

Southwest Ecodistrict–Maryland Avenue SW Plan Public Meeting Comment Digest

This was the third public scoping meeting for the Southwest Ecodistrict and second public meeting for the Maryland Avenue SW Plan.

May 19, 2011, 6:30 –8:30 p.m.
1100 4th Street, SW (2nd Floor Meeting Room)

DC Office of Planning (OP) Attendees: Geraldine Gardner (Associate Director for Neighborhood Planning), Andrea Limauro (Ward 3 Neighborhood Planner), Tarek Bolden (Ward 1 Neighborhood Planner), Melissa Bird (Ward 6 Neighborhood Planner), Gizachew Andargeh (Ward 7 Neighborhood Planner), Joyce Tsepas (Project Manager)

National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) Attendees: Bill Dowd (Director of Physical Planning), Elizabeth Miller (Project Manager), Will Herbig (Urban Planner), Sarah Moulton, (Urban Planner), Diane Sullivan (Sustainability Planner), Amy Tarce (Urban Planner), Scott Sowers, (Public Affairs Writer)

Consultant Attendees: Ryan Bouma (AECOM), Claire Sale (AECOM), Otto Condon (ZGF), Elizabeth Schulz (ZGF)

Agenda: Sign in 6:30-6:45, Introduction 6:45-7:00
Group Breakout Discussions 7:00 – 8:30
Adjournment 8:30

Meeting Summary: NCPC and OP held a public meeting for the Southwest Ecodistrict and Maryland Avenue SW Plan on May 19, 2011. 58 people attended the meeting, including interested citizens, area residents and neighborhood leaders. At the start of the meeting, Elizabeth Miller and Joyce Tsepas gave an overview of both planning initiatives, the status of where we are in the planning process and the purpose of the meeting –which was also provided in the agenda handout. Goals for both initiatives were also highlighted in the agenda handout. After the overview, breakout groups were formed and NCPC and OP staff received input from the public on the future uses and character of the study area as a sustainable and livable community.

The three breakout groups were organized as stations featuring a discussion about mobility, livability or sustainability. Participants had 30 minutes at each station to listen to a brief orientation and provide feedback on various planning topics. NCPC and OP facilitators asked the public to provide input on the range of activities, amenities, and connections that would improve existing and new streets and open spaces. Comments were noted on input forms, flip boards and by staff note-takers. The following summary is a compilation of the comments that were communicated by participants during breakout discussions. The summary does not include direct quotes and does not represent a consensus. Public comments will be considered throughout plan development along with other inputs like the Comprehensive Plan, the Monumental Core Framework Plan, agency coordination, Task Force and Advisory Committee input, and federal and local policies.

Feedback Summary:

1. **Mobility + Connectivity:** *What vehicular, transit, bike, and pedestrian connection improvements are needed?*

- One of the best assets of this area is its connection to metro, bus, and commuter rail lines. Great transportation options should be utilized and enhanced through revitalization.
- A lack of green space, poor maintenance, limited land uses and unsafe pedestrian connections are the biggest hurdles to mobility.
- The greatest opportunity is to improve walking and biking in the study area. Streets designed for people and bikes, not vehicles, should be planned for as much as possible.
- Southward connections leading from the National Mall need to be improved. 7th and 4th Streets are the main connections to the National Mall for Southwest neighborhood residents. 10th Street also connects to waterfront; it just needs to work better.
- It would be beneficial if Southwest neighborhood residents could walk to the Portals and throughout the study area continuously at the same grade; stairs, gaps and other hurdles should be avoided.
- The management and operations of existing and new open spaces is important to consider so that the public realm is safe, active and clean.
- The only reason for Southwest neighborhood residents to walk through the study area is to use the metro or walk to the National Mall. Introducing new uses, like cultural, retail and residential, is also important to improving mobility. Southwest Waterfront redevelopment coordination is critical.
- Access to L'Enfant Metro needs to be improved by creating a new south entrance pedestrian route from the Southwest neighborhood.

Independence Avenue:

- Independence Avenue should reinforce connections to the waterfront.
- Independence is daunting, wide and is no fun to walk.

L'Enfant Promenade (10th Street):

- 10th Street is an urban disaster. With limited funding opportunities, we should concentrate on making 10th Street improvements –like trees, lighting, shopping and programming.
- You can see the water from 10th Street, but can't figure out how to get there. Visual connections could be improved if the Forrestal building were redeveloped with a pedestrian friendly building.
- 10th Street already bridges the freeway and connects to the waterfront. The goals should be revised to state the psychological barriers and connections that need to be addressed.
- 10th Street offers a great cultural opportunity to commemorate L'Enfant and Banneker, to tell the local story of the foundation of the city. Nodes of interest along 10th Street, vertical elements, a visitor's center, cultural uses and/or an overhead canopy could encourage

pedestrian movement from the National Mall to the 10th Street Overlook/Banneker Park and the waterfront.

10th Street Overlook + Banneker Park + Freeway:

- Improve access to the 10th Street Overlook/Banneker Park from both the National Mall and the waterfront. Southwest Waterfront redevelopment coordination is critical to create access to Banneker Park.
- The freeway is a major concern for the Southwest neighborhood near 10th Street Overlook/Banneker Park. The noise and vastness of the freeway keeps people from crossing it. If it is decked, it should be an opportunity for mixed-use development or park space.
- Maine Avenue and Water Street need connections to the 10th Street Overlook/Banneker Park. Some participants communicated that terracing 10th Street Overlook/Banneker Park would better connect it to the community. However, the concept of a grand stairway or terrace does not address ADA requirements or bike access. Other participants stated that an overpass from the overlook to the waterfront should be considered.

Maryland Avenue, SW:

- Multiple circulation and public realm options for the Avenue should be explored. Participants discussed the potential for Maryland Avenue to be a grand boulevard, like other diagonal streets in the city, an open space with park-like features, or a combination of the two.
- In any scenario, Maryland Avenue should respond to a grand vision. Sidewalks and tree beds should be maximized.
- If the study area is to become a national showcase ecodistrict, then we need to think bigger than traditional vehicular and mobility accommodations.
- Because traffic is not an issue in the study area, there is not a need to prioritize vehicular traffic. Pedestrian comfort, bike lanes and other modes of transit should be prioritized.
- Maryland Avenue was intended to be a monumental diagonal avenue for vehicles, aligned with residential buildings and a tree canopy, to connect parks.
- Maryland Avenue could have a linear park in the middle, like a grand boulevard. However in many U.S. cities, medians are not activated and become wasted space if they are not programmed.
- If Maryland Avenue is reconstructed, there should be a focus to make north-south connections. Fixing the connections of Maryland Avenue to the artificial topography and multi-level intersecting streets is key.

2. Livability: *What would you like to be able to do in this area of the city that is missing today? What specific improvements are needed?*

- The greatest asset of the study area is the proximity to the Mall and the Waterfront.

- Federal security standards prohibit livability and pedestrian access. Dilapidated security measures should be replaced with hardened furniture and landscaped security solutions. Transparency into federal facilities should be encouraged to tell story of agency missions. GSA headquarters modernization should be a model for orienting federal buildings to the street.
- Some vehicular access should be maintained on both Maryland Avenue and 10th Street but priority should be given to pedestrians and bicycles.
- The Southwest neighborhood is family-oriented and lively. Future redevelopment opportunities and uses should respond to a family-oriented theme. Neighborhood serving retail and services should be considered.
- Design guidelines should be established to promote diversity of materials, provide more façade articulation and break down the scale of development.
- Access to light and vistas in Southwest should be preserved. New buildings could step-back from the street, like in Penn Quarter where the fronts of buildings closest to sidewalks retain the historic scale of 2 – 3 story buildings.
- The long-term maintenance of public realm improvements should be addressed in the planning process. Past mistakes of urban renewal should not be replicated. Avoid elements that cause major maintenance problems and lead to dismal conditions.
- If the study area is to remain a federal office location, changes that could make it more livable are to:
 - demolish Forrester building and locate a hotel along Independence;
 - use Penn Quarter as a model for a mixed-use federal neighborhood;
 - consider cultural uses and the arts;
 - add “soft” attractions throughout the study area; and
 - avoid urban renewal architecture and consider breaking up monotonous heights.
- The study area is not ideal for a great increase in residential density, but a sprinkle of housing activity is needed and desired. Avoid high density development like new construction in Southeast near Nationals Park. Plan for both the human and a community scales. Some participants felt that a lower density residential character should be created throughout the study area.
- One challenge to adding residential is that the Southwest neighborhood already has a surplus of unsold condos.
- Tour bus parking on Maine Avenue will need to be addressed through this planning process, as buses negatively impact the Southwest neighborhood. Without buses cluttering the streets, proposed improvements to the ecodistrict will be more successful.
- The sustainable environment of an ecodistrict should also consider healthy body and healthy mind options. Healthy food opportunities through storefronts or kiosks should be considered.
- The uses and design of the ecodistrict should respond to all seasons.

Independence Avenue:

- Independence Avenue is daunting and too wide, with no areas for pedestrian refuge. The unanimated federal character of the area needs to be overcome.
- Build-off of the presence of the museums and animate the street into the night. Create compelling reason to visit or stay beyond traditional office hours. Ground floor retail, benches and pedestrian amenities should be considered.
- The monumental character of the corridor should be maintained while activating with use and public realm enhancements. Fountains and water could help define the character.
- Traditional federal hours are part of the federal city and should be accepted.
- Independence Avenue should be more like to Connecticut Avenue, NW between White House and Hilton.
- Focus on south side on Independence to create a city street not a federal office enclave.
- Find complementary services and retail to augment existing uses and density. Quality retail spaces should be designed, rather than pop-up souvenir shops.
- Use Navy Memorial residential buildings along Pennsylvania Avenue as a model for residential development along a civic Independence Avenue.

L'Enfant Promenade (10th Street):

- The poor maintenance of the Promenade and property along it should be addressed.
- The Smithsonian Castle is a great destination at the north end of 10th Street. This existing anchor is an opportunity to work with.
- Overcome the unforgiving nature of 10th Street and create something grand, but usable. The street should be programmed with a compelling reason to visit or traverse. New amenities and programming should include kiosks, evening markets, night animation, retail anchors, and/or special events. Souvenir kiosks should be avoided and neighborhood serving retail amenities should be considered. 10th Street needs retail character and anchors to make it an interesting destination. It could be Washington's "artwalk".
- L'Enfant Plaza should be revitalized as a green space, rather than a redevelopment site.
- A redeveloped L'Enfant Plaza and decking of freeway are critical to repair previous urban development mistakes. The air rights above freeway should be used to connect the neighborhood and add needed community amenities.
- 10th Street should be thought of as a civic square. It should be an important address and world-class venue.
- The 10th Street viewshed should be protected under any infill or redevelopment scenario. An appropriate terminus should be the Smithsonian Castle to the piers of the Washington Channel.
- 10th Street does not have large vehicular volumes and vehicular access should be limited. The travel width of vehicular lanes on 10th Street should be narrowed, sidewalks should be widened and shade trees should be added. Green space and shade should be prioritized; consider vine and trellis treatments. Impervious areas should be reduced in the public realm

and a green linear park should be considered. A pleasant walking experience should be provided.

10th Street Overlook + Banneker Park + Freeway:

- Terraces can be used to help ecodistrict goals, but they need to address ADA requirements and bike access.
- There is a need to have an active open space like Wilson Plaza at the Reagan Building.
- Banneker Park should be retained as a green space or “great lawn”. By decking the freeway, the park could be enlarged. Millennium Park in Chicago is an example of green decking.
- A visual connection between East Potomac Park and Banneker Park should be considered. Washington Channel is an ultimate visitor destination.
- Many participants stated that an intermodal bus facility at Banneker Park is not desired by Southwest neighborhood residents because it would have negative impacts like air pollution and increased tour bus traffic.
- Acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the Washington Interdependence Council to establish a memorial to Benjamin Banneker at Banneker Park.

Maryland Avenue:

- Because Maryland Avenue is currently not a main vehicular connector, space for vehicles should be limited. The public realm vision for Maryland Avenue should be an active promenade with park elements.
- Some participants expressed a desire for Maryland Avenue to be a pedestrian zone or similar to the 16th Street pedestrian and transit mall in Denver. Other participants stated that an underutilized “pedestrian mall” should be avoided.
- Benches should be provided and hardscape should be limited. Green elements should be maximized. Maryland Avenue should be used as a way to promote the green ecodistrict approach.
- Maryland Avenue should be a place for local traffic only. Textured pavement and other treatments should be utilized to discourage high speed traffic.
- A dynamic mix of uses and retail storefronts could help create a truly usable space. Several participants liked the idea of people living and shopping on a new Maryland Avenue. Programming will dictate the success of a new Maryland Avenue.
- Maryland Avenue should be activated with density and should include hotels, residential, museums, grocery, restaurants and ground floor retail to activate the avenue after 5pm. There is a need for another grocery store. New residential buildings should be targeted to people that currently work in the study area.
- The intersection of Maryland Avenue and 10th Street should be considered for a visitor’s center and dining. The intersection should become an engaging destination. Capitalize on the presence of Banneker Park and L’Enfant Promenade that commemorate two of the cities founding fathers, Banneker and L’Enfant.

3. Sustainability: *To what degree should energy, water, and waste strategies drive land use and design of the community?*

- The study area should be branded as an ecodistrict. There should be interpretive signs throughout the district to educate people about the technologies. It should look like a living laboratory from afar –a green district you can see from the National Cathedral or the top of the Old Post Office Tower.
- The entire study area needs more green space.
- Formal gardens are appropriate for DC. Parks should utilize cutting edge sustainable technology but should still look “tidy” and civic.
- Adding greenery to the concrete walls would enhance the area.
- Green walls may not blend in as well as green roofs. Wind power should be considered on roof tops.
- Green alleyways similar to Chicago’s efforts should be considered.
- Keep Banneker Park green, especially with so much development in the pipeline. If changes to the Banneker site are made, consider the impact on sustainability.
- The addition of parking should be avoided in the study area.
- Consider using the temperature of the river for heating and cooling technology.
- Building green space over the freeway could help meet sustainability goals. Lining the freeway with solar panels is also something that should be considered.
- Consider adding geothermal wells to buildings.

Next Steps for OP:

OP’s consultant, AECOM, will be refining alternatives for Maryland Avenue and developing draft recommendations, including an implementation strategy for the Avenue. The Office of Planning will also be working with our agency partners to develop draft recommendations for community and stakeholder review in July. These recommendations will include a strategy for developing the Avenue and potential infill sites into a well-connected and lively avenue. Information about the Maryland Avenue SW Plan is available on OP’s website at: www.planning.dc.gov. Draft recommendations for Maryland Avenue will be presented for public comment at the final public meeting in July. Please visit OP’s website to confirm meeting time and location.

Next Steps for NCPC:

The Southwest Ecodistrict Task Force’s consultants, ZGF, are developing the sustainability and urban design strategies and revitalization scenarios for the SW Ecodistrict study area. NCPC will be working with ZGF, federal, and local stakeholders to develop draft recommendations for community and stakeholder review in late July. Information about the SW Ecodistrict, including upcoming meetings, past meeting materials, public comment summaries, and links to informational videos and the Public Comment webpage can be found at www.ncpc.gov/swecodistrict.

Questions or Comments:

As a follow-up to the May 19, 2011 meeting, the public was asked to provide comments by June 3, 2011 by contacting Elizabeth Miller (NCPC) or Joyce Tsepas (OP), or by submitting comments online at <http://swecodistrict.ideascale.com/>.

Questions are welcome any time.

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