

Testimony of John V. Cogbill, III
Chairman, National Capital Planning Commission
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Committee of Natural Resources Oversight Hearing
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Good morning, Chairman Grijalva and Members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forest and Public Lands. My name is John Cogbill. I am the Chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission, also known as NCPC. The agency serves as the federal government's central planning agency for the National Capital Region.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak with you about NCPC's role in enhancing the future of the National Mall and burnishing Washington's image as a great capital city.

This is an ideal time to focus on the future of the Mall and central Washington. Currently, there is extraordinarily good coordination taking place among key agencies responsible for the Mall and its surrounding areas.

NCPC, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the National Park Service, the District of Columbia Government, and the Architect of the Capitol are closely collaborating with each other and others who have a vital interest in this open space. Together, these agencies announced a joint endeavor in February—"Planning Together for Central Washington." Our coordinated efforts are distinct; yet reflect the shared objectives we have for the city and the treasured open space of the Mall that is recognized by millions of Americans as a premier symbolic site in the nation's capital.

NCPC recognizes that there are continuing and increasing demands on the National Mall due to its role as the preeminent symbolic landscape in our country. The Mall is an historic landscape, as envisioned by Pierre L'Enfant and the McMillan Commission, but it also is an evolving landscape that must be adapted to meet the needs of current and future generations.

In recognition of the needs of the Mall, NCPC and CFA joined forces to develop the National Capital Framework Plan, a comprehensive study of predominantly federal precincts immediately surrounding the Mall. This initiative is one of four of the Planning Together projects. The other three include the Park Service's National Mall Plan, the city's Center City Action Agenda, and the Architect of the Capitol's Capitol Complex Master Plan. NCPC's and CFA's Framework Plan will identify opportunities to create new and exciting cultural destinations beyond the Mall for memorials, museums, and public gatherings. Launched in May 2006, the plan is being developed with the input of important stakeholders that include key federal and local agencies as well as the public.

The Framework Plan seeks to

- Preserve the open space, grace, and beauty of the National Mall;
- Create desirable settings for new cultural destinations and enhance the appearance and function of public spaces, streets, parks, and plazas for workers, visitors, and residents;
- Improve connections to existing and new destinations; and
- Contribute to the growth and sustainability of the capital city.

The initiative focuses on the enhancement of five key areas: (1) establishing the **Federal Triangle** and the **Northwest Rectangle** as high-quality workplaces and walkable cultural destinations that are connected by beautiful and engaging public spaces; (2) strengthening **Pennsylvania Avenue**'s image as Washington's main street; (3) transforming the **Southwest Federal Center** precinct into a distinguished workplace and a welcoming cultural hub and visitor destination; and, (4) establishing **East Potomac Park** as an easily accessible destination in Washington's iconic landscape, offering expanded opportunities for commemoration, celebration, active recreation, and leisure activities.

By expanding the setting for new memorials and museums, enhancing the function and beauty of public space, and linking destinations within the city, the Framework Plan can be a valuable tool to preserve the Mall. To achieve these goals, the plan explores beautification of public spaces; infrastructure changes; mixed-use development opportunities in precincts around the Mall; the use of federal land and facilities in the monumental core, and transit options between downtown, the Mall, and the waterfront.

The Framework Plan respects the foundation laid by Pierre L'Enfant, designer of the capital city. It is an action plan that builds upon NCPC's *Extending the Legacy* and the *Memorials and Museums Master Plan*. *Legacy* is a visionary guide for long-term growth in the capital for the next 50 to 100 years. It is the result of a multi-year collaboration with federal landholding agencies, Congress, the public, preeminent architects, planners, historians, and other experts. *Legacy* called for re-centering the city on the U.S. Capitol by distributing memorials, museums, and other new development on axis with the Capitol and in emerging areas along the waterfront.

The *Memorials and Museums Master Plan*, released in 2001, aims to protect the capital city's open space and ensure future sites for commemorative works by identifying 100 appropriate sites throughout the city. The Master Plan was the first tool designed to bring the visions outlined in *Legacy* to fruition. In addition to identifying alternative sites for commemorative works, the Master Plan called for the establishment of a Reserve or no-build zone on the Mall, which Congress enacted in 2003. Since its release, the *Memorials and Museums Master Plan* has been instrumental in guiding five commemorative works to sites off the Mall. These include the U.S. Air Force Memorial overlooking the Pentagon, the Memorial to Victims of Communism (intersection of New Jersey and Massachusetts Avenue), the Thomas Masaryk Memorial (at Massachusetts and Florida Avenue), and two future memorials—one honoring President Eisenhower (to be located near the Air & Space Museum) and another honoring American Veterans Disabled for Life (along 2nd Street, SW across from Washington Avenue).

The success of the Master Plan in locating commemorative works off the Mall supports the Framework Plan's premise that memorial sponsors will be attracted to sites off the Mall, as long

as there are appealing and exciting destination spots elsewhere in the city. Creating new destinations throughout Washington will ease pressure on the Mall, stimulate activity in other parts of the city, and encourage visitors to see more of central Washington. Collectively, this will broaden the public's image of the nation's capital and improve the visitor's experience.

The opportunities identified in the Framework Plan support and complement the work of the National Park Service, the District of Columbia, and the Architect of the Capitol, which have undertaken major initiatives for central Washington, DC. Shared goals include preservation of the Mall, expanding the city center to the waterfront, creating distinguished and accessible public places, and achieving a liveable and sustainable capital city.

The National Park Service's Mall Plan is a necessary tool to both preserve the Mall's historic landscape and manage its physical development. As America's symbolic front yard, the Mall must accommodate high levels of use, both in numbers of visitors, the volume of special events, and commemorative needs. The Mall, roughly 650 acres in size and framed by historic landscape, should exemplify model practices in environmental sustainability. We are working with the National Park Service as a cooperating agency on the National Mall Plan, and we have collaborated with NPS throughout the development of our Framework Plan.

NCPC also is an active participant in the National Park Service's identification of a new interpretive transportation system. We strongly support an easy-to-use and affordable system that is integrated with the city's urban transportation network to serve visitors, residents and workers. One potential future transit service that could be considered for the Mall is the successful DC Circulator system, first proposed in NCPC's Legacy Plan. The city's Circulator system offers frequent, affordable, and easy-to-use service that has the flexibility to accommodate the changing needs of the National Mall. NCPC, in collaboration with its partners, also seeks to improve vehicular, bicycle, and transit options between the monumental core and the center city, and along the waterfront.

In addition to the Park Service's Mall Plan, the Framework Plan also complements the District's Center City Action Agenda, which strives to improve downtown DC and advances Washington's identity as a world-class city. The District's work to enhance the capital city supports our efforts to draw memorial and museum sponsors to locations away from the Mall, by creating vibrant and attractive destinations that feature a variety of mixed-uses such as retail, restaurants, offices, and residential dwellings.

Further, NCPC, the Park Service, and the District have joined together to develop a permanent levee solution for the National Mall that is sensitive to the historic landscape. Since 1936, a levee system—in the vicinity where temporary buildings were located on the Mall during World War II—has helped to protect Washington's federal buildings and downtown business district from river flooding. However, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers identified a need to make the levee more reliable and effective against a 100-year flood. The partnering agencies recognize that the Mall is an evolving landscape that must be adapted to meet current and future needs. We are committed to collaborating with our federal and local stakeholders to design and construct an interim fix to this problem and to identify potential permanent solutions.

NCPC shares the concerns voiced by Congressional members, the National Park Service, and the American people regarding the need to protect this historic terrain and ensure the availability of visitor support facilities on or near the Mall. The Framework Plan supports efforts to increase food service, restrooms, seating, and signage on the Mall and in adjacent areas in order to help create a world-class experience for the millions of annual visitors from home and abroad. Americans take proud ownership of the National Mall for many reasons, and we must ensure that they are inspired by their visit.

NCPC and CFA are currently preparing a draft of the Framework Plan for public review and comment. The plan has benefited from public input at several public meetings and from coordination with many federal and District of Columbia agencies. A 16-member interagency Steering Committee also is providing oversight to the planning process. We intend to present the draft to the interagency Steering Committee on June 2. A final draft will then be presented to both Commissions and released to the public for review and comment. Following public comment, staff will refine the plan as appropriate and seek final approval from NCPC and CFA.

Thank you for inviting me to share NCPC's work on the National Mall and to brief you on our continuing efforts to develop the National Capital Framework Plan. We welcome the opportunity to keep you informed of our progress on the Framework Plan and as well as our collaborative efforts with our partners to improve the image of the nation's capital and the experience of those who visit, live, and work in Washington, DC.

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