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National Capital Planning Commission Releases Ambitious Report for Revamping South Capitol Street

Washington, DC – The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) has released an ambitious plan to transform the South Capitol Street corridor into a grand gateway to the nation’s capital. A joint task force assembled by NCPC will make the revitalization of this important corridor a top priority in the coming months. The seven-member group will focus on facilitating the key recommendations contained in a just-released report by an Urban Land Institute (ULI) advisory panel. Specifically, the task force will look at the planning, design, and redevelopment of the street and the replacement of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge.

The South Capitol Street Task Force intends to build on the findings of the ULI panel commissioned by NCPC and the District Office of Planning (DCOP) to offer specific land use, transportation, and urban design recommendations for the area. The corridor is currently littered with abandoned businesses and vacant lots. The ULI panel spent six months preparing the study and delivered the final report to NCPC this week. The panel said it is confident the street will one day rival the world’s greatest urban boulevards and recommends that federal and local officials waste no time in beginning to redevelop the area.

The primary role of the task force will be to advance the panel’s plans for the street’s redevelopment, including land uses, public open spaces, future memorial sites, and new design concepts for streetscapes and civic plazas.

One presidential appointee and one mayoral appointee from NCPC will serve on the task force in addition to a representative from the National Park Service, the General Services Administration, the Department of Defense, the District of Columbia City Council, and the DC Office of Planning. Other key stakeholders, including representatives from the offices of Congressman Hoyer, Congresswoman Norton, the DC Department of Transportation (DDOT), and the Architect of the Capitol, will be invited to participate in task force deliberations.

“NCPC has long considered South Capitol Street ripe for renewal,” said Jose L. Galvez III, task force chairman. “The street could be a grand southern entrance to the capital city that NCPC has long envisioned. Our goal is to create an exciting new address in Washington featuring new businesses, cultural, and residential uses.”

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NCPC identified the potential of South Capitol Street in its 1997 Extending the Legacy Plan and again in its 2001 Memorials and Museums Master Plan. Most recently, the Commission focused on the corridor's potential in its 2003 South Capitol Street Urban Design Study. All three NCPC plans were reviewed thoroughly by the ULI panel as it prepared its own analysis of the area. The ULI experts also studied DDOT's South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study, toured the area, and interviewed more than 80 local stakeholders.

The panel urged local and federal officials to collaborate on this important endeavor and recommended that the federal government play a prominent role in promoting the redevelopment of the street due to the many federal interests in the area and the significant federal resources that will be required to rebuild the street and bridge. To advance and protect the federal interests, the street should:

- Be designed as a grand boulevard worthy of a major entrance to the nation's capital;
- Provide a setting for future national monuments, memorials, and museums;
- Provide the capacity for South Capitol to serve as a major evacuation route;
- Expedite redevelopment by helping with the funding, design, and construction;
- Ensure convenient vehicular and pedestrian access to nearby federal sites, including Capitol Hill, the Navy Yard, the new Department of Transportation headquarters, and the Southeast Federal Center.

The panel unanimously concluded that the corridor be redeveloped as soon as possible into a grand entry to the city. Noting the extensive planning work that NCPC and DDOT have already completed, along with the extremely hot real estate market, the ULI panel recommends immediate implementation steps and urges federal and local planners to act quickly to achieve their development goals.

“Now is the time for federal and city agencies to collaborate to ensure that the dual goals of re-establishing South Capitol Street as a major gateway to the nation's capital and connecting the entire area south of the Capitol into a vibrant mixed-use community are accomplished under a cohesive set of design guidelines with the resources to do it right,” said Richard Reynolds, chairman of the ULI Advisory Panel.

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Key recommendations of the panel include:

- Target the South Capitol and M Street intersection as a central focal point for new development;
- Promote mixed-use development while adding to existing green space;
- Unify the southeast and southwest quadrants of the city and connect communities on both sides of the river;
- Rebrand the area with a new name and image reflecting its potential as an exciting urban destination;
- Clean up the Anacostia River and improve public accessibility to the waterfront;
- Replace the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge with a stately new bridge over the Anacostia River that better connects historic Anacostia with the rest of the city;
- Create a surface roadway that retains the street's current 130-foot width and provides additional space for parks, memorials, and pedestrian amenities along its length;
- Establish design guidelines and setback requirements to guide development of adjacent properties.

The South Capitol Street Task Force plans to meet throughout the summer and present a report to the National Capital Planning Commission during the fall. Ultimately, the group's goal will be to advise Congress and the administration on strategies for transforming the street into a grand urban boulevard and gateway to the nation's capital.

“We have a fabulous opportunity to reclaim the corridor and transform it into an area that is truly worthy of the nation's capital,” said NCPC's Executive Director Patricia Gallagher. “After many studies it's time to bring about change. Development of South Capitol Street will be a win-win for residents, developers, and local and federal employees. I look forward to working with this task force and with key stakeholders to advance this important project so that we can break ground in the near future.”

The National Capital Planning Commission is the federal government's central 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 projects and memorials, oversees long-range planning for future development, and monitors capital investment by federal agencies.

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