

# **Federal Urban Design Element DRAFT Policies**

**Draft Goal Statement:** The federal government should provide and support a public realm that is reflective of Washington's heritage and role as the nation's capital.

## **THE CHARACTER OF THE CAPITAL**

### **Section A: The L'Enfant City and its Setting Policies**

The federal government should implement and support policies and actions that:

1. Maintain the consistent building height and the relationship of building height and street width as established in the Height of Buildings Act within the L'Enfant City.
2. Maintain or reestablish the integrity of the original L'Enfant Plan rights-of-way wherever possible.
3. Encourage private and public building design that enhances public spaces and respects symbolic civic buildings and federal icons.
4. Promote and maintain Pennsylvania Avenue between the U.S. Capitol and the White House as a multi-modal street bordered by an actively programmed, lively, pedestrian- oriented public realm that maintains the avenue's important reciprocal views.
5. Maintain the character of the Federal Triangle and the formal design of the National Mall as established in the McMillian Plan.
6. Foster active, enhanced and publicly accessible waterfronts along the Potomac River, Anacostia River, and Washington Channel with unobstructed views to important civic buildings and national icons.
7. Uphold the design of transportation infrastructure that respects viewsheds to symbolic civic buildings and federal icons and does not negatively impact street character.
8. Maintain the prominence of the topographic bowl formed by lowland and rim features of the L'Enfant City and environs by controlling the urban and natural skylines in the Anacostia, Florida Avenue, and Arlington County portions of the bowl as follows:

- a. Preserve as much as possible the green setting of the Anacostia hills and integrate building masses with, and subordinate to, the natural topography.
  - b. Maintain the Florida Avenue escarpment's natural definition of the L'Enfant Plan boundaries by retaining developments that are fitted to the landforms and by promoting low-rise development that can be distinguished from the greater height of the L'Enfant City's core areas.
  - c. Within the western portion of the bowl, retain a horizontal skyline by relating building heights to the natural slope and rim areas of Arlington Ridge as viewed from the Capitol, the Mall, and other riverside outlooks.
9. Encourage building, street and exterior lighting that respects the hierarchy among memorials, monuments, and important civic buildings and spaces of the nation's capital, with the U.S. Capital being the most prominent feature in the nighttime skyline. Signage, illuminated billboards and/or other lighting should enhance viewsheds to symbolic civic and federal buildings and should not impact the setting of the National Mall.

**Section B: The District of Columbia Policies**

The federal government should implement and support policies and actions that:

- 1. Encourage building heights that respect symbolic public buildings in the skyline and are proportionate to the streets on which they are located.
- 2. Maintain or reinforce views to and settings of federal properties in the District of Columbia and to symbolic civic buildings and federal icons within the L'Enfant City.
- 3. Encourage private development to enhance the character of any adjacent federal facilities or federal park land.

**Section C: The National Capital Region policies**

The federal government should implement and support policies that:

- 1. Reinforce the prominence of gateways and the experience of entering Washington by:
  - a. Working with local jurisdictions to ensure the protection and enhancement of gateway routes.

- b. Regulating the scale and use of nearby development.
  - c. Improving and enhancing gateways with street trees and amenities.
- 2. Maintain the prominence of federal icons and federal park land by ensuring surrounding development is complementary.
- 3. Maintain or enhance the characteristics of the National Park Service Parkways by:
  - a. Maintaining parkways as scenic landscape corridors and protecting their historic character.
  - b. Encouraging local jurisdictions to plan and zone development so that it is not visible from parkways.
  - c. Encouraging local jurisdictions to minimize — through planning, regulation, and thoughtful design — the impact of development that is visible from parkways.
  - d. Requiring actions to minimize and mitigate negative impacts to maintain parkway characteristics where transportation system impacts are unavoidable.
- 4. Preserve the region's tree canopy and expand the region's tree canopy where possible.
- 5. Enhance and support public access to regional waterfronts along the Potomac River, Anacostia River and other tributaries by:
  - a. Avoiding the creation of physical barriers to the waterfront.
  - b. Determining building height based on the building's proximity to the shoreline.
  - c. Designing and locating bridges so that they minimally affect local riverine habitat, waterways, shorelines, and valleys.

## **FEDERAL FACILITIES AND PROPERTY**

### **Section D: Inspiring Building Design Policies**

New, redesigned, modernized or refurbished federal buildings should:

1. Reflect their importance in the National Capital Region and be designed and constructed to the highest quality.
2. Complement or improve their context by providing consistency with the adjacent urban fabric. This should include consistency with scale, materials, streetwalls or heights where possible.
3. Implement sustainable site and building design on a precinct level where possible.
4. Achieve a balance between iconic design and infill design as appropriate to the location and setting of the building's site.

### **Section E: Activating Street Level Policies**

The federal government should:

1. Incorporate publicly accessible retail and/or cultural resources into the street level of federal buildings where possible.
2. Avoid blank walls where a building meets adjacent public space and activate street level facades by utilizing art displays, transparent materials or other appropriate methods. Ensure that buildings are as publicly accessible as possible at the street level. Security measures should be limited and integrated into the public realm. Primary building entrances should be appropriately located in relationship to public space.

### **Section F: Integrating Buildings and Campuses Policies**

The federal government should:

1. Provide access to or connections through campuses, building yards, plazas, or courtyards for local and regional trails, bikeways, pedestrian ways or open space networks where possible. Agencies should explore programming these areas with publicly accessible amenities such as art installations and/or farmers markets.
2. Provide, to the extent possible, multi-modal street connections or extensions to adjacent streets or local street grid to and through installations to provide a continuous transportation network.
3. Locate and design appropriate amenities including retail and parking facilities so that they are accessible to the local community where possible.

4. Design pedestrian and vehicular entrances or any physical gateways to federal campuses and buildings to be as inviting and as accessible as possible.
5. Consult and respect the design guidelines or goals of the local host community.

### **Section G: Enhancement of Public Spaces Policies**

The federal government should:

1. Minimize public space obstructions such as vehicular curb cuts, orient service areas away from major streets and locate them in the area of least visibility on the site.
2. Provide memorial landscapes that are adaptable and programmed with a balance of active and passive uses and amenities as appropriate to the surrounding context.
3. Provide, where possible, well landscaped areas with active amenities such as seating, public art, educational or commemorative elements or other amenities in public spaces around federal buildings or federal icons.
4. Utilize sustainable features in their landscapes and adjacent public space, where possible.
5. Locate perimeter security elements on the building site and not in the public right-of-way where possible. These elements should be minimized, unobtrusive, and relate to the surrounding context.