

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

R. Taylor  
NCPC File No. CP 01



---

### COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL: FEDERAL ELEMENTS

Adoption of the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

August 5, 2004

---

#### *Abstract*

One of the National Capital Planning Commission's (NCPC) primary responsibilities is preparing a Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) that addresses federal interests in the National Capital Region. The Plan is comprised of two parts—the Federal Elements, that cover matters related to federal properties and federal interests; and District of Columbia Elements that address local planning issues. The Plan provides for the long-term development of the National Capital and is the decision-making framework for actions that the Commission takes on specific plans, proposals, and projects submitted for its review. As part of its periodic reassessment of the Plan, the Commission has updated the Plan to address new policy issues and planning concerns that have arisen since the adoption of most of the federal elements in the mid-1980s.

#### *Authority*

Section 4 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C., § 8721).

---

#### *Executive Director's Recommendation*

**Approves** the adoption of the revised *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements*.

\* \* \*

## BACKGROUND

The National Capital Planning Commission staff proposes final revisions to the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements*. The Commission initiated the revision to the Federal Elements because they had not been updated since the mid-1980s and changing conditions in the National Capital Region necessitated a review. The impact of the federal government on the region has changed over the last two decades. While the federal government is still the largest single employer in the region, federal contracting and procurement activities have become more significant. Federal facility locations have also impacted regional growth and development patterns. Heightened security at federal facilities has led to haphazard solutions affecting the character and perception visitors and residents have of the city and region. Transportation mobility, which affects the efficiency of the federal government and its workers, continues to challenge the region. These issues and many others are addressed in the updated Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Plan expresses the federal government's interests and provides clear rationale for its policy recommendations. The Plan consists of an introduction, seven elements, and an action plan. The seven elements include: Federal Workplace; Foreign Missions and International Organizations; Transportation; Parks and Open Space; Federal Environment; Preservation and Historic Features; and Visitors. The Plan links the Federal Elements through common guiding principles and themes. The guiding principles accommodate federal and national capital activities, reinforce Smart Growth and sustainable development planning principles, and support local and regional planning and development objectives. The Action Plan promotes projects and implementation strategies for advancing the Plan's policies.

The draft Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements was circulated to the public for review and comment in March 2004 for 60 days. The original public comment period ended in May 2004, but, in response to public requests, was extended through June 4, 2004. During the comment period, staff held two meetings for the general public and one meeting for federal agencies. The Commission received a number of comments from reviewers representing federal agencies, local governmental agencies, professional organizations, and individuals. A snapshot of the major changes resulting from the public comments is highlighted in each of the following Comprehensive Plan sections. A more detailed response to the public comments is provided in the attached Comment/Response Matrix. The matrix is organized by element. Within each element staff has identified the reviewer, the comment, and the staff response. Staff has also indicated where in the text of the final version of the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan changes responsive to the comments have been made.

**Introduction.** Major changes include emphasizing the purpose of the Federal Elements and the relationship between the Federal and District of Columbia Elements. Staff included an expanded discussion on the Commission's planning responsibilities. Staff also refined the discussion on the L'Enfant Plan and added additional text on comprehensive planning in the National Capital Region during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the evolution of the Commission and other regional planning bodies, and information on previous comprehensive planning initiatives (e.g., 1950s and 1980s plans) in the "Planning Legacy" section.

**Federal Workplace Element.** Staff added more text on promoting benefits of locating new federal workplaces near public transportation facilities. Staff also included more information on areas identified for redevelopment within *Extending the Legacy* as areas to consider for new federal workplaces. Staff also provided more clarity that the District of Columbia, as the seat of the nation's government, is given first consideration for new federal workplaces. Staff also improved language to encourage opportunities to use federal procurement for economic development throughout the region and within the District of Columbia.

**Foreign Missions and International Organizations Element.** Staff primarily focused revisions to the "Define a New Diplomatic District" section, reflecting the most current discussion related to the potential alternatives for a new diplomatic district, including identifying additional areas where chanceries could locate without FMBZA review and developing a replacement methodology for the current 1/3-2/3 methodology for identifying chancery development areas. Staff also modified the urban design and historic preservation policies to shift the emphasis from locating in historic districts to stewardship of historic properties.

**Transportation Element.** Most of the substantive changes are primarily in the "Parking Ratios" section. Staff strengthened this discussion to emphasize that the parking ratios are goals and that proposed ratios will be evaluated based upon facility-specific considerations, such as operational characteristics and location, as well as impacts to the local community. Additionally, staff has emphasized that Transportation Management Plans, including an analysis of impacts to the local transportation infrastructure, will be required to support proposed plans and projects. Staff has also indicated parking ratios previously approved by the Commission will continue to be in effect until an updated master plan or major project is submitted for Commission approval, at which time the new parking ratios will be applied.

**Parks and Open Space Element.** Staff added discussion about specific parks and open space efforts (e.g., Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, Fort Circle Parks, NPS triangle/smaller parcels, and the "greenbelt"). Several comment letters requested specific language encouraging federal/local coordination on planning, management and use issues, particularly where federal and local parkland was in close proximity. Text was added that supported this concept while still ensuring that federal interests are fully protected. Many comments requested specific implementation actions and/or deadlines, which are more appropriately located in subsequent efforts identified in the Action Plan rather than in the broad policy statements of the Plan. Staff also improved the discussion related to protecting the historic designed landscape qualities of parkways.

**Federal Environment Element.** Staff introduced new discussions on biodiversity and light pollution. Staff also included an enhanced overview of the Chesapeake Bay Program. Staff provided more information on ozone, including the episodic nature of high ozone levels and the designation of Ozone Action Days. The "Solid Waste Management" section has also been improved with a more detailed discussion of recycling.

**Preservation and Historic Features Element.** The primary change was strengthening the “National Capital Image” section, in which staff included new policies and modified existing policies to encourage good design principles that strengthen the image and character of the nation’s capital. Staff also strengthened policies relating to the L’Enfant rights-of-way in “The Historic Plan of Washington, D.C.” section.

**Visitors Element.** Staff included more recent visitor-related activities, including the completion of the World War II Memorial and soon-to-be-completed Museum of the American Indian. Staff also incorporated some of the *Legacy Plan’s* recommendations related to desired locations for new visitors attractions and highlighted some of the emerging areas (e.g., 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> Street corridor north of the Mall) that have seen an influx of new visitor activities, including new arts, entertainment, shopping, and dining venues. Staff also strengthened the “Visitor Transportation” section by expanding on some of the ways visitors could reach attractions, including the new Downtown Circulator.

**Action Plan.** Staff strengthened the relationship between the Plan’s themes and projects, linking them back to the themes laid out in the Introduction. Staff also clarified the selection of projects and explained the timeframe of the projects. Additionally, staff added two new projects—one relating to the interpretation/application of the Height of Buildings Act; the other an “environmental footprint” study of the federal establishment.

#### *PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION*

On March 4, 2004, the Commission approved circulation of the Federal Elements of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* for a period of sixty days. (Note: Due to public requests, the Commission extended the comment period through June 4, 2004.)

On May 3, 2001, the Commission adopted the Federal Environment Element of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

On February 1, 2001, the Commission adopted the Parks, Open Space, and Natural Features Element of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

On December 6, 1984, the Commission adopted the Visitors Element of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

On May 3, 1984, the Commission adopted the Federal Preservation and Historic Features Element of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

On December 1, 1983, the Commission revised the Foreign Missions and International Organizations Element of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

On March 3, 1983, the Commission adopted the Federal Facilities Element of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

On March 3, 1983, the Commission adopted the Federal Employment Element of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

