

THE STUDY AREA TODAY

The Study Area comprises about 110 acres of Southwest Washington and is bounded by Independence Avenue to the north, Maine Avenue to the south, 12th Street to the west, and 4th Street to the east. The area encompasses 15 blocks that include eight federal buildings, two federal parks, and eight private buildings. Approximately 56 percent of the land is federally owned, 26 percent is private, and about 18 percent is devoted to streets, freeways, and rail lines under the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia, the Federal Highway Administration, or CSX Railroad.

The area was once a diverse working class neighborhood of houses and businesses supporting the nearby shipping wharves along Potomac River and the military arsenal at Ft. McNair. Although the city around it grew and improved, the living conditions within this neighborhood deteriorated until there was a call for radical change following World War II, resulting in the nation's most ambitious Urban Renewal Program. During this period, houses and businesses were razed to make way for a new neighborhood constructed along Modernist tenets, displacing many former residents. The Southwest Freeway was constructed dividing the area into a new residential neighborhood to the south and a predominantly federal office precinct to the north.

Tenth Street, later named L'Enfant Promenade, became the central spine of this office precinct. Flanked by large office buildings and a hotel, the street was constructed over the train tracks and the new freeway to terminate in a circular park overlooking the Washington Channel and Potomac River. The construction of these and nearby other buildings created a federal enclave built in the late Modern International style. The resulting precinct is characterized by superblocks and single-use office buildings with large setbacks and no ground floor uses.

Crossing the railroad and highway requires multiple levels of streets, ramps and stairs that make it difficult to get around. The streetscape is barren with little vegetation and minimal amenities to serve the daily needs and comfort of pedestrians. Despite the investment expended during the urban renewal era, the building form, infrastructure, and minimal public realm create barriers that sever the area from the surrounding city, causing it to seem isolated and undesirable for improvement or investment.



(Top image) The expansive setbacks, obstructed views, and lack of vegetation and amenities discourage pedestrian activity along 10th Street.

(Lower image) The railway in the Maryland Avenue right-of-way disrupts the street grid, causing a void between downtown and the waterfront.