

STAFF RECOMMENDATION



Hart

NCPC File No. 6919

FEDERAL TRIANGLE FEDERAL TRIANGLE HERITAGE TRAIL

Bound by Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Constitution Avenue, NW, and 15th Street, NW
Washington, DC

Submitted by the United States General Services Administration

November 22, 2011

Abstract

The General Services Administration has submitted for preliminary and final approval the Federal Triangle Heritage Trail in Washington, DC. The heritage trail is a self-guided walking tour consisting of 16 signs that highlight the art, architecture, and history of the Federal Triangle area. The signs are 7.25 feet in height and 2.67 feet wide and will be located within public space. The General Services Administration has coordinated the project with the District of Columbia government and the National Park Service to ensure that the project meets the all applicable public space permitting regulations.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary and final site development plans, pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

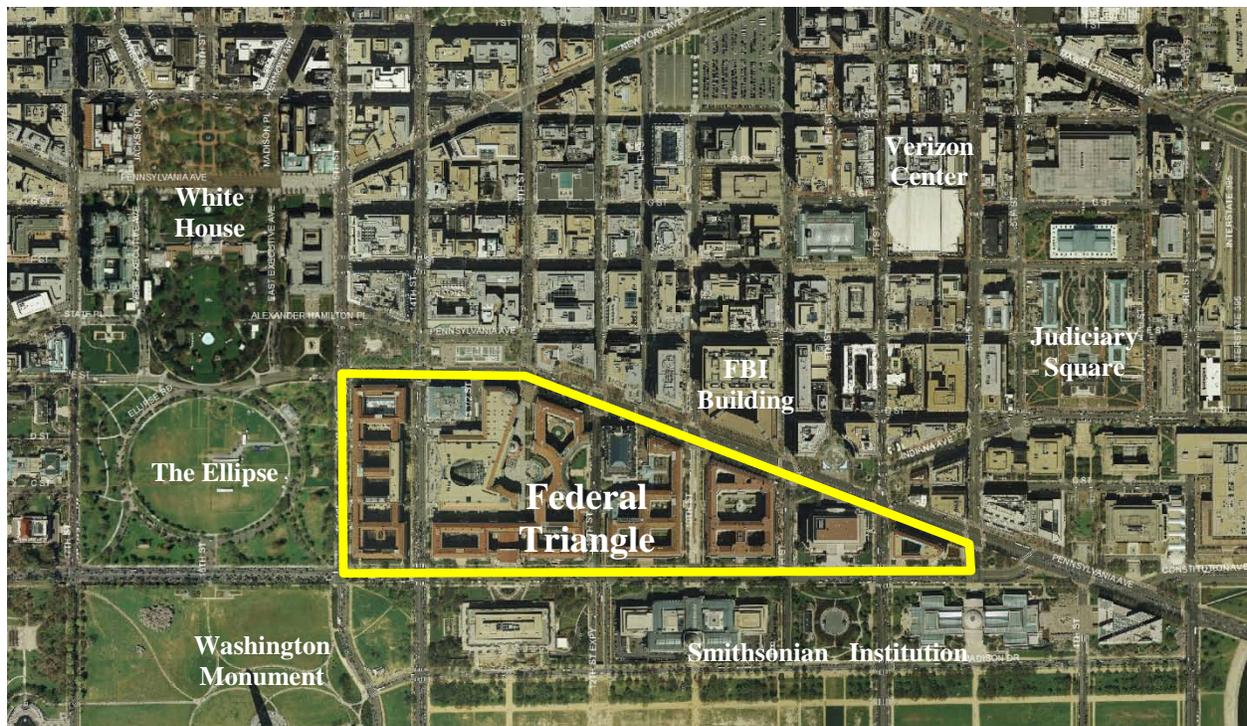
Approves the preliminary and final site development plans for the Federal Triangle Heritage Trail, a self-guided walking tour consisting of 16 signs that highlight the art, architecture, and history of the Federal Triangle, located in Northwest Washington, DC, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.23(38.00)43447.

* * *

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The project is located in the Federal Triangle precinct of downtown Washington, DC. This area is located south of Pennsylvania Avenue, NW; east of 15th Street, NW, north of Constitution Avenue, NW and is outlined on the map below. Included in this area are the following buildings: the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center, the EPA building (including Ariel Rios building and Mellon Auditorium), the Wilson Building, the Old Post Office Building, the Department of Justice building, the Internal Revenue Service building, the National Archives and Record Administration building and the Federal Trade Commission.

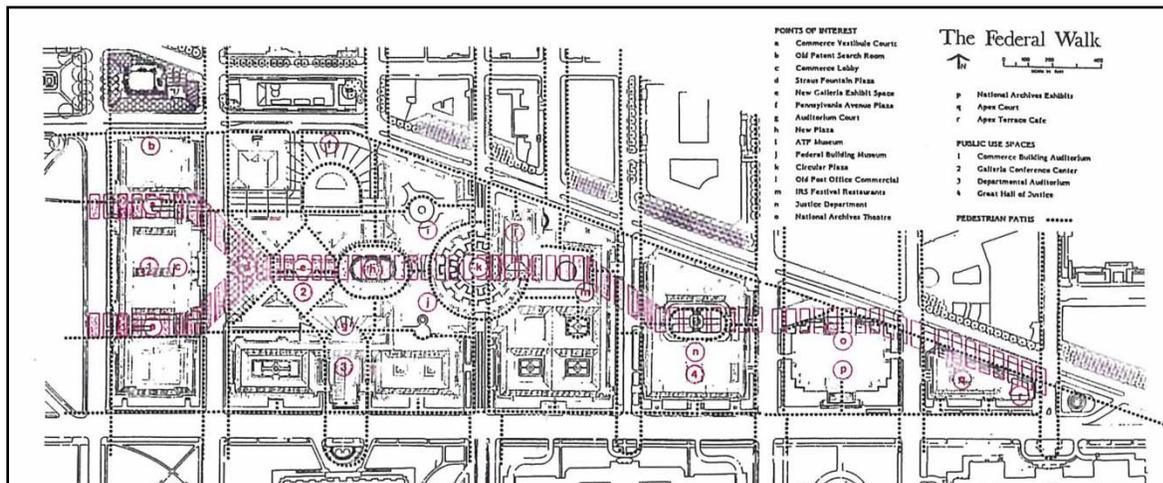


Site Context

Background

The idea of a self-guided tour through the Federal Triangle was originally conceived in the 1982 Federal Triangle Master Plan, a product of the General Services Administration (GSA). According to this plan, the “Federal Walk”, as it was called then, would educate visitors on the historic significance, architectural treasures, and governmental functions of the Federal Triangle. The 1988 Federal Triangle Master Plan update reinforces this idea, and states that “this walk would be a series of attractions, or destinations that taken as a whole would provide a picture of the Triangle’s richness and variety, yet when taken individually would provide a number of important points of interest.” GSA further acknowledged the importance of implementing the

Federal Walk when, despite the growing concern for security in the federal workplace, it preserved this idea in its report “Urban Design Guidelines for Physical Perimeter and Entrance Security: An Overlay to the Master Plan for the Federal Triangle.” Most recently, the notion of implementing a self-guided walking tour through the Federal Triangle was included in the *Monumental Core Framework Plan: Connecting New Destinations to the National Mall*, prepared by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA). This plan not only recognizes the value of the heritage trail in showcasing the rich cultural, social, and governmental history of this area of the nation’s capital, it also considers the trail to be an opportunity to improve pedestrian connections between the National Mall, the Federal Triangle, and downtown Washington, DC.



Federal Triangle Master Plan: The Federal Walk (1982)

In September 2008, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) partnered with Cultural Tourism DC (CTDC), a local not-for-profit that specializes in the development of Neighborhood Heritage Trails within Washington, DC, to prepare an assessment study that looked at the feasibility of developing a heritage trail for the Federal Triangle. The content of the study was prepared through a series of multi-agency brainstorming sessions that included several representatives from GSA, the National Park Service, the District of Columbia Office of Planning, and all of the agencies currently located within the Federal Triangle. According to the study, the heritage trail would highlight the art, architecture, history, commemoration, and governmental functions within the Federal Triangle, with reference to the uses of the land that predate the federal installations.

In March 2010, the Commission formally reviewed the Federal Triangle Heritage Trail Assessment Study and commented favorably on the goals and objectives of the project to highlight the art; architecture; and social, cultural, and governmental history of the Federal Triangle, as well as improve pedestrian connections throughout the Federal Triangle, and between downtown and the National Mall. In addition, the Commission noted the importance of coordinating the Federal Triangle heritage trail with the District of Columbia’s existing system of Neighborhood Heritage Trails through consistent signage, graphic design, information

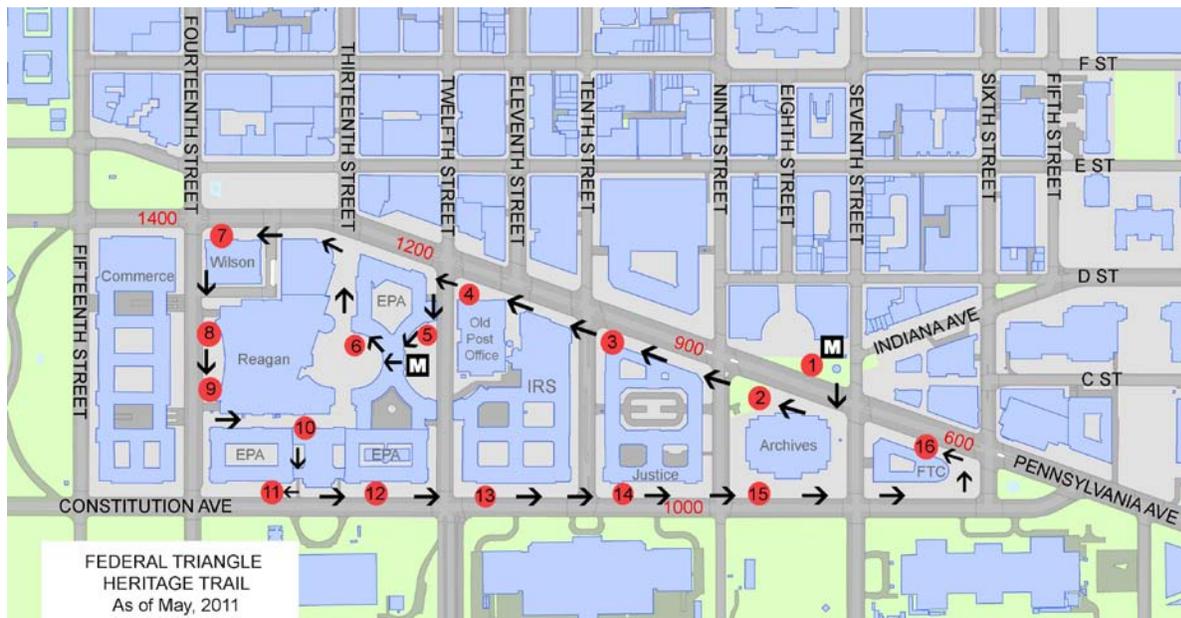
presentation, and trail development process. The Commission directed staff to pursue implementation of the project by:

- Meeting with federal and local agencies to gain support, identify the necessary funding opportunities, and determine what public space and permitting rules and regulations exist within the study area;
- Identifying a lead agency and working with the lead agency to develop an implementation timeline;
- Conducting public outreach; and,
- Educating interested stakeholders on the project, and soliciting their interest in participating during the project’s planning, research, and design phases.

During the Commission’s discussion of the assessment study, GSA noted its support for the project and reiterated its interest in moving the project toward implementation as expressed in a letter submitted to NCPC by the Commissioner of the General Services Administration, Mr. Robert Peck. Subsequent to the Commission’s review of the assessment study, GSA initiated the process to develop and implement the heritage trail.

Proposal

The creation of a Federal Triangle Heritage Trail is a unique opportunity to educate residents, workers, and visitors on the rich and diverse cultural and social assets that comprise this area. At the same time, the heritage trail can serve to better connect this federal precinct to the rest of the city by opening up new passages for pedestrian circulation, making public spaces more accessible, and reducing the monumentality of the area at the pedestrian level by providing a familiar system of wayfinding signage.



Proposed Federal Triangle Heritage Trail Route

Trail Route

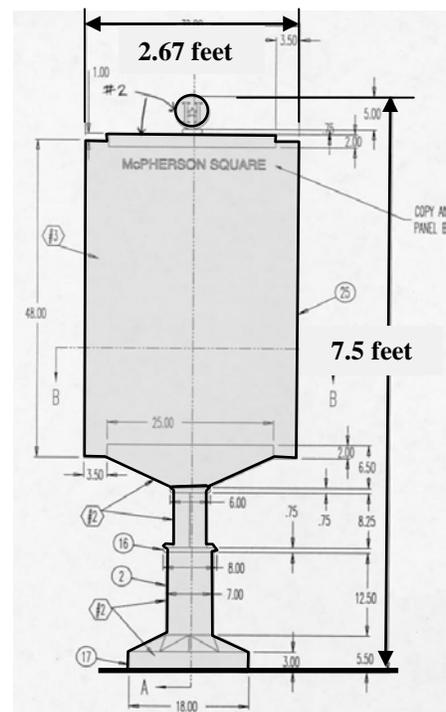
As depicted in the Proposed Federal Triangle Heritage Trail Route graphic above, GSA is proposing a self-guided walking tour composed of 16 signs that begins just outside of the Archives/Navy Memorial Metrorail Station. From the point of origin, the trail crosses to the southern sidewalk along Pennsylvania Avenue and continues along in a counterclockwise fashion west toward Freedom Plaza. The trail turns south at 12th Street, NW to the Federal Triangle Metrorail Station entrance and through the Ariel Rios building arcade. It then continues through the Woodrow Wilson Plaza and turns north returning to Pennsylvania Avenue and the Wilson Building. Once it reaches 14th Street, NW the trail turns south toward Constitution Avenue and passes the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center Building. After traversing along the pedestrian walkway between the Ronald Reagan Building and EPA Building, the trail turns south toward Constitution Avenue, passing through the arcade next to the Mellon Auditorium. Finally, upon reaching Constitution Avenue, the trail travels eastward to 6th Street where it turns northward to Pennsylvania Avenue and terminates in front of the Federal Trade Commission building. While the description above appears to follow a particular order, it should be noted that the sign locations and content do not follow a particular order and therefore trail-goers will be able to begin the walking tour from any point along the trail.

Signage

The design of the proposed signs is consistent with that used for all of the existing District of Columbia Neighborhood Heritage Trails, including the Downtown Heritage Trail which existing directly north of the Federal Triangle. The signs are 7.5 feet in height, 2.67 feet in width, and approximately 4 inches in thickness with a base that flares out from 5 inches to 1.5 feet in diameter. The two-sided signs will be laminated plastic with a metal base and fasteners. Each sign has been sited in public space to allow for easy pedestrian access but not to obstruct pedestrian flow.



Illustrative Example



Sign Elevation

Sign Themes

The graphic and narrative content of each of the signs will revolve around a particular theme and will include a combination of photographs, maps and text, as follows:

Sign #	Theme and Description	Sample Image(s)
1	<u>America's Main Street</u> – Pennsylvania Avenue as the main street for America.	
2	<u>Grandeur for the People</u> – The creation of the federal city and Federal Triangle as a location for new federal offices as identified in the McMillan Plan.	
3	<u>G-Men and G-Women</u> – The Federal Bureau of Investigation.	
4	<u>Preserving the Past</u> – The preservation of the Old Post Office Building.	

<p>5</p>	<p><u>Appointed Rounds</u> – The United States Postal Service and its importance in sustaining democracy.</p>	
<p>6</p>	<p><u>Arts and Artists</u> – The art and architecture of the Federal Triangle. Woodrow Wilson Plaza which honors President Woodrow Wilson, a noted scholar and former president of Princeton University. This plaza includes artwork.</p>	
<p>7</p>	<p><u>Washington, DC: Capital and City</u> - The Wilson Building and District of Columbia Government</p>	
<p>8</p>	<p><u>Open for Business</u> – The Commerce Department.</p>	
<p>9</p>	<p><u>Completing the Triangle</u> – The Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, dedicated in 1998.</p>	

<p>10</p>	<p><u>The Division</u> – The Federal Triangle prior to its development as a federal enclave.</p>	
<p>11</p>	<p><u>From Workers to Environment</u> – The former home of the Department of Labor and the transition to the headquarters of the Environmental Protection Agency.</p>	
<p>12</p>	<p><u>Keeping it Green</u> – The Environmental Protection Agency.</p>	
<p>13</p>	<p><u>Our Tax Dollars</u> – The Internal Revenue Service.</p>	

<p>14</p>	<p><u>Equal Justice Under the Law</u> – The Department of Justice (DOJ)</p>	
<p>15</p>	<p><u>Temple of our History</u> - The history of the National Archives as the central archives for the federal government.</p>	
<p>16</p>	<p><u>Protecting Consumers and Competition</u> - The Federal Trade Commission and its consumer protection responsibilities.</p>	

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff has reviewed this proposal and finds that it has been developed in a manner that is consistent with the Federal Triangle Heritage Trail Assessment Study that the Commission provided comments on in March 2010. The themes that GSA has identified to describe the art, architecture, and history of the area are very similar to those themes identified within the 2010 Assessment Study.

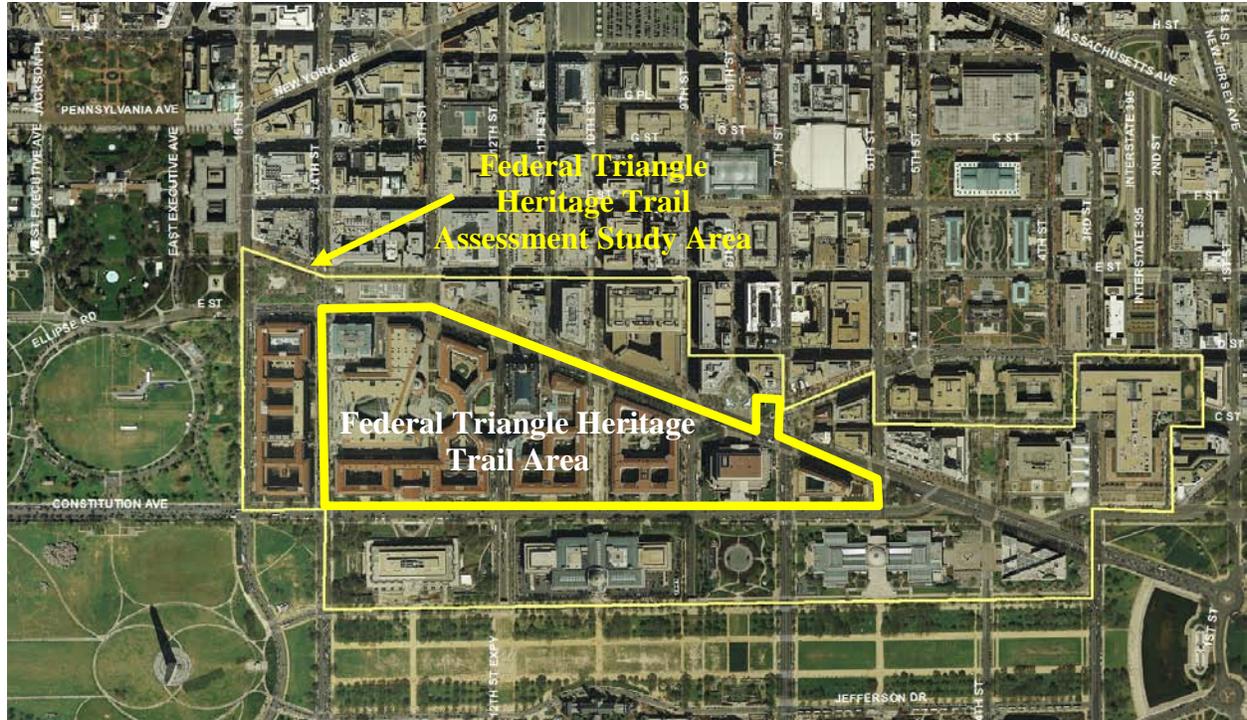
GSA has provided staff with detailed siting diagrams that identify where each of the 16 signs will be located in the public space along the proposed route. Staff finds that each location has been sited to keep from obstructing pedestrians and bicyclists. These locations are prominent

enough however to be visible and approachable from either side. Also, staff notes that GSA has coordinated the location of the proposed heritage trail signs with the locations of its new Federal Triangle building identification signs which were recently approved by the Commission. Therefore, staff recommends that the Commission **approve the preliminary and final site development plans for the Federal Triangle Heritage Trail, a self-guided walking tour consisting of 16 signs that highlight the art, architecture, and history of the Federal Triangle.** Further analysis is included in the Conformance section of this report.

CONFORMANCE

Extending the Legacy

NCPC's *Extending the Legacy Plan* acknowledges the enormous potential the Federal Triangle has to be an important destination in the nation's capital. The Legacy Plan envisions a Federal Triangle animated at the ground-floor level with shops, exhibits, and other attractions for residents, workers, and visitors. Also included in this vision is a self-guided walking trail that ties together the area's many parks, plazas, and public spaces. According to the Legacy Plan, "opening the interior courtyards of these buildings would create a Federal Walk from 9th to 15th Streets, connecting the Old Post Office to the new Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center and the Ellipse. This network of interior pedestrian streets would complement adjacent grand avenues." While a different alignment than the original, this proposal implements the idea of incorporating a heritage trail for the benefit of visitors to the federal precinct.



Assessment Study Area and Proposed Trail Area

Monumental Core Framework Plan

Enhancing the public realm of the Federal Triangle is one of the key improvements focused on in the *Monumental Core Framework Plan*. The Framework Plan advocates for the establishment of a welcoming interconnected system of streets, introduction of sustainable public spaces, and improvement of the pedestrian experience throughout this area of the city. One way the Framework Plan recommends to do this is to weave together the Federal Triangle's parks, public spaces, and civic art with a flexible and easy-to-use heritage trail that showcases the history, art, and architecture of the Federal Triangle, including a narrative about American governance. The submitted proposal to place signage around the Federal Triangle implements the 2010 Federal Triangle Heritage Trail Assessment Study and completes the idea of providing interesting information for visitors, workers and residents.

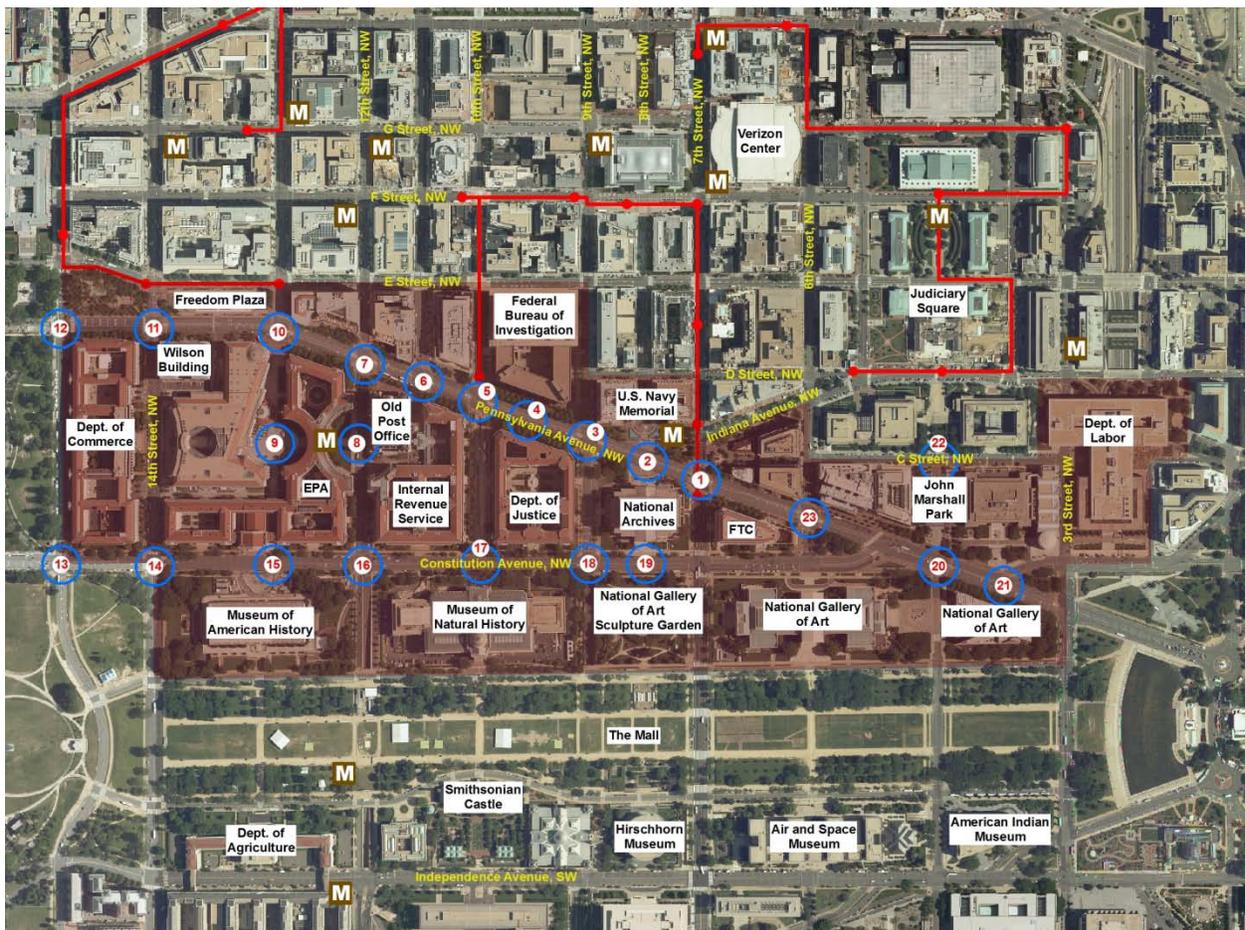
Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The proposed signage program is not inconsistent with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital, and in particular the Visitors Element, which establishes goals to provide accurate and helpful information to visitors. These signs will provide information about the history of the area and building architecture. The following policies are directly applicable to the Federal Triangle Heritage Trail signage proposal that has been submitted:

- Provide and maintain space for activities that encourage public access to and stimulate public pedestrian traffic around, into, and through federal facilities. Shops, restaurants, exhibits, residential, and other public activities that stimulate pedestrian street life surrounding facilities in urban areas should be considered.
- Locate publicly accessible activities within federal workplaces on public streets and other pedestrian access levels, as well as within courtyards and on rooftops.
- Encourage the use of federal workplaces for occasional cultural, educational, and/or recreational activities, providing suitable space and equipment for such activities.
- Identify and protect historic properties and disseminate information about their significance to the public.
- Encourage exhibits and other educational activities and events in lobbies and public areas of government buildings to inspire and educate visitors about the role of government.
- Promote a pedestrian friendly monumental core and improved pedestrian access to neighborhoods and federal visitor attractions within the nation's capital through the development of sidewalks, streetscape enhancements, and ground level retail or other amenities.
- Encourage specialized information, learning aids, and tours at federal visitor attractions for groups such as school children or international visitors

Relevant Federal Facility Master Plan

The idea of a self-guided tour through the Federal Triangle linking downtown and the National Mall was originally conceived in the 1982 Federal Triangle Master Plan, a product of GSA. The 1988 Federal Triangle Master Plan update reinforced this idea. The 2010 Federal Triangle Heritage Trail Assessment Study was reviewed and commented on by the Commission in March 2010. The submitted proposal is the implementation of this study as it identifies the sign location, sign content and route. While the proposed heritage trail does not exactly follow the same trail route or consist of the same number of signs included in the assessment study it does contain many of the same elements proposed in the study. For example, the study proposes 23 signs and the proposal includes only 16 signs and the assessment study trail is slightly longer than the trail included in the submitted proposal. Staff does not believe that these changes significantly detract from the overall project. Therefore, staff finds that this proposal implementing the Federal Triangle Heritage Trail is consistent with the master plan and the recent assessment study.



Assessment Study Route (2010)

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), GSA has determined that the project is a categorical exclusion under its regulations Section 5.4B for implementing NEPA, for improvement to an existing facility. NCPC staff has independently reviewed the project information and has determined that the project is categorically excluded under Section 8(C)(2) of NCPC's *Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures* for routine installation of site elements such as site or building identification signs.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

GSA determined that the project would have no adverse effect on historic properties and on October 7, 2011, the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) concurred with GSA's determination. As NCPC also has a responsibility under NHPA, staff independently reviewed the proposal and concurs with GSA's no adverse effect on historic properties determination as these signs will enhance the pedestrian experience, will not block any views, and are being placed in strategic locations giving information of interest to particular places located within the Federal Triangle.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its November 9, 2011 meeting, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District Department of Transportation; the National Park Service; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.