

**ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON**  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

**COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE**

SUBCOMMITTEES:

CHAIRWOMAN  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,  
PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT

AVIATION

WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**COMMITTEE ON  
OVERSIGHT AND  
GOVERNMENT REFORM**

SUBCOMMITTEES:

FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL  
SERVICE, AND DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

\* COVERS DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ISSUES

**COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY**

SUBCOMMITTEES:

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY, AND  
INVESTMENT PROTECTION

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION,  
PREPAREDNESS, AND RESPONSE

**STATEMENT OF**  
**THE HONORABLE ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON IN THE**  
**THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS HEARING**  
**“The Future of the National Mall”**  
**May 20, 2008 10 A.M.**

I am very grateful to you Mr. Chairman and to the subcommittee for this hearing, the first we have had on the two-mile 700 acre strip of land, informally called the Mall, since I began working to improve the National Mall a dozen years ago. Because it is in my district, I have taken a special interest in the Mall and have introduced several Mall and Mall-related bills that I am seeking to move forward to passage. This hearing entitled “The Future of the Mall” relates particularly to the Mall Revitalization and Redesignation Act that I introduced in October 2007. I am requesting that the subcommittee mark-up this low-cost bill at an early mark-up. In addition, I have introduced two bills necessary for the Smithsonian Institution. As you know the majority of Smithsonian museums have the Mall as their front yard, and will play an integral role in increasing the life and vitality on the Mall. In fact, the Smithsonian’s Jazz in the Sculpture Garden is a prototype of the lively performing art I would like to see more of throughout the Mall. H.R. 4098, The Smithsonian Modernization Act, would bring the Smithsonian into this century by giving it a governing board that meets modern standards and whose members are free and equipped to raise urgently needed funds. HR 5424, The Smithsonian Free Admission Act, is important to preserve the long-standing requirements and tradition of access to Smithsonian museums and exhibits without admission charges.

The National Mall is one of the nation’s best known and most treasured sites, and it is also Washington’s most neglected and undervalued. The Mall lacks everything that a majestic natural wonder deserves, from an official identity to necessary amenities. My bill: (1) authorizes the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) to officially designate and expand the boundaries of the Mall, and (2) requires the Secretary of the Interior to submit a plan to enhance visitor enjoyment and cultural experiences within 180 days of passage of the bill. I worked closely with NCPC and other agencies in framing the Mall designation and expansion section of the bill, in keeping with its National Capital Framework Plan. However, HR 3880 would not only give the NCPC the responsibility for designating and expanding the Mall, it also would meet the vision of

NATIONAL PRESS BUILDING  
529 14TH STREET, N.W., SUITE 900  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20045  
(202) 783-5066  
(202) 783-6211 (FAX)

2136 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-8050  
(202) 225-3002 (FAX)  
(202) 225-1904 (TDD)  
[www.house.gov/horton](http://www.house.gov/horton)

2041 MARTIN L. KING AVENUE, S.E.  
SUITE 300  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20020-5734  
(202) 678-8900  
(202) 678-8844 (FAX)

many of us and of the District of Columbia for an expanding Mall to specific, named sites. The bill gives the NCPC the necessary flexibility to both expand and designate the Mall area, as appropriate, for the first time since its creation

Let me begin with the section of my bill that is easiest to implement now. The twenty million visitors annually to the Mall should not have to wait for the long term makeover of the Mall it must have before it becomes more than a mowed but battered lawn bereft of even restrooms. HR 3880 requires near-term action now to erase barren and disgrace of today's Mall and make it people- friendly. I introduced the bill on the Mall with world class musicians playing jazz to help make the point that tourists and workers downtown should be able to walk to the Mall and hear terrific music, or have other appropriate, free entertainment - from string quartets to poetry readings - perhaps during lunch at attractive tables where sandwiches and good – not fast – food are available. Although bordered by internationally famous cultural institutions, the Mall itself has been reduced to a lawn with a few – too few - ordinary benches and a couple of fast food restaurants. In writing this bill, I was compelled to recognize today's reality that funds to make the Mall the 21<sup>st</sup> century destination it deserves to become are simply not available, and will not become available until the deficit and other priorities make room. The Mall needs, and must get, a total makeover for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that would be worthy of L'Enfant vision for the city he planned and the MacMillan plan that is largely responsible for the space between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial. However, preparing for the future must not stand in the way of moving now to begin to do what we can to rescue this space from its present condition, damaged by heavy use and often no more than a pass-through, despite its magnificent potential.

With the necessary imagination, a plan to make the Mall an inviting place with cultural and other amenities envisioned by the bill is achievable now. What I have envisioned in HR 3880 would do no more than make the Mall presentable and pleasant for visitors. At very little cost, the Mall would no longer lack the most basic amenities appropriate to such an area including restrooms, shelter and informal places to gather and interesting places to eat. Today, when it rains, there are no places to stay dry on the Mall and when the humidity reaches sky high, there are few places to rest and have a cold drink. These are disgraceful conditions for a place that is grandly called "The National Mall." The NCPC is already working on the other section of my bill's requirements for an expansive 21<sup>st</sup> century definition of the Mall. Frustrated at continually fighting off proposals for new monuments, museums, and memorials, on the crowded Mall space, I asked the NCPC to devise a mall presentation, and in 2003, Congress amended the Commemorative Works Act to enact the NCPC's designation of a no-build-zone where no new memorials may be built without an act of Congress. This action was helpful in quelling some but by no means all of the demand from groups for placement on what they view as the Mall.

Recognizing the need for more sites, the NCPC and other federal agencies have been devising a National Capital Framework Plan that has already identified sites near the Mall which are suitable for new memorials, including East Potomac Park, a part of the Mall area that is seldom visited or viewed as integral to the more familiar space between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial; Banneker Overlook, the grounds around RFK Stadium, the Kennedy Center Plaza site and the new South Capitol gateways. Five new prestigious memorials are scheduled for such sites, including the Eisenhower Memorial and the U.S. Air Force Memorial.

Just as important, residents of the city region and should be able to find expanded space for fun and games beyond the cramped space between Third street and the Lincoln Memorial. I appreciate that NCPC works closely with the District of Columbia in designating off-Mall sites for new monuments, but the country needs to understand that these are not off-Mall, but part of the official Mall, as my bill would make clear. The District has long welcomed the expanded Mall into our neighborhoods, enhancing the work of the District of Columbia government and local organizations, such as Cultural Tourism that offers historic tours of District neighborhoods and all the while, helping to develop local tourism that is vital to the city's economy. The off-Mall sites for monuments complement the creation of entire new neighborhoods now underway near the Mall, particularly the District's re-development of the Southwest waterfront and my own SE Federal Center legislation, now taking shape as The Yards, a mixed use public private development and waterfront park.

The Mall Revitalization and Designation Act is the first step in an effort to finally focus the Congress on the necessary steps to give the Mall its due after decades of neglect and indifference. HR 3880 begins at the beginning – defining officially for the first time what we mean by the Mall, allowing for expansion of its natural contours, and taking the first steps to breathe life into a space that is meant for people to enjoy.