



The traditional civic core of Washington, DC can be an attractive workplace and vibrant visitor destination with beautiful outdoor spaces that connect the National Mall and downtown Washington.

# Federal Triangle



Aerial view of the Federal Triangle

## Objectives and Strategies

### Federal Triangle Objective:

Strengthen Pennsylvania Avenue's image as America's "Main Street" and establish the Federal Triangle as a pre-eminent visitor destination and high-quality federal workplace, featuring a mix of activities and engaging public spaces.

### Primary Strategies

- **Establish new destinations along Pennsylvania Avenue** for culture and hospitality to complement the concentration of federal offices, enliven daily street life and evening use, and provide public amenities for visitors, workers, and residents along America's "Main Street."
- **Promote a nationally significant urban landscape** by establishing an interconnected system of functional, lively, and beautiful streets, parks, and plazas to improve the pedestrian experience and showcase the symbolic importance of Pennsylvania Avenue and the Federal Triangle in American civic life.

## A Civic Legacy

Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the U.S. Capitol has long been considered the civic heart of Washington. The avenue is the most important axis designed by Pierre L'Enfant to provide a symbolic, physical, and visual link between the executive and legislative branches of government. L'Enfant intended it as a center of civic activity, lined with residences, government buildings, and a city market. Pennsylvania Avenue quickly became one of the city's main commercial streets, and by the mid-19th century the brothels and saloons that operated alongside the hotels, banks, and shops made it one of the liveliest, though somewhat disreputable, streets in the nation.

The completion of the Romanesque Post Office Building in 1899 signaled a change of fortune for the neighborhood. Shortly afterwards, the McMillan Commission recommended that a 70-acre triangle of land be set aside for municipal government buildings, leading to the construction of the Beaux-Arts Wilson Building at 14th Street, NW. In 1926, in response to the growing federal workforce, construction began on the massive Federal Triangle whose impressive scale and detail reflect "the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the Federal government" that Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan later defined as a fundamental principle of public architecture. The Federal Triangle is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places. By the 1960s, the area north of Pennsylvania



With its limestone facades, red-tile hipped roofs, and classically inspired colonnades the Federal Triangle is a fine example of public architecture.

Avenue was in decline, losing much of its retail and private commercial activity. By 1964 Pennsylvania Avenue looked so shabby that supporters of President Lyndon B. Johnson suggested his inaugural parade be moved to Constitution Avenue.

In 1972, the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) was formed to rejuvenate the avenue. The 21-block area under PADC jurisdiction stretching along the north side of the avenue from 15th Street to 3rd Street underwent a vast makeover, including significant new construction of mixed-use development and streetscape improvements. The Ronald Reagan International Trade Center and Woodrow Wilson Plaza were completed in 1998 and marked the full build-out of the Federal Triangle. The most noteworthy recent addition is the Newseum on Pennsylvania Avenue at 6th Street. Today, Pennsylvania Avenue is a contributing element to the L'Enfant Plan's historic designation, and the buildings along the street comprise part of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site.

The Federal Triangle is home to several federal agency headquarters. With more than 16 million square feet of owned and leased office space and more than 33,000 employees in the precinct, the federal government remains a dominant presence. Several planning initiatives are underway in the Federal Triangle. The Old Post Office Building and its annex are the subject of proposed legislation that seeks to redevelop the site in order to preserve this important historic asset and maximize its use.



In addition to its ceremonial function, Pennsylvania Avenue was at one time the city's most vibrant commercial corridor.

## A National Showcase In Need of Renewal

Implementation of the McMillan Plan fundamentally changed the scale and character of this area of the city as originally envisioned by L'Enfant. The twenty-three individual city squares laid out by L'Enfant were replaced with six large office blocks of the Federal Triangle built in a monumental Neo-Classical style. While the effect is grand, the loss of city fabric can today be felt in the cluster of single-use government properties that disrupt the urban cohesion of downtown, Pennsylvania Avenue, and the National Mall.

The north side of Pennsylvania Avenue now enjoys a lively mix of commercial, retail, residential, and cultural activities, while the south side appears lifeless. The connecting streets between Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues are typically deserted outside of office hours and are dominated by government buildings that are closed to the public. Attractive interior courtyards are used for parking and loading operations or closed off for security reasons.

On the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue, the FBI's operation and security requirements have prevented street-level public uses along the entire block. Security installations and the building's unornamented International Style architecture exacerbate a fortress-like presence. Across the street, revitalization of the Old Post Office (OPO) building and adjacent glass pavilion has not achieved its potential.

Throughout the precinct, poorly landscaped building yards and the absence of a clear way-finding system, create a monotonous public realm. The parks, plazas, and commemorative spaces along Pennsylvania Avenue are showing their age, and the precinct's nationally significant art and architecture are inadequately showcased.



The FBI Building's large setbacks and lack of ground-floor retail detract from the public realm.

The Federal Triangle precinct is typically defined by 15th Street, NW, Constitution Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue, and 6th Street. The Framework Plan extends the boundaries of this precinct to include Pennsylvania Avenue, Freedom Plaza, Pershing Park, and the city blocks that front the north side of the avenue.



## Opportunities For a Vibrant Civic Core

As the seat of national government, Washington's civic core should showcase the purpose and mission of the federal government and the best America has to offer in public art, landscape, vibrant urbanity, and national heritage. This pre-eminent civic area of the nation's capital should have beautiful city streets and public spaces animated with a variety of day and evening activities; public buildings that welcome visitors; transit service that is flexible and convenient; and federal, local, and private development that are mutually beneficial.

Concentrating public activity along a portion of Pennsylvania Avenue and programming public space to celebrate the attributes of the Triangle are the two primary strategies to establish the Federal Triangle as a destination and improve linkages between the Mall and downtown. These strategies respect the historic significance of the triangle, enhance its position in the monumental core, and offer amenities and services for visitors, workers, and residents.



Looking east along Pennsylvania Avenue toward the U.S. Capitol



View of a new mixed-use destination between 9th and 12th Streets at the FBI and Old Post Office sites

## Establish New Destinations on Pennsylvania Avenue

The area between 9th and 12th Streets on Pennsylvania Avenue offers a prime opportunity to infuse a mix of uses that will establish a premier destination. This area includes the Old Post Office Building (OPO) and annex, and stretches across the street to the FBI's J. Edgar Hoover Building. A new concentrated area of activity, near the center of the triangle, would greatly enhance street life along Pennsylvania Avenue and complement the U.S. Capitol, the museums, and the White House that anchor each end of the avenue, as well as 10th Street. Situated along the mid-point of the Federal Triangle, 10th Street is emerging as an important connection between downtown and the monumental core. It is transforming into a vibrant mixed use corridor between Massachusetts and New York Avenues in the vicinity of the Old Convention Center site and a popular tourist destination between G and E Streets that terminates at the National Museum of Natural History at Constitution Avenue on the National Mall.

Since the mid 1970s there has been interest in more effectively capitalizing on the location and historic resource offered by the magnificent OPO to create an accessible and welcoming destination. Adaptive reuse would help to showcase the landmark architecture of the Richardsonian Romanesque structure and make better use of the outdoor public space, thereby enlivening the area beyond the workday and contributing to the vitality of the public realm. Previous studies have indicated that adaptive reuse of the

OPO Building would be more viable if the adjacent annex were included in the redevelopment plan and the new activities shared mechanical systems and underground parking where appropriate. While the best use has not been determined for this important location, a preliminary examination indicates that the OPO and annex would best support a combination of uses, such as hospitality, museum, restaurant, and special event space.

If in the long term, the FBI is able to better fulfill its mission in an appropriate location elsewhere in the District, redevelopment of the site would significantly contribute to the rejuvenation of Pennsylvania Avenue and improve connectivity between the city and the monumental core. The site could be redeveloped to benefit the federal government, the city, and its visitors. Federal offices developed above public street-level uses could fill the blocks between D, E, 9th, and 10th Streets. Redevelopment of this site provides an opportunity to reclaim a portion of the D Street right-of-way as a pedestrian connection. A nationally significant museum with a prominent public plaza could front on Pennsylvania Avenue. Redevelopment of the site could strengthen the avenue as a culturally important thoroughfare, increase public activity on the streets, and provide commemorative opportunities. This redevelopment would also help to modernize and humanize the federal workplace, and provide an opportunity to replace an outdated structure with a well-designed, environmentally efficient building worthy of its outstanding location.

A mix of uses would help to seamlessly connect the National Mall and its museums to the civic core and the rest of the city. The new and improved National Aquarium, now planned to front on Constitution

Avenue at 14th Street, will also complement the cultural activities of the Smithsonian museums along the Mall. While the Mellon Auditorium is already available for public use, it could be used for a wider range of activities, serving more diverse audiences. Reprogramming activities at the surrounding Mall museums by extending visitor hours or organizing more public events beyond 5:00 p.m. could also help to increase visitation and evening activities in the immediate area.



The Old Post Office building garners a commanding presence along America's Main street

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and that offers opportunities for people to gather, visit, and celebrate. It is time to renew Pennsylvania Avenue's streetscape, parks and plazas, and to find ways to either eliminate or integrate perimeter security so it does not dominate the public realm. A comprehensive plan is needed to encourage people to use the street's public spaces and ensure aesthetic continuity and adequate safety on this grand boulevard. Improved landscaping, seating and lighting can enhance the wide sidewalks and abundant outdoor spaces created by the strong allee of trees. More sidewalk cafes, tasteful vending kiosks, seasonal activities, and community events can all contribute to a more memorable Washington experience.

## What if...

The Old Post Office Annex was a cultural site?

If the annex site is used as a cultural site, independent of the OPO, the Framework Plan recommends studying the potential to integrate the northern wing of the Internal Revenue Service into the proposed adjacent cultural development on the annex site. This would give the new cultural site frontage on Pennsylvania Avenue and entries from the 11th Street Plaza and the 10th Street arcade-like passage way. The displaced uses in the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Headquarters building could then be incorporated into a portion of the new development on the annex site and integrated into the main wing of the IRS building.



Located within a courtyard, the Old Post Office Annex site and northern wing of the IRS building could provide a major opportunity for a new cultural facility on Pennsylvania Avenue.



The intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and 10th Street can be transformed in to a mixed-use, transit-oriented, pedestrian friendly destination.

This strategic location establishes a concentrated activity area on Pennsylvania Avenue and would improve connections between the Old Convention Center, the tourist attractions to the north, and the Museum of Natural History on the Mall.

## Promote a Nationally Significant Urban Landscape

The monumental core's identity as the symbolic heart of the capital city is centered on its prominent location between the White House and the U.S. Capitol, its admirable architecture, concentration of the federal workforce, and its treasured cultural resources. As the center of the nation's governance, these areas should be distinguished and embody beautiful civic infrastructure and architecture that reflects stability, vitality, elegance, and stewardship.

While Pennsylvania Avenue will always be symbolically important and serve as a venue for nationally significant civic activities, it should also be a place that is recognized as a "Main Street," a place that includes commerce, government, and culture

## Successful Places

Beautiful and functional buildings and urban landscapes are key components to achieve a cohesive public realm that welcomes pedestrians and allows for civic engagement and social interactions.

Two successful urban places on or near Pennsylvania Avenue achieve these objectives: the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden and the U.S. Navy Memorial. They are flexible spaces that offer a place to rest, listen to music, eat, read, or just watch the passing scene. Both places are on axis with the iconic National Archives, which provides a stunning backdrop and establishes a setting that elevates the significance of the adjacent plazas. These spaces have become gathering places that are enjoyed by visitors, workers, and residents; they are memorable elements of a great capital city.



PHOTO: CAROL M. HIGHSMITH/ MARKET SQUARE DEVELOPED BY TRAMMELL CROW COMPANY

### NAVY MEMORIAL

Across from the National Archives on Pennsylvania Avenue, people are attracted to the U.S. Navy Memorial and its handsome plaza, memorial, and fountain that are surrounded by offices, residences and places to dine.



### SCULPTURE GARDEN

The elegant yet informal National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden on the National Mall attracts year-round visitors to its public art, fountain, cafe and skating rink.

Freedom Plaza, at the western end of Pennsylvania Avenue, serves as the Wilson Building's civic plaza and is designated as a site for a future commemorative work. The plaza can be made more welcoming throughout the year by providing shade and seating. The relationship of the plaza to Pershing Park could be improved if the eastern portion of Pershing Park were redesigned to accommodate restrooms and visitor services, and possibly a refurbished garden pavilion offering indoor and outdoor food service.

While summer afternoon concerts in Woodrow Wilson Plaza are a wonderful amenity, the plaza is often underused during the rest of the year. The western end of the Federal Triangle can be improved by animating the space with a fountain and increasing seasonal street-level activities in the plaza. This could be accomplished by tapping into the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center's enormous food court located in its basement and bringing these uses to the plaza level with well-designed kiosks and seating. Additionally, increasing exposure to the visitor services and entertainment venues that are behind the magnetometers and security checkpoints would also encourage street-level activity where people can engage in an outdoor setting.



Freedom Plaza can be redesigned to be more pedestrian friendly, provide amenities, and strengthen the vista along Pennsylvania Avenue

Improving the entries and plazas of the office buildings and museums that front Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues would also improve the ambiance. Fountains, seasonal flowers, improved landscaping, a commemorative work, or an appropriately scaled and placed piece of permanent or temporary public art would enliven nearby buildings and the avenue. Locations for such embellishment may include the space around the Andrew Mellon Fountain, National Archives Plaza on Pennsylvania Avenue, Benjamin Franklin Circle on 12th Street, the Reagan Building and Woodrow Wilson Plaza at 13th Street, the Natural History Museum entryways, and the proposed aquarium entrance. Tasteful lighting could accentuate the beautiful architecture and art and significantly enhance the nighttime experience along the avenue.

Rotating outdoor exhibits and public art displays could draw visitors into plazas and courtyards, bringing life and animating the public spaces. The effective placement of these elements could improve pedestrian circulation by creating focal points that draw people to and through the area.

Additionally, an interpretive program, such as a Federal Walk, could celebrate the architecture and art of the Federal Triangle and provide information on the agencies that are located in it. Weaving together a system of parks and public spaces with interpretive programs would enrich the visitor's experience, provide a spontaneous learning opportunity for pedestrians just passing by, and be a source of pride for workers. The proposed Federal Walk would help establish the triangle as a destination itself.

With handsome buildings, stunning views, and abundant open space, the public realm throughout the monumental core has enormous potential to reflect the beauty of the national capital and become a memorable feature in the urban landscape.



Looking southeast along Pennsylvania Avenue towards the U.S. Capitol

## A Federal Walk

The Framework Plan builds upon the General Services Administration's 1982 Federal Triangle Master Plan, which asserts that the triangle can take its place among Washington's premiere destinations by cohesively weaving its assets into a flexible and easy-to-use "Federal Walk" interpretive program.

Each branch of government is present along Pennsylvania Avenue and the federal agencies and cultural institutions in and near the Federal Triangle have an opportunity to showcase their missions and achievements. The carefully modulated buildings and facades form a delightful series of courtyards and intimate spaces and depict a sophisticated architectural vocabulary that often carries cultural meaning. These attributes contribute to the grandeur of Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues, the narrative of American government, and the image of the nation's capital.

The Federal Triangle contains one of the largest collections of 20th-century sculpture in the United States. Over 100 symbolic works of art produced by 42 sculptors have been incorporated into the design of many of the buildings, representing the missions of its occupants and reflecting the work of skilled craftsmen and artisans.

The Federal Trade Commission building houses a collection of art and sculpture that depict trade, agriculture, shipping, and industry. The National Archives prominent pediments represent history, achievement, knowledge, heritage, and

guardianship. Massive bronze doors with inscriptions by famous Americans adorn the entry to the Department of Commerce's Herbert C. Hoover building.

Many political, social, and cultural leaders are commemorated in the parks and plazas. The landscapes, statues, fountains and inscriptions add yet another layer to the visitor's experience and some even serve as a place to rest and interact.

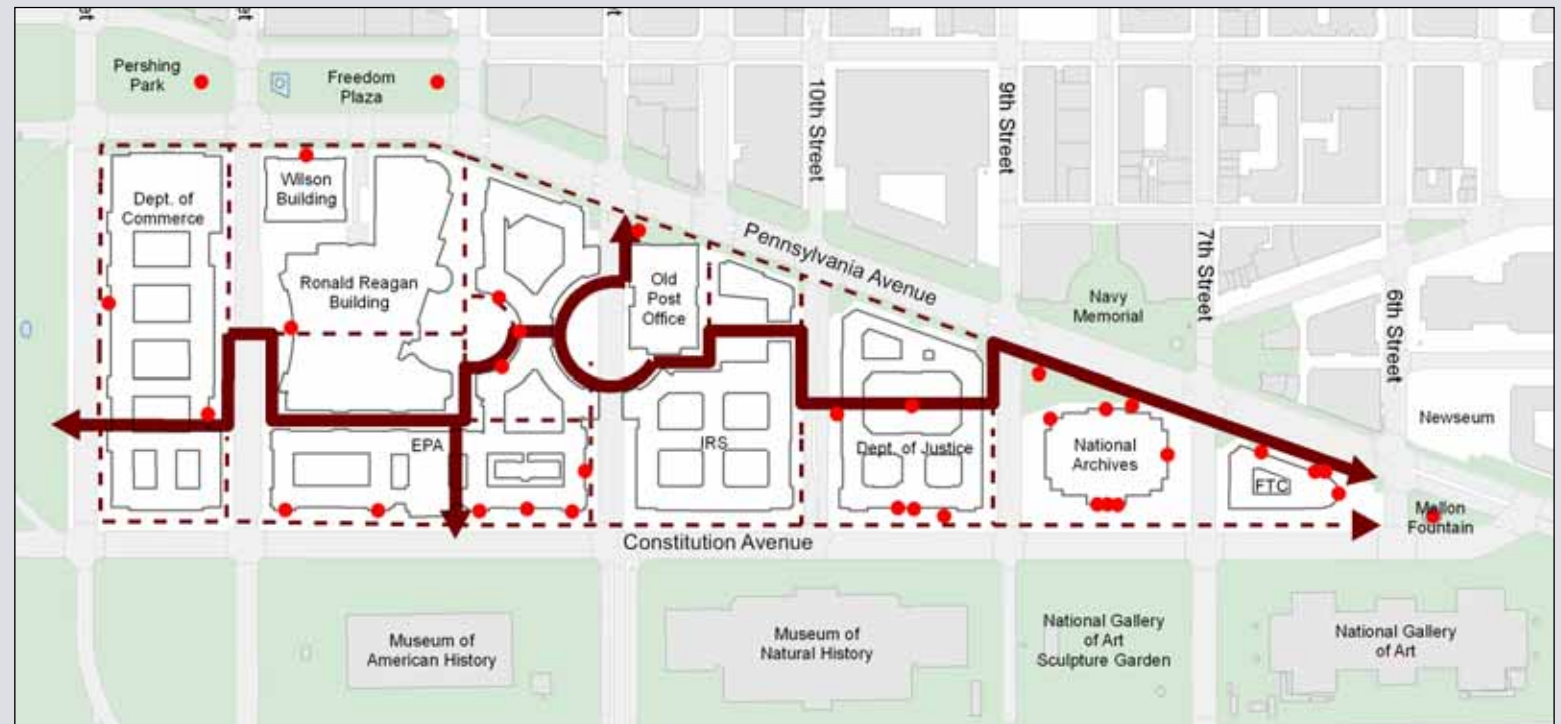
Self-guided or docent-guided tours supported by state-of-the-art technologies could offer a range of short and long walks along the avenues and through some of the courtyards. These flexible interpretative programs could focus on a range of themes in American culture and history and bring them to life through sight and sound. Also, where appropriate, agencies can use the courtyards to feature their mission. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency has constructed a rain garden in one of its courtyards that demonstrates sustainable storm water management.

The Federal Walk could be supported by a prominent visitor center that contains a bookstore, restrooms, hosts revolving exhibits, and serves as a distribution point for maps, tour and program information, and audio or visual aids.

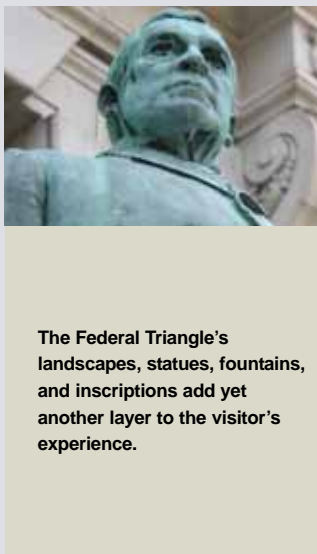


Security gates and procedures currently restrict east-west pedestrian circulation through the Federal Triangle's interior courtyards.

Opening selected courtyards in the Federal Triangle would improve pedestrian movement and enhance the visitor's experience.



The Federal Triangle contains one of the largest collections of 20th-century sculpture in the United States.



The Federal Triangle's landscapes, statues, fountains, and inscriptions add yet another layer to the visitor's experience.



# Connecting the National Mall and the City

In addition to establishing the Federal Triangle as a destination itself, the Framework Plan also strives to improve linkages throughout the triangle, both north to south and east to west to seamlessly connect downtown and the National Mall.

While the streets provide the primary connections for pedestrians and vehicles north and south through the triangle, the east-west passage is currently limited because security barricades and magnetometers have cordoned off many of the courtyards, arcades, and interior atriums. Redeveloping the OPO Annex and reopening the arcade-passageway on 10th Street, using some of the courtyards where appropriate, and establishing a Federal Walk could greatly enhance the east-west mobility and the pedestrian experience through the triangle.

Tenth Street now functions as a Metrobus hub. It serves the employment base in the area and provides a transfer point to other bus routes and to four nearby Metro rail

lines. Redesigning the 10th Street block between Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues could create a beautiful and welcoming forecourt to the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum. This redesign would also improve traffic and Metrobus functions, as well as the overall walkability of the street. Such improvement could include appropriately placed and designed WMATA bus ticketing and information facilities, reprogramming the street for a one-way southbound traffic pattern for buses only, and beautifying the streetscape. Two new Metro entrances, one in the plaza of OPO or near the annex and the other near the National Gallery of Art, could support easy transfers, encourage transit use, ease traffic congestion, and significantly improve pedestrian safety.

Currently, the portion of the Department of Labor's Frances Perkins building that spans 3rd Street contributes to an undesirable pedestrian environment. If the office space contained in this span could be accommodated elsewhere on site or nearby, removing that portion of the building would remove a significant psychological barrier, provide an opportunity to improve the adjacent park that is home to the General Albert Pike Memorial, restore vistas to the Mall, and significantly improve the beauty and safety of the pedestrian environment.



Existing views along 10th Street, NW



The EPA's north courtyard is currently closed to the public.



Existing views of the Department of Labor building spanning 3rd Street



The EPA's south courtyard is currently closed to the public.

## Destination and Connection Opportunities

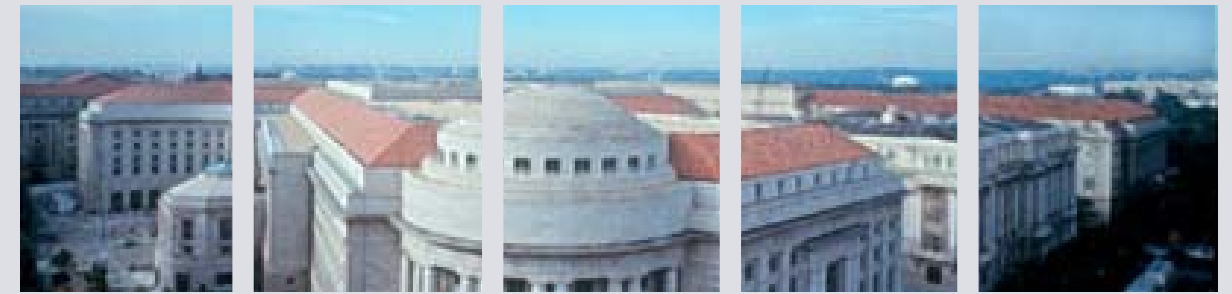
### Key Improvements Federal Triangle

- **Establish new destinations along Pennsylvania Avenue** for culture and hospitality to complement the concentration of federal offices, enliven daily street life and evening use, and provide public amenities for workers, visitors, and residents along America's "Main Street."

1. Re-use the Old Post Office Building and annex for a mix of hospitality and cultural uses.
2. Redevelop the FBI Building site with a mix of federal office, street-level retail, and cultural uses.

- **Promote a nationally significant urban landscape** by establishing an interconnected system of functional, lively, and beautiful streets, parks, and plazas to improve the pedestrian experience and showcase the symbolic importance of Pennsylvania Avenue and the Federal Triangle in American civic life.

3. Redesign Pennsylvania Avenue to enhance its beauty and accommodate street life, culture and commerce, showcasing American governance, culture, and history.
4. Redesign 10th Street streetscape as a beautiful and welcoming forecourt to the National Museum of Natural History and transit commuting center.
5. Improve pedestrian comfort and visitor services at Freedom Plaza and Pershing Park, while continuing to highlight their commemorative functions, and the plaza's role as a premier civic space for the city of Washington.
6. Improve linkages between Benjamin Franklin Circle and the OPO Plaza.
7. Animate and increase visitor and worker services for year-round use of Woodrow Wilson Plaza.
8. Establish a "Federal Walk" to showcase agency missions, history, architecture, and art in the Federal Triangle.
9. Improve pedestrian sightlines and circulation along 6th Street between Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues.
10. Remove a portion of the Frances Perkins building that spans 3rd Street and improve the streetscape and adjacent park.
11. Beautify National Archives plaza with fountains or seasonal color.



### Federal Triangle Framework Plan

