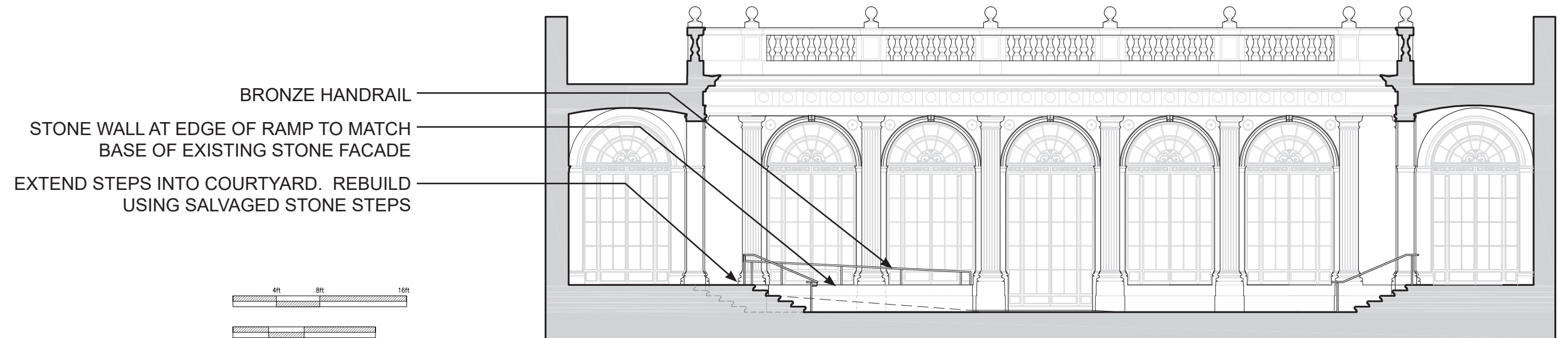


PROPOSED

NORTH-SOUTH SECTIONS LOOKING WEST



EXISTING



PROPOSED

EAST-WEST SECTIONS LOOKING NORTH



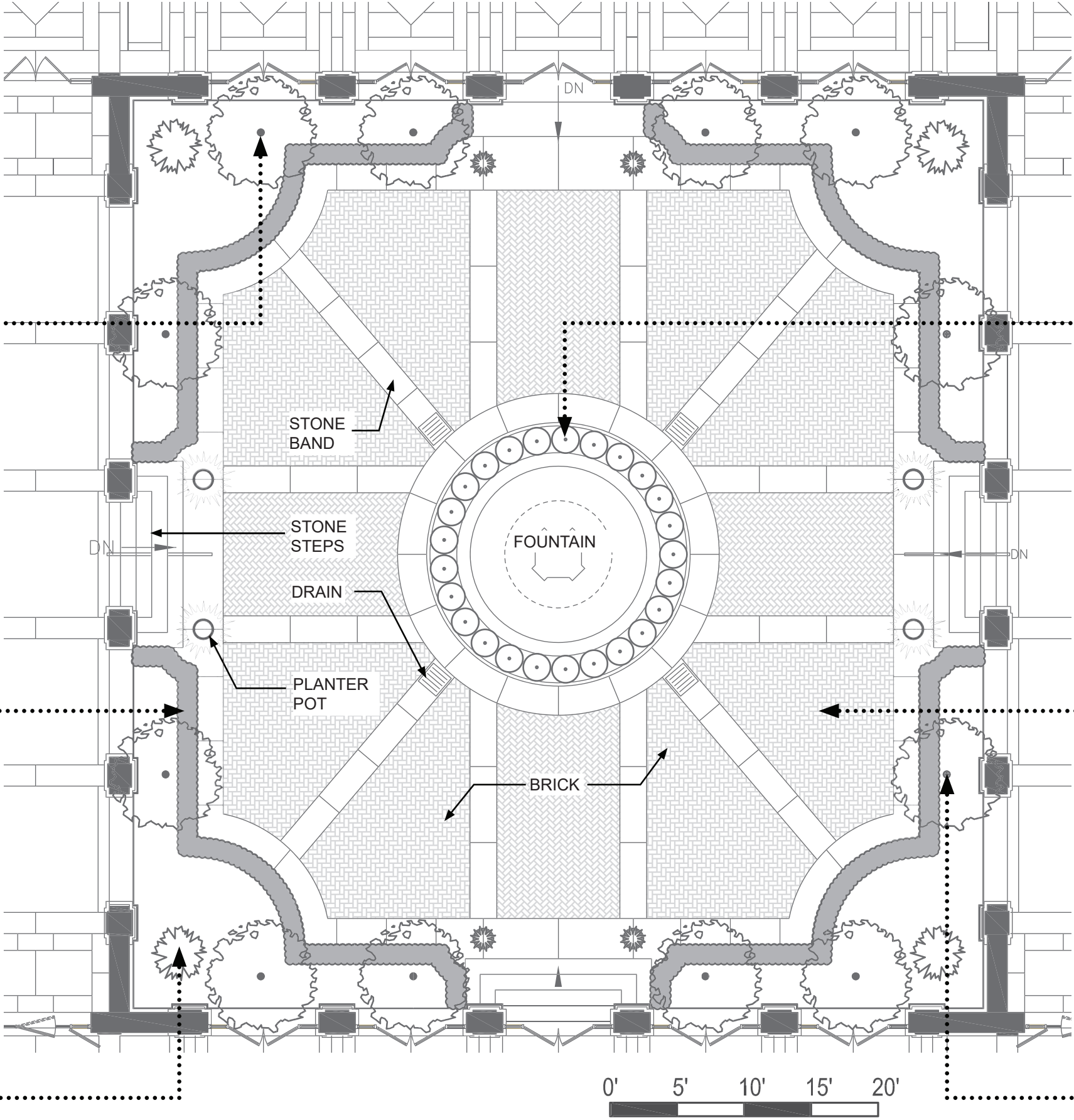
PERSIAN IRONWOOD



BOXWOOD HEDGE



HINOKI CYPRESS



BOXWOOD HEDGE

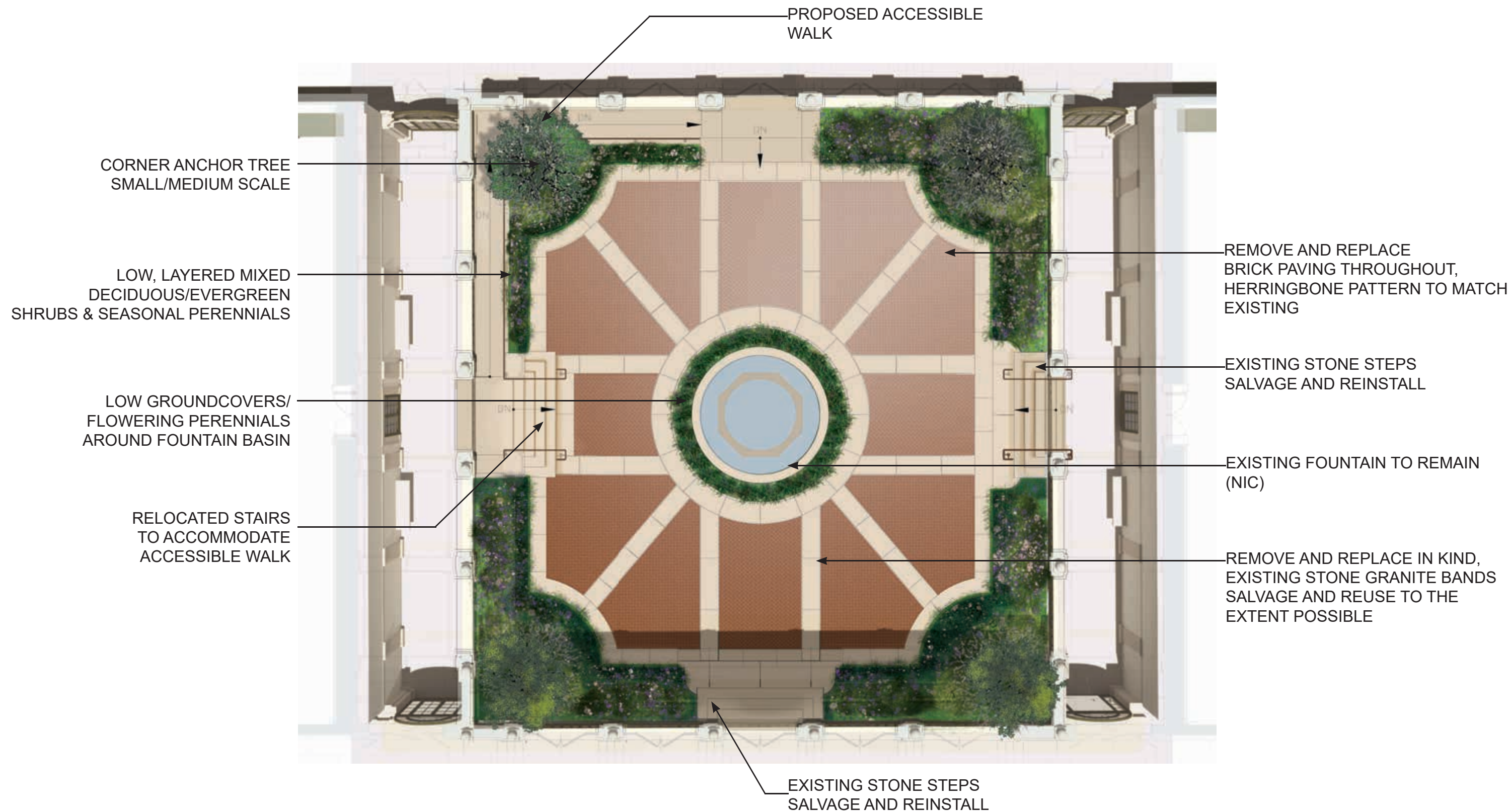


BRICK AND STONE PAVING



JAPANESE MAPLE

EXISTING COURTYARD CONDITIONS



PROPOSED LANDSCAPE CONCEPT PLAN

SPECIMEN TREES AS ANCHOR PLANTS



Maidenhair Tree



Japanese Maple



Japanese Umbrella Pine



Black Bamboo

SHRUBS



Lauren Camellia



Poets Laurel



Lacecap Hydrangea

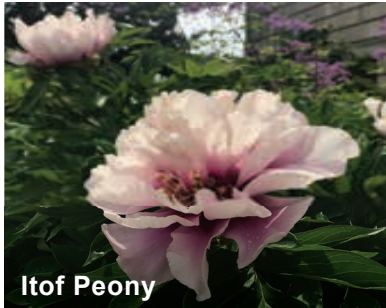


Dwarf Japanese Cedar



David Viburnum

PERENNIALS / GRASSES / GROUNDCOVERS



Itof Peony



Dwarf Crested Iris



Siberian Iris



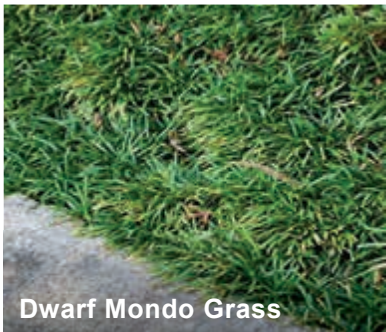
Foam Flower



Hellebores



Windflower



Dwarf Mondo Grass



Hakone Grass



Tassel Fern



Dwarf Kuma Bamboo



Trout Lily

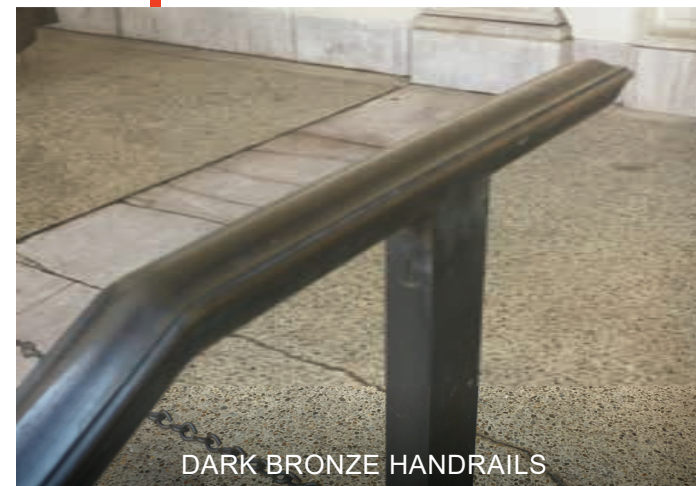


Fragrant Sweetbox

PRELIMINARY PLANT PALETTE



RENDERING WITH PROPOSED LANDSCAPE CONCEPT



MATERIALS



VIEW LOOKING NORTHWEST FROM SOUTHEAST CORNER OF COURTYARD



VIEW LOOKING NORTH FROM WEST LOGGIA



OVERHEAD VIEW