



2016



National
Capital
Planning
Commission

Creating an Urban Design Element

The 2004 *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements* (Comprehensive Plan) contained policies that pertain to urban design, but not a stand alone element. Given the importance of urban design across NCPC activities, staff began crafting a new Federal Urban Design Element to include in the Comprehensive Plan.

In July 2011, an Urban Design Task Force was created to work with NCPC staff to guide policy development for a new element. NCPC held two workshops to obtain stakeholder and public input. A resulting draft Urban Design Element was released in November 1, 2012 for a 90-day public comment period.

Following this release, the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform directed NCPC to jointly prepare a study of the 1910 Height of Buildings Act with the District of Columbia. As a result, NCPC staff placed development of the Urban Design Element on hold until completion of the Height Master Plan. This plan received extensive public input and produced relevant technical information and visual modeling studies. NCPC submitted its portion of the final study, which included five recommendations that address national interests regarding the city's form and character, to Congress in November 2013. One recommendation was to study viewshed protections within the Comprehensive Plan.

Following completion of the Height Master Plan, NCPC updated and expanded the Urban Design Element, to include policy section and a technical addendum. The element reflects the guidance and contributions of the Task Force and public comments received on the original draft, as well as new material derived from technical work conducted for the Height Master Plan, public input, and the Commission's final recommendations, including a new viewshed section.

A Supplementary Technical Addendum

This technical addendum is a resource that supports policies within the new Urban Design Element of the Comprehensive Plan, including background, planning approaches, and explanatory graphics. The technical addendum provides more detailed context to support decision-making, including key concepts and definitions.

The addendum is comprised of two sections:

- An introductory overview of the formative contributors to Washington's urban design framework, particularly the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans (collectively the *Plan of the City of Washington*) and the Height of Buildings Act. This section also includes a summary of other notable plans, policies, and regulations that shape the urban design condition of the city and region.
- A viewshed policy framework to identify and evaluate critical viewsheds and vistas within Washington and its environs.

The Technical Addendum is part of the Comprehensive Plan and may be referenced in Commission activities, as appropriate.

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I. Formative Contributors to Washington’s Urban Design Framework

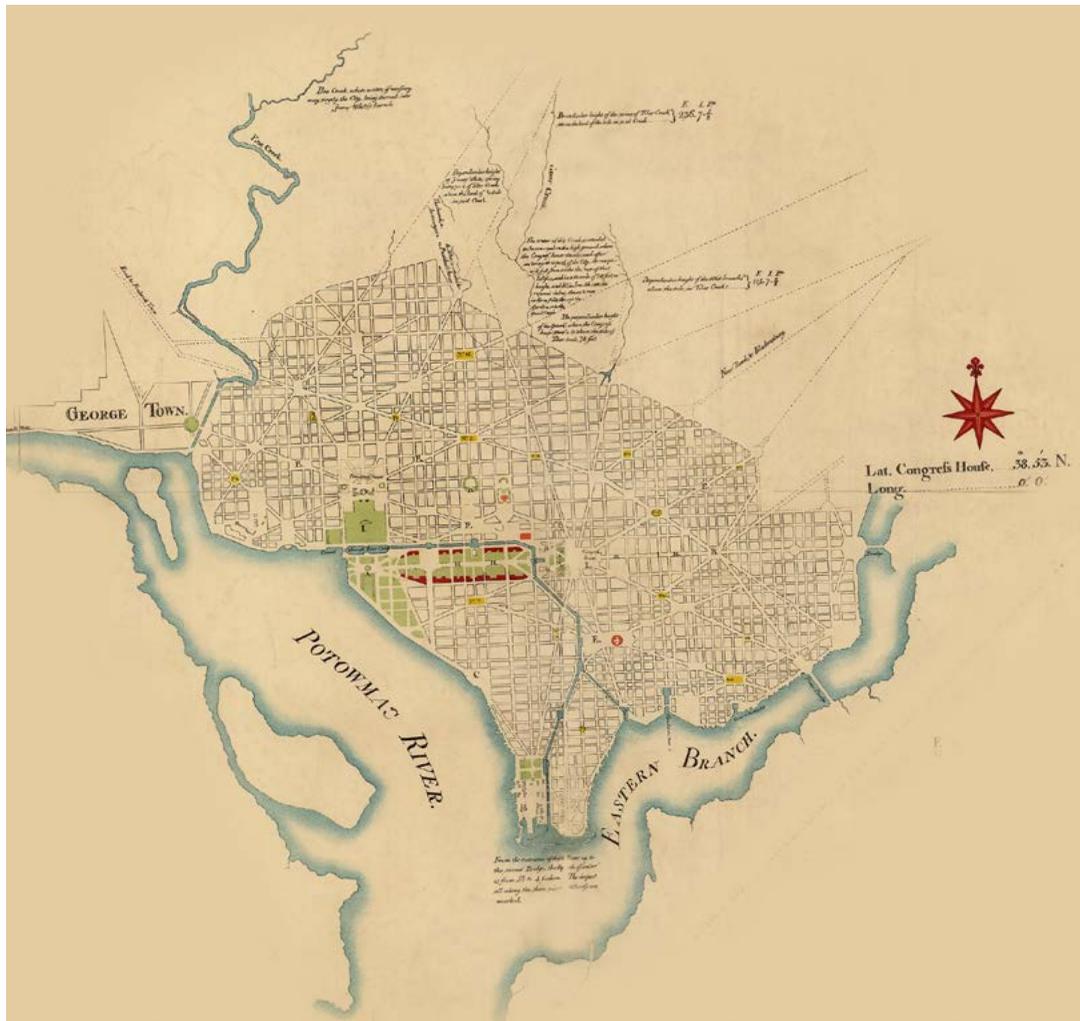
Two of the most formative contributors to Washington’s form and character are the Plan of the City of Washington and the Height of Buildings Act. The Plan of the City of Washington refers to the L’Enfant Plan and McMillan Plan collectively.

A. Plan of the City of Washington

THE L’ENFANT PLAN.

The L’Enfant Plan of 1791 established the basic form of the original city including the National Mall, the city street grid, public spaces, and the location of the White House and U.S. Capitol. The L’Enfant Plan is a baroque city plan of four quadrants with a pattern of radiating avenues, parks, and vistas laid over an orthogonal system. The avenues were to be “wide, grand boulevards, lined with trees, and designed in such a manner that would visually connect topographical sites throughout the city.”¹ At these sites important structures, monuments, and fountains were to be constructed.

The result of Pierre L’Enfant’s design was a plan with ceremonial spaces and grand boulevards that respected the land’s natural contours in a picturesque manner. The open spaces established by the L’Enfant Plan are as integral to the city’s design as the street network and configuration. In particular, the vistas, which are related to the location and extents of avenues and streets, “propel the [L’Enfant City] into the third dimension...for this reason, in keeping with the height-limit regulations governing construction in the District of Columbia and its importance to understanding the baroque nature of the plan. The open space above the streets and avenues is included in the National Register nomination.”²





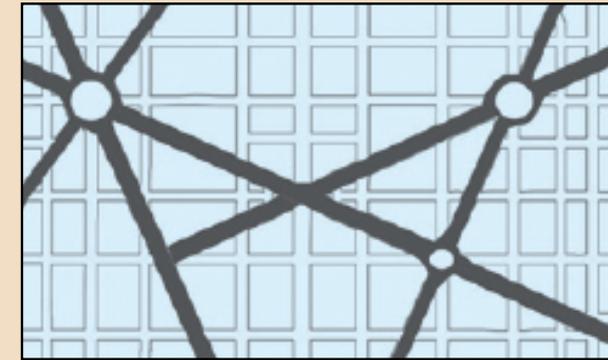
Edward Sachse, 1852 Historic Panoramic City Map

Key L'Enfant Plan features include:

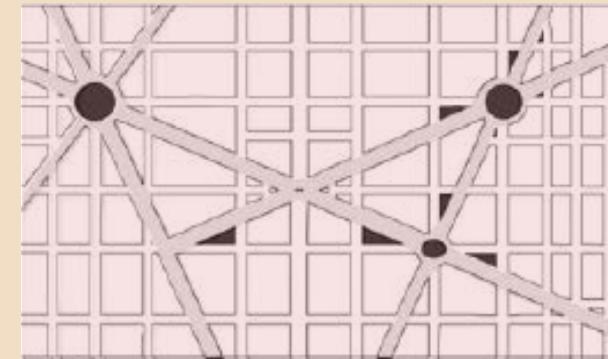
- The location of the U.S. Capitol at the center of, and on the most prominent site, within the city. This established the importance of Congress as the people's house.
- The location of the President's House at another elevated site, with a visual link to the U.S. Capitol by way of what is now known as Pennsylvania Avenue.
- Dramatic unimpeded views of the Potomac River and flanking hills from the U.S. Capitol and the White House, providing a constant reminder of the city's natural setting and the nation's first president.
- A connected and important system of streets, reservations, and open spaces that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Within that system there are several major streets and avenues that have a particular role in establishing the images and symbols of the national capital. Many of these are the widest avenues. According to the 1792 version of

L'Enfant's plan drawn by Andrew Ellicott, "the grand avenues and such streets as lead immediately to public places are from 130 to 160 feet wide, and may be conveniently divided into foot ways, walks of trees, and a carriage way. The other streets are from 90 to 110 feet wide." Some of the most important streets in the city's urban design framework include:

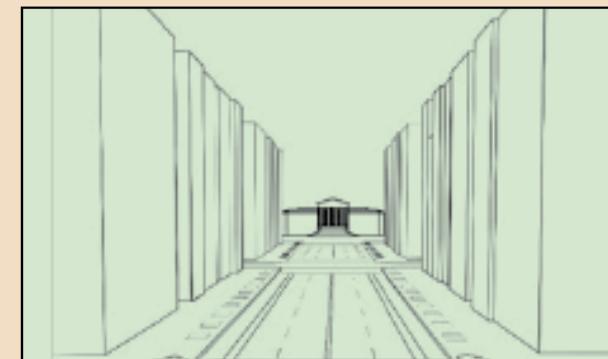
- The avenues set aside for major ceremonial functions and the pageant of government.
- The great axial streets that form the basic organization of the capital city, and avenues, including circles and squares.
- Boundary streets that mark the city's limits, define major topographic contours, or abut major rivers and streams.
- Street network that provide pedestrian connections between important civic buildings, national resources, and activities.



Grand Avenues



Public Spaces



Terminating Vistas

THE McMILLAN PLAN.

Developed by the Senate Park Commission in 1901, the plan now known as the McMillan Plan formalized the National Mall's design; created federal precincts around the National Mall (such as the Federal Triangle); and established key national parks such as the Civil War Defenses of Washington, also known as the Fort Circle Parks. It also refocused on removing development that interfered with the L'Enfant Plan's original framework, with uninterrupted greenspaces restored. The McMillan Plan was built upon the baroque ideals of the L'Enfant Plan and reinforced the idea of grand public spaces and civic buildings based on the City Beautiful Movement.

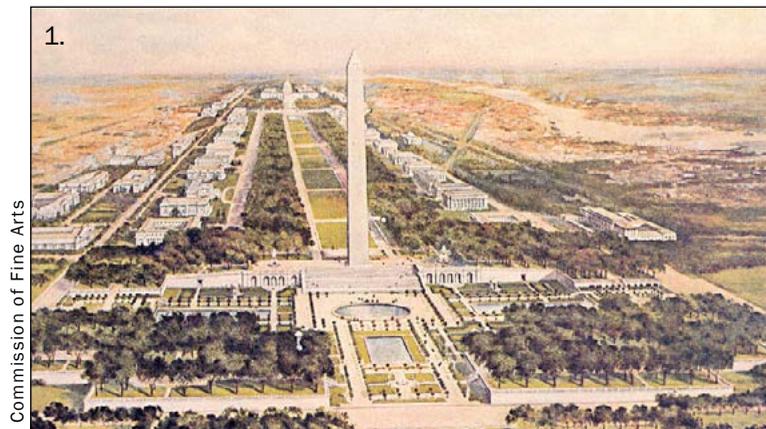
The McMillan Plan was concerned with "...two main problems: the building of a park system and the grouping of public buildings. By connecting existing parkland and carrying the park system to the outlying areas of the District and across the river as far as Mount Vernon and Great Falls, it addressed the city's regional character."

Key McMillan Plan features include:

1. Plans for the monumental core, including improvements to the National Mall and creation of the Federal Triangle.
2. Development of new infrastructure, including Memorial Bridge and Union Station.
3. An expanded park system, including Rock Creek Park, the Civil War Defenses of Washington, and parkways.

Victorian Era Contributions to the Plan for the City of Washington

Washington's form has adapted over time to accommodate growth and change. In addition to the bold plans articulated in both the L'Enfant and the McMillan Plans, a significant modification to Washington's street pattern occurred in the last several decades of the nineteenth century. "Maps show a proliferation of narrow mid-block streets, mainly in residential areas that developed during this period. The historic city plan of Washington DC, designed by L'Enfant and further enhanced by the innovations of the Senate Park Commission, focused on radial avenues, vistas, and park systems and laid the framework for the Nation's capital. Within this grand organization of arterial thoroughfares, the platting of streets to be lived upon rather than journeyed bears significance to the overall plan of a city. Just as the McMillan Plan adapted to a new century and a larger city and nation, the functional and aesthetic accommodations made by the Victorians cannot be ignored or slighted. Their landscaped reservations and their creation of intermediate grid streets were just as formative of the present character of 'Washington City' as were the McMillian Plan's grander designs. The formal nature of L'Enfant's design led to modifications of his large squares that were otherwise difficult to subdivide, develop and use efficiently without the introduction of new, minor streets. L'Enfant's concentration on first laying out the radial avenues led him to create blocks of differing dimensions when he overlaid the orthogonal streets. That longer blocks were later bisected by tertiary streets appears as unplanned by L'Enfant, as was the development of alleys, front-yard public-space 'parking,' and the reservations at the intersections of radial and grid streets. The creation of minor streets, though unplanned, was historically important and represents a natural outgrowth of the plan as it developed. Minor streets proved crucial to the filling-out of L'Enfant's plan and to the development and service of the dense, row residential pattern characteristic of the nineteenth-century city."³



National Mall



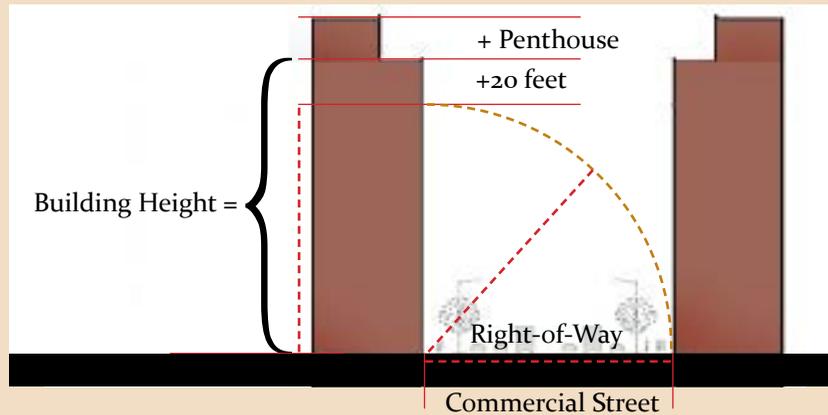
1927-1932, Lincoln Memorial Bridge under construction



Commission of Fine Arts

Library of Congress

Adam Fagen



Building height is measured based on the width of the street on which the building is located plus twenty feet.



Mathew Thomas Carroll

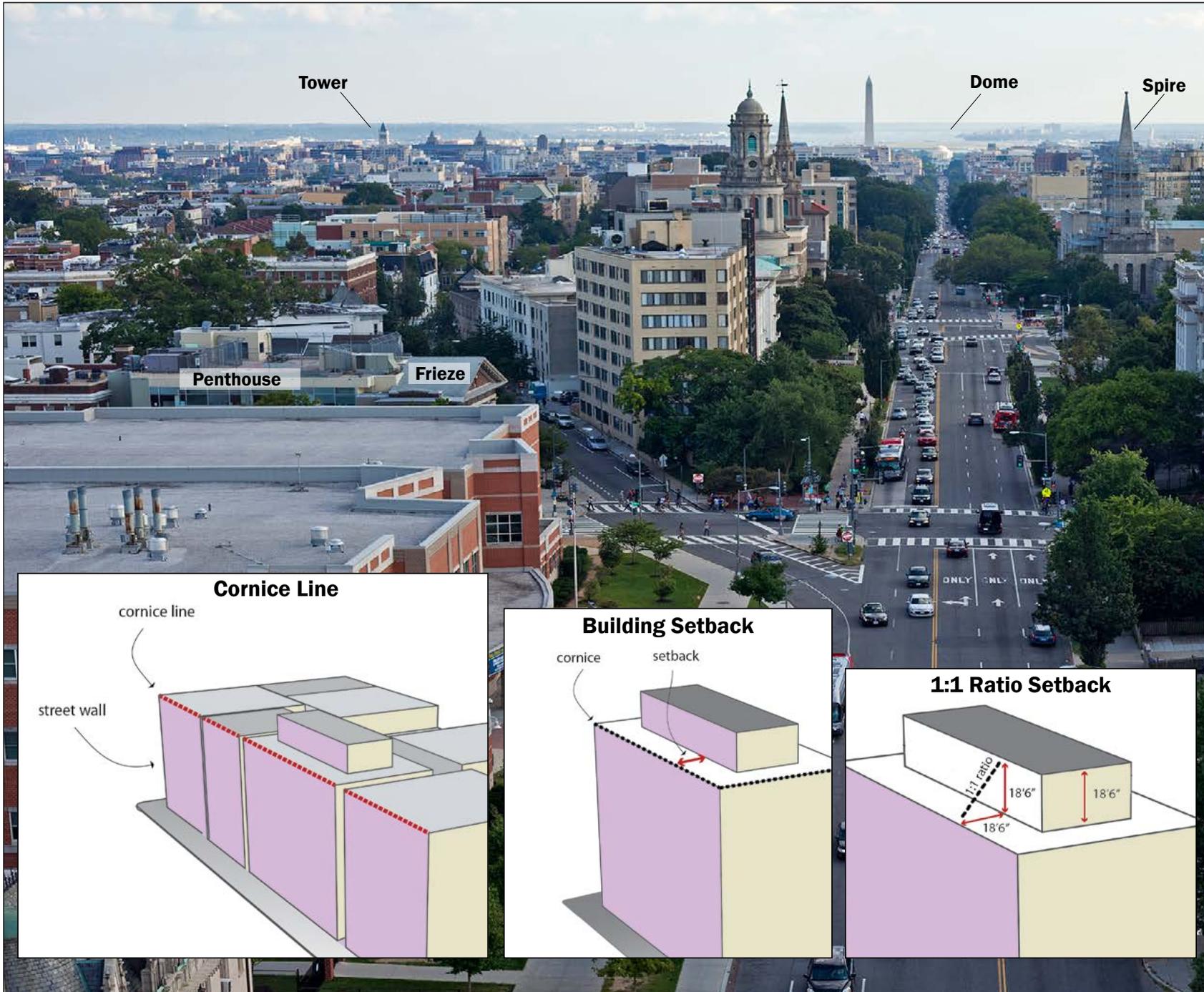
B. The Height of Buildings Act

One of the most important contributors to Washington's image is its unmistakable and symbolic skyline. For more than a century, the federally regulated [1910 Height of Buildings Act](#)⁴ (Height Act) has played a central role in shaping the form of the skyline, particularly within the boundaries of the L'Enfant Plan area and topographic bowl. From within Washington, DC or from across the Potomac River in Virginia, the long views of Washington reveal a skyline punctuated not by commercial skyscrapers, but by architectural embellishments and civic symbols. The Height Act also contributes to the pedestrian street-level experience, which is often described as having a sense of openness. It is of note that in many parts of the city, local zoning has historically been more restrictive than the Height Act.

In 2013, NCPC prepared the [Height Master Plan](#)⁵ in partnership with the District of Columbia. The study's purpose was to examine whether the Height Act continues to meet national and local planning goals. The plan included a visual modeling study, technical planning analysis, and extensive public input. NCPC submitted its portion of the final study to Congress in November 2013, including recommendations to retain the Height Act throughout Washington and allow for occupancy of penthouses. In 2014, Congress passed a minor amendment to the Height Act, which generally reflects NCPC's recommendations.

Key Height Act features include:

- Building height is measured based on the width of the street on which the building is located, plus twenty feet in commercial areas. The Height Act includes a maximum height of 130 feet on commercial streets and 90 feet on residential streets. Certain segments of Pennsylvania Avenue may go up to 160 feet, with a building step back.
- The Height Act includes guidance on architectural and functional building elements that may exceed the maximum limits of the Height Act.
- The 130 foot building cap results in a horizontal street section along some of L'Enfant's grandest avenues, which means they are wider than the buildings on them are tall. This horizontal street section widens the frame around views, such as those to the U.S. Capitol. There are other streets within the L'Enfant Plan where the urban fabric is built out to the full height allowed under the Height Act. Many of these have street sections that are taller than the buildings on them are wide, and are more commercial in character. This creates a subtle but important distinction between the character of the city's monumental and symbolic streets and avenues from local commercial and residential streets.
- The creation of a horizontal skyline allows civic structures, such as the U.S. Capitol and the Washington Monument, to be the most visible objects within the skyline. This sets the national capital apart from other U.S. cities, where commercial buildings tend to dominate the skyline.
- The Height Act permits human occupancy of penthouses within a height of 20 feet or less, with a penthouse setback.



Terminology and Definitions

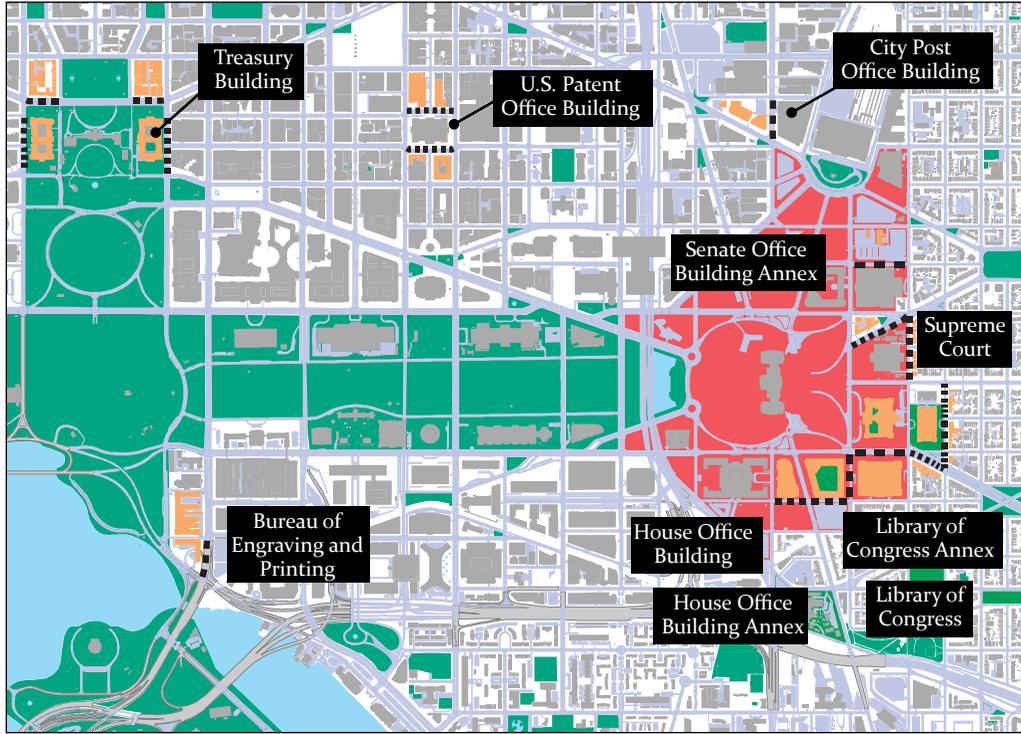
Penthouse: A structure on the top of a building's roof that is setback from the exterior walls and does not occupy the entire roof of the building. Penthouses may serve as occupiable spaces, or they may be constructed to house mechanical equipment.

Architectural Embellishments: Architectural details that add character and interest to a building. Embellishments primarily serve an aesthetic purpose. Examples of traditional embellishments on civic and institutional buildings in Washington, DC are spires, towers, friezes, and domes. (Architectural embellishments are sometimes used to conceal mechanical equipment, but generally are not occupied.)

Cornice Line: The horizontal top edge of a building. Cornice lines define the street-wall along a street and serve an important role in framing views along streets.

Building Setback: Distance which a structure is setback from a particular point. A penthouse setback refers to the distance a penthouse must be setback from the main building's outer-wall. The setback both distinguishes and preserves the main building's cornice line.

1:1 Ratio: As applied to penthouse setbacks, this requires a structure to be setback a distance equal to its height above the roof upon which it is located. The 1:1 ratio tucks additional building height away from the building's cornice line, opening more sky from a street level view. This proportion historically kept mechanical equipment on a roof out of sight from the street level.



Schedule of Heights adjacent to public buildings

- Schedule of Heights Location
- Schedule of Heights Buildings
- Buildings
- Architect of the Capitol Boundary
- Parks and Open Space

THE SCHEDULE OF HEIGHTS.

Section 5 of the Height of Buildings Act provides for a [Schedule of Heights](#).⁶ This Schedule addresses site specific maximum building heights in sensitive areas adjacent to public buildings. These sites may require more specific or restrictive height limits given their location. While the Schedule can further restrict building height, it cannot violate the underlying formula determined in the federal law. The District of Columbia Government manages the Schedule. Note: policy guidance within the Urban Design Element should be viewed in concert with the existing Schedule of Heights. It assumes buildings covered under the Schedule will remain regulated within current limits.



The Cairo Building was constructed in 1894 (before the Height Act) and is 164 feet tall.

A summary of selected laws that influence urban design or the process by which key planning and design decisions are made include:

National Capital Planning Act. This Act, set forth at 40 U.S.C. §§8701 et seq., establishes the National Capital Planning Commission as the central planning agency for the federal government in the National Capital Region. The Act provides for the agency's essential functions, including development of a Comprehensive Plan for the region; review of federal and some District of Columbia (DC) proposed developments and projects; review of DC zoning amendments; annual production of the *Federal Capital Improvements Program* and review of the *DC Capital Improvements Program*; and the development of special planning projects.

Commemorative Works Act. This Act, set forth at 40 U.S.C. §§8901 et seq., specifies the requirements for development, approval, and location of new memorials and monuments in the District of Columbia and its environs. The Act preserves the urban design legacy of the historic L'Enfant and McMillan Plans by protecting public open space and ensuring that future memorials and monuments in areas administered by the National Park Service and the General Services Administration are appropriately located and designed. When amended in 2003, the Act established a Reserve, or no-build zone on the National Mall, a proposal called for by NCPD in its *Memorials and Museums Master Plan*.

District of Columbia Zoning Act. This Act, set forth at D.C. Code §§6-641.01 et seq., authorizes the DC Zoning Commission to regulate the location, height, bulk, number of stories, and size of buildings and other structures; lot occupancy; the sizes of open spaces; the density of population; and building and land uses. Federal buildings are exempt from zoning controls, but the Act mandates that NCPD serve on the DC Board of Zoning Adjustment, which hears many cases involving land near, or affected by, federal landholdings.

The Shipstead Luce Act. A federal law that regulates the height, exterior design, and construction of private and semi-public buildings in certain areas of the national capital. (P.L. 231-71).

A series of federal statutes from the 1880s through the turn of the century governs the laws prohibiting overhead wires, including those that support utilities and transportation. The law specific to the prohibition of overhead contact rail wires dates from a March 2, 1889 statute, which applies to Washington City and Georgetown (March 2, 1889, ch. 370, §2). Subsequent federal legislation authorizing the charters of new railroad companies operating in the District of Columbia contained mandates to lay underground wires specific to the boundaries of individual charters. The statutes specific to rail wires may be seen within the context of a larger body of legislation prohibiting use of overhead utility wires (July 18, 1888, ch. 676, §1; DC ST 1981 § 34-1402).

C. The Public Parking Act of 1870

In 1870, Congress passed the [Public Parking Act of 1870](#)⁷ “Parking Act” which designated part of the right-of-way immediately adjacent to private property as park areas for shade trees and walkways to be maintained by the adjacent property owner. The Act led to the enhancement of the L'Enfant City's broad avenues creating tree-lined vistas to the city's prominent landmarks. It also largely shaped the public space and park-like character of Washington's system of streets across the entire city. The District of Columbia government regulates “parking” areas on non-federal lands in Washington to ensure that the areas remain landscaped and is visually accessible to the general public. Although these regulations have evolved over time, they continue to respected the original intent of the Parking Act to maintain public space as part of the District's park and open space system.

D. 20th Century Planning and Beyond

Additional selected contemporary plans and policies that continue to influence urban design in Washington today, include:

The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital is comprised of District and Federal Elements. These Elements include broad urban design goals and key resources, including related to viewsheds.

[Extending the Legacy: Planning America's Capital for the 21st Century](#)⁸ (1997) re-orientes the perceived center of the city to the U.S. Capitol and reinforces the importance of the major north-south axial relationships, including North and South Capitol Streets. It also proposed to eliminate obsolete freeways, bridges, and railroad tracks that fragment the city and break up major viewsheds, such as on South Capitol Street. The plan adds visual and functional focal points, such as new plazas.

[Memorials and Museums Master Plan](#)⁹ (2001) identifies potential sites for future memorials based on the city's symbolic and physical urban design framework.

[Monumental Core Framework Plan](#)¹⁰ (2009) proposes strategies to restore the viewsheds of important corridors, strengthen the seamless connection between federal and local areas, and create new connections to symbolic locations.

Sector Plans prepared by each of the jurisdictions within the National Capital Region that include broad and detailed urban design guidance. Of particular note are the District of Columbia Office of Planning Small Area Plans and Studies completed for neighborhoods throughout the city, as well as Arlington County's Rosslyn and Courthouse Area Sector Plans.

Area Plans prepared by NCPD, such as the [SW Ecodistrict Plan](#),¹¹ and [The South Capitol Urban Design Street Study](#)¹² (2003).

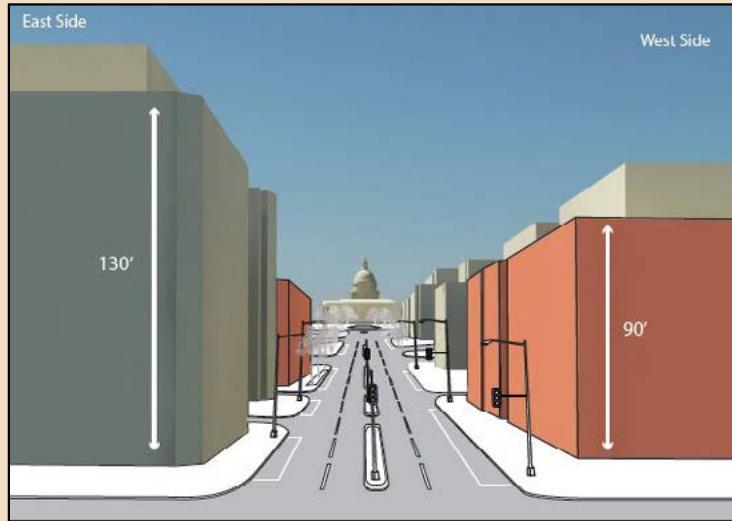
Federal Management Plans may identify urban design elements, such as viewsheds. Examples include plans for Arlington National Cemetery, the Armed Forces Retirement Home, and select National Park Service parks.

Public Space Plans and Policies including those related to street infrastructure, transportation infrastructure, and lighting. The [District Department of Transportation Public Realm Design Manual](#)¹³ provides a summary of District of Columbia regulations and specifications for the design of public space elements throughout the city.

Planning Tools: Visual Analysis and 3D Modeling

Visual analysis and 3D modeling are useful planning tools for evaluating impacts of new built development. The following images are a sampling of visual analysis NCPC completed while working with local jurisdictions to understand impacts to important national resources.

The image of North Capitol Street is part of a massing study completed by NCPC while working with the District of Columbia Office of Planning to understand proposed building massing south of K Street, NW. North Capitol Street is an important gateway into the monumental core with a preeminent view of the U.S. Capitol.

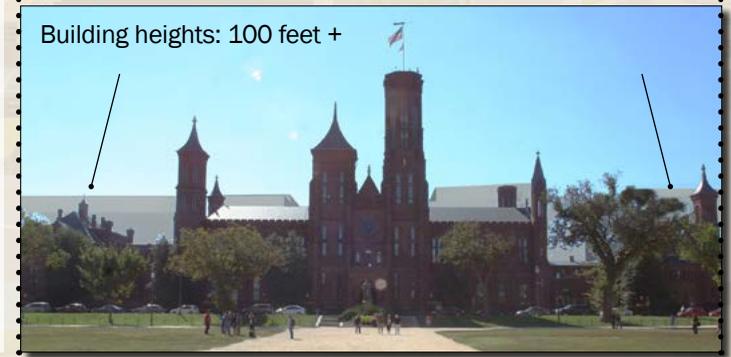


This image is part of a series of 3D simulations completed by NCPC while working with Arlington County Planning Department. Evaluated proposed building heights within Arlington's Courthouse neighborhood in the *Envision Courthouse Square Plan*, evaluated views from the National Mall.



These rendered images are part of a series of 3D simulations looking at various building heights and setbacks along the south side of Independence Avenue within the SW Ecodistrict. These images look at the Smithsonian Castle, a building with a unique roofline.

Design conditions such as building massing, roofline sculpting, and material choice all contribute to the making of a successful transition.



II. Viewshed Policy Framework

NCPC prepared this technical analysis and background information about viewsheds for the Urban Design Element. In the final Height Master Plan report, the Commission recommended adding a study of viewshed protections within the Comprehensive Plan. The viewshed section within the Urban Design Element is new and includes a distinct set of questions and issues. NCPC prepared this section of the Technical Addendum to explain the planning approach to viewshed protections and to support policy development, particularly within sections B.2 and B.5 of the element.

The primary purpose of this viewshed section is to create a framework for identifying and evaluating critical viewsheds and vistas within Washington and its environs. This section also:

- Provides technical information and guidance.
- Creates a succinct and replicable analysis of viewsheds that describes important characteristics and qualities.
- Establishes a baseline condition for particular views.
- Provides consistent criteria, vocabulary, and direction on planning matters.
- Proposes an agenda for future study.



General Principles for Viewshed Maintenance

One of the most important hallmarks of the capital city's symbolic image and urban design framework is a three dimensional spatial and visual order that reinforces the preeminence of national symbols and democratic institutions. The city's street-level views and vistas are created by the location and extent of its streets, the height of buildings, and where streets intersect with important public spaces or natural areas. These elements help define the pedestrian experience in the nation's capital and generally prioritize natural and symbolic elements within a viewer's line of sight. Many of the city's vistas and views are particularly distinctive within the original L'Enfant City, although some street-level linear viewsheds extend well beyond the topographic bowl and at elevated points which give the viewer a wider perspective to enjoy the city. These panoramic viewsheds are principally shaped by natural features and the building mass in the surroundings. Building mass, public realm, streetscape programming, and natural features are all important contributors to the quality of the city's viewsheds and the character of its streets.

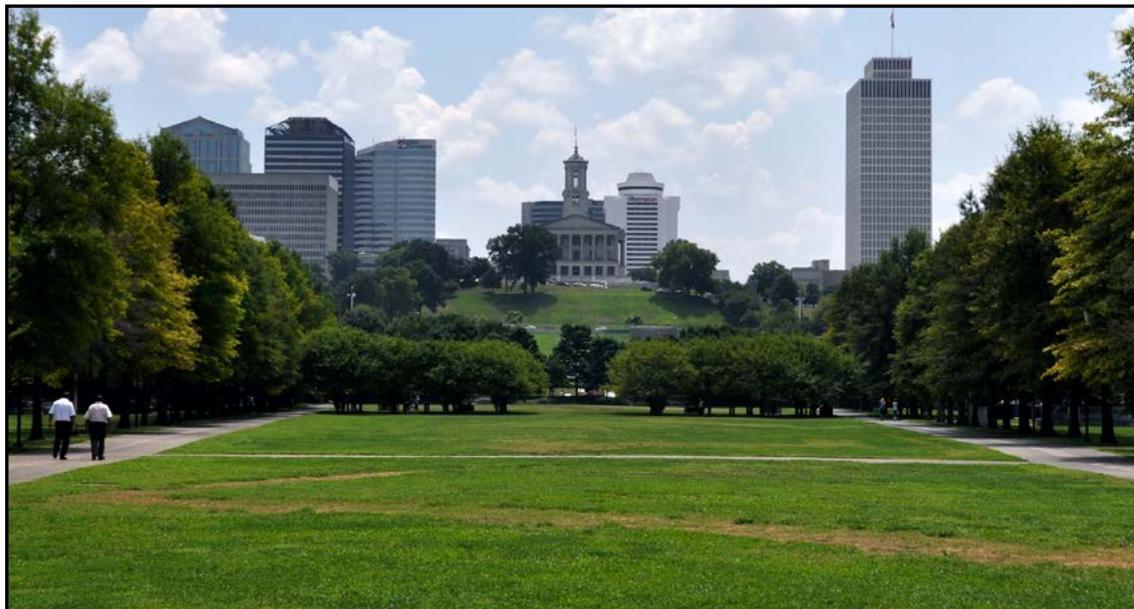
NCPC supports the following general principles related to viewshed maintenance:

- To the greatest extent possible, create a wide visual frame and natural backdrop (“breathing room”) around the U.S. Capitol, White House, Washington Monument, and other major symbolic elements within the monumental core.
- Preserve the visual openness and functional qualities of public spaces by preventing visual incursions into the rights-of-way wherever possible, particularly throughout the L'Enfant City and at key topographical points and gateways. Within the L'Enfant City, this protection extends to the public space up to the full height allowed under the Height Act and is particularly important at intersections and termini of radial and axial avenues, on streets that cross or are adjacent to reservations, and near major historic landmarks and settings.
- Support the District Department of Transportation's current practice of linking lighting design to special streets and places. Many of Washington's lights are vertical and have limited horizontal armatures, which limits infrastructure in the right of way, and reinforces the city's viewsheds. Encourage existing and new practices, as necessary, to ensure that preeminent viewsheds and significant vistas which provide views of major buildings, parks, or commemorative works are enhanced by trees and other streetscape elements.
- Support policies to sensitively locate and design interpretive, directional, advertising, and other functional signs in a way that reinforces preeminent viewsheds described in this section.



Architect of the Capitol

The visual frame around the U.S. Capitol is a natural one.



Scottt@GP

Elsewhere, commercial buildings and other signage may be located within the backdrop of major civic structures. This is in Nashville, TN.



Roadway infrastructure impacts the South Capitol Street view corridor. Further study is needed to address major infrastructure and develop a distinct, cohesive corridor to reinforce the quality of views to the U.S. Capitol.

Visual Incursions

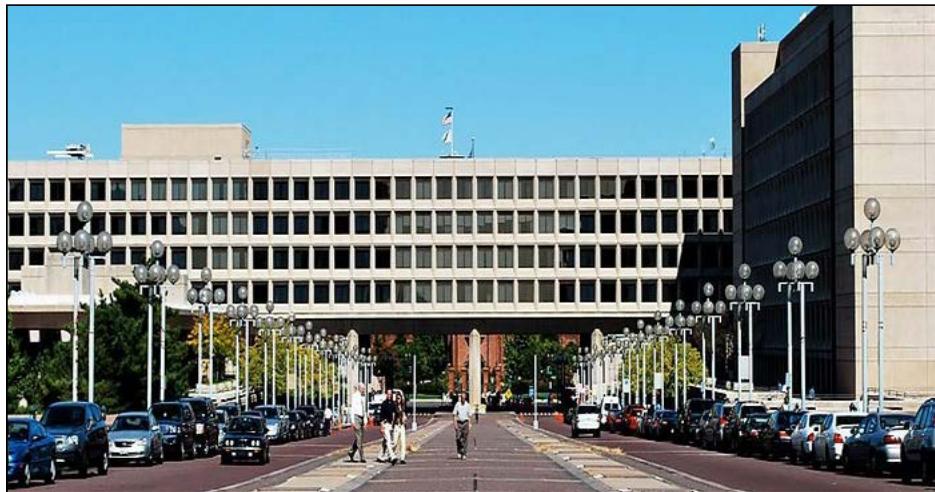
In the context of viewsheds, visual incursions are built or natural elements that extend within a view corridor. They could technically include a wide range of built and natural elements, permanent and semi-permanent. Examples of visual incursions may include some types of transportation infrastructure, security infrastructure, and permanent buildings with overhangs. It is important to note that well-designed streetscape elements and a healthy tree canopy are not considered visual incursions. These can contribute to viewshed quality and reinforce the processional experience (spatial order) along an important corridor.

One public realm feature that is unique to parts of Washington and that has enhanced its viewsheds is the long-standing practice of hiding or diminishing views of utilitarian infrastructure. Examples include the ban on overhead streetcar and utility wires within the L'Enfant City, the design of lighting and other utility infrastructure, and the 1:1 penthouse setback within the Height Act, which hides mechanical equipment for buildings.¹⁴ As a result, it is one of the largest wire-free cities in the world.

Together with the Height Act, these public realm principles created an elegant and orderly quality to city character that reinforces a sense of openness at the street-level and enhances the natural setting—integrating these qualities into future decisions about modern transportation and utility infrastructure—which also occupy public space—remains an important urban design policy question.

Generally, NCPD is concerned with visual incursions that:

- Extend within the street right of way.
- Detract from the preeminence of a major national resource along a view corridor.
- Visually sever major landscape elements.
- Detract from the character of historic, cultural, or other open space areas.



NCPD studied alternatives to reconfigure the U.S. Department of Energy building and reopen 10th Street, SW. This will strengthen the quality of the street and link the waterfront and the National Mall.



U.S. Capitol, 1960s

National Capital Trolley Museum



U.S. Department of Treasury, 1920s

National Capital Trolley Museum

Washington operated a streetcar system that utilized an underground conduit system from the 1890s-1960s.

Core Issues for Discussion: Viewsheds

There are several related urban design issues that should be addressed at the project level and through public dialogue, rather than through Comprehensive Plan policy.

The L'Enfant Plan—by design—creates opportunities for reciprocal relationships between natural and built elements. And, the city's baroque planning tradition often situates elements at the center of parks and open spaces. Parks that contain memorials may define the extent of, or be located within, the preeminent viewsheds or vistas identified within this addendum. Enhancing viewsheds and creating civic spaces within them do not have to be mutually exclusive. However, priorities should be weighed early in the site planning process.

On a project level, key questions to consider include:

- The proposed element's scale.
- The significance of the viewshed.
- Whether a vertical or horizontal orientation is appropriate, given the design and the needs of the setting.
- Planning and urban design goals for site integration and creating successful public spaces.

Maintaining Washington's visual hierarchy

Washington's skyline, and a few major vistas within the monumental core, follow a visual hierarchy that emphasize symbolic and monumental buildings. (refer to section A.2.3 of the Urban Design element on the visual order) How do we encourage quality design of built elements, such as federal buildings, within the preeminent viewsheds, while also maintaining that hierarchy? What is the role of new memorials and museums proposed within major viewsheds? How do we understand the visual hierarchy of new memorial elements within the context of the city's preeminent viewsheds?



M. V. Jantzen

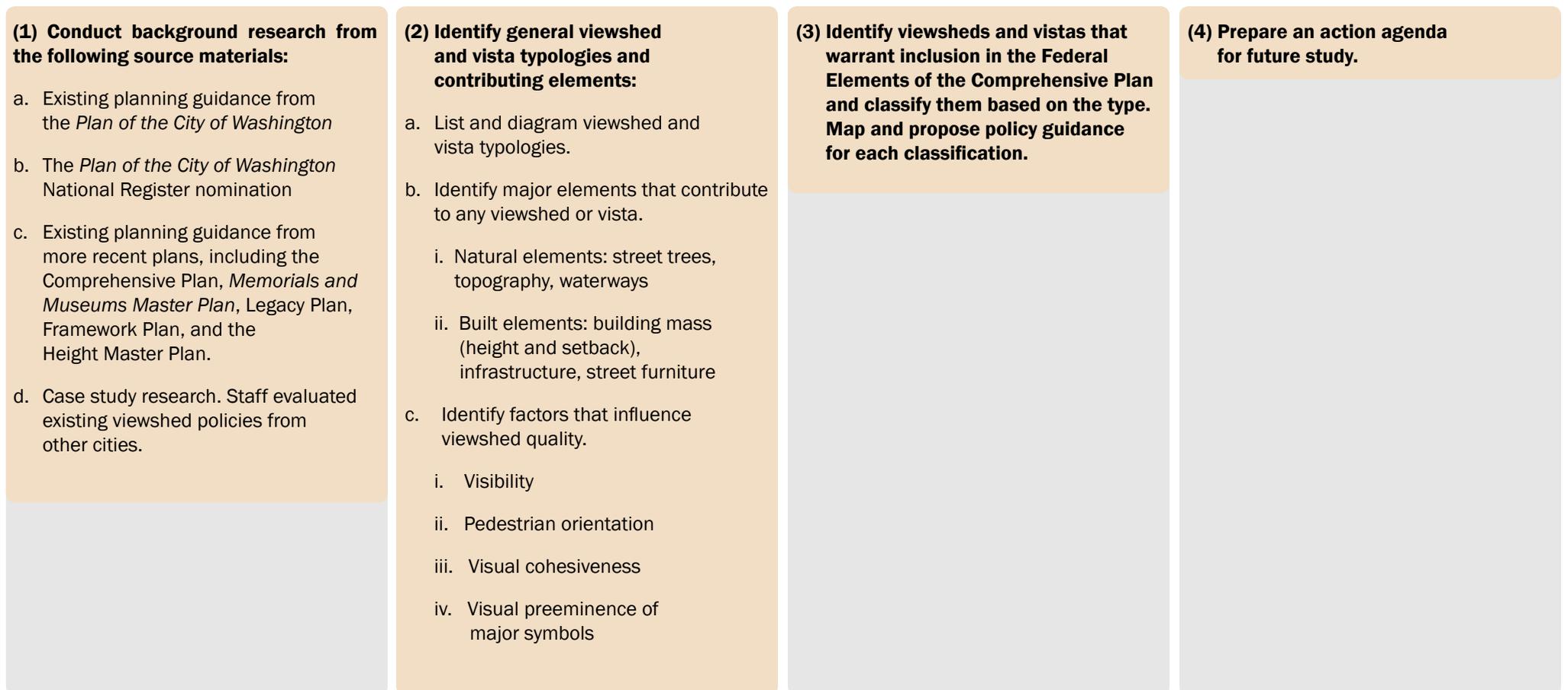
Freedom Plaza, along Pennsylvania Avenue, is an example. Depending on its scale and location, a new memorial or structure, could disrupt this long view corridor. On the other hand, terminating vistas are part of the city's design and a principal of the L'Enfant Plan.



DDIS Photography

Viewshed Policies: Methodology and Approach

The primary purpose of the addendum is to create a framework to identify and evaluate critical viewsheds and vistas within Washington and its environs. The Technical Addendum provides the tools to evaluate impacts and urban design challenges within the nation's capital. Viewsheds are one of many critical elements that together create Washington's urban design, and viewshed maintenance should not be prioritized to the exclusion of other planning goals, such as creating public spaces. As a general matter, viewshed maintenance is a design challenge that must be weighed and evaluated against other program goals and design for future development within the region.



Viewshed Types + Definitions

This section will identify the different types of views and create a common vocabulary. There are three types of viewsheds within the National Capital Region: panoramic viewsheds, viewshed cones, and linear viewshed corridors. The character of each viewshed type is described below, as are other key terms.

Panoramic Viewshed: Washington, DC's sweeping vistas are a result of geography and height restrictions that maintain the hierarchy of buildings across the skyline (not allowing visual competition with the defined prominent structures). Additionally, height controls allow for sweeping vistas that can be appreciated from numerous vantage points from all directions. Without height restrictions within the topographic bowl, the sweeping panoramic views of the U.S. Capitol dome would likely be lost and its visual prominence restricted to viewshed corridors. Therefore, the skyline is as integral an element of urban design as individual view corridors.

Viewshed Cone: (views to the horizon) The primary vistas, as defined in the NRHP nomination,¹⁵ are examples of viewshed cones in the nation's capital. The extent of these viewsheds is conical in form.

Linear Viewshed Corridors: Or a terminating vista within the L'Enfant Plan, are linear views with an axial line of site that are defined by public realm elements streetwalls in the middle ground, and the focal point object(s) at the viewshed terminus. Terminating vistas within the L'Enfant City commonly feature significant civic buildings or spaces.

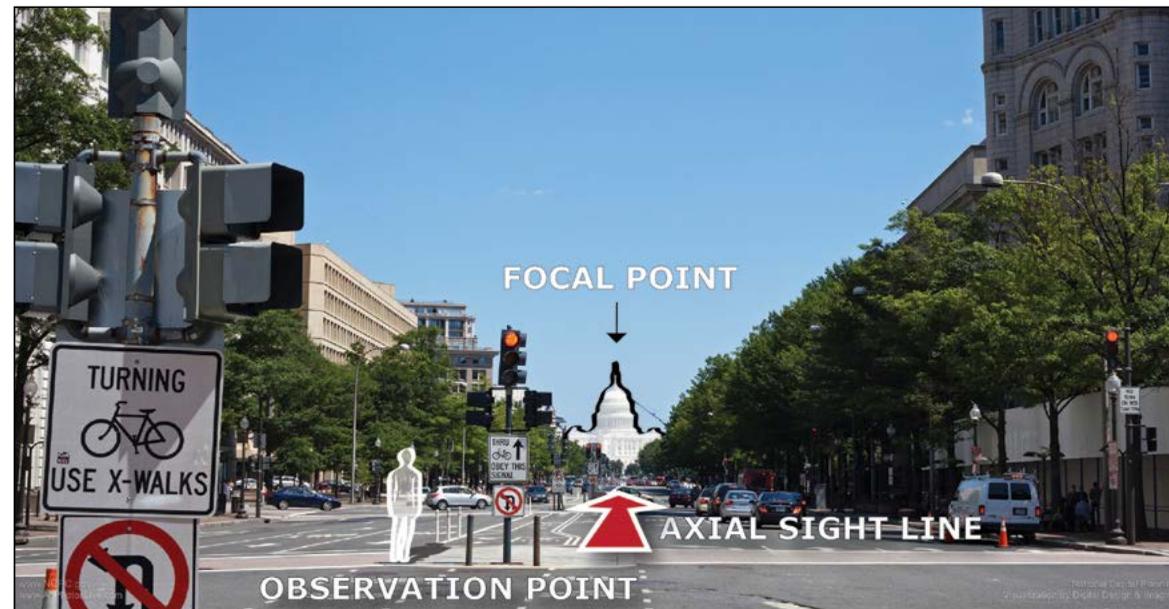
Observation Point: A position where a person stands to view.

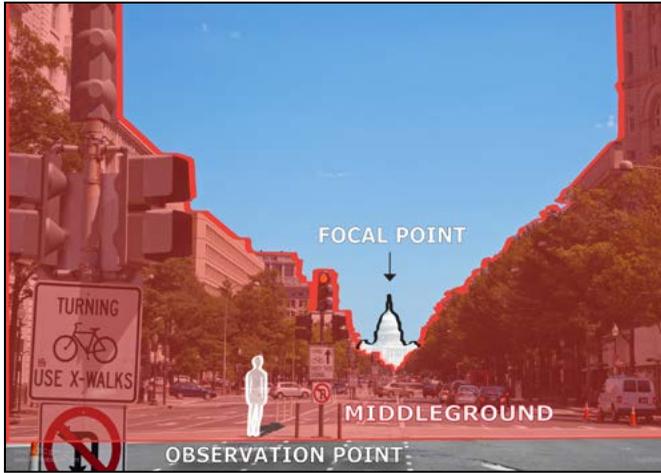
Middle ground: The part of the view that is the space between the foreground and background.

The streetscape or landscape program: An important public realm feature that contributes to a view's composition. Looking down Pennsylvania Avenue, the tree canopy (for a majority of the year) serves as the primary visual element framing the U.S. Capitol.

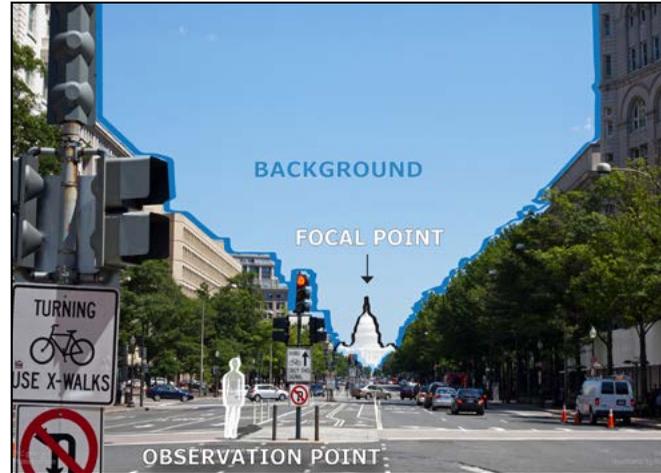


Panoramic viewshed: Observation point from the front lawn of Arlington House, Arlington National Cemetery





Middle ground



Background



Tree Canopy



Visual Incursions

Background: The part of the view that is furthest from the viewer and beyond both the foreground and middle ground. The background can be thought of as the backdrop or canvas for which the foreground and middle ground are set against.

Visual Incursions: In the context of viewsheds, visual incursions are built or natural elements that extend within a view corridor. They can technically include a wide range of built and natural elements, both permanent and semi-permanent.

For example, District Department of Transportation uses vertical lighting elements that have limited horizontal armatures. These particular elements are also removable. This current practice of locating functional elements in this way maintains the openness of pedestrian level views to important landmarks.

Viewshed Classification System

For purposes of the Urban Design Element, policy development, and future work, views are organized into three classes. Policy guidance for each class varies.

1. Pre-Eminent Viewsheds: Includes views to and from the monumental core, in particular to and from the U.S. Capitol and White House. These views are critical because they contribute to the visual importance/hierarchy of nationally symbolic public buildings and civic spaces.

2. Significant Vistas: All other important views that are generally a product of Washington's historic composition (Plan of the City of Washington). Many of these views are street-level traditional terminating vistas. These vistas offer public realm elements and streetscape programming that maintain the visual order and reinforce the city's network of streets and public spaces.

3. Scenic Panoramic Viewsheds: Includes significant panoramic views within the National Capital Region. Sweeping views capture Washington's skyline including many prominent structures within the monumental core (Washington and Arlington). These views often offer the greatest opportunity to understand the relationship between the scenic and built elements of the capital's urban design framework.

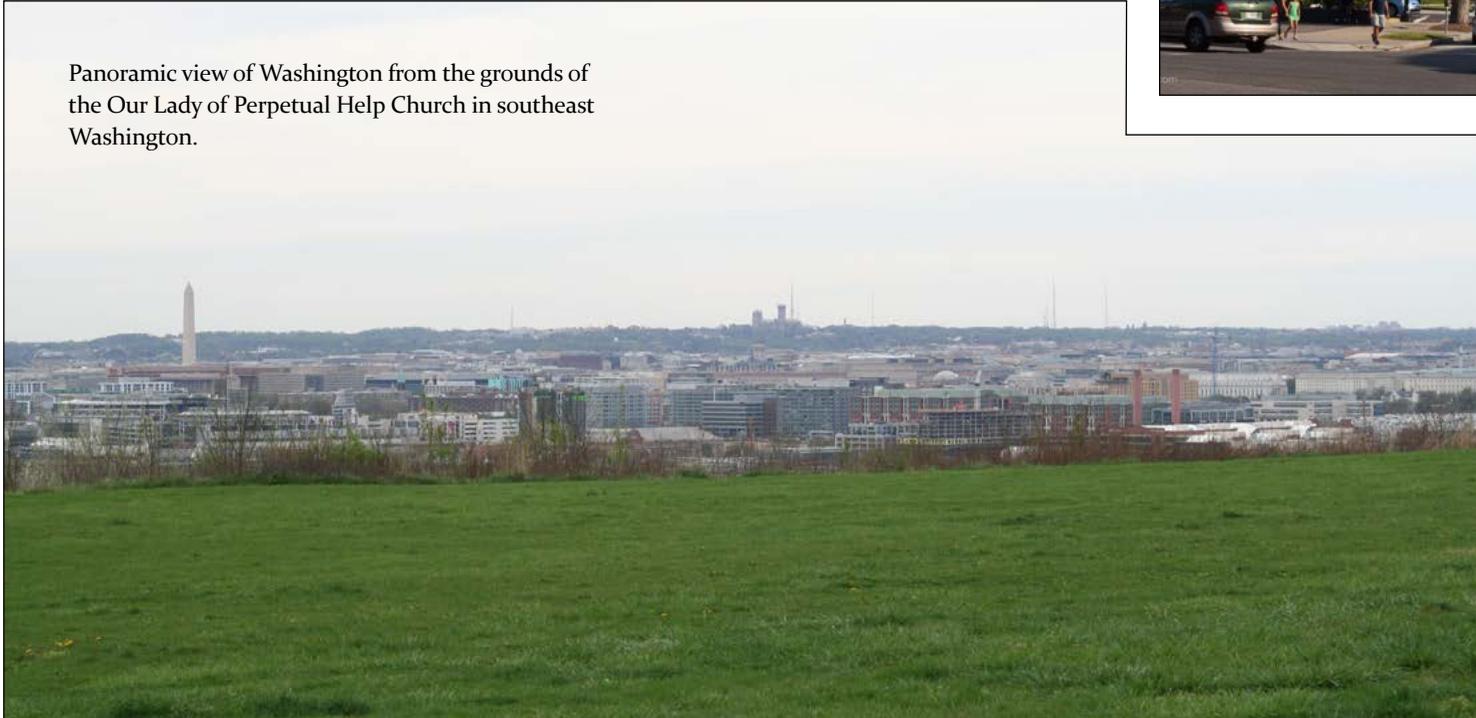
Terminating vista along 10th Street, NW looking toward the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.

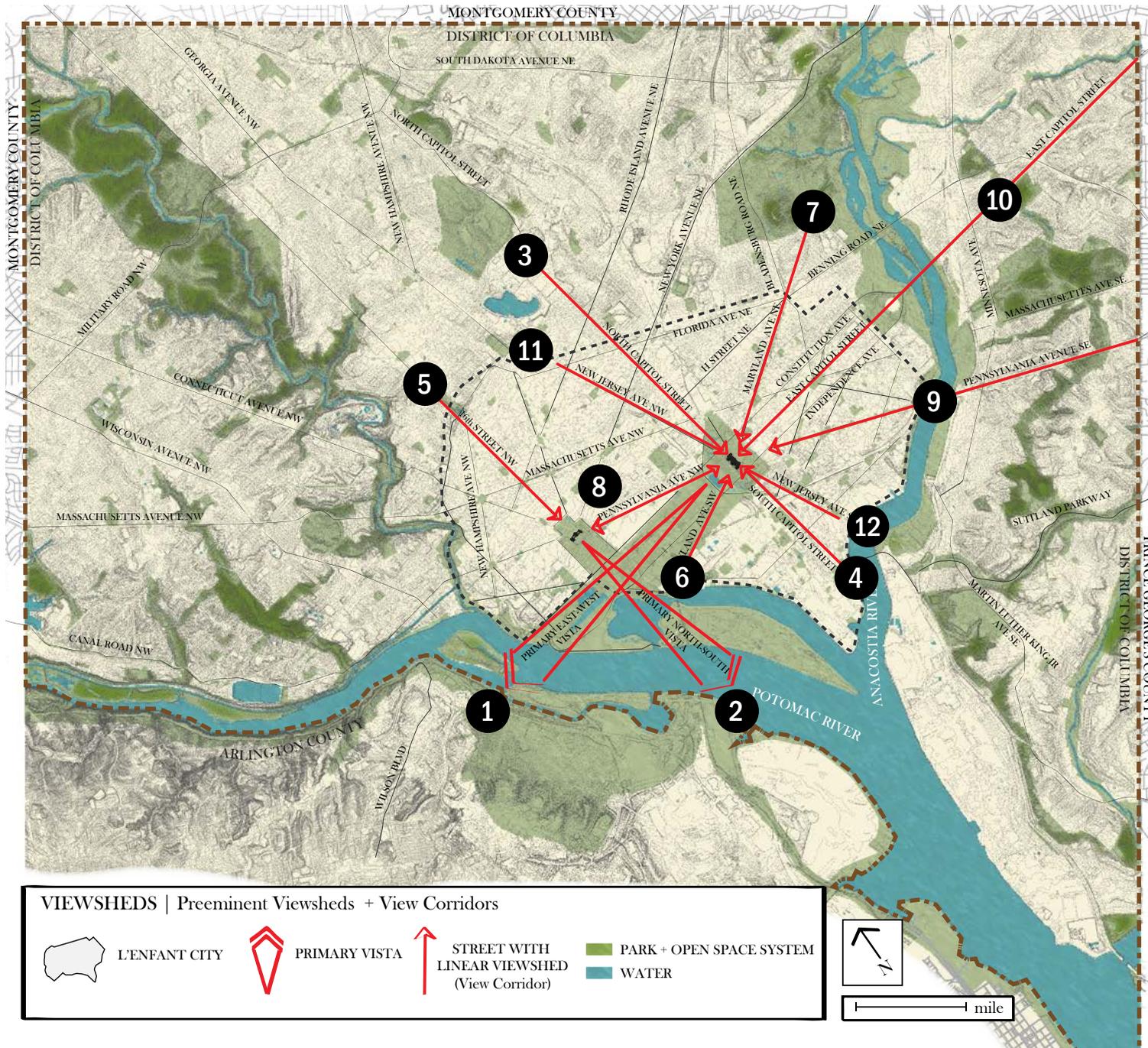


Terminating vista along New Jersey Avenue, NW looking toward the U.S. Capitol.



Panoramic view of Washington from the grounds of the Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in southeast Washington.





Inventory | Preeminent Viewsheds

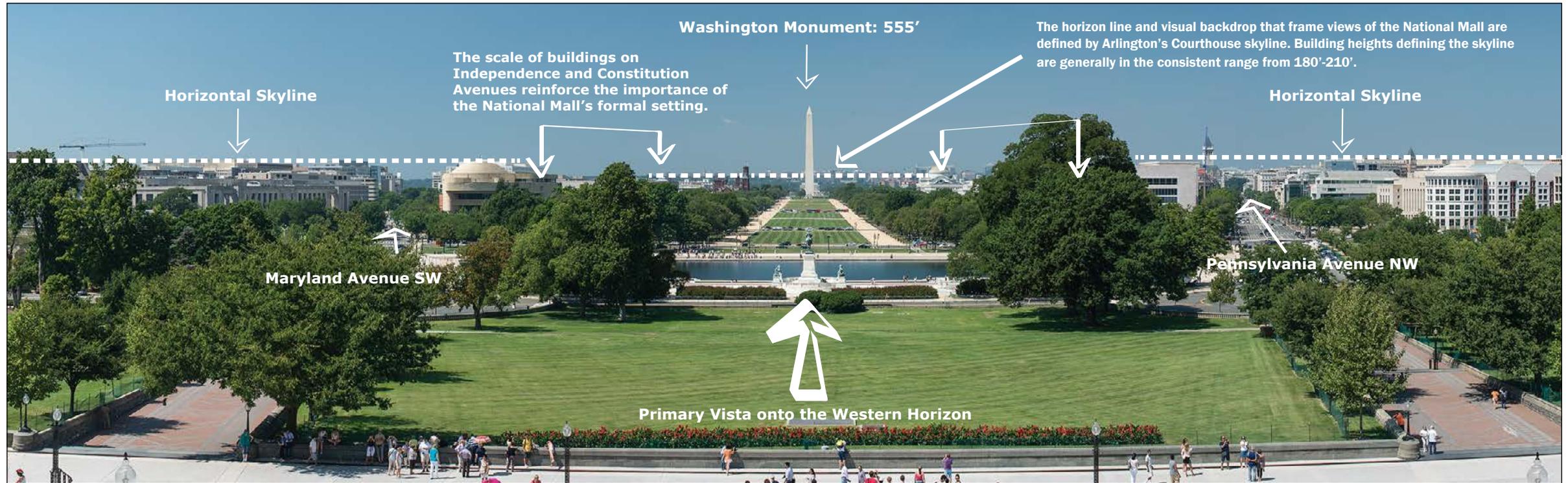
This inventory includes streets and geographic regions within Washington that warrant the most detailed planning and urban design guidance. These include views to and from the monumental core, specifically to and from the U.S. Capitol and White House. The character and quality of these iconic views are the most critical because they contribute to the visual hierarchy of buildings and spaces that symbolize the capital city.

This category of viewsheds will receive the most detailed level of guidance related to viewshed maintenance.

Preeminent Viewsheds

1. Primary East-West Vista from the National Mall to the Western Horizon
2. Primary North-South Vista from the White House to the Southern Horizon
3. North Capitol Street Linear View from the U.S. Capitol to Michigan Avenue, NW
4. South Capitol Street Linear View from the U.S. Capitol to Potomac Avenue, SW
5. 16th Street, NW Linear View from the White House to Euclid Street, NW
6. Maryland Avenue, SW Linear View from the U.S. Capitol to the Tidal Basin
7. Maryland Avenue, NE Linear View from the U.S. Capitol to the National Arboretum
8. Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Linear View from the U.S. Capitol to the White House Grounds
9. Pennsylvania Avenue, SE Linear View from the U.S. Capitol to Southern Avenue, SE
10. East Capitol Street from the U.S. Capitol to Southern Avenue, SE
11. New Jersey Avenue, NW Linear View from the U.S. Capitol to Florida Avenue, NW
12. New Jersey Avenue, SE Linear View from the U.S. Capitol to Tingey Street, SE

Preeminent Viewshed: Primary East-West Vista



Existing Conditions

This primary vista is listed in the NRHP, and it provides a strong visual connection from the U.S. Capitol along the National Mall to the Lincoln Memorial and westward to the horizon. This axis is an essential orientation point that establishes the spatial order of the city and contributes to the visual quality within the monumental core. Arlington County, Virginia plays an integral role in the urban design framework of the National Capital Region, including this particular vista. The Courthouse neighborhood is sited along the Arlington Ridge, a natural feature that functions as the visual backdrop to the East-West vista. Viewed from the National Mall, an interspersed tree-line complements Courthouse's consistent, low-lying urban wall and frames westward views from the Mall. While the east-west axis is no longer a strictly scenic vista, the Courthouse is perceived today as fairly uniform, without individual vertical

elements interrupting the skyline and competing with the visual frame around the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument. A wider perspective of the east-west axis includes a sharper transition to the building masses of the Rosslyn skyline to the north. This shift from scenic to urban backdrop presents a challenge for assessing the character and future maintenance of this major vista.

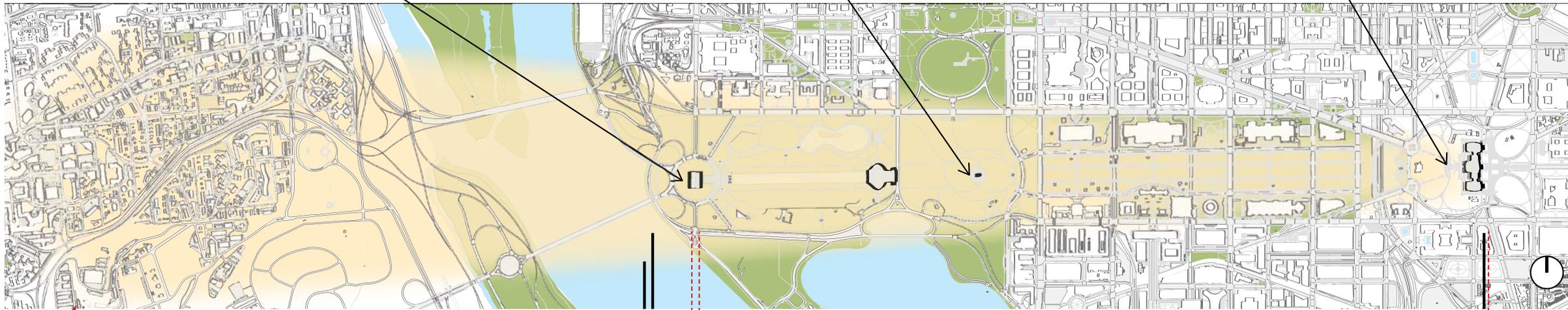
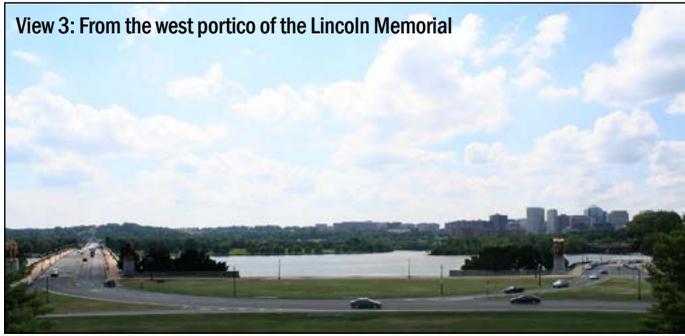
Focal Point: The National Mall onto the Horizon

This vista includes the National Mall, one of the most important civic and cultural spaces in the nation. The U.S. Capitol, Washington Monument, and Lincoln Memorial are the most visually prominent structures within a panoramic, scenic setting of the National Mall and surrounding landscapes. The form and character of the built and natural elements within and around this vista are important parts

of how the public experiences some of the nation's most beloved memorials and public buildings. Additional important resources located within this vista include Arlington National Cemetery and the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

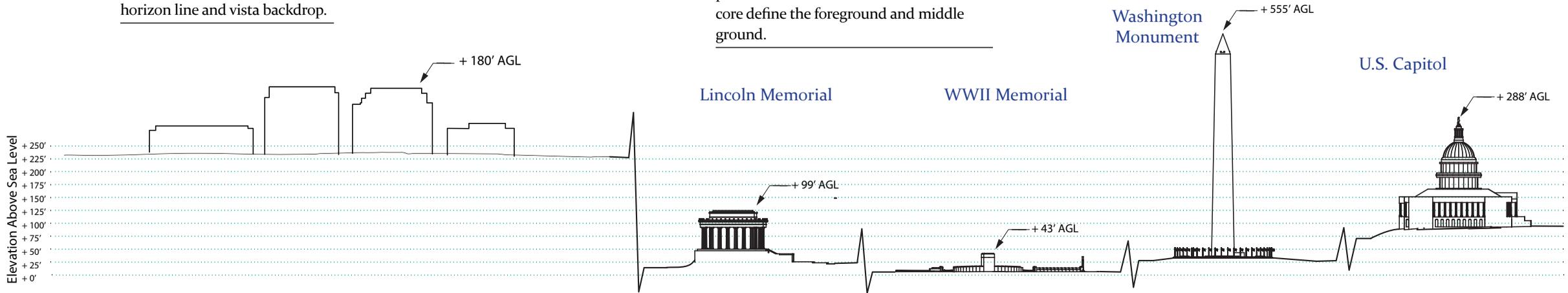
Policy Direction

Prepare urban design studies to assess the visual quality of the viewshed cones that extend outward from the primary vistas along the western and southern axes of the National Mall. Encourage and work with local jurisdictions to prepare and implement urban design strategies to address major land use transitions and protect the visual quality of viewsheds from the National Mall, in consideration of both the built and natural elements.



The Arlington Ridge and its urban landscape defines the horizon line and vista backdrop.

The National Mall and the visually prominent structures of the monumental core define the foreground and middle ground.



Preeminent Viewshed: North Capitol Street

Existing Conditions

North Capitol Street is a primary axis and a major civic gateway into the monumental core. Its topography descends steadily in grade starting roughly at Florida Avenue heading south towards the U.S. Capitol. Today, building height generally tapers off moving outward from the bowl toward the topographic ridge. This relationship between natural topography and building scale strongly influences perceptions about the scale of the U.S. Capitol dome and its preeminence within the pedestrian's line of site. This affords the U.S. Capitol dome a generous sky backdrop and visual preeminence when viewed well north of the L'Enfant City. Street lighting and other infrastructure along North Capitol within the L'Enfant City is designed with limited intrusion into the right of way. A significant view of the U.S. Capitol Dome terminates directly north of the North Capitol Street intersection with Michigan Avenue, NW.

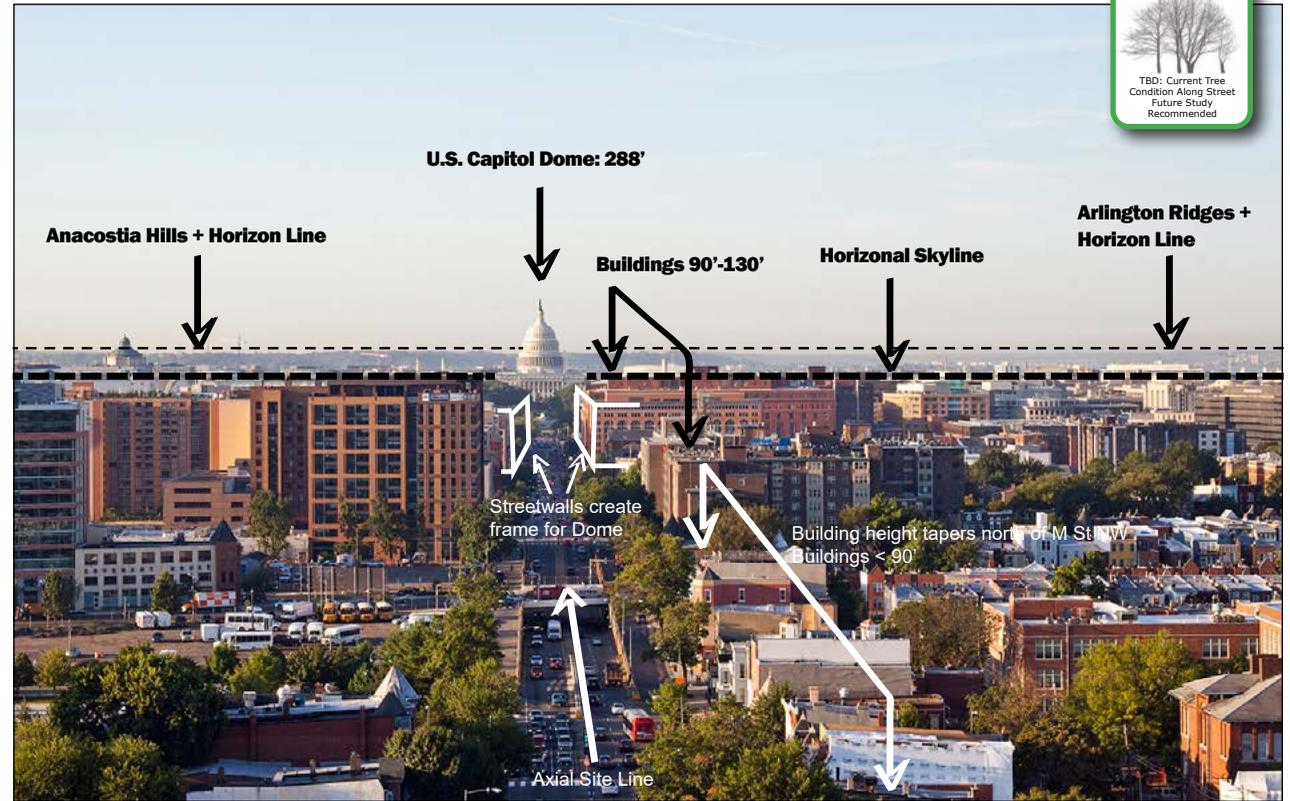
From a planning perspective, North Capitol Street is at a pivotal point in its development that prompts several complex urban design questions. Today, North Capitol is at the confluence of the new, higher densities of the NoMa commercial neighborhood to the east, and lower densities that have historically characterized this area on the west. Visual models illustrate the undefined edges along each of the blocks within the corridor under zoning, weakening the composition among buildings on either side of the street. This results in the impression that North Capitol is defined by the edges of the areas around it, rather than as a distinctive street unto itself.

Focal Point: U.S. Capitol Dome

The U.S. Capitol was intentionally situated on an elevated location within the topographic bowl to reflect its preeminence and lasting significance to the country as the People's House. Its preeminence is reinforced by the U.S. Capitol's location along a primary symbolic axis with respect to the city's system of streets and public spaces. Today, the U.S. Capitol dome itself is a defining symbol within the cityscape and contributes to the city's distinctive skyline. Skyline and street-level linear views to and from the U.S. Capitol are an essential and distinguishing element of Washington's form and character.

Policy Direction:

- Specific recommendations for building mass south of K Street with respect to block-level symmetry and the visual frame around the U.S. Capitol.
- Additional urban design study to develop a distinct, cohesive corridor with urban design strategies that address these important transitions in building scale with respect to topography, reinforce the quality of views to the U.S. Capitol, and promote the potential of this street as one of the city's most important gateways.
- Additional urban study to address tree canopy conditions and the ground floor retail program to improve the pedestrian experience.



Considerations for Viewshed Maintenance

- Consider preserving existing building height along the blocks immediately adjacent to the U.S. Capitol Building. This allows for “breathing room” that reinforces the visual frame around these structures. In particular, building heights south of K Street should be maintained through massing and setbacks to preserve the established landscape-oriented frame.
- Consider height, mass, and bulk of new development in the foreground, middle ground, and background to maintain the relationship between the U.S. Capitol dome and the sky backdrop.
- Consider whether the roofline/cornice line treatment of new buildings appropriately frames the viewshed corridor along North Capitol Street.
- Consider the visual impact of public infrastructure and landscaping on the view corridor.

Viewshed Extent Plan View



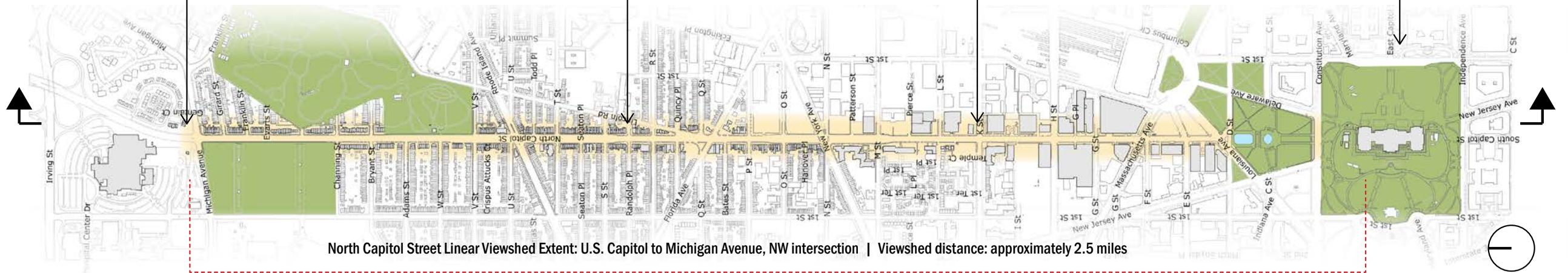
View 2: North Capitol Street at Randolph Place, NW



View 1: North Capitol Street, NW at K Street, NW

A significant view of the U.S. Capitol terminates at the Michigan Avenue, NW intersection

Focal Point:
U.S. Capitol Dome



North Capitol Street Linear Viewshed Extent: U.S. Capitol to Michigan Avenue, NW intersection | Viewshed distance: approximately 2.5 miles

Michigan Avenue

Randolph Street

New York Avenue

K Street

Viewshed Extent Street Section Facing East

1/2 Mile

Preeminent Viewshed: South Capitol Street

Existing Conditions

South Capitol Street is a primary axis and gateway into Washington. Historically, there was a tremendous gap between the potential of this corridor and its condition. Most particularly, the Southwest/Southeast Freeway severs the urban fabric along South Capitol Street and the view to the U.S. Capitol. Spotty development and empty lots along some blocks have also historically characterized the area. However, new development, such as the baseball stadium, a handful of buildings, and the proposed new Frederick Douglass Bridge are linking downtown to the waterfront and reclaiming South Capitol as an important place for both the future growth of the District and as a monumental civic boulevard. Building height and density varies greatly leaving opportunity to develop and reinforce the viewshed corridor along this street. However, South Capitol's potential to achieve more than the appearance of a vehicular thoroughfare depends on future streetscape and infrastructure improvements.

Focal Point: U.S. Capitol Dome

The U.S. Capitol was intentionally situated on an elevated location within the topographic bowl to reflect its preeminence and lasting significance to the country as the people's house. Its preeminence is reinforced by the U.S. Capitol's location along a primary symbolic axis with respect to the city's system of streets and public spaces. Today, the U.S. Capitol Dome is a defining symbol within the cityscape and contributes to the city's distinctive skyline. Skyline and street-level linear views to and from the U.S. Capitol are an essential and distinguishing element of Washington's form and character.

Policy Direction:

- Specific recommendations for building mass between M Street and the freeway, and north to the U.S. Capitol.
- Recommend revisiting the *South Capitol Street Urban Design Study (2003)* and developing strategies to address major infrastructure, land use, and public realm issues. Goals include developing the street as a distinct, cohesive corridor with urban design strategies that reinforce the quality of views to the U.S. Capitol, promote the potential of this street as one of the city's most important gateways, and address tree canopy conditions and ground floor retail programs, which would greatly impact the pedestrian experience.
- Recommend further urban design and programming study of the planned South Capitol Street terminus (the oval) at the Anacostia River.



Considerations for Viewshed Maintenance

- Address the nature of transportation improvements that should be undertaken in the South Capitol Street corridor to improve visibility of the U.S. Capitol currently hindered by highway infrastructure.
- Address the visual impact of public infrastructure and landscaping on the view corridor.
- Consider maintaining the existing building height along the blocks immediately adjacent to the U.S. Capitol. This allows for “breathing room” that reinforces the significance of the dome.
- Consider height, mass, bulk of new development in the foreground, middle ground, and background to maintain the relationship between the Capitol dome and the sky backdrop.
- Consider whether the roofline/cornice line treatment of new buildings appropriately frames the viewshed corridor along South Capitol Street.

Viewshed Extent Plan View

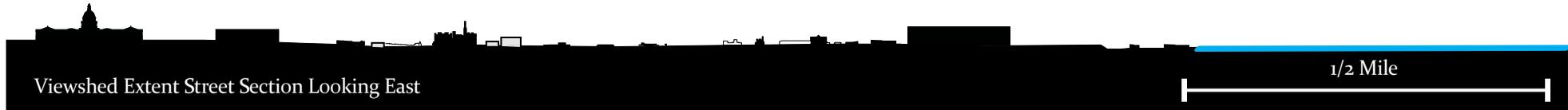
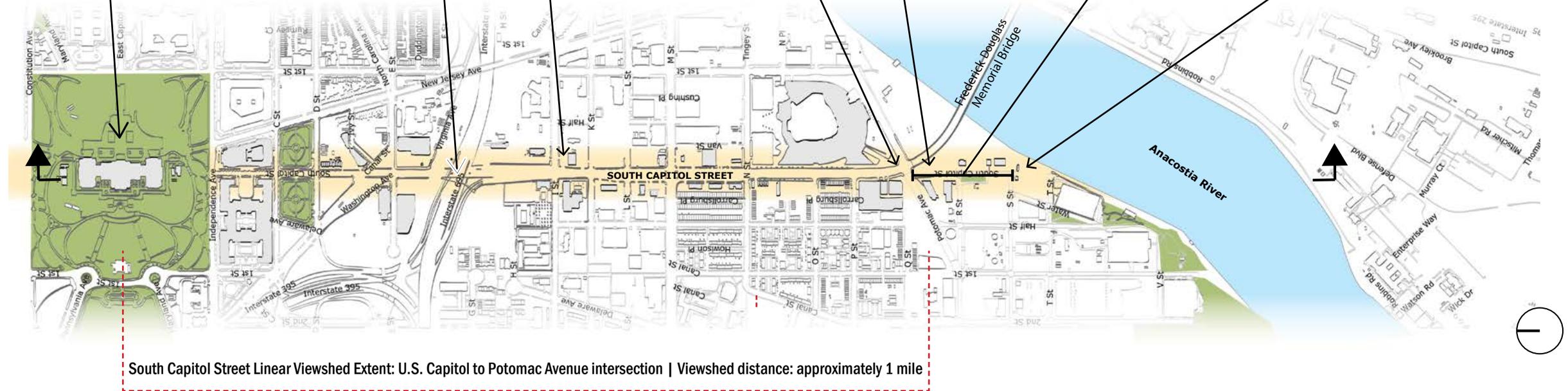


**Focal Point:
U.S. Capitol Dome**

Highway infrastructure interrupts the linear view to the U.S. Capitol

A significant view of the U.S. Capitol terminates at the Potomac Avenue intersection

The portion of South Capitol Street that extends south beyond the Potomac Avenue intersection is treated as an alley way.



Preeminent Viewshed: 16th Street

Existing Conditions

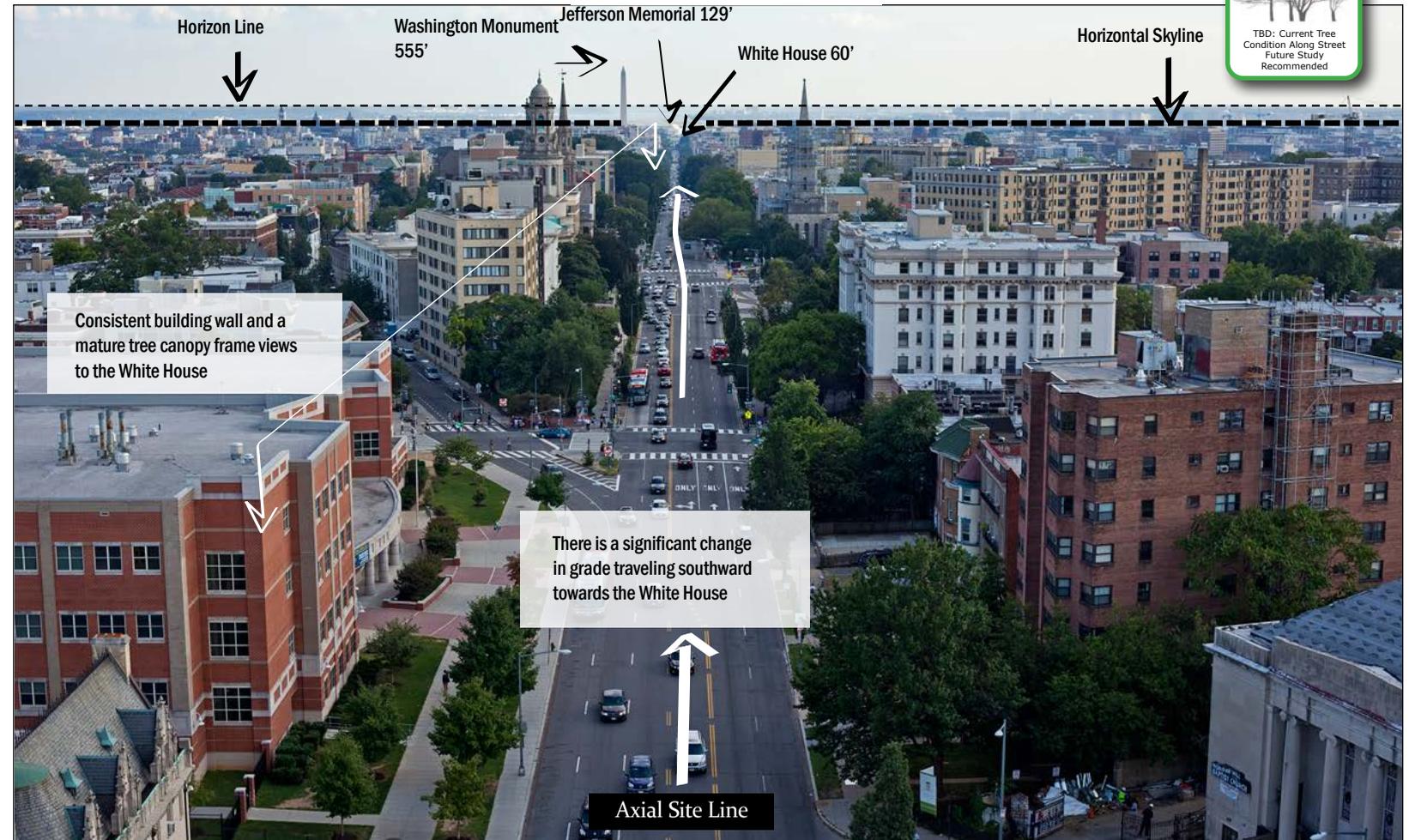
16th Street, NW is a civic gateway on axis with the White House. It is also the spine of an important historic residential neighborhood. Of all of the preeminent viewsheds within this section, it is the most cohesive and well-maintained. A mixture of wooded buffers, open lawns, and residential uses border the street north of Meridian Hill Park along 16th Street. South of Meridian Hill Park the scale of buildings transitions into higher density residential, commercial, and office uses and is generally symmetrical on a block-level. There are significant views of the White House where 16th Street crosses the escarpment (approximately at Euclid Street, NW) leading into the L'Enfant City and continuing southward. Minor improvements, such as tree pruning, may enhance the quality of this viewshed. One important land use issue with potential urban design impacts on the quality of this viewshed is the existing zoning and building height of a single parcel just north of the White House. If built to full potential at 130 feet, this building may disrupt the streetwall and diminish the appearance of the White House. Additional visual analysis is required to assess impacts and propose urban design strategies.

Focal Point: White House

The White House and grounds are symbol's of the executive branch of the U.S. government and are located at an important orientation point within the city plan, where they are connected to the U.S. Capitol from Pennsylvania Avenue.

Policy Direction

- Recommendations for viewshed maintenance.
- Additional urban design study on the blocks immediately adjacent to the White House.



Considerations for Viewshed Maintenance:

- Consider height, mass, bulk of new development in the foreground, middle ground, and background to maintain the visual prominence of the White House. These elements are particularly critical along this view corridor as the White House is smaller in scale than many of the buildings in the immediate context.
- Consider whether the roofline/cornice line treatment of new buildings appropriately frames the viewshed corridor along 16th Street, NW.
- Consider the visual impact of public infrastructure and landscaping on the view corridor.
- Consider a streetscape plan, including tree canopy.

Viewshed Extent Plan View



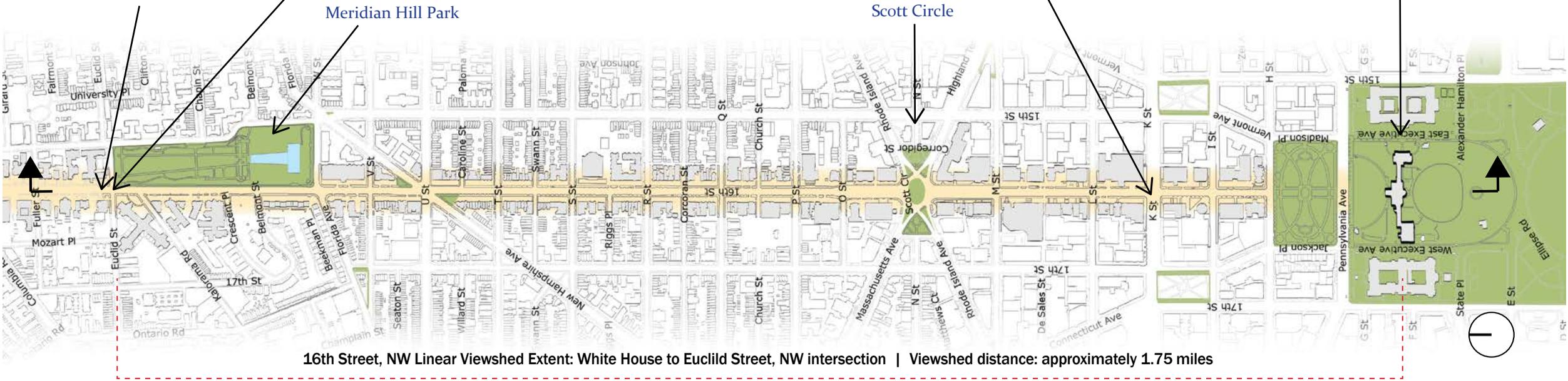
View 2 : 16th Street, NW at Euclid Street, NW



View 1 : 16th Street, NW at K Street, NW

A significant view of the White House terminates at the Euclid Street, NW intersection.

**Focal Point:
White House**





Existing Conditions

Pennsylvania Avenue, NW between the White House and U.S. Capitol is one of the most significant and historic thoroughfares of the nation, physically and symbolically connecting the legislative and executive branches of government. The avenue's south side is dominated by the Federal Triangle's neoclassical buildings, home to federal agency headquarters and the District's city hall. It has a consistent building wall with setbacks approximately 25 feet from the curb. The north side of the corridor is flanked by large scale commercial/office buildings of varying architectural styles and time periods with setbacks ranging from 25–75 feet from the curb. Both sides reinforce the viewshed through consistent building heights and the use of a compatible street tree canopy. Most of the year, this critical streetscape feature forms the viewshed, serving as the primary vertical element.

The avenue serves local, regional, and national needs as a ceremonial promenade, a place for First Amendment activities, and a downtown event space. Pennsylvania Avenue is also an important link between the U.S. Capitol and the White House; between the formal settings of the National Mall and Federal Triangle to the south; and the central business district and Penn Quarter to the north.

A major redevelopment effort led by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) from the 1970's to the 1990's reshaped the design and character of the street and surrounding neighborhood. This effort set the stage for the rebirth of downtown Washington. The PADC Plan and Square Guidelines currently guide the character and development of the avenue. The National Park Service's [Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic](#)

[Site Management Plan](#)¹⁶ also provides policy guidance on character, symbolism, and maintenance of the viewshed.

Today, Pennsylvania Avenue is confronting challenges related to aging infrastructure and maintenance, and the lack of vibrant streetscape and programming properly integrated into the greater neighborhood. These impact site conditions that shape the quality of this viewshed and the everyday experiences of people along the Avenue.

Focal Point: U.S. Capitol Dome

Skyline and street-level linear views to and from the U.S. Capitol are an essential and distinguishing element of Washington's form and character. The U.S. Capitol was intentionally situated on an elevated location to reflect its preeminence and lasting significance to the country as the People's House. Its preeminence is reinforced as the center of the cross axis in the city plan. Today, the U.S. Capitol dome is a defining symbol within the cityscape and contributes to the city's distinctive skyline.

Focal Point: White House Grounds and President's Park

The White House Grounds serve as the western terminus of the central section of Pennsylvania Avenue. The avenue once continued west as E Street, past the Ellipse and through the Foggy Bottom neighborhood. After 9/11, E Street was closed to vehicular traffic through the grounds. This significantly impacts vehicular traffic along the Avenue's central section, and creates an imposing (but pedestrian-accessible) visual barrier of perimeter security elements.

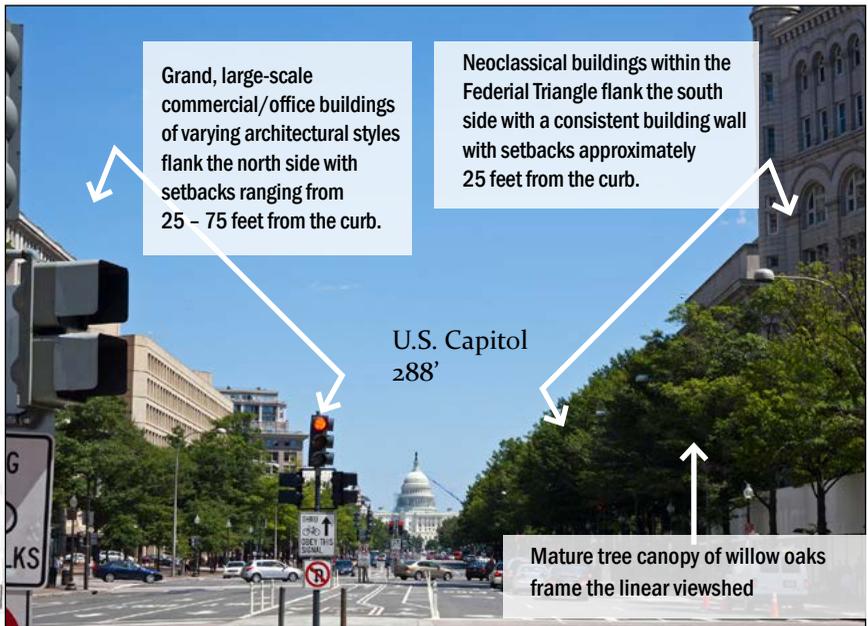
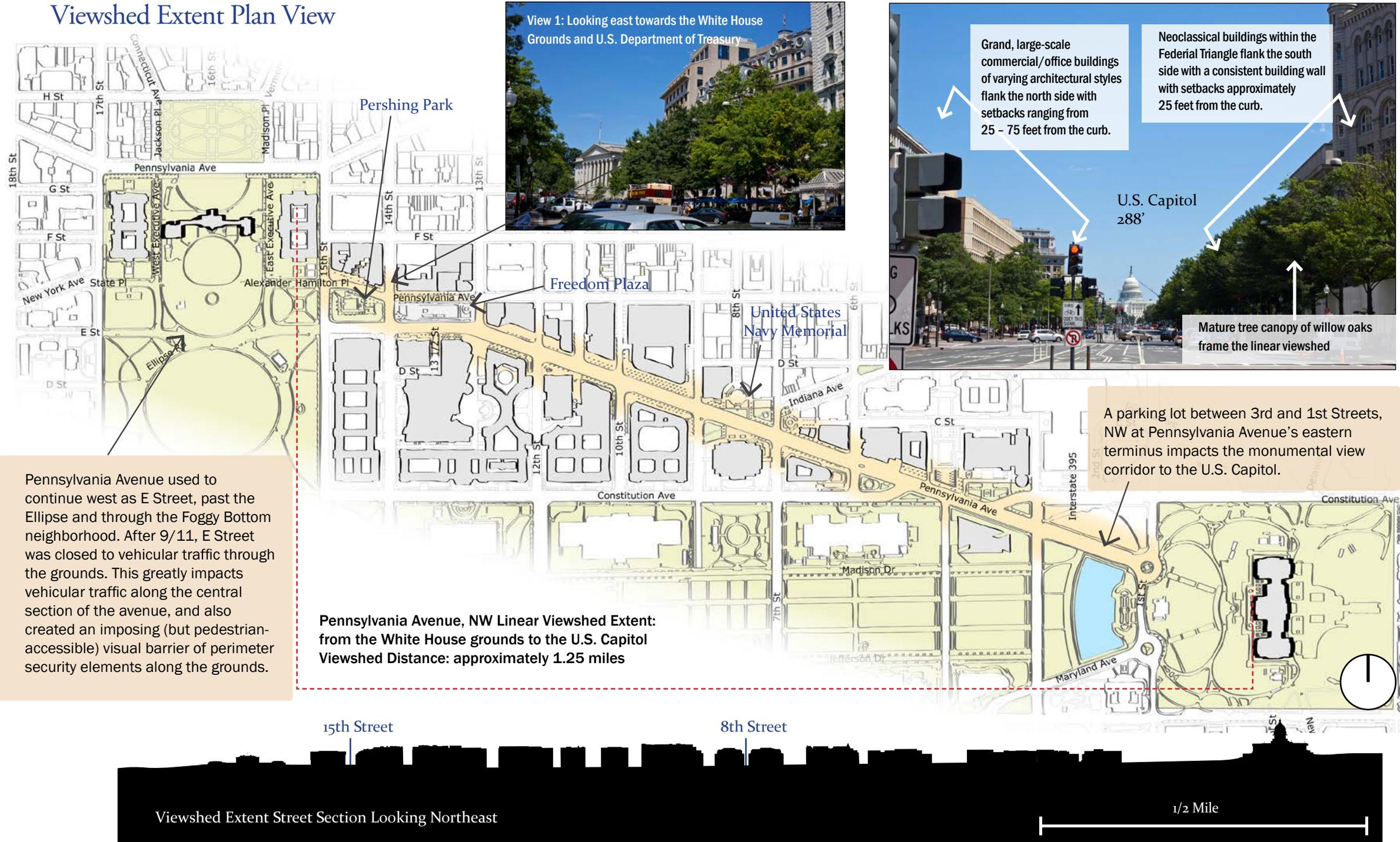
Policy Direction

- Address any new vision to reinforce Pennsylvania Avenue's national and local roles in a future update.
- Consider strategies and best practices for long-term maintenance in programming and urban design to reinforce viewsheds.
- Distinguish the programmatic role of the avenue from the National Mall in ways that celebrate/maximize the view.
- Consider ways to maximize pedestrian accessibility to experience the viewshed.

Considerations for Viewshed Maintenance

- Consider maintaining the balance and symmetry of building mass along the entire avenue. This allows for "breathing room" that reinforces the dome's significance.
- Consider height, mass, bulk, and building setbacks of new development in the foreground, middle ground, and background to maintain the relationship between the Capitol dome and the sky backdrop.
- Consider opportunities to reinforce the primary tree canopy and building walls that frame views toward the U.S. Capitol.
- Consider how the roofline/cornice line treatment of new buildings respect the established line of Federal Triangle buildings and appropriately frame the viewshed corridor toward the U.S. Capitol.
- Consider the visual impact of public infrastructure and landscaping on the view corridor.
- Consider how the viewshed is reinforced through a consistent design and visual relationship between the U.S. Capitol and White House grounds if a new public realm design (including streetscape and parks) is developed.

Viewshed Extent Plan View



Pennsylvania Avenue used to continue west as E Street, past the Ellipse and through the Foggy Bottom neighborhood. After 9/11, E Street was closed to vehicular traffic through the grounds. This greatly impacts vehicular traffic along the central section of the avenue, and also created an imposing (but pedestrian-accessible) visual barrier of perimeter security elements along the grounds.

Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Linear Viewshed Extent:
from the White House grounds to the U.S. Capitol
Viewshed Distance: approximately 1.25 miles

A parking lot between 3rd and 1st Streets, NW at Pennsylvania Avenue's eastern terminus impacts the monumental view corridor to the U.S. Capitol.



Preeminent Viewshed Inventory: Maryland Avenue, SW

Existing Conditions

Maryland Avenue, SW is a symbolically important avenue radiating from the U.S. Capitol. Although Maryland Avenue, SW is different in character, it is related in geometry and location to Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. This important street visually links the U.S. Capitol, federal reservations, and open spaces, the Jefferson Memorial, and the waterfront. However, the sunken CSX rail line currently dominates a significant portion of the street. This railroad infrastructure disrupts the urban fabric and diminishes Maryland Avenue's streetscape quality.

Focal Point: U.S. Capitol Dome

The U.S. Capitol was intentionally situated on an elevated location to reflect its preeminence and lasting significance to the country as the People's House. Its preeminence is reinforced by the U.S. Capitol's location along a primary symbolic axis with respect to the city plan. Today, the U.S. Capitol dome is a defining symbol within the cityscape and contributes to the city's distinctive skyline. Skyline and street-level linear views to and from the Capitol are an essential and distinguishing element of Washington's form and character.

Policy Direction:

- Address transportation infrastructure.
- Implement strategies to improve the avenue's public realm as found in the *SW Ecodistrict Plan* and the DC Office of Planning's *Maryland Avenue, SW Small Area Plan*.

Considerations for Viewshed Maintenance

- Address the nature of development and transportation improvements that could restore the street surface at-grade to improve visibility of the U.S. Capitol that is partially hindered by railway infrastructure.
- Consider opportunities to reinforce the streetwall that frames views toward the U.S. Capitol.
- Consider whether the roofline/cornice line treatment of new buildings appropriately frames the viewshed corridor along Maryland Avenue.
- Consider the visual impact of public infrastructure and landscaping on the view corridor.

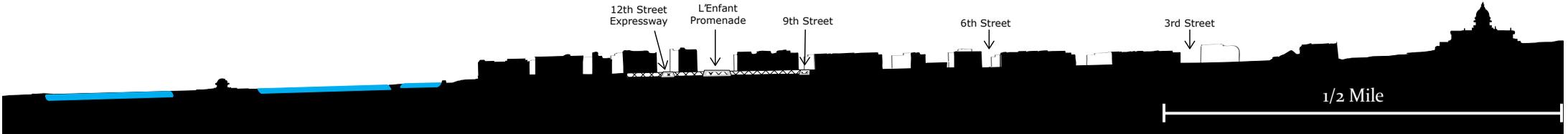
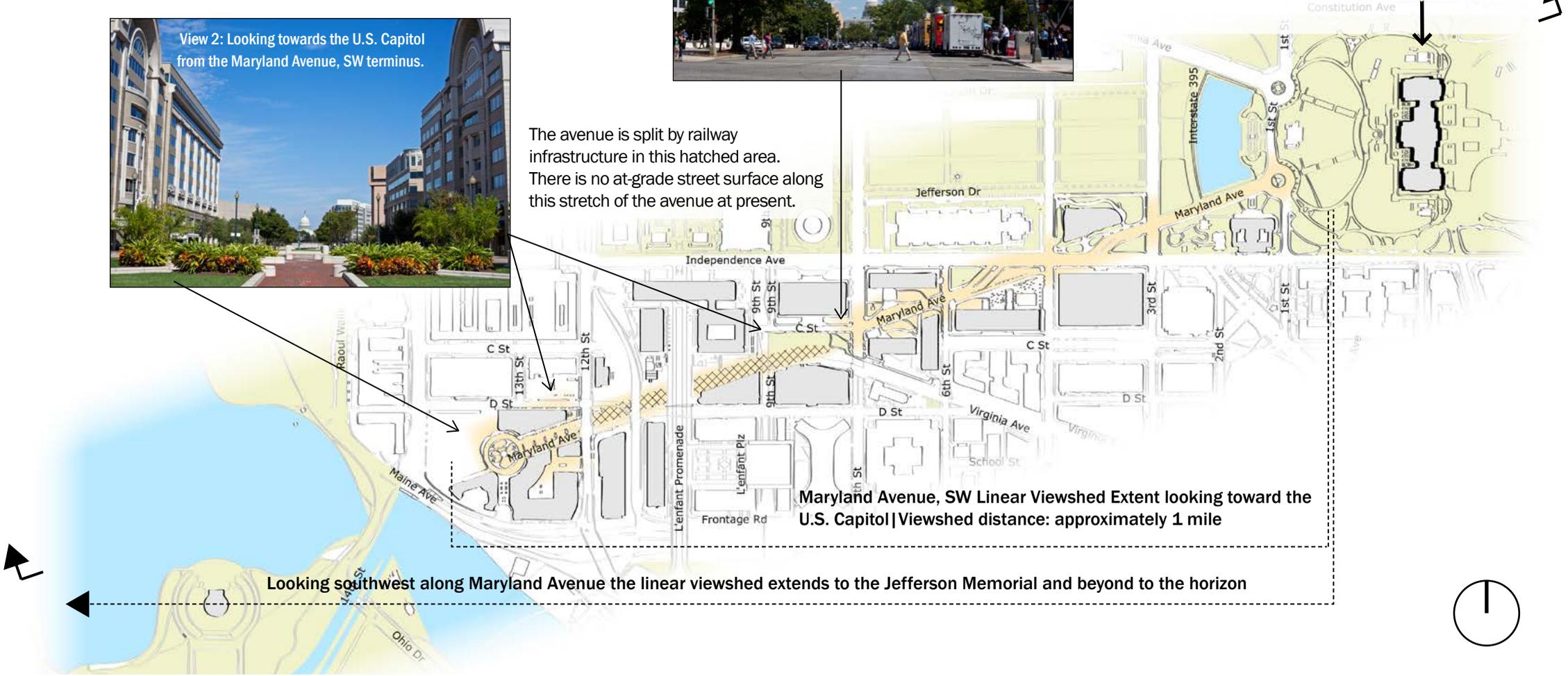


Viewshed Extent Plan View



**Focal Point:
U.S. Capitol**

The avenue is split by railway infrastructure in this hatched area. There is no at-grade street surface along this stretch of the avenue at present.



Preeminent Viewsheds: Future Work and Action Items

The following viewsheds require further study to assess their existing conditions and opportunities to reinforce their visual quality. While these viewsheds are all similar in significance, each viewshed presents a unique condition that requires individual assessment.

Policy Direction

The Urban Design Element includes an action item to address further study and encourage local jurisdictions to study and prepare urban design strategies to address and protect the visual quality of these viewsheds.

Viewshed: North-South Primary Vista

Existing Conditions

This Primary Vista, as listed in the NRHP, provides the strong visual connection from the White House along the Mall to the Jefferson Memorial and southward to the horizon. This axis is an essential orientation point that establishes the spatial order of the city and visual quality within the monumental core. This vista includes the National Mall, one of the most important civic and cultural spaces in the nation. The White House, Washington Monument, and the Jefferson Memorial, the Tidal Basin, Potomac River, and the Wilson Bridge are the most visually prominent structures within this panoramic, scenic setting.

The form and character of the built and natural elements within and around this vista are important parts of how the public experiences some of our nation's most beloved memorials and public buildings, today and in the future. Arlington County, Virginia plays an integral role in the urban design framework of the National Capital Region, including this particular vista. The Crystal City neighborhood serves as part of the visual backdrop of this primary vista. Additional important resources located within this vista, include the George Washington Memorial Parkway, Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, Pentagon, and Air Force Memorial.

Viewshed: Pennsylvania Avenue, SE

Existing Conditions

Pennsylvania Avenue, SE radiates southeast from the U.S. Capitol across the Anacostia River providing the public with long views of the U.S. Capitol Building. West of the Anacostia River, a mix of commercial and residential uses flanks the Avenue. East of the Anacostia River, low-density development with generous setbacks, and the Fort Circle Parks, flank the Avenue.

Pennsylvania Avenue links together the monumental core, historic neighborhoods, and natural features. The variety of land uses as well as transitions between built and natural features along the avenue presents opportunities and challenges for future development. Further study is needed to assess strategies to reinforce views to nationally and locally significant focal points along the avenue. The District of Columbia Office of Planning has completed a visionary planning study for Pennsylvania Avenue, SE (east of the Anacostia) as part of the "Great Streets" Initiative, which is a multiple agency effort to improve and transform a selection of prominent corridors in Washington.

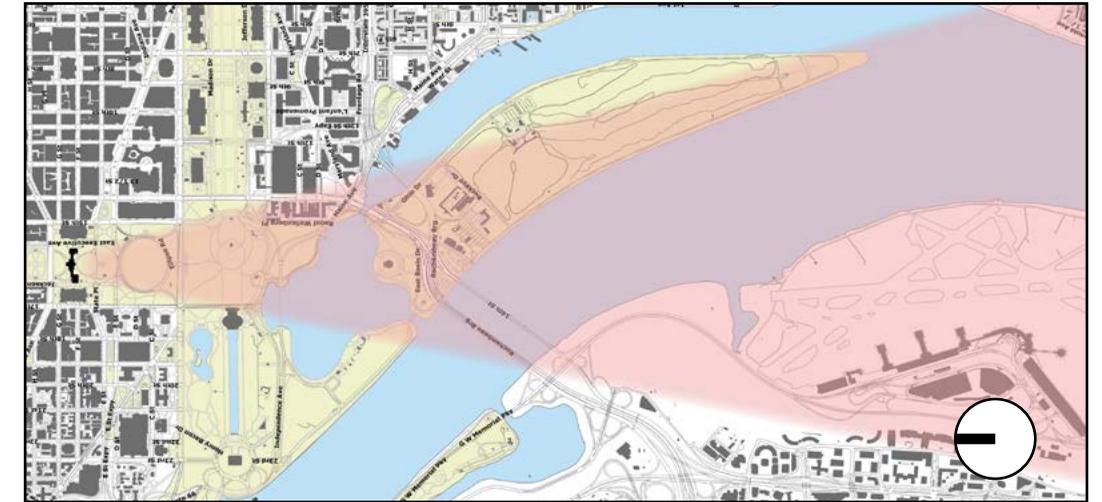
Viewshed: Maryland Avenue, NE

Existing Conditions

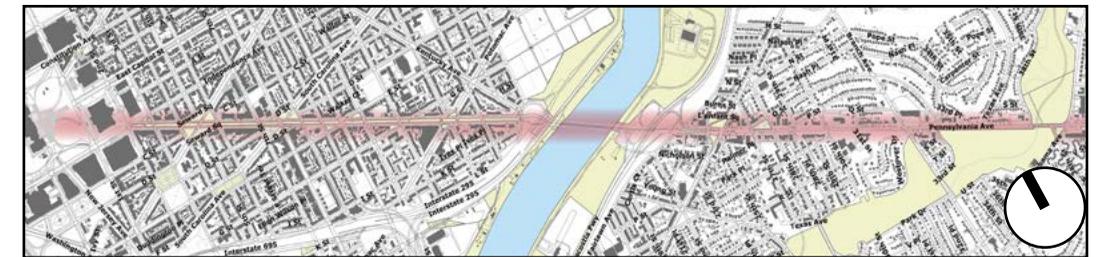
Maryland Avenue, NE radiates from the U.S. Capitol extending northeast to the United States National Arboretum. Maryland Avenue crosses through predominantly residential neighborhoods of small-scale medium density buildings. In addition to the U.S. Capitol, there are several other focal points along the avenue, such as Stanton Park, which is a significant public space.

Further study is necessary to assess the visual quality of the linear view and identify opportunities to maintain the monumental view along this predominantly residential corridor.

North-South Primary Vista

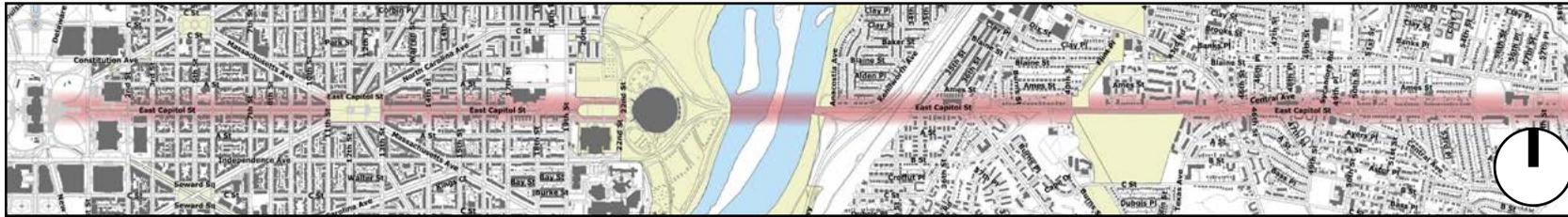


Pennsylvania Avenue, SE



Maryland Avenue, NE





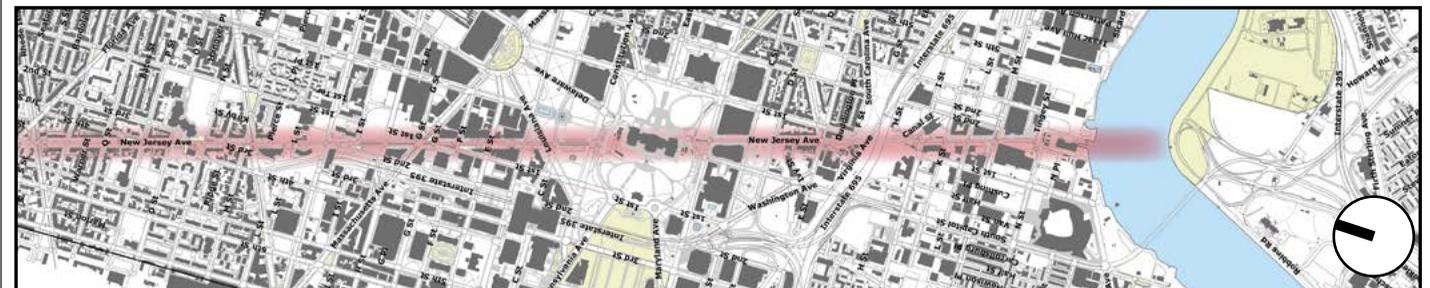
Viewshed: East Capitol Street

Existing Conditions

East Capitol Street radiates eastward from the U.S. Capitol, extending through historic neighborhoods, and crossing the Anacostia River; linking together both nationally and locally significant features. East Capitol Street serves as a gateway into the city that leads to the monumental core. The street provides long views of the U.S. Capitol dome and the Washington Monument creating a visual link between the monumental core and the surrounding established neighborhoods.

Further study is needed to assess strategies to reinforce views to national symbols as well as significant features, such as the Anacostia River and the RFK Stadium site, which both serve as focal points along this prominent street.

New Jersey Avenue, NW+SE



Viewshed: New Jersey Avenue, NW+SE

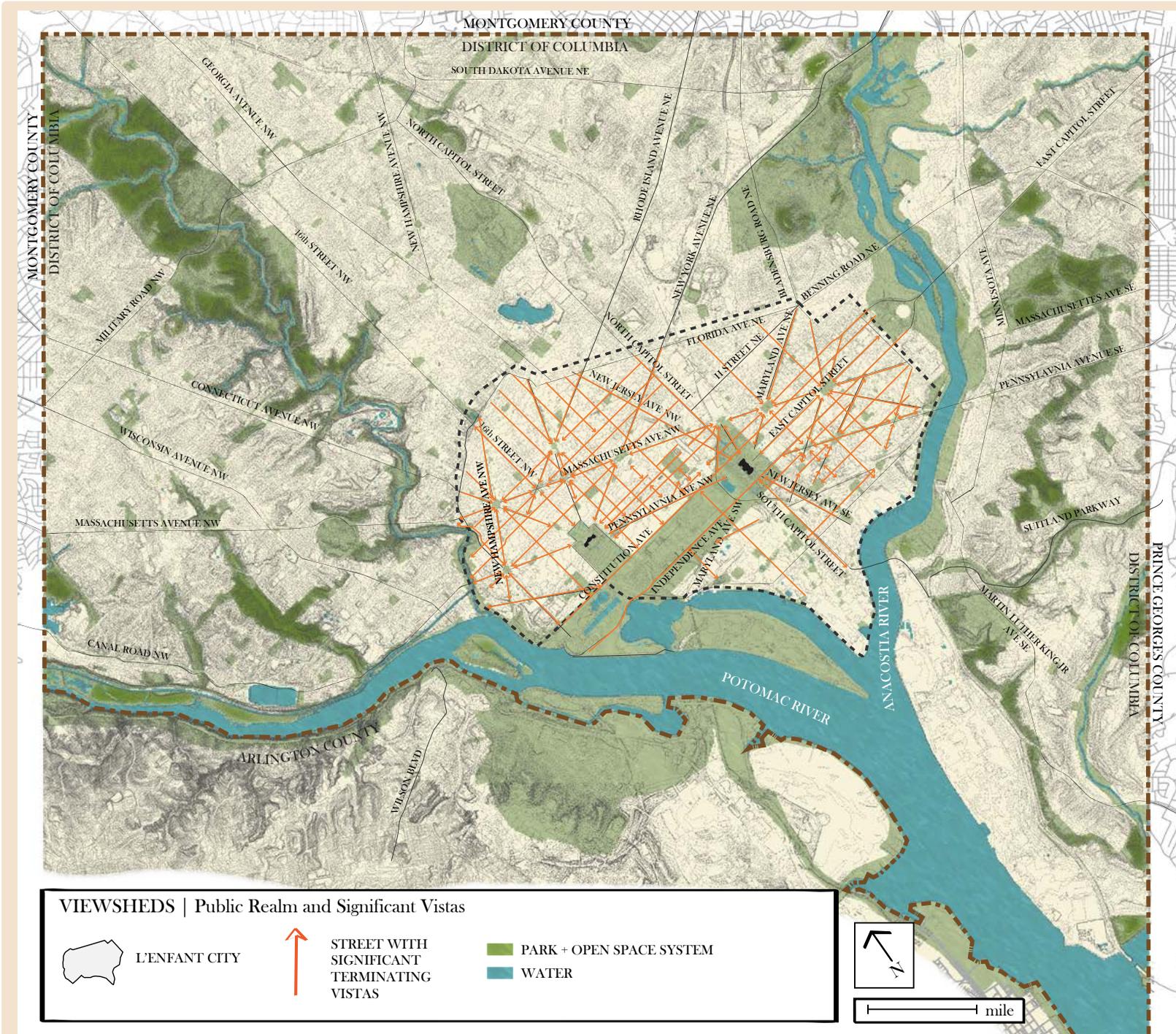
Existing Conditions

New Jersey Avenue radiates from the U.S. Capitol extending to the northwest and to the southeast.

New Jersey Avenue, NW extends north through the historic L'Enfant City and is flanked by relatively dense development and a mature tree canopy, which frames views of the U.S. Capitol. The land use patterns and building scale that frame the avenue's linear view of the U.S. Capitol transition at the intersection of New Jersey and New York Avenues. Large scale commercial office buildings generally flank the avenue to the south of this intersection. Smaller scale residential buildings flank the avenue to the north. Further study is needed to assess the extent and visual quality of views to the U.S. Capitol along the avenue's axis.

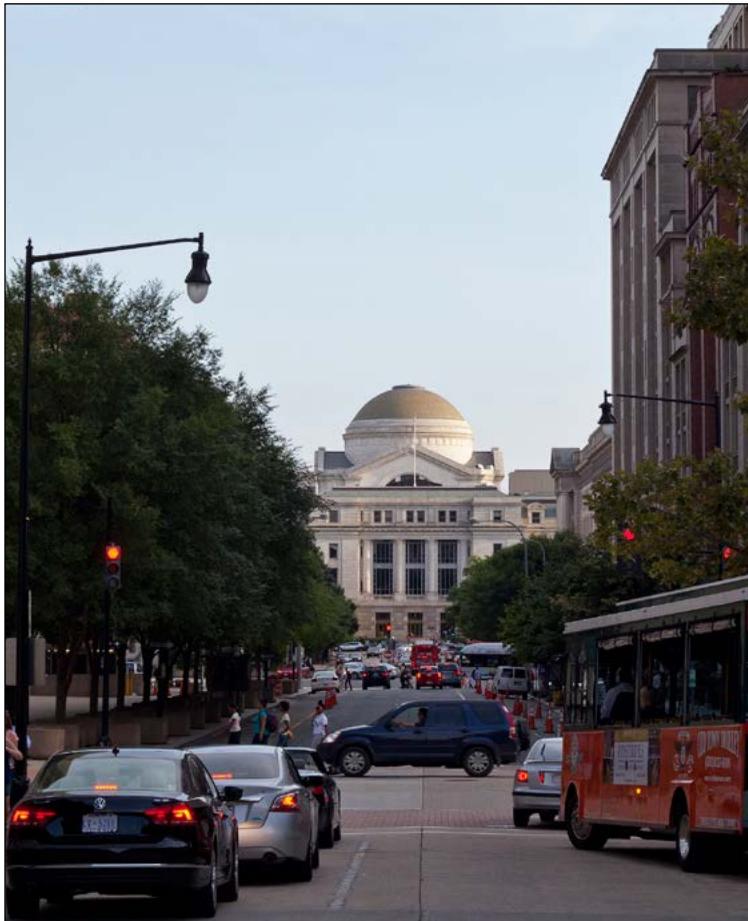
New Jersey Avenue, SW provides views to both the U.S. Capitol, the Anacostia River, and waterfront parkland.

The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative completed visionary planning work addressing the Anacostia Park system (part of the Anacostia Park System) that is on axis with New Jersey Avenue across the Anacostia River. There is a significant visual connection between the Avenue and this particular parkland. Anacostia Waterfront Initiative's work suggests creating a visual extension of the New Jersey Avenue across the Anacostia River. This site can also be incorporated into a memorial entranceway to the historic L'Enfant City from the southern bank of the Anacostia River. This site location offers the opportunity for a major destination memorial, museum, and/or several smaller memorials.



Inventory of Significant Vistas

Connect public spaces, civic buildings, and other civic works within the historic city. The vistas documented on the map include all of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) registration for the L'Enfant Plan.



Significant Vistas along Avenues and Streets

The following inventory list is sourced from the NRHP registration for the L'Enfant Plan of the City of Washington.

1. Vistas Along Radiating Avenues (providing oblique views of major buildings indicating their orientation in the plan, and views between various monuments and parks, as noted):

- Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland Avenues (view toward U.S. Capitol)
- Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Vermont Avenues (view toward White House Precinct)
- Indiana Avenue (view toward Old City Hall)
- Virginia Avenue (view toward Washington Monument)
- Massachusetts, New York Avenues (view toward Central Public Library)
- Louisiana Avenue (view toward Union Station)
- New Hampshire, Rhode Island, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Potomac Avenues

2. Vistas Along Orthogonal Avenues (providing frontal views of major buildings, and flanking or connecting major parks on axis):

- East, North, South Capitol Streets (view toward the U.S. Capitol)
- 16th Street, NW (view toward White House)
- K Street, NW/NE (various parks)
- Constitution and Independence Avenues (view toward U.S. Capitol Grounds, National Mall, Potomac Parks)

3. Vistas Along Major Cross-Axes (providing frontal views of focal buildings)

- 8th Street, NW (view toward Old Patent Office/Archives/Central Public Library)
- 4th Street, SW/ 4th-1/2 Street NW (view toward judiciary square)

4. Tangential Vistas (providing views of major buildings marking the location of cross-axes):

- F Street, NW (view toward Old Patent Office)
- G Street, NW (view toward Old Patent Office/White House Precinct)
- E Street, NW (view toward Judiciary Square)

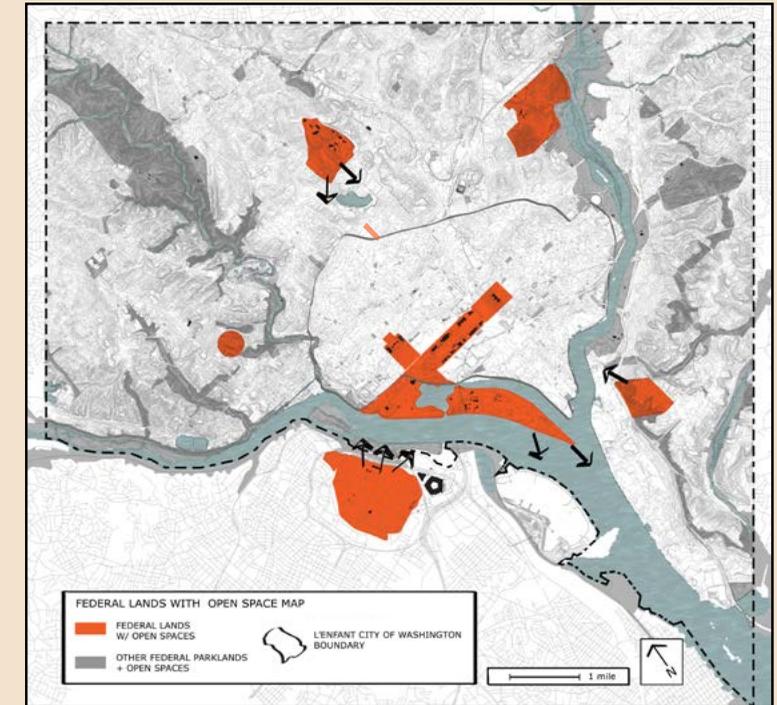
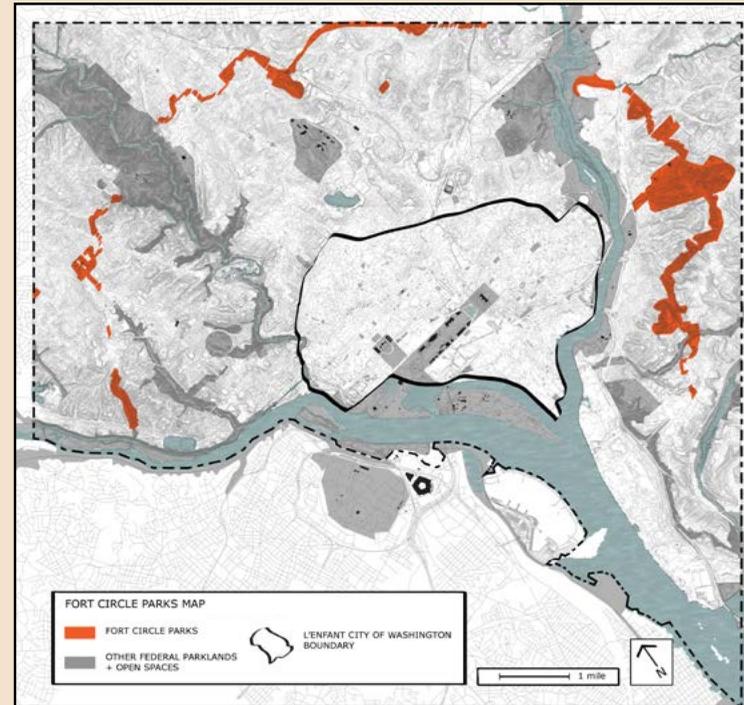
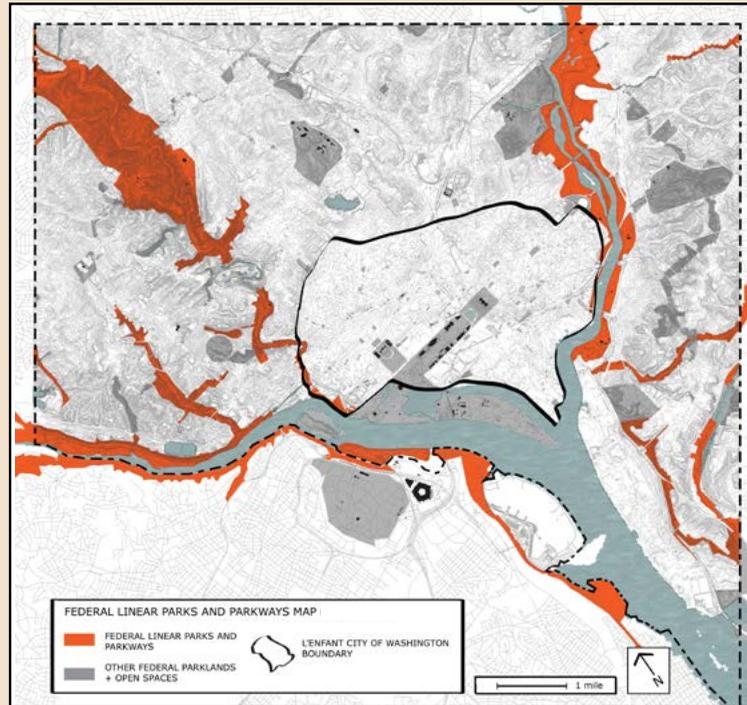
5. Other Frontal Vistas

- 10th Street, SW (view toward Smithsonian Castle)
- 10th Street, NW (view toward Museum of Natural History)
- 6th Street, NW (view toward National Gallery of Art)
- F Street, NW (view toward Treasury Department/Old Executive Office Building)

6. Axial Street Vistas (connecting the center points of parks and circles on the orthogonal grid):

- 23rd Street, NW (view toward Washington Circle/Lincoln Memorial)
- 19th Street, NW (Dupont Circle)
- P Street, NW (Dupont/Logan Circles)
- 13th Street, NW (Logan Circle)
- 14th Street, NW (Thomas Circle)
- M Street, NW (Thomas Circle)
- N Street, NW (Scott Circle)
- 8th Street, NW (Mt Vernon Square)
- C Street, NW (Market Square)
- 5th Street, NE/SE (Stanton Park/Seward Square/Marion Park)
- C Street, NE (Stanton Park)
- C Street, SE (Seward Square)
- 8th Street, SE (Eastern Market Metro Square/Navy Yard)
- D Street, SE (Eastern Market Metro Square)
- 12th Street, NE/SE (Lincoln Park)
- G Street, SE (Garfield Park)
- L Street, SE (Reservation 126)





Scenic Panoramic Viewsheds

While panoramic views may be experienced from many parts of the National Capital Region, a priority are views from publicly accessible federal lands. Some of these lands are strategically located with respect to topography or geography and offer sweeping views of Washington’s skyline, including prominent structures within the Monumental core and its environs.

Public Accessible Federal Lands

This list includes lands with documented views:

1. Arlington National Cemetery: View to the monumental core; general panoramic view of the skyline.
2. St. Elizabeths: View to U.S. Capitol.
3. Armed Forces Retirement Home: View to the U.S. Capitol and Washington Monument.
4. Hains Point: Views of the waterfront, Anacostia Hills, and Arlington Ridge.
5. Frederick Douglass House.

In addition to the federal lands listed above, there are other publicly accessible lands within the city, such as the Fort Circle Parks, Naval Observatory, and National Arboretum that potentially offer panoramic views as well. Additional urban design studies are necessary to assess the visual quality, character, and contributing elements of panoramic viewsheds within the National Capital Region.

Key Questions for Additional Study

- What are the defining characteristics of these vistas?
- How would we define the contextual elements of each viewshed?
- How do these characteristics contribute and frame the city’s urban design framework?
- How can we reinforce these qualities through urban design viewshed policies?
- What other value do these natural places within the city offer from an urban design perspective?
- Are there any publicly accessible federal open spaces that are absent from this list?

Endnotes

1. National Register of Historic Place Nomination Form: L'Enfant Plan of the City of Washington, District of Columbia. October, 1990.
2. Ibid.
3. Draft National Historic Landmark Nomination for The Plan of the City of Washington, pg. 71-72, 1791.
4. **Height of Buildings Act:** <http://www.ncpc.gov/buildingheights>
5. **Height Master Plan:** <http://www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy/>
6. **Schedule of Heights:** [https://www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy/docs/Historical_Background_on_the_Height_of_Buildings_Act_\(draft\).pdf](https://www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy/docs/Historical_Background_on_the_Height_of_Buildings_Act_(draft).pdf)
7. **Public Parking Act of 1870:** <https://comp.ddot.dc.gov/Documents/1870%20Parking%20Act.pdf#pagemode=none>
8. **Extending the Legacy: Planning America's Capital for the 21st Century:** [http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main\(T2\)/Planning\(Tr2\)/ExtendingtheLegacy.html](http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/Planning(Tr2)/ExtendingtheLegacy.html)
9. **Memorials and Museums Master Plan:** [http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main\(T2\)/Planning\(Tr2\)/2MPlan.html](http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/Planning(Tr2)/2MPlan.html)
10. **Monumental Core Framework Plan:** [http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main\(T2\)/Planning\(Tr2\)/FrameworkPlan.html](http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/Planning(Tr2)/FrameworkPlan.html)
11. **SW Ecodistrict Plan:** www.ncpc.gov/swecodistrict
12. **South Capitol Urban Design Street Study:** https://www.ncpc.gov/DocumentDepot/Publications/SouthCap/SouthCap_Part1.pdf
13. **District Department of Transportation Public Realm Design Manual:** <http://ddot.dc.gov/PublicRealmDesignManual>
14. 1888 Congressional Legislation Banning Overhead Wires § 34-1901.01 <http://dcode.org/simple/Title-34/Chapter-19/>
15. National Register of Historic Place Nomination Form, L'Enfant Plan of the City of Washington, District of Columbia. October, 1990.
16. **Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site Management Plan:** http://www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan/Documents/Penn/PAAV_Management_Plan_5-14-2014.pdf