

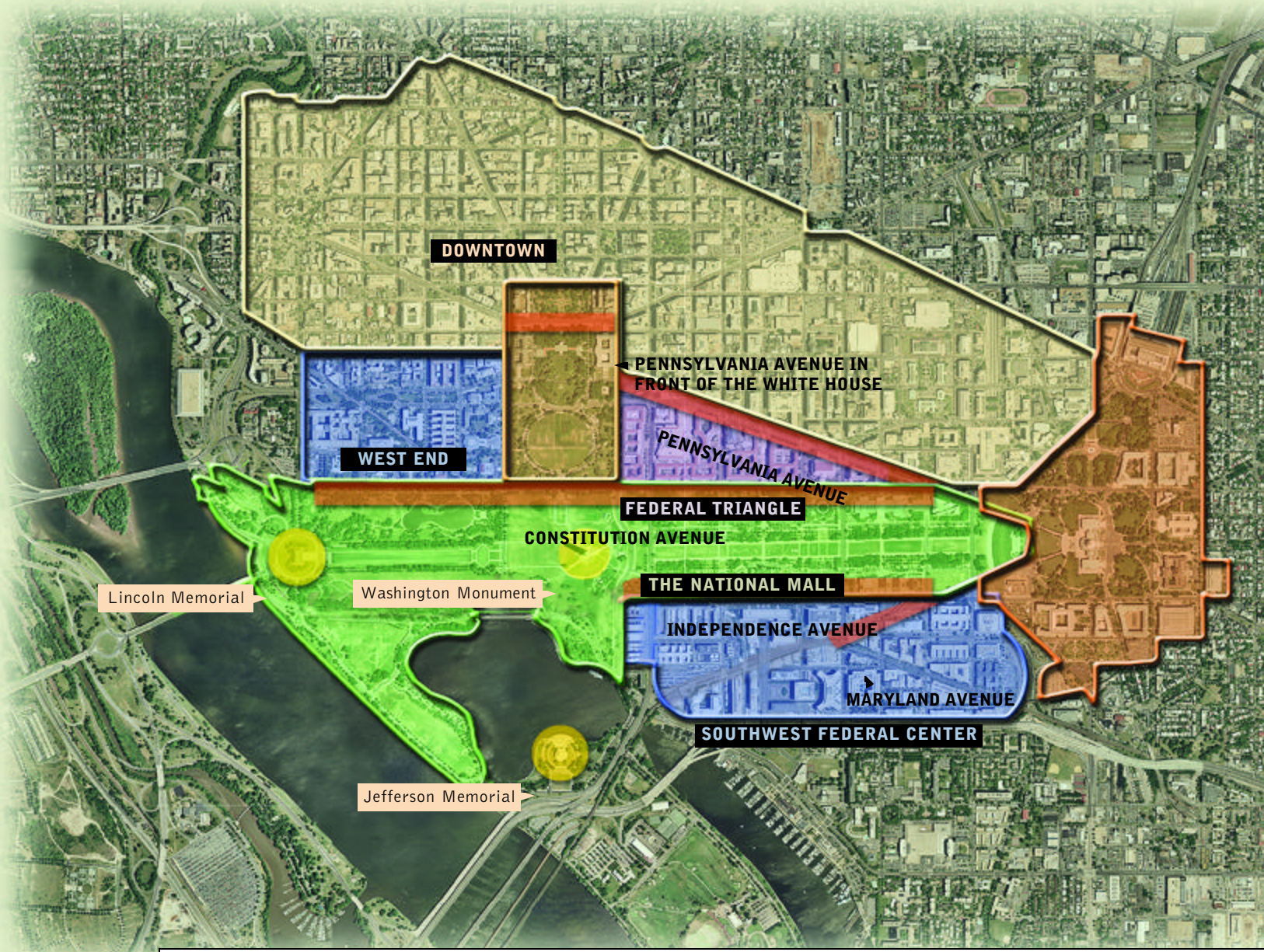
# The National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan



Illustration: Michael McCann

*Washington, DC* is admired throughout the world for the sweep and grace of its historic streetscapes and open public spaces. Today, however, guard huts define the National Mall, rows of concrete planters encircle our public buildings and temporary barriers block Pennsylvania Avenue. These and other fortifications have become familiar features in the Washington landscape, and since September 11, 2001 their number has increased alarmingly. They communicate fear and retrenchment and undermine the basic premises of an open and democratic society.

The National Capital Planning Commission has prepared *The National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan* that proposes solutions to seamlessly integrate building perimeter security into the historic urban fabric of Washington's Monumental Core. While enhancing security installations, the Plan creates a more welcoming and beautiful public realm. The Plan demonstrates that good urban design and good security can go hand in hand.

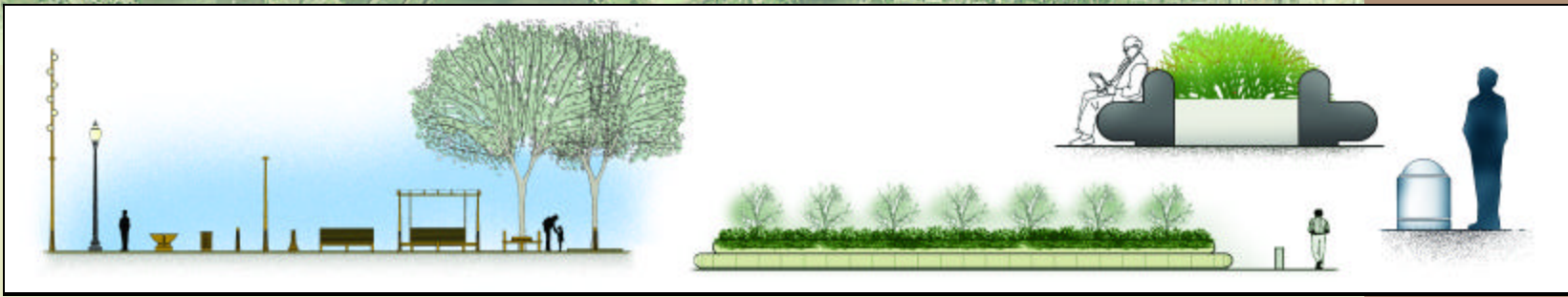


The Urban Design and Security Plan:

- Provides perimeter security against the threat of bomb-laden vehicles.
- Offers a citywide program that provides both security and urban beautification.
- Expands the palette of attractive street furnishings and landscape treatments that can provide curbside security.

The Plan is built on an urban design framework that identifies key areas and streets within the Monumental Core and recommends solutions that respond to the unique conditions and special character of each precinct. One size does not fit all and while the Plan proposes several design approaches, all share a compatible aesthetic vocabulary that helps knit together the fabric of Downtown Washington.

The Plan evolved when in March 2000, Congress authorized the Commission to establish the Interagency Security Task Force to evaluate the impact of security measures on the historic urban design of Washington’s Monumental Core. In November 2001, the Commission adopted the task force’s recommendations contained in a report entitled *Designing for Security in the Nation’s Capital*. Among its recommendations, the report called for the preparation of an urban design and security plan to identify permanent security and streetscape improvements for federal facilities in the Nation’s Capital. The Plan is the result of a collaborative effort by the National Capital Planning Commission, the federal and District of Columbia governments, security agencies, and civic and business organizations.



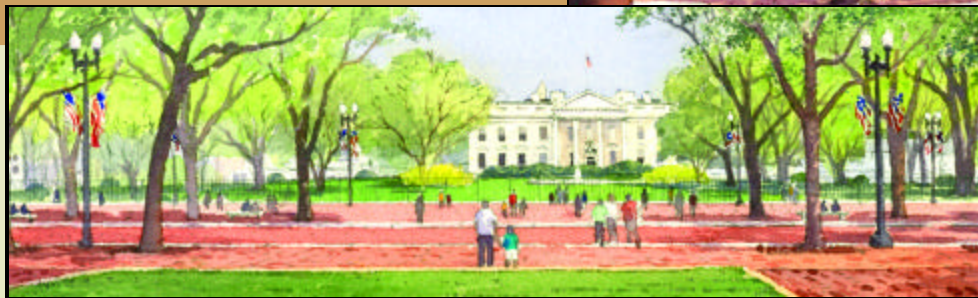
The Plan proposes concepts for special streets and areas within the city’s Monumental Core and offers a variety of security solutions such as hardened street furniture, low plinth walls, planters, bollards, and green curbside hedges with embedded security measures. These elements can be applied in a variety of ways to meet the security and design needs of particular downtown areas.

# Pennsylvania Avenue *at the White House*

Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House is one of the most symbolic and visible places in the nation, and its closure in 1995 has significantly affected Downtown Washington. Because overriding security concerns require the continued closure of this portion of the Avenue to normal city traffic for the foreseeable future, the Commission has called for its redesign as a beautiful, pedestrian-oriented public space. NCPC invited four of the nation's leading landscape architecture firms to submit design proposals and the Commission selected Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates as the team to develop a final design.



The Van Valkenburgh concept envisions a pedestrian-welcoming precinct in front of the White House with mature trees, shaded seating areas, and security checkpoints at 15th and 17th Streets.



The design includes a simple array of historic Washington light fixtures, stone benches, and discreet bollards. It preserves the existing street pattern while creating an environment that is welcoming and dignified.

The proposal accommodates inaugural parades and the Circulator, a new transit system planned for Downtown Washington, and permits the possible future reopening of the Avenue.

# Pennsylvania Avenue

Built in the 1970s, the existing streetscape along Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the U.S. Capitol has withstood the test of time. Today, the mature trees, abundant landscaping, and street furniture are worthy of the Avenue's role as "America's Main Street." *The National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan* proposes to install custom-designed hardened street furniture in the spirit of the existing elements and add new components as necessary, all aligned within the row of willow oaks along the street. Meeting new security requirements offers the opportunity to refurbish the Avenue and bring consistency to its entire length.

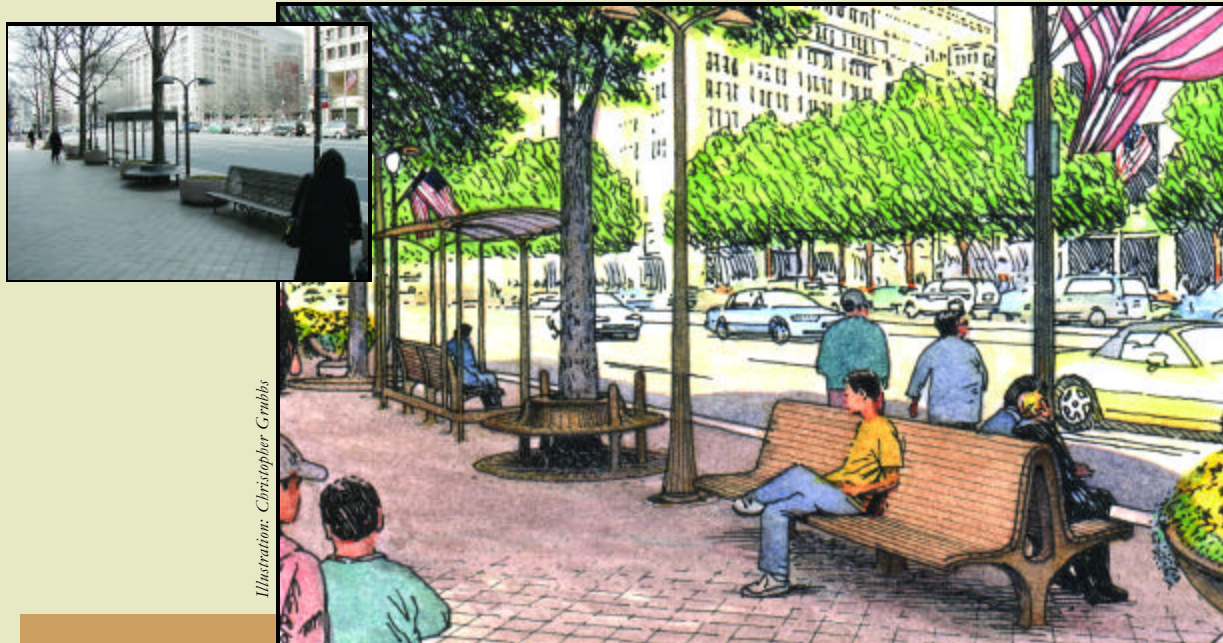


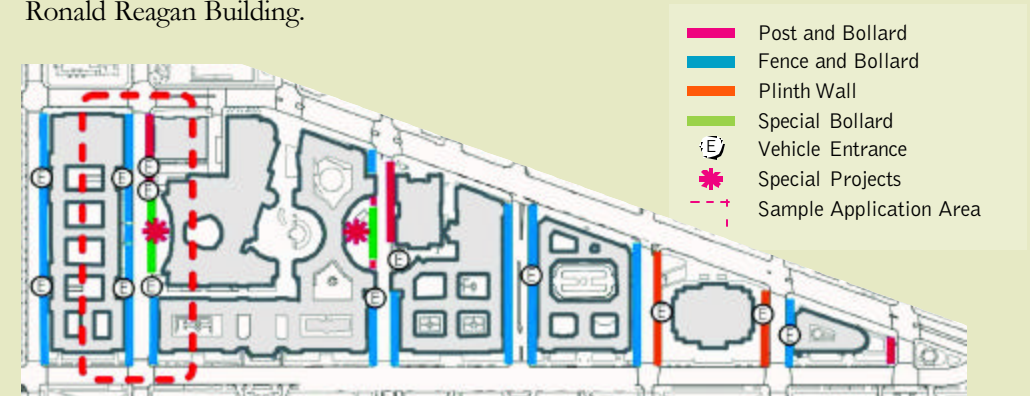
Illustration: Christopher Grubbs

Mature street trees and hardened benches, drinking fountains, trash containers, and light fixtures combine with bollards, planters, and bus shelters to create rhythm and visual continuity along the length of the Avenue.



# Federal Triangle

The Federal Triangle, the enclave of federal buildings bounded by Constitution and Pennsylvania Avenues, is a leading example of Washington's monumental civic architecture and urban planning. The proposed design reinforces the historic character of this precinct and responds to the hierarchy of ceremonial avenues and north-south streets. Designs for the north-south streetscapes include fence walls along existing tree boxes and custom-designed solutions for the 12th Street hemicycle and 14th Street plaza in front of the Ronald Reagan Building.



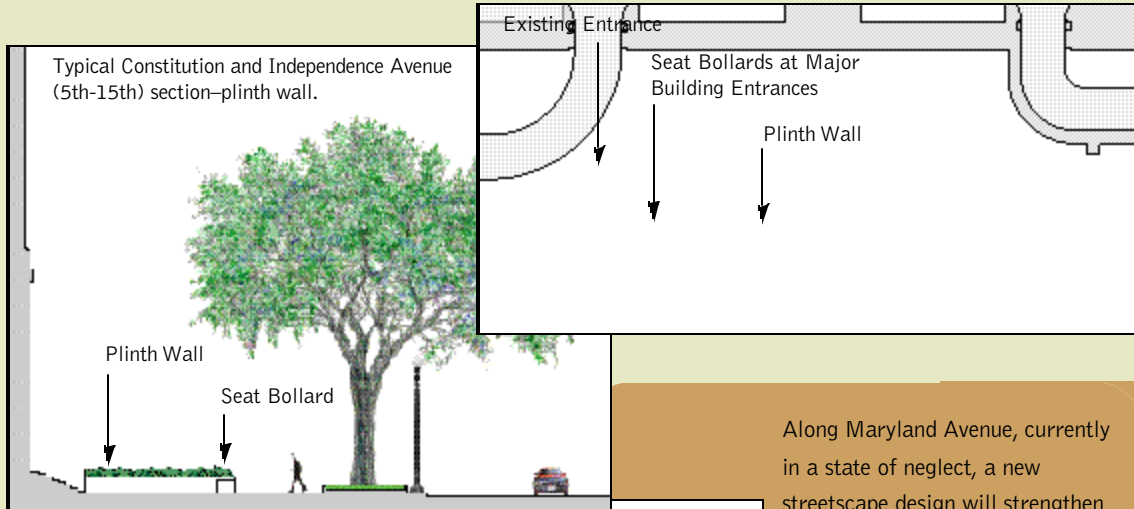
Within the Federal Triangle, the Department of Justice is currently designing security for its headquarters building that is compatible with the solutions proposed for the rest of the precinct.

Illustration: Christopher Grubbs



# Constitution, Independence, and Maryland Avenues

Along with Pennsylvania Avenue, Constitution, Independence and Maryland Avenues are the most significant ceremonial streets in Washington's Monumental Core. Constitution and Independence frame the National Mall and are key arteries for cross-town traffic. Landscaped stone plinth walls, part of the existing streetscape along portions of these two avenues, can be extended to improve security, offer shady seating areas, and unify the appearance of these two significant but very different thoroughfares.



Along Maryland Avenue, currently in a state of neglect, a new streetscape design will strengthen the prominence of this historic L'Enfant street. In the design solution here, the appearance of bollards placed between a double allee of street trees will be softened by significant plantings within the tree beds.

Illustration: Christopher Grubbs



# Southwest Federal Center

Transformed in the 1960s by federal and private office development, the Southwest Federal Center lacks the urban design coherence and integrity of other parts of Washington's Monumental Core. Many of the precinct's large modern buildings are set back from the street on plazas, and raised roadways and parking ramps detract from the overall pedestrian experience. Well-designed security installations can help bring visual continuity and enhance the urban character of this precinct.



Along the 10th Street Promenade would be large round and linear planters that incorporate seating and provide curbside security. The extensive use of plantings and landscaping helps to soften the appearance of the precinct.

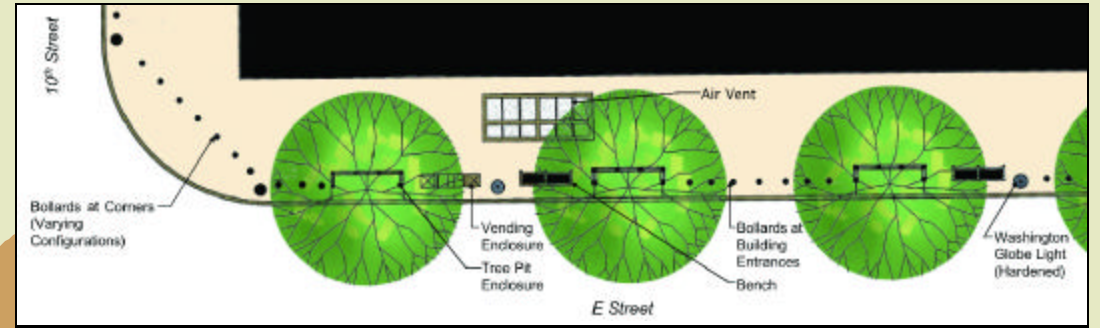
Security design incorporates a combination of seat planters and hardened benches at the curb of a widened sidewalk. Street trees are maintained and the overall design helps reduce the scale of the street, slows traffic, and improves the pedestrian environment.



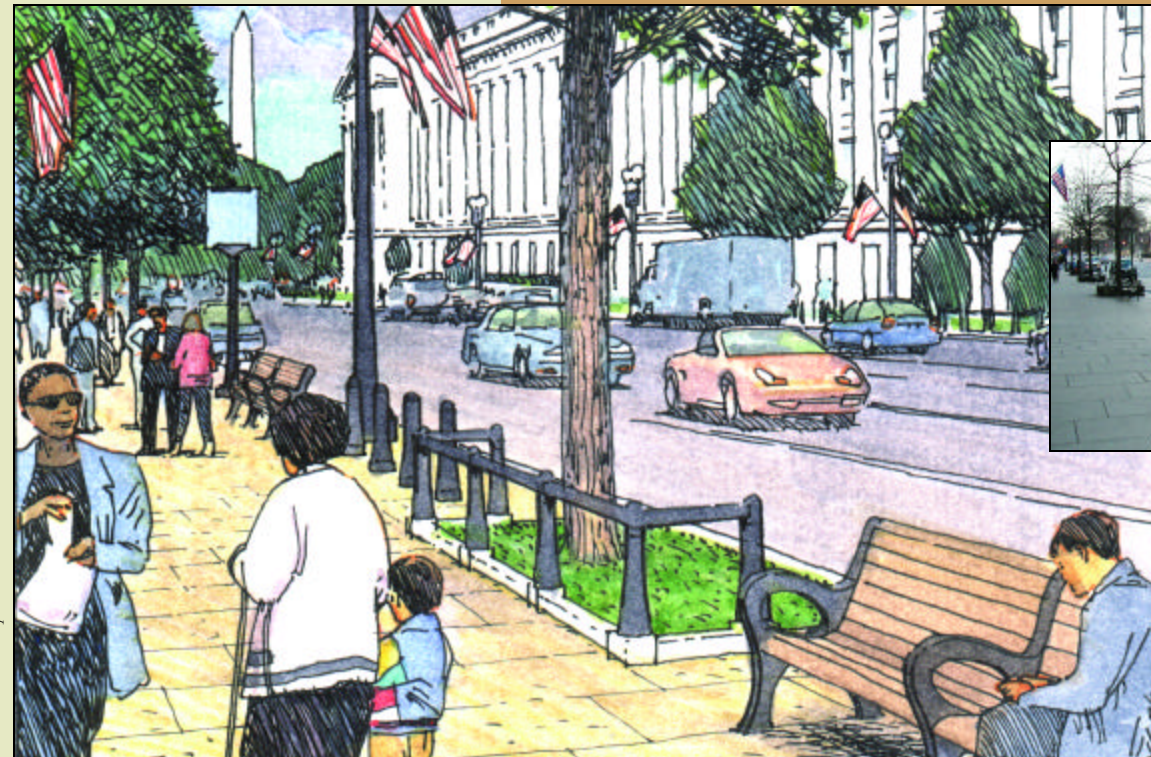
Illustration: Christopher Grubbs

# Downtown

Downtown Washington is one area where federal facilities coexist with private buildings. Since only a few of the federal buildings are likely to require perimeter security, such components may be needed on only a few blocks or a portion of a block. The design maintains a unified streetscape appearance around both public and private buildings and conforms to the existing standards established by the City and the Downtown Business Improvement District. It also hardens streetscape elements only where required and avoids unnecessary clutter of security elements.



A hierarchy of streetscape security design relates to Downtown diagonal avenues and grid streets. In general, security elements can be incorporated into the landscaping along the broad diagonal avenues. Security along grid streets, with their narrower sidewalks, would include hardened street lighting, benches, bicycle racks, and tree fence enclosures.



Illustrations: Christopher Grubbs

# Washington, Lincoln & Jefferson

As three of the most widely recognized icons in American civic life, the Washington Monument and the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials have special security needs. All three are surrounded by sweeping expanses of lawn that provide ample space for low stone walls, planters, and landscape elements that respect their setting.



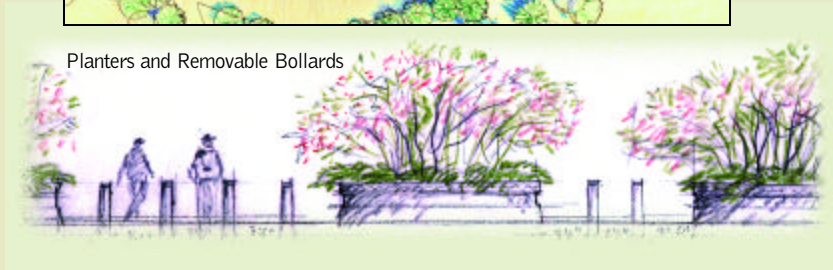
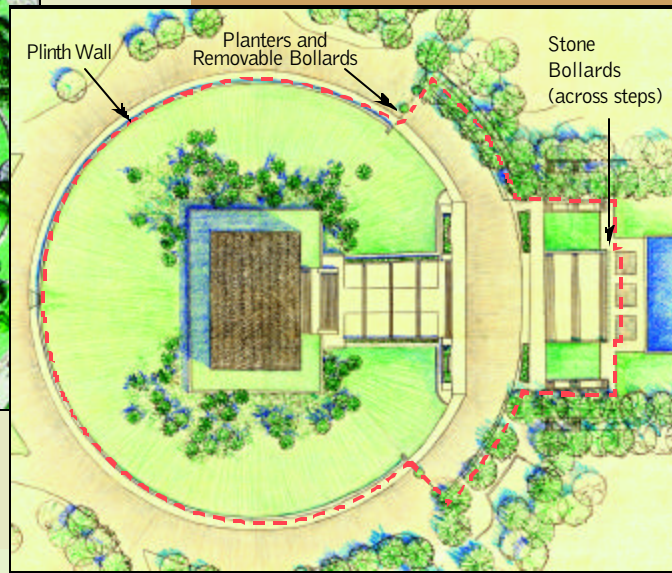
Existing temporary security measures



At the Lincoln Memorial a low wall will enclose the mound on which the memorial sits. Retractable bollards allow limited access to the circular roadway and benches and bollards permit easy pedestrian movement between the memorial and the Mall.



The National Park Service has developed a concept plan for perimeter security improvements for the Washington Monument. The existing walkways around the monument would be reconfigured as a series of partial ovals incorporating retaining walls extending east and west from the monument plaza.



# West End

Originally planned, although never fully executed as an enclave of federal buildings, the area west of the White House contains monumental and historic buildings such as the Department of the Interior and the Department of State. The architecture projects the image of an established federal presence, and impressive institutional buildings, such as the Federal Reserve and the American Red Cross, further contribute to the precinct's historic character. The streetscape designs proposed for the West End reinforce the green, campus-like setting of the area.

Security designs include low retaining walls and decorative fences composed of a variety of elements such as granite pillars, seats and benches, as well as bollards and shrubbery.

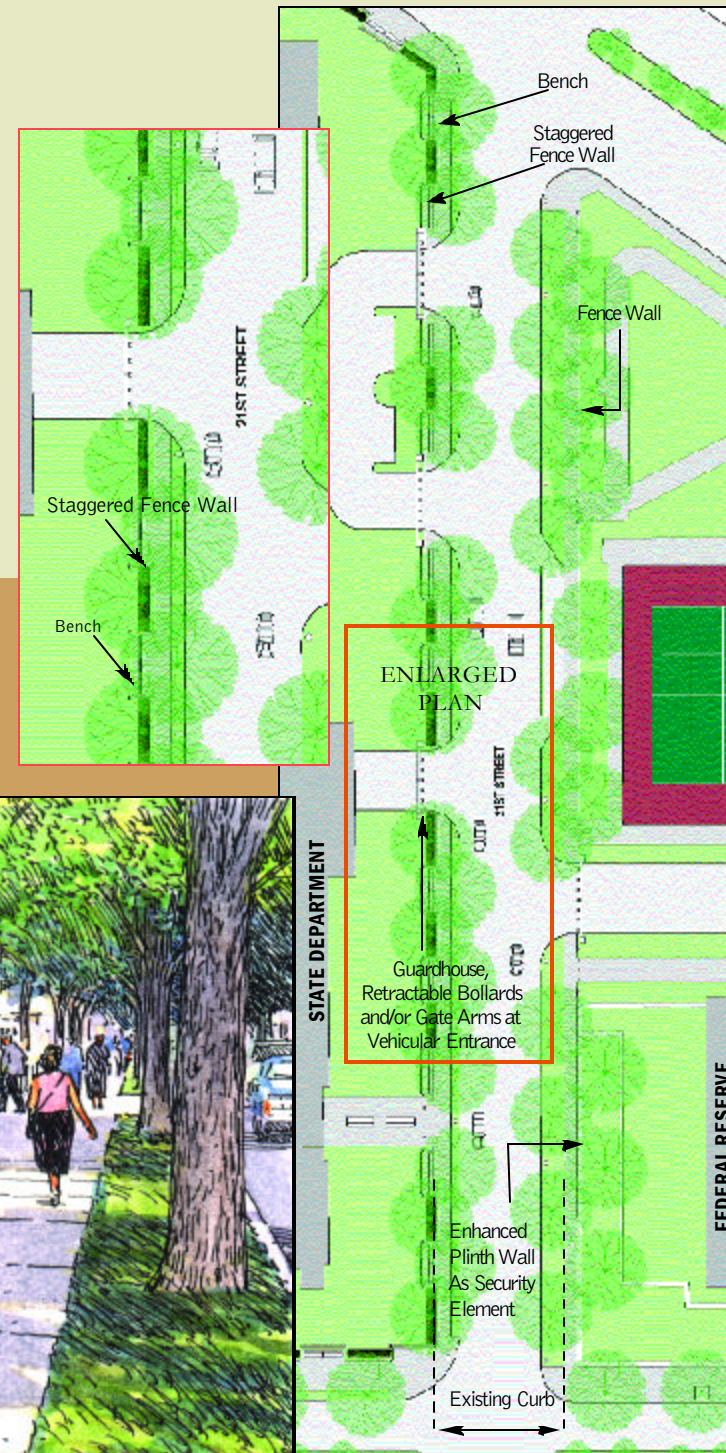


Illustration: Christopher Grubbs



## Implementation

The Commission is working with the Administration, Congress, and federal agencies to secure funding for the projects outlined in *The National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan*. NCPC has recommended that the Federal Highway Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation serve as the lead agency to oversee the design and construction of the Plan. Additionally, the Commission is coordinating closely with those federal agencies that already have perimeter security projects planned or under construction to ensure that they are executed in conformance with the broad outlines of the Urban Design and Security Plan.

Risk assessments for individual buildings, as well as site specific analyses, environmental and historic preservation reviews, and structural testing of the various security components must be completed before final designs are developed. The Commission has also recommended mobility and parking studies, including a feasibility study for the Downtown Circulator, as part of the implementation program. NCPC estimates that once funding is secured, design and construction of many of the proposed projects can be completed within two to three years.

## Public Participation

The *National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan* was developed with broad input from the public, local government agencies, and the professional design and planning community. The Interagency Security Task Force invited key public and private stakeholders to participate as members of its Core Advisory Group. During early development of the Plan, NCPC staff presented its security design work to dozens of audiences in Washington and around the country. The Plan was released in draft form in July 2002, and the Commission carefully considered all public comments when preparing the final Plan. The complete report is available from the Commission offices and online at [www.ncpc.gov](http://www.ncpc.gov).

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