



May 11, 2015

Dear Interested Parties:

The United States National Arboretum and the Agricultural Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (ARS), in partnership with the National China Garden Foundation, are proposing the construction of the National China Garden, a classical Chinese garden complex on the grounds of the United States National Arboretum. ARS will serve as the lead federal agency for the proposed action, working in cooperation with the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC). The proposed project is subject to the review of NCPC under the National Capital Planning Act. In accordance with Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for Implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1500-1508), ARS intends to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the environmental impacts of the proposed action. Concurrently, ARS and NCPC will also conduct consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

This letter formally initiates the scoping process for the EA and invites government agencies, members of the community, and other interested stakeholders to assist ARS and NCPC in identifying potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed action. Your participation in this process is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of the proposed project is to create the finest example of a classical Chinese garden in the United States, featuring a harmonious balance of man-made structures, plants, water and rock formations. The National China Garden would become:

- an important cultural center in the nation's capital, providing an opportunity for visitors from around the world to learn from, enjoy, and gain an appreciation for, the profound influence of China's history of horticulture and garden design;
- a focal point for cultural activities, as well as a vibrant link between the United States and China;
- a living classroom and national center for the study, appreciation and practice of traditional Chinese culture; and
- a venue for meetings, conferences and special events, in addition to public tours and year-round cultural and educational activities.

The project is necessary as an expression of friendship and collaborative effort between China and the United States that builds on formal agreements in 2004 and 2011 between the two countries to construct the garden at the U.S. National Arboretum. It also helps fulfill mutual commitments, reaffirmed during the U.S.-China Strategic Economic Dialogue, to deepening bilateral economic cooperation and advancing common objectives.

The proposed National China Garden would be constructed on a 12-acre, undeveloped parcel within the U.S. National Arboretum, a 446-acre research and education facility and living museum open to the public and located two miles from the U.S. Capitol Building in the District of Columbia. The project site is located east of Holly Spring Road at its intersection with Meadow Road (see attached site location map).

In addition to the garden itself, the venue is envisioned to include 22 structures, art and furnishings—all provided by the People’s Republic of China as a gift to the people of the United States—as well as a central lake feature. The National China Garden Foundation, an independent non-profit organization, has been established to raise the funds to construct the garden and sustain the site for the public’s enjoyment for years ahead. Once completed, the U.S. National Arboretum will own the China Garden.

Preliminary issues to be studied in the EA include: historic and cultural resources, visual quality, vegetation, visitor experience, transportation and parking, land use, stormwater management, utilities, and sustainability. In addition to analyzing proposed build alternative(s), the EA will also consider a no-build alternative as a baseline or benchmark against which the build alternatives are evaluated.

ARS and NCPC will accept written comments regarding the scope of the EA for 30 calendar days from the date indicated on this letter. Comments received during the scoping period will be used to refine alternatives and identify issues to be analyzed in the EA. Comments received after the scoping period has concluded will be addressed to the extent feasible. Please submit your comments related to the scope of the EA to:

Eric Feldman
Rhodeside & Harwell
510 King Street, Suite 300
Alexandria, VA 22314
Email: ericf@rhodeside-harwell.com

During this period, ARS will host a joint NEPA/Section 106 public scoping meeting at which the general public may learn more about the project and submit comments related to the scope of the proposed action. Interested members of the public are encouraged to attend this meeting, which will be held on:

Wednesday, May 27, 2015
6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
National Capital Planning Commission
Commission Chambers
401 9th Street, NW, Suite 500 (North Lobby)
Washington, DC 20004

The meeting will include a brief presentation at 7:00pm describing the National China Garden project, the proposed alternatives, and issues to be analyzed in the EA. The remainder of the meeting will be structured as an “open house” during which attendees are encouraged to browse materials, ask questions and provide formal comments.

After the public scoping period, ARS will analyze the comments submitted and prepare the EA. ARS will not be preparing responses to individual scoping comments, but rather will address these comments in the EA. The public will be informed of the opportunity to review and comment on a Draft EA when the document is publicly available.

Should you have any questions regarding the EA and proposed action, please contact Eric Feldman at ericf@rhodeside-harwell.com or (703) 683-7447.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ramon Jordan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ramon" and the last name "Jordan" clearly distinguishable.

Ramon Jordan, PhD
Associate Director
U.S. National Arboretum

Attachment:
National China Garden Site Location Map

National China Garden Environmental Assessment

Site Context



--- U.S. National Arboretum Boundary
--- Proposed National China Garden Site Location

National China Garden
U.S. National Arboretum, Washington, D.C. 