

# PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE

## *at the White House*



View of the White House from Lafayette Park

**A** dignified new civic space featuring pedestrian-friendly amenities and site furnishings now graces the famous stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. The redesign of America's Main Street has transformed the Avenue from one cluttered with ad-hoc security measures to a beautiful civic area befitting one of the nation's most prominent and visited destinations.

The project is the result of the work of dozens of federal, local, and civic agencies that worked with the National Capital Planning Commission, as well as the Federal Highway Administration, which managed construction of the project. Thanks to the leadership and guidance of First Lady Laura Bush, the vision of an *Avenue for the People* is now a reality.

“This is a historic day for America. A true *Avenue for the People* is now a reality due to the work of the many stakeholders and First Lady Laura Bush, whose personal involvement made this project possible.”

NCPC Chairman John V. Cogbill, III

“After years of planning, Pennsylvania Avenue will once again provide an inviting place for visitors. Barriers will be replaced with towering elms, and benches along the open walkways will make welcome spots to enjoy the historic scenery of Washington, D.C.”

*First Lady Laura Bush*



**PROJECT HISTORY**

Ad-hoc security barriers first appeared on Pennsylvania Avenue after security concerns forced its closure in the wake of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, the number of barriers cluttering the historic Avenue soon proved to be overwhelming. Disheartened by the appearance of America’s Main Street, NCPC in 2001 proposed the redesign of the Avenue, and in 2002 selected Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates to create a safe and beautiful pedestrian space on the Avenue.

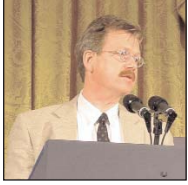


In September 2003, NCPC gave final approval to the Van Valkenburgh design, and First Lady Laura Bush endorsed the project just days later during a White House ceremony. Throughout the project, Mrs. Bush strongly supported the effort, engaging in the design and the selection of materials to be used on the Avenue. Her steadfast support enabled the National Capital Planning Commission and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to transform the Avenue into a dignified civic space appropriate for a place of national significance.

The FHWA began construction on the site in January 2004. Working on an expedited schedule, the agency completed a design that is both elegant and secure—a public streetscape for all Americans and our nation’s visitors to enjoy.

Aerial view of construction in July 2004





Michael Van Valkenburgh

## DESIGN ELEMENTS

The central elements of Van Valkenburgh’s design include new paving materials; pedestrian amenities and site furnishings; a combination of retractable, removable, and fixed bollards; new guard booths; new trees; and a route for a planned transit system.

The plan is simple and flexible and can be easily retrofitted to accommodate a vehicular thoroughfare in the future, should the security environment change.

### Paving

To help unify Lafayette Park with the White House grounds, a more natural looking paving material was installed for the central portion of Pennsylvania Avenue and Jackson and Madison Places. The rustic pavement is similar to that used at Buckingham Palace in London. At 15th and 17th Streets, large granite pavers that are a subtle mix of grays and pinks accentuate entry to the precinct and reinforce the connection of the Avenue to the city’s urban fabric.

### Pedestrian Amenities and Site Furnishings

Pedestrian amenities are an important component of the project and contribute to the quality of the civic space. Forty-seven twin-headed streetlights, originally designed for Washington by Henry Bacon in 1923, replaced the existing streetlights in the precinct. Sixteen new granite benches placed along the open walkways on the south side of the Avenue within the double tree row make welcome spots for visitors to sit and enjoy the historic scenery. In addition, the redesigned Avenue can accommodate the new Downtown Circulator, a hop-on, hop-off shuttle service that will provide convenient transportation to the city’s national treasures.



### Security Bollards

In place of jersey barriers, the project employs specially designed bollards, some of which are retractable and removable. The retractable bollards will allow authorized vehicles to access the site while the removable bollards will accommodate the Inaugural Parade every four years. The bollards allow for free pedestrian movement, maintain a visually open environment, and respect the character of the street.

The project’s design also features elegant security booths that reflect the classical architecture found along the Avenue. The booths are placed at each entry point and when finished later this month will have a granite base and lead-coated copper roof with cast iron columns painted to match the light fixtures.

### Planting Scheme

In spring 2005 when planting conditions are favorable, 88 mature Princeton American elms will be planted along the Avenue. The trees will stand where concrete bollards once lined the front of the White House. The American elm has a high arching form that will provide a spectacular promenade as well as wonderful fall color and an attractive winter form. The new trees will provide a welcome canopy for pedestrians and a gracious setting for the White House grounds. The planting scheme will consist of a single row of street trees along the north and south curbs of Pennsylvania Avenue and a double row of trees along the south curb of the Avenue in front of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and the Treasury Building.



A planting scheme of Princeton American elms will be in place along the Avenue by spring 2005. They will provide shade for pedestrians, a magnificent promenade for America’s Main Street, and a dignified setting for the White House.



## Acknowledgments

This project would not be a success without the partnership of the key stakeholders, the Federal Highway Administration, the National Park Service, the United States Secret Service, the District of Columbia, and designer Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates. We are indebted to First Lady Laura Bush for her commitment to and interest in this project. The end result is a design that incorporates necessary security measures while respecting the Avenue's historical character.

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The National Capital Planning Commission is the federal government's planning agency in the District of Columbia and surrounding counties in Maryland and Virginia. The Commission provides overall planning guidance for federal land and buildings in the region. It also reviews the design of federal construction projects, oversees long-range planning for future development, and monitors capital investment by federal agencies.