

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL: FEDERAL ELEMENTS

Initiate Public Comment Period

March 4, 2004

Abstract

One of the National Capital Planning Commission's (NCPC) primary responsibilities is developing a Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) that addresses federal interests in the National Capital Region. The Plan is comprised of two parts—the Federal Elements, which cover matters related to federal properties and federal interests, and District Elements that address local issues such as land use, housing, and economic development. The Plan is the blueprint for the long-term development of the National Capital and the decision-making framework for actions that the Commission takes on specific plans and proposals submitted for its review. As part of its periodic reassessment of the Plan, the Commission has produced an update to address new policy issues and planning concerns that have surfaced since the adoption of most of the federal elements in the mid-1980s. The Plan responds and provides direction to the changing needs of the federal government and our Nation's Capital in the 21st Century.

Authority

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

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission approves circulation of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements* for review and comment by federal departments and agencies, state and local governments, regional agencies, and interested organizations and individuals for a period of 60 days.

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BACKGROUND

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A revision to the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements* was initiated because the Federal Elements had not been updated since the mid-1980s and a number of new realities must be addressed as conditions in the National Capital Region have changed. The impact of the federal government on the region has changed over the last two decades. Although the federal government is still the largest single employer in the region, federal contracting and procurement activities have become more significant. Security at federal facilities has been heightened and the response 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 regional leadership. These emerging issues must be accounted for in the Comprehensive Plan and are being addressed as part of the update.

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 implementation section. The seven elements include: Parks and Open Space; Federal Environment; Federal Workplace: Location, Impact, and the Community; Foreign Missions and International Organizations; Preservation and Historic Features; Visitors; and Transportation. The Plan links the Federal Elements through common guiding principles and themes, which are threaded throughout the elements. 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 implementation section also provides linkages with the Commission's *Strategic Plan* and agency work program. With a more coordinated approach to the Plan, the Commission seeks to make the Plan a more useful tool for planning and decision-making processes.

Four Federal Elements—the Federal Workplace: Location, Impact, and the Community (formerly the Federal Facilities and Federal Employment Elements); Foreign Missions and International Organizations; Preservation and Historic Features; and Visitors—have not been modified since the mid-1980s. These elements have been enhanced as part of the overall Plan revision and updated to reflect recommendations from more recent Commission work, including *Extending the Legacy*, the *Memorials and Museums Master Plan*, the *National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan*, *The Impact of Federal Procurement on the National Capital Region*, and the *Economic and Fiscal Impact of Foreign Missions on the National Capital*.

The **Federal Workplace: Location, Impact, and the Community Element** encourages an efficient and orderly distribution of federal work activities in the region, assuring federal workplaces that offer good work environments for the federal workforce while providing services that attract and retain federal employees, and supporting the efforts of local and regional planning officials to direct land use and economic growth. The element encourages federal development to be designed in a manner that complements local and regional plans that promote compact land use and development patterns. It places priority on using existing federal facilities and federal land to accommodate future federal space requirements. The element analyzes the

growing importance of federal contracting and procurement activities in the region. It also emphasizes the importance of partnerships with local and regional governments in the region to support federal and local planning activities that satisfy mutual planning goals.

The **Foreign Missions and International Organizations Element** provides a policy framework for the United States to fulfill its obligation to foreign governments in obtaining suitable locations for their activities. The element is primarily concerned with accommodating the locations of foreign missions in the District of Columbia. In the past foreign governments have concentrated their activities in Northwest D.C. neighborhoods. However, the element establishes a new policy direction that diverges from this past practice—one that encourages dispersing diplomatic and international activities away from “traditional” locations in the city’s northwest quadrant, toward other areas in the city. The element also recommends various ways to accommodate foreign missions, such as developing new foreign mission centers, while at the same time encouraging foreign missions to be good neighbors to the communities in which they locate.

The **Preservation and Historic Features Element** preserves and enhances the image and identity of the Nation’s Capital and region, and provides a framework for the federal government’s treatment of historic properties. The element protects and promotes the qualities that have made the capital a strong symbol of our nation for two centuries. Historically, the Commission has been committed to encouraging excellence in the design of federal buildings, parks, and monuments to reflect the appropriate character and image of the federal government, while preserving and enhancing our historic heritage as reflected in our buildings, public spaces, and unique views and vistas of the National Capital. The element calls for coordinated federal-local efforts to identify, designate, and protect landmarks, as well as ensure that adjacent development is appropriate, and addresses the challenge of balancing our security needs with the appropriate image for our federal public buildings that are “worthy of the nation.”

The **Visitors Element** provides a response to the growth in tourism and the continuing interest in creating new federal visitor attractions. It establishes policies to accommodate the location of federal visitor attractions and to address the needs of visitors. Policies are provided to ensure the conservation and protection of the unique federal visitor attractions so that they may be enjoyed by future generations. Policies promote sites away from the Mall in coordination with the Commission’s *Memorials and Museums Master Plan*, accommodates transportation needs of visitors, promotes improvements to disseminate information about visitor attractions in the region, and advocates innovation in programming, scheduling and ticket purchases to federal visitor attractions.

The **Transportation Element** is an entirely new element. Prior to the current Plan update, the Commission’s transportation policies were included in the Federal Facilities and Federal Employment Elements. However, given the importance of this regional issue, the Commission concludes that transportation merits a separate discussion in the updated Plan. The federal government has a significant impact on the transportation network in the National Capital Region, and can offer guidance in developing solutions that promote greater transportation choice and result in greater efficiencies in access and mobility, more sustainable land use patterns, and improved air quality for the region’s residents and visitors. The Transportation

Element promotes a balanced, multi-pronged strategy that encourages the development of new transportation modes and new commuting alternatives. Policies encourage the provision of improved public transit services; relate federal parking ratios to the regional transit system; support other modes of transportation, such as bicycle commuting; and encourage transit-oriented development.

In addition, two of the Federal Elements—the Parks, Open Space, and Natural Features, and the Federal Environment Elements—were adopted in 2001. However, the Commission determined that these two elements should be revised to fit the new cohesive structure and subsequently be re-adopted as part of the adoption of the entire Plan.

The **Parks and Open Space Element** establishes policies for the use and protection of federal parks and open space in the region. The element encourages approaches to ensure that an adequate supply of parkland and open spaces are available to expand and enhance the system to meet the needs of an increasing population and fill gaps in the existing system. It encourages preservation and maintenance of the system to protect existing open space from overuse, conversion to other uses, and encroachment by inappropriate new development. It emphasizes connections among and accessibility to the various parks and open spaces in the region. The element supports a holistic, coordinated approach to addressing deficiencies and gaps in the parks and open space system and encourages partnerships with local governments and others.

The **Federal Environment Element** promotes the federal government as an environmental steward and emphasizes and supplements the existing environmental regulatory framework. The element establishes the federal interest as it relates to the maintenance, protection, and enhancement of the quality of the environment and protects the health and welfare of the public in the National Capital Region. It provides guidance to evaluate the environmental implications of federal development proposals, and aids in managing the region's environmental resources.

It has long been Commission practice to circulate proposed NCPC policies and plans for review and comment to federal departments and agencies, state and local governments, regional agencies, and interested organizations and individuals prior to adoption of the policy or plan. A 60-day public comment period has been established for such review and comment. Comments that are received from the public will be addressed by Commission staff in conjunction with the final preparation of the Plan, when it is considered for adoption by the Commission.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

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*.

