

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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Draft National Capital Framework Plan Destinations and Connections Beyond the National Mall Monumental Core, Washington, DC

Prepared by
National Capital Planning Commission and U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

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Abstract

The Draft National Capital Framework Plan (the Framework Plan), which was launched in May 2006, is a multi-agency initiative led by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA). The purpose of the plan is to enhance new destinations beyond the National Mall and improve the connections between the National Mall, Downtown and the waterfront. Focusing on federal land and buildings in the Federal Triangle, the Northwest Rectangle, the Southwest Rectangle, and East Potomac Park, the Framework Plan's goals are:

- To plan for the federal government's future space needs, including space for new memorials, museums, public gathering spaces, and federal offices in a way that contributes to sustainable city life;
- To preserve the historic open space of the National Mall and protect it from overbuilding;
- To extend the special civic qualities of the National Mall and the vitality and vibrancy of city life into adjacent federal precincts.

Requested Commission Action

Authorization to circulate the July 10, 2008 Draft National Capital Framework Plan for a 90-day public comment period pursuant 40 U.S.C § 8711(e)(2).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Authorizes staff to circulate the July 10, 2008 Draft National Capital Framework Plan for a 90-day public comment period for the purposes of obtaining and considering public and stakeholder input prior to preparation of a final plan for review and approval by the National Capital Planning Commission.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The National Capital Framework Plan is a multi-agency initiative led by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA). The Framework Plan seeks to help preserve the treasured open space of the National Mall by proposing strategies to improve the setting of the adjacent areas to make them desirable locations for the next generation of national museums, memorials, public gatherings, and federal offices. As part of this strategy, the Framework Plan seeks to reinvigorate Washington's existing federal office precincts by encouraging a mix of offices, shops, businesses, and cultural activities that support economic vitality and vibrant city life.

To achieve its goals, the Framework Plan re-imagines the precincts near the National Mall as new city destinations with distinctive identities of their own. It focuses on federal land and buildings in four key precincts near the National Mall: the Northwest Rectangle, the Federal Triangle, the Southwest Rectangle, and East Potomac Park. The overall objectives of this plan are:

- To transform the Southwest Federal Center precinct into a distinguished 21st-Century workplace, a welcoming visitor destination, and cultural hub;
- To establish East Potomac Park as an easily accessible destination in Washington's iconic landscape, with expanded opportunities for recreation, leisure, commemoration and celebration;
- To establish the Federal Triangle as an attractive workplace and vibrant welcoming visitor destination featuring beautiful, lively, and engaging public spaces, and to strengthen Pennsylvania Avenue's image as America's main street; and
- To establish the Northwest Rectangle as a quality workplace and cultural destination that includes an interconnected system of beautiful streets and parks.

The connections between these precincts are as important as the places themselves. The Framework Plan proposes to eliminate barriers such as shattered street grids and intrusive road, rail, and bridge infrastructure. It proposes to connect these precincts to one another, to the waterfront, the National Mall, and to the rest of the city. Making these connections, enhancing the quality and beauty of public spaces and improving transit options is essential to creating a city that is livable, walkable, and enjoyable. These important connections include:

- The 10th Street corridor connecting Washington's downtown with the National Mall and the National Mall with the Southwest Waterfront;
- Improved accessibility between the Southwest Waterfront and East Potomac Park, and the Potomac River;
- A restored Maryland Avenue between the US Capitol and the Jefferson Memorial;
- A transformed Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the US Capitol; and
- Commemorative parks along E Street NW and the waterfront, connecting the Kennedy Center to the Lincoln Memorial and to President's Park.

The Framework Plan builds upon NCPC's *Extending the Legacy* and *Memorials and Museums Master Plan*. *Legacy* is a visionary plan to guide long-term growth in the capital and the *Memorials and Museums Master Plan* protects the open space of the Mall by identifying 100 sites for commemorative works throughout the city.

Like *Legacy*, the Draft Framework Plan examines how to overcome barriers; how to fill in the gaps in the urban fabric; how Washington's extraordinary but often undervalued assets such as its waterfront, historic public buildings, civic spaces, and parkland can be more accessible and better integrated into the life of the city; and how to provide new opportunities for open space and public and private development. Some of the key planning and development strategies include:

- Reusing key historic buildings, redeveloping key properties, and using infill development to increase government office space, introduce an appropriate mix of retail support services, and to restore the street grid;
- Bringing cafeterias, food courts, dry cleaners, banks, and other services often buried in office basements to the street level and opening them to the general public;
- Replacing, realigning, or decking highways and rail lines to eliminate infrastructure barriers and capture valuable urban space for private air-rights development, such as residential, hospitality or commercial uses;
- Expanding programs and extending hours of activities in federal buildings and public spaces to animate day and evening activity in the surrounding community;
- Rehabilitating public parks, plazas, and streets to create a beautiful, distinguished and engaging public realm for use by more people; and
- Expanding transit facilities including Metro, Circulator, and water taxi connections to improve mobility and reduce need for single-occupancy vehicles.

Benefits for the federal establishment as well as the local city include the opportunity to develop an additional 5.6 million square feet of space that could result in an increase of:

- 2.6 million square feet for museums and other cultural attractions that showcase American culture and democracy for Washington's 20 million annual visitors;
- 1.0 million square feet of new space for federal offices to strengthen the monumental core as a federal employment center; and
- 2.0 million square feet for private development that will provide opportunities for mixing uses and contribute to the city's economic vibrancy.

Amongst this new development, the Framework Plan identifies opportunities for:

- 4 new memorial and 4 new museums sites to celebrate the nation's achievements, heroes, diverse heritage and culture;
- 75 acres of large multi-purpose festival, celebration and recreation space to relieve pressure on the National Mall; and
- 32 acres of new recreation space and 13 acres of small pocket parks and parkways.

The Draft Framework Plan examines the type of development and infrastructure changes necessary to meet the future needs of the federal government and enrich the city's public realm. These initiatives could transform the way residents, workers, and visitors experience Washington. The intent is to create:

- Compact, mixed-use corridors that enliven federally dominated office precincts with street-level public uses and cultural attractions;
- Walkable corridors and transit-oriented development that is the hallmark of sustainable, vibrant cities;
- A beautiful public realm of distinguished streets, boulevards, parks, plazas, landscape, art, and architecture that is worthy of the capital city of a great nation.
- An increase in sustainable, low impact site design, green building, and environmental restoration.

The Framework Plan can serve as a tool to coordinate near term and long term initiatives to ultimately achieve a unified vision for Washington's Monumental Core. It is important to begin studying and documenting how to guide growth for site specific development so that the overall vision can be realized over time in the most effective and cost efficient manner. It is neither a prescriptive master plan nor an implementation program; rather, it identifies opportunities to coordinate complex land use, urban design, open space and transportation improvements.

Many of the plan's recommendations will require studying alternative proposals, conducting detailed analysis, evaluating environmental impacts, and consulting with many parties prior to implementation. Compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Policy Act will be necessary to prepare development plans of sufficient detail to seek project approvals and funding. Detailed feasibility studies will be required to evaluate the impacts, costs, and benefits.

The Draft Plan includes an Action Agenda that identifies organizational approaches and strategies that could be used by many different entities to implement recommendations in the Framework Plan. Depending on the initiative, it may be appropriate for the federal government, the District government, the private sector, a nonprofit organization, or a combination thereof, to take the lead in executing the next steps to advance initiatives. Alternatively, many of these initiatives could be implemented by a federal development corporation.

These organizational strategies are also associated with various funding strategies. While there may be a few cases where it would be appropriate to use an agency's existing funding resources, many of the initiatives suggested in the plan are intended to achieve broad goals to enliven and improve the monumental core with widespread and varied benefits to the federal establishment, the city and the nation. In such instances, due to the scope and significance of these recommendations, a range of funding mechanisms beyond individual agency budgets, should be considered. These include innovative public/private partnerships, direct congressional appropriations, private financing, and non-profit support.

The federal government has a range of existing legislative tools that can be used to effectively move the Framework Plan's recommendation's to reality. There are a number of Executive

Orders, existing laws, and agency policies that promote economic and social sustainability of cities across the country. Generally, these policies and laws have promoted sustainable urban development by allowing federal land and facilities to contribute to lively active civic life within local communities.

Initiatives identified in the Draft Framework Plan can be pursued over time as funding becomes available. Some of the simple and relatively inexpensive initiatives could be achieved in a few years, other initiatives that are more complex and would only be considered when the useful life of a facility (building or infrastructure) is close to its end. By keeping longer-term goals clearly in sight, nearer-term projects can move forward in a way that will support, not impede, the major infrastructure projects to come at a later date.

The Draft Framework Plan reinforces and compliments the goals of planning efforts developed by partnership agencies. These planning efforts include the National Park Service's National Mall Plan, the District of Columbia's Center City Action Agenda, and the Architect of the Capitol's Capitol Complex Master Plan. It promotes collaboration, planning and future implementation to ensure that Washington becomes an even greater capital city and continues to serve as a model for the nation and the world.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

On May 17, 2006, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) held a press conference to launch preparation of the National Capital Framework Plan (Framework Plan). The Commission has not yet taken official action on the work completed to date.

CONSULTATION

To facilitate interagency coordination, a Memorandum of Agreement was established with key federal and local government stakeholders. These stakeholders made up a Steering Committee which provided a forum for guidance, input and interagency coordination. A Working Group, made up of the Steering Committees' appointed staff, as well as other key federal stakeholders also provided input and expertise to help address complex land use, transportation and public space issues. The Steering Committee and Working Group include representatives from NCPC, CFA, the General Services Administration, the National Park Service, the Department of Defense, the Architect of the Capitol, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, the District of Columbia City Council, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, the District of Columbia Department of Transportation, the Smithsonian Institution, the National Gallery of Art, the Kennedy Center, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Staff also provided a forum for citizens, interest groups, and key stakeholders to identify and provide valuable input on potential opportunities, issues, and strategies to be included in the Plan. Interested parties include the Committee of 100, the National Coalition to Save our Mall,

the Downtown BID, various tourism and recreation related interest groups, and leading members of the professional design community, as well as recognized historians and preservationists.

After the Framework Plan initiative was kicked-off at the Navy Memorial Plaza in May 2006, staff began conducting research and collecting necessary data. During the first year, meetings and workshops were held with the Steering Committee and the public to identify issues and opportunities and begin to refine the project goals, objectives, and potential strategies. At key milestones during the early planning process, staff met with interested citizen groups, as well as conducted frequent individual and collective meetings with the Working Group to obtain their input, feedback and obtain their technical expertise.

During this time, NCPC and CFA worked with the National Building Museum to host the symposium "Framing a Capital City" on April 11, 2007. More than 200 people attended, including stakeholders, interested citizens, governors' representatives, and members of the steering committee participated in this event. Experts on urban ecology, history, planning, design, and commemoration examined how commemoration, environmental sustainability, symbolic architecture, and the use of public space should influence the character and shape of the city in the 21st century. They spoke about how these topics transcend local planning concerns and touch on social, political, and economic matters of national importance and the need to balance Washington's dual role as an urban center and a national showcase.

In December 2007, the preliminary Framework Plan strategies and recommendations were presented to the Steering Committee for review and comment. A public meeting was also held on December 11th, 2007 to brief interested parties and stakeholders on the preliminary recommendations and the status of the planning work. Executive briefings were provided to CFA and NCPC, and staff met with other federal stakeholders potentially affected by the Framework Plan proposals. On June 2, 2008, staff met with the Steering Committee and Working Group to review the draft plan and request their comments prior to release for public review and comment.

During the public comment period, staff will conduct an aggressive public outreach effort to schedule meetings and presentations with interested parties that may wish to comment on the Framework Plan proposals. To date, two informational public meetings are scheduled. The Framework Plan will be presented to the Commission of Fine Arts at their monthly meeting scheduled for July 17, and staff will host an open house on the evening of July 22 at the National Capital Planning Commission. To facilitate public review, the Plan will also be posted on NCPC's website on July 11.

After the public comment period closes on October 10, 2008, NCPC and CFA staff will refine the plan and place it on CFA's and NCPC's public hearing agenda for review and approval. The tentative date for the CFA meeting is November 20, 2008, and the tentative date for the NCPC public meeting is December 4, 2008.