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For Immediate Release  
May 6, 2009

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## **Reimagining the Federal Superblock: Bringing Mixed-Uses to Government Sites** *NCPC Hosts Public Discussion on Enlivening Federal Office Buildings*

Washington, DC – The chambers of the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) were opened to the public this morning for discussion between the private and public sectors to explore ways to improve vitality in the federal precincts in DC’s monumental core.

“This idea is a key component of our recently adopted *Monumental Core Framework Plan*,” says Marcel Acosta, executive director of NCPC. “Discussions like this help bring ideas to fruition.”

The Framework Plan—a joint effort between NCPC and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts—identifies several key precincts throughout the monumental core that would benefit from a broader mix of uses in and around government facilities.

“The talk focused less on individual buildings and more on general concepts of what can be done to integrate active uses into the street level of federal buildings and the public spaces surrounding them,” said David Zaidain, an urban planner and project officer at NCPC.

Incorporating mixed uses into public buildings isn’t a new concept, but security and other concerns have slowed progress. Elements of the *Monumental Core Framework Plan* address the need of invigorating neighborhoods dominated by the “superblock” by opening the ground floors of buildings to retail and culturally-based development.

The General Services Administration co-sponsored the discussion. GSA’s Frank Giblin, who oversees GSA’s Good Neighbor Program, provided a presentation illustrating successful mixed-use activities in federal buildings elsewhere in the nation including Seattle, San Francisco, and Boston. Many of the facilities feature retail and restaurants at the ground floor or plaza level.

The morning’s discussion was attended by members of the general public and representatives of federal and local agencies, the security industry, the architectural and design community, and other key stakeholders including the Federal City Council and Cultural Tourism DC.

“Washington, DC is a unique environment,” said Hany Hassan, partner and director of the DC office of Beyer Blinder Belle Architects and Planners, LLP. “But we can certainly learn from the many good examples of mixed-use buildings that exist across the country. Having people living in the federal city is vital to this effort being successful.”

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William Dowd, the director of NCPC's Plan and Project Implementation Division moderated the discussion. "It's very important that we engage the public as we further explore key issues identified in the Framework Plan," said Mr. Dowd. After brief presentations by NCPC and GSA staff, Mr. Dowd opened the floor for questions and discussion.

Many of the public comments addressed the need to incorporate housing into the mix, in addition to retail and other uses that can help foster a 24 hour environment. Another issue addressed by several members of the audience was the need to revitalize Pennsylvania Avenue into a livelier main street.

"Pennsylvania Avenue is a tremendous problem as well as a tremendous opportunity," said Rick Reinhard with the DC Downtown Business Improvement District. "It's one of the most important streets in the world, yet it's dead. The software of the street is missing. We need to roll up our sleeves and partner together to make this a truly great thoroughfare."

The observations and ideas emerging from today's discussion will help inform NCPC, CFA, and GSA as well as stakeholders and the public. More meetings will be held during the spring and summer and the ideas shared will be reflected in a summary publication identifying challenges and best practices for achieving enhanced public spaces. The summary report is expected to be released in the fall.

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