



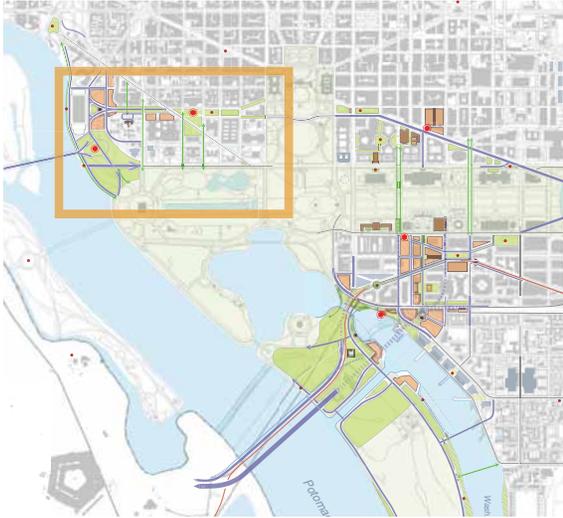
Extending a Commemorative Landscape

THE NORTHWEST RECTANGLE

The Northwest Rectangle—a place of beautiful and monumental institutions adjacent to the National Mall—can become an accessible and walkable cultural destination and workplace. An interconnected system of parks can extend the commemorative qualities of the National Mall northward to link the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts with the Lincoln Memorial, the White House, and President’s Park.

The Northwest Rectangle can emphasize its own distinctive identity of historic, architectural, cultural, and scenic interest by capitalizing on the prominence of the Kennedy Center, a living memorial to President John F. Kennedy, and strengthening its connection to nearby iconic landscapes. In a rejuvenated Northwest Rectangle, pedestrians and transit would easily make their way between the river, the National Mall, the Kennedy Center, and downtown Washington. Decking over disruptive roadways, creating a new waterfront park along the Potomac River, strategically locating cultural attractions, shops, and visitor amenities along the E Street corridor, and cohesively knitting together the parks and plazas of this precinct are fundamental to achieving this objective.

Streamlined and less intrusive infrastructure for the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge would maintain vehicular access and capacity while eliminating the roadways and access ramps that currently disrupt the area. It would also allow the establishment of a ceremonial boulevard between the Kennedy Center and the Lincoln Memorial.



Context

During the New Deal era, the federal government established an enclave of major government headquarters in this area, the counterpart of the Federal Triangle complex east of the White House. Most of the land is in federal ownership, and the area is known for the modern Classical Style of its semi-public buildings. Major international organizations and private businesses are also housed here, in office buildings of various architectural styles and sizes. Cultural centers anchor both ends of the precinct, with the Kennedy Center to the west, DAR Constitution Hall and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, among others, to the east. There are few shops or restaurants to serve workers and visitors in the area. As currently configured, the precinct is reaching its built capacity.

In the 1960s, some of Washington's most ambitious highway and bridge projects were implemented in the precinct, such as the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, the Potomac Freeway, and the E Street Expressway. An underused, six-lane "highway to nowhere" was never completed and the portion that was built does not connect directly to surrounding streets. The highway chasms, overpasses, and interchanges, along with the sprawling Roosevelt Bridge approach, profoundly disrupt the area's urban fabric.

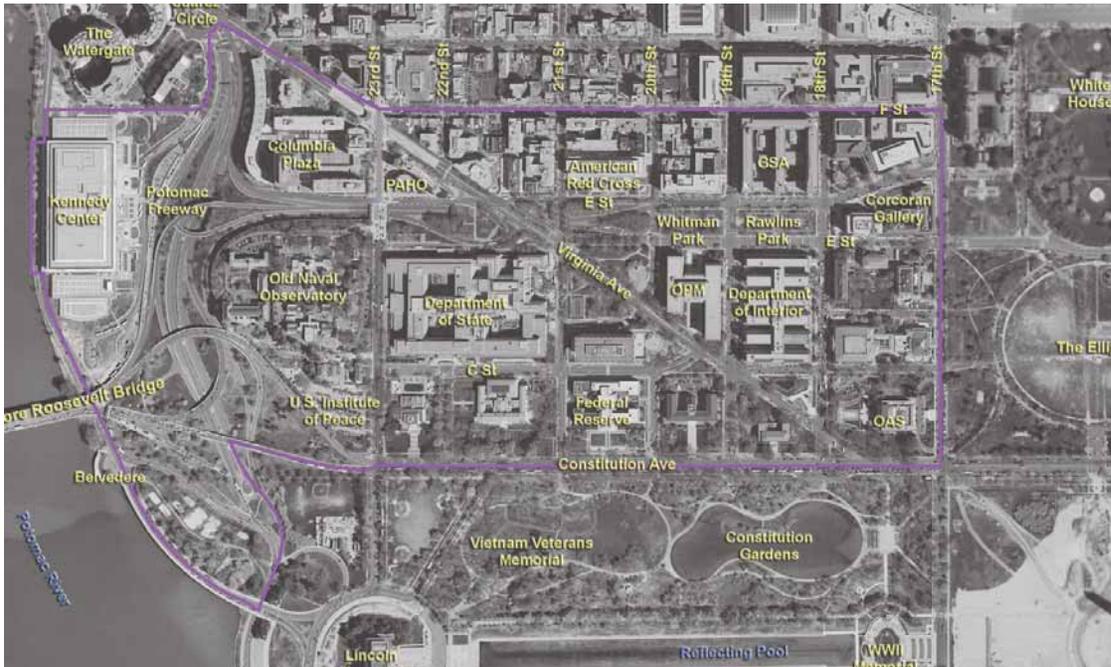
Currently, the tangle of transportation infrastructure provides vehicular connections between many areas of the city including the West End, Georgetown, the White House, President's Park, Rock Creek Park, and the National Mall. While these connections provide alternate routes for commuters, they have separated the Kennedy Center from the Northwest Rectangle, and the West End from the National Mall and the waterfront. This infrastructure has also caused

severe disruptions to the city's street grid, impeding mobility and creating hazards that jeopardize pedestrian safety.

The Kennedy Center each year attracts more than five million visitors. It is only 500 yards from the National Mall. However, reaching the center on foot is perilous. The nearest Metrorail station is half a mile away and there are no direct or clearly marked paths to the center from the National Mall, the riverfront, or the White House. Pedestrians, therefore, improvise a hazardous footpath across either Virginia Avenue or Rock Creek Parkway.

A comprehensive solution to this challenge will require significant changes to the current transportation infrastructure system. To create a truly accessible waterfront and reconnect this portion of the city to the National Mall, the freeway ramps to the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge will need to be rerouted and buried in tunnels. To link the Kennedy Center to the east, ramps leading to and from the E Street Expressway will need to be lowered, modified, or eliminated.

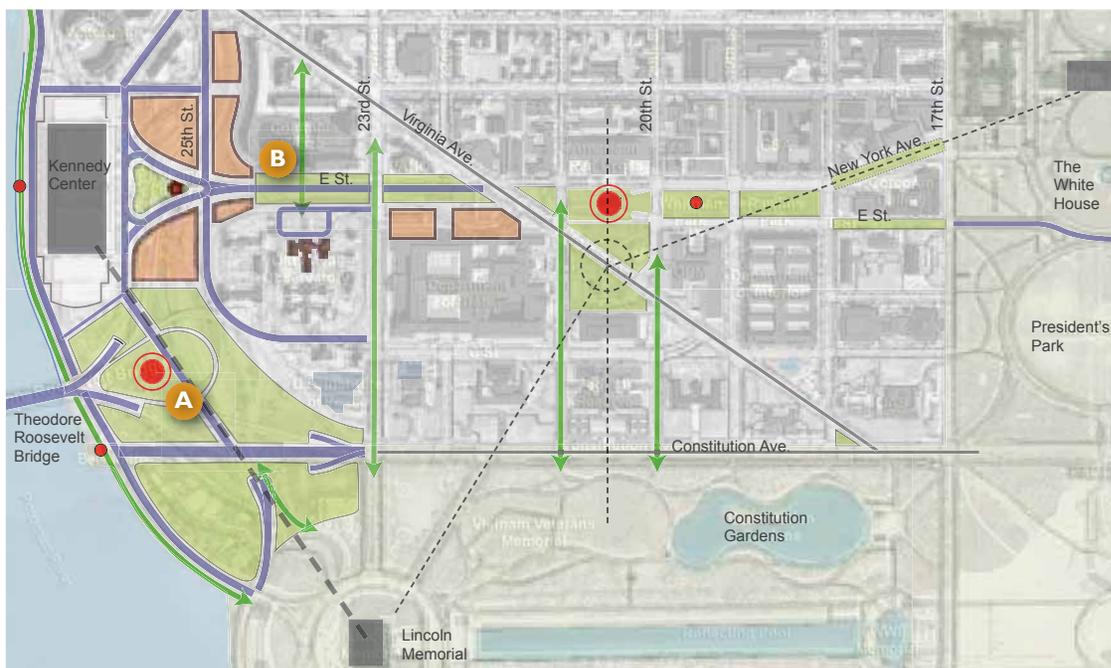
One of the architectural treasures of the precinct is the Naval Surgical Hospital, once known as the Old Naval Observatory, sitting quietly on a hilltop surrounded by highways. Its historic buildings, expansive grounds, and panoramic views of the Potomac River and National Mall offer a campus of character and distinction. South of the hospital facing the National Mall, a new headquarters for the U.S. Institute of Peace is destined to be a landmark and gateway for this part of the city, and the American Pharmacists Association's expansion includes leased space for federal agencies.



Aerial view of the Northwest Rectangle.

Key Improvements

- A. Link the Kennedy Center Complex with the Lincoln Memorial** by establishing a ceremonial boulevard and enhanced waterfront esplanade that will extend the powerful symbolic qualities of the National Mall.
- B. Connect the Kennedy Center with the White House and President's Park** by establishing the E Street corridor as a commemorative linear park with places for cultural enrichment and leisure activities, and by extending the street grid and placing infill development over the Potomac Freeway.



The *Framework Plan* proposal for the Northwest Rectangle.

NCP/CFA



Link the Kennedy Center Complex with the Lincoln Memorial

The Kennedy Center's role as a national presidential memorial should be enhanced through dramatic new relationships with nearby memorials and ceremonial areas. These visual and physical links would extend the symbolic qualities of the National Mall to the Northwest Rectangle along the Potomac River.

The maze of interchange ramps associated with the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge should be reconfigured and decked, and an expansive, pedestrian-friendly landscape should be created along the river. These actions would improve access, create a commemorative gateway to the nation's capital, provide new flexible open space south of Constitution Avenue for recreation, and provide green areas for stormwater management and additional tree canopy.

The changes to this area would also improve the connection between the National Mall and Georgetown and contribute to the continuous riverfront trail linking the Potomac and Ancostia Rivers.

The central feature of this proposal is a new ceremonial boulevard and commemorative landscape that will strengthen the visual and symbolic connection between the Kennedy Center and the Lincoln Memorial. The character of this open space would reinforce the commemorative function of the Kennedy Center and blend the expansive character of the National Mall with the urban identity of the Northwest Rectangle.

Constitution Avenue, which currently terminates at a bridge ramp on the west, should be extended

to restore its historic terminus on the Potomac River. This location serves as a belvedere and is an important opportunity for a future memorial and waterfront access. Additionally, the northern terminus of Virginia Avenue—an area of potential scenic beauty currently occupied by a surface parking lot—should also be used for commemoration and recreation.

The riverfront experience would also become more inviting if high-speed commuter traffic were rerouted from Rock Creek Parkway to the currently underused Potomac Freeway. This reduction in traffic would establish the riverfront as a welcoming and safe pedestrian environment for residents, workers, students, and visitors, while potentially improving commuter movement between Georgetown and the monumental core.



Current view of the Potomac Freeway and Theodore Roosevelt Bridge ramps, looking southwest from the Kennedy Center toward the Lincoln Memorial.



Tunneling and realigning the freeways will permit a graceful and ceremonial connection between the Kennedy Center and the Lincoln Memorial, including areas for commemoration and recreation.

NCPC/CFA, ILLUSTRATION BY EDAAW

A PRESIDENTIAL SETTING For decades, there has been a need to correct the tangle of highways around the Kennedy Center that effectively isolate it from the National Mall, the Potomac River, and the rest of the city. There also have been numerous proposals to create a physical connection from the Kennedy Center to the Potomac River.

NCPC's *Extending the Legacy Plan* called for highway decking to make space for a lively civic plaza on the east side of the center. Subsequent efforts by the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Kennedy Center detailed options for spanning the highway, improving access for pedestrians and motorists, and expanding the Kennedy Center for additional performing arts and support space. The *Framework Plan* recommendations for the Kennedy Center broadly reflect the *Legacy* proposals and

build upon those advanced by Rafael Viñoly, the architect working with the Kennedy Center to advance this vision.

A civic plaza over the existing freeway, with its plantings and fountains, would serve as a dramatic forecourt to this presidential memorial. It would also provide two new building sites for rehearsal, exhibit, educational, and performance space. The plaza should be edged with street-level public uses, such as a visitor center, shops, and restaurants, to animate it during daytime and evening hours, and create a lively new Washington destination. The local street grid, including 25th and 26th Streets, should be reestablished and C Street could be extended as part of the street network. The reestablished urban grid should extend northward to a restored Juarez Circle on Virginia Avenue.

The technical analysis required to evaluate these complex transportation proposals is beyond the scope of the *Framework Plan*. However, the *Kennedy Center Access Study*, conducted by the Federal Highway Administration, and the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge studies, conducted by the District of Columbia Department of Transportation, have suggested viable solutions that are worthy of further analysis.

The *Framework Plan* supports the current proposal for a pedestrian connection from the Kennedy Center's western terrace down to the waterfront esplanade with two flanking stairways and an elevator bank landing on a landscaped plaza along the river. This important connection from the Kennedy Center to the Potomac esplanade would create a new destination where people can sit and enjoy the water.



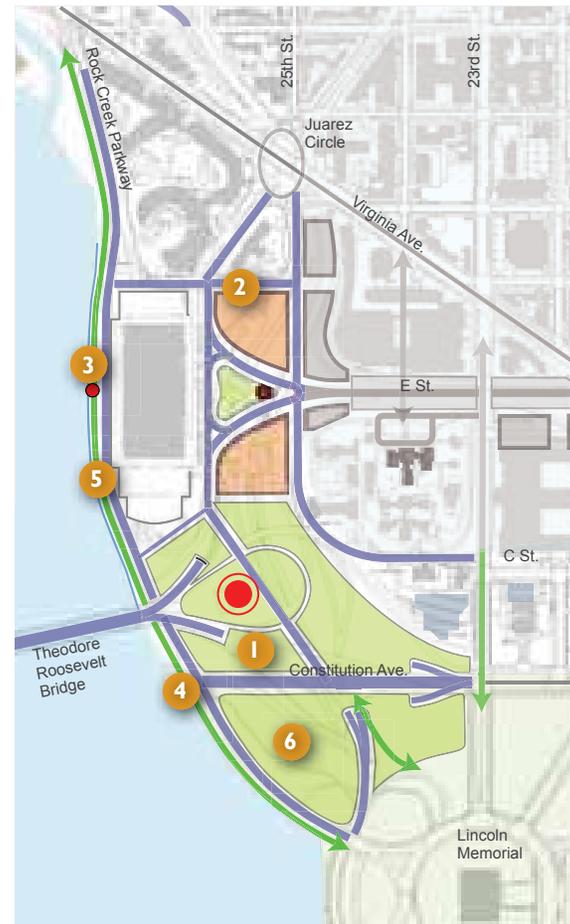
NCPC/CFA. ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL MCCANN

Concept for stairways connecting the west terrace of the Kennedy Center to the Potomac River.



NCPC/CFA. ILLUSTRATION BY EDRAW

Proposed street-level improvements of the *Framework Plan*.



NCPC/CFA

Framework Plan proposal for the area between the Kennedy Center and the Lincoln Memorial.

1. Deck the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge approach ramps to develop a new ceremonial boulevard between the Kennedy Center and the Lincoln Memorial.
2. Deck the Potomac Freeway to expand the Kennedy Center cultural facility and create a civic plaza that promotes urban sustainability through green and sustainable design techniques.
3. Construct a staircase from the Kennedy Center's west terrace down to the waterfront.
4. Restore the historic terminus of Constitution Avenue at the belvedere.
5. Develop a more pedestrian-friendly riverfront promenade.
6. Create a flexible open space for recreation and gatherings.

Connect the Kennedy Center with the White House and President's Park

The Northwest Rectangle should become a destination in its own right through a series of interconnected parks centered on E Street between the Kennedy Center on the west and the White House on the east.

With E Street serving as the organizing spine, a series of cohesively designed open spaces, combined with the plazas and building yards of the flanking government buildings, will create a well-defined sequence of commemorative parks between the White House and President's Park and the Kennedy Center. The walkable corridor would provide approximately 500,000 square feet of infill development opportunity for the Department of State within its northern building yard on the south side of E Street. This additional federal office space, combined with the almost 1.5 million square feet of mixed-use development potential at the Kennedy Center plaza and the new U.S. Institute of Peace Headquarters, could transform the Northwest Rectangle into both a desirable workplace and a visitor destination.

The confluence of open spaces that flank Virginia Avenue between 19th and 22nd Streets creates an opportunity for a new cultural destination and a vibrant public park. This park could include a cultural building, commemorative works dedicated to the arts, and other public amenities that would

create a welcome outdoor space for the surrounding neighborhood and George Washington University. Located halfway between the Kennedy Center and the White House grounds, this location provides a prominent setting for a visitor destination midway between the cultural hubs at either end of the precinct and between downtown and the National Mall. This location reinforces both a secondary cross axis of the L'Enfant Plan and a node on the McMillan "Kite Plan."

An elegant eastern approach to the Kennedy Center should be established for pedestrians and motorists by reclaiming E Street as a continuous, at-grade, landscaped boulevard stretching for the mile between the Kennedy Center and the White House and President's Park. The new connection would be achieved by decking over the E Street Expressway from the Kennedy Center to Virginia Avenue and over a portion of the expressway ramps between 20th and 21st Streets.

This new system of parks along E Street would also fulfill an important role in managing stormwater. The parks would include a substantial grade change from north to south, creating the potential for stormwater runoff to flow into the E Street corridor. Currently there is nothing to mitigate this flow before it continues to the National Mall, exacerbating that area's susceptibility to flooding. Potential stormwater management strategies could include cisterns, rain gardens, and pervious

pavement and could become a model for new sustainable urban parks.

The corridor should also incorporate renewable energy and green site and building technologies ranging from cultural venues to vending kiosks. Access to the parks should be provided along a pedestrian-friendly E Street designed to accommodate all modes of travel. The E Street corridor should become a vital east-west public transit link between the Northwest Rectangle and the Federal Triangle.

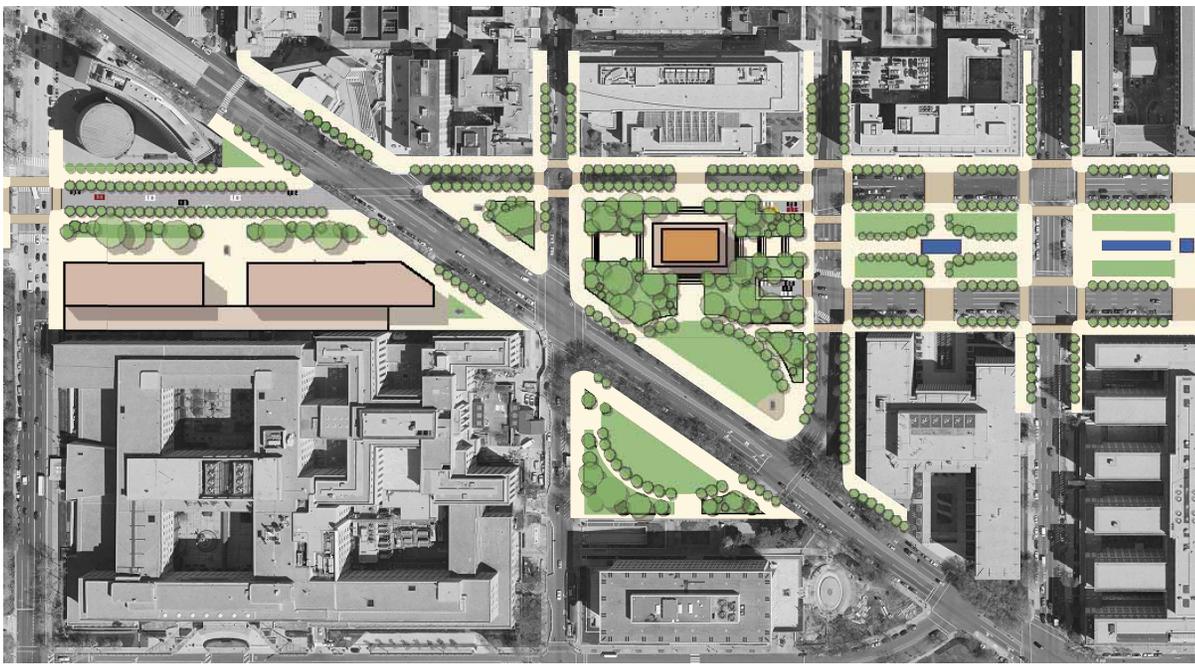
Pedestrian movement between downtown Washington, the Foggy Bottom Metro station, the Northwest Rectangle, and the National Mall should be made continuous and pleasant with street beautification along 20th, 21st, and 25th Streets, including improved signage and wayfinding. The linear park and commemorative area along E, 20th, and 23rd Streets would encourage pedestrians to move easily between the Northwest Rectangle and the National Mall.

The topographical and historic significance of the Old Naval Observatory, which sits atop a prominent hilltop overlooking the National Mall and the river, warrants special programming to allow some public access, such as public event space, or walking and biking tours. These actions would further help connect the Northwest Rectangle to the adjacent National Mall and the Potomac River waterfront.



Framework Plan proposal for the E Street corridor.

1. Rehabilitate and improve the E Street linear parks as a cohesive system that includes sustainable solutions to stormwater management and energy conservation.
2. Deck the E Street tunnel portal to create a park with cultural or commemorative uses between 20th and 21st Streets.
3. Deck the Potomac Freeway to reestablish E Street west of Virginia Avenue as a beautiful street.
4. Reestablish 25th Street and develop residences and shops along the street.
5. Develop the State Department's northern building yard as expansion office space, constructed according to the latest green building standards.
6. Program the Old Naval Observatory for public access and feature its historic significance.
7. Make streetscape improvements to major streets, including Virginia Avenue, 20th, 21st, and 23rd Streets.



Decking over portions of E Street could provide a new cultural or commemorative opportunity near the intersection of E Street and Virginia Avenue.



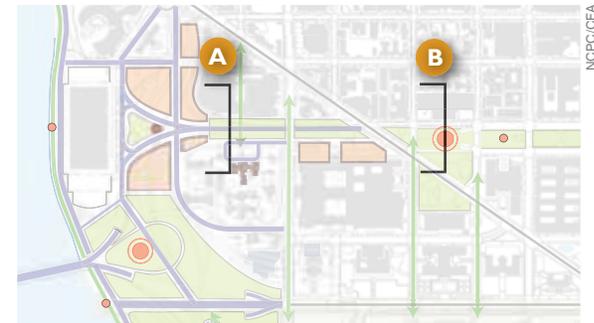
Cross-section of proposed E Street, looking west from 23rd Street toward the Kennedy Center.



Cross-section of E Street, looking west from 20th Street toward a proposed cultural site.



Current view of the Virginia Avenue and 20th Street intersection, looking northwest.



Cross-section key.



A new cultural or commemorative work at the intersection of E Street and Virginia Avenue could help to organize a cohesive park system along the E Street corridor.