

A FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE



EXTENDING THE LEGACY REPRESENTS THE THIRD ACT IN A CONTINUING PLANNING DRAMA THAT BEGAN OVER 200 YEARS AGO, WHEN PRESIDENT GEORGE WASHINGTON COMMISSIONED PIERRE L'ENFANT TO LAY OUT THE NEW CAPITAL. LIKE THE L'ENFANT AND McMILLAN PLANS, IT LOOKS AHEAD 50 TO 100 YEARS. AND LIKE THEM, IT OFFERS A FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT.

A framework is not a blueprint that renders the future in precise and immutable detail. It is more like a map with a few dramatic highlights, corresponding to the best locations for museums, parks, bridges, transit stations and other public assets. It is both a guide to the big picture and a defense against the myopic quick fix.

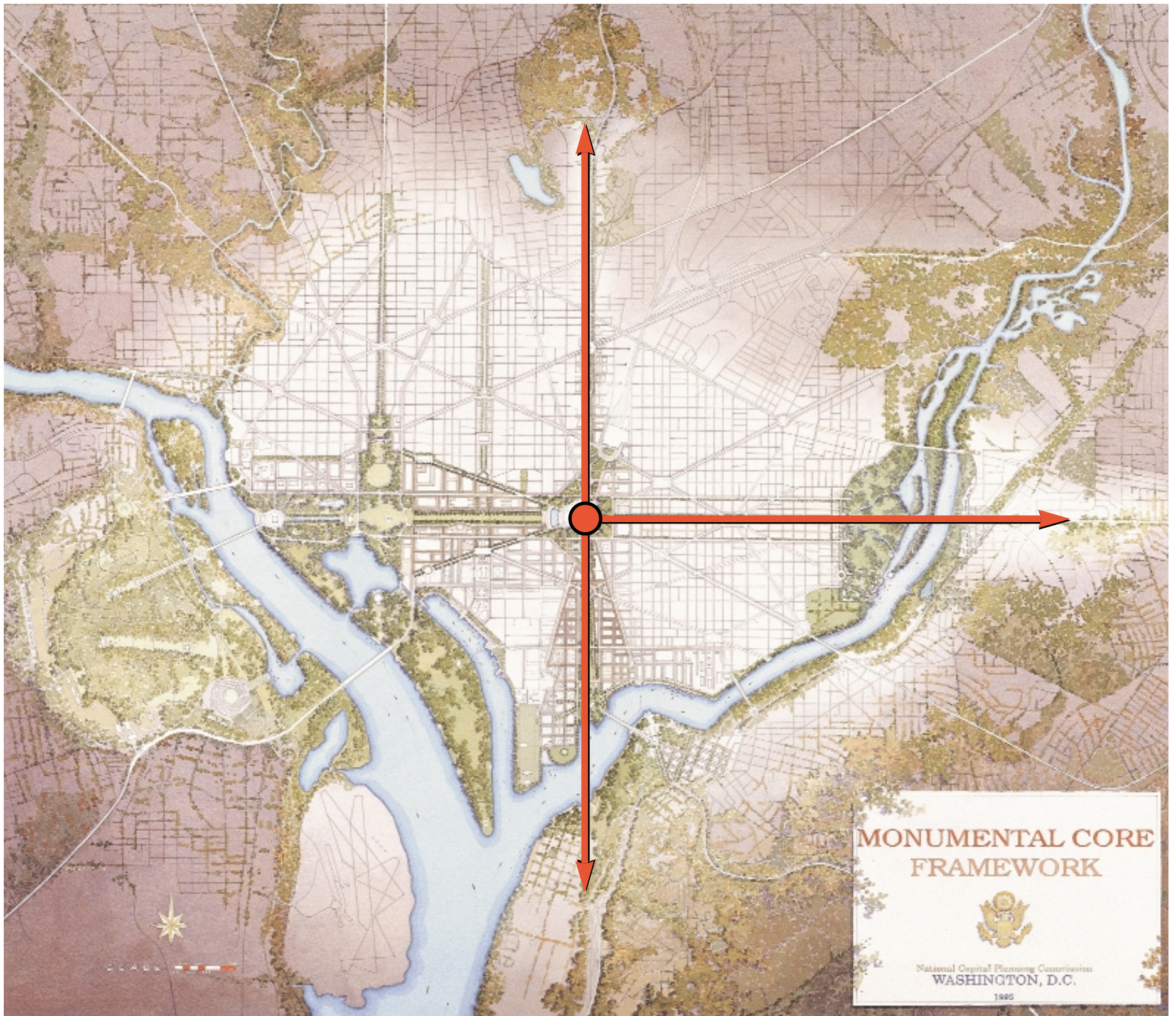
This critical distinction was explained nearly a century ago by President Theodore Roosevelt in a speech to the American Institute of Architects. “What I have said does not mean that we shall go, here in Washington for instance, into immediate and extravagant expenditures on public buildings. All that it means is that whenever hereafter a public building is provided for and erected, it should be erected in accordance with a carefully thought-out plan adopted long before and that it should be not only beautiful in itself, but fitting in its relation to the whole scheme of public buildings, the parks and the drives of the District.”



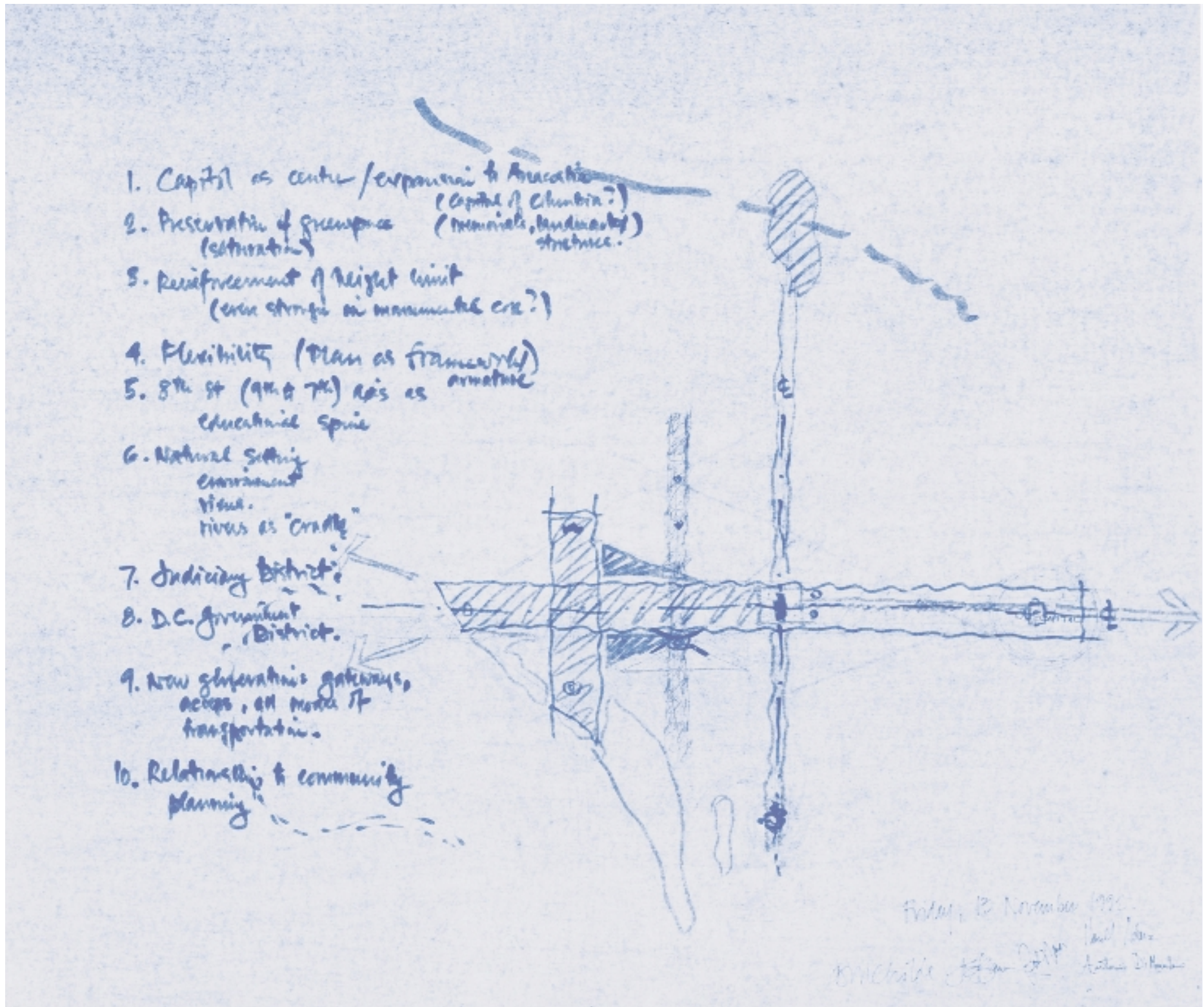
Legacy began as a search for a “carefully thought-out plan” that would ensure the orderly development of the Monumental Core. In the mid-1980s it became clear that such orderly development was threatened by a flood of new museums and memorials, primarily along the Mall. The East Wing of the National Gallery of Art, the National Air & Space Museum and the Hirshhorn Museum had all opened within a decade, and a dozen more important proposals, including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, were in the works. At that rate, the Mall’s distinctive openness would soon disappear under a mantle of marble and glass.

NCPC prepared several studies exploring alternatives to overbuilding on the Mall. One showed the northwest quadrant of the city jammed with new museums, memorials and office buildings, arranged in tight, Beaux-Arts configurations. Another relocated the Supreme Court to the Potomac Tidal Basin and framed it with conventional Neoclassical civic architecture. These approaches were monumental and remote, barely acknowledging the existence of non-governmental Washington.

Although largely hypothetical, these planning studies sparked intense debate about the competing claims of open space and new development in the heart of Washington. In the end, NCPC made preserving and enhancing the open space around the Mall the cornerstone of its new plan and locating new museums and memorials outside the Mall the principal tool for achieving it. The Mall is a unique national space, the Commission reasoned, a summary of our democratic ideals and achievements, and must be protected from excessive development.



The plan recenters Washington on the Capitol and extends development to the four quadrants of the city.



This simple pencil sketch was the catalyst for *Extending the Legacy*.

In 1992-1993, NCPC invited a team of prominent architects, urban designers, economists and transportation planners to review the staff's initial studies. Think about the whole city, the consultants urged, not just the federal enclave. While preserving Washington's ceremonial heart was commendable, the opportunity to address some of the city's other urgent needs — jobs, housing, transit — was unprecedented. What began as a federal facilities study gradually evolved into a vision for an expanded Monumental Core. A problem had been transformed into an opportunity.

NCPC conducted workshops and community meetings to hear the public's views about replanning the Monumental Core. The sessions took place in schools, libraries and community centers, at night and on weekends.

Once again, consultants reviewed and commented on the staff's work and made several important suggestions. The most crucial was a simple axial diagram showing the Capitol as the center of Washington, with bold lines radiating north, south, east and west. This single move redefined the plan, pushing it east and south toward the Anacostia River and enlarging the traditional boundaries of the Monumental Core. Unlike earlier plans, *Extending the Legacy* goes beyond the Mall and the ceremonial enclaves and expands the definition of "federal interest" to include adjacent neighborhoods, waterfronts, parks and gateways.

Like the earlier McMillan Commission, the consultants not only supplied design ideas, but also gave a fledgling plan visibility, credibility and political clout. Their participation showed that *Extending the Legacy* was not just another busywork document written for the archives, but a unique collaboration among government agencies, community groups and some of America's most talented urban designers.

The *Legacy* exhibit at Union Station encouraged visitors to share their visions of Washington's future.



Out of these early collaborations came the five themes that form the armature of *Extending the Legacy*:

- 1** Building on the historic L'Enfant and McMillan plans, which are the foundation of modern Washington;
- 2** Unifying the city and the Monumental Core, with the Capitol at the center;
- 3** Using new memorials, museums and other public buildings to stimulate economic development;
- 4** Integrating the Potomac and Anacostia rivers into the city's public life and protecting the Mall and the adjacent historic landscape from future building; and
- 5** Developing a comprehensive, flexible and convenient transportation system that eliminates barriers and improves movement within the city.



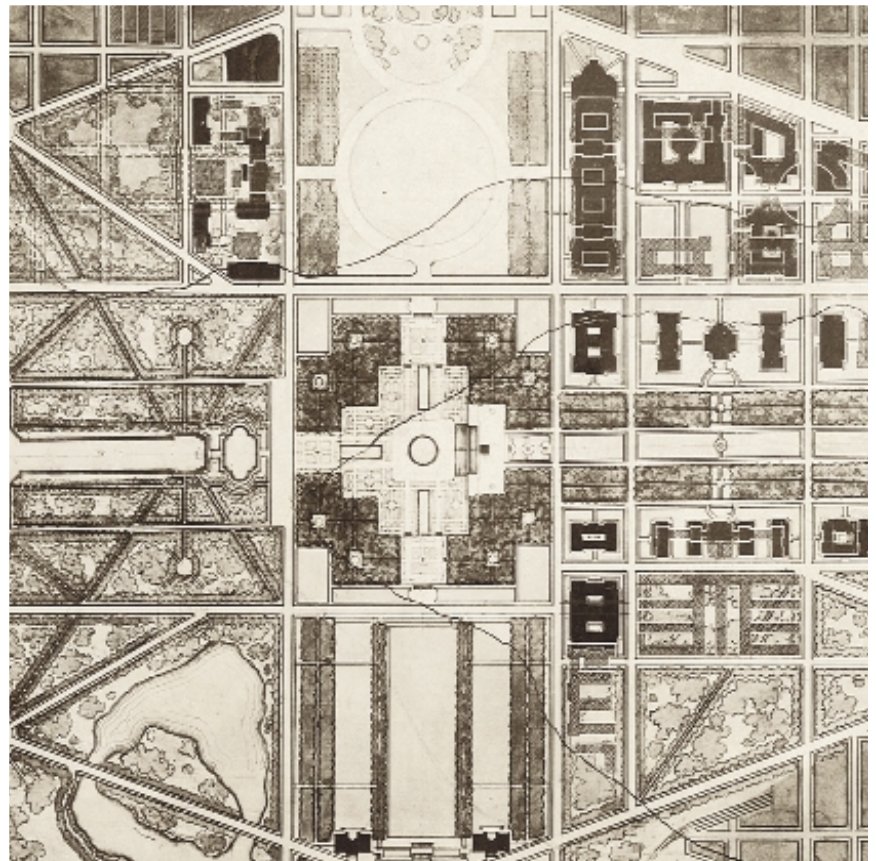
The new plan for Washington expresses neither an imperial dream, nor only the wishes of Washington's political and business establishment. It derives instead from years of collaboration among federal agencies, local governments and community groups. NCPC returned to the community many times to review and refine the plan so that it would reflect the popular will.

Extending the Legacy made its national debut in March 1996 at Washington's Union Station, complete with model, videos and dramatic graphics. This event was followed in June by a major exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. Over 2 million people visited the museum during its seven-month run. NCPC also received thousands of responses to its visitor questionnaire, many filled front and back with suggestions for improving the plan. Whatever their political views, Americans are unequivocally proud of their capital — its beauty, its history and its power to symbolize their best aspirations. The plan has been widely reviewed by the popular and professional press and been the subject of several television programs. In both overall conception and specific details, *Extending the Legacy* can truthfully be called a "national plan" for the heart of the nation's capital.

SOUTH CAPITOL STREET



The Capitol dome provides a stunning backdrop for night life on the new South Capitol Street.



Clockwise, from upper left: L'Enfant Plan detail • George Washington and Pierre L'Enfant • Washington Monument grounds, McMillan Plan • Anacostia waterfront, 1834