The nation’s capital provides both symbol and experience, translating the country’s democratic ideals into physical form. This form, and the resulting federal and local development, was shaped by visionary plans. The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital continues this tradition, providing a vision for a 21st century capital by encouraging sustainable, smart development and thoughtful stewardship that inspires and engages visitors and residents, enables the federal government to accomplish its mission, and supports the region’s aspirations.

The National Capital Planning Commission plays an important role in the region’s development, building upon a rich planning legacy and responding to evolving needs and opportunities. Through the Comprehensive Plan’s Federal Elements, the Commission establishes goals and policies that guide federal development and provide a decision-making framework for future initiatives. The Federal Elements highlight the most important issues in national capital planning. This update reflects ongoing interagency and public coordination that identified emerging issues and changing regional conditions, and tested policy directions.

For example, policies in the Federal Workplace Element respond to how transforming technology and productivity goals impact federal employees. The new Urban Design Element reflects extensive technical analyses of the viewsheets, public realm, and physical form that contribute to the capital’s unique identity and character. Sections and policies in the Federal Environment Element respond to guidance on sustainability, climate change, and related issues, such as flooding.

The federal government’s significant regional presence presents extraordinary opportunities to lead by example in urban design; sustainable community development; cultural, historic, and environmental stewardship; and innovation. The Comprehensive Plan’s Federal Elements provide the framing tools to realize these possibilities and ensure that Washington, DC is a great capital and a dynamic, thriving city for generations to come.

L. Preston Bryant, Jr.
Chairman
The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements

Introduction

National capitals have distinct planning and development needs that distinguish them from other cities. While they share many traits with other metropolitan areas, by virtue of their national constituency they have unique qualities and requirements that must be addressed in their planning. The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital (Comprehensive Plan) recognizes that the nation’s capital is more than a concentration of federal employees and facilities. Washington, DC is the symbolic heart of the United States. It provides a sense of permanence and centrality that extends well beyond the National Capital Region (NCR) and the United States’ national borders. It represents national power and promotes the country’s history, traditions, and culture. Through its architecture and physical design, Washington symbolizes national ideals, values, and aspirations.

The Comprehensive Plan is comprised of two parts—the Federal Elements and the District Elements. The Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan is a statement of principles, goals, and planning policies for the growth and development of the national capital during the next 20 years. They address matters related to federal properties and interests in the NCR. The Federal Elements are prepared pursuant to Section 4(a) of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952.

The eight Federal Elements in the Comprehensive Plan include Urban Design, Federal Workplace, Foreign Missions & International Organizations, Transportation, Parks & Open Space, Environment, Historic Preservation, and Visitors & Commemoration. Prior to this current update, the Federal Elements were last adopted in 2004.

The District Elements are prepared by the District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP) on behalf of the Mayor, and adopted by the Council of the District of Columbia. The District’s Comprehensive Plan is organized around thirteen Citywide Elements and ten Area Elements. The Citywide Elements include Framework; Land Use; Transportation; Housing; Environmental Protection; Economic Development; Parks, Recreation and Open Space; Urban Design; Historic Preservation; Community Services and Facilities; Educational Facilities; Infrastructure; and Arts and Culture. The Area Elements include Capitol Hill; Central Washington; Far Northeast and Southeast; Far Southeast/Southwest; Lower Anacostia Waterfront/Near Southwest; Mid-City; Near Northwest; Rock Creek East; Rock Creek West; and Upper Northeast. The First Amendment Cycle for the 2006 Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: District Elements was initiated in 2009. After concluding the approval process the amendments officially became effective in 2011 (text) and 2012 (maps). In early 2016, DCOP will launch the second amendment cycle for the 2006 District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

The National Capital Region includes the District of Columbia; Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland; Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties in Virginia; and all cities within the boundaries of those counties.
The region’s significant federal presence requires extensive planning and coordination. As the central planning agency for the federal government in the NCR, NCPC is charged with planning for the appropriate and orderly development of the NCR and the conservation of its important natural and historical features. The Commission coordinates all federal planning activities in the region, and has several planning functions.

Commission responsibilities include:

- Preparing long-range plans and special studies to ensure the effective functioning of the federal government in the NCR.
- Preparing the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital jointly with the District of Columbia government.
- Approving federal master plans and construction proposals in the District of Columbia, as well as some District government buildings.
- Reviewing proposed District of Columbia master plans, project plans, and capital improvement programs, as well as changes in zoning regulations.
- Reviewing plans for federal buildings and installations in the region.
- Reviewing comprehensive plans, area plans, and capital improvement programs proposed by state, regional, and local agencies for their potential impact on the federal establishment.
- Preparing the Federal Capital Improvements Program, and monitoring and evaluating federal capital investment projects proposed by federal agencies in the region.

Section 4(a) of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952\(^1\) requires that NCPC prepare and adopt a “comprehensive, consistent, and coordinated plan for the National Capital.” The Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan is the blueprint for the long-term development of the national capital and is the decision-making framework for Commission actions on plans, proposals, and policies submitted for its review. The Commission’s comprehensive planning function involves preparing and adopting the Federal Elements, as well as reviewing the District Elements for their impact on the federal interest.

Collectively, federal, regional and local planning plays an important role in the character, development and growth, and livability of Washington. A vibrant District of Columbia should accommodate both the needs of our national government as well as enhance the lives of the city’s residents, workers, and visitors. It should embody an urban form and character that builds upon a rich history, reflects the diversity of people and embodies the enduring values of the American republic. Furthermore, it creates a development trajectory in which residents participate in day-to-day life, in a manner that leverages the unique assets and identity of the National Capital Region.

The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital is comprised of two parts: the Federal Elements and the District Elements. The Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan are developed by the National Capital Planning Commission and the District Elements by the District of Columbia’s Office of Planning. Combined, these elements constitute the District’s mandated planning documents, and guide development in the District of Columbia to balance federal and local interests with a collective responsibility for the natural, cultural, economic, and social environments. Many of the Elements have local, regional, and national significance; and together they advance Washington’s great design and planning heritage.

Together, the National Capital Planning Commission and the District of Columbia Office of Planning work to enhance Washington, DC as a great national capital and plan for its equitable development through inspiring civic architecture, rich landscapes, distinct neighborhoods, vibrant public spaces, environmental stewardship, and thoughtful land-use management.
Federal Impact in the Region

The National Capital Region draws millions of visitors to its national memorials, museums, and other destinations. The federal government exerts a powerful influence on the region’s image, appearance, and livability. Americans have special aspirations for Washington, DC and the surrounding region because it is the nation’s capital and symbolic heart of the country. They expect their seat of government to set the national standard for beautiful and inspiring civic architecture and landscapes, efficient transportation, environmental stewardship, and land-use management that respects Washington’s great urban design heritage. Since the establishment of the city in the late 18th century, the federal government has played an active role in its planning and development to ensure that the nation’s capital meets these expectations. In many cases federal laws, regulations, policies, and funding decisions direct activities in the region. Existing federal laws and policies recognize and give priority to the nation’s capital meets these expectations. In many cases federal laws, regulations, policies, and funding decisions direct activities in the region. Existing federal laws and policies recognize and give priority to Washington, DC as the established seat of the national government. This has been a major factor in assuring the continued growth of Washington’s downtown commercial core even during periods of slow economic growth.

There are more than 230 memorials and museums in the city and surrounding environs. Washington attracts approximately 17.4 million domestic visitors and 1.6 million international visitors annually, generating about $6.7 billion for the local economy. The tourism sector is strengthened by the large number of federal visitor attractions in the area. Heritage tourists who constitute the leading growth sector in national tourism, are drawn by cultural resources such as memorials, museums, and historic sites. The region continues to be enriched through the creation of new national memorials and museums.

According to the 2004 Comprehensive Plan’s Foreign Missions & International Organizations Element, there were 169 foreign diplomatic missions and 28 officially recognized international organizations in the NCR. In 2013, the figures reached 322 and 31, respectively. The diplomatic and international community continues to be a source of economic growth in Washington as it provides employment and attracts international culture and commerce.

The federal government is the single largest employer in the National Capital Region.

The federal government continues to be the single largest employer in the region, although the federal share of total regional employment has declined since 1990. In 2000, approximately 15 percent of the total regional workforce was federal. In 2013, approximately 437,000 federal workers worked in the NCR, accounting for 12.3 percent of the total regional workforce. Of the total federal workforce, approximately 49 percent worked in Washington, DC; 30 percent in Virginia; and 21 percent in Maryland.

The federal government spends billions on procurement and contracting activities in the National Capital Region.

While the size of the federal workforce has decreased since the 1990’s, federal procurement and private-sector contracting has increased. Regional federal procurement spending grew from approximately $32.3 billion in 2001 to more than $80 billion in 2010. Most of the growth was due to unusually large procurements for homeland security and defense. However, the recent fiscal outlook suggests increased budget constraints in the near future, pushing agencies to achieve their missions with greater efficiencies, limited budgets, and reduced spending on federal contracts.

Open space and parkland are important resources for residents, visitors, and workers as the region continues to experience growth. These federal open spaces are significant settings for important monuments, grand public promenades, major federal buildings, public open spaces, and quiet gatherings. Examples include the L’Enfant Plan’s formal squares and circles, the National Mall, Manassas Battlefield, and the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal (all managed by the National Park Service). Due to the environmental value and scenic beauty provided by natural and cultural landscape resources, the federal government acquires and protects hundreds of acres of natural areas.
The Planning Legacy

L’Enfant Plan Era

In 1787, the Constitution authorized the new federal government to establish a federal district as the seat of government. In the Residence Act of 1790, the government called for the district to be sited within a 75-mile stretch of the Potomac River, and authorized President Washington to choose the precise location. He chose an area encompassing the upper reaches of the navigable waterway, embracing the mouth of the “Eastern Branch” (now the Anacostia River), as well as the port cities of Georgetown and Alexandria.

The next task was to site and construct government buildings within this district. President Washington accepted the proposal of Pierre L’Enfant, an engineer who previously worked with the Continental Army and federal government, to design the capital with a broad vision, providing the framework for a complete large-scale city that would meet the long-term needs of a growing nation.

L’Enfant’s city plan, though occupying only a portion of the federal district, was extraordinarily ambitious. It included sites for major government buildings; memorials and other civic art; barracks and arsenals; cultural facilities; institutions such as hospitals and city markets; and the urban fabric to support a residential and commercial city. The streets and avenues were broad and park-like: half their right-of-way was intended for walkways with double rows of trees. The L’Enfant Plan was overlaid with an abundant network of open space, ranging from monumental to local in scale, incorporating the area’s rivers and topography, and resulting in the varied yet cohesive form that still characterizes the nation’s capital.

McMillan Commission Era

The McMillan Commission was concerned with reviving, refining, and extending the L’Enfant Plan to preserve and enhance the national capital’s character. The McMillan Plan of 1901 addressed two main issues: building a public park system and designating sites for groupings of public buildings.

By connecting the existing parkland and extending the capital’s park system into the outlying areas of Washington, Maryland, and Virginia, the McMillan Plan established a unified character for regional open space. Scenic drives and parkways would trace the shorelines of the area’s rivers and streams. These parkways would rise through the valleys and along steep hillsides to connect the larger parks and unite the old Civil War forts into a great circle encompassing L’Enfant’s axial organization. The Fort Circle Park System, as it was conceived, was to be second in importance only to the National Mall and the river designs.

The McMillan Plan grouped public buildings in formal landscaped settings, resulting in a highly concentrated monumental core. The plan reinforced a monumental National Mall composed of prominent features and public buildings. Many important elements of the plan were accomplished over the next quarter century: building the Lincoln Memorial; redesigning the landscape of the U.S. Capitol and White House; removing the railroad tracks from the Mall; constructing Union Station; building the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway; and landscaping East and West Potomac Parks.
Comprehensive Planning in the National Capital Region During the 20th Century

The development of planning in the Washington region parallels the evolution of the profession throughout the nation, but with unique circumstances due to the presence of the national capital.

The McMillan Plan of 1901 provided a strong framework for many projects, both in the core and extending into the region. The plan formalized the National Mall’s design, established key national parks, and created federal precincts such as the Federal Triangle. Within a few years, the need for a regulatory body became apparent. In 1910, the federal government created the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, whose duties included “advis[ing] upon the location of statues, fountains, and monuments in the public squares, streets, and parks in the District of Columbia.” It took on the role of protecting and promoting the McMillan Plan, and two of its initial members had been part of the McMillan Commission. In 1910, Congress passed the Height of Buildings Act to limit building heights in Washington, DC. The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts’ duties soon expanded to include design review of all public buildings and enforced the height limitations in Washington. The Height of Buildings Act has shaped Washington’s horizontal skyline, views, and street-level character and is a valued urban design principle and important part of planning in the nation’s capital.

In the 1910s and 1920s, the planning field was becoming a more established component of modern urban management. Federal legislation in 1924 created the National Capital Park Commission to develop a comprehensive plan for the park, parkway, and playground systems of Washington. In 1926 its duties were extended to include consideration of all elements of city and regional planning, such as land use; major thoroughfares; systems of parks, parkways, and recreation; mass transportation; and community facilities. This federal agency was renamed the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC) in 1926, and in 1952 it became the National Capital Planning Commission. It was responsible for all planning matters within the District of Columbia, and also had limited planning responsibilities extending into the region. Planning bodies at the county and state level were also created during this period, including the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in 1927, established by the state with authority in both Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties.

These federal and state agencies worked together on planning initiatives throughout the following decades. Beginning in 1930, the Capper-Cramton Act authorized NCPPC to acquire land for a regional park and parkway system, including coordinated acquisition of stream valley parks in coordination with Maryland and Virginia planning authorities. NCPPC produced the 1950 Comprehensive Plan, primarily covering Washington, DC but also addressing regional issues. During the 1950s, NCPPC and NCPC studies demonstrated the need for a regional mass transit system, leading to the federal authorization of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority in 1965. In 1961, NCPC produced the influential A Plan for the Year 2000 proposing a model for long-term regional growth. M-NCPPC then incorporated and expanded on this recommended model in its own comprehensive plan, titled “On Wedges and Corridors.” The National Capital Regional Planning Council, a federal agency operating between 1952 and 1966, issued a Regional Development Guide in 1966. And, NCPC issued drafts of new Comprehensive Plans in 1965 and 1967.

During this period, pressure was building for home rule in Washington, DC including reconsideration of the appropriateness of NCPC’s role as Washington’s local planning agency. The federal Home Rule Act of 1973 designated the District of Columbia’s elected mayor as the planner for the District government, a power that is exercised through the DC Office of Planning. NCPC’s role was re-defined to focus primarily on federal property in Washington, DC and the region. A new comprehensive planning effort was undertaken, leading to the publication of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital during the mid-1980s. This plan, a joint effort of NCPC and the District of Columbia government, contained Federal Elements, addressing federal concerns throughout the region, and District Elements, addressing matters of local concern. The Federal Elements also work in conjunction with comprehensive plans adopted by the various counties and cities in the region. This shared responsibility for the Comprehensive Plan remains the model for planning in the NCR.

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Planning America’s Capital for the 21st Century

In 1997, the NCPC released its long-term vision for the development of the monumental core. Extending the Legacy Planning America’s Capital for the 21st Century was developed in response to the projected long-term demands on the nation’s capital and the threat of overbuilding in the monumental core. By recentering the monumental core on the U.S. Capitol, the Legacy Plan creates opportunities for new monuments, museums, and federal offices in all quadrants of the city. It calls for mixed-use development, expanding the reach of public transit, and eliminating obsolete freeways, bridges, and railroad tracks that fragment the city. It reclaims Washington’s historic waterfront for public enjoyment and adds parks, plazas, and other urban amenities. While the Commission initially characterized the Legacy Plan as a long-range vision, support has been strong and many of the plan’s most significant proposals are in development.

Principal themes of the Legacy Plan:

- Build on the historic L’Enfant and McMillan Plans, which are the foundation of modern Washington.
- Unify the city and the monumental core, with the U.S. Capitol at the center.
- Use new memorials and other public buildings to enhance economic development.
- Integrate the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers into the city’s public life and protect the Mall, East and West Potomac Parks, and adjacent historic buildings from future development that would result in a loss of open space, natural areas, and historic resources.
- Develop a comprehensive, flexible, and convenient transportation system that eliminates barriers and improves movement within the city.
The Planning Framework: Vision and Guiding Principles

The Commission envisions:

A vibrant world capital that accommodates the needs of our national government; enriches the lives of the region’s residents, workers, and visitors; and embodies an urban form and character that reflects the enduring values of the American people.

The Comprehensive Plan’s Federal Elements are linked by three guiding principles and themes that emerged within these principles.

1. Accommodate federal and national capital activities.
2. Reinforce smart growth and sustainable development planning principles.
Accommodate Federal and National Capital Activities

One of the key themes within this guiding principle is the importance of the appearance and image of the nation’s capital. The city’s physical design conveys the values and qualities to which we aspire as a nation. The Federal Elements emphasize fundamental concepts of beauty and order. Washington, DC, and the federal activities within it, must reflect the highest standards of architecture, urban design, and planning. As the central planning agency for the federal government, NCPC is committed to ensuring that adequate provisions are made for future generations who will come to the capital to petition the government, conduct business, or visit memorials and museums that honor the nation’s heroes and capture its history.

A second important theme is the operational efficiency of the federal government. The Federal Elements envision a capital city that is the economic, political, and cultural center of the Washington region. The Central Employment Area (CEA) (refer to the map in the Federal Workplace Element) is seen as the primary focus of new federal office development and the preferred location of new major national capital activities. Government headquarter facilities and functions that support national capital activities, such as entertainment and tourism, are encouraged to locate within or near the CEA. Washington, DC is considered the primary location for foreign missions and international organizations, consistent with international law and practice. An emphasis will be placed on retaining national and international activities in the city while preserving the autonomy of the District of Columbia government to regulate and plan local land use.

Those sectors of the regional economy that have traditionally been strong—information processing, support services, intelligence gathering, medical research, international activities, national defense, tourism, information technology, and support services related to the government—are expected to continue to be drivers of the region’s economy because of their strong ties to the federal government. Activities requiring larger land areas or greater levels of security should locate in areas of the region that can accommodate those requirements. The federal government should make every attempt to use existing federal facilities and land for new federal space needs.

The Federal Elements recognize that many federal employees value living near their places of work, increasing the possibility that federal employees could commute primarily by transit, bicycle, and walking. Further, the situing and design of new federal facilities in the city and its urban core that are convenient to public transportation will encourage employees and visitors to make greater use of transit opportunities. Federal activities will also be encouraged to locate in ways that promote the development of new, related private-sector activities, while meeting the requirements of federal agencies. Regardless of their location, federal facilities are expected to safely and efficiently accommodate government functions while promoting the highest quality design.

PRINCIPLE 1

- Enhance the beauty and order of the nation’s capital.
- Promote the highest quality design and development in the National Capital Region.
- Balance accessibility and security.
- Preserve historic properties and important L’Enfant and McMillan Plan design features.
- Disperse activities throughout the city and region.
- Promote the District of Columbia as the prime location for foreign diplomatic missions.
PRINCIPLE 2

Reinforce Smart Growth and Sustainable Development Planning Principles

The Federal Elements encourage smart growth and sustainable development. The plan includes strategies that orient development to public transit; protect environmental and natural resources; organize new development in compact land use patterns; promote opportunities for infill development to take advantage of existing public infrastructure; and adapt and reuse existing historic and underutilized buildings to preserve the unique identities of local neighborhoods. Sustainable development recognizes the interrelationship between economic growth, environmental quality, and livability, and the responsibility that citizens have to preserve their communities and quality-of-life for future generations. These principles benefit the federal government and the region as a whole.

A critical theme within this guiding principle is transportation mobility and accessibility. To facilitate the movement of federal employees to and from their places of employment, federal agencies in the region are leading the way with a variety of creative commuting programs. The federal government provides a monthly transit benefit for employees. Many agencies have highly effective transportation management plans to help reduce the number of drive-alone commuters, encourage carpooling and vanpooling, and offer staggered work hours and telework options. Considering the NCR’s status as one of the most congested regions in the country, federal agencies must continue to find new and effective transportation strategies at their work sites, including incentives for alternative travel modes such as walking and biking.

Another fundamental theme that emerges within the guiding principle is the stewardship of the region’s natural and cultural resources. For more than two centuries, the federal government has actively acquired, developed, and maintained parks and open space, and protected and enhanced natural resources in the region. The importance of this mission continues. In addition, the federal government is also focusing on planning for, and addressing the impacts of climate change and flooding. Natural resources continue to be threatened by growth and development and with declining budgets, it is imperative to develop and seek unified approaches and implement innovative solutions to ensure that these resources will be preserved and enjoyed by all citizens now and in the future.

- Prepare for, and address impacts of climate change.
- Preserve open space, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Encourage compact forms of development.
- Encourage mixed uses within federal facilities.
- Support pedestrian-oriented development that adds vitality and visual interest to urban areas.
- Concentrate more intense federal development near existing high capacity transportation facilities.
- Promote non-auto transportation alternatives, including transit, walking, and bicycling.
Support Local and Regional Planning and Development Objectives

The federal government will continue to be a major generator of growth and development in the NCR. Federally owned and leased facilities are located throughout the region, and federal activities significantly impact the region’s economic health, welfare, and stability.

The Commission and other federal agencies should work closely with local authorities and affected community groups in areas where federal activities are located, or are proposed to be located.

The Commission strongly promotes intergovernmental cooperation and public participation in the preparation and review of federal policies, plans, and programs in the region by:

- Coordinating federal plans, projects, and capital improvement programming with local, regional, and state plans and programs.
- Encouraging federal agencies planning development projects to participate in the Commission’s “early consultation” program in order to inform nonfederal officials and community organizations about such projects prior to their submission to the Commission.
- Providing for public participation in the Commission’s preparation and review of federal policies, plans, projects, and capital improvement programs.
- Assisting federal agencies in resolving issues with affected non-federal agencies and community groups in preparing proposed policies, plans, and programs.
- Coordinating the federal interest review of local, regional, and state plans and programs.
- Promoting information-sharing and data exchanges with state, regional, and local authorities.

The SW Ecodistrict Initiative proposes to redesign the 10th Street corridor.
The Planning Program: Federal Elements

The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements identifies and addresses the current and future needs of federal employees, visitors, and residents to the nation’s capital and provides policies that:

• Guides urban design features that contribute to the image and function of the nation’s capital.
• Guides the location of new federal facilities and the management of existing federal facilities.
• Guides the placement and accommodation of foreign missions and international agencies.
• Promotes the preservation and enhancement of the region’s natural resources and environment.
• Protects historic and cultural resources.
• Encourages federal, local, state, and national authorities to work together.
• Supports access into, out of, and around the nation’s capital that is as efficient as possible for federal and non-federal workers.

The eight Federal Elements are Urban Design (a new element); Federal Workplace; Foreign Missions & International Organizations; Transportation; Parks & Open Space; Federal Environment; Historic Preservation; and Visitors & Commemoration.

Urban Design Element: Promote quality design and development in the region that reinforces its unique role as the nation’s capital and creates a welcoming and livable environment for people. Its Technical Addendum is a resource that supports policies and includes background, planning approaches, and explanatory graphics.

Federal Workplace Element: Locate the federal workforce in a way that enhances the efficiency, productivity, value, and public image of the federal government; strengthens the NCR’s economic well-being; and emphasizes Washington, DC as the seat of the federal government.

Foreign Missions & International Organizations Element: Plan a secure and welcoming environment for the location of diplomatic and international activities in Washington, DC. This should be done in a manner that is appropriate to the status and dignity of these activities; enhances Washington’s role as one of the world’s great capitals; and is sensitive to the character and use patterns of the city’s neighborhoods.

Transportation Element: Develop and maintain a multi-modal regional transportation system that meets the travel needs of workers, residents, and visitors while improving regional mobility, accessibility, air quality, and environmental quality through expanded transportation alternatives and transit-oriented development.

Parks & Open Space Element: Conserve and enhance the NCR’s parks and open space system, ensure that adequate resources are available for future generations, and promote an appropriate balance between open space resources and the built environment.

Federal Environment Element: Promote the NCR as a leader in environmental stewardship and sustainability. The federal government seeks to preserve and enhance the quality of the region’s natural resources to ensure that their benefits are available for future generations to enjoy.

Historic Preservation Element: Preserve, protect, and rehabilitate historic properties in the NCR and promote design and development that is respectful of the guiding principles established by the Plan of the City of Washington and the symbolic character of the capital’s setting.

Visitors & Commemoration Element: Provide a positive and memorable experience for all visitors to the NCR in a way that showcases the institutions of American culture and democracy, supports planning goals, and enhances activities that are unique to visiting the nation’s capital.

The Federal Elements—along with the District Elements, federal and District agencies’ systems plans, individual installation master plans and subarea plans, development controls, and design guidelines—constitute the road map for NCPC’s land use planning and development decision-making processes in the NCR.
Endnotes

1. Section 4(a) of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952
11. L’Enfant Plan http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/About_Uis(tr2)/About_Uis(tr3)/History.html
12. McMillan Plan http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/About_Uis(tr2)/About_Uis(tr3)/History.html
14. Capper-Cramton Act https://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/About_Uis(tr2)/About_Uis(tr3)/CapperCramton.pdf
15. A Plan for the Year 2000 http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.390150064762713?urlappend=%3Bseq=7
16. Regional Development Guide http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015031866729;view=1up;seq=4
18. Extending the Legacy http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/Planning(Tr2)/ExtendingtheLegacy.html
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The Plan in Action

The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements (Comprehensive Plan) guides growth and development of federal activities in the National Capital Region (NCR). The Comprehensive Plan drives the National Capital Planning Commission’s (NCPC) mission and work program, and forms the basis for the decisions it makes on projects and plans it reviews. Implementing the policies outlined in the Federal Elements is an important feature of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan’s Action Plan contains specific projects to advance the Commission’s vision and set in motion the necessary steps to activate the plan’s goals and policies. The projects advance the policies in the Comprehensive Plan; the objectives of the Commission’s Strategic Plan and annual work program; and the recommendations from NCPC’s past planning initiatives such as the Legacy Plan. The Federal Capital Improvements Program plays a prominent role in the Action Plan as the Commission encourages federal agencies to use the Comprehensive Plan as a policy guide in preparing their capital improvement project’s submissions.

The projects in the Action Plan include a reference to the relevant plan elements, provide a brief description, outline accompanying implementation strategies, identify action partners, and offer a timeframe. While the project itself may be long-term, the timeframe reflects the short- or long-term nature of the project’s implementation strategies. Short-term strategies are usually achievable within five years. Long-range strategies may also be achievable within five years, but are typically of a scope that require five to twenty years or more. It is important to note that not all projects are currently funded. The Action Plan will be evaluated periodically to update projects as they progress and to add new projects as they are identified and developed to continue fulfill the Comprehensive Plan’s vision and goals.

NCPC is committed to implementing the vision and goals of the Comprehensive Plan in coordination with federal and non-federal regional stakeholders. In addition to partnering with other federal and non-federal government agencies and private organizations, the Commission advances Comprehensive Plan goals and policies through its regulatory responsibilities and day-to-day activities, such as:

- Reviewing development plans and proposals to ensure conformance with the highest planning and urban design standards, and for consistency with the symbolic role and function of the nation’s capital.
- Developing specialized plans for the NCR.
- Recommending projects in the Federal Capital Improvements Program—a six-year program of public works projects for the federal government.
- Incorporating special initiatives in its annual performance plan.

The projects in the Action Plan are organized by themes, which are closely tied to the Comprehensive Plan’s guiding principles.
As the capital of the United States, Washington is a unique place with its own authentic character and identity. Since the city’s founding, the image and experience of Washington has been carefully planned to reflect the preeminence of the nation’s democratic institutions. The built and natural features contribute to the distinctive image of our nation’s capital, including its iconic skyline, vistas, major streets, and public spaces, and the ridges and waters that frame the monumental core. The Commission’s work on the Height Master Plan and the Urban Design Element reflect its commitment to preserve and enhance the form, character, and experience of the nation’s capital. A number of projects were identified as part of the Comprehensive Plan’s implementation strategy to contend with the issues affecting the region’s image.

The Action Plan includes ideas to actively promote future memorial sites away from the National Mall; analyze and evaluate important viewsheds and vistas; prepare urban design strategies related to topography; prepare a public realm and design standards study; prepare study to assess massing and scale transition around the White House; and work with local jurisdictions to protect linear views. In addition, the Action Plan includes study to Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the U.S. Capitol—one of the most important settings of national significance in the country—and address issues related to transportation, security and open space, urban design, and land use management with other federal agencies and public stakeholders; and improve regional gateways and identify responsible implementation agencies to carry out components of the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, to transform the waterfront into a new vibrant corridor befitting the nation’s capital.
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| 1  | VISITORS & COMMEMORATION | Memorial and Museum Sites | For sites identified in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan that are not already in federal ownership, assess the appropriateness of various methods (e.g., purchase, agreement, easement, PUD) for assuring the future availability of these sites. For federally owned sites, determine if major action is needed to assure future availability (e.g., relocation of major roadways). Utilize information from the NPS/NCPC Small Parks Study to identify potential new memorial sites. | • Prepare a study of methods, preferred strategies, and priorities for memorials, in consultation with affected agencies and private parties.  
• Use the study to identify strategies to enhance memorial and museums sites.  
• Develop cooperative agreements to manage potential 2M sites.  
• Create an interactive website. | NCPC, NPS, USDOT, DDOT, and DCOP | Short-term |
| 2  | FEDERAL ENVIRONMENT FEDERAL WORKPLACE PARKS & OPEN SPACE | Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) Implementation | Develop public and private properties along the Anacostia River for park- and water-related uses, and develop nearby areas with federal and non-federal facilities as proposed in the AWI. | • Identify specific AWI components requiring federal involvement; prioritize these items and identify responsible implementation agencies; and assist agencies in obtaining authorization and funding. | NCPC, NPS, GSA, DOD/Navy, USACE, D.C. government, and other AWI partners | Long-term |
| 3  | URBAN DESIGN | Topographic Ridge and Urban Form Design Study | Prepare and study urban design strategies that distinguish between densities along the escarpment from downtown’s greater building heights. Link information about topography with Comprehensive Plan land use and density maps. Within the western portion of the topographic bowl, prepare urban design strategies that relate building heights to the natural slope and rim areas of Arlington Ridge as viewed from the U.S. Capitol, the National Mall, and riverside outlooks. | • In coordination with federal and local partners, study the future land use, allowable density, building height, and form, in conjunction with the topography along the escarpment.  
• Prepare urban design strategies that relate building heights to the natural slope. | NCPC and DCOP | Short-term |
| 4  | URBAN DESIGN | Vista and Viewshed Study | Create an inventory and analyze important scenic panoramic viewsheds from federal sites throughout the city. Prepare urban design studies to assess the visual quality of the viewsheds that extend outward from the primary vistas along the western and southern axes of the National Mall. The east-west axis terminates on Arlington County, particularly Courthouse. The north-south axis terminates on Crystal City. Encourage local jurisdictions to prepare urban design strategies to protect the visual quality of viewsheds from the National Mall, in consideration of both built and natural elements, such as material, lighting, and building mass. | • Document and analyze existing scenic panoramic viewsheds from federal sites.  
• Develop measures to protect the viewshed’s visual quality from future federal actions.  
• Continue to work with local jurisdictions (Arlington County) to study the impacts of future development within the primary vistas on the character and setting of the monumental core and the National Capital Region.  
• Develop future development strategies to retain the character of the primary vistas.  
• Study the parameters of the vistas (defined outer edges). | NCPC, NPS, GSA, DCOP, Arlington County CPHD and other federal and local agencies | Short-term |

While the projects may be long-term, the timeframe reflects the short- or long-term nature of the project’s implementation strategies. Short-term strategies are usually achievable within five years. Long-range strategies may also be achievable within five years, but are typically of a scope that may require five to twenty years or more. Note: Not all projects are currently funded.
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| 5  | URBAN DESIGN           | Public Realm and Design Standards for Street Sections Study | Study the potential for baseline design and/or planning criteria that reinforces the coherence and continuity of reservations that are identified as contributing elements of the L’Enfant Plan within the National Register. Collaborate with federal and local stakeholders to prepare an Urban Design and Public Realm Guide for special streets and federally owned parks, plazas, open spaces and areas around federal facilities in the monumental core and L’Enfant City. The guide will provide a framework to strengthen linkages and the character defining elements that frame or punctuate these public spaces to elevate human experience and enjoyment. | • Facilitate partnerships with federal and local agencies to implement urban design and security through comprehensive streetscape strategies, independent of funding.  
• Continue to pursue partnerships and funding opportunities with federal agencies to implement perimeter security through comprehensive streetscape projects.  
• Continue to work with federal agencies throughout design development in the project and plan review process.  
• Develop street section standards. | NCPC, DCOP, NPS, and other federal and local agencies | Short-term |
| 6  | URBAN DESIGN           | Improve Regional Gateways and Reinforce the Preeminence of the Monumental Core | Prepare urban design studies to assess land use transitions along North Capitol Street with respect to topography. Utilize the South Capitol Street Urban Design Study (2003) to identify opportunities to enhance the street. Prepare urban design studies that consider westward views along East Capitol Street at points east of RFK Stadium. Incorporate the RFK Stadium alternatives. | • Study and analyze land use transition along North Capitol Street.  
• Design and develop the stretch of South Capitol Street in Washington between the U.S. Capitol and the Anacostia River into an urban boulevard that can accommodate new federal office space and a mix of uses that further serve the operations of the federal government, the city, and the surrounding neighborhoods.  
• Renew partnership with the District Government to advance the South Capitol Street Corridor Plan.  
• Study and analyze land use transition along East Capitol Street. | NCPC, NPS, GSA, USDOT, DCOP, and DDOT | Short-term |
| 7  | URBAN DESIGN           | Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative | Evaluate the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation Plan, as well as current and projected economic, physical, and operational conditions to determine how to update the plan, including strategies for the physical, programmatic, operational and maintenance improvements that will address 21st century needs. | • Partner with GSA and NPS in coordination with other federal and District agencies with interests in the avenue.  
• Study the near- and long-term needs of the avenue and surrounding neighborhoods, including Federal Triangle.  
• Develop a vision for how the avenue can meet local and national needs in a 21st century capital city.  
• Identify a governance framework.  
• Develop strategies for the physical, programmatic, operational and maintenance improvements.  
• Work with stakeholder groups in the planning, preservation, and development of the avenue. | NCPC, NPS, GSA, and other federal and local agencies | Long-term |

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| 8 | URBAN DESIGN | Massing/Scale Study | Prepare urban design studies to assess massing and scale transitions around the White House precinct. Prepare preeminent viewshed and view corridor future work and assess existing conditions and opportunities to reinforce the visual quality of several view corridors. While these view corridors are significant, each should be individually assessed. Study of scenic panoramic viewsheds from publicly accessible federal lands. | • Study the impacts of future development on preeminent view corridors.  
• Develop strategies in coordination with federal and local agencies for the massing and scaling of new development along preeminent view corridors. | NCPC, GSA, and USSS | Short-term |
| 9 | URBAN DESIGN | Linear View Corridor Study | Encourage local jurisdictions to prepare and study urban design strategies to protect the visual quality of linear view corridors in consideration of both built and natural elements, such as material, lighting, and building mass. This should be done on the following streets and geographic areas: East Capitol Street; Pennsylvania Avenue, SE; New Jersey Avenue, NW; New Jersey Avenue, SE; and Maryland Avenue, NE. | • Work with local jurisdictions to develop urban design strategies to protect the visual quality of linear view corridors. | NCPC and local jurisdictions | Short-term |

While the projects may be long-term, the timeframe reflects the short- or long-term nature of the project’s implementation strategies. Short-term strategies are usually achievable within five years. Long-range strategies may also be achievable within five years, but are typically of a scope that may require five to twenty years or more. Note: Not all projects are currently funded.
Operational Efficiency of the Federal Government

Enhancing the operational efficiency of the federal government is a primary concern of the Comprehensive Plan. Several projects identified in the Action Plan are designed to analyze the current conditions of federal activities and the future needs of federal employees, which are paramount to improving efficiency. Projects such as developing and maintaining a database of key federal indicators (including such information as federal demographics), analyzing federal procurement activities, and studying employee commuting patterns will provide a means to better monitor the federal presence and impact in the region.

As the major employer, occupier of buildings, and purchaser of goods and services within the region, the federal government is dependent on a strong and economically vibrant region to maintain and enhance its operational efficiency and productivity. Decisions on where federal activities locate foreign missions and visitor amenities—can result in significant efficiencies. Identifying locations in Washington and throughout the region to accommodate these activities is an important component of the Comprehensive Plan’s implementation strategy and one where federal and local collaboration to identify mutually desirable locations can benefit both federal and local interests. Projects in the Action Plan call for updating the NCPC project submission guidelines; analyzing the Central Employment Area boundaries; accommodating the federal government’s office space needs; identifying sites for foreign missions; and researching potential sites for new visitor centers/kiosks.
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| 10 | FEDERAL WORKPLACE      | Changing Federal Footprint | Study and assess the impact of the changing federal footprint in the NCR. Monitor and report on the changing footprint’s impact on federal procurement, the economy, and its changing patterns across jurisdictions. Report on economic and demographic indicators related to the federal presence in the NCR. Other strategies such as GSA’s research on hoteling, desk-sharing, and other regional real estate approaches will be analyzed. The study will evaluate case studies of recent consolidation efforts in the NCR. | • Study and evaluate policies that reduce the federal footprint.  
• Evaluate case studies of recent consolidation efforts in the NCR to identify potential planning trends and implications.  
• Conduct a survey and compile data on federal agency demographics (e.g., types of jobs held by federal employees, spending patterns of federal agencies and employees, induced economic activity due to federal presence, and federal employee commuting patterns). Develop and publish a report of findings.  
• Monitor and publicly report on federal procurement and spending activities in the NCR.  
• Meet with regional stakeholders in federal procurement activities (federal agencies; regional, state, and local economic/business development organizations) and develop policy actions and strategies (federal and other). | NCPC, GSA, DCOP, federal agencies, regional Congressional representatives, OMB, SBA, BOT, MWCOG, and state/district and local economic/business development organizations | Short-term |

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### Action Plan: Operational Efficiency of the Federal Government

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| 12 | FOREIGN MISSIONS & INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS | Revise District of Columbia Zoning Regulations and Identify Foreign Missions Center Sites. | Background information prepared for the Foreign Missions & International Organizations Element reinterpreted the Foreign Missions Act of 1982, which established the procedures and criteria governing the location of foreign missions in the District of Columbia. The criteria are codified through the zoning regulations of the District. Identify potential specific sites for the development of one or more new foreign missions centers. General development areas have already been identified in Comprehensive Plan policies. | • In conjunction with the District of Columbia government, prepare zoning revisions for the future location of foreign missions in the District of Columbia. Zoning text revisions are requested to facilitate the siting and expansion of foreign missions in the District of Columbia. All zoning text and map revisions require adoption by the Zoning Commission.  
• Analyze specific sites, identify development scenarios and strategies, develop cost estimates, and identify funding sources, including partnerships with other public agencies and the possibility of public/private partnering. Draft legislation for a new Foreign Missions Center Act, as appropriate. | NCPC, DCOZ, DCOP, and DOS | Short-term |
| 13 | VISITORS & COMMEMORATION | Visitor Center Sites | Identify different alternatives to provide visitor's information including locations for new visitors centers, smaller information kiosks, and digital opportunities. Determine where centers can be located that can contribute to a more informative, interesting, educational, comfortable, and convenient visit, and determine if, outside the monumental core, these facilities can further educate the visitor about visitor activities that can be found throughout Washington and the region. | • Prepare a study to evaluate the operational/locational consideration of visitor information related to advances in technology.  
• Analyze specific sites; identify development scenarios and strategies; develop cost estimates; and identify funding sources, including partnerships with other public agencies and the possibility of public/private partnering.  
• Determine how both large, comprehensive visitor orientation centers and small kiosks can be developed to provide essential information to visitors. | NCPC (lead), NPS, SI, DCOP, and tour industry stakeholders | Short-term |

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<td>14</td>
<td>ALL ELEMENTS</td>
<td>Project Submission and Review Guidelines and Transportation Management Plan (TMP) Submission Guidelines.</td>
<td>Re-engineer and streamline NCPC’s project submission process to ensure that its review is consistently applied, is efficient, and is responsive to the needs of federal agencies. Develop new guidelines for TMP submissions by federal agencies to encourage alternative means of commuting to minimize impact of federal employees driving alone during periods of congestion.</td>
<td><strong>Project Submission and Review Guidelines:</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Review and revise NEPA/106 submission guidelines.&lt;br&gt;• Review and revise current submission guidelines.&lt;br&gt;• Develop an electronic submissions form in support of E-gov.&lt;br&gt;• Review the federal leasing process with GSA and negotiate an appropriate and constructive role for NCPC.&lt;br&gt;<strong>TMP Submission Guidelines:</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Review TMP submissions.&lt;br&gt;• Review Commission actions on TMPs.&lt;br&gt;• Interview NCPC Project Review staff and federal agency representatives.&lt;br&gt;• Draft specific content requirements.</td>
<td>NCPC, GSA, and federal agencies</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>TRANSPORTATION FEDERAL WORKPLACE</td>
<td>Central Employment Area (CEA) boundaries</td>
<td>Reexamine the CEA boundaries within Washington where existing federal facilities and high density development contribute to the employment population, economic diversification, and mixed-use nature of the core, and where higher-density mixed land uses are encouraged for economic development within an active planning initiative.</td>
<td>• Research past Commission and District Council decisions on CEA boundary updates.&lt;br&gt;• Identify a process for updating and changing the CEA boundary.&lt;br&gt;• Identify existing federal facilities within the core area.&lt;br&gt;• Research adopted land use plans and current planning initiatives in the core area and identify sites with existing and planned high-density development.&lt;br&gt;• Develop proposed boundaries in conjunction with the update of the District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan.&lt;br&gt;• Adopt and map new boundaries, and then update the Comprehensive Plan’s Federal Elements with the new boundaries.</td>
<td>NCPC, other federal agencies, DCOP, DCOZ, and local business organizations</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
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Transportation Mobility and Accessibility

Closely linked to federal operational efficiency is the mobility of the federal workforce. Improving mobility and accessibility provides advantages to federal workers, to the federal government in general, and to all who reside in or visit the region. Mobility doesn’t only translate into putting more cars on already overflowing roads.

The Commission is committed to working with regional entities toward reducing the transportation gridlock that threatens commuters and travelers to and through the region daily. Promoting alternative modes of transportation and innovative transportation management programs are key components of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Action Plan reflects the importance placed on developing a number of multi-pronged solutions to one of the most pressing issues in the NCR. Improved biking access to and around federal facilities are reflected in projects calling for construction of bicycle paths and lanes. The plan promotes studying the viability of water taxis to move residents and visitors and the accommodation of tour buses to facilitate visitor needs. One Action Plan project will study new trends in office mobility and evaluate the designated employee count in the existing parking ratios.
### Action Plan: Transportation Mobility and Accessibility

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| 16 | TRANSPORTATION         | Tour Bus and Commuter Bus Operations and Parking Management | Partner with federal and local agencies to address tour bus and commuter bus parking and loading operations.                                                                                                                | • Improve tour and commuter bus operations management, parking infrastructure, and information systems. Note: DDOT and the Union Station Redevelopment Corporation are planning to expand tour bus parking in the near future.  
• Provide a foundation for the evaluation of future policies. | DDOT (lead), NCPC, Downtown BID, DC Council, NPS, and WMATA | Short-term |
| 17 | FEDERAL WORKPLACE      | Bicycle Paths/ Lanes on Federal Installations | Support bicycle commuting by constructing bicycle travel lanes connecting the various buildings on federal installations and connecting to nearby off-installation bicycle paths, lanes, and trails, as well as nearby Metrorail stations. | • Study bicycle trail connections in master plans.  
• Work with and support local jurisdictions’ efforts to build regional and local bicycle infrastructure that serves and provides access to federal properties. | NCPC, NIH, NPS, MCPD, MNCPPC, WABA, and local jurisdictions | Short-term |
| 18 | TRANSPORTATION         | Water Taxi Study | Plan for future water taxi service. | • Develop a comprehensive picture of Washington’s waterfront improvements.  
• Partner with stakeholders to develop water taxi use for federal workers and visitors. | NCPC, DDOT, DCOP, DOD, and NPS | Short-term |
| 19 | FEDERAL WORKPLACE      | Parking Study     | The parking ratio goals outlined in the Transportation Element were developed using a ratio of the number of employees for each employee parking space. The current trends are that the number of employees to a building are increasing due to office mobility, major federal consolidation efforts, and reduction in the overall space allocated to individuals and agencies. NCPC, in coordination with other federal agencies, will develop a parking study that will evaluate the designation of employee count for the parking ratios, and new trends in office mobility. | • Study new trends in office mobility and develop case studies with large consolidation efforts.  
• Reevaluate the existing methodology used to designate employee counts in the parking ratios.  
• Participate in a study that models parking ratio goals for federal installations in the region.  
• Consider parking for housing on federal facilities. | NCPC and federal agencies | Short-term |

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Stewardship of Natural Resources

The region’s beauty is exemplified not only in the stone, marble, and granite found in its manmade structures, but also in the natural beauty evident in its open spaces and parks, forests, waterways, topography, and views and vistas. The federal government has been a vigilant steward in the preservation and enhancement of these natural resources. There are also a number of other public and private groups dedicated to preserving and enhancing natural resources in the region. NCPC will play a pivotal role in establishing a unified strategy for addressing natural resource issues in the region by providing leadership, coordination, and technical ability, as well as partnering with others.

A first step in ensuring that these resources are protected, maintained, and enhanced is analyzing the current inventory of parks and open spaces and ascertain the deficiencies and gaps. By conducting a survey of existing parks and open spaces and analyzing their condition, the Commission and its partners can assess what will be required to protect and maintain the current inventory, determine where new parks and open spaces are needed to accommodate future generations, and develop innovative solutions to effectively manage and maintain these resources throughout the region. In addition, partnering with multi-agency groups addressing flooding, climate change, and ecosystem services will allow federal and community agencies to work together on climate preparedness and resilience, based on informed planning and decision-making.
### Action Plan: Stewardship of Natural Resources

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| 20 | ENVIRONMENT            | Floodplain Standard | The science, understanding, and application of information about projected flooding conditions resulting from climate change are constantly evolving. NCPC will stay informed with future revisions to the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard. In addition, in coordination with other federal agencies, NCPC will review best available climate/flooding data for the NCR and strive for agreement with other federal agencies on a single set of data to be used by all agencies in the climate-informed scientific approach. | • Develop a NCR standard for floodplains.  
• Work with federal agencies to establish a uniform set of data to be used with the climate informed scientific approach in the NCR.  
• Participate in a multi-agency group to annually review best available climate data in the region. | NCPC and federal agencies                       | Short-term     |
| 21 | ENVIRONMENT            | Ecosystem Services  | Participate in and encourage regional and/or federal efforts to incorporate ecosystem services in federal planning and decision-making. This will enhance our ability to recognize and leverage the benefits of natural systems, protect against natural hazards, and support social and economic development. | • Research future opportunities to incorporate ecosystem services in the NCR to inform future planning and decision-making processes.  
• Develop policies to promote the consideration of ecosystem services—where appropriate and practicable—in planning, investments, and regulatory contexts.  
• Work with CEQ and other federal agencies to develop guidance on implementing environmental systems in the decision-making process. | NCPC, CEQ, and federal agencies                  | Long-term      |

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| 22 | ENVIRONMENT PARKS & OPEN SPACE | Parks and Open Space Assessment and Management | Establish and maintain a central database for collecting and analyzing data about parks and open spaces. Establish partnerships to enhance and manage regional parks and open space resources. Enhance the Civil War Defenses of Washington system in accordance with the current NPS General Management Plan, which proposes several alternatives. This system was proposed in the McMillan Plan as a connected ring of parks and parkways incorporating Civil War fort sites; and was later refined and partially implemented. Current proposals include adding trails and emphasizing several key fort locations. | • In conjunction with other stakeholders, coordinate regional parks and open space data collection and analyses. Develop strategies to protect, develop, enhance and manage parks and open space resources to meet all user needs.  
• Create federal/local and public/private partnerships to protect, develop, enhance, and manage parks and open space.  
• Work with stakeholders to develop a methodology for defining and assessing parks and open spaces.  
• Develop an inventory of federal, state, local, and other parks and open space, considering both in the NCR and preparing more detailed work within Washington. Maintain the inventory as a detailed GIS database.  
• Produce two reports assessing needs and opportunities for parks and open space. One report will be prepared at the regional level, and the other report will be developed for the area within the historic boundaries of the District of Columbia. Include analyses of future needs for both federal and local interests, and identify strategies to coordinate and optimize federal and local resources.  
• Sponsor a Green Infrastructure Symposium.  
• Prepare a property acquisition, transfer, and management analysis.  
• Work with NPS on action items identified in its General Management Plan, focusing on small parks. | NCPC, NPS, DOD, USDA, GSA, DDOT, DCOP, other federal agencies, and local jurisdictions | Short-term |
### Action Partners List

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AWI</td>
<td>Anacostia Waterfront Initiative</td>
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<td>BID</td>
<td>Business Improvement District</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOT</td>
<td>Washington Board of Trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEQ</td>
<td>Council on Environmental Quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPHD</td>
<td>Arlington County Community Planning, Housing, and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCCouncil</td>
<td>Council of the District of Columbia</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCOP</td>
<td>DC Office of Planning</td>
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<td>DCOZ</td>
<td>DC Office of Zoning</td>
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Introduction to the Federal Urban Design Element

The federal government’s goal is to promote quality design and development in the National Capital Region that reinforces its unique role as the nation’s capital and creates a welcoming and livable environment for people.

Urban design is the practice of shaping the built environment of a city, town, or neighborhood. At its best, urban design results in cities that express the ideals of the people who build and occupy them, while adapting to their changing needs over time. Urban design operates on two scales: the larger scale, which addresses urban systems such as networks of streetscapes and public spaces; and the smaller scale, which addresses the pedestrian experience. Good urban design requires expertise in many disciplines including urban planning, architecture, landscape architecture, engineering, public policy, land use law, and social psychology. Through the use of these disciplines, it creates functional, sustainable, lively, and engaging places and improves the quality of life for the people who live and work there.

Urban design policy in Washington, DC must meet these objectives at an elevated standard due to the city’s role as the nation’s capital and one of the world’s great planned cities. Washington is unique because the core planning documents that established the city’s spatial framework continue to shape its development today.

The city and the surrounding National Capital Region (NCR) continue to evolve as both federal and local planning efforts guide growth and development throughout the region. It is critical for the federal government to engage with local jurisdictions throughout the region to address areas of mutual interest and prepare strategies for the region’s overall urban design quality. This element provides guidance for the urban design of federal properties throughout the NCR.
Pennsylvania Avenue looking toward the U.S. Capitol.
The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements | Urban Design

Defining the Federal Interest for Purposes of the Urban Design Element

The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital (Comprehensive Plan) sets forth a planning vision for Washington, DC and the NCR. It is a unified document comprised of both District and Federal Elements. The District of Columbia undertook a major update of the Comprehensive Plan’s District Elements that was completed in 2006, subsequently the First Amendment cycle was completed in 2011. The Federal Urban Design Element complements the District’s element by focusing on areas under federal jurisdiction; planning matters related to Washington’s form and character in areas with major, or contiguous to, national assets; and resources that contribute to the city’s image or function as the nation’s capital. For purposes of the Urban Design Element, the federal government’s interests operate at two equally important levels: those related to Washington’s role as the nation’s capital (national interests), and Washington’s role as the seat of the federal government (federal interests).

National and Federal Interests

The primary national interests as defined in this element are the preservation and enhancement of Washington’s defining characteristics as a capital city that were established by the L’Enfant Plan, the McMillan Plan, and the 1910 Height of Buildings Act (Height Act). These qualities are important in areas such as the monumental core, where federal properties and national cultural institutions predominate, and along primary streets within the L’Enfant City that establish the city’s basic spatial organization (see map, page 9). While the policies in this element apply primarily to federal property, they are also intended to inform the work of the Commission and staff when providing comments on non-federal property and proposals such as amendments to the Comprehensive Plan’s District Elements, zoning map, other regulations, or regional development proposals and plans.

The national interest in Washington’s design applies most particularly to the city’s skyline and setting as typified by the topographic bowl (see map, page 6); the street grid; federal parks and reservations; federal buildings and infrastructure; Congressionally-authorized memorials and museums; and the contributing features of the L’Enfant Plan as defined in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The national interest regarding federally-owned National Historic Landmarks extends beyond the building itself to its setting, especially when that setting is included in the Schedule of Heights.

Like all cities Washington’s urban design character is not a simple formula: it is complex and sometimes contradictory. Great urban design calls for a constant reconciliation of tensions among a variety of planning goals. Planning for a capital city and region requires balancing urban design principles that shape the everyday urban condition with additional design principles that focus on reinforcing the image of the nation’s capital.

Finally, from a planning perspective, boundaries—political, geographic, or otherwise—are important. However, urban design policy and national interests related to the form and character of the nation’s capital do not neatly fit into jurisdictional boundaries. Indeed, an urban design framework is a whole system of built and natural elements. These resources may be managed by different entities, but nonetheless contribute to a visual and functional composition that contributes to the national capital’s image and function. Therefore, the related policies within this element are exclusively focused on national interests as described above, primarily within the topographic bowl (as described on page 23) and L’Enfant City. However, the introduction includes broader language to fully capture the scope and complexity of the major contributing urban and natural forms that make Washington distinctive as a national capital and a home for its residents.

Federal interests include matters related to federal buildings, campuses, parklands, operations, and security. Urban design policy is based on best planning practices and urban design principles for locating federal buildings and campuses for the benefit of agencies, employees, and the surrounding community. These policies are in Part II and apply in both a city and regional context.
Part I: The Form and Character of the Nation’s Capital

Great cities evolve in a way that is authentic to their character and their future aspirations. Deep-rooted in Washington’s DNA are signature qualities such as broad sun-lit and tree lined streets, and an unmistakable skyline. Equally authentic to Washington’s character is a tradition of long-range planning that asserts that the capital’s cityscape is more than a random result of economic activity over time; rather, it has aspired to a more explicit civic form. Built Washington—situated and scaled to the natural environment—emerged as a city of form and experience for residents, the nation’s citizens, and millions of annual visitors. As Washington continues to evolve towards a vibrant future, its established urban design framework assures that it will do so in a way that retains many of those qualities that distinguish it from other cities.

Planning Together

The federal and District of Columbia governments share a vision to further Washington, DC as a great capital city that continues to evolve by building upon its extraordinary planning legacy with a renewed focus on elevating the way people experience the city. As joint stewards charged with protecting and advancing Washington as a vibrant capital, the federal and District governments believe it is essential to mutually promote these shared values. Through coordinated planning and project review both governments ensure the established urban design framework supports an evolving city that serves as a progressive 21st century metropolis and a nation’s capital.

The foundation of Washington’s design and character is based on continuous and deliberate planning to create a capital worthy of our nation. The streets, reservations, and vistas in Washington’s urban core collectively establish the historic L’Enfant City as the singular American example of a purpose built national capital solely conceived to physically express the ideals of a new republic. This historic plan serves as a significant urban design framework. Both the federal and District of Columbia governments have extended through subsequent generations of planning and the development of a signature system of public parks, lushly landscaped streets, and architecturally rich neighborhoods and buildings. Deeply rooted in the city’s form are also natural qualities like the topography, streams and waterways, and sweeping promontory views that continue to shape the human experience of this city in both subtle and formative ways.

As a growing city, Washington, DC, must respond to the evolving needs of its residents, workers, and visitors and be cognizant of how technology and innovation are transforming the way people engage the public realm and built landscape to remain vital for future generations. The continued planning efforts by the federal and District of Columbia governments will build upon our planning legacy to meet the new century by shaping buildings, streets, and public spaces of our city as places for people; celebrating the increasing diversity of people and institutions within our city through the design of public spaces; and elevating our nation’s capital as a sustainable and resilient place. By weaving the everyday experiences of people and contemporary design into the historic plan of our city we aim to elevate the national image of Washington as a truly great city.
Section A: Urban Design Framework

Good urban design enhances a city’s vitality, livability, and beauty. Washington’s design emphasizes its role as a national capital with natural, urban, and symbolic identities.

The composite urban design framework is particularly distinctive within the original L’Enfant City. Here, the combination of public spaces created by the L’Enfant and McMillan Plans (collectively known as The Plan of the City of Washington), together with the Height Act, resulted in an expansive, elegantly proportioned urban core. The Public Parking Act of 1870 shaped the public space and park-like character of Washington’s system of streets and public spaces across the entire city. These defining documents broadly define Washington’s innovative urban design framework and shape the qualities associated with its unique role as the nation’s capital. These documents are placed within a planning context and described in more detail in pages 1-7 of the Urban Design Element’s Technical Addendum.

As set forth through the Plan of the City of Washington and the Height Act, the natural and man-made components form a unique framework of basic physical forms, patterns, and features. These can be perceived as interrelated parts that form a single composition, making Washington a widely recognizable and memorable city.

None of these components can stand alone. From the many overlooks throughout the city, the visual field reveals how the framework components uniquely fit together and create a three dimensional spatial and visual order that reinforces national identity through prominently situated symbols and cultural institutions.

Because Washington is designed to be both seen and experienced, one policy objective is to identify the visual structures and enhance the city’s visibility from publicly-owned overlooks at key vantage points. While many cities have overlooks at the top of buildings, nowhere else is such a premium placed on pedestrian vantage points located on public land. Where these overlooks are federal properties, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) will continue to address the important planning issues associated with balancing agency security needs with public access.
The L'Enfant Plan integrates a cityscape with natural geography to create an urban framework for the Washington region. In 1791, the city was established as the seat for the federal government. It places two seats of government, the People’s House (U.S. Capitol) and the President’s House (the White House), on prominent topographic flats (see page 23 for more information on the topographic bowl). A network of diagonal streets radiates outward from these two locations over the escarpment. The plan includes a system of open spaces, streets, and reservations explicitly designed to create a visual hierarchy of important places and to reinforce civic identity.

Policy Guide
For policies related to the city's natural form please see:

- B.2 Natural Setting: The Topographic Bowl, Waterways, and their Extents
- B.5 Preeminent Viewsheds and View Corridors

Escarpment: a long, steep slope, especially one at the edge of a plateau or separating land areas at different heights. The escarpment defines the edge of the topographic bowl.
The existing park and open space system in Washington is influenced by the 1902 Report of the Senate Park Commission: The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia (The McMillan Plan), which recommended acquiring lands to better connect the park system within Washington, DC. It also established a more formal design framework that shapes the appearance of the National Mall, the park system, and parkway drives, illustrated in the map on the left.

These federal lands together provide a system of public parks and a natural environment at a variety of scales throughout the city. This includes smaller scale urban parks, circles, and squares that are woven throughout the city’s core and located at its major extensions. Parkways line the city at its natural edges nearest the rivers. Washington also has an extensive linear parkway system, including Rock Creek Park (the largest park). The Civil War Defenses of Washington (commonly referred as the Fort Circle Parks), define the high ridgelines that encircle the historic city.

There are also several publicly accessible federal lands within the city that provide a natural setting. Some offer panoramic views of the nation’s capital and surroundings. These include the Armed Forces Retirement Home, St. Elizabeths, the National Arboretum, and the U.S. Naval Observatory.

**Policy Guide**

For policies relating to the open-space system please see:

- B.2 Natural Setting: The Topographic Bowl, Waterways, and their Extents
- B.3 The L’Enfant City and the Public Realm
- B.5 Preeminent Viewsheds and View Corridors
Within the L'Enfant City, there is a visually coherent system of streets and public spaces. Broad avenues radiate outward from prominent, civic sites (such as the White House and U.S. Capitol) extending beyond the historic city. These streets retain the formal, baroque qualities of their original design. The diagonal avenues visually connect public spaces, parks, monuments, and important buildings.

Outside the L'Enfant City, these streets and diagonal avenues have varying characteristics. However, many are framed by concentrated activity and higher densities than the local street networks that occur in the interstitial spaces between the avenues.

**Capital Gateway** These designated gateways announce entry into the capital city. They are entry points where elements of the monumental core are visible. For example, the Arlington Memorial Bridge has symbolic significance and provides a formal processional entry into Washington, DC.

**Gateways** Define the city’s edge or major entries into the city.

**Major Axial Streets** These streets extend along the primary north-south and east-west cross axes established within the L'Enfant Plan leading to the U.S. Capitol and White House.

**Expressways and Parkways** The city's expressways serve a primary purpose of moving people through the city. The city’s parkways are sited along elevated quays and afford commuters sweeping views of the city and surrounding area from a variety of vantage points.

**Major Transit Hubs and Metro Stations** Washington’s Metrorail system is an important piece of transportation infrastructure that shapes and connects the city and region. Many parts of the system exist underground and aren’t visible with the exception of station entrances.

**Policy Guide**

For policies relating to the streets and public space system please see:
- B.1 Capital City Character: General Urban Design Policies
- B.3 The L'Enfant City and the Public Realm

![Figure 3](image-url)
The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements

Urban Design

Streets + Public Space System: L'Enfant City

The visually coherent system of streets and public spaces within the L'Enfant City retain the formal, baroque qualities with which they were originally designed. The diagonal avenues visually connect public spaces and buildings, parks, monuments, and important civic buildings. The significant vistas shown on the map include all of the views documented as part of the NRHP registration for the L’Enfant Plan. There are several additional vistas added outside of those included in the NRHP nomination. For more detailed information on significant vistas please refer to page 32-33 of the Technical Addendum.

The area with the greatest concentration of federal properties and resources surrounds the National Mall and is known as the monumental core. Many of these facilities were built at a similar grand scale as those located on the Mall. These concentrated federal areas, as well as the edges that bound them, present opportunities to improve physical and visual connections and create more engaging and lively spaces.

NCPC undertakes long range planning efforts that focus on specific areas within the monumental core, including the Southwest Federal Center, the Federal Triangle, and the Northwest Rectangle. The Monumental Core Framework Plan (2009) established planning goals to strengthen linkages between important places, reinforce national symbols, and realize place-making goals. The SW Ecodistrict Plan (2013) proposed a transformation of the Southwest Federal Center between 3rd and 12th Streets, SW into a more dynamic center with a greater mix of uses, higher densities, and more engaging public spaces. These plans provide more detailed guidance on streets and public spaces.

Policy Guide

For policies relating to the streets and public space system please see:

- B.1 Capital City Character: General Urban Design Policies
- B.3 The L’Enfant City and the Public Realm
- B.4 The Monumental Core
- B.5 Preeminent Viewsheds and View Corridors
Urban Patterns

Generally, there is a higher density, or an urban core, within the L'Enfant City. Many federal headquarters and facilities, as well as the city’s main business district, are located here. Beyond the L'Enfant City there are concentrated dense corridors with a mix of uses surrounded by lower density residential areas.

The relationship of building height to geography plays an important role in the sweeping panoramic views of Washington’s skyline. The dense urban core is located within the topographic bowl at elevations close to sea level. The urban core is also where the greatest concentration of higher buildings (generally those exceeding 90 feet) are located. The surrounding highlands beyond the escarpment have buildings of lesser height.

There is also a network of dense urban neighborhood hubs throughout the NCR. Examples include Rosslyn in Arlington County and Bethesda in Montgomery County.

Policy Guide

For policies relating to urban patterns please see:
- B.3 The L'Enfant City and the Public Realm
- B.4 The Monumental Core
- B.5 Preeminent Viewsheds and View Corridors
Significant Structures + Civic Art

Major Symbolic Structures
These structures symbolize the nation’s capital and define its image. The U.S. Capitol dome, the White House, and Washington Monument are the most prominent structures that delineate the skyline by creating a significant break in the consistent horizontal quality of the city’s built form.
1. U.S. Capitol
2. White House
3. Washington Monument

Skyline + Gateway Structures
Structures that are visually prominent due to their spatial location. Some examples of notable elements that define the skyline and others are adjacent to gateways into the city.

Skyline:
1. U.S. Air Force Memorial
2. Washington National Cathedral
3. Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

Gateway:
4. Jefferson Memorial
5. Lincoln Memorial
6. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial
7. Kennedy Center
8. Arlington House
9. U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial
10. RFK Stadium site

Proposed Civic + Cultural Sites
These sites reference those designated in NCPC’s Memorials and Museums Master Plan (2001). This plan, along with other NCPC long-range plans, envisions ways to extend and better integrate the language of the U.S. Capitol and monumental core into the contemporary city and surroundings. These plans established a principle of locating memorials and cultural sites with respect to topography and orientation to the original city plan.

Policy Guide
For policies relating to significant structures, civic, art, and the symbolic skyline, please see:
- B.1 Capital City Character: General Urban Design Policies
- B.3 The L’Enfant City and the Public Realm
- B.4 The Monumental Core
- B.5 Preeminent Viewsheds and View Corridors
The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements | Urban Design

Westward views along the National Mall

Fort Stevens Park

Westward views along the National Mall
A.2 Washington's Dynamic Character

A.2.1 Natural Identity

Washington has a strong, natural identity. Its given form is highly varied and has a rich diversity of ridges, stream valleys, waterways, and ecological systems. The natural blueprint was irretrievably lost in many cities, buried beneath buildings and infrastructure. However, the distinctive elements of natural identity persist today in Washington in various conditions. For example, many of the ridges remain fully perceptible and the major summits are emphasized by iconic structures, such as the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception and the Washington National Cathedral. Other natural elements, such as the city’s once abundant, but often neglected, street trees are being replanted at greater rates after decades of decline.12

One of Washington’s most distinctive characteristics is the link between its natural and man-made forms, and the manner by which together they uniquely express civic identity. The site chosen to establish the federal city was a relatively flat area at the confluence of the Potomac River and the Eastern Branch (now known as the Anacostia River). The site was surrounded by a series of low hills (the topographic bowl) which includes the Anacostia Hills, Arlington Ridge, and the Florida Avenue Escarpment (see Figure 1). The natural features of these rivers and the topographic bowl were all-important to L’Enfant’s Plan because they gave a sense of place and a green backdrop to his vision for the new city. Today, some of these topographic sites remain under the control of the National Park Service and are protected from development.

The topographic bowl gives visual definition to the center of the L’Enfant City and two man-made focal points. The first of these is the U.S. Capitol. The central feature of L’Enfant’s design was the elevated site selected for a People’s House, on the brow of Jenkins Hill near the geographic center of the topographic bowl. The U.S. Capitol is symbolically connected to the Potomac River through sweeping views looking west down a “grand avenue bordered by gardens,” today known as the National Mall. A less grand but still elevated site a little over a mile and a half northwest of the U.S. Capitol was set aside for the second focal point, the President’s House, with its own sweeping views to the south, down the Potomac River towards Alexandria.

The view from the U.S. Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and the western horizon form a major east-west axis. Views of the White House across the Ellipse to the Jefferson Memorial and the southern horizon form the major north-south axis. The National Register Nomination for the L’Enfant Plan identifies these two axes as primary vistas, and they cross at the Washington Monument. This characteristic integration of a monumental and urban framework with a natural topographic composition creates a unique urban design basis for the nation’s capital.

From a geographic perspective, the topographic bowl is the natural frame for the nation’s capital. However, the political jurisdictions within the bowl are not the same and their community goals may differ. Therefore the topographic bowl and the primary vistas are no longer characterized as predominately green settings in some areas. This topographic bowl condition presents a singular challenge for envisioning the future design basis for the nation’s capital, particularly as viewed from the primary vistas within the monumental core.

For example, Arlington Ridge is an important segment of the bowl, and parts of its natural character were preserved by the presence of Arlington Cemetery, Fort Meyer, and the U.S. Marine Corp Memorial. Parts of Rosslyn are characterized by a corporate office presence and high-rise residential development, creating an urban backdrop in place of a natural setting. Because the Height Act does not extend beyond the District, a conceptual understanding of building height in Arlington with respect to the primary vistas is defined through a resolution of the Arlington Board. This non-binding resolution acknowledges the importance of building height within Arlington with respect to the National Mall, particularly with the east-west axis.13

It is critical to engage local jurisdictions to address mutual interests in the overall urban design quality of the nation’s capital and region, and to prepare strategies that holistically consider the quality of the primary vistas and their context as viewed from points in Washington, Virginia, and Maryland, as well as from the steps of the U.S. Capitol and the White House. As the surrounding natural and urban landscapes evolve it is important to maintain the monumental core’s symbolic image.

Beyond the monumental core, the existing urban design framework integrates natural beauty and nature within the city fabric. The L’Enfant Plan created many circles, squares, and other places that can provide civic identity within neighborhoods. Each contributes to the city’s natural identity and are important components of urban design. The natural setting was also a central concern of the McMillan Plan, as described in the Open Space Network map on page 7, which envisioned the parks and open space well beyond the L’Enfant Plan into the rest of the city.
A.2.2 Urban Identity

The NCR embodies a rich variety of built elements that shape its urban identity, from the low scale historic districts of Old Town Alexandria and Silver Spring, to the denser areas within downtown Washington and Montgomery and Arlington Counties. While the complete planning context for how the city and region developed is too broad and complex for the scope of this Urban Design Element, some of the most important aspects are found in the Formative Contributors section of the Technical Addendum on pages 1-7. For further reading, see Worthy of the Nation, which includes a detailed history of more recent major planning influences, such as urban renewal (1960s), regionalism (1950s-present), and sustainability.

For purposes of the Federal Urban Design Element, there are four central and interrelated themes that shape policy issues and directions within the context of urban identity:

- City form and civic identity: the importance of the public realm in Washington
- The character of the monumental core
- City and symbol: downtown and the monumental core
- Beyond the monumental core: the federal role in city-building

City Form and Civic Identity: The Importance of the Public Realm in Washington

Plans for Washington sought to join nature into the urban fabric at every scale and link city form to civic identity. The national image is largely achieved through the design and function of the public realm and its relationship to important civic places.

Washington’s interconnected system of open spaces shapes the human experience of its built and natural features. These include both visual and physical connections that orient viewers to their surroundings, create visual cues to important places (immediately and at a distance), and move people throughout the entire city.

The Plan of the City of Washington, the Height Act, and the Public Parking Act of 1870 are major influences in the functional and visual quality of the public realm. Open space typologies include the spaces between buildings, the settings of federal buildings, and cultural institutions, plazas, and urban and natural park spaces. Decisions about how the public realm and streetscapes are programmed and designed influence how people experience the nation’s capital and their perceptions about its character. Within this context, the foremost planning challenge is balancing security and accessibility. Security is a leading factor in decisions about how agencies locate, design, and program federal facilities and the setting around them. Integrating security elements with other urban design goals, such as design integrity, national image, and pedestrian experience, is also a priority.

One public realm feature that is unique to parts of Washington is the long-standing practice of hiding or diminishing utilitarian infrastructure. Examples include the ban on overhead streetcar and utility wires within the L’Enfant City and the 1:1 penthouse setback within the Height Act, which hides building mechanical equipment from street view. These public realm principles created an elegant and orderly quality to Washington’s 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 challenge.
The special visual qualities and monumental forms of the capital city are translated even beneath the ground. The American Institute of Architects awarded its 2014 Twenty Five Year Award to the Washington Metrorail system. “Designed by Harry Weese, Fellow of the AIA with the matching ideals of ‘Great Society’ liberalism and Mid-Century Modernism, the Washington Metro gives monumental civic space to the humble task of public transit, gravitas fit for the nation’s capital.” Further, the American Institute of Architects describes the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority’s goal to provide a ridership experience “radically different from pre-WWII transit systems, an experience largely fulfilled by station design.”

“From the outset, Weese and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority knew exactly what they did not want: the New York City subway system. Metro was defined in total opposition to the most successful urban rail transit system in North America. Despite its status as an iconic set piece for the cultural capital of the nation, the New York subway is largely a haphazard assembly of rabbit warren tunnels dug out with an industrial utilitarianism that stops long before self-aware references to New York’s heavy-industry past. Instead, Metro would be airy, spacious, and ennobling, and it would accomplish this through size and scale. As Weese explained in The Great Society Subway, ‘Our whole thrust is to maximize the volume. It would use the formal language of monumental civic architecture, seen so often in Washington’s federal buildings, and watch it seep into the earth, below ground, for the yeoman’s task of public transit.’”

The Character of the Monumental Core

The spatial and symbolic center of the city is the monumental core, which includes the U.S. Capitol grounds, the White House, Arlington National Cemetery, the National Mall, Federal Triangle, and the surrounding government offices and civic, cultural, and symbolic structures. The monumental core is most closely linked to the distinctive image of the capital city and the functions of federal government. While the major landmarks and resources within the core are perceived, it does not have a rigid geographic or jurisdictional boundary and continues to evolve.

The success of the monumental core first rests on a strong vision for its future, and upon addressing and enhancing the complex relationships between the core and its surroundings. This includes both natural areas and some of the region’s densest neighborhoods, including downtown Washington and parts of Arlington, Virginia. NCPC’s Monumental Core Framework Plan, an extension of The Legacy Plan, set forth a vision for the core.

This vision continues to be refined. A first impression of this area may be one of distinctive volume, including its gracious building forms and settings, its formal influences, and the predominance of some of the most significant national memorials, including the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Many of the city and nation’s most architecturally significant federal and cultural buildings are also located within the monumental core. Although the core was historically characterized by neoclassical influences and architecture, new projects enrich the city’s architectural quality. Examples include the National Museum of the American Indian, the U.S. Institute for Peace, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Although the monumental core is envisioned as a composition of spaces, parts are disrupted by physical barriers. Residents and millions of annual visitors experience these barriers on several levels. First, on a site specific level, security elements such as bollards disrupt pedestrian circulation and access and reduce people’s comfort. Given the importance of the public realm in the city’s original plans and identity as a capital, planners must continue to identify solutions that protect federal buildings, employees, and the core’s design integrity.
Second, on a larger scale, major transportation infrastructure cuts across whole neighborhoods in and around the core. These large disruptions in the urban fabric are most prevalent in Southwest Washington which is shaped by urban renewal plans from the 1950s. Some large federal buildings occupy entire blocks and retail may be tucked within indoor malls, which fosters a bleak pedestrian experience. Addressing the unanticipated consequences of these past interventions is a core theme of the Monumental Core Framework Plan and continues to be an important priority. The planning community should continue to refine and implement a vision that realizes the monumental core’s potential, including steps to address transportation barriers and create a more accessible and welcoming place.

City and Symbol: Downtown and the Monumental Core

The relationship between the monumental core and the surrounding urban environment is an important condition with implications for urban design policy. Creating a place for both government and commerce is integral to the Plan of the City of Washington. While the role of nature in national identity is explicitly documented, urban identity has evolved over time.

Today, the downtown areas of Washington and Arlington are growing stronger, more diverse, and more vibrant; and there are many economic and community benefits of this growth. Long-range plans and smaller focused studies have established a vision for improving accessibility and the public realm within these urban areas. For example, the District of Columbia Office of Planning’s Center City Action Agenda7 (2008) established a place-making initiative for the urban neighborhoods that surround the monumental core. The form that new density should take—whether at a human scale or more grand, whether the monumental core’s potential, including steps to address transportation barriers and create a more accessible and welcoming place.

Several examples of contemporary urban design principles related to the physical relationship between the monumental core and the surrounding urban areas are discussed below. These principles guided policy development in subsequent sections of this element.

Create placemaking strategies to strengthen the public realm and user experience in the monumental core.

In addition to the corrective measures necessary to re-knit the monumental core’s urban fabric, an important question is what roles are the area’s major spaces expected to play? Many parts of the core are shuttered at night and would benefit from strategies to enhance their public spaces and create more active programming—a goal also shared for downtown Washington. The core’s design structure and monumentality has the strength to support a wide variety of place-making activities without detracting from its role as a national showplace for visitors and the seat of government. Indeed, the success of the monumental core requires an intermixing of adaptable programming at a range of scales with those elements that are important for the capital city’s image.

Integrate federal buildings into the surrounding urban fabric.

One important policy question for federal offices in the monumental core, downtown, and suburban locations is how buildings physically address the streets and public spaces in front of them, in terms of both design and programming. For example, a criticism of the FBI building on Pennsylvania Avenue is that it does not support important principles for a strong downtown. In particular, it is unwelcoming to pedestrians and breaks the “retail wall” along E Street. There are, however, other examples where federal buildings have successfully engaged their surroundings, including the headquarters buildings for the U.S. General Services Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Protect the monumental core from impacts of commercial digital signage.

Digital signage, including lighting, is another example of a policy issue associated with balancing the commercial and civic presence in and around the monumental core. In general, some cities have used lighting to activate public areas and create a more dynamic visitor experience. However, depending on where these programs are situated and how they are implemented, digital lighting may negatively alter the monumental core’s street atmosphere and skyline views of iconic national resources. This prompts an important discussion about balancing efforts to enhance the city’s commercial and retail presence while also protecting the monumental core’s night time image, which emphasizes memorials and major civic structures.

Develop transition strategies between densities and land uses to protect national resources.

A final policy issue relates to physical transitions between lower and higher density areas, particularly with respect to topography. A good example where transitions are important is North Capitol Street, where the street gains elevation as it moves north toward the escarpment. The street is framed by buildings of greater height and higher density on the east side in the NoMa commercial district. The west side remains largely residential.

Another important transition is the scenic and urban backdrop, as viewed from the primary east-west vista towards Arlington, Virginia. Washington’s elegant urban pattern is situated with respect to topography. To reinforce this character, policies should identify transition and integration strategies at every scale between the traditional parts of the monumental core and the surrounding downtown and scenic areas. If Washington is historically a landscape image, what is the conceptual understanding of vertical elements, such as buildings or sculpture, within the city’s design framework?
Beyond the Monumental Core: The Federal Government and City-Building

A final theme is the role of the federal government in city-building. Establishing a seat for federal functions was clearly an important part of Washington’s early urban identity. Yet, what role does the federal government play today in city-building? How does it shape the region’s urban identity? While the Plan of the City of Washington created a holistic approach to establishing federal buildings and grounds that emphasized the public realm, large scale federal planning efforts, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, were generally less successful.

The Plan of the City of Washington connected federal buildings to the city around them on a large scale, reinforcing a sense of place with interrelated implications for both federal offices and the city. Today, many new federal buildings are constructed within campus settings. Although the context for new projects within the region is site specific, the relationship between federal buildings and their immediate surroundings remains important.

The legacy of the federal government’s contribution to urban design quality in the region is one of successes and failures. Planners today draw lessons from the past when engaged in urban design and city-building. Case studies, such as the relationship between the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Headquarters and the surrounding NoMa neighborhood, illustrate the potential for federal agencies to positively participate in the city-building process.

A.2.3 Symbolic Identity

Washington’s iconic cityscape is distinguished through the close relationship between its form and the functional and visual symbols of national civic life—whether a public building, ceremonial avenue, museum, memorial, or national park. Washington’s symbolic identity expresses itself in a number of ways:

- A visual order of importance (hierarchy) that emphasizes symbols and structures, particularly the U.S. Capitol, White House, Washington Monument, and places along the National Mall from both composite skyline views and linear views along particular streets.

- The character of the monumental core, including the National Mall.

- Memorials, museums, and cultural resources that represent narratives of national significance.

- Special ceremonies that relate to symbolic and core governmental functions of the nation’s capital.

For more detailed information see the Significant Structures + Civic Art map on page 11.
Major resources that contribute to Washington’s symbolic and civic image include:

The Symbolic Skyline

As stated in Worthy of the Nation, L’Enfant urged “embracing in one view the whole extent from the Eastern Branch to Georgetown, and from the banks of the Potomac to the mountains [the hills surrounding the city].” One of the most important contributors to Washington’s image is its unmistakable and symbolic skyline. For more than a century the federal Height Act has played a central role in shaping the form of the skyline, particularly within the boundaries of the L’Enfant City and the topographic bowl.

As viewed from the many overlooks within Washington, or from across the Potomac River in Virginia, the long views of Washington reveal a composite skyline punctuated not by commercial skyscrapers but by architectural embellishments and civic symbols. The Washington Monument, U.S. Capitol, Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Old Post Office, U.S. Air Force Memorial, and Washington National Cathedral are some of the most distinctive skyline structures. From closer vantage points, the low scale of buildings and spacious settings around other landmarks, such as the White House, Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, and Smithsonian museums, creates a fitting character for a capital city set in natural beauty. This park-like quality distinguishes Washington from other major metropolitan cities, though not to the extent it once did due to tree loss.

Washington’s skyline and views have evolved over time. However, the urban design principles that give preeminence to its most important national symbols, and particular viewsheds to them, has generally been retained. These principles were reaffirmed through 2013’s Height Master Plan. This plan, requested by the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, included detailed technical analysis and extensive public input that considered the extent to which the Height Act continues to serve local and national interests.

Viewsheds

The city’s street-level views and vistas are created by the location and extent of its streets where they 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. These features 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.

Commemorative Works

The memorial, another hallmark of Washington’s symbolic character, is both a ceremonial and permanent fixture. Memorials are often located in national parks among Washington’s high-profile structures, viewsheds, and promontories. They may inspire and broaden civic engagement; enhance their surroundings; and introduce cultural resources to parks. One of the hallmarks of a successful public realm is adaptability; thus, it is important to sensitively locate and design permanent memorials with respect to urban design goals and other open space uses. Since the 1980s, some of the city’s memorial proposals are moving away from single, ornamental objects to large landscape solutions, with multiple commemorative elements. This trend prompts an important question—with implications for planning and design—how to balance a need for a variety of public space uses that typify an urban park system with the sacred, commemorative purposes of a memorial. Policies related to memorials are located in the Visitors & Commemoration Element.
It is important to create a sense of arrival to the nation's capital through prominent gateways, such as bridges, and the design and programming of federal reservations and special streets.

North Capitol Street

Chevy Chase Circle

Proposed East Capitol Street Gateway from NCPC's Legacy Plan
Section B: Policies Related to the Form and Character of the Nation’s Capital

B.1 Capital City Character: General Urban Design Policies

As the capital city, Washington represents the country and embodies many of its civic identity aspirations. Washington’s image is experienced by residents and visitors, and transmitted around the nation and world by media, arts and literature, photographs—even through currency. This resonating and powerful image is formed in part by individual buildings, park lands, and monuments, and in part by the city’s overall urban design framework, which was explicitly designed to create a setting that reinforces the nation’s democratic ideals.

NCPC is committed to enhancing the urban design quality of the nation’s capital and protecting the integrity of the city’s essential urban design framework. This especially includes the interconnected system of streets, reservations, and public spaces created by the Plan of the City of Washington. Two important, related principles must also be rooted in the vision for the nation’s capital: first, the contributions of each new generation have an important place in the city’s identity, and second, the federal government should support creativity and innovation in design and planning. While the Urban Design Element will not include guidance regarding architectural style or fine-grained design detail, a principle that Washington is a vital and evolving place, with an urban design framework that can accommodate both the old and the new, is fundamental to the image of America’s capital.

The federal government should:

**UD.B.1.1** Express the dignity befitting the national capital’s image. Federal development in the city and region should adhere to high aesthetic standards already established by the planning and design legacy of the nation’s capital. This legacy encompasses both the old and the new. The capital’s rich architectural heritage is continually augmented by the design contributions of each new generation.

**UD.B.1.2** Create a sense of arrival to the nation’s capital through prominent gateways, such as bridges, and the design and programming of federal reservations and special streets as described within this element. See Figure 4.

1. Enhance gateway routes. Distinct and memorable landscaping, public art, building sculpting and/or architectural treatments can reinforce the experience of arrival.
2. Create gateways for important settings within the monumental core that provide a sense of entry with visual cues and transition points from one place to another.
UD.B.1.3 Preserve Washington’s picturesque, horizontal character, and reinforce the Height Act.

UD.B.1.4 Maintain the skyline formed by the region’s natural features, particularly the topographic bowl and its symbolic character.

1. Visually reinforce the preeminence of the U.S. Capitol, White House, Washington Monument, and other major nationally significant resources by protecting the visual frame around them. Carefully examine the use of vertical elements within the setting of major national resources.

2. Protect the settings of major skyline elements from visual intrusions such as antennas, water towers and rooftop equipment, or other constructed elements.

UD.B.1.5 Utilize building, street, and exterior lighting that respects the hierarchy of memorials, monuments, and important civic buildings and spaces in the nation’s capital, with the U.S. Capitol and Washington Monument the most prominent features in the nighttime skyline.

1. Digital and motion signage, illuminated billboards, and/or other lighting should not detract from the setting of the National Mall, capital gateway views of the monumental core, or skyline views to important symbols and civic buildings, particularly in and around the monumental core. Any proposed illuminated signage that could impact the monumental core or other major park spaces and natural areas including waterfronts should be extensively modeled and analyzed for potential impacts prior to implementation.

UD.B.1.6 Enhance physical and symbolic connections that reinforce the city’s spatial order.

UD.B.1.7 Use the city’s physical framework of major axial views, vistas, streets, termini, and natural elements to establish new places and create symbolic points of reference and distinctive settings for new museums, commemorative works, and civic spaces.

UD.B.1.8 Create welcoming and vibrant spaces that enhance the user experience and foster civic and local uses. Design the visual and functional qualities of the public realm to reinforce Washington’s national image, as well as its everyday experiences.
B.2 Natural Setting: The Topographic Bowl, Waterways, and their Extents

The importance of the natural setting as an abiding and foundational component of the capital city’s form cannot be emphasized enough. The Plan of the City of Washington addresses the city’s character through natural elements in a variety of ways, such as creating parks and green settings that surround important federal buildings and civic spaces. The plan utilizes topography in both dramatic and subtle ways to convey the importance of a select few civic structures. While these characteristics are most readily apparent within the L’Enfant City and the topographic bowl, national parkland extends into the city and region, including Rock Creek Park in Washington, Mount Vernon in Virginia, and Great Falls in Maryland. In addition to the region’s waterways and hillsides, these parks create a rich and varied setting of natural beauty that contributes to the urban design character and sense of place for the nation’s capital.

A key challenge for addressing the historic and future design framework for the nation’s capital is the character of the topographic bowl and river settings. The lower elevations or basin areas of the topographic bowl are a central consideration. There are excellent wide and distant views up and across the Potomac River that reveal the natural extent of the local topography and reinforce the monumental core’s horizontal character. Because of the broad and open design for the river and lowlands at these points, the encircling slopes of the topographic bowl are particularly conspicuous. From an urban design perspective, these hillsides perform two important functions: they are backgrounds for notable views and vistas in or around the L’Enfant City, and their slopes provide public outlooks for appreciating the capital.

The three key hillsides that comprise the topographic bowl include:

**The Anacostia Hills** (Washington, DC) form the eastern rim. Much of this area is characterized by a backdrop of green against the rivers. Development in this area is largely comprised of low-rise development and neighborhoods. There are significant open spaces established along the elevated ridges including several of the Civil War Defenses of Washington.

**The Arlington Ridge** (Virginia) form the western rim and comprise a direct spatial relationship with the National Mall. This area is characterized by clustered downtown development of varying heights (upwards of 300 feet) in Rosslyn which creates an urban backdrop to the Lincoln Memorial. This urban wall is in contrast with the rest of the views from the National Mall, particularly when compared to the green backdrops and consistent, low-lying urban forms found within the other hillsides. Other parts of Arlington have retained a green backdrop, particularly near Arlington National Cemetery.

**The Florida Avenue Escarpment** (Washington, DC) forms the northern ring of hills. Its central terrain slopes steeply and forms a broad overlooking terrace parallel to the L’Enfant Plan’s boundary. Its western features, separated by the rift of Rock Creek Valley, are the Georgetown Heights, which rise up from the river and are some of the highest peaks in the metropolitan area. To the east, the escarpment turns northeasterly away from Florida Avenue and terminates near the National Arboretum. This terrain features the most uniformly urbanized portion of the topographic bowl. However, much of this area has the built-up character of a hill town, with low density neighborhoods and open spaces at strategic points, such as Meridian Hill Park (due north of the White House).
The federal government should:

**UD.B.2.1** Preserve the natural setting of the L’Enfant City. In particular:

1. Protect the natural green aspect of federal lands that are part of the topographic bowl, including, but not limited to, National Park Service lands along Arlington Ridge and the Anacostia Hills, Arlington National Cemetery, and St. Elizabeths West Campus.

2. Support the following policies related to natural topography, consistent with the District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan:
   a. Maintain the prominence of the topographic bowl formed by the lowland and rim features of the L’Enfant City. This should include preserving the green setting of Anacostia Hills and maintaining the visual prominence of the Florida Avenue Escarpment.
   b. Respect and perpetuate the natural features of the city’s landscape. In low-density, wooded, or hilly areas, new construction should preserve natural features, rather than alter them to accommodate development. Density in such areas should be provided as needed to protect natural features such as streams and wetlands. Where appropriate, clustering of development should be considered as a way to protect natural resources.
   c. Protect prominent ridgelines so as to maintain and enhance the District’s physical image and horizontal character.

**UD.B.2.2** Encourage local jurisdictions and federal agencies to reinforce the capital’s natural frame.

1. Retain and add trees on hillsides.

2. Scale and strategically locate buildings in relationship to the topography to reinforce important views to and from sloping sites. Protect views outward from the L’Enfant City and views inward from vantage points along the rim of the topographic bowl from inappropriate intrusions. Preserve open space and allow for public use of the waterfront.

*Washington’s Waterfront*

The city’s waterfront is an important piece of the public realm providing a place for public enjoyment, recreation, commemoration, and environmental stewardship. The Anacostia and Potomac Rivers define natural and urban edges of the city and offer panoramic views and settings of extraordinary beauty unique. The waterfront should be accessible to the public, with a mix of quiet and reflective spaces and others actively developed to support programming and urban activities. Much of the shoreline is publicly owned, with significant portions of the waterfront framed by open space parklands under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, including heavily used parks and trails such as Potomac Heritage Trail, Mount Vernon Trail, and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal towpath.

On-going planning work developed by both federal and local agencies continues to enhance this extraordinary natural feature. NCPC’s Legacy Plan envisioned Washington’s waterfront along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers as a national showcase of urban vitality and sensitive design. The plan proposed restoring the city’s historic connections to the river and developing a continuous band of open space from Georgetown to the National Arboretum. The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, a public-private partnership under the leadership of the District Department of Transportation, further developed this vision with planned projects such as the Anacostia Riverwalk and the 11th Street Bridge Park.
UD.B.2.3 Recognize the contribution of Rock Creek Park, the Anacostia Parks, and the Civil War Defenses of Washington in reinforcing the natural setting and character of the nation’s capital. In particular:

1. Complete multi-purpose trails connecting the Civil War Defenses of Washington, and those within the parks along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers.
2. Improve the transition between the edges of these large, natural parks and the neighborhoods that abut them to be sensitive to the natural setting.
3. Encourage tree planting and natural habitat restoration to meet goals described in the Federal Environment Element.

UD.B.2.4 Maintain and enhance the characteristics and natural settings of the National Park Service parks and parkways. In particular:

1. Maintain parkways as scenic landscape corridors and protect their historic character.
2. Encourage local jurisdictions to minimize—through planning, regulation, and thoughtful design—the impact of development visible from parkways.
3. Require actions to minimize and mitigate negative impacts to maintain parkway characteristics where transportation system impacts are unavoidable.

UD.B.2.5 Support public access to, and along, regional waterfronts along the Potomac River, Anacostia River, and other tributaries. In particular, work with federal and local governments as necessary to:

1. Avoid creating physical barriers to the waterfront.
2. Design and locate bridges to minimally affect local riverine habitat, waterways, shorelines, and valleys, as described within the Federal Environment Element.
3. Improve way-finding, signage, and pedestrian amenities on streets that lead to parks.
4. Preserve views from public lands to regional waterfronts, wherever possible.

UD.B.2.6 Encourage the further development of the urban tree canopy to frame street views, reinforce the human scale on broad streets, and provide critical shade and beauty.

Protecting Washington's Natural Framework

The District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan guide the vision for the densities within the topographic bowl along the Florida Avenue escarpment and Anacostia Hills. They include important guidance about protecting the natural frame of the L’Enfant City. With the exception of the NoMa neighborhood north of Union Station, these areas tend to be characterized by lower density development than found downtown. The federal government should continue to engage the District of Columbia and Arlington County governments to prepare a plan for enhancing the design framework of the nation’s capital, including urban design strategies that take into account the natural setting and the visual quality of the primary views.

One of the most important contributors to the urban design quality of the city and region are their trees. Washington was planned to support a lush tree canopy, with green open spaces and tree-lined boulevards. According to Casey Trees, a non-profit devoted to restoring Washington’s tree canopy, “some consider Washington the birthplace of arboriculture due to the tens of thousands of trees planted in the city in the 1800s, which earned the nickname the City of Tree’s.” Sadly, the loss of the city’s once abundant street trees is well documented. Washington lost an estimated 64 percent of its urban forest cover between 1973 and 1997 due to disease, development, and natural attrition. The District is implementing plans to replenish the city’s tree cover, and an important goal of the Urban Design Element is to reinforce these local, community, and nonprofit efforts.
B.3 The L’Enfant City and the Public Realm

The urban design of Washington’s public realm is inextricably linked to its emblematic image and character, and perhaps most importantly, how it is experienced. The public realm includes exterior places, linkages, and built form elements that are physically and/or visually accessible. These elements include streets, sidewalks, bicycle trails, bridges, plazas, squares, transportation hubs, gateways, parks, waterfronts, natural features, view corridors, landmarks, and building yards. The scale, form, and character of public realm elements signify the relative significance of a space within the city and define the human experience. For federal facilities, it is important to consider the accessibility of transit, bicycle, and pedestrian modes with urban design including American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) requirements.

The composition of buildings, reservations, streets, and vistas that collectively establish the historic L’Enfant City is the most important American example of a planned urban core that physically expresses its political role as a purpose-built national capital which also provides a framework for many of the city’s oldest commercial and residential neighborhoods. That these values were interwoven within the Plan of the City of Washington and continue to be reflected speaks to the ability of architecture and urban design to embody and project a deeper collective consciousness. And while the L’Enfant City’s development is based on the city’s original plan, it is not fixed architecturally to a particular time period. Indeed, the process of rebuilding and reimagining many parts of the L’Enfant City should be organic and ongoing.

Of particular importance to the Urban Design Element is the pedestrian experience along Washington’s avenues and public spaces. This is distinguished by a sense of openness, both within the immediate setting, and in terms of visibility to more distant structures and natural elements. This emphasis on the visual qualities and preeminence of the public realm is a fitting and fundamentally unique contribution to Washington’s image as the country’s capital city and is a legacy of its original plans.

For policies that further address the public realm for federal properties throughout Washington and the region, refer to Section C: Policies Related to Federal Facilities, Property, and the Public Realm starting on page 35. Additionally, the District of Columbia’s Public Realm Design Manual is a useful resource that provides further guidance for the maintenance of the public realm.

This policy section provides guidance on the distinct system of streets and public spaces within the L’Enfant City as documented on the map on the following page, highlighting special streets as defined within this element, the settings of federal buildings and grounds, parks, plazas and other open spaces that meet the following qualities:

Special Streets
- Streets that radiate from the U.S. Capitol and White House.
- Streets that radiate from the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial, or within the setting of the Jefferson Memorial.
- Streets that frame or contribute to defining major scenic or symbolic areas or that serve as important connections, edges, or boundaries to special settings of national importance.
- Preeminent view corridors as defined within this element. For more detailed information on each specific view corridor listed on this map please refer to pages 17-31 in the Technical Addendum.
- Significant vistas as defined in this element and documented in the NHRP registration for the Plan of the City of Washington. For more detailed information on each specific view corridor listed on this map please refer to pages 32-33 in the Technical Addendum.

Parks, Plazas, Open Spaces, and Natural Features
- Reservations within the L’Enfant City, particularly squares and circles located at the intersection of major radial/axial streets.
- Public spaces that frame or contribute to defining major scenic or symbolic areas or that serve as important connections, edges, or boundaries to special settings of national importance.
- Open spaces that promote a sense of entrance to the capital.
- Places that embody or display a distinctive functional importance by providing settings for ceremonies or activities related to the functions of the nation’s capital.
- Open spaces that serve as significant routes for ceremonial, cultural, or governmental activities related to the functions of the nation’s capital.
- Open spaces that contribute to interconnected landscapes, architectural settings or activity centers that display distinctive coherence of national importance.
The federal government should work with federal and District of Columbia agencies to:

**UD.B.3.1** Maintain or restore the integrity of the original L'Enfant Plan elements, including original rights-of-way, squares, streets, vistas, symbolic connections, and termini.

1. Discourage the closure of L'Enfant streets for private development. When L'Enfant streets must be closed for public purposes, ensure that deed restrictions are adopted so streets will be re-opened when the rights-of-way are no longer required for non-street purposes.

2. Protect the visual openness and functional qualities of L'Enfant public spaces by preventing visual incursions into the rights-of-way wherever possible. 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 adjacent to reservations, and along special streets as described in this element.

**UD.B.3.2** Enhance L'Enfant Plan reservations, particularly those at the intersection or termini of radial and axial streets and avenues, as public open spaces that serve residents and visitors as attractive neighborhood parks and sites for commemorative works. In particular:

1. Provide attractive, well-designed and well maintained amenities such as landscaping, lighting, way-finding, signage, seating, and where appropriate, play spaces for children.

2. Embellish reservations with commemorative works, fountains, and public art in ways that establish focal points for axial views.

3. Work with federal and local stakeholders to program reservations for placemaking, cultural activities, and passive recreation while, in accordance with federal regulations, respecting their historic character.

4. Work with federal and local stakeholders to ensure that pedestrian walkways and other public realm elements are designed to provide safe and appealing public access.

**UD.B.3.3** Protect the open space of the L'Enfant streets. The exceptional width and openness of the street rights-of-way constitutes public space that contributes to the city’s character.

**UD.B.3.4** Consider building setbacks, massing, and scale when constructing building facades to reinforce and frame the spatial definition of public spaces and right-of-ways.
UD.B.3.5 Ensure that streetscape elements including trees, enhance significant vistas, including the major axial and radiating streets that provide views of major buildings, parks, or commemorative works. Provide public realm and streetscape elements, such as street trees, transit amenities, curb cuts, garage access, transit infrastructure, security elements, and signage that:

1. Maintain views and don’t obstruct or detract from important views/viewsheds as described within this element.
2. Reinforce the processional experience (spatial order) along important view corridors.
3. Reinforce the visual frame for, and not detract from, the views of major national memorials, civic institutions, landmarks, and park reservations.
4. Enhance the pedestrian experience and reinforce the human scale along Special Streets.

UD.B.3.6 S sensitively locate and design public realm and streetscape elements along Special Streets and near important places. Public realm and streetscape programs should complement the surrounding area and create a visual cohesiveness to the setting. In particular, these programs should:

1. Maintain Special Streets with a cohesive tree canopy, and public realm and streetscape programs.
2. Provide landscape treatments that reflect the significance of Special Streets as important settings for the nation’s capital.

UD.B.3.7 Reinforce the distinctive character and gracious monumentality of the public realm and enhance the pedestrian experience in those areas that provide a setting for ceremonies or activities related to the functions of the capital, particularly within the monumental core.

1. Create cohesive treatment for roadway and sidewalk widths, building setbacks, and public realm and streetscape elements throughout the length of the street within the monumental core, except where a customized design defines a special precinct, such as the White House.
2. Establish and maintain a vision for a streetscape and public realm design program for all precincts within the monumental core, including, but not limited to the White House, U.S. Capitol, Federal Triangle, and Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the U.S. Capitol.

UD.B.3.8 Protect the beauty and visual qualities of the public realm and the pedestrian experience along Special Streets by orienting service functions to the backs of buildings where possible. To the extent feasible, orient all building garage entrances, mechanical equipment rooms, and loading facilities along service streets and designated alleys.

UD.B.3.9 Landscape treatments should enhance the settings around civic and cultural buildings and grounds.

UD.B.3.10 Streetscape furniture and other structural elements should be of high quality and design, and enhance the settings around civic and cultural buildings and grounds.

UD.B.3.11 Work with federal and local stakeholders, as appropriate, to sensitively locate and design interpretive, directional, advertising, and other functional signs in a way that complements the civic qualities of the monumental core and contributes to the public realm’s overall visual character. In particular:

1. Establish signs and other graphics in public spaces that respond to the context and aesthetic of the surrounding environment. Signage programs near the White House, the U.S. Capitol, the National Mall, and other nationally significant sites should not detract from the site’s visual preeminence nor the civic character of the settings around them.
2. Complement the street-defining elements of the precinct by keeping signs to a minimum.
3. Consolidate street signs and directional signs in one location to the extent possible.
4. Consider the concepts of placement, scale, size, composition, color, texture, lettering style, and readability of interpretive signs and graphics.

UD.B.3.12 Design and maintain streetscapes and open spaces to be adaptable to changing needs, while continuing to embody the design intent of Washington’s urban design framework.
B.4 The Monumental Core

The heart of Washington’s symbolic fabric is its monumental core. Much of the monumental core is a cherished part of the country’s architectural and cultural heritage, though parts of this extraordinary civic composition are disrupted by physical barriers. Examples of preeminent civic and cultural assets within the monumental core include the White House, U.S. Capitol, Supreme Court, Smithsonian Campus, major federal headquarters buildings, Kennedy Center, and Arlington National Cemetery.

Where noted, the policies within this section are derived by reference from the Framework Plan that guides the development of the monumental core, including opportunities for placemaking, locations for new cultural attractions, and strategies to increase the economic vitality of the area. The Framework Plan sets forth opportunities and strategies that address key challenges, including identifying new sites for memorials and museums; eliminating physical barriers that impede movement and limit access; creating a stronger diversity of land uses to promote day/night activities; and fostering a more welcoming street-level experience.

The federal government should:

**UD.B.4.1** Plan carefully for the design and land uses in and around the monumental core to reinforce and enhance its special role in the image of the nation’s capital. In general, encourage federal agencies and local jurisdictions to incorporate urban design strategies that consider the relationship between the design of new development and significant adjacencies, such as major public spaces, urban and historic fabric, and along the preeminent viewsheds described within this element. In particular:

1. Respect the character of the Federal Triangle buildings and grounds as established in the McMillan Plan. Explore new programming for the public realm and ground floors, including public art and pedestrian amenities, to create visual variety and activate the spaces for the enjoyment of the public and federal employees.

2. Respect the National Mall’s historic open space and monumental character for the benefit of future generations. Ensure that new development does not infringe on the civic qualities and integrity of the National Mall and the surrounding monumental core. In particular:
   a. Protect the experience of the National Mall as a public space within a park-like setting framed by civic and cultural buildings. Sensitively scale development of buildings on Independence and Constitution Avenues.
   b. Respect existing lines of sight from the National Mall and existing relationships, including height and mass within that line of sight.
**U.D.B.4.2** S sensitively sculpt new development and create or maintain public space programs for streets adjacent to major national civic and cultural institutions, such as the National Archives, National Building Museum, Kennedy Center, and Smithsonian museums.

1. Carefully plan development along axial streets that connect major historic cultural buildings, particularly along 8th Street, NW (National Archives and the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture).

2. Carefully plan development along streets with major adjacencies, particularly those next to the White House (including 15th and 17th Streets, NW), and at intersections with historic buildings, such as on F Street, NW at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and the U.S. Treasury Department.

**U.D.B.4.3** Create or strengthen multiple visual and functional linkages that connect reservations and civic spaces within the monumental core to the rest of the city utilizing the principles set forth in the Monumental Core Framework Plan. In particular, reinforce linkages with placemaking strategies, including public realm and streetscape programs as described in the Special Streets section of this element, and transportation programs to improve access for visitors.

1. Improve visual and functional connections between the National Mall, waterfront, and the rest of the city, where possible.

2. Improve transitions between places and remove visual and psychological barriers at major pedestrian thoroughfares and open spaces. Eliminate or redesign barriers in locations where historic axes and public spaces were disrupted in a way that supports the urban fabric’s continuity.

3. Locate civic attractions such as parks, overlooks, and memorials across the Anacostia River.

4. Achieve a cohesive public realm that welcomes pedestrians and allows civic engagement and social interactions through attractive urban landscapes and functional buildings.

5. Maximize opportunities to create high-quality, pedestrian-friendly public spaces and increase access to major destinations.

6. Wherever possible, deck over high speed roadways and rail lines, and relocate rail and roadway infrastructure where it impedes pedestrian access.
Constitution and Independence Avenues, two of the most prominent streets in the nation’s capital, serve unique transitional roles in the monumental core. Framing the National Mall’s northern and southern edges, respectively, they shift the user experience between the pastoral setting of the National Mall and the built environment in the surrounding urban core. The scale of the federal buildings on these avenues helps to minimize intrusions and provides a frame sympathetic to the culturally significant viewshed.

While the federal presence on Constitution Avenue is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future, the federal government is currently analyzing the best use of its land and buildings on and around Independence Avenue. In the future, Independence Avenue could be home to the Smithsonian Campus to its north and a new mix of uses to its south, which underscores its role as a threshold between the monumental core and downtown Washington.

The SW Ecodistrict Plan envisioned this area, anchored by Independence Avenue, as a vibrant and sustainable district with residential, commercial, cultural, and office uses joining some of the federal agencies that call this area home. The plan recognizes the need to protect the open sky views and public character of the National Mall in addition to the sense of symmetry of new development on Independence Avenue with the Smithsonian Campus. The plan also recognizes that if some of the federally-owned land on Independence Avenue were to become private, there is a significant opportunity to increase density and the mix of uses that would make this area a more enjoyable place to work, live, and visit.

Therefore the plan proposes development controls such as building setbacks and upper-story setbacks that respect the lower-scale Smithsonian buildings on the north while anticipating greater density to the south. As with Constitution Avenue between the Mall and Federal Triangle, future Independence Avenue development should use design elements such as building massing, rooftop sculpting, and material choice to successfully make this transition.

Beyond their transitional roles as a threshold between the Mall and surrounding areas, Constitution and Independence Avenues are part of a larger, interconnected open space network and reinforce linear views of the primary east-west vista (see Section B.5), most notably from Independence Avenue west to the Washington Monument. Both orthogonal avenues are part of the National Register of Historic Places Inventory of Significant Vistas, are home to prominent federal public buildings and cultural destinations, and serve as event spaces for a variety of local, regional and national activities.

**Edges and Transitions: Independence and Constitution Avenues**

**UD.B.4.4** Use the principles and strategies of the Monumental Core Framework Plan to identify opportunities to strengthen linkages between nationally significant places, improve the public realm, and enhance the monumental core’s character. Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. Promote and maintain Pennsylvania Avenue, NW between the U.S. Capitol and the White House as a distinguished, high quality, mixed-use, multi-modal boulevard for residents, workers, tourists, and other visitors. It should contain an actively programmed, pedestrian-oriented, and inviting public realm that enhances the avenue’s symbolic character and function and connects downtown Washington and the National Mall. Enhance the avenue’s iconic reciprocal views to the U.S. Capitol and White House grounds through a cohesive streetscape design.

2. Redefine 10th Street, SW as a pedestrian friendly, mixed-use corridor that connects the southwest waterfront to the National Mall and establishes a terminus at the overlook as a premier cultural and mixed-use site.

3. Envision E Street, NW as a primary open space connector and urban pathway between the White House grounds and the Kennedy Center, including several potential sites for major new commemorative works.

4. Establish a strong physical and visual connection between the Lincoln Memorial and the Kennedy Center.

5. Improve walkability and access to key destinations within the monumental core and downtown by enhancing the pedestrian quality of secondary and tertiary connections within and around the monumental core, such as 23rd Street, NW; 20th Street, NW; 12th Street, NW; 10th Street, NW; and 7th Street, NW.

6. Consider opportunities to re-establish the Washington Monument view corridor along Virginia Avenue southeast of Independence Avenue.
B.5 Preeminent Viewsheds and View Corridors

L’Enfant urged the importance of “embracing in one view the whole extent from the Eastern Branch to Georgetown, and from the banks of the Potomac to the mountains.”

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. Public realm and streetscape programming are important contributors to the quality of the city’s viewsheds and the character of its streets.

Many of the city’s vistas and street-level views are particularly distinctive within the original L’Enfant City. Sweeping panoramic views also exist from observation points at the edge of the topographic bowl which give the viewer a wider perspective to enjoy the city. These panoramic viewsheds are principally shaped by natural features and are included in Section B.2. The L’Enfant Plan National Register Nomination form documents viewsheds within the plan area. Major panoramic views have not been similarly documented and evaluated in a singular, comprehensive document.

Preeminent viewsheds and view corridors within this section include views to and from the monumental core, specifically to and from the U.S. Capitol and White House. These views are critical to maintain as they contribute to the visual importance and hierarchy of nationally symbolic public buildings. Simple massing studies should be prepared prior to major decisions about zoning, master plans, and development review along any of the preeminent viewsheds listed in this section. Additional documentation and guidance for each viewshed and view corridor listed in the inventory below can be found in the Technical Addendum.

| 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 between the U.S. Capitol and 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 U.S. Capitol to Tinge Street, SE |

For more detailed information on each specific view corridor listed on this map please refer to page 19 in the Technical Addendum.
In September 2014, NCPC staff offered comments on the District of Columbia Zoning Regulations Review (ZRR) including recommendations on the proposed zoning along North and South Capitol Streets. The image above illustrates the NCPC proposed building massing along North Capitol Street.

The vista of the U.S. Capitol along North Capitol Street is one of two primary north/south axes that establish the urban design framework and fundamental symbolic design basis for the city, and it is one of the important gateways to the monumental core.

North Capitol Street’s topography is similar to 16th Street north of the White House. From Florida Avenue, the street generally slopes down towards the U.S. Capitol, therefore, the mass and location of buildings along these blocks strongly influence perceptions about the scale of the U.S. Capitol dome and its preeminence within the pedestrian’s line of site. At the same time, North Capitol is at the confluence of the new, high densities of the NoMa commercial neighborhood on the east side of the street, and lower density residential development on the west side of the street. NCPC staff recommended that buildings south of K Street, NW along North Capitol, on lands subject to zoning and not subject to other height restrictions, have a 1:1 step back at 110 feet.

NCPC staff also recommended a 1:1 stepback at 110 feet on South Capitol Street between the SE/SW freeway and M Street, SW. The stepback will ensure that the U.S. Capitol dome is not diminished by the proposed matter of right building heights and will also encourage a consistent cornice line in the blocks immediately adjacent to the Capitol.

The federal government should work with federal and local agencies to:

**UD.B.5.1** Protect and enhance panoramic and street-level linear views of the U.S. Capitol, White House, Washington Monument, and other major skyline elements. Remove visual intrusions to increase visibility.

**UD.B.5.2** Plant and maintain street trees to help frame preeminent and axial views and renew the park-like character of the nation’s capital.

**UD.B.5.3** Locate tour bus and commercial truck parking in a way that does not disrupt the preeminent view corridors.

**UD.B.5.4** Reinforce street-level linear views with consistent building setbacks and cornice lines, wherever possible.

**UD.B.5.5** Enhance and protect the primary north-south/east-west vistas within the L’Enfant Plan through appropriately scaled building development, wherever possible.

**UD.B.5.6** Reinforce the U.S. Capitol as the spatial center of the city and restore the prominent role of the radiating streets and important intersections through decisions about public realm and streetscape programming, street-level uses, building mass, and viewshed protections as described within this element. These include: North Capitol Street, South Capitol Street, East Capitol Street, New Jersey Avenue, Maryland Avenue, and Delaware Avenue. Destinations along these streets should reflect their role as prominent gateways into the monumental core.

1. Visually reinforce the preeminence of the U.S. Capitol within street-level linear views along intersecting streets. Utilize building setbacks and sculpting to protect the visual frame around the U.S. Capitol dome and reinforce sweeping and open views to it. Continue to scale and orient building heights along streets that intersect with the U.S. Capitol with a general landscape vista, where the width of the street is greater than the height of buildings that flank the street.

2. Protect views to and from the U.S. Capitol from visual competition from new development, wherever possible.

3. Promote balanced massing and scale along linear views of streets that intersect with the U.S. Capitol to form a coherent composition on a block-by-block level.

**UD.B.5.7** Reclaim Maryland Avenue, SW as a grand boulevard that links the U.S. Capitol to the Jefferson Memorial by enhancing existing public spaces and reconnecting the street grid.

**UD.B.5.8** Reclaim South Capitol Street as a grand boulevard that links the U.S. Capitol to the waterfront by addressing transportation infrastructure and enhancing public spaces. Repair the urban fabric.
UD.B.5.9 Ensure that any new uses or improvements on Pennsylvania Avenue between 3rd and 15th Streets, NW are cohesively planned, improved, and maintained in a manner befitting the avenue’s national and local role in a 21st century capital city, reflecting the ceremonial heart of the nation and the daily vibrancy of the city.

1. The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation Plan’s (1974), General Guidelines, and Square Guidelines, as amended, ensure that the siting and massing of any structure or landscape elements strengthen the sweeping open frame around the U.S. Capitol and are compatible with building massing and the public realm within its surroundings.

UD.B.5.10 Visually reinforce the special importance of the White House and its grounds.

1. Maintain a consistent tree canopy along 16th Street, NW from the escarpment north of Meridian Hill Park, a key observation point that offers singular views to the White House.

2. To meet urban design quality and security goals, the scale of buildings located on the blocks within the immediate vicinity of the White House should not visually overwhelm the building and grounds, particularly as viewed from 16th Street, NW and Pennsylvania Avenue. In general, protect the existing spatial relationship of the White House and the mass and scale of adjacent buildings along 16th Street, NW up to Scott Circle.

3. Ensure that massing and scale of buildings along 16th Street, NW is balanced and forms a coherent composition on a block by block basis.

Panoramic Viewsheds: St. Elizabeths West Campus

The unique integration of Washington’s city plan with its natural geography produces sweeping views of the urban and natural landscape from the surrounding topographic ridgelines. Notable portions of these prominent ridgelines in southeast Washington are the site of federal parklands such as the Civil War Defenses of Washington and federal facilities. For example, the St. Elizabeths West Campus is part of the southern portion of the Anacostia Hills and the open plateau within the campus offers unique vantage points for panoramic views towards the Washington Monument, the dome of the U.S. Capitol Building, and the Washington National Cathedral in the distance. Panoramic views from public lands such as St. Elizabeths should receive further study to ensure these important viewsheds are maintained and enhanced wherever possible.
Part II. Urban Design Principles: Federal Facilities & Property

There are many important factors that shape the location and design of federal buildings and property within the city and region, including agency mission, budget, operational needs, and proximity to transit. Urban design is one component that should be incorporated into this decision-making process. This section establishes policies related to the urban design of federal property. How federal facilities are situated and designed plays an important role in the overall character of the environs and of their immediate setting. The quality of a federal property’s urban design is an important contributor to the workplace experience for federal employees and can impact the way that the agency conducts its day-to-day operations. Finally and more broadly, the design of federal buildings is an important contributor to the capital’s image, and has the potential to shape impressions of the federal establishment more generally.

Many federal properties are concentrated in the monumental core and are important contributors to the visual and functional qualities of the public realm in this important symbolic setting. Similarly, campuses and bases such as the National Institutes of Health in Montgomery County, Maryland and Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County, Virginia are important parts of the urban design and character of the communities in which they are situated. As such, it is critical that federal properties, whether located in an urban, suburban, or even rural context, address the public space around them. This includes pedestrian street-level experience and access. Although each building and campus is unique, each should be developed with an urban design strategy that considers whether and how the buildings should fit and engage the surrounding context, circulation in and around the site, and other related planning goals.

Section C: Policies Related to Federal Facilities, Property, and the Public Realm

The policies established in the following sections focus on design issues related to federal facilities and property. The policies are organized into three focus areas which reflect the core issues associated with federal building design. These include encouraging quality design; integrating buildings and campuses into their communities; and urban design and security. Interior space, another important contributor to a federal facility’s design quality, is not considered. The policies work in concert with those established in the Federal Environment, Federal Workplace, and Historic Preservation Elements, which each provide direction during a facility’s design phase.
The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements

The Urban Design Element establishes policies that guide the design of federal buildings, including modernizations, rehabilitations, expansions, and new construction. The policies do not endorse any particular architectural style. Rather, this section considers how a federal building’s outward appearance and orientation can enhance the surrounding context. The policies encourage facility designers to incorporate best planning practices, including those related to sustainability and building design.

While a federal building’s design and construction should be of a high quality, not all federal buildings must be iconic in design. The design approach should contribute to an area’s sense of place. Further, designers should explore opportunities to relate a building’s efficiency and sustainability to the buildings around it. Combining stormwater management systems or sharing energy can minimize design and construction costs and maximize efficiencies. This “district-level” approach to sustainability is a core value in designing high quality federal buildings and is a central theme of the SW Ecodistrict Plan. For further guidance concerning stormwater mitigation and other ecological and sustainable practices please refer to the Federal Environmental Element.

The federal government should:

**UD.C.1.1** For the construction or modernization of principal federal buildings, such as headquarters and major offices, should reflect their importance in the National Capital Region. Buildings should be designed and constructed with quality, durable materials to protect the public investment and reflect the National Capital Region’s image.

1. Use building orientation, mass, and façade articulation, as well as landscaping and lighting to emphasize the importance of special settings of national importance.

2. Location of vegetation, color, scale, and texture of landscape elements in the settings of federal buildings and national institutions should complement the building’s programmatic elements and design.

**UD.C.1.2** For federal campuses and installations, agencies should address specific urban design issues through the preparation and updating of master plans. In conformance with NCPC guidelines, master plans should be updated on a regular basis, in consultation with local governments and the Commission, to respond to changing conditions and agency needs. The urban design component of master plans should:

1. Analyze existing installation characteristics and surroundings, including the qualities and resources to be protected, and problems to be resolved.

2. Propose urban design policies, including topics such as building groupings, massing, and architectural character; streetscape, landscape elements, and character; signage and parking.

3. Include a strategy for the site and design of principal agency functions.

4. Include a strategy for utilitarian or routine support functions, which should generally be sited and designed to avoid or minimize intrusion on principal urban design features.

**UD.C.1.3** Implement sustainable site and building design at a district-level scale, where possible.

**UD.C.1.4** Federal buildings should achieve a balance between iconic design and infill design as appropriate to the building site’s location and setting.

**UD.C.1.5** For federal facilities, integrate the accessibility to transit, bicycle, and pedestrian modes into the urban design and comply with ADA and ABA requirements.

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[Image of U.S. Census Bureau Headquarters, Suitland, MD]
The Intelligence Community Campus-Bethesda project in Maryland transformed an inefficient and outdated federal campus into a sustainable, interconnected workplace. Extensive coordination with the community, adjacent federal agencies, and local jurisdictions resulted in refinements addressing parking, building design, and stormwater management. Construction began in 2012.
UD.C.2.2 Agencies should enhance the pedestrian experience in and around federal buildings and campuses, wherever possible, and in consideration of this element’s security section. In particular:

1. Consider flexible and impervious areas, such as plazas, to accommodate congregating and place-making activities within the design program of federal building yards.

2. Avoid blank walls where a building meets adjacent public space and activate street level facades by utilizing art displays, transparent materials, or other appropriate methods.

3. Principal facades and primary public building entrances should face major streets or open spaces.

4. Break up superblocks and introduce mid-block alleys that can either be used for community open space or shared access to service areas of multiple buildings.

5. Incorporate shared open space into new federal office developments, where possible.

6. Habitable building space should be provided along the street frontage to accommodate public space or activated ground floor uses, such as retail or other commercial enterprises, as appropriate. In particular:
   a. Concentrate retail activity near transit hubs and key intersections adjacent and accessible to public sidewalks and plazas.
   b. Consider establishing street markets and farmers markets on federally-owned plazas, courtyards and underused open spaces.

UD.C.2.3 Provide access to, and/or connections through, campuses, building yards, plazas, or courtyards for local and regional trails, bikeways, pedestrian ways, or open space networks where possible. Agencies should explore programming these areas with publicly accessible amenities such as art installations and/or farmers markets.

UD.C.2.4 Provide strategic multi-modal street connections or extensions to adjacent streets or the local street grid to and through installations to provide a continuous transportation network.

UD.C.2.5 Design pedestrian and vehicular entrances, or any physical gateways to federal campuses and buildings, to be as inviting and as accessible as possible.

UD.C.2.6 Locate and design appropriate amenities, including retail, to be accessible to the local community, where possible.

Farmers market at the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Whitten Building
C.3 Urban Design and Security

Both federal and local governments are responsible for the safety of those who live, work, and visit the nation’s capital while preserving the openness and historic design that have made Washington one of the world’s most unique capital cities. Many of these policies are also applicable to federal building and campuses in the greater region.

Washington, DC is admired for the sweep and grace of its historic streetscapes and open public spaces. However, guard huts, street closures, rows of concrete planters, and other permanent and temporary barriers can adversely affect the capital’s appearance and people’s impression of it. Such security features can also adversely impact the character of local neighborhoods in which federal facilities are located.

There are many aspects to security planning and design that must be considered when designing effective security measures. Risk management strategies for external threats range from infrastructure protection, building construction, and perimeter security to surveillance and operations. The criteria are derived from various Presidential directives and other federal security criteria contained in documents such as the Department of Homeland Security’s Interagency Security Committee’s Manual for New Federal Office Buildings and Major Modernization Projects and the Department of Defense’s Unified Facilities Criteria.

NCPC supports the development of effective security systems that preserve the characteristic openness of Washington’s public spaces and enhance the city’s public realm, as well as the character of adjacent communities in the region. When physical perimeter security is necessary, it should be located within, and integrated into, the design of the building yard. If there is no building yard, as is typically found in urban areas, it may be necessary to place physical perimeter security measures in public space. This should be done in an unobtrusive manner that integrates security barriers and furthers or creates an attractive urban landscape or pastoral green suburban edge.

The policies within this section are derived by reference from NCPC’s National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan, which includes context and objectives.

Specifically, the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan:

- Provides strategies for perimeter security against the threat of bomb-laden vehicles.
- Includes a citywide program that provides both security and urban beautification.
- Expands the palette of attractive street furnishings and landscape treatments that can provide curbside security.

NCPC reconvened the Interagency Task Force and produced an addendum in 2004 with updated information.

In 2005, NCPC adopted an updated set of objectives and policies for reviewing perimeter security projects. The updated policies reinforce the importance of design quality in the nation’s capital, and strive to balance building security with the functional and visual qualities of public space.

In March 2000 Congress authorized the Commission to establish the Interagency Security Task Force. This Task Force evaluated the impact of security measures on the historic character of Washington’s monumental core. In November 2001, the Commission adopted the Task Force’s recommendations contained in a report entitled Designing for Security in the Nation’s Capital. Among its recommendations, the report called for the preparation of an urban design and security plan to identify permanent security and streetscape improvements for federal facilities in the nation’s capital.

The Task Force’s recommendations became the basis for the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan (2002). The plan was the result of a collaborative effort by the National Capital Planning Commission, federal and District of Columbia governments, security agencies, and civic and business organizations.

Specifically, the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan:

- Provides strategies for perimeter security against the threat of bomb-laden vehicles.
- Includes a citywide program that provides both security and urban beautification.
- Expands the palette of attractive street furnishings and landscape treatments that can provide curbside security.

NCPC reconvened the Interagency Task Force and produced an addendum in 2004 with updated information.

In 2005, NCPC adopted an updated set of objectives and policies for reviewing perimeter security projects. The updated policies reinforce the importance of design quality in the nation’s capital, and strive to balance building security with the functional and visual qualities of public space.
UD.C.3.1 Permanent closure of streets or sidewalks within right-of-ways established by the L’Enfant Plan should be strongly discouraged.

1. Streets necessary for emergency evacuation should not be closed, blocked, or access restricted except for brief periods when required for extraordinary events or activities.

UD.C.3.2 Temporary closure or access restrictions to streets, parking lanes, or sidewalks should be limited to only the protection of those uses deemed absolutely essential for immediate continuity of critical government operations. These closures or restrictions should only be allowed during times of extraordinary security threats, or brief periods of time when required for extraordinary events or activities, such as large public demonstrations, the State of the Union Address, or ceremonial parades.

1. Temporary closure or access restrictions should be in accordance with previously established plans and procedures. Coordination should occur among governmental entities directly affected by the closure, or those that can provide meaningful input on a range of potential impacts caused by the closure, such as the Department of Homeland Security-National Capital Region Coordination; the local emergency management service; the local law enforcement agency; the U.S. Capitol Police; the U.S. Park Police; the U.S. Secret Service; the Federal Protective Service; local planning and transportation offices; and the National Capital Planning Commission, as appropriate.

UD.C.3.3 The placement of security barriers in public space is discouraged and should be minimized.

1. Interior building space programming for new buildings, or for major renovation projects, in urban settings should consider locating critical uses and operations in areas of the building that will minimize the need to place perimeter security in public space.

2. Protection of exterior air-intake systems should be visually and physically integrated into the architecture of the building design. Air-intake protective measures should not prevent access to the building yard or public space, nor impede pedestrian circulation.

3. For existing buildings in urban areas, perimeter security barriers should be located within the building yard when the face of the sensitive building to the outside edge of the building yard is a minimum of 20 feet. If the distance from the face of the building to the outside edge of the building yard is less than 20 feet, then perimeter security barriers may be permitted in public space adjacent to that building.

4. Existing streetscape, landscape, or building site features should be hardened, or perimeter security should be integrated into the topography of the site to provide physical perimeter security where feasible. If this not achievable, then security barriers should be integrated into the urban landscape in a manner that minimizes their visual impact and physical infringement into public space.

5. When physical perimeter security elements are located at the edge of the building yard, designs should accommodate visual and physical public access to the building lawn and designated entries.

6. The location of perimeter security barriers should minimize interruption of pedestrian circulation. Barriers should not unduly cross sidewalks perpendicularly, causing pedestrians to maneuver between them.

UD.C.3.4 The location and arrangement of security barriers should be compatible with the placement of security barriers for other buildings on the street.

UD.C.3.5 Perimeter security barriers at intersections, corners, and near cross walks or other highly used pedestrian areas should be minimized; barriers that are needed should be located to allow safe pedestrian waiting areas and pedestrian movement.
UD.C.3.6 Placement of security barriers should incorporate best design practices and industry standards and be arranged to:

2. Provide visual clues to signify important circulation routes and site or building features.
3. Ensure that the public space is visually and physically accessible.
4. Provide sufficient clearances to allow access to and from transit stops.
5. Provide safe pedestrian access to and along sidewalks, public spaces, and building entrances.
6. Provide emergency access to buildings and emergency evacuation from buildings.
7. Ensure that maintenance equipment such as snow plows, utility trucks, and motorized cleaners can access and maneuver within building yards, sidewalks, and plazas.
8. Provide at least two feet from the face of the curb to the face of the barrier to allow for opening car doors, unloading and loading of passengers, and ease of access to public space.

UD.C.3.7 Security elements located at the curb, or edge of the sidewalk, should not unduly impede pedestrian access to various permitted sidewalk and street activities, such as cafés, kiosks, demonstration areas, or parade viewing areas along ceremonial streets. The designs must accommodate viewing stands, tents, and review stands that are used during significant public events.

UD.C.3.8 The design of security barriers, including their mass, form, and materials should respond to the architectural and landscape context in which they are located and complement and aesthetically enhance the special character of the associated building and precinct.

UD.C.3.9 Physical perimeter security barriers within the building yard should be incorporated into the landscape design and include low walls, fences, seating, landscaping, and other public amenities typically found within the landscape. The design of these barriers should be architecturally compatible with adjacent buildings and respect the overall character of the streetscape.

UD.C.3.10 Perimeter security barriers in public space should incorporate decorative tree wells, planters, light poles, signage, benches, parking meters, trash receptacles, and other elements and public amenities typically found in a streetscape.

UD.C.3.11 Protection of existing trees, including their canopies and root systems, and new street tree planting is encouraged when the plantings will be in context with the existing or the planned corridor streetscape. This will minimize the visual impact and the physical intrusion of the security barriers in the urban landscape.

UD.C.3.12 The design of perimeter security should respect the building's use, significance and location in the community, as well as established view corridors.

UD.C.3.13 Perimeter security design should strive for continuity, consistency, and enhancement of the overall streetscape.

UD.C.3.14 Perimeter security design should avoid relying on repetitive use of single elements, such as continuous rows of bollards or planters.

UD.C.3.15 Physical perimeter security should follow design principles to achieve a sense of openness, balance, rhythm, and hierarchy that will improve way-finding and visual linkages along a street and enhance the pedestrian experience. For example, elements can be designed and placed to signify primary or secondary pedestrian entrances.

UD.C.3.16 Perimeter security barriers should be designed as a family of beautiful, functional streetscape elements that also function as a public amenity.

UD.C.3.17 Physical perimeter security projects that are located in areas with a previously approved streetscape program should be designed to be consistent with the design intent of the streetscape standards of that associated area.

UD.C.3.18 Security barrier design (placement, height, spacing, dimensional volume, structural integrity, and other physical characteristics) should respond to the identified threats as well as specific building and site conditions, relational vehicle design speeds, angles-of-approach, and pavement types.

UD.C.3.19 Curbs, copings, and retaining walls should be incorporated into the design of security barriers to reduce the perceived barrier height.

UD.C.3.20 Pedestrian screening security operations should not be conducted in public space. If building additions or renovations are required to accommodate this function, the new construction should be compatible with the existing architecture and should not project into L'Enfant Plan rights-of-way, other public space, or viewsheds.
Guard booths should be integrated into, and designed in context with, the site and building design. When feasible, guard booths should be located in the building yard. Where the depth of the building yard is insufficient, the guard booth should be located to minimize interruption of pedestrian movement along the pathway.

Vehicular controls at building entries, such as vehicle barriers and guard booths should be located so that pedestrian movement along sidewalks is not blocked. Check points should be designed to allow off-street queuing space that does not block pedestrian movement or traffic flow.

Vehicular control measures that are visible from public space should be attractively designed and mechanical equipment should be hidden. Solid hydraulic plate barriers should only be used in locations that are not highly visible from public space.

Signage, electronic signals, or other control measures should be integrated into vehicular barriers and guard booths to minimize visual clutter.

The National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan is predicated on a design framework that defines contextual areas and Special Streets. Special Streets, recognized as the monumental avenues and diagonal streets in the L’Enfant Plan, are the great linear connectors of the city and provide an important symbolic and ceremonial function in the nation’s capital. Ideally, the physical perimeter security for buildings on these monumental and diagonal streets should be designed collectively as a contextually appropriate, cohesive streetscape. In the absence of funding to design the entire streetscape, it is incumbent upon federal agencies to coordinate their design solutions with their neighbors along the street and consider the larger context.

The capital’s preeminent viewsheds and monumental avenues, such as Pennsylvania, Constitution, Independence, Maryland, Virginia, and New Jersey should receive special treatment to ensure that security projects are addressed comprehensively, emphasizing the streetscape as a whole with attention to their axiality and formality.

Diagonal avenues should be treated in a manner that emphasizes their landscape features, including significant tree and ground plantings.
Endnotes

1. The Federal Elements are prepared pursuant to Section 4(a) of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952 (now codified at 40 U.S.C. § 8722).
2. L’Enfant Plan: http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/About_Us(tr2)/About_Us(tr3)/History.html
3. McMillan Plan http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/About_Us(tr2)/About_Us(tr3)/History.html
4. 1910 Height of Buildings Act: https://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/About_Us(tr2)/About_Us(tr3)/HeightofBldgs1910.pdf
5. The Schedule of Heights are height limitations in 15 different areas of Washington that are adjacent to public buildings, including the blocks around the White House, the Supreme Court, and the congressional office buildings. It functions in addition to the Height of Buildings Act.
8. For more information, see the National Register Nomination Form: http://focus.nps.gov/pdfhost/docs/NRHP/Text/97000332.pdf
10. SW Ecodistrict Plan: http://www.ncpc.gov/swecodistrict/
11. Memorials and Museums Master Plan: http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/Planning(Tr2)/2MPlan.html
13. The Arlington County Board adopted “The Resolution of Concern Regarding Building Heights Related to the National Capitol Mall Axis” in 1982. It is non-binding and addresses NCPC’s concerns regarding the east-west axis.
22. DDO’s Urban Forestry Administration accounts for about half of all trees planted each year throughout the District. Casey Trees has a goal of creating 40 percent canopy by 2035.
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 as a standalone 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.
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.” 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.”
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.
**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.”

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1. 1927-1932, Lincoln Memorial Bridge under construction
2. 1927-1932, Lincoln Memorial Bridge under construction
3. Welcome to Rock Creek Park
   National Park Service
   U.S. Department of the Interior
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 (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 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.

Building height = \underbrace{\text{Right-of-Way}}_{\text{Commercial Street}} + 20\text{ feet} + \text{Penthouse}

- 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.
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 SCHEDULE OF HEIGHTS.

Section 5 of the Height of Buildings Act provides for a Schedule of Heights. 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 NCPC 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 NCPC 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 operating in the District of Columbia contained mandates to lay underground wires specific 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 *(1997) re-orient 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* (2001) identifies potential sites for future memorials based on the city’s symbolic and physical urban design framework. Monumental Core Framework Plan* (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 NCPC, such as the SW Ecodistrict Plan, and The South Capitol Urban Design Street Study. 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 provides a summary of District of Columbia regulations and specifications for the design of public space elements throughout the city.

C. The Public Parking Act of 1870

In 1870, Congress passed the Public Parking Act of 1870 "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.
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.

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.

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.
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.

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

Elsewhere, commercial buildings and other signage may be located within the backdrop of major civic structures. This is in Nashville, TN.
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. 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, NCPC 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.
Core Issues for Discussion: Viewsheds

There are several related urban design issues that should be addressed at the project level and though 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?

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.
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.

(1) Conduct background research from the following source materials:
   a. Existing planning guidance from the Plan of the City of Washington
   b. The Plan of the City of Washington National Register nomination
   c. Existing planning guidance from more recent plans, including the Comprehensive Plan, Memorials and Museums Master Plan, Legacy Plan, Framework Plan, and the Height Master Plan.
   d. Case study research. Staff evaluated existing viewshed policies from other cities.

(2) Identify general viewshed and vista typologies and contributing elements:
   a. List and diagram viewshed and vista typologies.
   b. Identify major elements that contribute to any viewshed or vista.
      i. Natural elements: street trees, topography, waterways
      ii. Built elements: building mass (height and setback), infrastructure, street furniture
   c. Identify factors that influence viewshed quality.
      i. Visibility
      ii. Pedestrian orientation
      iii. Visual cohesiveness
      iv. Visual preeminence of major symbols

(3) Identify viewsheds and vistas that warrant inclusion in the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan and classify them based on the type. Map and propose policy guidance for each classification.

(4) Prepare an action agenda for future study.
**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, 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
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.

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

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

The Courthouse neighborhood is sited along the Arlington Ridge, a natural framework of the National Capital Region, including this particular vista. Arlington County, Virginia plays an integral role in the urban design of this Primary Vista onto the Western Horizon.

This Primary Vista is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and future maintenance of this major vista is essential orientation point that establishes the spatial order of the city and provides the strong visual connection from the US Capitol along the Mall.

The scale of buildings on the National Mall is defined by the 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, 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 horizon line and visual backdrop.

Horizontal Skyline

American Architecture reflects the scale and passage of time along this vista.

Avenues reinforce the importance of Independence and Constitution Avenues as the primary routes for movement through the National Mall.

The building heights defining the skyline are generally consistent range from 180’ - 210’.

The National Mall's formal setting is reinforced by these 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 public experiences some of our nation's most beloved memorials and cultural spaces in the nation.

The US Capitol Building, Washington Monument, and Lincoln Memorial are the most visually prominent cones that extend outward from the primary vistas along the Western and Southern Axes of the National Mall.

Photography provided by Digital Design & Imaging Service, Inc.
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.
A significant view of the U.S. Capitol terminates at the Michigan Avenue, NW intersection.

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

**View 1:** North Capitol Street, NW at K Street, NW
- North Capitol Street Linear Viewshed Extent: U.S. Capitol to Michigan Avenue, NW intersection
- Viewshed distance: approximately 2.5 miles

**View 2:** North Capitol Street at Randolph Place, NW
- Viewshed Extent Street Section Facing East

**1/2 Mile**
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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.
The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements

Technical Addendum to the Urban Design Element

Anacostia River

Viewshed Extent Plan View

View 1: South Capitol Street at I Street, SW
View 2: South Capitol Street at Potomac Avenue, SW
View 3: South Capitol Street at 5 Street, SW

Viewshed Extent Street Section Looking East

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 alleyway.

South Capitol Street Linear Viewshed Extent: U.S. Capitol to Potomac Avenue intersection | Viewshed distance: approximately 1 mile

Viewshed distance: approximately 1 mile

1/2 Mile
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.
A significant view of the White House terminates at the Euclid Street, NW intersection.

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

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

16th Street, NW Linear Viewshed Extent: White House to Euclid Street, NW intersection | Viewshed distance: approximately 1.75 miles
Preeminent Viewshed: Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

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 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.
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

Neoclassical buildings within the Federal Triangle flank the south side with a consistent building wall with setbacks approximately 25 feet from the curb.

Grand, large-scale commercial/office buildings of varying architectural styles flank the north side with setbacks ranging from 25 – 75 feet from the curb.

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.

Mature tree canopy of willow oaks frame the linear viewshed.
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.
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View 1: Looking towards the U.S. Capitol from Maryland Avenue, SW at 7th Street.

View 2: Looking towards the U.S. Capitol from the Maryland Avenue, SW terminus.

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.

Looking southwest along Maryland Avenue the linear viewshed extends to the Jefferson Memorial and beyond to the horizon.

Viewshed distance: approximately 1 mile.

Maryland Avenue, SW Linear Viewshed Extent looking toward the U.S. Capitol.
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.
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

**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)
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?

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.
5. Frederick Douglass House.
Endnotes

2. Ibid.
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. Monuments 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](http://www.ncpc.gov/swecodistrict)
14. 1888 Congressional Legislation Banning Overhead Wires § 34-1901.01, [http://dccode.org/simple/Title-34/Chapter-19/](http://dccode.org/simple/Title-34/Chapter-19/)
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Introduction to the Federal Workplace Element

The federal government’s goal is to locate the federal workforce in a way that enhances the efficiency, productivity, value, and public image of the federal government; strengthens the National Capital Region’s economic well-being; and emphasizes the District of Columbia as the seat of the federal government.

The nation’s founders planned Washington to serve a special purpose as the seat of the federal government. Throughout the city’s history, the federal government constructed buildings to house important governmental functions. Over time, decisions about the location, design, and function of federal buildings have greatly influenced the National Capital Region’s (NCR) physical development and economy. Today, the federal presence remains concentrated in the region, distinguishing it from other metropolitan areas in the nation.

Some of the best-known federal workplaces in the region are also some of the nation’s most iconic structures. Examples include the U.S. Capitol, White House, Supreme Court, Pentagon, and numerous government headquarters. In addition to administrative space, there is a broad diversity of governmental functions and workplaces throughout the region including laboratories and research facilities; military bases and airfields; agricultural land and stables; industrial and manufacturing sites; and warehouses. Many federal buildings and resources are a source of national pride, providing testimony to the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American system of government.

This element addresses the core policy issues and goals that shape decisions related to federal workplaces. One policy dimension is broad and external-facing: understanding the complex relationship between federal workplaces and the surrounding community and region. Today, the federal government is a primary contributor to the region’s economic health and a significant player in trends related to transportation, environmental stewardship, real estate, workforce development, and employment. For example, through the purchases of goods and services, the federal government is the region’s chief customer for private-sector contracts. In 2010, federal procurement made up of 19 percent of the region’s economy.1 With vast owned and leased real estate, and federal employment and contractor wages, the federal workplace significantly affects all sectors of the region’s economy. The federal workplace continues to evolve. Current trends show the federal government moving from leased spaced to federally owned space. The federal government equally depends on a strong and economically vibrant region to maintain and enhance its operational efficiency and productivity. This symbiotic relationship results in many common economic interests between the federal government and regional jurisdictions in the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland.

A second policy dimension is internal-facing and principally concerned with planning issues related to facilities, operations, and the everyday workplace experiences of federal employees. Today, the federal workplace is evolving in response to interrelated goals for operational efficiency, fiscal responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Simultaneously, new technologies are driving a more flexible, mobile work environment. Each of these external drivers affects the federal government’s overall demand for office space and the design and function of offices and individual workstations.

The Federal Workplace Element encourages federal agencies and communities to work together to improve the operational efficiency and productivity of federally owned and leased workplaces, as well as the economic health and livability of communities within the region. The element works in tandem with the other Federal Elements, particularly the Urban Design and Transportation Elements, to guide federal workplaces in a manner which benefits local communities’ urban design, development, and transportation goals.
The Federal Government and the Regional Economy

Historically, economists measured the federal government’s role in the region’s economy by the size of its workforce. Today, workforce size is only one aspect of the scope and complexity of the federal government’s influence on the region. The following data includes key trends and figures with implications for both federal workplace policy and its influence on the region’s economy.

Federal Employment

Understanding the federal government’s size and its impact on the regional economy is an important component of planning for the federal workplace. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis is the primary source for federal employment figures contained in the Federal Workplace Element. It collects data based on the zip code from which employees’ paychecks originate. This is a new source of data not used in previous Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements (Comprehensive Plan). Data from security-sensitive agencies is estimated and it does not include Postal Service employees. While accurately estimating federal employment on a regional basis remains a challenge, this new data source provides a more consistent picture of the volume and distribution of federal employment over time.

Direct federal employment is relatively steady and remains an economic driver in the regional economy. However, the federal workforce as a percentage of the overall regional workforce has decreased from 17.6 percent in 1990 to 12.3 percent in 2013. This trend reflects strong growth in the regional economy, which has added more than 850,000 jobs since 1990. The federal presence anchored some of this growth.
Federal Employment: City and Regional Distribution

By law, the District of Columbia is the seat of the federal government and all “offices attached to the seat of government shall be exercised in the District of Columbia, and not elsewhere, except as otherwise expressly provided by law.” The law does not define “offices,” but the rule generally applies to the main offices for executive agencies or departments, unless granted a statutory waiver.

Because federal employment is such an important part of the regional economy, a vital goal is to strike a balance between centralized and regional locations. A 1968 Comprehensive Plan policy stated that 60 percent of the region’s federal employees should work in the District of Columbia with 40 percent located elsewhere in the region. This “60:40” policy remains in effect today.

Federal employment has always been concentrated in the District of Columbia. In 1960, 63 percent of federal employment (civilian and military) in the NCR was located in the District of Columbia, 14 percent in Maryland, and 23 percent in Virginia. Since then, the District of Columbia’s total percentage has declined. By 1990, the District of Columbia’s share of the region’s federal employment was reduced to approximately 52 percent. It has remained at this general level through 2013. This shift in the distribution could have occurred due to the increase in federal employment at military installations and biotechnology research facilities, both predominately located outside of Washington.

Federal Real Estate Inventory

The federal government is the single largest owner and occupant of real property in the region. The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) manages, builds, constructs, and leases 100.5 million rentable square feet of federal office space in the NCR, comprised of 44.2 million rentable square feet in 212 federal buildings and 56.3 million rentable square feet in 485 leased buildings. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) controls approximately 75 million square feet in more than 3,204 buildings in the NCR, comprised of approximately 73 million square feet in 2,993 owned buildings and two million square feet in 211 leased buildings.

Figure 3: Distribution of Federal Employment in the National Capital Region

Figure 4: U.S. General Services Administration NCR

Figure 5: U.S. Department of Defense NCR Building Portfolio
Federal Procurement

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Consolidated Federal Funds Reports for Fiscal Years 2001 and 2010, NCR federal procurement spending grew from approximately $32.3 billion in 2001 to more than $80 billion in 2010. Most of the growth was due to unusually large procurements for homeland security and defense. A portion of the growth is also attributed to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Federal procurement can create spin-off industries and employment in other sectors of the economy. Local and federal agencies continue to explore how to encourage private sector opportunities and workforce development in industry sectors anchored by federal activities. Federal Procurement declined $11 billion (14 percent) between Fiscal Year 2010 and Fiscal Year 2013. The current fiscal outlook suggests increased budget constraints in the near future, pushing agencies to achieve their missions with greater efficiencies and limited budgets, and reduced spending on federal contracts.

Contracting and the Federal Work Program

The nature of federal government work has changed over time, and the role of the federal employee has evolved from office clerks and support services to technical and professional staff, managers, and administrators overseeing specialized programs. Many services previously done by federal employees are contracted to the private sector, ranging from project management support services to technology, professional services, and the research and development needed to run these programs. These private contractors contribute to regional property tax, sales tax, and other revenues. The federal government indirectly supports a significant number of regional private sector workers.

Major Drivers Shaping Workplace Policy

The manner by which the federal government manages its assets and operations is fundamentally changing in response to new laws, policies, and technologies. Therefore, the federal workplace is evolving with implications at a variety of scales, from the consolidated real estate portfolio level to the individual building and workstation level.

Executive Orders promote interrelated goals for fiscal and environmental stewardship, and the Office of Management and Budget’s aggressive goals to use federal real estate assets more efficiently are reshaping the federal government’s physical footprint.

These federal Executive Orders and policies will continue to impact the region’s development, resulting in agencies considering plans to consolidate, co-locate, dispose of real property, and move out of leased space and into greener, smaller, workspaces in federal ownership.

The changing federal workplace poses important implications for the future of local communities and the region. The potential impacts of federal consolidation and mobile workplaces on development patterns and the regional economy are not fully understood and should be carefully examined using scenario-based planning analysis or other methods.
“Reduce the Footprint”

To stay operationally efficient, the federal government continually evaluates its facility requirements and adjusts its portfolio. One challenge is how to meet tightening budgets and use real estate more efficiently. \textit{Executive Order 13589: Promoting Efficient Spending} \cite{11} (2011) requires that agencies not increase the size of their civilian real estate inventory, subject to certain exceptions and requires agencies to offset increases in square footage through consolidations, co-locations, or disposal of space from its inventory.

In 2013, the Office of Management and Budget’s “Freeze the Footprint” policy expanded these goals for federal real estate.\footnote{This guidance prohibits agencies from increasing their total domestic office and warehouse inventory square footage compared to the FY 2012 baseline. Agencies are required to develop plans, internal controls, performance criteria, and strategies to reduce the federal footprint. Strategies may include developing off-sets to address growth, co-locating with other agencies, and consolidating offices. These requirements are leading many agencies to use assets more efficiently and eliminate underutilized space.}

Environmental Stewardship

In addition to operational efficiencies, another factor that strongly influences workplace policies, including federal building location decisions, is environmental stewardship. In 2011, the Council of Environmental Quality issued \textit{Sustainable Locations for Federal Facilities}, \footnote{Executive Order 11988: Floodplain Management} (1977) and \textit{Executive Order 13690: Establishing a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and a Process for Further Soliciting and Considering Stakeholder Input} \footnote{Executive Order 13693: Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade} (2015) direct federal agencies to consider practicable alternatives before locating in a floodplain to avoid impacts and floodplain development.

The Federal Workplace Element policies reflect guidance enacted at national and local levels since the 2004 Comprehensive Plan update, including:

- Executive Order 13690: Establishing Federal Flood Risk Management Standards
- Executive Order 13693: Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade
- Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 (H.R. 1722)
- Executive Order 13589: Promoting Efficient Spending
- Presidential Memorandum Disposing of Unneeded Federal Real Estate
- Council of Environmental Quality Recommendations for Sustainable Locations for Federal Facilities
- Plans and goals for Washington, DC and the region, including the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government’s Region Forward Initiative.

The Federal Workplace Element provides policies for siting and managing federal facilities in a manner that supports a more sustainable federal workplace. For example, federal agencies are required to create an updated sustainability plan that reflects how their operations will lower greenhouse gas emissions and meet energy efficiency targets, as required in Executive Orders. The plan requires that federal facilities meet the energy goals established in the \textit{Energy Independence and Security Act} \footnote{Energy Independence and Security Act} (2007) which established the goal of net zero energy usage for federal facilities by 2030.

GSA require at a minimum, new construction and substantial renovations of federally owned facilities to be LEED Gold.
The Mobile Workplace

The federal workplace is also moving towards a mobile work environment to create a more effective and efficient government, meet sustainability and performance measures, and address tightened budgets. New technologies and work practices are advancing goals for environmental stewardship and redefining the workplace, allowing employees to work anywhere and any time. The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 allows flexibility in work arrangements whereby employees can perform their duties and responsibilities from an approved worksite other than their designated workplace. The choice to telework can help agencies improve productivity, assure continuity of operations, and respond to the workforce’s changing needs. These trends, broadly captured by the term “mobility,” help agencies achieve their missions and also support transportation goals, such as traffic reduction.

Workplace mobility trends are redefining employee space requirements, leasing policies, and building design. At the building level, these trends impact interior space configurations including smaller workstations and more advanced mobile devices; reduced individual space per employee; increased density within office environments; adaptable community environments such as eating areas and collaborative work zones; and more flexible workstations to accommodate multiple users.

GSA helps agencies develop customized strategies to forecast how mobility can help them achieve cost savings and meet space reduction goals. Each scenario characterizes how an agency might structure a mobility program based on varying levels of desk sharing, mobility, and telework, with the consideration of desksharing, mobility, and telework. Scenarios are also weighed against transportation cost savings and broader environmental benefits, such as reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Another approach is the concept of “right sizing” office environments. “Right sizing” identifies the actual amount of workspace needed to perform the agency’s mission. As an example, GSA advises its client agencies on information technology innovations and investments as the key component to enabling workplace mobility and reducing required space. When coupled with a flexible and open office design and mobility, “right sizing,” desk sharing or hoteling, and alternate work schedules can significantly reduce space requirements and increase utilization rates.

The Evolving Workplace Approach

In 2013, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) launched the Total Workplace Initiative to create a 21st century workplace throughout the federal government. This initiative would provide services to help agencies create strategies to reduce their office space, drive down costs, foster collaboration, better manage IT spending, and increase energy efficiency.

GSA modernized their own Washington, DC (Central Office) building, adding approximately 119,517 usable square feet to the existing historic building. Mobility strategies such as hoteling (an arrangement where employees reserve non-dedicated, non-permanent workspaces assigned on an as-needed basis) and desk-sharing, are included in the modernization, allowing an additional 2,300 occupants to be assigned to the building. The original building program was approximately 460,000 usable square feet, housing 2,200 occupants with a utilization rate of 208 square feet per person.

The modernized building contains approximately 579,000 usable square feet, houses approximately 4,500 occupants at 2,300 seats for a utilization rate of 129 usable square feet per person. These strategies are based on GSA’s research on regional real estate use, employee leave use, alternate work schedules, and telework schedules.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service is another example of how federal agencies are consolidating real estate. The agency houses 762 workers in 206,000 square feet across three buildings, including the federally-owned Sidney Yates Building and two leased locations in Rosslyn. The agency plans to consolidate the three buildings and relocate all employees to the Yates Building, using a total of 108,000 square feet. The 762 employees would utilize 550 seats, effectively improving utilization rates from 270 usable square feet/employee to 195 usable square feet/employee.

Office space at GSA's Central Office Building.
Security

Security is an important consideration when deciding on the siting of a federal facility. Federal agencies that require greater setback requirements and security needs may decide to locate on federal campuses or areas located outside of Washington, DC. Federal campuses like St. Elizabeths, FDA White Oak, and the Suitland Federal Center are desirable locations for agencies that want to provide a security buffer for one larger area vs. providing perimeter security for individual buildings. The U.S. Department of Defense’s Unified Facilities Criteria established minimum anti-terrorism and force protection standards for all U.S. Department of Defense buildings, which play an important role in siting decisions.

Key Plans and Policies that Shape Federal Building Locations

One of the most important workplace policy issues is the location of federal buildings, which impacts the region’s growth, agency missions, and federal workers’ experiences. Federal facilities can bring new employment and economic opportunities to local communities, spurring development and activity. The location of federal facilities can affect the local and regional transportation network and their design can impact a community’s character. A wide range of plans and policies guide location decisions. The Federal Workplace Element focuses on planning priorities for agencies located within the NCR.

The Central Employment Area in the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The federal government should prioritize workplace locations within the official Central Employment Area (CEA). The CEA incorporates the federal establishment’s symbolic and physical heart, encompasses the hub of the Metro system, and has transit stops served by both Virginia Railway Express and MARC. In accordance with Executive Order 12072, Federal Space Management (1978), GSA uses the CEA boundary as the delineated area for federal leasing in the District of Columbia. While the Comprehensive Plan defines the CEA, it does not include a specific process to review or update its boundaries.

As the District of Columbia invests in new transportation systems such as streetcars, planners should assess the CEA as a tool to support infrastructure needs and other reinvestment efforts. This policy update continues to support the CEA as the first priority area for federal office space, but also proposes establishing an assessment process through which the CEA is reevaluated.
Figure 6: Central Employment Area
Base Realignment and Closure Act

While the Comprehensive Plan and Council on Environmental Quality guidance is general and applicable to location decisions for all agencies, there are examples of plans that address specific agency needs and requirements. The 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC) program significantly impacted civilian and active duty DoD facilities nationally and within the region. Affected installations gained and/or lost commands and related personnel, or were closed. BRAC was intended to enhance agency mission, support operational needs, and use resources more efficiently.

BRAC responded to specific policy goals, such as a desire to increase safety and strengthen anti-terrorism measures, which included moves from leased spaces to owned space. ‘Joint base’ proposals brought different branches of the military together at an installation, often supporting similar functions. For example, the military consolidated medical services at Joint Base Anacostia Bolling in Washington and the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

BRAC actions include some of the region’s largest construction projects between 2005-2015, particularly at Fort Belvoir’s Main Post and Engineer Proving Ground in Virginia, Alexandria’s Mark Center, and Bethesda’s Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. These actions changed major employment locations, affected infrastructure, particularly transportation, and impacted regional office space leases.

BRAC presented several implementation challenges for the NCR with lessons for the future. Short deadlines often resulted in major project implementation without the benefit of an overall master plan to coordinate different projects, evaluate approaches to minimize negative impacts, or realize potential site opportunities. Currently, planning efforts are catching up to the major new developments that have already occurred at different installations.

Many of the affected installations were located in urban or urbanizing areas and have well served by existing transit, infrastructure, and services. Unfortunately, some DoD facilities moved from areas well served by transit and amenities to locations with neither. The Mark Center project moved 6,400 employees from transit-served leased locations to a new site adjacent to an already congested road network. While state and federal funds were pooled together to provide some road improvements, intensive efforts were required to expand existing bus and shuttle services to accommodate demand. Negotiations and discussions among DoD, federal, local, and state officials, and service providers continue to address approaches to the land use, economic development and transportation impacts from these major relocations.

Recommendations for Sustainable Locations for Federal Facilities

In April 2010, the Council on Environmental Quality, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Transportation, GSA, DoD, and other agencies, developed Recommendations for Sustainable Locations for Federal Facilities, government-wide guidance for the location of federal facilities. This guidance directs federal location decisions around factors including affordable housing, development on infill sites, locating in central employment areas, and adaptive reuse of historic buildings. The recommendations prioritize locating federal offices near transit:

- When possible, site selection should give priority to areas with existing and/or planned transit service so that the building’s primary entrance is within ½ mile of a well-served transit stop and is easily accessible by pedestrians.
- Transit should be available by regularly scheduled, fixed-route transit service at a level of convenience, speed, frequency, and overall level-of-service that connects employees and constituents to the federal facility.
- Locations where federal development would help anchor Transit Oriented Development should be prioritized.

In 2011, A Study of Workforce House, Transportation and Employment Decisions: Implications for Siting Future Federal Facilities was prepared for GSA. This study recommended future siting considerations to meet the housing, transportation and lifestyle preferences of the current and emerging workforce, and direct growth and transportation patterns that meet regional goals.

The Federal Workplace Element location policies reflect the priority of locating near transit and define proximity to transit as ½ mile from a well-served transit stop. Recommendations for Sustainable Locations for Federal Facilities defines a well-served transit stop as one that provides at least 10-minute headways during peak hours and at least 15-minute headways during off-peak hours, with operations for at least 14 hours daily. The connection of federal facilities to transit is critical to developing a sustainable federal footprint in the NCR.
Region Forward is an important plan that establishes goals and benchmarks for a sustainable, accessible, livable and prosperous region. The Greater Washington 2050 Coalition, a group established through the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) developed the plan. All 23 of MWCOG’s member jurisdictions adopted Region Forward. Region Forward’s goals and subsequent local government input was the basis for a newly revised Regional Activity Center Map, adopted by MWCOG in 2013. While varying in scale and type, each center represents a location where planning and infrastructure support growth and development. Many centers are areas with access to current and future transit services, reflecting the importance given to creating walkable, multi-modal, mixed-use communities.
The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Federal Workplace Element

Where federal facilities locate can have major impacts on the agency mission, operations, and the surrounding community and region. Federal facilities can bring new employment and economic opportunities to local communities and can affect the local and regional transportation network. The policies within the Federal Workplace Element prioritize federal building locations with respect to key planning goals and priorities related to the environment, operations, and transportation.

The federal government should:

**FW.A.1** Consider the modernization, repair, and rehabilitation of existing federally owned facilities for federal workplaces before developing new facilities.

**FW.A.2** Use the following priorities when locating federal workplaces:

1. In existing urban areas, give first consideration to the Central Employment Area within Washington, DC. The CEA should reflect the District of Columbia’s priority areas for commercial or mixed-use development and transportation investment. The District of Columbia, NCPC, and other federal agencies should evaluate the CEA as needed, to ensure that it reflects current priorities.

2. Beyond the CEA, give first consideration to sites in proximity to transit and compatible with local planning efforts. In rare exceptions, agencies that have specific operational or land use requirements associated with their missions should locate where these needs can be fulfilled, only if such needs cannot be fulfilled in the CEA or other sites in proximity to transit and compatible with local planning efforts.

**SECTION A: Policies Related to Locating Federal Workplaces**

Thomas P. O’Neil, Jr. Federal Building was modernized and renovated to serve as a modern office building for the U.S. Government. Completed in 2013, the building includes several features to promote water efficiency and reuse, resulting in a 45 percent reduction in water usage as compared to similar commercial building standards.
FW.A.3 Consider the following additional criteria when locating federal workplaces:

1. Locate federal facilities within walking distance of existing or planned fixed route transit services, such as Metrorail, MARC, VRE; light rail transit; streetcar; or bus rapid transit. Priority should be given to locations within walking distance to Metrorail.

2. Locate new federal facilities to support regional and local agency objectives that encourage compact forms of growth and development and support local and federal goals to increase local and regional transit system ridership.

3. Locate federal workplaces to support the creation of employment opportunities in economically distressed areas identified through federal, state, and local economic development programs. Federal agencies should work with community officials and local stakeholders to identify suitable sites for federal workplaces when these workplaces can contribute to local planning and economic development goals.

4. Use historic properties, or properties located within historic districts in central employment areas, for new federal workplaces. If no such property is suitable, consider other developed or undeveloped sites within historic districts. Finally, consider historic properties outside of historic districts if no suitable site within a district exists.

5. Locate employees near other federal agencies and departments with which they regularly interact.

6. Locate federal workplaces in areas where efficiencies are gained through proximity to a market of private suppliers of goods and services.

7. Locate federal workplaces near a variety of housing options to benefit employees.

8. Minimize development of natural spaces by selecting disturbed land or brownfields for new federal workplaces, or by reusing existing buildings or sites.

FW.A.4 Engage the public throughout the location, planning, and construction process. Federal agencies should seek technical assistance for public planning processes if they do not have the expertise.

FW.A.5 Achieve within Washington, DC a relative share of the region’s federal employment (civilian and military) that is not less than 60 percent of the region’s.

FW.A.6 Reserve the most prominent development sites, particularly those with important symbolic visual connections to the U.S. Capitol and other landmarks in downtown Washington, for federal workplaces, particularly for headquarters facilities or preeminent commemorative works.

FW.A.7 Protect the natural environment by preserving environmental resources and considering the impact of the siting of federal facilities on existing natural resources.

Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site

The Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site encompasses the avenue between the U.S. Capitol and the White House and is within the Central Employment Area. This site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1966 and includes federal buildings in the Federal Triangle.
Once a federal facility is sited and built, it should be operated, managed, and maintained in a manner that supports federal goals related to sustainability, energy efficiency, resource management, and transportation. The Federal Workplace Element includes policies for the operation and management of federal workplaces throughout the region. The element supports development of—and access to—public transit and alternative means of transportation such as pedestrian and bicycle access.

The Federal Workplace Element complements the Transportation, Federal Environment, and Federal Urban Design Elements. These elements can help federal facilities become more sustainable in their operations. Providing a workplace that includes amenities for federal employees and the surrounding community is an important objective of this section’s policies.

The federal government should:

**FW.B.1** Locate, design, construct, and operate federal facilities to minimize total energy use.

**FW.B.2** Continue to provide and maintain safe and healthy working conditions at all federal facilities.

**FW.B.3** Create federal workplaces that engender a sense of pride, purpose, and dedication for employees and agency missions.

**FW.B.4** Encourage federal employees to use non-motorized modes and multi-occupant modes of travel including rideshare, carpools, vanpools, privately leased buses, and public transportation to get to/from work.

**FW.B.5** Permit and encourage telework and alternative work schedules for federal employees where it benefits the federal government and the public.

**FW.B.6** Support local agency efforts to create new housing options where federal workplaces exist or are planned.

**FW.B.7** Promote Live-Near-Your-Work initiatives for a variety of housing options close to public transit and/or federal facilities.

**FW.B.8** Develop master plans that guide the long-range development of installations where more than one principal building, structure, or activity is located or proposed.

**FW.B.9** Establish the characteristics of an installation and its surroundings through the master planning process, as required by the Commission. Characteristics include qualities and resources to be protected; building groupings, massing, and architectural character; streetscape and landscape elements; and access elements to buildings and from surrounding streets and transit facilities.

**FW.B.10** Encourage agencies to review master plans at least every five years to ensure that both inventory material and development proposals are current. Agencies should advise the Commission of the results of such reviews and provide NCPC with a proposed schedule for revising master plans when an update is needed. Revisions to master plans should reflect changed conditions and provide a current plan for the facility’s development.

**FW.B.11** Establish a level of employment that can be accommodated on installations where more than one principal building, structure, or activity is located or proposed through the master planning process established by the Commission.

**FW.B.12** Continue to monitor installation employment levels and revise master plans as necessary to reflect changed conditions. Provide an up-to-date plan for the installation’s development.

**FW.B.13** Provide, or work with local jurisdictions, to develop, a variety of service uses and amenities for federal employees within a reasonable travel time or walking distance. Services should include restaurants, retail outlets, financial and professional services, day-care centers, and health and fitness centers, as well as public open space.

**FW.B.14** When federal facilities are located near existing or planned business districts with amenities for federal employees, competing services should not be provided within the federal facility, installation, or campus.

**FW.B.15** Plan federal workplaces to be compatible with the character of the surrounding public space, properties, and community, and where feasible, advance local planning objectives such as neighborhood revitalization.

**FW.B.16** Consult with local agencies to ensure that federal workplaces enhance their communities’ urban design and vitality.
FW.B.17 Make primary pedestrian entrances at federal workplaces readily ADA accessible to public transportation options, particularly Metrorail, where available. Facility entrances should be situated as close as possible to transit stops and stations where possible.

FW.B.18 Provide and maintain space for activities that encourage public access to, and stimulate public traffic around, into, and through federal facilities, including pedestrian or bicycle traffic where possible.

FW.B.19 Include a mix of uses, particularly on the ground floor where possible, at federal workplaces located in urban areas.

FW.B.20 Include publicly accessible amenities such as retail or public art, particularly at the street level where possible when modernizing, rehabilitating or developing new federally owned facilities. Also, explore opportunities to provide publicly accessible and actively programmed open space outside of the building envelope.

FW.B.21 Incorporate publicly accessible civic art, including memorials, plazas, public gardens, fountains, sculpture, and murals, into federal workplaces. Proposals for civic art should be coordinated with local agencies.

FW.B.22 Use appropriate commemoration and exhibits at federal workplaces. Buildings, auditoriums, plazas, courtyards, and other features can be named and embellished with plaques and sculptures. Exhibits are encouraged in widely used areas such as lobbies and corridors.

FW.B.23 Encourage the use of federal workplaces for occasional cultural, educational, and/or recreational activities, providing suitable space and infrastructure for such activities.

FW.B.24 Support an economically vibrant region that meets the government’s procurement needs for goods and services through program collaborations with local, state, and regional economic development organizations. Support business development initiatives to create jobs and economic growth in disadvantaged communities throughout the region, in particular within Washington, DC.

FW.B.25 Lease or share space in federal workplaces for publicly accessible commercial, cultural, educational, civic, recreational, residential, and other high-traffic use activities where these uses will fulfill a local need, provide amenities for federal workers and residents, and support local development objectives.

FW.B.26 Explore public-private partnerships in adjacent communities that can create job training opportunities for the local community at all educational levels and help meet federal workforce needs.

FW.B.27 Support local agency and community efforts to use economic development incentives and infrastructure development to capture new commercial activities that can provide goods and services for federal workplaces. Federal procurement of goods and services should be focused in these areas.

FW.B.28 Foster the growth of socially and economically disadvantaged firms in areas around federal facilities through the use of existing federal programs and targeted resources to support existing and emerging industry clusters.

FW.B.29 Explore opportunities for federal laboratories to co-locate with related private and university research institutions and business incubators to encourage development, transfer, and commercialization of new technologies where such an arrangement will benefit the federal government, private sector, and general public.

FW.B.30 Maintain and reinforce the preeminence of the L’Enfant City by attracting and retaining federal employment through modernizing, repairing, and rehabilitating existing federal workplaces in the monumental core. Provide amenities for federal workers and the surrounding community on, and around, federal sites to enhance and activate the public realm.

FW.B.31 Support local and regional efforts to coordinate land use with the availability or development of transportation alternatives to the private automobile, including walking, bicycle riding, and public transit (Metrorail, VRE, MARC, or other type of transit service such as streetcar or bus rapid transit) systems when locating federal workplaces.
New policies regarding mobility and federal space consolidation may lead to a smaller federal footprint in the NCR. DoD and GSA are leading agencies out of leased space and into federally owned space, generally concentrated in the region’s core. As a result, vacant space may be created in localities around the region. How federal agencies handle the redevelopment or reuse of excess properties is an important factor in the regional economy’s health. The policies in this section apply to the reuse of federal space and land and provide a framework that can guide federal agencies to provide opportunities for local communities to benefit from the shrinking federal footprint.

SECTION C: Policies Related to Reuse of Federal Space and Land

Excess Properties

GSA has considered other methods of disposing excess land, including the acquisition of construction services for the exchange of federal property. This allows agencies to exchange title to federal property for constructed asset or construction services of other federal properties that are utilized by the federal government.

When disposing of excess land, federal agencies should work with the community to undertake plans for economic development and/or use the property or facilities for other public (including open space) and private uses. The disposal of excess federally owned property should result in minimal adverse economic impacts on affected communities. Its future use should contribute to solving existing community development problems.

Guidance on the disposal of federally owned property can be found in the following:

- Other laws and regulations.

Utilizing Existing Properties

The Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act of 1976 encourages the public use of federal buildings and permits the inclusion of mixed uses in portions of federal buildings and the co-location of federal offices with other cultural institutions or services. The act encourages the location of commercial, cultural, education, and recreation facilities and activities within public buildings. In Washington, there are many examples where the federal government has utilized existing federal properties to incorporate public uses like the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, the Old Post Office Building, and the National Building Museum.

The federal government has opportunities to consider public-private partnerships and incorporate public uses as federal agencies reevaluate underutilized assets.

SECTION C: Policies Related to Reuse of Federal Space and Land

Walter Reed Army Medical Center

The largest BRAC closure in the region occurred at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC. As part of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Act, the DoD closed the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and moved many of its activities to installations in Maryland, Virginia, and elsewhere. The U.S. Department of State proposes to acquire approximately 43.5 acres of the northwest portion of the site and redevelop it as a Foreign Missions Center for the construction of new chancery facilities assigned to foreign governments. See the Foreign Missions & International Organizations Element. The federal government declared 67.5 acres on the main post, located on the site’s northeast portion, as surplus property. This portion was transferred to the District of Columbia for redevelopment.
The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Federal Workplace Element

The federal government should:

FW.C.1 Utilize available federally owned land or space before purchasing or leasing additional land or building space. Agencies should continuously monitor land and building space utilization rates to ensure their efficient use.

FW.C.2 Develop strategies to minimize adverse economic impacts on a jurisdiction when a facility, or a large number of federal employees relocates (federal facilities of 200 or more employees or more than 100,000 more square feet).

FW.C.3 Ensure, in the relocation of federal employees, that similar or improved availability of public transportation, employee services, and affordable housing are within a convenient commuting distance.

FW.C.4 Dispose of excess federal property in a manner that ensures that its future use is coordinated with surrounding development patterns and land uses and contributes effectively to existing community development goals.

FW.C.5 Explore new federal activities and civilian public activities before a property or facility is determined to be excess.

FW.C.6 Make better use of underutilized space within a federal facility for a public use such as commemoration, art, or retail where possible.

FW.C.7 Evaluate facility requirements and use assets more efficiently to reduce underutilized space.

West Heating Plant

The U.S. General Services Administration disposed of the former West Heating Plant and removed the property from federal ownership. The West Heating Plant was sold for $19.5 million to a team of developers that plan to convert the site into luxury condominiums with a public park that will tie into the existing Georgetown Waterfront Park. The decommissioned historic heating plant, previously used to provide steam to government facilities, sits on a two-acre site near the Georgetown waterfront. The building and adjacent land was identified as excess and the disposal of the parcel was needed to eliminate the costs associated with maintenance. This is consistent with Disposing of Unneeded Federal Real Estate, a Presidential Memorandum issued June 10, 2010.
Establishing Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and a Process for Sustainable Locations for Federal Facilities

Endnotes

2. 4 USC § 71: https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/4/71
3. 4 USC § 72: https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/4/72
6. U.S. Department of General Services, NOR’s Public Buildings Service, Data Received February 24, 2015.
19. Alternate Work Schedule: Flexible work schedules and compressed work schedules.
20. Total Workplace Initiative: http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/178259
21. Central Employment Area: The CEA is defined within the District of Columbia’s Elements and the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan. The CEA boundaries within the District of Columbia’s Elements are amended through actions by the Council of the District of Columbia. Historically, the Commission has adopted those amendments and changed the boundary of CEA within the Federal Elements to correspond. The Council of the District of Columbia last amended the CEA boundaries within the District of Columbia’s Elements on December 31, 1998. During its review of these amendments to the CEA boundaries, the Commission, through a tie vote on March 4, 1999, found that the amendments did not have a negative impact on the interests or functions of the Federal Establishment in the National Capital. The Commission, however, did not amend the CEA boundaries within the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan to correspond to those adopted by the Council of the District of Columbia. The CEA boundaries within the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan were last amended by the Commission on July 27, 1995.

Current CEA boundary: An area in the District of Columbia, generally bounded on the north by Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Ninth Street, NW, N Street, NW, Seventh Street, NW, H Street, NW and NE, North Capitol Street, and Florida Avenue, NE; on the east by Fourth Street, NE, M Street, NE, Third Street, NE, K Street, NE, Second Street, NE, and C Street, NE, Constitution Avenue, First Street, NE, Maryland Avenue, NE, Second Street, SE, C Street, SE, New Jersey Avenue, SE, D Street, SE, South Capitol Street, E Street, SE, Southwest Freeway, M Street, SE, and 11th Street, SE; on the south by the Anacostia Freeway, Sterling Avenue, SE, South Capitol Street, Southwest Freeway, 14th Street, SW, Constitution Avenue, NW; and on the west by the Expressway to 23rd Street, NW, north along Virginia Avenue, NW, east along the northern lot line of 2121 Virginia Avenue, NW, to the eastern lot line of 2121 Virginia Avenue, NW, to E Street, NW, east along E Street, NW, to 21st Street, NW north along 21st Street, NW, to the northern edge of the rear lot line of the American Red Cross Building on Lot B34 in Square 104, east along the rear lot line of the American Red Cross Building to 20th Street, NW, south along 20th Street, NW, to the northern edge of the rear lot line of the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) Building on Lot B35 in Square 122, east along the rear lot line of the AGC Building to 19th Street, NW, north along 19th Street, NW, to F Street, west on F Street, NW, to 20th Street, NW, north along Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, to 22nd Street, NW, north along 22nd Street, NW, to K Street, NW, east along K Street, NW, to 21st Street, NW, to M Street, NW, and New Hampshire Avenue, NW.
Endnotes

22. Executive Order 12072: Federal Space Management: http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/101580


24. This includes locations already served by transit as well as locations planned for future TOD where local officials are able to provide the federal agency with sufficient confidence that it will provide such service.


27. Walter Reed Army Medical Center Local Redevelopment Authority: www.walterreedlra.com


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The federal government’s goal is to plan a secure and welcoming environment for the location of diplomatic and international activities in Washington, DC. This should be done in a manner that is appropriate to the status and dignity of these activities; enhances Washington’s role as one of the world’s great capitals; and is sensitive to the character and use patterns of the city’s neighborhoods.

Washington, DC is one of the world’s most important diplomatic centers. There are a total of 195 independent states in the world, and the United States maintains diplomatic relations with 191 of them.1 The United States also has diplomatic relations with many international organizations. There are approximately 185 countries that have foreign missions in Washington, DC.2 These missions are vital to the United States government in assisting diplomatic relations with international institutions, organizations, and states. Foreign missions help promote peace and stability and bring nations together to address global challenges.

The Foreign Missions & International Organizations Element of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements (Comprehensive Plan) provides a policy framework for the United States to fulfill its international obligation to assist foreign governments and international organizations in obtaining suitable locations for their diplomatic missions. This in turn supports efficient functioning of diplomatic and international activities. The element also includes policies to ensure that foreign missions promote the prestigious nature of the diplomatic mission, contribute to the city, and acknowledge and maintain the unique characteristics of Washington’s neighborhoods.

Honoring the United States’ treaty obligations is an important component in accommodating foreign missions in the nation’s capital. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations obligates the U.S. government to assist foreign governments in obtaining suitable facilities for diplomatic missions. The Convention states that “the receiving State shall either facilitate the acquisition on its territory, in accordance with its laws, by the sending State of premises necessary for its mission or assist the latter in obtaining accommodation in some other way.”3

The Foreign Missions Act4 of 1982 reaffirms the federal government’s jurisdiction over the operation of foreign missions and international organizations in the United States. It enunciates the policy to support and facilitate the secure and efficient operation of U.S. missions abroad, and of foreign missions and international organizations in the United States.

To ensure reciprocal accommodations in foreign countries, the Act established the Office of Foreign Missions within the U.S. Department of State (State Department) to review and control the operations of foreign missions in the United States. It empowers the Secretary of State to set forth the mechanism and criteria relating to the location of foreign missions in Washington, DC.
Chancery Development

Foreign missions occupy buildings of all sizes, shapes, and ages. Some are housed in former residential row houses or mansions, while many are in custom-designed buildings. Others lease space in commercial office buildings.

The facilities that house diplomatic functions—office space where the mission is conducted, and the residence of the ambassador—are commonly referred to collectively as embassies. Individually, these facilities are referred to differently depending upon their use. These uses include:

- **Ambassador’s residence**: The official home of the ambassador or the chief of mission.
- **Chancery**: The principal offices of a foreign mission used for diplomatic or related purposes.
- **Chancery annex**: Used for diplomatic purposes in support of the mission, such as cultural or military attachés, or consular operations. Chanceries and chancery annexes are the same in this element when considering the accommodation of foreign missions in Washington, DC.

Many foreign missions in Washington occupy chanceries, chancery annexes, and ambassadors’ residences in more than one location. Collectively and individually, these buildings contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of Washington’s neighborhoods and add significantly to the city’s visual interest and character.

Some countries maintain limited diplomatic establishments in Washington, with only the minimal staff needed to maintain diplomatic relations. Others have quite extensive activities and employ hundreds of people to work in specialized offices with particular functions. For example, several foreign missions maintain trade offices to encourage the import and export of goods to and from their countries. Many missions have offices for military liaisons to the U.S. Department of Defense. The diplomatic and international community continues to be a source of economic growth in Washington, DC as it provides employment and attracts international culture and commerce.

The Economic and Fiscal Impact of Foreign Missions on the Nation’s Capital

The foreign missions in the National Capital Region represent the world’s major countries, and with few exceptions are those countries’ largest missions. Even though foreign missions by themselves are not major generators of economic activity, they have an economic force far exceeding their measurable benefits.

**International Business Industry in Washington, DC**

In addition to direct and indirect spending, foreign missions represent a critical component of the international business industry in Washington, DC. The continued growth and vitality of the city’s international business industry is closely tied to Washington maintaining its position as a power center among world capitals, generating country-to-country business opportunities, and attracting visitors seeking individual or multiple-country meetings.

Foreign missions support and facilitate a significant and growing sector within the District of Columbia economy in the following ways:

- Foreign missions employ workers in Washington, DC.
- Consumer spending by foreign mission employees.
- Non-payroll spending by foreign missions.
- Foreign missions attract a large volume of day visitors and business visitors staying overnight, who spend money on lodging, food, and shopping.
- The District of Columbia collects taxes generated by the office space and homes leased in the city by foreign missions and their employees, respectively.

**International Investments in Virginia**

Between 2009 and 2013, French companies invested more than $570 million in Virginia, making France the second-largest foreign direct investor in the state. In 2014, the Ambassador of France to the United States and the Commonwealth of Virginia signed a partnership agreement to develop new solutions to face climate change, develop quality of life, create jobs, and generate new economic opportunities. This partnership symbolizes two countries working together to address climate change and sustainable economic development in Virginia.
Some countries maintain limited diplomatic establishments in Washington, with only the minimal staff needed to maintain diplomatic relations. Others have quite extensive activities and employ hundreds of people to work in specialized offices with particular functions. For example, several foreign missions maintain trade offices to encourage the import and export of goods to and from their countries. Many missions have offices for military liaisons to the U.S. Department of Defense. The diplomatic and international community continues to be a source of economic growth in Washington, DC as it provides employment and attracts international culture and commerce.

In recent decades, the nature of international diplomacy has shifted. In addition to political relationships, economic and cultural relationships have taken on added significance. This expansion of diplomatic functions has resulted in a commensurate shift in foreign mission facilities. Buildings are increasingly used to signify the importance a country places on its relations with its host country and to project a positive image.

In addition to their traditional function as places of negotiation, chanceries also act as communication vehicles for their countries. Increasingly, foreign missions use their chancery facilities as event spaces to foster intergovernmental relations at the political, economic, and cultural level. Using the power of architecture to convey a message in a way that spoken and written words cannot, many foreign missions now host public and private cultural events such as art exhibits, concerts, and films, or sponsor special events to increase awareness of their country and promote trade and tourism. These new programs often result in the need for larger buildings and specialized space. As a result, increased security requirements have become a consideration in chancery development.

Foreign Missions Since 2004: Key Developments and Trends

In 2004, when the Comprehensive Plan’s Foreign Missions & International Organizations Element was last updated, there were 169 countries with foreign missions spread across 507 facilities (residential and non-residential) in the region: 451 facilities in the Washington, DC, 41 facilities in Maryland, and 15 facilities in Virginia. In Washington, DC, there were 195 chanceries—18 located on federal land and 177 located on non-federal land.

The collapse in the 1990s of both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia resulted in the creation of 21 new countries, which established diplomatic missions in Washington, many located in small, historic townhouses in Northwest. Two decades later, many of these countries have outgrown their smaller facilities.

Since 2004, the growth and diplomatic presence of foreign missions such as Brazil, China, India, and Vietnam, have increased, resulting in larger facilities in the United States, as well as on the State Department’s reciprocal presence and operations in those countries.

The construction of the new U.S. chancery in Beijing and the Chinese chancery in Washington provides an example of how reciprocity functions. Without the ability to accommodate China’s construction at the International Chancery Center, the State Department’s efforts to construct a new chancery in Beijing would likely not have been successful.

Another example relates to a proposal from the Republic of Georgia to relocate to another property in Washington. The State Department determined that the case was a federal interest and acknowledged the Republic of Georgia’s generous assistance in establishing a new U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi in 2005. Such cooperation was essential to successfully achieve the federal government’s mission to provide safe, secure and functional facilities for the conduct of U.S. diplomacy and the promotion of U.S. interests worldwide.

In addition, the increasing “footprints” of U.S. diplomatic facilities abroad—largely due to security requirements—have resulted in additional pressure for similarly sized sites for foreign missions in the United States. Within Washington, DC, this task is challenging due to the lack of larger, undeveloped sites.

As foreign governments continue to face greater difficulty identifying properties within Washington that are either available for chancery use, or viewed by foreign governments as suitable for modern embassy operations, the State Department faces a number of challenges in its attempts to reciprocally acquire properties in other countries.
As of 2013, there were 322 chanceries (chancery and chancery annexes), 78 ambassador residences, and 46 missions to the Organization of American States in Washington, DC. Since 2004, the Embassy of the Republic of Congo, Embassy of South Africa, and the Embassy of Brazil are just a few of the completed multiple renovation and expansion projects. Under development are the Chinese Embassy Annex on Connecticut Avenue, estimated to be completed in the summer of 2016, and the Moroccan Embassy at the International Chancery Center. With the restoration of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, both countries have reestablished embassies in each other’s countries. While most chancery facilities are owned by the countries that occupy them, several missions lease space in office buildings, small commercial buildings, or freestanding structures.

Where Foreign Missions Are Located

Currently, all chanceries in Washington, DC are located in the city’s Northwest quadrant, with the majority located between 16th Street, NW (to the east) and Wisconsin Avenue, NW (to the west.) The Sheridan Kalorama neighborhood contains the largest number of chanceries, with the adjacent Dupont Circle neighborhood having the second most.

In 1968, the International Center Act established a 47-acre enclave in the Van Ness neighborhood known as the International Chancery Center, where foreign missions leased land from the U.S. government. The International Chancery Center became a purpose-built community designed to balance the federal government’s need to accommodate foreign mission facilities while addressing the concerns of citizens about the location and operation of foreign missions in Washington.

The International Chancery Center houses 17 chanceries and is essentially built out, as all 47 acres have been developed with the exception of two lots for Morocco. The final plans for the new Moroccan chancery have been approved. Embassies are located predominately in the northwest quadrant of Washington, with a high concentration along a stretch of Massachusetts Avenue, NW (known as “Embassy Row”) and along New Hampshire Avenue, NW and 16th Street, NW. Many embassies are located in neighborhoods including Dupont Circle, downtown, Foggy Bottom, Georgetown, Kalorama, and Van Ness. Where foreign missions locate can influence neighborhood character. For example, the many embassies in Dupont Circle bring a constant flow of employment and distinctive international feel to the historically designated neighborhood. These embassies generate demand for restaurants and the arts, helping establish the neighborhoods’ distinct character.
Future Demand

The greatest demand for new chancery facilities will likely come from existing foreign missions that expand as they increase their presence and the services performed. A few small countries that house their primary diplomatic missions to the U.S. in New York City may also choose to open chanceries in the capital. As new countries are created over time, it is likely that they too may establish diplomatic relations with the U.S. and will require new chanceries in Washington, DC.

New foreign missions, and the relocation of existing ones, could require the identification of chancery sites each year. It is unlikely that all foreign missions would require new sites—some may purchase or lease existing foreign mission facilities, while others may purchase or lease other existing buildings. However, the past trend has been toward new construction of larger facilities on large lots, both on privately owned land and in the International Chancery Center. Because of the full build-out of the International Chancery Center, another large tract of federally owned land to accommodate a new foreign missions center is planned. A discussion of the proposed foreign missions center at the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center campus is located in Section B: Policies Related to Locating Chanceries.

Locating Chanceries

Where Foreign Missions May Locate

The Foreign Missions Act establish procedures and criteria governing the location, replacement, or expansion of chanceries in the District of Columbia and identified areas where foreign missions may locate without regulatory review, and areas where foreign missions may locate subject to disapproval by the District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment.

The areas where foreign missions may locate without regulatory review are referred to as matter-of-right. A foreign mission may locate a chancery in a matter-of-right area without it being subject to review by the BZA. The Foreign Missions Act establishes matter-of-right areas as those areas in the District of Columbia zoned commercial, industrial, waterfront, or mixed-use. According to the current District of Columbia zoning map, these areas are located in all quadrants of the city, with the single largest contiguous area within the Central Employment Area (see the Federal Workplace Element for more details). From this core, several matter-of-right areas extend outward along major avenues of the city. In addition, large matter-of-right areas are located south of the National Mall and east of the Anacostia River.
Foreign missions are also permitted to locate chanceries in areas outside of the matter-of-right areas subject to review and disapproval by the BZA as defined in Section 4306(b)(2) of the Act. These include areas zoned medium-high or high density residential, as well as “any other area” deemed suitable for a chancery use on a case-by-case basis. For these latter areas, prior to making a decision concerning the location of a chancery, the BZA must first determine whether the area within which the chancery is to be located is suitable based upon an evaluation of existing office or institutional uses in that area. As required by the Foreign Missions Act, any determination concerning the location of a chancery outside of the matter-of-right areas must be based solely on a set of six criteria found in Section 4306(d). While the areas considered outside of the matter-of-right can be found in all quadrants of Washington, these areas are primarily located in Northwest and Northeast Washington.

### Six Criteria for Locating Chanceries Outside of Matter-of-Right-Areas

Section 4306 (d) of the Foreign Missions Act

(d) Criteria for determination

Any determination concerning the location of a chancery under subsection (b)(2) of this section, or concerning an appeal of an administrative decision with respect to a chancery based in whole or in part upon any zoning regulation or map, shall be based solely on the following criteria:

1. The international obligation of the United States to facilitate the provision of adequate and secure facilities for foreign missions in the nation’s capital.

2. Historic preservation, as determined by the Board of Zoning Adjustment, in carrying out this section; and in order to ensure compatibility with historic landmarks and districts, substantial compliance with District of Columbia and federal regulations governing historic preservation shall be required with respect to new construction and to demolition of or alteration to historic landmarks.

3. The adequacy of off-street or other parking and the extent to which the area will be served by public transportation to reduce parking requirements, subject to such special security requirements as may be determined by the Secretary of State, after consultation with federal agencies authorized to perform protective services.

4. The extent to which the area is capable of being adequately protected, as determined by the Secretary of State, after consultation with federal agencies authorized to perform protective services.

5. The municipal interest, as determined by the Mayor of the District of Columbia.

6. The federal interest, as determined by the Secretary of State.
Location Decisions

All foreign missions in Washington are currently located in the city’s Northwest quadrant. This is due to historic development patterns, availability of buildings and land, proximity to government offices and other chanceries, and former Comprehensive Plan policies that encouraged this practice.

**Historic Patterns.** The historic pattern came early in Washington’s diplomatic history. The first foreign missions in the city were near the White House, and as outlying areas of the city became fashionable—and increasingly urbanized—foreign missions followed. The first concentration of foreign missions occurred along 16th Street, NW in the vicinity of Meridian Hill Park. By the 1920’s 16th Street, NW was referred to as Embassy Row.

However, during the Depression, many of the grand homes in the area northwest of Dupont Circle became vacant and were bought by foreign missions that wanted to establish their presence in a stylish neighborhood. By the end of the 1930’s Massachusetts Avenue, NW from Scott Circle to Wisconsin Avenue had become the new Embassy Row. As the United States became an international power and Washington became an increasingly important diplomatic center, more and more foreign missions clustered around this area. Its desirability continues to this day.

**Available Buildings.** As large private homes became available, many foreign missions purchased and occupied them. When these foreign missions later moved into larger facilities, new missions establishing or increasing their diplomatic presence often moved into these former residences.

**Available Land.** Although chancery construction has dispersed to areas including the Pennsylvania Avenue, NW corridor and Georgetown, for many years the availability of large lots along the Massachusetts Avenue corridor allowed for the construction of new chancery facilities that accommodated a variety of functions and uses.

**Proximity to Government Offices and Other Chanceries.** As increasing numbers of foreign missions clustered in the city’s Northwest quadrant, the desirability of locating chanceries near or in the cluster increased. The neighborhood character and the prestige of the nearby foreign missions added to the desire to locate there. In addition, foreign missions in Northwest often prefer to be located in proximity to the State Department headquarters, with easy access to other government functions located around the monumental core.

**Former Comprehensive Plan Policies.** Based on prior development patterns over the course of 20 years, the Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2004 recognized a potential for future expansion of existing foreign missions and demand for new chancery sites. Planning challenges with chancery development in Washington, DC included the over-concentration of chanceries in specific neighborhoods and the impact on traffic, parking, noise, and land use patterns. To address those challenges, several potential development areas were identified in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan that could accommodate future chanceries including the 16th Street, NW Corridor and the South Capitol Street Corridor. Other policies encouraged the development of a new foreign missions center at the Armed Forces Retirement Home. However, due to changing conditions, future foreign missions centers at the Armed Forces Retirement Home and along the South Capitol Street Corridor are no longer viable.
Key Policy Issues and Challenges. The Foreign Missions Act continues to serve as the federal regulatory framework that guides the location of chanceries in the District of Columbia. Section 4306 of the Foreign Missions Act establishes specific areas where chanceries are permitted as a matter-of-right, and areas where chanceries are permitted subject to the disapproval of the BZA (implemented at a local level through the District of Columbia Zoning Regulations). In general, the BZA process and the matter-of-right zoning restrictions are intended to balance a number of key planning challenges associated with locating chanceries within the context of both federal and local interests. For example, concentrating chanceries in neighborhoods may impact traffic, parking, noise, and land use patterns. There may be other issues related to protecting neighborhood character or site-specific historic preservation issues. These must be balanced with fundamental federal interests to respect the nation’s diplomatic obligations and locate chanceries within the capital.

One issue for locating chanceries is how to define the “in any other area” section of the Foreign Missions Act in Section 4306(b)(2)(B) and described on page 6. In December 1983, NCPC amended the Foreign Missions & International Organizations Element to provide planning and policy guidance to the Zoning Commission and the BZA with a method developed to delineate the “in any other area.” It included a methodology that identified areas with 1/3 office and institutional and 2/3 residential land uses. Thus, it was commonly referred to as the “1/3–2/3 method.” This mixed-use ratio was then applied to city squares zoned low- to medium-density residential, and squares that met the ratio were identified as being appropriate for chanceries under Section 4306(b)(2)(B).

The 1/3-2/3 methodology was intended to clarify guidance in the Foreign Missions Act and help delineate areas where chanceries were appropriate in non-matter-of-right areas. However, from a process perspective, it was noted that the methodology has been applied somewhat inconsistently and in some cases caused an unanticipated increase in the concentration of chanceries in certain residential neighborhoods. Thus, NCPC is not including this methodology in this update. NCPC supports prioritizing matter-of-right areas and the proposed foreign missions center at the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center for location of chanceries. The location of chanceries outside of the matter-of-right areas are subject to the review of the District of Columbia BZA. The BZA makes their determination based on the six criteria defined in the Foreign Missions Act, which considers both local and federal interests.

The BZA has reviewed approximately 120 chancery applications since the 1960’s. Of these, approximately 67 percent were chancery applications reviewed after the 1982 Foreign Missions Act was established. The number of chancery applications have declined in the past two decades.
Chancery Facilities

Future Building Requirements

In the past, foreign countries built new, large, distinctive chancery facilities on prominent, busy streets. Most of these chanceries were stand-alone, multi-use buildings with underground garage parking and increasingly sophisticated security. Although there is high demand for new construction, a lack of larger sites available for foreign mission development or redevelopment in Washington, DC have led to the emergence of three other patterns of chancery development:

1. Rehabilitating prestigious historic structures.
2. Relocating into vacated chancery buildings.
3. Leasing space in commercial office buildings.

Many foreign countries use the power of architecture in the design of their chancery facilities to convey a message. Buildings are often used as statements about their countries and relationships to the international community. For example, the design of the South African Embassy renovation and expansion project represents the “new” South Africa with a symbolic message that South Africa, while respecting the past, is moving towards a bright future free of the political strife that characterized the country’s recent history. The contemporary Scandinavian architecture of the House of Sweden, located in Georgetown, exemplifies Swedish values such as openness, transparency, and democracy with a building that is light and airy with large glass segments.

Sustainable Design

Many countries are incorporating sustainable design in their architecture and green facility renovations. The Finnish Embassy’s architecture includes materials that are age-old and contemporary, with simplicity and transparency which captures the essence of Finnish culture. The building was the first embassy in the United States to receive the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s ENERGY STAR for superior energy efficiency, as well as the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and U.S. Environmental Design certificate for green buildings. More than 75 diplomatic missions and international organizations in Washington have signed a pledge with the city and mayor through the D.C. Greening Embassies Forum to commit to maintain their operations sustainably and to pursue environmental and efficiency goals consistent with those of the District of Columbia. The U.S. Department of State and Earth Day established the forum.
Future Chancery Development

As the seat of our nation’s government and an important diplomatic center, future development opportunities should be provided within Washington, DC for new chanceries so that foreign missions will not have to relocate outside the boundaries of the nation’s capital. The continuing demand for new chancery sites within Washington, the build-out of the International Chancery Center, and increasing private-sector land and development costs demonstrate the need to plan and establish additional foreign missions centers to assist in the accommodation of new and expanding foreign missions. NCPC anticipates an increased demand for larger foreign missions sites in the future. Foreign countries make their chancery siting decisions for a variety of reasons, including proximity to other foreign missions and government offices, neighborhood character, access, cost, and security requirements. The availability of sites that meet the needs within traditional diplomatic areas in the city is increasingly limited. Therefore, identification of additional areas is needed to accommodate future demand of foreign missions.

Future chancery development areas need to consider matter-of-right areas, compatible land uses with chancery development, adequate land for a variety of chancery sizes, and potential redevelopment and reuse opportunities. These areas should offer prominent sites that can accommodate the prestigious nature of the diplomatic mission, meet the planning objectives of the local and federal governments, are easily accessible by multiple modes of transportation, promote historic preservation and adaptive reuse, and strengthen the capital’s image and character. Future chancery development areas should consider building mass and scale, and provide adequate and secure siting for foreign missions.

New chancery development should be encouraged at designated foreign missions centers and areas of the city that have not traditionally been considered, where chanceries and their functions are sensitive to the character and use patterns of the neighborhood. Chancery development can help strengthen neighborhood redevelopment, revitalization, and economic development goals, and promote diverse and lively communities. Many embassies already host events such as tours, exhibits, lectures, and performances that promote the country’s culture and character. Future chancery development areas should consider building mass and scale, and provide adequate and secure siting for foreign missions.

Potential Foreign Missions Center Development Area

In the foreseeable future, the prime development opportunity for a large-scale foreign missions center is at the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center, located on 16th Street, NW. As part of 2005 Defense Base Realignment and Closure, the U.S. Department of Defense closed the Walter Reed Army Medical Center campus in 2011, relocating its functions to facilities in Virginia and Maryland. After several years of considering the suitability of other locations throughout the District, the State Department concluded that the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center site presented a viable option for the development of a foreign missions center of a similar size and scale to the existing International Chancery Center. 16th Street is one of most important streets in Washington, with visual and symbolic connections to the White House and the historic embassy district centered on Meridian Hill, making it an appropriate location for the development of a new international center.

The State Department is preparing a master plan for a new foreign missions center on a 43.5-acre portion of the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center site. Similar to the International Chancery Center, it is envisioned that the master plan will divide the property into several development parcels that would be assigned to foreign governments, under long-term leases, for the construction of foreign missions facilities. The master plan estimates a planned 20-year buildout of this foreign missions center and may accommodate approximately 15 chanceries. The master plan is being developed with consideration given to the District of Columbia government’s plan to redevelop the remainder of the campus with a mix of uses including office, institutional, residential, and retail.

The federal government should:

FM.A.1 Encourage all foreign missions to locate chanceries, combined chancery/ambassadors’ residences, and chancery annexes in owned or leased facilities in Washington due to its stature as the established seat of the federal government.

FM.A.2 Identify areas appropriate for the future location of foreign missions in the nation’s capital.

Foreign missions are encouraged to:

FM.A.3 Site chanceries so that they satisfy their operational requirements to further the efficient conduct of diplomatic relations between the United States and other nations.

FM.A.4 Site chanceries so that they add visual interest and character, contribute to cultural life, and promote diverse and lively communities.
As the number of foreign missions in Washington increased throughout the twentieth century, different regulatory mechanisms were enacted to guide chancery location decisions. Over time, technology driven methodologies were created to guide future chancery locations, which resulted in land-use controversies in some of the residential neighborhoods in which chanceries are located.

A key challenge with locating chanceries is balancing the need to plan secure locations for diplomatic activities while being sensitive to residential neighborhoods. The 1/3-2/3 method developed in the 1983 Comprehensive Plan resulted in an increase in the concentration of chanceries in certain residential neighborhoods not suitable for chancery uses. As a result of indirect impacts to residential neighborhoods, the Comprehensive Plan moves away from the previous 1/3-2/3 method. Instead, it prioritizes location of chanceries in matter-of-right areas and at designated foreign missions centers—areas compatible for chancery uses. The location of chanceries outside of the matter-of-right areas are subject to the review of the BZA. The BZA makes their determination based on the set of six criteria as defined in the Foreign Missions Act, which considers both local and federal interests. This public decision-making process includes the input and participation of stakeholders, and attempts to balance the need for diplomatic activities with the concerns of residential neighborhoods.

The District of Columbia is updating the District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Throughout the District’s Element update process, NCPC, the State Department, and the District of Columbia government should work collaboratively to ensure that any proposed plans and policies identified as suitable locations for foreign missions are consistent with the Foreign Missions Act.
Foreign Missions Center

Foreign missions can be expected to relocate their chanceries to a new foreign missions center for several reasons: a range of office space alternatives; office space that is appropriate for chancery use; increased security requirements; proximity to other chanceries; and amenities that serve the diplomatic community.

Incentives. At the existing International Chancery Center, foreign missions leased land at a favorable rate. The lease price for the land was determined by the size of the property and the commensurate cost of building the infrastructure necessary to support the facility. Although it is unlikely that the same low-cost lease rates could be offered in a new foreign missions center, it is anticipated that land acquisition costs would be more favorable than in the open market.

Office Space Alternatives. Several foreign missions currently occupy small buildings or office space in commercial buildings. Several foreign missions moved from small facilities to larger facilities as their missions expanded and the range of services they provided increased. The demand for varying space requirements over time would be met in a foreign missions center that contains a wide range of buildings available to foreign missions for shorter lease periods than is currently available.

Appropriate Office Space. Chancery office space in a foreign missions center can fulfill the unique requirements of the diplomatic community without the need for expensive renovation, and without negatively affecting the neighborhood's character. This might mean the construction of facilities with increased security and privacy requirements or parking requirements appropriate to the vehicular traffic a foreign mission may be expected to generate.

Security. It may be easier to control access and provide increased security to chanceries located in a foreign missions center. In addition, facilities built exclusively for chancery use can be built to accommodate specific security standards.

Proximity. As demonstrated by the success of the International Chancery Center, proximity to other foreign missions may create greater demand to relocate, and add to the prestige of a foreign missions center address.

Amenities. A large concentration of chanceries is likely to require amenities necessary to support the diplomatic community, such as restaurants, housing, retail, and back-office functions. As a foreign missions center is developed these amenities are likely to locate in the vicinity.

The federal government is encouraged to:

FM.B.1 Give priority consideration for the location of chancery facilities at the proposed foreign missions center.

FM.B.2 Give priority consideration for the location of chancery facilities in matter-of-right areas.

Foreign missions are encouraged to:

FM.B.3 Locate chanceries where they would support neighborhood revitalization and economic development.

FM.B.4 Locate chancery facilities in areas where adjacent existing and proposed land use and zoning are compatible (e.g., office, commercial, and mixed use), giving special care to protecting the integrity of residential areas.

FM.B.5 Renovate, expand, or reuse an existing chancery to the extent consistent with the Foreign Missions Act.

FM.B.6 Evaluate the availability of chancery sites in matter-of-right areas prior to considering sites within areas that are primarily residential in nature.
SECTION C: Policies Related to Chancery Facilities

Federal and local planners in Washington have the unique responsibility of balancing the needs of foreign missions with the responsibility of creating orderly growth and fostering community development.

Consistency with federal and District of Columbia planning initiatives and compliance with federal and local plans and regulations are primary criteria for guiding planners’ decisions. Some of these criteria include historic preservation and revitalization goals that must be balanced with the needs of the foreign missions. Other criteria include transportation goals, sustainability guidelines, and the desire to protect the city’s unique character established by the L’Enfant Plan (refer to the Federal Urban Design Element). Together, these criteria form a complementary set of guiding principles where the most desirable locations can be recommended for future chancery facilities. Foreign missions may locate without regulatory review in matter-of-right areas, including all areas zoned commercial, industrial, waterfront, or mixed-use.

The following policies provide general guidance in response to the identified needs of foreign missions and ensure that foreign missions maintain chanceries in a way that enhances the unique qualities of the nation’s capital. When new chanceries are built, or foreign missions relocate to other facilities, these policies should be applied to ensure that chancery development is compatible with the neighborhood and that the integrity of residential neighborhoods is maintained. As foreign missions relocate their chanceries, the policies should be applied to ensure that older existing chanceries are maintained so they do not negatively impact a neighborhood’s character.

Urban Design

Foreign missions are encouraged to:

FM.C.1 Protect the L’Enfant Plan’s historic open space system and develop structures and landscaping that enhance and preserve its historic qualities.

FM.C.2 Preserve and enhance the urban spaces, circles, squares, and plazas generated by the L’Enfant Plan and the national capital’s unique views and vistas.

FM.C.3 Protect Washington’s historic legacy by ensuring that buildings and landscapes are consistent with the grandeur of a great world capital.

FM.C.4 Design chanceries to complement—and be consistent with—the height, size, and spatial orientation of existing buildings and the surrounding neighborhood character.

FM.C.5 Construct buildings and landscapes in a manner that demonstrates an appreciation for the architecture and landscape of the surroundings, while also expressing characteristics of the corresponding nation’s native architectural styles.

FM.C.6 Maintain existing chancery facilities so they do not negatively impact neighborhood character.

FM.C.7 Where possible, include sustainable site and building design, green space, tree canopies, and pursue environmental and efficiency goals that are consistent with the District of Columbia’s.
Historic Preservation
Foreign missions are encouraged to:

FM.C.8 Protect, preserve, and rehabilitate historic buildings when locating chanceries in them.

FM.C.9 Ensure that chanceries located in historic districts are respectful of the architectural character established by the district.

FM.C.10 Protect and enhance historic landscapes by ensuring that development adjacent to such landscapes promotes their preservation and rehabilitation.

FM.C.11 Promote awareness of significant historic properties.

Open Space and Parkland
Foreign missions are encouraged to:

FM.C.12 Preserve and protect existing parks and open space.

FM.C.13 Enhance and make accessible adjacent open space or parkland, including waterfront locations.

FM.C.14 Construct landscapes that promote a beautiful and healthy environment by preserving the tree canopy and avoiding the destruction of mature trees.

FM.C.15 Maintain and enhance the public space adjacent to chancery facilities so they do not negatively impact the neighborhood’s character.

Access
Foreign missions are encouraged to:

FM.C.16 Locate chanceries such that access is possible from multiple transportation modes (e.g., walking, bicycling, public transportation, and automobile).

FM.C.17 Consider urban design qualities, neighborhood characteristics, and traffic capacity in the configuration of vehicular access for diplomats, staff, and service, events, and delivery vehicles.

FM.C.18 Provide pedestrian access and offer safe, clean, and pleasant environments for pedestrians that include sidewalks and other amenities.

FM.C.19 Provide adequate off-street parking on private property that accommodates employees, visitors, and special event participants.

FM.C.20 Minimize obstructions to public connections for local and regional trails, bikeways, pedestrian ways, or open space networks where possible.

FM.C.21 Minimize public space obstructions such as vehicular curb cuts and orient service areas away from major streets or locate them in an area that will be the least disruptive on the site.

FM.C.22 Locate perimeter security elements within the building yard and not in public space. Where necessary, perimeter security elements located in public space should be minimized, unobtrusive, and designed to relate to the surrounding context.
SECTION D: Policies Related to Ambassadors’ Residences

As the number of foreign missions in Washington has increased, so has the number of ambassadors’ residences. Like most chancery facilities, most ambassadors’ residences are under the ownership of the country that occupies them. Ambassadors’ residences are located in Washington, DC, as well as in the Maryland and Northern Virginia suburbs immediately outside the city. As of 2013, there are 78 ambassadors’ residences in Washington.

The number of new residences established in the National Capital Region is expected to be the same as the number of foreign countries that establish new foreign missions. While the majority of residences are expected to locate in Washington, some are expected to locate in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. Ambassadors’ residences are considered residential uses under the DC Zoning Regulations. As such, these residences are permitted to locate in all areas of the District of Columbia except areas zoned industrial. Many of the preceding policies related to urban design, historic preservation, open space and parkland, and access are applicable to ambassador’s residences.

Foreign missions are encouraged to:

FM.D.1 Locate ambassadors’ residences, as the official home of the ambassadors or heads of foreign missions, in Washington befitting their status as the established seat of the federal government.

FM.D.2 Locate ambassadors’ residences in all of Washington’s quadrants in areas which are compatible with residential uses.
SECTION E: Policies Related to International Organizations

International organizations perform a wide range of functions and activities in the National Capital Region. A public international organization is designated or created pursuant to the International Organizations Immunities Act (22 U.S.C. 288-288f-2), treaty, or other international agreement where two or more foreign governments engage in some aspect of their conduct of international affairs. International organizations are official missions that are supported by real property and personnel. In 1983, there were 23 international organizations located in the region; in 2002, there were 28. As of 2013, there are 31 international organizations and 46 missions to the Organization of American States. Most international organizations are located in the downtown business district, particularly in the area west of the White House. Proximity to the State Department, the U.S. Department of Treasury, and other international activities is a key factor in the site selection of international organizations.

Most international organizations prefer high-density office and mixed-use areas that are convenient to the federal offices, organizations, and foreign missions with which they interact. The majority of the organizations occupy leased office space. While national symbolism is typically not a factor for international organizations, the location and design of international organizations’ facilities can increase the organization’s public awareness. Additionally, international organizations can contribute to the visual appearance of the nation’s capital by maintaining and restoring historic structures and locating on the L’Enfant Plan’s historic street network.

Under the Foreign Missions Act, the Secretary of State may extend the relevant provisions of the Act to an international organization. In that event, the references to chanceries in the preceding policies would also apply to the offices of that international organization. When subject to the Foreign Missions Act, international organizations are permitted to locate as a matter-of-right in areas zoned waterfront, mixed-use, and commercial. The location of international organizations outside of the matter-of-right areas are subject to the review of the BZA.

International organizations in the National Capital Region are encouraged to:

FM.E.1 Locate their principal offices in Washington, befitting its status as the established seat of the federal government.

FM.E.2 Locate so that access to them is possible from multiple transportation modes and in a manner that their activities can function efficiently and be compatible with the surrounding land uses.
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Introduction to the Transportation Element

The federal government’s goal is to develop and maintain a multi-modal regional transportation system that meets the travel needs of workers, residents, and visitors, while improving regional mobility, accessibility, air quality, and environmental quality through expanded transportation alternatives and transit-oriented development.

A strong transportation policy is the lynchpin of successful urban planning strategies in most large cities and communities. The Washington, DC region, like many metropolitan areas, faces important transportation challenges which impacts where people live and work, development patterns, environmental quality, and the overall residential quality of life. This region is among the most congested in the country and is serviced by an aging transportation system that operates near capacity. Federal, state, and local land use and transportation policy decisions are interconnected, and must be coordinated to develop long-term solutions for the success of the region.

The federal government has long played an influential role in the region’s development, including helping to plan and fund the Metrorail system, which serves as the centerpiece of the region’s transit system. With employees, federal facilities and other assets in the National Capital Region (NCR), the federal government has a strong interest in improving the quality of transportation services and infrastructure.

With a unique position to provide leadership regarding transportation decisions, the federal government can accommodate its mobility needs and set a standard for the entire region. This dual role will foster development of the transportation infrastructure required by the federal government and contribute to overall regional infrastructure solutions.

The federal government contributes money to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and supports the system through its worker transit subsidy benefits program, providing a monthly subsidy for employees. According to WMATA’s 2012 Metrorail survey and 2014 Metrobus passenger survey, 42 percent of peak period Metrorail passengers and 16 percent of peak period Metrobus passengers are federal employees. Metrorail carries the second highest daily ridership of rail systems in the country and reinforces the region’s smart growth development pattern. With the federal government’s unique role in transportation infrastructure, federal agencies must work with state, local, and regional organizations to ensure that the system is adequately funded for continued operation and expanded services, and appropriate contributions are made to accommodate projected regional population and employment growth.

The Transportation Element is built upon the principles of transit-oriented development and sustainability. As such, federal policies promote resource-efficient planning for travel (transit, biking, walking, and car/ van-pooling) and development (compact, mixed-use) to maximize federal workplace accessibility. Federal planning is also designed to offer a “live, work, play” environment near federal facilities, and to minimize the impacts of federal worker’s travel on the region.

In the 1990’s, the area north of Massachusetts Avenue, NW near Union Station (NoMa) had the land use potential for the location of federal buildings but lacked transit. Stakeholders funded and built an infill Metrorail Station (opened in 2004), making the area a desirable option for new federal office buildings and other development. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives constructed a new headquarters building in NoMa, which contributed to redevelopment of the neighborhood.
How Federal Workers Commute to Work

Federal employees commute to work in a variety of ways and are much more likely to commute by transit than the whole regional population. According to WMATA’s Metro Facts 2014 Report, at the 35 Metrorail stations serving federal facilities, over a third of the Metrorail customers are federal employees. This trend may reflect the success of federal programs, planning policies, and incentives that encourage alternative travel modes.

The federal government’s use of alternative work schedules and telework options contributes to commuter flexibility and reduced trips. Growing trends in the mobile workforce through hoteling, redesigned office spaces, and technology will further affect commuting patterns. Federal agencies increased their telework from 16 percent of federal workers in 2007 to 38 percent in 2013.

Federal policies related to sustainability helped reduce traffic on the region’s roadways. In 2010, the Council on Environmental Quality developed the Recommendations for Sustainable Locations for Federal Facilities, providing government-wide guidance to prioritize locating federal offices near transit. The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) is incorporating principles of sustainable economic development and efficiency into GSA business practices and location decision-making. This addresses Executive Order 13893: Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade policies that reinforce transit-oriented development by supporting locations that provides employees with easy access to multiple commuter options, businesses, and services. The Transportation, Federal Workplace, and Federal Environment Elements support policies that encourage federal agencies to locate federal buildings near transit and utilize telework programs, providing federal employees greater opportunities to decrease the number of single-occupancy vehicles (SOV) on the roads.

Other vehicle options such as taxicabs, private car services, private transit services, Segways, and bikeshares may provide alternatives for federal employees to commute to work or to external business meetings.

Figure 1: Past Federal Commuting

In 1994, the federal commuting pattern in the metropolitan region consisted of approximately 61 percent driving alone; 24 percent using transit; ten percent riding in a carpool; three percent walking; and one percent biking. In 2008, the number of federal workers decreased slightly to 54 percent, while federal employee transit ridership increased to 33 percent.
The regional transit system continues to expand. The Metrorail system, opened in 1976, serves as an important mode of regional transit. The first phase of a new Silver Line opened in 2015; a second phase to Dulles International Airport and beyond is under construction.

The WMATA is updating the region’s Mass Transit Plan, which includes plans for additional heavy rail, streetcar, light-rail transit, and bus rapid transit lines, many of which will locate near federal facilities. The federal government can support these future transit facilities and reinforce the region’s planned Regional Activity Centers based growth as developed in the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (MWCOG)’s Region Forward Plan, and other future regional transit plans in the region including the Virginia Railway Express (VRE), Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC), and the DC rail plans.

In 1977, there were approximately 103,000 daily Metrorail riders. In 2008, there was an average weekday ridership of approximately 750,000. In 2014, there was an average weekday ridership of approximately 721,804. As the federal government leads regional teleworking efforts, Metrorail ridership could decrease. Metrobus provides more than 400,000 trips each weekday serving 11,500 bus stops in the region with a fleet of more than 1,500 buses operating on 325 routes. Metrobus recorded an average weekday ridership of 439,648 riders in 2010 and 458,662 riders in 2014. The Metrorail and Metrobus serve a population of five million people within a 1,500 square-mile area, with 91 Metro stations on a 118-mile network.

The Washington, DC area has two commuter rail services VRE and MARC that serve regional commuters in Maryland and Virginia, respectively, and carry passengers as much as 50 miles into the Washington, DC area. The VRE provides service between Union Station in Washington, DC and stations in Virginia along the Manassas and Fredericksburg Lines. The MARC train provides service between Union Station in Washington, DC and stations in Maryland along the Penn, Camden, and Brunswick Lines. MARC ridership expanded 30 percent between 2003 and 2010. In 2013, the MARC train had an average of 36,685 weekday riders. VRE grew from a daily average of 5,800 passengers in 1992 to approximately 18,000 in 2013. In addition to VRE and MARC, other fixed-rail services are emerging. The District of Columbia Department of Transportation is planning a streetcar network intended to connect areas that are underserved by Metrorail and Metrobus. Plans for a light rail system, the Purple Line, that will connect Bethesda with New Carrollton, continue to move forward.

Most of the region’s transit system will continue to be operated by WMATA. However, private companies are increasingly taking on operational/management roles for various segments of the system such as the Purple Line. Although the Maryland Transit Administration will own the Purple Line, a private company will manage and operate the service through a public-private partnership arrangement. These partnerships will become more common as federal funding declines for large-scale “regional” transit projects. As such, multiple public and private groups will have to work together to continue the success of the regional system by maximizing regional service efficiencies and enable a wide range of non-driving-based travel alternatives for residents, visitors, and workers.

These transportation systems need to remain adaptive to changing needs of the workforce, such as teleworking, the mobile workplace, and the mobile workplace. See the Federal Workplace Element for more information on the mobile workplace.

The Metrorail system serves Washington, DC, Virginia, and Maryland and has six rail lines: Red, Orange, Silver, Blue, Yellow, and Green. (serves Washington, DC, Virginia, and Maryland.)

The Metrorail system continues to expand. The first phase of a new Silver Line opened in 2015; a second phase to Dulles International Airport and beyond is under construction.

The WMATA is updating the region’s Mass Transit Plan, which includes plans for additional heavy rail, streetcar, light-rail transit, and bus rapid transit lines, many of which will locate near federal facilities. The federal government can support these future transit facilities and reinforce the region’s planned Regional Activity Centers based growth as developed in the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (MWCOG)’s Region Forward Plan, and other future regional transit plans in the region including the Virginia Railway Express (VRE), Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC), and the DC rail plans.

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These transportation systems need to remain adaptive to changing needs of the workforce, such as teleworking, the mobile workplace, and the mobile workplace. See the Federal Workplace Element for more information on the mobile workplace.
SECTION A: Policies Related to Integrated Regional Transit

Federal workers, residents, and visitors should be able to meet their travel needs through an integrated transit, walking, and biking network. The regional transit system should be accessible for all users, and meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Filling critical gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle network around transit facilities should help increase transit use. Federal agencies should support expansion of the region’s planned mass transit plan including components of existing transportation network and alternatives that improve the operation of the region’s transportation systems. Additional discussion on visitor’s transportation can be found in the Visitors & Commemoration Element. The following policies support an integrated network of complementary regional transit services.

The federal government should support:

T.A.1 Capacity and service expansion of the regional Metrorail and Metrobus systems and other regional and local transit services, particularly where these services will support existing or planned federal facilities.

T.A.2 Expanded levels of service for regional commuter rail between the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia.

T.A.3 Increased utilization of passenger rail service in the Northeast Corridor and points south and west to serve Washington’s Union Station.

T.A.4 Exclusive transit rights-of-way to all regional airports with an emphasis on establishing opportunities for transit-oriented development near transit stations along these routes.

T.A.5 The efforts of local jurisdictions to design and implement new, expanded, and innovative transit services that supplement existing transit and fill unmet transit needs (i.e. Circulator, busways, Bus Rapid Transit, commuter rail, light rail, streetcars, bikeshare stations, and vehicle-sharing services).

T.A.6 The development of intermodal transit centers within regional activity centers to provide greater transit access and improved interconnectivity for commuters.

T.A.7 Improved accessibility of the regional transit system for all users.

The Metro system serves the Washington area and is an important link to many transportation facilities and services outside of that area. These include commuter rail, airports, Amtrak, and intercity and local bus.
SECTION B: Policies Related to Parking and Parking Ratios

Parking

The parking policies and associated employee parking goals are intended to encourage a gradual shift from SOV commuting to transit, walking, biking, carpooling/vanpooling, vehicle-sharing, and teleworking. With the varying cost of parking and commuting in the region, it is important to provide federal workers with alternatives to commuting to work. Each ratio reflects a conceptual degree of accessibility within the region based on transit availability and distance to downtown Washington, DC. This section recognizes that each location has a unique set of opportunities and challenges, the parking ratios are long-term (20-30 year) goals, are to be weighed in conjunction with other factors such as agency missions, local plans/policies, and previous Commission actions.

Beyond the recommended parking ratios, these policies provide direction for parking facility design, placement, access, and possible car-sharing services. Federal regional planning policies discourage locating new federal facilities in outlying areas with poor accessibility, since funding infrastructure expansions are inefficient, expensive, and increasingly more difficult.

The federal government should:

T.B.1 Provide motor vehicle parking only for those federal employees who are unable to use other forms of transportation.

T.B.2 Give priority parking spaces to carpool and vanpool vehicles, hybrid vehicles, and other vehicles utilizing “clean” technology.

T.B.3 Provide parking for disabled persons in accordance with federal law.

T.B.4 Provide temporary parking for official vehicles and visitors. The number and location of spaces should be justified in the facility’s master plan and Transportation Management Plan.

T.B.5 Place parking in structures, preferably below ground, in the interest of efficient land use and good urban design. Any parking facility, including surface parking lots and free-standing parking structures, should be designed and constructed to be sensitive to the surrounding context and in an environmentally-sensitive manner using features such as permeable pavers, bioswales, green roofs, solar panels, and/or wind turbines. Parking structure design should provide opportunities for future conversion to open or usable space and enhance adjacent public space, where possible.

T.B.6 Position parking facilities to not obstruct pedestrian or bicycle access to buildings, and to minimize their visibility from surrounding public rights of way. Access to parking facilities should be consolidated, and curb cuts minimized, where possible.

T.B.7 Provide a safe and convenient means of entry and egress to vehicle garages for all commuters, including bicycle commuters and pedestrians.

T.B.8 Consider nearby commercial parking space availability when calculating parking requirements, presuming that employees who choose to drive can purchase parking in nearby private or public facilities at market rates. Any spaces secured for motor-vehicle parking in an adjacent facility must be accounted for in a facility’s Transportation Management Plan and should not accommodate parking above prescribed parking ratio goals.

T.B.9 Evaluate opportunities to share parking spaces with nearby uses or lease parking spaces to local car share services. Agencies should pursue arrangements whereby the agency is able to utilize car-sharing vehicles in fair exchange for the service’s use of parking spaces.
Parking Ratios

Both a master plan, projects, and Transportation Management Plan (TMP) should include strategic steps on how federal agencies will meet long-term parking ratio goals. Federal facilities with more stringent parking ratio goals (one parking space for every four employees (1:4) or one parking space for every five employees (1:5)) should plan for more transit-supportive, compact development on their property and institute more robust TMPs. TMP programs, strategies, and goals should complement future proposed land uses and development within a facility master plan.

There may be challenges to meeting prescribed parking ratio goals, including lack of funding for transit and TDM programs, or impact to employee morale and preferences. However, federal agencies should contribute to addressing regional transportation and infrastructure challenges.

As directed in Executive Order 13693: Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade (2015), federal agencies have a responsibility to increase efficiency and improve their environmental performance by reducing greenhouse gases and preparing for the impacts of climate change. It is important for federal agencies to develop and implement sustainable transportation strategies that optimize sustainable space usage and consider existing transportation planning infrastructure, promote sustainable commuting and work-related travel practices, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and address climate change on transportation demands. Agencies should develop their master plans and TMPs with a sense of environmental stewardship, and consider energy and environmental sustainability.

The parking ratio policies support the federal government’s role in environmental stewardship and planning for a sustainable future. These strategic steps can change employee travel behavior and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the NCR.

This element’s parking ratios reflect the relationship between the locations of federal workplaces relative to the Metrorail system. In measuring access to transit, the ratios define reasonable walking distance as 2,000 feet (about a 10 minute walk). These parking policies were shaped by the overall quality of available transit services; the proximity and cost of commercial parking facilities; guidelines established by local zoning ordinances; and walking distances and conditions in the region’s various cities and counties.

The parking ratio goals—the ratio of the number of employees for each employee parking space—are divided into four general categories reflecting the accessibility of the area, transit service, and travel options. The following ratios represent how the region should develop, with greater density closer to downtown Washington, DC and closer to the regional transit system.

The federal government should:

T.B. 10 Within the Central Employment Area, the parking ratio should not exceed one space for every five employees (1:5).

T.B. 11 Outside of the Central Employment Area, but within the Historic District of Columbia boundaries, (see page 7) the parking ratio should not exceed one space for every four employees (1:4).

T.B.12 For suburban federal facilities within 2,000 feet of a Metrorail station, the parking ratio should not exceed one space for every three employees (1:3).

T.B. 13 For suburban federal facilities beyond 2,000 feet of a Metrorail station, the parking ratio will reflect a phased approach linked to planned improvements over time (1:1.5-1:2).
Suburban areas within 2,000 feet of Metrorail: One parking space for every three employees (1:3)

Because suburban areas in the region tend to be less well-served by transit, commuters must often drive and park to utilize Metrorail and bus transit services. These are suburban areas within 2,000 feet of Metrorail and outside of the historic District of Columbia boundaries. Offices may be located near Metrorail, but ridership to these offices is expected to be lower than in more urban parts of the region. Walking conditions typically degrade with distance from Metrorail stations, and there are fewer commercial parking facilities than in the more urban parts of the region.

Federal facilities that fall into this category include the Suitland Federal Center and the National Institutes of Health. Special consideration of other factors will be given for federal facilities near Metrorail stations at, or near the end of, the line.

Central Employment Area (CEA): One parking space for every five employees (1:5)

The CEA, as defined in the Federal Workplace Element, is characterized by a wide variety of travel options, with a high concentration of transit services; bicycle infrastructure; a walkable, active street network; and a relative abundance of commercial parking. Within the CEA, the majority of federal facilities are situated within a quarter mile (1,320 feet) of a Metrorail station, and are connected to the station by a network of walkable streets. With the continued expansion of multimodal transportation options the CEA can better support the use of alternative transportation methods by federal commuters, reducing the need for the federal government to provide parking spaces.

Historic District of Columbia Boundaries: One parking space for every four employees (1:4)

The Historic District of Columbia boundary includes the entire District of Columbia outside of the CEA, all of Arlington County, and a portion of the city of Alexandria that lies within the original District of Columbia borders. This area is well-served by transit, but federal facilities here tend to be somewhat further from Metrorail stations than in the CEA (between a quarter mile and a half mile). These areas now support higher transit use than in the past because of additional Metrorail stations and a significant amount of transit-oriented development. Commercial parking is generally available. However, there is a wide range of accessibility within the area. Examples include the Pentagon, with direct access to Metrorail and numerous bus routes, and the Patent and Trademark Office with its proximity to the King St-Old Town station.

Suburban areas beyond 2,000 feet of Metrorail: Phased approach linked to planned improvements over time (1:1.5-1:2)

Some federal facilities in the NCR lie beyond the effective reach of the regional transit system, with few travel alternatives available other than driving. Although the goal of one parking space for every 1.5 employees (1:1.5) may be challenging for some of these facilities to attain, the goal encourages federal agencies to implement innovative and effective strategies to reduce the overall impact of federal activities on the region. For this reason, the base parking ratio of 1:1.5 has remained the same since the 1983 Federal Elements.

The Commission considers parking ratios for all federal facilities within the context of the Constrained Long Range Plan, a 25-year regional transportation plan that ties air quality and transportation improvements to available funding sources. Existing federal facilities located near new transportation infrastructure, such as Metrorail stations, are expected to adjust their parking ratio goals as they become operational. Federal facilities that are served by HOV lanes today or in the future will be expected to achieve a parking ratio of one space for every two employees (1:2).
SECTION C: Policies Related to Transportation Management Plans

The GSA, MWCOG, and National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) worked together to develop a Federal Transportation Management Plan (sometimes referenced as program) Handbook. This tool provided federal agencies in the NCR with guidance on how to create TMP’s for major federal facilities and campuses. Each distinct TMP should document an employer’s active program to foster more efficient employee commuting patterns by minimizing SOV trips related to federal agency worksites.

TMPs are required for all master plans and projects that would increase the employment level on a worksite to 500 or more (including existing and proposed employees). Federal agencies are encouraged to prepare TMPs for projects that would increase employment levels to 100 or more employees. These plans are focused on various aspects of how workers travel during their commute trips, the type of transportation used, distance traveled, and travel route. The TMPs are intended to help federal facilities operate in a more sustainable manner; modify employee commuting behavior to more efficient and less impactful levels; reduce traffic congestion near federal facilities; and create sustainable facilities that reduce emissions, impervious surfaces, and parking needs (and its cost). The TMP provides a framework for changing travel behavior and creating a healthier workplace by encouraging “active commuting.” Active commuting consists of bicycling, walking, running, or any other physical method that does not use a motorized vehicle.

Federal agencies should develop a TMP complementary to the facility’s master plan, in terms of development/facilities and programmatic content. The TMPs should support a facility’s master plan to promote compact development, internal and external transit, walking, and biking-based transportation systems.

TMPs should have both short-term (5 year) and long-term (20-30 year) travel goals that support a gradual reduction in parking to meet and maintain a facility’s applicable employee parking ratio goal (as identified in Section B). The plan should identify mode share targets dependent on the facility’s distance from transit and non-motorized transportation access. Although the applicable employee parking ratio goal may not currently be obtainable, the TMP should include applicable implementation strategies (as discussed in the next couple of sections) and identify actions to reach both short- and long-term travel goals, coordinated with local jurisdictions and other nearby facilities.

Federal agencies should continue to reevaluate existing TMPs as future conditions change, including when additional transit, bicycling, and walking infrastructure (expanding the coverage area for walkers and bikers) becomes available to a facility’s location.

The federal government should:

T.C.1 Prepare Transportation Management Plans that encourage employee commuting and work-related travel by modes other than the single-occupant vehicle. The TMP should evaluate opportunities and establish goals for employee commuting and work-related trips through active commuting, the use of telework and flexible schedules, transit, as well as carsharing and vehicle pooling.

T.C.2 Develop TMPs that explore methods and strategies to meet prescribed parking ratios. A thorough rationale and technical analysis must be provided to support all TMP findings and goals.

T.C.3 Analyze scenarios that incorporate data on employee home zip codes; nearby commuter and transit bus routes, Metrorail, commuter rail lines and their schedules; availability and expansion of Capital Bikeshare at home/office locations; carpool/vanpools; bicycle routes; and existing and planned HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) and HOT (High Occupancy Toll) lanes.

T.C.4 Include, within TMPs, implementation plans with specific proposed actions and timetables outlining each agency’s commitment to reaching short- and long-term TMP goals, as well as goals established in their Strategic Sustainability Performance Plans.

T.C.5 Reflect, within TMPs, planned regional and local transportation infrastructure or service improvements within five miles of the federal facilities. Federal installations and campuses close to each other are encouraged to coordinate TMP programs to eliminate redundancies and minimize costs.

T.C.6 Assess, as part of a traffic impact study, a project or master plan’s forecasted impacts on the surrounding roadway network, transit network and surrounding station, and bike and pedestrian access. Where future development is forecasted to cause an intersection or road to fail or impact the transportation system, mitigation measures must be identified and accounted for in the TMP goals. Mitigation measures could include demand management strategies and off-site improvements, support transit, and preserve or replace existing access, which are developed in coordination with local planning and public works staff.
SECTION D: Policies Related to Transportation Demand Management

Policies in this element provide a framework for promoting Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies as part of the regional federal planning process. The federal government promotes a variety of strategies to address commuter travel demand such as new large-scale transit and roadway projects to accommodate the region’s ever-increasing mobility needs. TDM strategies are designed to change traveler behavior, such as reducing the number of peak travelers, reducing the total number of travelers, encouraging more travelers to share vehicles, and shifting travelers to transportation systems with excess capacity.

A federal facility’s location within the NCR directly influences its impacts on the local and regional transportation system, employee travel behavior and TDM approaches. Generally, facilities located closer to downtown Washington, and in areas with greater travel options, require less SOV commuting. In contrast, federal facilities situated further away from downtown Washington, in areas with fewer travel options, tend to have more SOV commuters. Regardless of where a federal facility is located, federal agencies should strive to minimize SOV commuting by instituting aggressive travel goals and a wide variety of TDM strategies.

The planning and development of federal facilities greatly influences employee travel behavior, both on- and off-site. Federal agencies located on federal campuses have the greatest opportunity to design and support a robust transit, walking, and bicycling network; with bicycle and vehicle-sharing station locations. Federal agencies should plan an internal roadway network that is convenient and safe for all users; while offering attractive streetscapes, pedestrian-oriented lighting, adequate street furniture, and convenient transit stops. Through proper planning, TDM strategies can be implemented at federal facilities with maximum effectiveness. As part of the planning process, federal agencies are encouraged to work with local planners to develop improvements and/or TDM strategies to meet sustainable goals and help reduce transportation impacts to the surrounding community.

The federal government should:

T.D.1 Encourage ridesharing, biking, walking, transit, and other non-SOV modes of transportation for federal commuters and visitors.
T.D.2 Maximize employee telecommuting strategies in accordance with federal law and agency telework policies.
T.D.3 Employ compressed and alternative work schedules for employees, consistent with agency missions.
T.D.4 Create partnerships with federal agencies and local governments that support multi-modal commuting and shorter commute times through federal facility location decisions and Live-Near-Your-Work programs.
T.D.5 Steadily increase transit subsidy rates and consider applying subsidies and incentives to other forms of transportation (such as biking, walking, carpooling, and vanpooling) while not subsidizing SOV commuting or parking.
SECTION E: Policies Related to Active Commuting and Bicycling for Federal Employees

The 1993 Federal Employees Clean Air Incentives Act encourages commuting to federal worksites by means other than SOVs and encourages federal agencies to provide space, facilities, and/or services to support bicycling. In 2010, the Council on Environmental Quality’s Office of the Federal Environment Executive released Implementing a Successful Bicycle and Active Commuting Program in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area, which describes how to initiate bicycling and “active commuting” programs at federal worksites. As identified in CEQ’s 2015 Implementing Instructions for Executive Order 13693 Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade, the Interagency Task Force on Bicycling and Active Transportation will reconvene and make appropriate updates to support bicycling, walking, running, or any other physical method that does not use a motorized vehicle.

Bicycle infrastructure in the Washington, DC region continues to expand. Washington is recognized as one of the most bike-friendly cities in the country by several industry publications. The Capital Bikeshare is a regional system, with many suburban locations with varying degrees of bikeability and opportunities for improved services. In Washington, DC, the network of bike-lanes has grown from 15 miles in 2005 to 52 miles in 2014, the number of Capital Bikeshare stations has grown from 165 in 2011 to more than 350 in 2014 with approximately 27,600 annual/30-day members. In 2015, the District Department of Transportation released the District of Columbia Capital Bikeshare Development Plan to establish goals, measures, and expansion plans, and financial projections to ensure continued growth and financial sustainability. The plan encourages more bicycle trips and enhances access to employment activities.

The District of Columbia completed a 2023 sustainability plan (A Vision for a Sustainable DC) with an ambitious goal of 75 percent of all trips originating in the city made by walking, biking, transit, or other clean transportation alternatives. Furthermore, the District’s 20-year transportation plan, Move DC, proposes a 133-mile trail system (with 60 miles of new off-street paths), 70 miles of new “cycle tracks” and within downtown, and 70 miles of new bike lanes. Federal agencies should continue to participate in the District of Columbia’s goals to expand the bicycle system while increasing non-motorized transportation use by employees and visitors.

As the regional bicycle network continues to grow, federal agencies should ensure that workplaces provide adequate bicycle parking and support facilities and provide physical connections to surrounding neighborhoods. Federal facilities should plan and develop extensive bicycle networks throughout their properties for workers and visitors to encourage transit usage, both on- and off-site, and create “park once” precincts (park in one place and then make stops on foot rather than driving from one destination to another). Also, streets networks on federal property should be designed to favor bicycling (more than just accommodating bicycle travel). Facilities should also provide lockers and showering facilities in buildings, and bicycle racks on shuttle vehicles. In addition to biking, federal agencies should consider the walkability of federal campuses and buildings, and pedestrian connections and access to transit stops and local amenities. Pedestrian activity is more likely to occur when sidewalks and streets provide a safe environment for walking.
The federal government should:

T.E.1 Provide a system of dedicated, inter-connected trails, bike lanes, and sidewalks for non-motorized vehicles and pedestrians among federal campus entrance points and all on-site buildings. Providing trail and sidewalk connections to nearby transit stations and bus stops is a priority. Where such facilities exist outside of the campus, the campus network should connect to the surrounding system and provide through access, where possible.

T.E.2 Provide secure and sheltered bicycle parking spaces or bicycle lockers in close proximity to federal building entrances and throughout federal campuses in convenient locations. The number of spaces, storage, and support facilities should be provided in accordance with the requirements of the local jurisdiction in which the federal facility resides. In the absence of such requirements, federal facilities should provide a sufficient supply of bicycle spaces, storage, and support facilities to meet current and future employee needs as identified in the facility master plan and TMP. Opportunities to employ bicycle sharing programs should be evaluated and implemented, where possible, and coordinated with local and regional bicycle-sharing programs to provide a flexible, comprehensive, and efficient system.

T.E.3 Work with local jurisdiction bike coordinators, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Commuter Connections, cycling organizations, such as the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, and others, to promote bicycle commuting among federal employees.

T.E.4 Support the development of a regional system of trails that would accommodate a variety of users including hikers, bikers (commuters and recreational users), and pedestrians in a safe and appropriate manner. Consider multi-use trails only when appropriate and safe for users.

T.E.5 Allow regional and neighborhood trails for non-motorized vehicle and pedestrian access through federal properties, working with federal security staff to determine appropriate access points, pathways, and hours of operation.

T.E.6 Support the efforts of WMATA and other transportation entities to provide facilities that encourage bicycle commuting, such as bicycle lockers at transit stations, bike racks onboard buses, and space for the location of regional bike-sharing stations.
SECTION F: Policies Related to Shuttles and Circulators

Federal shuttles and circulators typically provide the foundation for successful facility TDM programs. Shuttles provide “point-to-point” service and circulators operate “loop” service between multiple points in a network. Federal transit systems can successfully reduce commuter driving by supporting services that are reliable, convenient, extensive, easy-to-use, and effectively connects into the larger regional transit system. If not, transit can drain employee time and agency resources. As such, it is important to plan and operate transit within certain parameters, such as a wait time of less than 10-15 minutes, an extensive coverage area, and with stops in strategic locations on a federal facility.

In April 2010, the U.S. Department of Energy issued new guidance for agencies on transit service for federal facilities. The policies, Guidance for Federal Agencies on Federal Fleet Management, stress the importance of partnering with other nearby federal agencies to enable more efficient, joint service, and to employ vehicles that use clean fuel technology to reduce emissions. The following regional policies reinforce this guidance and encourage federal agencies to work with other federal partners to avoid overlap in services and local service providers to support transit that serves federal facilities.

The federal government should:

T.F.1 Operate circulators on federal campuses with multiple federal buildings. Such circulators should have the following operating characteristics and associated infrastructure:

1. Maximum of 15-minute “headways” (time between vehicles at a stop) or on-call service, with a preferable 10-minute headway service.
2. Service to areas of federal campuses adjacent to, or near, transit stations.
3. Waiting facilities with shelters, benches, trash/recycle cans.
4. Signage to identify shuttle stops, with maps of the campus and the service area.

T.F.2 Fund transit-to-workplace shuttles if adequate off-site transit service is not otherwise present. If transit is available in proximity to the facility, the agency should work with the appropriate service provider to implement convenient transit for the facility to prevent redundant service.

T.F.3 Combine transit station-to-workplace shuttle service with on-campus circulators to operate as a single system.

T.F.4 Operate cross-town shuttles in urban areas with inadequate local service to provide transit between federal agencies that regularly do business with one another, or among multiple agency office locations. Shuttle services should be coordinated among federal agencies with overlapping route requirements to minimize costs and improve service. Where local transit service exists, federal agencies should utilize the local service in lieu of providing their own transit service.

T.F.5 Coordinate with local transit station owners (WMATA, MARC, and VRE) to ensure that the station is equipped to handle private shuttles and circulators.

Many agencies offer shuttles to transport employees between work and mass transit stations. For example, the Food and Drug Administration White Oak Campus located in Silver Spring, Maryland is approximately four miles from the nearest Metro station. The Food and Drug Administration provides shuttles for their employees to and from the White Oak Campus to five different Metro stations.
SECTION G: Policies Related to Non-Auto-Oriented Transportation, Tourism, and Development Interests

In addition to minimizing the impact of federal commuting on the region, other important regional transportation challenges include reducing the impact of existing highway/freeway infrastructure on the city, facilitating freight movement into and through the region, and reducing the barrier-effect of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. Improving regional mobility and facilitating economic activity are both critical to our region’s economic health and overall livability. The MWCOG estimates that the region will spend an estimated $243 billion to operate, maintain and expand the transportation system within the Washington metropolitan area through 2040. The following federal policies call for several types of non-auto-oriented transportation improvements, and tourism and development investments.

The federal government should:

T.G.1 Support transit-oriented development at Metrorail stations, within Regional Activity Centers, and at other transit notes.

T.G.2 Support multimodal connections and transportation alternatives in the regional system.

T.G.3 Support federal and District of Columbia efforts to remove or deck freeways and other transportation infrastructure that interrupt the city’s historic street grid pattern, and restore the surface network in a manner that is consistent with the urban design context of the L’Enfant Plan and monumental core.

T.G.4 Encourage connections to, and the optimum use of, all regional airports. Airport service capacity should remain consistent with environmental constraints (particularly noise) and security concerns.

T.G.5 Provide sidewalks and non-vehicular connections among buildings on federal campuses as well as between federal buildings, transit stations, and surrounding neighborhood amenities.

T.G.6 Provide for publicly-accessible bicycle racks, and bicycle and vehicle-sharing stations, on federal land, where possible.

T.G.7 Support regional efforts to manage transportation infrastructure in response to states of emergency.

T.G.8 Participate in efforts to manage tour bus and commuter bus operations within the city, providing relief for residents, workers, and visitors, while accommodating tour industry needs.

T.G.9 Support the development of a water taxi service or ferry type system serving the District of Columbia and surrounding jurisdictions to provide an alternative commuting mode. This should coincide with waterfront redevelopment opportunities and serve waterfront attractions.
The following policies support investments that will improve the efficiency of the existing regional transportation system through relatively inexpensive “transportation system management” projects. They focus on more “intelligent,” technology-based and local-level transportation solutions since federal funding for larger regional projects will likely continue to decline in the future. These improvements (i.e. high occupancy toll facilities and light-rail transit lines) will need to rely on greater local, state, and private funding sources. The following policies prioritize these types of transportation infrastructure investments.

The federal government should:

**T.H.1** Fix it first: support funding to maintain and improve existing transportation facilities, with a priority on transit, pedestrian, bicycling or other facilities that encourage use of non-motorized vehicles.

**T.H.2** Support funding to increase capacity, security, and multi-modal development of the regional transit system.

**T.H.3** Support projects that provide improved transit, bicycle, pedestrian, and roadway access in existing, highly-developed areas.

**T.H.4** Extend the transit system’s reach into developed, but underserved areas of the region.

**T.H.5** Encourage deployment of new “intelligent transportation” technologies that make more efficient use of roadway capacities.

**T.H.6** Integrate transit services, pedestrian, bicycle, and ADA modes, wherever possible.

Innovative Technologies

In 2015, NCPC, along with the District Government, and the Golden Triangle Business Improvement District launched the Pennsylvania Avenue 2040 (PA2040) pilot project, which will integrate Internet of Things (IoT) technologies into the Pennsylvania Avenue streetscape. New innovative technologies provide the government with opportunities to deliver services that are energy efficient, improve performance, sustainable, and enhance the public’s urban experience.
Endnotes

1. See Federal Workplace Element for employment data.
2. WMATA, Smart Benefits: http://www.wmata.com/business/employer_fare_program/
4. Many federal land use-related policies are contained within the Federal Workplace Element.
8. Regional Activity Centers are locations identified by MWCOG that will accommodate the majority of the region’s future growth. They include existing urban centers, priority growth areas, traditional towns, and transit hubs. These areas can help the region meet its prosperity, sustainability, accessiblity, and livability goals. For more information see the Federal Workplace Element.
21. Details of NCPC Transportation Management Plan requirements are provided in the NCPC Submission Guidelines located on NCPC’s website. Please note that requirements differ for Master Plan TMPs and project-specific TMPs.
22. Executive Order 13693: Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade requires each federal agency to develop a Strategic Sustainability Performance Plan, which outlines how each agency will achieve the Executive Order’s environmental, economic, and energy goals.
23. Federal Employees Clean Air Incentives Act: https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/103/hr3318/text/ih
24. Implementing a Successful Bicycle and Active Commuting Program in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area: https://www.fedcenter.gov/-kt/Items/actions.cfm?action=ShowItem&item_id=15046&destination=ShowItem
29. The District of Columbia sustainability plan is known as “A Vision for a Sustainable DC.”
31. Storage includes vehicle racks and lockers both in public space and within the building footprint. Storage should be made available for bicycles, skateboards, and any other similar, non-motorized vehicle.
32. Support facilities include showers, lockers, changing rooms and any other personal facility needed for a successful bicycle or non-motorized, personal vehicle commute.
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Introduction to the Federal Environment Element

The federal government’s goal is to promote the National Capital Region as a leader in environmental stewardship and sustainability. The federal government seeks to preserve and enhance the quality of the region’s natural resources to ensure that their benefits are available for future generations to enjoy.

The National Capital Region’s (NCR) natural resources have influenced development throughout its history, from agricultural beginnings and early port cities to the siting of the capital city at the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. The region’s topography, forests, and waterways give the nation’s capital a unique natural setting that has been respected and protected for generations. These natural resources remain valued, and the region has grown to become one of the nation’s largest metropolitan areas in terms of population, jobs, and annual visitors. This growth requires conscious management and stewardship to maintain proper balance between the region’s natural and built environments.

The Federal Environment Element identifies planning policies related to the maintenance, protection, and enhancement of the region’s environment. This includes the natural and physical environments as well as the relationship of people with that environment. The element provides an overall framework for the Commission and others to evaluate the implications of federal projects to the environment, encourages improved low impact design and development practices, and facilitates coordinated management of resources among agencies. The element identifies several presidential executive orders, federal and local laws and regulations, and initiatives that encourage federal and local governments to work together and assume leadership roles in improving the environment.

The federal government has a significant influence and strong interest in protecting the region’s environment:

• The federal government owns important environmental resources, including a large portion of the region’s land and water bodies. The federal government is the region’s single largest employer, tenant, and property owner. As a result, the government’s environmental stewardship has a significant impact on the region’s overall environmental quality.

• The federal government maintains a long-term perspective on the region’s environmental quality as a permanent presence in the region.

• The nation and world look to the NCR as a symbol and model of leadership. Environmental policy in this region has an impact far beyond the area’s immediate environment.

• The region is interconnected to environmental resources beyond its borders. As a result, environmental policies within the region affect other populations and ecosystems.

• As home to the government agencies that set national policies, the region often plays a role in testing innovative policies and demonstrating the benefits of sound environmental stewardship.
Federal agencies are individually responsible to comply with a number of environmental laws and executive orders that protect and conserve environmental resources. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) develops and sets national standards for topics such as clean air, water, and waste material and enforces regulations that implement many of these laws.

The primary environmental law that applies to all federal activities is the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Commonly referred to as the ‘umbrella act,’ it requires federal agencies to evaluate the effect of their actions on the environment, and consider multiple laws, executive orders, and regulations before they make final decisions to ensure informed decision-making. Federal agencies must document the impacts of their potential actions on the environment as part of their decision-making process. The Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) regulations further define aspects of environmental implementation and compliance.

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) provides planning guidance to many agencies on how they can meet these requirements and contribute to environmental stewardship in the region. NCPC also reviews environmental documentation as part of its project review process. Together, NEPA and other environmental requirements help the Commission and submitting agencies evaluate and properly address impacts early in the master planning and project planning processes.

The extensive federal presence in the region makes it imperative that specific efforts be made by federal facilities to follow policies considered in NEPA, related laws, and executive orders. Agencies should involve NCPC early on in the NEPA and project planning process to ensure that environmental issues are properly identified and considered. Planning considerations addressed early in the decision-making process will help the federal government preserve and enhance the quality of the region’s natural resources.

The 17th Street Levee closure protects downtown Washington from river and storm surge flooding.

The broad environmental challenges of climate change; watershed and habitat protection; and air, water, and land protection must all be addressed within the Mid-Atlantic context of the region. Restoration of the Chesapeake Bay includes hurricanes and extreme weather events and the specific impacts from regional growth patterns. Integrating resilience into federal planning and decision-making are important steps in addressing challenges facing the region.

The NCR has a complex economy fueled by millions of residents and visitors that work for, or interact with, federally related functions. As in any metropolitan area, it is a challenge to accommodate offices, housing, transportation, and other development with minimal disruption to the natural environment. To decrease potential disruptions, the element supports policies that direct development and encourage greater density to established areas and near transit. Sound planning recognizes the value of compact, efficient, and well-designed development as a necessary part of the protection and enhancement of existing natural resources.

Environmental Issues

The Federal Environment Element includes overarching goals and policies designed to reinforce the federal government’s role in sustainable development while considering potential impacts to the environment resulting from federal actions. The element provides a policy framework that supports a sustainable region using best planning practices, as well as thoughtful site planning and design solutions, to maintain and increase the region’s environmental resources. The element consists of fourteen policy areas that provide guidance on numerous environmental issues.
SECTION A: Policies Related To Climate Change

Climate change, a significant and lasting shift in weather patterns over periods ranging from decades to millions of years, is a critical issue for the region, the country, and the world. According to the U.S. Global Change Research Program, there is evidence from the top of the atmosphere to the depths of the oceans that the planet is warming. Over the last half century this warming was primarily driven by human activity, predominantly through the burning of fossil fuels. Warming is causing glaciers and Arctic sea ice to melt, affecting ecosystems and contributing to sea level rise. Beyond warming, climate change affects the type, frequency, and intensity of weather events, including heat waves, significant storms, floods, and droughts. Recent U.S. and international climate change studies document that globally the average sea level rise was approximately 1.7 millimeters per year through the twentieth century, after a period of little change during the previous two thousand years. Ocean acidification, caused through the absorption of carbon, is affecting biodiversity and ecosystems around the world.

While the global trend of warmer temperatures is clear, different regions can experience different impacts. For example, the Southwest United States should expect decreased winter and spring rainfall while the North, which includes Maryland and Washington, DC should expect greater precipitation. For this reason, it is important to localize climate projections to determine local impacts. Federal agencies should use the best available data and projections in planning and decision-making tools.

Climate Change In The Region

Various recent studies have explored regional climate change.

Increased Rainfall. The District of Columbia Department of Energy & Environment projected that by the 2080s the number of days with more than one inch of rainfall would increase from 10 to 13 days. This would result in more frequent flash-flooding that overwhelms the existing stormwater infrastructure, and poorer water quality flowing directly into the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, as well as other water bodies.

Urban Heat Island Effect and Air Quality Impact. Days with temperatures over 95 degrees would increase to 7-9 days/year by 2020 and to 40-70 days/year by the 2080s. This presents energy consumption challenges (such as increased cooling loads), as well as health and safety concerns for residents, workers, and visitors.

Increased Sea Level Rise. By the 2050s, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) predicted a regional sea level rise between 7-28 inches with an average annual temperature increase of 3-5°F. Vulnerability to threats associated with rising sea levels is compounded by high population densities along coastal areas and rivers leading to major estuaries, such as the Chesapeake Bay. Low-lying areas in Washington, DC and locations along water bodies, including the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, are affected by rising sea levels. Shorelines of the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River are among the region’s most threatened resources from the effects of climate change. Even the rise of a few feet would exacerbate the effects of storms, tides, or floods and increase the risk of damage. There are significant numbers of federally-owned properties in these locations, including parkland, military installations, museums, and agency headquarters.

Climate change can increase the frequency and intensity of flooding in urban areas.
Mitigation and Adaptation

Federal and local agencies are focused on two important aspects of climate change: how to minimize further climate change from occurring (mitigation); and how to plan for, and address, the impacts of climate change (adaptation). The key to mitigation is reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The use of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas produce GHG emissions, which enter the Earth’s atmosphere and prevent heat from escaping into space. As a result, the planet grows warmer and is more susceptible to extreme weather events. The federal government administers a wide array of public-private partnerships to reduce GHG emissions in the United States, including energy efficiency, renewable energy, substituting alternative modes of transportation, and implementation of other technologies.

Greenhouse gases are categorized into three broad scopes:

- **Scope 1 Emissions**: Direct emissions derived from sources that are owned or controlled by the reporting entity; for example fuel used for heating federal buildings or for entity vehicles.
- **Scope 2 Emissions**: Indirect emissions derived from the consumption of purchased electricity, heat, or steam.
- **Scope 3 Emissions**: Indirect emissions from sources not owned or directly controlled by the entity but related to the entity’s activities, such as employee travel and commuting.

In addition to reducing GHG emissions, the federal government is committed to planning for, and addressing, the impacts of climate change. Adaptation recognizes that even if global mitigation efforts are successful, there will still be impacts and consequences because of inaction over the last few decades. Adapting requires evaluation of how climate variability and change will affect assets, operations and service while planning and making decisions with these outcomes in mind. Both adaptation and mitigation have been a focus of legislative and procedural documents in federal and local agencies.

Resilience

Resilience is another form of adaptation that focuses not just on preparing for climate impacts, but also on a community’s ability to sustain shocks and bounce back from them. Climate resilient planning involves thinking about how to strengthen social and economic networks to increase a community’s adaptive capacity. The federal government has embraced climate resilience as a major planning effort through initiatives such as the U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s National Disaster Resilience Competition. Federal agencies are encouraged to plan for resilience in the National Capital Region.

Federal Mitigation and Adaptation Efforts

Two executive orders focus on climate change and sustainability. Executive Order 13693: Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade (2015) requires federal agencies to meet ambitious sustainability goals for their own operations and account for their direct and indirect environmental impacts. The primary goal of this Executive Order is for federal agencies to reduce GHG emissions. Executive Order 13653: Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change (2013) instructs federal agencies to improve the location’s preparation and resiliency to the impacts of climate change by managing the associated climate risks to federal assets, operations, services and programs. Together these two executive orders make up the primary federal guidance for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Within Washington’s monumental core is an unparalleled concentration of federal headquarters, buildings, military installations, national security facilities, and significant national cultural treasures. This clustering of federal resources and operations makes it imperative that federal agencies in the region prepare for climate change as the potential consequences are too high to ignore. NCPC is working to better understand how federal policy can shape regional development, bringing multiple federal agencies together to discuss climate change in the region and how they can work together to adapt.

Interagency efforts include NCPC’s Monumental Core Climate Adaptation Working Group. In 2013-2014, NCPC, U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), NASA, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG), the U.S. Global Change Research Program, and the Smithsonian Institution sponsored the Building a Climate Resilient Region webinars and workshops to assist with climate adaptation planning and to help improve regional coordination. The workshops included new downscaled climate data provided by NASA, as well as opportunities to share climate information and a chance to brainstorm climate adaptation strategies tailored to the NCR. This project received the 2014 American Planning Association Federal Planning Division’s Outstanding Collaborative Planning Project Award.

The Federal Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force’s 2010 Progress Report provided a set of implementing instructions for federal agencies to integrate climate change adaptation into their planning, operations, policies, and programs. The Office of Management and Budget’s annual Circular A-11 directs federal agencies to consider climate preparedness and resilience as part of their FY 2017 construction and maintenance budget requests.
A Cross-Cutting Issue

Climate change is a cross-cutting issue in this region that particularly affects stormwater (increased intensity and frequency of rain), flooding (rising sea levels and increased frequency and intensity of surge generating coastal storms), vegetation and wildlife (changes such as increased heat and ocean acidification result in loss of habitat and biodiversity), infrastructure (increased energy demand) and public health (increased heat and severe storms). Climate change serves as a force multiplier, increasing the severity and frequency of impacts. Climate change solutions are equally cross-cutting, and will have positive impacts on other environmental issues.

The federal government has the opportunity to play a major role in responding to climate change regionally, due to its large federal presence. The policies in this section address mitigation by reducing the amount of GHG emitted directly or indirectly by federal activities and adaptation by protecting federal assets from the impacts of climate change. Decreasing energy use in federally owned buildings and decreasing indirect emissions resulting from employee commutes are two primary ways to help reduce GHG emissions and mitigate climate change. Encouraging compact, transit-oriented development that reduces employee reliance on automobiles is another broad strategy for mitigation. Another important strategy is to share climate adaptation expertise and information across agencies and among local governments, so that the federal government can properly plan for future consequences. Armed with better information, federal agencies can make better decisions to protect federal assets from climate change impacts.

The federal government should:

FE.A.1 Implement sustainable building design and transportation strategies to address the challenges of climate change and advance projects that will minimize fossil fuel consumption and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

FE.A.2 Establish compact, transit-oriented development to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

FE.A.3 Pursue opportunities with vendors and contractors to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (e.g., transportation options and supply chain activities).

FE.A.4 Decrease, and where possible eliminate, the use of chemicals directly associated with greenhouse gas emissions.

FE.A.5 Develop and implement innovative, agency-specific policies and practices to reduce Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions in agency operations.

FE.A.6 Design buildings to achieve energy, waste, and water net-zero use, where feasible.

FE.A.7 Increase renewable energy and renewable energy generation on federal agency properties. Institute aggressive development of energy districts in federal project construction involving multiple buildings and/or other physical assets.

FE.A.8 Address climate change impacts in long-range plans, site selection, and capital projects by considering, among others, the effects of:

1. Risks of flooding (sea level rise, annual rainfall, intensity of rainfall)
2. Pollutant levels in runoff
3. Soil erosion
4. Increased stormwater runoff
5. Temperature extremes
6. Increased number and severity of storms such as hurricanes
7. Impact to tree viability and vegetation
8. Critical services and infrastructure reliability

FE.A.9 Assist in the development of regional climate adaptation and resilience plans to enable the National Capital Region and individual localities and utilities to prepare vulnerability assessments, conduct adaptation planning, and facilitate regional emergency preparedness.

FE.A.10 Support local and regional analysis of impacts from climate change and associated risks to the region’s infrastructure, buildings, natural resources, populations, and, in particular, federal lands and facilities adjacent to the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers and their tributaries.

FE.A.11 Develop federal plans and projects consistent with agency, local, and regional climate adaptation and mitigation plans by:

1. Prioritizing capital investments that are climate resilient and will increase the region’s adaptive capacity.
2. Coordinating climate adaptation actions with other federal, regional, and local agencies within the same geographic area (such as a drainage basin, shoreline community or coastal region).
3. Ensuring that federal actions do not create greater climate change vulnerabilities in local communities or the region.
4. Considering the long-term vulnerability of a community’s critical infrastructure to climate change risks during the site-selection process.
SECTION B: Policies Related to Air Quality

Population growth and related automobile use has made air quality one of the region’s leading environmental concerns. In addition to detrimental effects on human health, air pollution degrades visibility to important viewsheds. Air pollution and the accompanying acid rain also cause the deterioration of materials in many historic federal buildings, memorials, and other susceptible structures.

Impacts of Poor Air Quality

Poor air quality has direct impacts to human health. Exposure to toxic air pollutants can cause serious health effects, including damage to the immune, neurological, reproductive, developmental, and respiratory systems, as well as other health problems. Humans and animals are exposed to air pollutants from breathing in air toxics and from ingesting air pollutants deposited in water sources or in the soil. Once in the water or soil, the pollutants are taken up by plants and ingested by other animals and wildlife, making their way up the food chain.

Air pollution has other environmental consequences. Poor air quality can lead to vegetation damage: from the way trees and plants look, to impaired reproduction and growth, and to decreased crop yields (refer to Section G: Policies Related to Tree Canopy and Vegetation for more discussion about trees and how they can improve air quality). Air pollution contributes to acid rain, which causes damage to structures (especially marble and limestone). It is also destructive to fish and animal life when it makes its way to rivers and oceans. Air pollution contributes to regional haze and visibility, which can obstruct important viewsheds.

Air pollutants can also impact indoor air quality. These pollutants include combustion sources, off-gassing building materials and furnishings, cleaning products, and outdoor sources brought inside. Air quality is highly regulated at the local, state, regional, and federal levels. Following the Clean Air Act of 1970, the National Ambient Air Quality Standards were established to regulate pollutants shown to threaten human health and public welfare. The Clean Air Act and the standards include six criteria pollutants standards set by the EPA. The criteria pollutants are carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen oxide, ozone, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide. Areas where a criteria pollutant level exceeds the standards are designated as non-attainment status.

The Washington region is in a non-attainment status for ozone and fine particulate matter. Exhaust from cars, trucks, and buses primarily cause high ozone levels. In order to improve air quality in non-attainment areas, the Clean Air Act requires states to develop long-term State Implementation Plans to identify measures to help the region meet air standards, including transportation control measures designed to offset auto emissions. Federal activities should apply measures identified in the long-term plans to help the region meet air quality standards.

Sources of Air Pollution in the Region

Pollution is emitted by either stationary or mobile sources. Stationary sources include point sources such as individual facilities with smoke stacks as well as area sources such as gas stations, painting operations, and use of consumer projects (not identified individually because they have only cumulative impacts). Mobile sources include “on-road” sources such as cars, trucks, and buses, and “non-road” sources such as aircraft, boats, construction equipment, and lawn and garden equipment.

Pollutants from mobile sources affect the entire region. In 2011, 28 percent of volatile organic compounds, 47 percent of nitrogen oxides, and 50 percent of carbon monoxide came from on-road sources. In the presence of sunlight, these pollutants chemically react to form ground level ozone. The impact of these pollutants, as well as others including particulate matter, are most dramatic within 600 feet of major highways and roads. Their effects can extend as far as 1.5 miles away. Federal facilities located, or that plan to locate, within 600 feet of a highway should consider the hazardous pollutants emitted from mobile sources and the impact they may have on employee health and safety.

In addition to local pollution, interstate transport of pollutants is another source of pollutants. One EPA study estimated that nearly 75 percent of ozone pollution in the region is transported in the wind from other states. This includes long-range transport of pollutants from west of the Appalachians, medium-range transport from the southwest Mid-Atlantic, and local transport along the I-95 corridor. Pollutant transfer is an important reminder of the need for coordinated regional and national efforts, and that emissions generated in the region can harm public health and welfare in downwind jurisdictions.
The federal government’s activities directly impact regional air quality. Policies in the element support the reduction of pollution from mobile sources by reducing vehicle miles traveled, and from stationary sources by reducing the amount of energy consumed. Because point sources of pollution are already regulated, federal agencies will have the greatest impact in the region by reducing pollution emitted by mobile sources. Many federal employees use public transit; however, the federal government should increase its efforts to support transportation infrastructure needs and provide amenities that encourage public transportation use. Other federal activities contribute to air pollution, including facility emissions from heating and air conditioning systems, power generators, and waste incinerators. Many agencies are incorporating “green” building materials and systems, which can improve indoor air quality and minimize power generation requirements. Federal agencies and employees can also improve air quality by choosing low-polluting transportation modes, reducing vehicle trips and trip lengths, conserving energy, and using low-polluting energy sources for buildings.

The federal government should:

**FE.B.1** Reduce mobile source air pollutants by:

1. Encouraging federal, state, and local governments, as well as private employers, to support improvements to, and use of, public transportation systems and enhance bicycle and pedestrian mobility.

2. Decreasing federal employee use of single-occupant vehicles and reducing the number and length of trips through operational policies, such as reduced parking ratios using Transportation Demand Management techniques and the location and design of workplace facilities. Transportation Demand Management techniques are defined in the Transportation Element.

3. Encouraging use of alternative clean fuels (e.g., electric, fuel cell, compressed natural gas, and “clean” diesel fuels) and promoting or increasing use of Alternative Fuel Vehicles. Alternative fuels are defined by federal law.

4. Establishing alternative fueling locations on federal property and assigning preferred parking spots for low emission vehicles.

5. Encouraging the use of aircraft that meet or exceed the current emission standards set by EPA.

6. Designing parking lots to support electric vehicle charging stations, where electricity sources are from renewable resources.

**FE.B.2** Reduce stationary sources of air pollutants by:

1. Minimizing power generation requirements, such as by using best available green building systems and technologies.

2. Using less-polluting sources of energy like clean renewable energy (e.g., solar, geothermal, and wind).

3. Encouraging the development and use of alternative and distributed energy sources to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels.

4. Carefully controlling and reducing the incineration of waste materials, particularly those that may contain toxic substances.

**FE.B.3** Use environmentally-friendly green building materials, construction methods, and building designs to promote safe indoor air quality.

**FE.B.4** Take measures to temporarily reduce the generation of emissions that contribute to ozone formation in response to Ozone Action Days, when the highest ozone levels occur. Similar measures should be applied to long-term plans to reduce mobile and stationary sources.

**FE.B.5** Protect employees from breathing pollutants produced from mobile sources, especially when located within 600 feet of a major highway.
SECTION C: Policies Related to Water Resources and Stormwater Management

Water Supply

The Potomac River supplies about 80 percent of the region’s water.\(^23\) The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission’s Patuxent River Plan and Fairfax County Water Authority’s Occoquan River Plan provide the remaining balance. The region’s major water supply agencies coordinate operations in the Potomac watershed, essentially operating as a single entity in sharing water across the Potomac, Patuxent, and Occoquan basins during periods of low flow.

Despite occasional low flows in the Potomac River, and ongoing growth in the region, MWCOG projects that the region has sufficient water supply from its regional resources to accommodate expected future demand up to 2040. By the year 2040,\(^24\) the existing system may have difficulty meeting demand during periods of drought without water use restrictions or the development of additional supply capabilities.

Federal government operations are dependent on the regional water supply system. As a result, it is important to retain and reuse stormwater as a resource in federal facilities to reduce the region’s water consumption. Greater infiltration rates across the region will help recharge the groundwater and aquifer system and help achieve higher stream flows during dry weather.\(^25\) The federal government, along with state and local authorities, has a responsibility to help ensure that the region’s water supply is protected from contamination, and that the future water supply is adequate for federal facility operations, private sector activities, and general public consumption.

Water Quality

The region’s rivers, streams, and groundwater systems are critical natural features and support a diverse array of wildlife and flora. The quality of these features is important for human use and enjoyment, and a variety of sources contribute to them. In the Washington area, major point source pollution is discharged from the region’s sewage treatment plants and combined sewer overflows; and non-point source pollution is produced principally from stormwater and agricultural runoff.

Stormwater runoff occurs when precipitation does not infiltrate into the ground and instead flows over the land, accumulating debris and other pollutants.\(^26\) Pollutants commonly include grease, oil, heavy metals from cars, fertilizers, pesticides, sediment from construction sites and agricultural areas, other loose soils, and bacteria from pet wastes. Eventually this polluted runoff is deposited into the rivers or streams. When the ground is no longer saturated, the polluted runoff can percolate into the ground water system. Once in the water supply, these pollutants can harm fish and wildlife populations, kill native vegetation, foul drinking water supplies, and make recreational areas unsafe and unpleasant.\(^27\) Municipalities that operate combined sewer systems also negatively affect water quality because raw sewage flows into the rivers during rainstorms.

Potomac River Watershed
Improving the Region’s Water Quality

By the late twentieth century, the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers had suffered serious water quality deterioration. Officials banned fishing in many areas and discouraged direct human contact with the water. In response, federal and local agencies developed strategies to improve regional water quality. Several efforts are addressing these issues, including the Chesapeake Bay Program, multiple Anacostia River initiatives, and the DC Water Clean Rivers Project. The Chesapeake Bay Program is an initiative developed to protect, restore, and enhance the Chesapeake Bay and the natural resources that rely on the Bay’s continued good health (see Section H: Policies Related to Wildlife). Some solutions involve careful and coordinated regulation of future land development and densities to minimize impervious surfaces, control runoff, and ensure appropriate buffer areas along rivers, streams, and other sensitive areas. Other solutions require costly modernization of sewer and stormwater management systems. The Clean Rivers Project is DC Water’s ongoing program to reduce pollution from combined sewer overflows to Rock Creek and the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers.

Stormwater Management

The federal government controls a significant amount of shoreline and adjacent properties along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers and related tributaries, particularly in Washington, DC. In order to protect the region’s waterways and water resources for generations to come, the federal government should reduce the amount of stormwater that flows into the sewer system and rivers; clean the stormwater that does flow into streams and rivers; increase regional infiltration rates and aquifer recharge; and reduce water consumption by reusing stormwater.

Under the Clean Water Act, (1972) EPA is responsible for developing and implementing the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Stormwater Program, which regulates stormwater discharges from three sources: municipal separate storm sewer systems, construction activities, and industrial activities. The act requires each state to identify impaired waters (those that do not meet water quality standards even after point sources of pollution have installed the minimum required levels of pollution control technology) and develop strategies to limit pollution in the waters to a Total Maximum Daily Load. There are multiple plans in place to address the region’s impaired water bodies including the Potomac River, Anacostia River, and the Chesapeake Bay. Federal agencies have a shared responsibility to help restore these waters.
Under Section 438 of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (EISA), federal agencies are required to reduce stormwater runoff from federal development and redevelopment projects in order to protect water resources. Any development or redevelopment of a federal facility, with a footprint that exceeds 5,000 square feet, is required to use site planning, design, construction, and maintenance strategies to maintain or restore, to the maximum extent feasible, the predevelopment hydrology of the property with regard to the temperature, rate, volume, and duration of flow.

EPA has provided technical guidance on implementing EISA, focusing on retaining rainfall on-site through infiltration, evaporation/transpiration, and re-use of water resources to the same extent as occurred prior to development. Many federal facilities comply with federal, state, and local stormwater requirements using a variety of stormwater management practices including low impact development and best management practices and procedures.

The federal government should:

**FE.C.1** Develop stormwater management plans that:

1. Encourage federal agencies and local jurisdictions to work together to develop stormwater management plans.
2. Encourage stormwater management at a campus or district-level.

**FE.C.2** Strengthen stormwater management practices for federal facilities and federal land to meet federal and regional requirements, specifically to restore clean water, recover habitat, sustain fish and wildlife, and increase public access.

**FE.C.3** Upgrade water supply and sewage treatment systems, modernize storm and sanitary sewer systems, and integrate green infrastructure approaches to avoid the discharge of pollutants into waterways.

**FE.C.4** Avoid the use of pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, chemicals, oil, salts, and other threats to prevent the pollution of groundwater and waterways.

**FE.C.5** Use pervious surfaces and bio-retention facilities, if appropriate to the site, to reduce stormwater runoff and impacts on off-site water quality.

**FE.C.6** Encourage the use of innovative and environmentally-friendly “Best Management Practices” in site and building design and construction practice, such as green roofs, bio-retention ponds, vegetated filtration strips, rain gardens, and permeable surface walkways, to reduce erosion and clean and capture stormwater on-site.

**FE.C.7** Use technical guidance provided by EPA, in addition to working with local jurisdictions, to meet both federal and local stormwater requirements.

**FE.C.8** Ensure that stormwater runoff does not impact neighboring properties.

**FE.C.9** Prevent unnecessary wastewater discharge and the potential for combined sewer overflow events. Require reduced wastewater output through conservation and reuse in all new federal buildings and major federal renovation projects consistent with the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 and all other applicable policies.

**FE.C.10** Participate in regional agreements and programs that improve water quality and address watershed issues.

**FE.C.11** Encourage the natural recharge of groundwater and aquifers by limiting the creation of impervious surfaces, avoiding disturbance to wetlands and floodplains, designing stormwater swales and collection basins on federal installations, and using pervious surfaces wherever possible.

**FE.C.12** Promote water conservation programs and the use of water-saving technologies including landscaping and irrigation strategies that conserve and monitor water consumption in all federal facilities.

**FE.C.13** Encourage the implementation of water reclamation programs at federal facilities for landscape irrigation purposes and other appropriate uses.

**FE.C.14** Reduce or eliminate the use of potable water (water that is safe for humans to drink) for landscaping or water features. Encourage the reuse of greywater.

**FE.C.15** Avoid sites that have high stormwater retention value, such as areas with soils that have high infiltration rates or discharge directly into wetlands or water bodies. Promote development on previously disturbed sites, especially those with impervious surfaces or compacted soil so that redevelopment can achieve better filtration.
Flooding in the Region

In the region, a significant number of federal properties and buildings, including agency headquarters, cultural institutions, and iconic monuments are located in areas at risk of flooding. The region is vulnerable to three types of flooding: riverine flooding, tidal/storm surge flooding, and interior flooding.

Riverine flooding is caused by heavy sustained rainfall or rapid snowmelt upstream in the Potomac River watershed that results in increased water flowing down the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. Tidal and storm surge flooding occurs when coastal storms push water up the Potomac River from the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean. In both riverine and storm surge flooding, the results are the same: water overflows the banks of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers onto land. Insufficient stormwater management in the region can cause greater river flooding occurrences downstream on the Potomac River. The most vulnerable areas in the region are those that are at the lowest elevation points that are connected to the rivers.

Flooding can also occur when excess water enters a stormwater system (both natural and manmade). Urban areas have poor infiltration rates, requiring greater capacity in the stormwater sewer systems to handle excess runoff from impervious ground cover like streets and building roofs. Interior flooding occurs when rain overwhelms the stormwater system capacity and the ground’s ability to infiltrate the water. As a result, stormwater ponds in streets and low-lying areas.

Impacts of Flooding

Floods have a variety of negative consequences, including direct impacts such as loss of life and damage to property, infrastructure, and natural systems. When infrastructure such as power stations, roads, and Metro stations are damaged by floods, there are further impacts to services and the local economy, as normal life is disrupted. Because of the high concentration of federal buildings, military installations, national security facilities, and significant national cultural treasures in the NCR, the federal government faces significant flood risks. The Federal Triangle Floods in 2006 are one example of how the government can be impacted by floods. Heavy rains in Washington, DC resulted in over 20 feet of water inundating buildings and Metro tunnels in the Federal Triangle. Damage estimates show that GSA and the IRS expected to spend $54 million in repairs, in addition to $4 million associated with employee time lost. Many of Washington’s infrastructure (Metro and power facilities) are located underground and are vulnerable to flooding.
One of the best ways to protect federal resources from the impacts of flooding is the preservation of floodplains. Floodplains perform important water management functions, including temporarily storing floodwaters to reduce peak flows; maintaining water quality; recharging groundwater; and preventing soil erosion. Floodplains provide habitat for wildlife, recreational opportunities, and aesthetic benefits. By preserving floodplains in the NCR and only allowing uses where occasional flooding is acceptable, the federal government can reduce its risks of flooding in areas downstream.

Executive Order 11988: Floodplain Management, and Executive Order 13690: Establishing a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and a Process for Further Soliciting and Considering Stakeholder Input guide federal agencies to avoid development in floodplains where possible, and minimize potential impacts to ensure that development does not exacerbate possible flood impacts. In Executive Order 11988, the federal government defined floodplains as flood events with one percent annual chance or greater, of occurring in a single year. Executive Order 13690 asks agencies to consider the impacts of higher floods when planning federally funded projects (actions where federal funds are used for new construction, substantial improvements, or to address substantial damage to structures of facilities) and to apply one of three stricter floodplain standards when evaluating these projects. This Executive Order directs agencies to think critically about the level of flood risk they are willing to accept, and to plan with higher elevation floods in mind to account for uncertainties associated with climate change, increased heavy rain events, and sea level rise. NCPC encourages consideration of the most conservative floodplain definition when planning for critical facilities and the many significant cultural and historic resources.

The policies in this section aim to protect federal facilities from the risks of floods and protect floodplains as a resource.

The federal government should:

**FE.D.1** Collaborate with federal and regional agencies on flood management plans and flood protection projects.

**FE.D.2** Prohibit hazardous activities and critical actions in floodplain areas.

**FE.D.3** Encourage modification of existing developments to remove or mitigate flood hazards, restore floodplain values, and improve water management. If the necessary modifications cannot be accomplished, the buildings should be removed when feasible to allow restoration of the floodplain and to correct flood hazards and restore floodplain values.

**FE.D.4** Discourage investment in floodplain areas unless related to correcting flood hazards, restoring floodplain values, or supporting conservation, passive recreation, or memorial uses.

**FE.D.5** If construction in a floodplain is necessary:
1. Preserve natural drainage where possible.
2. Elevate structures above base flood level.
3. Use best available flood proofing and protection measures.
4. Return the site as closely as possible to its natural contours.
5. Consider the cumulative impacts to the floodplain.
6. Consider long-term operational and capital costs associated with preparing and recovering from potential floods.

**FE.D.6** Consider relocating outside of the floodplain when planning substantial improvements or repairs to an existing facility in a floodplain. If locating in a floodplain is necessary:
1. Elevate all equipment and assets from the ground level floor, where flooding might be expected.
2. Apply flood proofing and protection measures to existing infrastructure to ensure that critical operations will not be disrupted during flood events.
SECTION E: Policies Related to Waterbodies and Wetlands

The protection of the region’s wetlands and waterbodies is important not only to maintain water quality for human use and enjoyment, but to protect the ecosystems that depend on them. Waterbodies in the region include rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands. The impact of stormwater on water quality is further discussed in Section C of this element. Policies in this section aim to protect important waterbodies and wetland ecosystems as well as the recreational, navigational, and other services they provide.

Ecosystem Services

As directed in the Presidential Memorandum, Incorporating Ecosystem Services into Federal Decision Making (2015), agencies shall develop policies to promote consideration of ecosystem service assessments within existing agency planning and decision frameworks. Ecosystem services are generally described as the benefits that flow from nature to people, such as nature’s ability to provide clean air and drinking water, habitat for wildlife and mitigating the effects of storms and floods. These services have immense value, but are often overlooked because of the difficulty in placing a monetary value to them. Recognizing that healthy ecosystems are essential to human welfare, security, and the health of social and economic systems, federal agencies incorporating ecosystem services into the planning and decision making process will effectively address the challenges facing the nation and ensure ecosystems are healthy for this and future generations.

Regional Waterbodies

The Potomac and Anacostia Rivers are the region’s two primary waterbodies, both of which are impaired by the EPA. These rivers are fed by a number of tributaries. The Anacostia River has 13 major tributary creeks and streams and its watershed is a 176 square mile area of land that encompasses most of the District of Columbia and Maryland. The Potomac River watershed is much bigger, covering 14,670 square miles across four states (West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania) as well as Washington, DC. The NCR is also entirely within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which means that the water quality and health of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers directly translates to the health of the Chesapeake Bay. The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative and the Chesapeake Bay Program.

Anacostia Waterfront Initiative

The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, launched in 2000, is a $10 billion, 30-year program to restore the health of the Anacostia River and revitalize neighboring areas. It is led by the District of Columbia and endorsed by multiple regional and federal partners. The initiative includes innovative transportation improvements such as the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail that can spur economic development and help clean stormwater. It also includes environmental initiatives such as the River Smart Home program and the “catch basin trash screen” pilot program. Though a separate initiative, the DC Clean Rivers project (see page 9) will also greatly increase water quality in the Anacostia River.

Chesapeake Bay Program

After a Congressionally funded study in the late 1970s that rapid loss of wildlife and aquatic life in the Chesapeake Bay was a result of excess nutrient pollution, the Chesapeake Bay Program was formed in 1983 as a means to restore the bay. The program was initially formed through the Chesapeake Bay Agreement of 1983 that was signed by the governors of Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, the mayor of the District of Columbia, and the EPA Administrator. Since then, the program has made new agreements and plans, and added Delaware, New York, and West Virginia as signatories. Plans include setting goals for reduction of phosphorous and nitrogen entering the bay as well as goals for land conservation and forest buffer restoration. Executive Order: 13508 Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration (2009), further bolstered efforts to restore the bay and led to EPA’s Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load requirements in 2010, which set mandatory limits on the amount of nutrients and sediment that can enter the Bay and its tidal rivers. In order to meet the requirements, each of the seven jurisdictions has created Watershed Implementation Plans outlining how they will meet the pollution reductions by 2025.

Chesapeake Bay Program
There are many streams and lakes throughout the region which are not as heavily monitored as the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. High velocity stormwater, a common occurrence in urban rivers and streams, can also physically alter the course of these waterbodies, affecting the ecosystems that rely on them.

**Shorelines**

Growing recognition of the Potomac and Anacostia waterfronts as an amenity has increased competition for space along the water’s edge and in the water itself. Shorelines serve as vital habitat corridors and ecological resources that address water quality and quantity, and provide flood protection, in addition to being important recreation and industrial resources. The region’s shorelines are unique because of the many nationally significant cultural and historical resources located on the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. They are also home to multiple federal facilities with unique missions and needs. The majority of the shorelines along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers are controlled by the federal government, affording it great influence on how the region’s water bodies are accessed and used.

**Wetlands**

Wetlands are generally defined as lands that are wet for significant periods during the year, including marshes, swamps, and bogs. Wetlands are a significant part of the region’s ecosystem, providing fish and wildlife habitats, flood protection, erosion control, and maintenance of water quality. Human development often disturbs wetlands directly (by filling or constructing in wetlands) or indirectly (by altering an area’s hydrology). The steady conversion of undeveloped land to impervious surface is an ongoing threat to the region’s wetlands, resulting in increased stormwater runoff (causing erosion and pollution) and requires water treatment facilities. Sediments and pollutants enter wetlands and degrade its ability to provide ecological benefits. The federal government protects wetlands through the Clean Water Act and state and local regulations that control activities in wetlands.

In 1791, the L’Enfant City was home to six swampy areas that covered a total area of 100 acres, or two percent of the planned city’s total area. Due to urbanization, the six original wetlands identified in 1791 are gone today. The District of Columbia Department of Energy and Environment conducted a field reconnaissance of wetlands in 1996 and identified 48 known wetland areas in the city, not including the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers.

There are important benefits of wetlands in the region and the federal government should enhance the function of existing wetlands and reduce the loss of wetlands in the future. Federal policies, including Executive Order 11990: Protection of Wetlands (1977), discourage disturbances of wetlands and the general pattern of development that alter their function in the natural ecosystem. The federal government is also striving to restore natural streams and to establish planted buffers along waterways. Combined with the policies in Section C, the following policies improve regional water quality and the health of the area’s shoreline and wetland ecosystems.

The federal government should:

- **FE.E.1** Protect the physical and ecological functions of wetlands and riparian areas with priority in the following order:
  1. Avoid development of areas that contain wetlands, including isolated wetlands, or on sites that will impact the quality and health of nearby wetlands.
  2. Minimize the impacts to wetlands by reducing the area of disturbances. If construction in a wetland is necessary, utilize the highest standard in project development requirements to minimize adverse impacts.
  3. Replace wetlands that are lost or degraded as a result of site development.

- **FE.E.2** Avoid any intensive land uses with high amounts of impervious surface or significant pollution discharges within or adjacent to wetlands and riparian areas.

- **FE.E.3** Create vegetative and open space buffers around wetlands, waterways, or riparian areas when constructing near wetlands.

- **FE.E.4** Coordinate wetland activities with federal, state, and local government programs and regulations, including the Chesapeake Bay Program. Support local and regional watershed implementation plans and regulations.

- **FE.E.5** Design vegetated buffer strips around wetlands and waterbodies to capture and clean stormwater runoff. Encourage restoration of streams and stream banks that have been negatively impacted by runoff.

- **FE.E.6** Protect wetlands and waterbodies from indirect impacts such as significant adverse hydrological modifications, excessive sedimentation, deposition of toxic substances in toxic amounts, nutrient imbalances, and other adverse anthropogenic impacts.

- **FE.E.7** Promote improvement of degraded wetlands, especially during significant building or site improvements on federal property.

- **FE.E.8** Promote shoreline uses that create public access, improve riparian conditions, and enhance water quality.
SECTION F: Policies Related to Soils

Soils play a critical role in maintaining a healthy and viable ecosystem and can support clean water and air, productive forest, diverse wildlife, beautiful landscapes, as well as contribute to a diverse and productive environment. Healthy soils are defined as those that are able to sustain a living ecosystem, and do so through six essential functions: regulating water flow, nourishing plant and animal life, cycling important nutrients, filtering pollutants, mitigating climate change, and providing physical support to plants and infrastructure.

Soil qualities can vary naturally, including differing degrees of stability and nutrients. Soil quality is not easily altered. However, healthy soils can become compromised due to erosion, pollutants, harmful farming practices, and unprecedented urban growth.

Soil degradation then limits or halts the functions of a healthy soil environment causing impacts such as fewer resources for food, or poor water quality. The activities of federal agencies can affect the quality of soil, resulting in impacts on the ecosystem as well as on the ability of the soil to support structures and activities of the federal government. Soils and sediments have an important relationship with the planning of stormwater management. The policies in this element support the enhancement of degraded soils when making significant building or site improvements on federal property.

The federal government should:

FE.F.1 Discourage development in areas of identified high erosion potential, on slopes with a gradient of 15 percent and above, and on severely eroded soils. Avoid development on excessive slopes (25 percent and above).

FE.F.2 Employ best management practices to reduce the potential for soil erosion and the transportation of sediment, consistent with state and local requirements.

FE.F.3 Limit uses on highly unstable soils to passive recreation, conservation areas, and open space.

FE.F.4 Locate and design buildings to be sensitive to natural groundwater flows. Avoid development in areas where mineral resources, such as diabase clay and shale, are located.

FE.F.5 Identify and protect soil protection zones.

FE.F.6 Create and implement an erosion and sedimentation control plan during construction to prevent damage or loss of critical soils.

FE.F.7 Avoid soil compaction in design of landscape plans, during construction, and maintenance.

FE.F.8 Minimize tree cutting and other vegetation removal to support soil structure (slope geometry, location and geologic content), reduce soil disturbance, and limit erosion. When tree removal is necessary, replace trees, shrubs, and other vegetation to prevent a net vegetation loss.

FE.F.9 Encourage remediation and redevelopment of brownfield sites.

FE.F.10 Enhance degraded soils during significant building or site improvements on federal property.

In 2011, the region experienced the Virginia earthquake, which led to damage to federal buildings and the Washington Monument. This earthquake prompted agencies to consider future seismic risks.

Agencies should consider native vegetation, since once established, native plants do not need fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, or watering, thus benefiting the environment and reducing maintenance costs.
SECTION G: Policies Related to Tree Canopy and Vegetation

Tree canopy and vegetation provide numerous benefits to the urban framework. While they provide an aesthetic appeal, they also serve as food and habitat for wildlife, and enhance the well-being of communities and ecosystems, and provide biodiversity, making them an integral part of development and design. Vegetation provides root systems that help maintain soil integrity, function as natural aquifers, and recharge areas. It reduces erosion, particularly on steep slopes and areas adjacent to waterways.

Large trees, especially in groupings, are a particularly valuable environmental resource. The tree canopy in Washington, DC includes approximately 2.5 million trees with a tree cover of 36 percent. Urban vegetation can directly and indirectly affect local and regional air quality by altering the built environment. Urban trees can improve air quality by:

- Reducing temperature and energy costs by providing shade and cover.
- Reducing ozone and other pollutant concentrations.
- Mitigating climate change by storing carbon.
- Enhancing water and soil quality through stormwater retention and reduction of soil erosion.

In addition to these environmental contributions, trees also shade buildings and homes, which reduces energy consumption and provides quality settings for habitation, contributing to the community’s overall health. The benefits of tree canopy and vegetation highlight the need to protect and restore urban vegetation, including tree canopy, wherever possible.

Trees and Vegetation in the Region

The tree canopy coverage in Washington, DC has decreased since 1950. Increased urbanization and growth has reduced a 50 percent tree canopy coverage to a 36 percent tree canopy coverage in 2014. The region is working to restore vegetation. In 2014, over 12,000 trees were planted around Washington. The District adopted the goal of 40 percent tree canopy coverage by 2032 to improve air and water quality in the District of Columbia Urban Tree Canopy Plan (2013). Based on current estimates in the plan, the District, federal agencies, and private property owners will need to plant a total of 216,300 trees over the next 20 years. Federal agencies in Washington are encouraged to participate and meet this target.
The federal government should:

**FE.G.1** Preserve existing vegetation, especially large stands of trees.

**FE.G.2** When tree removal is necessary, trees should be replaced to prevent a net tree loss to the project area, according to the following procedures:

1. An evaluation of potential tree loss should be made prior to any removal. Trees shall be replaced according to the regulations of the local jurisdiction.
2. Trees of 10 inch diameter or less will be replaced at a minimum of a one-to-one basis.
3. Significant trees (diameter greater than 10 inch) will be replaced at a rate derived from a formula of the [International Society of Arboriculture](https://www.trees.org/) or as established by the local jurisdiction’s requirements for tree replacement.
4. The replacement of trees should be located on-site, on adjacent properties, or in areas within the site’s jurisdiction.

**FE.G.3** Enhance the environmental quality of the National Capital Region by replacing existing trees where they have died or where they have been removed due to development. Tree replacement should adhere to the standards and guidelines of the local jurisdiction, but at a minimum prevent a net tree loss in the development area.

**FE.G.4** Incorporate new trees and vegetation into plans and projects to absorb carbon dioxide, moderate temperatures, minimize energy consumption, reduce pollution, and mitigate stormwater runoff. This includes the use of vegetation in the design and development of green roof projects where feasible and consistent with local regulations.

**FE.G.5** Conserve plant communities native to the site’s ecoregion (as defined by the [Council on Environmental Quality](https://www.whitehouse.gov)). Protect and/or restore areas containing native plant communities, and provide habitat corridors connecting to off-site natural areas or buffers adjacent to off-site natural areas for migrating wildlife.

**FE.G.6** Maintain and preserve woodlands adjacent to waterways, especially to aid in the control of erosion, sediment, and thermal pollution.

**FE.G.7** Encourage the use of native plant species and remove invasive plants where appropriate.

**FE.G.8** Protect and preserve all vegetation designated as special status plants.

**FE.G.9** Use vegetation to minimize building heating and cooling requirements.

**FE.G.10** Use trees and other vegetation to offset emissions of greenhouse gases from operations. Plant and maintain trees and other vegetation to achieve long-term storage of carbon dioxide following accepted protocols that ensure offsets are permanent and verifiable.

**FE.G.11** Support sustainable practices in federal landscape development to include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Use of sustainable soil amendments.
2. Reduced irrigation runoff.
3. Reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
4. Use of Integrated Pest Management practices.
5. Reduced potable water consumption and recycling of all organic matter.
6. Introduction of plants that support pollinator species.
7. Selection of vegetation in the appropriate [U.S. Department of Agriculture Plant Hardiness Zone](https://plants.usda.gov) while accounting for regional changes in climate.

**FE.G.12** Use of grass species as lawn should be limited to recreational areas so that major reductions in water, chemicals, maintenance, energy, air and water pollution, and noise occur. Where turf grass is used, species and cultivar selection should reflect the local climate and growing conditions to minimize the need for irrigation and the use of chemicals for feeding, and controlling insects and disease.
Wildlife habitats are important to ensure the biodiversity and environmental well-being of the region. They provide the necessities of food, water, and shelter for plants and animals but are also a critical factor in carrying out daily ecosystem functions. Conserving wildlife habitats enables biodiversity to thrive and serves many benefits. A biodiverse wildlife habitat provides an array of resources for food and improves the resiliency of communities and habitats from events such as natural disasters.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1934 protect endangered animals and plants, their habitats, and wildlife population. Although declining, wildlife habitats and biodiversity prove to be vital to environmental and community well-being. The reduction in natural habitats and biodiversity causes loss in animal and plant life, and a reduction in ecological functions. This can have negative impacts to the natural landscape and built environment. There are many underlying causes of habitat degradation, including deforestation, development, and other activities associated with outward urbanization and sprawl. The District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, each have developed a State Wildlife Action Plan to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered. Together, these action plans reduce the cost of wildlife management in the NCR by decreasing the need for recovery projects for endangered species. Therefore, it is important for federal agencies to use the State Wildlife Action Plans as guides for conservation and preservation of wildlife habitat in future development and actions.

The federal government should:

**FE.H.1** Encourage facility design and landscaping practices that provide food and cover for native wildlife.

**FE.H.2** Discourage development or significant alteration of areas used by wildlife, including migratory wildlife.

**FE.H.3** Consider the impacts, including cumulative impacts, of environmental changes on wildlife habitats and the biodiversity of an ecosystem. Consideration should extend to non-protected areas, as well as areas protected by designations such as parks and wetlands.

**FE.H.4** Create and maintain inventories of species and natural resources and encourage regional cooperation to protect natural areas and species.

**FE.H.5** Avoid actions that could have significant long-term adverse effects on aquatic habitats, such as dredging and filling operations that disrupt and destroy organisms.

**FE.H.6** When constructing in areas near wildlife habitat, consider the following:

1. Use buffer areas to transition the intensity of uses (active uses, passive uses, and conservation areas) from development to wildlife functions.
2. Design the site to avoid habitat fragmentation.
3. When constructing barriers (such as roadways, railways, bridges, and fences) through areas of significant wildlife habitat, consider design methodologies that allows species movement through barriers.
4. Ensure that lakes, rivers, and streams near the site provide adequate undisturbed habitat for species movement.
5. Link new parks, open spaces, and conservation areas to existing natural vegetated corridors and other wildlife habitat.
SECTION I: Policies Related to Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials

Solid Waste

At the regional level, solid waste typically includes two major categories: ordinary trash from households or commercial activities, and sludge from wastewater treatment systems, such as the District of Columbia’s Blue Plains Advanced Waste Water Treatment Plant. Solid waste management involves three strategies: 1) reducing the amount of waste generated; 2) recycling waste material; and 3) effectively disposing of waste that cannot be recycled.

The Pollution Prevention Act of 1990 established national policies related to waste: pollution should be prevented, whenever feasible; pollution that cannot be prevented should be recycled; pollution that cannot be prevented or recycled should be treated in an environmentally responsible manner; and disposal should be employed only as a last resort. Under Executive Order 13693: Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade (2015), the goals were expanded for federal agencies to encourage recycling through the procurement of BioPreferred and recycled products, as well as diverting at least 50 percent of non-hazardous solid waste. Recycling programs should comply with applicable federal, state, and local recycling requirements and should include cooperative programs with other federal facilities, state or local agencies, or non-profit organizations.

For the remaining solid waste, disposal can cause significant environmental problems. Two methods are commonly used: incineration at waste-to-energy facilities, and landfill. Incineration plants, if properly designed with pollution control technology, can be a valuable solution. Landfills must also be carefully designed, to avoid degradation of surface and ground water. The transportation of solid waste also typically requires the use of transfer facilities, to consolidate waste from local trucks into larger shipments. The location of these transfer facilities, as well as incineration and landfill facilities, causes public concern. The emphasis on reduced waste generation is a critical goal.

Hazardous Materials

Some federal facilities such as military bases and research labs handle hazardous materials that could pose risks to humans and to the environment if not managed properly. In some cases, these facilities are located in proximity to residential communities, businesses, and public recreation areas. An increased awareness of the potential for contamination has led to significant improvements in the safe transfer and disposal of hazardous materials, in accordance with local, state, and federal guidelines and procedures.

The proper management of hazardous materials is important to the regional economy and human health. The release of toxic chemicals from damaged or leaking underground storage tanks can lead to contamination of natural aquifers, estuaries, ground water resources, and the regional water supply. Without regular maintenance and monitoring, underground tanks could produce leaching of hazardous products, resulting in soil contamination that could leave federal or nearby land unsuitable for federal, private, or public recreational use. Historic federal buildings may contain potentially hazardous materials, such as asbestos, that must be carefully controlled and or removed.

Entities that generate, treat, store, manage or dispose of hazardous waste are subject to federal regulations including the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (1976) and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (1980). This act established requirements for closed and abandoned waste sites, and authorized long-term remedial response actions on hazardous waste sites listed on EPA's National Priorities List. As of 2015, the NCR is home to three superfund sites: the Marine Corps Combat Development Command in Quantico, VA; the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center in Maryland; and the Washington Navy Yard.

While agencies have made significant improvements to the procedures supporting the safe transfer and disposal of hazardous waste, the topic remains a concern. In 2007, NCPC and the District Department of Transportation conducted the Freight Railroad Realignment Feasibility Study to determine the feasibility of relocating the freight rail line in the monumental core as a long-term solution to address security concerns with the railroad carrying hazardous materials. The management of hazardous materials is particularly important in the region, where federal facilities are often located near highly-populated areas and sensitive habitats.

The federal government should:

FE.I.1 Ensure that development projects reuse or recycle salvaged building and organic materials to conserve resources and divert materials from landfills and incinerators. Encourage procurements that increase the purchase and use of products containing recycled content.

FE.I.2 Implement waste reduction measures that extend the life of waste disposal systems and reduce energy demand, including recycling programs, composting, and utilizing biodegradable products.

FE.I.3 Avoid locating federal facilities that produce or manage hazardous waste and toxic materials in (or upstream or upwind of) heavily populated or environmentally sensitive areas (e.g., unstable ground, high-value groundwater recharge areas, floodplains, and wetlands).

FE.I.4 Monitor and conduct periodic testing to detect and avoid leaks or spills from structures that hold hazardous materials (e.g. underground storage tanks, pipes, and retention areas), and remediate groundwater contaminations.

FE.I.5 Manage and dispose of hazardous wastes and toxic substances in a safe manner in accordance with national, state, and local regulations.

FE.I.6 Encourage federal facilities to develop and maintain an environmental management system to understand and manage the facility’s environmental risks and hazards.
NCPC considers the effects of lighting on existing resources from both an aesthetic and an environmental perspective. For example, NCPC has reviewed several projects within the monumental core to ensure that views to and from important monuments and memorials were not adversely affected by the project’s lighting levels.

Light pollution is any adverse effect of artificial lighting including glare, light trespass, skyglow, energy waste, and impacts to the environment. Light pollution first became a concern in the 1970s when astronomers identified the increase in lighting associated with development as a contributing factor in the degradation of the night sky’s visibility. Recent studies suggest that lighting associated with air safety and buildings disorient migrating birds. Studies have also linked excessive exterior lighting to air pollution, according to a study by scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado.

EPA identified light pollution as a major concern in exterior lighting in its 2008 ENERGY STAR Building Upgrade Manual. EPA recommends that agencies use outdoor lighting codes to encourage better-quality light fixtures that reduce glare, light trespass, and energy waste.

A subsequent EPA report noted these concerns as well as the visibility and safety benefits of artificial night-time lighting, and stated that it is relatively easy to tackle [light pollution] without needing to make significant trade-offs, simply by eliminating upward and horizontal spillage and turning off unnecessary lighting. In response to these environmental concerns, “dark sky” advocates promote changes in lighting design and technology.

This policy area provides guidance for federal agencies to incorporate exterior lighting in a manner that minimizes negative aesthetic and environmental impacts.

The federal government should:

FE.J.1 Reduce levels of light pollution by:
1. Selecting the appropriate level of lighting to meet design needs, while minimizing excess light.
2. Designing light fixtures to eliminate upward and horizontal spillage.
3. Designing and providing appropriate controls to operate lighting only when needed, and at appropriate light levels.
4. Selecting lighting that minimizes maintenance, reduces energy use, and provides better visibility.
5. Selecting appropriate lighting technologies in a historic context.

FE.J.2 Evaluate exterior lights for their effectiveness, maintenance requirements, and energy use.

FE.J.3 Switch off all exterior lighting when not required.
SECTION K: Policies Related to Noise Pollution

Noise is an invisible pollution that affects general health and welfare. Noise pollution can lead to increased stress, hearing loss, a decline in productivity, higher health care costs, and reduced property values. Common sources of noise pollution include airplanes, automobiles, boats, construction, loading docks, industrial activities, training activities, and outdoor concerts and special events.

One of the most controversial noise issues in the region results from flight operations at military airfields and at commercial airports such as Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. There are also noise impacts generated from helicopters and aircraft around populated areas. While modern technology has reduced noise levels produced by commercial aircraft, growth in air traffic may have offset some of these improvements. Federal agencies should also consider the accumulation of noise levels generated by mechanical equipment, loading docks, and operational activities. Noise from these types of activities can be mitigated through careful site planning and sound proofing technology.

Noise pollution will continue to be a concern in the absence of policies and technologies that can further mitigate noise levels. The federal government should reduce its contribution to noise pollution and coordinate with local governments to avoid proximity of noise generating activities to sensitive natural resources and land uses.

The federal government should:

**FE.K.1** Avoid locating activities that produce excessive noise near sensitive natural resources and land uses such as residential areas, hospitals, schools, and major public and civic destinations.

**FE.K.2** Locate, design, and construct improvements to roads, driveways, loading docks, and parking lots for federal facilities in a manner that is sensitive to existing adjacent land uses.

**FE.K.3** Ensure that construction activities comply with local noise ordinances, and coordinate with local governments and adjacent communities to establish limits on the intensity and hours of noise generation.

**FE.K.4** Use low noise equipment, sound proofing technology, or install noise barriers to reduce the impact of noise from mechanical equipment or from everyday operations and activities.
The majority of energy consumed in the NCR ultimately comes from nonrenewable fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas, which produces GHG emissions. As previously stated in the Climate Change section, the key to minimizing further climate change in the future is to reduce GHG emissions. This policy section considers the future operations of energy facilities, further use of renewable sources, and reduction of the overall energy consumption.

**Energy Sources**

In 2013, the U.S. Energy Information Administration estimated that nationwide federal facilities accounted for 38 percent of the federal government’s energy usage, with vehicles and equipment accounting for the rest. The U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Postal Service together account for 94 percent of vehicles and equipment energy usage, of which the vast majority comes from jet fuel.

Given the concentration of federal facilities in the region, energy use in federal buildings is a major contributor to GHG. While some federal buildings receive electricity and heating from federally-owned sources, most facilities are energized with electricity from the grid. According to Pepco, the electricity provider for all of Washington, DC and parts of Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties in Maryland, the electricity they distribute comes from 45 percent coal, 16 percent natural gas, 33 percent nuclear, and six percent from renewable sources. Federal facilities can help reduce GHG emissions through energy conservation and by installing or requiring the use of renewable energy sources.

**Renewable Energy**

By 2025, 30 percent of all electricity consumed by the federal government will come from renewable resources in accordance with Executive Order 13693. Federal agencies can purchase renewable energy or generate renewable energy on federal sites. EPA defines renewable energy as energy produced from solar, wind, geothermal, biomass, biogas (landfill/wastewater gas), and low-impact hydroelectricity. Many of the federal properties located in Washington, DC are in urban areas, which limits opportunities for large-scale renewable energy generation. There are, however, opportunities for renewable energy generation on federal buildings through geothermal heat pumps and rooftop solar panels. The U.S. Department of Energy installed solar panels on the rooftop of its headquarters building in 2008 to generate 230,000 KWh of electricity per year. In December of 2015, the GSA awarded a contract to design, construct, and operate solar energy systems on the rooftop of 18 buildings in Washington, DC area through a power purchase agreement that is projected to save over $5 million in utility costs over the contract.
Energy Conservation

Energy conservation can provide significant cost and GHG savings to the federal government. It supports long-term environmental goals to reduce demand for energy, reduce GHG emissions, and be independent on energy source. Specific energy requirements are outlined in EISA and Executive Order 13693. One important component of Executive Order 13693 is the requirement of federal facilities that begin the design process in 2020 to be designed for net zero energy and achieve net zero energy by 2025. EISA requires agencies to upgrade existing heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems at federal facilities to make them more energy-efficient. Over the past four decades, energy intensity in federal facilities have declined, a trend that will be further strengthened by recent guidance from executive orders.

Agencies may also explore improving environmental performance through the commissioning and recommissioning process of development. In new design and construction processes, commissioning begins at the onset of development, to ensure the systems under design meet specified performance requirements. Commissioning also ensures that the equipment is installed appropriately. Recommissioning is the process through which buildings are commissioned again after their initial completion, occupancy, and commissioning. Recommissioning is a check to ensure that building systems are still functioning as originally planned.

The federal government should:

**FE.L.1** Improve environmental performance and reduce costs in existing federal buildings through targeted energy improvements, such as:

1. Optimizing the efficiency of heating, ventilation, and cooling systems with more efficient boilers, motors, and variable-speed drives.
2. Reducing energy and maintenance costs by installing centralized energy management systems.

**FE.L.2** Reduce fossil fuel-generated energy consumption by 55 percent compared to an FY 2003 baseline for new and renovation projects. The required reduction under law is consistent with EISA, with designs for new buildings or major renovations begun in FY 2030.

**FE.L.3** At least 30 percent of hot water demand in new or renovated federal buildings should come from solar hot water heating if life-cycle cost-effective. Existing buildings with minor renovations must incorporate the most energy-efficient designs, equipment, and controls.

**FE.L.4** Locate and construct federal facilities to minimize energy loss in long-distance energy transmission.

**FE.L.5** Pursue energy conservation strategies at a multi-building or district-level.
The federal government has extensive requirements for antennas, telecommunication equipment, and facilities as part of the communication needs of government operations in the nation’s capital. In addition, widespread mobile phone use has resulted in the proliferation of new private-sector antenna and related towers throughout the region, resulting in a surge of requests for antenna and related towers on federal property. The cumulative effect of these antennas significantly impacts the visual quality of the nation’s capital and has the potential to impact human health.

While there can be health impacts when exposed to high levels of radiofrequency (RF) radiation, the general public is rarely exposed to these levels of radiation, even when working in a facility with cellular and personal communications service antennas mounted on rooftops. Workers servicing these antennas, or in environments near high-powered RF sources, however, may be affected. In these cases, when humans are immediately adjacent to antennas, tissue damage could occur because of the body’s inability to cope with or dissipate the excessive heat, also known as thermal effect. According to the Federal Communications Commission, “Environmental levels of RF energy routinely encountered by the general public are typically far below levels necessary to produce significant heating and increased body temperature.”

The steady population growth in the region and related use of wireless communication suggests continued demand for new antennas. Two main goals of the policies in this section are to reduce the visual impacts of antennas and minimize impacts to human health.

The federal government should:

**FE.M.1** Consider the joint-use of antennas and collocating antennas to reduce aesthetic impacts and limit the area of radiofrequency exposure. Federal agencies should evaluate the cumulative effect of multiple transmitters at one location to ensure that the combined radiofrequency emissions continue to meet Federal Communications Commission guidelines.

**FE.M.2** Follow a practice of “prudent avoidance” of RF exposure. Federal agencies should reduce the exposure of workers and the public to RF fields where they may be prevalent, including those from power lines, antennas, equipment, and other recognized sources of RF and electromagnetic field emissions.

**FE.M.3** Incorporate adequate interior building attenuation measures to reduce RF field penetration into the habitable areas of buildings.

**FE.M.4** Require adequate communication of potential risks where occupational/controlled exposure may be present.

**FE.M.5** Utilize advances in technology, such as fiber optics, cooperative antenna technologies, and teleports; and monitor changes in standards and guidelines for the installation of antennas.

**FE.M.6** Minimize visual impacts of telecommunication antennas proposed for the rooftop of a building with historic value by using a variety of tools including, but not limited to, matching building colors and design, incorporating screens, and moving antennas away from the building’s edge. All measures should be coordinated with local historic preservation requirements.
SECTION N: Policies Related To Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Historically, minority and low-income populations have been disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency through Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations (1994), provides guidance on considering environmental justice to ensure that no group of people bears a disproportionate burden of environmental harms and risks resulting from federal activities and operations.

The federal government has a role to identify and address potential environmental justice concerns in the region because of the proximity of federal facilities to residential communities, businesses, public recreation areas, and visitor attractions; the distribution of significant numbers of federal property and facilities throughout the region; and the historic use of select federal facilities for environmentally hazardous operations. Federal agencies can contribute to social equity and environmental stewardship by rehabilitating under-utilized and/or contaminated properties (often called grayfield and brownfield sites), which are often located in minority and low-income areas. Federal agencies have a responsibility to be good neighbors, to promote and support the general public health and welfare of all sectors of society.

The federal government should:

- **FE.N.1** Identify and address any disproportionately high and adverse health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations resulting from agencies’ programs, policies, and activities. Consider the indirect, multiple, and cumulative effects of actions on the cultural, social, historical, and economic characteristics of an affected community.
- **FE.N.2** Analyze and consider, as prescribed by NEPA, the demographics of a potentially affected area to determine whether such communities are characterized by low-income levels or high minority populations.
- **FE.N.3** Establish effective public outreach programs so that affected communities can participate in decisions that will impact its future.
- **FE.N.4** Prioritize and support the re-use of brownfield sites for federal or private-sector redevelopment.
- **FE.N.5** Adhere to the federal guidelines of the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Site and Neighborhood Standards, which strongly encourage development to be located in areas having access to amenities like transportation, educational, and health facilities.
Endnotes


3. **Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007.**


5. **Ibid**


7. **Ibid**


13. **This Federal Environment Element supports the recommendations and directions of the Federal Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force Progress Report (2010).**


17. **Ibid**


19. **Ibid**


22. **Alternative fuels are defined by federal law**: [http://www.afdc.energy.gov/laws/391](http://www.afdc.energy.gov/laws/391)


24. **Ibid**


27. **Ibid.**

28. **Chesapeake Bay Program**: [http://www.chesapeakebay.net/](http://www.chesapeakebay.net/)


30. **DC Water Clean Rivers**: [https://www.dcwater.com/cleanrivers](https://www.dcwater.com/cleanrivers)


34. **NCPC worked cooperatively with other District and federal agencies on the Federal Triangle Stormwater Drainage Study to better understand the interior flooding risk and possible strategies.**


38. **Executive Order 13508 Chesapeake Bay Program and Restoration**: [http://executiveorder.chesapeakebay.net/category/Reports-Documents.aspx](http://executiveorder.chesapeakebay.net/category/Reports-Documents.aspx)


48. Ibid


52. Special status plants are those plants that are legally protected under the federal Endangered Species Act, or other federal and state regulations, along with species considered sufficiently rare by the scientific community to qualify as defined by the CEQ recommendations, Guidance for Federal Agencies on Sustainable Practices for Designed Landscapes.


56. Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1934: [https://www.fws.gov/laws/lawsdigest/FWCORD.HTML](https://www.fws.gov/laws/lawsdigest/FWCORD.HTML)

57. Ibid


76. HUD’s Site and Neighborhood Standards: [http://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/24/941/202](http://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/24/941/202)
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Introduction to the Historic Preservation Element

The federal government’s goal is to preserve, protect, and rehabilitate historic properties in the National Capital Region and promote design and development that is respectful of the guiding principles established by the Plan of the City of Washington and the symbolic character of the capital’s setting.

Washington’s unique character rests on the foundation of its historic planning, notably the built and open space features of the Plan of the City of Washington, which includes both the L’Enfant and McMillan Plans. Both the Baroque influence of the L’Enfant Plan, and the City Beautiful ideals of the McMillan Plan, are responsible for much of the city’s physical form. Throughout Washington, the design and location of public and private buildings reinforce the plan’s principles. Washington’s historic properties typically contribute to, and complement, the visionary long-range plans that provided the basis for the capital’s development over the centuries. High urban design and historic preservation standards have played an important role in creating the appearance and character of the admired national capital.

From its inception, the federal government has implemented L’Enfant’s bold but flexible vision by constructing great buildings to house the seat of the national government. As the federal government built out the sites identified in the L’Enfant Plan, it added extensive facilities in other parts of the city and the region. Examples of significant factors that spurred growth and change through the centuries include national events such as the Civil War, New Deal, and World War II; planning initiatives such as the McMillan Plan; implementation of urban renewal in the 1950’s and 1960’s; as well as technological and transportation advances such as Metrorail. Federal buildings and sites illustrate the planning and architectural development of the city and region as well as the history of the federal establishment. Landmarks such as the U.S. Capitol, the White House, the National Mall and its memorials and museums, and Arlington National Cemetery have come to symbolize the nation and its democratic ideals.

Although the predominantly federal and commemorative areas around the National Mall may be Washington’s most widely recognized, the capital city is also an active commercial and residential city with neighborhoods and parks. These are important to Washingtonians and their sense of history and community. Even in these non-federal areas, the federal government has played a major role in shaping the historic urban fabric. Much of this rich historical planning record is also evident in the city’s architecture. The L’Enfant Plan streets and places—and their extension by the Permanent System of Highways Act (1893)—as well as the McMillan Plan and the Height of Buildings Act (1910), directed the city’s character and orderly development. See the Federal Urban Design Element’s Technical Addendum for the history of each individual plan and other plans that have shaped the history of Washington.

At a regional scale, the Washington area initially developed with large plantations and small family farms and was dotted with crossroads and market towns. At first, this pattern was little changed by the creation of the capital city. Notable port towns, and later military forts, overlooked the Potomac River and the capital city. Settlements and commercial centers, many quite independent of the national capital, arose along the great variety of transportation routes typical of the mid-Atlantic region.

The nineteenth-century construction of military and naval installations was followed in the twentieth century by the expansion of federal offices and research facilities. The National Institutes of Health, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Suitland Federal Center, Pentagon, and Dulles Airport (all of which include or are historic properties) are just a few of these federal facilities. The purchase of parkland in Maryland by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) through the Capper-Cramton Act, and the construction of parkways, are other examples of federal land use decisions that shaped the region.
The National Capital Region’s (NCR) variety of historic properties reflects the rich history of the region and its people. The U.S. Congress designated the Georgetown Historic District in the Old Georgetown Act (1950). The Joint Committee on Landmarks published the District’s first list of historic properties in 1964. In 1966, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), adding to the establishment of national standards and procedures for the protection of historic properties.

However, the federal government is not the only entity protecting historic resources. Municipal and county governments have protected historic resources they deem important for local, state, and national historical significance. In 1946, Alexandria created one of the first historic districts in the nation in order to preserve the port-city colonial and early federal character. Since the District of Columbia Home Rule Act (1973) and the D.C. Historic Preservation Act (1978), the District of Columbia government has identified and protected private properties and historic districts of local significance throughout the District. Local jurisdictions in Virginia and Maryland also responded to the growing historic preservation interest at the national, state, and local levels by establishing ordinances to protect their historic properties. These ordinances have contributed to the protection of individual buildings and their settings, open space, farms, historic neighborhoods, and commercial centers, even in an era of sustained regional growth.

**Historic Preservation Planning**

The NHPA established, as principle and law, the preservation of the nation’s historical and cultural heritage. This law provides the framework for federal preservation policy, authorizes legislation to fund preservation activities, and establishes State Historic Preservation Offices. While all federal agencies have some degree of responsibility for historic preservation, the National Park Service (NPS) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) are the federal agencies charged with the management and oversight of NHPA programs.

NPS is responsible for the administration of the National Register of Historic Places, the nation’s inventory of significant historic properties. NPS publishes the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, the benchmark by which federal and other agencies assess the effects of a proposed project on historic resources. NPS is also responsible for publishing guidance on treatment options for historic properties including preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.

The ACHP is an independent federal agency responsible for advising the President and Congress on historic preservation policy. One of the ACHP’s primary responsibilities is overseeing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act review—the process of commenting on federal projects that affect properties listed in, or eligible for, the National Register of Historic Places (for more information, see page 7). The Section 106 process is a federal requirement that takes into account the effects of undertakings by federal agencies on historic properties.

**Historic Preservation Challenges for Federal Agencies**

- Preserving the significant features and qualities of their historic properties through the proactive maintenance of historic building fabric and designed landscape settings.
- Adapting historic properties for new and additional uses by modernizing building systems and reallocating interior space while retaining significant interior architectural features such as lobbies, elevators, and public rooms and corridors.
- Responding to changes in visitation or use without affecting the property’s historic significance.
- Ensuring that historically significant parks and open space retain their integrity through the careful consideration of planning and design of potential facilities in historic landscapes and settings.
- Finding creative, appropriate solutions to changing requirements such as the provision of security measures. The desire for increased security around federal facilities is a challenge for designers, historians, and security experts and is best addressed in a concerted manner that respects each site’s historic features.
- Protecting and strengthening historic urban design features of the Plan of the City of Washington. In Washington, any proposal to close a portion of a L’Enfant Plan street or to not conform to the right-of-way building line requires the closest scrutiny and consideration of alternatives.
- Protecting the character of the region’s natural features, many of which have historical or cultural significance, such as the river shorelines, the ridge of the topographic bowl, agricultural land, parks, and designed landscapes, including areas planned for public access and enjoyment.
- Ensuring that new construction is responsive to the character of well-established built environments and reflects a commensurate level of design excellence.
- Collaborating with state and local governments in the protection and enrichment of the region’s cultural and historic heritage.
- Integrating sustainability objectives in the renovation or rehabilitation of existing facilities while also preserving and protecting historic and character defining features.
The ACHP publishes implementing regulations for Section 106, which describe the process for conducting Section 106 consultation. All federal agencies, have an affirmative responsibility to identify, protect, and manage historic resources under their jurisdiction. Before taking a federal action, federal agencies must consider the impact to historic properties, seeking to avoid or minimize adverse effects to their physical and historical integrity. If adverse effects cannot be avoided or minimized, federal agencies must mitigate these impacts.

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) has a significant and unique role in the NCR. Under the terms of the National Capital Planning Act (1952), NCPC reviews many of the projects undertaken by federal agencies and makes important decisions about the coordination and planning of federal activities, many of which involve historic properties. The Commission also has an independent approval, or licensing, authority for federal projects in Washington, DC and for some District of Columbia government projects. The Commission’s open public process and its unique planning perspective and role, underscored by the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements (Comprehensive Plan) and the Commission’s other plans and policies, are the foundations of its decision-making.

NCPC is committed to supporting preservation of historic resources by law and through its policies, review process, and plans. The policies established in the Comprehensive Plan, as well as the Commission’s Extending the Legacy: Planning America’s Capital for the 21st Century (1997), Memorials and Museums Master Plan (2001), and Monumental Core Framework Plan (2009) provide a framework for historic preservation planning. The Commission is a leader in the advocacy of coordinated urban and regional planning that accommodates the changing needs of the federal government while preserving the significant historic buildings and places, and the iconic horizontal character, that make the nation’s capital uniquely symbolic.

The Commission recognizes that sustained citizen engagement in the public process is fundamental to the broad acceptance of historic preservation decisions. The public dissemination of planning, historic preservation, and zoning information has resulted in a high general knowledge of, and interest in, federal and local decision-making. Federal agencies increasingly consider local planning initiatives and goals in their design and planning, including historic preservation. Factors such as the establishment of Home Rule in Washington, county historic preservation and environmental protection ordinances, landmark designations, zoning overlays, and greater citizen involvement have contributed to increased coordination among federal and local governments. It is important that this coordination continue in order to manage the capital’s growth and development.

The Pension Building (National Building Museum) was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1969 and became a National Historic Landmark in 1985. The building is used for exhibits and programs and houses various federal agencies.
SECTION A: Policies Related to the Plan of the City of Washington

The Historic Plan of Washington, DC

The L'Enfant and McMillan Plans established an urban design framework for the capital city that remains one of the world’s great examples of urban planning. Collectively, these plans are known as the Plan of the City of Washington. These planning principles continue to influence the design of public spaces and buildings in Washington today.

Pierre L'Enfant crafted the L'Enfant Plan, which established the basic framework for the city, by creating a regular orthogonal grid divided into four quadrants, with the U.S. Capitol at the center point. L'Enfant superimposed a series of diagonal avenues on the orthogonal grid, creating a system of open space and parks where the two intersected. These open spaces and vistas are as integral to the city’s design as the street network. In addition, the width and openness of the L'Enfant Plan’s original streets and the extended main axial boulevards established public space that defines the city’s character. These include North, East, and South Capitol Streets and major avenues such as Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, and Wisconsin. Vistas extend outward from vantage points within Washington, and inward from points along the rim of the topographic bowl, and are central to Washington’s dramatic character. Examples of these vistas include the St. Elizabeths West Campus and other parts of the Anacostia Ridge, the Arlington Ridge, and the escarpment north of Florida Avenue, NW. Important right-of-ways, vistas, and viewsheds are further discussed in the Federal Urban Design Element.

The L'Enfant Plan’s system of streets (for more information see the Federal Urban Design Element), open spaces, public buildings, and developable blocks has largely been maintained over the centuries. Building upon L'Enfant’s Plan, the McMillan Plan reinforced the idea of grand public spaces and civic buildings based on the City Beautiful Movement. The McMillan Plan focused on restoring L'Enfant’s original vision of the National Mall as an uninterrupted greensward; creating an enclave for government offices in the triangle bound by Pennsylvania Avenue, 15th Street, NW, and the National Mall; and establishing a comprehensive regional park and recreation system by connecting existing parkland and carrying the park system throughout Washington. Together, the Plan of the City of Washington has functioned as a framework for the city’s growth.
The federal government should:

**HP.A.1** Preserve, rehabilitate, enhance, and restore (where applicable) the *Plan of the City of Washington* and the urban design principles established by the Plan including building placement, street layout, vistas, and open spaces.

**HP.A.2** Protect the reciprocal views along the rights-of-way established by L’Enfant streets, as well as to and from squares, circles, and reservations.

**HP.A.3** Protect, maintain, and restore, where applicable, the L’Enfant street network and rights-of-way.

**HP.A.4** Restore or rehabilitate historic streets that were inappropriately disrupted, or closed, to their original right-of-way or configuration, at the earliest opportunity.

**HP.A.5** Avoid inappropriate traffic channelization, obtrusive signage and security features, and other physical intrusions that obscure the character of the right-of-way and viewsheds.

**HP.A.6** Reinforce the city’s historic landscape character and maintain the integrity, form, and design of the L’Enfant street network.

**HP.A.7** Protect the historic importance and function of the streets as operational thoroughfares.

**HP.A.8** Construct building facades to the street right-of-way lines (building lines) to reinforce the spatial definition of the historic street plan.

**HP.A.9** Protect the character and alignment of Washington’s gateway and boundary streets as defining features of the capital city.

**HP.A.10** Protect, rehabilitate, and restore the public squares, circles, reservations, and the park system that are a legacy of the *Plan of the City of Washington*.

**HP.A.11** Protect reservations that contain historic landscapes and features from incompatible changes or intrusions.

**HP.A.12** Protect and maintain the historic spatial significance of the L’Enfant reservations when designing and locating physical security measures.

**HP.A.13** Protect, rehabilitate, and enhance the extensions of major L’Enfant rights-of-way and associated reservations throughout Washington as part of the national capital’s open space framework.
Stewardship of Historic Properties

The federal government is a primary advocate for, and protector of, the image and legacy of the nation’s capital. Federal agencies working in concert with local officials and interested citizens must be careful stewards of the historic properties under their care or affected by their decisions. Agencies are responsible for preserving historic properties while also facing the challenge of new and evolving uses and missions. The federal government has many tools for the protection and enhancement of historic properties including laws, regulations, executive orders, federal planning and policy initiatives, the Comprehensive Plan, and individual agency policies. It has an obligation to coordinate with local and private entities and, when appropriate, to encourage partnerships with them. NCPC provides one of several public forums where planning and historic preservation consultation can occur.

The cornerstone of strong historic preservation planning is the identification of historic properties. Many historic resources in the NCR were identified and are widely recognized and acknowledged through federal and local historic designation. Many of Washington’s landmarks are well known, and there are hundreds of historic properties and districts in the region. Many of these resources are significant for their local history and their role in the nation’s history. Recognizing these properties and educating the public on their historic significance is an important component for their protection and preservation.

At times, the value of historic places or features may not be readily apparent. Therefore, it is important to publicize information on their significance for them to be better understood. This includes resources such as archaeological sites, cultural landscapes, and Modern-era (post World War II) properties.

While many historic properties in Washington date to the 19th century, there are also more recent resources worthy of recognition. The federal government played a critical role in urban renewal and was responsible for the development of many Modern era resources. One of the historic preservation challenges facing the federal government today is the evaluation of these properties.

The federal government should:

**HP.B.1** Identify and protect historic properties and disseminate information about their significance to the public.

**HP.B.2** Recognize that there may be resources including buildings, structures, and landscapes that are historically significant and reflect design or cultural significance of the recent past. Identify and protect these resources to ensure that properties that have not been evaluated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places are nonetheless noted for their potential future significance and are treated accordingly.

**HP.B.3** Coordinate with local agencies, citizen groups, and property owners in the identification, designation, and protection of public and private historic properties. Collectively these resources reflect the image and history of the National Capital Region.

**HP.B.4** Conduct archaeological investigations in the earliest phases of master planning or project development in order to avoid the disturbance of archaeological resources.

**HP.B.5** Recognize that historic federal properties are sometimes important for local history. Ensure that locally significant characteristics or qualities are maintained.

The U.S. Tax Court is a modern-era building.
The protection and management of historic properties are critical elements to successful historic preservation planning. The federal government owns and manages many of the nation’s most significant historic resources including the National Mall, and these properties should be protected for future generations. Sections 106 and 110 of NHPA provide the foundation for federal preservation policies, stewardship of historic properties, and decision-making. Federal agencies protect their historic resources by listing them, or by determining that they are eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places. This, in turn, provides further regulatory protection during the planning and implementation of rehabilitation and new construction projects. Section 106 provides the framework for the regulatory process by which federal agencies reach decisions about historic properties under their jurisdiction. Federal agencies use the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior’s established Standards for Preservation in carrying out historic preservation responsibilities. Historic preservation planning occurs during the design of individual projects; during the development of master plans; and through federal agencies’ efforts to research, evaluate, protect, and manage historical and cultural resources under their jurisdiction.

Section 106 establishes the process by which federal agencies consider the effects of their proposed actions on historic properties. For many projects, Section 106 requires that federal agencies consult with the State Historic Preservation Offices of Maryland, the District of Columbia, or Virginia, involved Indian tribes, and the ACHP. Relevant federal and county or municipal agencies (including NCPC), as well as interested professional, civic, and community organizations and individuals join public agencies in the consultation process.

Section 110 of the NHPA requires federal agencies to establish their own historic preservation programs and proactively identify, evaluate, designate, and protect historic properties under their jurisdiction. Agencies such as the U.S. General Services Administration, the NPS, and the U.S. Department of Defense have large inventories of historic properties, entailing a significant commitment of resources in all aspects of property stewardship. Smaller agencies with limited land holdings are also required to identify and protect their historic properties, even if property management is not central to their mission.
Along with the requirements of Sections 106 and 110, federal agencies’ master plans are primary tools for assessing historic resources, developing long-term goals and plans, coordinating with other public and private entities, and implementing new planning methods and technologies. NCPC reviews these master plans, verifying and participating in consultation with local preservation offices and providing an opportunity for public involvement. For installations with more complex historic preservation challenges, federal agencies may be asked to prepare management plans that provide in-depth procedures for the treatment of their historic properties. Master planning documents are important tools used by the Commission when reviewing individual site and building plans.

The federal government should:

**HP.C.1** Sustain exemplary standards of historic property stewardship.

**HP.C.2** Integrate the preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of historic properties, including buildings and landscapes, into master plans for federal campuses and facilities.

**HP.C.3** Maintain a sense of historic continuity and evolution by preserving federal buildings representative of different eras and styles. Include contemporary architectural styles in future federal development as they contribute to, and enhance, the area’s urban fabric.

**HP.C.4** Preserve, rehabilitate, and protect historic landscapes and open spaces, both natural and designed, which are integral components of federal properties.

**HP.C.5** Protect significant archaeological resources by leaving them intact and undisturbed. Maintain an inventory of sites with potential for archaeological discovery and significance.

**HP.C.6** Use historic properties for their original purpose or, if no longer feasible, for an adaptive use that is appropriate to their context and is consistent with the property’s significance and character.

**HP.C.7** Ensure the continued preservation of federal historic properties through ongoing maintenance.

**HP.C.8** Plan, where feasible, for federal historic properties to serve as catalysts for local economic development and tourism.

**HP.C.9** Promote the integration of sustainability objectives with the preservation, rehabilitation, or restoration of historic properties.

**HP.C.10** Protect and rehabilitate the National Mall and its monumental character as a historic open space that functions as the nation’s preeminent gathering space.

**HP.C.11** Protect, and preserve in place, the extant boundary stones that mark the original survey of the District of Columbia.

**HP.C.12** Ensure that sites and settings for federally owned historic assets in the region are preserved and maintained as integral parts of the National Capital Region’s historic character.

**HP.C.13** Identify appropriate historic preservation protections prior to disposal of historic properties.

The rehabilitated and renovated historic Center Building, located on the historic St. Elizabeths West Campus, will house the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Headquarters and the Secretary’s office.
SECTION D: Policies Related to Design Review

Through the insistence on good design and stewardship of its historic buildings and open spaces, the federal government is a primary advocate for, and protector of, the image and legacy of the nation’s capital. The character of adjacent historic properties must be considered when a historic building can no longer be used as originally intended, an addition or modernization is needed, or a new facility must be constructed. Complex planning and design decisions must be made by federal and local planners during the renovation or rehabilitation of historic properties. At times, in partnership with private entities, the federal government will pursue land acquisitions, transfer property, propose the adaptive use of historic buildings, expand federal facilities, or undertake site and campus development.

In all of these cases, the federal government should encourage design based on the premise of compatibility with the surrounding historic context. Rather than imitate historic buildings, a rehabilitation or new construction project should find a balance between contemporary design and the surrounding historic context. While finding a balance can be a challenge, strong contemporary architecture is necessary for the city to continue to evolve and function as the nation’s capital.

The policies relate to design review work in concert with those established in the Urban Design Element.

The federal government should:

HP.D.1 Ensure that new construction is compatible with the qualities and character of historic buildings and their settings, in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.

HP.D.2 Work cooperatively with local, state, and federal agencies to ensure that development adjacent to historic properties does not detract from their historic character, and is compatible with the surrounding context.

HP.D.3 Protect the settings, including viewsheds, greenspaces, and tree canopies, of historic properties, as integral parts of the property’s historic character.
The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards

The Secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior has established standards for historic preservation programs, including those advising federal agencies on the treatment of historic properties listed in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register of Historic Places. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, with guidelines for preserving, rehabilitating, restoring and reconstructing historic buildings were developed to cover a wide range of preservation activities and historic property types. There are separate standards for preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction, as well as for acquisition. In addition, the National Park Service developed guidelines to assist in applying the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards to these different preservation options and to different types of historic properties.

Federal agencies most commonly use The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation to carry out their preservation responsibilities for properties in federal ownership or control, and for properties affected by federal projects. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards provide guidance for the preservation of a historic property’s significance through the preservation of its historic materials and features. The National Park Service defines rehabilitation as “the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alteration, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.” The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines provide guidance on how to achieve these alterations without the loss of historic building fabric and finishes that define the building’s historic character.

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation:

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other historic properties will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archaeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

* Use of the term assumes that some alteration of the historic building is required in order to make the building suitable for a current or new use.
SECTION E: Policies Related to the Capital’s Historic Image

As the capital city, Washington represents the nation. The image of Washington is experienced by residents and visitors, and transmitted around the nation and world by the media, arts and literature, historic photographs—even through our currency. This resonating and powerful image is formed by individual buildings and monuments, and by the city’s overall urban design—particularly because central Washington’s overall form has been explicitly, and very successfully, designed to establish a setting that symbolically expresses the nation’s ideals and values.

This image evokes and reinforces our national aspirations, and is the backdrop to the nation’s celebration, culture, and political life. Since the federal establishment has grown beyond the original capital city to become a significant presence, the entire region’s historic resources have a role in shaping the capital’s image.

The following policies recognize and protect the overall character of the capital’s image, and improve it, where needed. The guidance helps to ensure that future development contributes to strengthening the significant architectural and planning character, achieved over centuries, that makes the national capital a special and unique place. These policies work hand in hand with the policies in the Federal Urban Design Element to provide goals and guidance to federal agencies to protect historic resources, improve federal building design, and support a high quality public realm in Washington.

The federal government should:

HP.E.1 Plan carefully for appropriate uses and compatible design in and near the monumental core to protect and preserve the nation’s key historic properties.

HP.E.2 Ensure that federal facilities and spaces respect and complement the capital’s rich design heritage and historic resources.

HP.E.3 Design transportation infrastructure that is consistent with the urban design principles of the Plan of the City of Washington and surrounding historic properties.

HP.E.4 Recognize the role historic properties, memorials, and monuments have in defining the national capital and its image.
Endnotes

1. L’Enfant Plan and McMillan Plan: [http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/About_Ustr2)/About_Ustr3)/History.html](http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/About_Ustr2)/About_Ustr3)/History.html
8. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: [http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards.htm](http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards.htm)
10. 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)
11. 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)
12. 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)
14. A geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.
Visitors & Commemoration Element

The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital | Federal Elements
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Introduction to the Visitors & Commemoration Element

The federal government’s goal is to provide a positive and memorable experience for all visitors to the National Capital Region in a way that showcases the institutions of American culture and democracy, supports planning goals, and enhances activities that are unique to visiting the nation’s capital.

Washington, DC is the symbol of the nation. As the seat of the national government, it includes places and activities central to the nation’s history, culture, and civic identity. Tourists, schoolchildren, international and local visitors, and business people all need information, transportation, and other services. Some come to Washington because it is the seat of government and a symbol of democracy. They may visit a memorial or participate in a celebration, ceremony, First Amendment activity or other experience unique to the nation’s capital. For many others, Washington is considered home to many of their local attractions.

The Visitors & Commemoration Element sets forth the Commission’s policies for visitor destinations that include federal and cultural institutions; attractions including memorials, monuments, and national landmarks; as well as spaces for national events and public gatherings. The element takes into account existing federal and local efforts designed to enhance visitor access to these sites, including transportation services and visitor amenities.

National cultural institutions, festivals, and memorials are the leading visitor destinations. For example, in 2013 an estimated 1.6 million tourists attended the Cherry Blossom Festival. In 2013, Washington’s Smithsonian Institution museums recorded approximately 30 million visits. The region’s many national parks include many destinations and event spaces, and are major attractions in their own rights. The National Mall—America’s front yard—is used by many local residents for active recreation, concerts, and cultural purposes. The National Mall and other nearby national parks are not only recreational and commemorative spaces but are also gathering space for citizens to exercise their First Amendment rights. The National Park Service (NPS) receives 6,000 applications annually for demonstrations, celebrations, and special events to be held on the National Mall.

Visitors to Washington, DC 2003-2013

The ten year trend shows a continuous increase of visitors to Washington, DC. In 2013, Washington welcomed 17.4 million domestic visitors and 1.6 million international visitors. There was an increase of domestic visitors and decrease of international visitors from 2012. Visitors to Washington, DC spent an estimated $6.7 billion in 2013, an increase of almost eight percent from 2012.

The Lincoln Memorial hosted at least seven million visitors in 2014.
Since the last update of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements (Comprehensive Plan), newly completed memorials include the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, and the Memorial to Victims of Ukrainian Manmade Famine of 1932-1933. Others still in the planning phase include the President Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial, Adams Memorial, Peace Corps Memorial, and General Francis Marion Memorial. If past trends continue, there could be more than 30 additional memorials in the nation's capital by 2050.

There is also continued interest in locating new national museums in the region. In 2012, construction began on the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the Washington Monument grounds, which is scheduled to open in 2016. Other examples include the National Museum of the Marine Corps (opened in 2006 near Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia) and the National Museum of the United States Army (opened in 2012 at Fort Belvoir, Virginia).

The federal government plays an important role in supporting a memorable visitor experience. The Visitors & Commemoration Element recommends policies that support accessibility and openness for visitors and encourages improvements to visitor amenities, circulation, and information-sharing. Policies respond to the growing number of visitors and the continued demand for new events, commemorative works, museums, and other attractions. The element supports planning for commemorative works in a manner that reflects their role in shaping a visitor’s Washington experience, enhancing neighborhoods, and providing quality public spaces. Many local, nonprofit, and private organizations also play an important role in providing a positive visitor experience. The element’s strategies should be coordinated with federal and regional agencies, and others including the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Destination DC, and the hospitality industry.

Washington, DC is one of the world’s great planned capital cities. It has a strong urban design framework that includes many important physical and visual linkages between important places (refer to the Federal Urban Design Element). Many of these sites are significant visitor destinations. From a federal planning perspective, there has been a particular focus on enhancing the linkages between the National Mall and adjacent areas, particularly to the north through the Federal Triangle into downtown and south towards the waterfront. Enhancing these connections to enrich the pedestrian experience and create access to important attractions includes decisions about land use, transportation routes, information services, and programming of the streets and public spaces. These are important parts of any visitor policy framework.

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), in coordination with federal agencies and the District of Columbia government, highlighted near-term and long-term opportunities for enhancing linkages in efforts including the Monumental Core Framework Plan\(^8\) (2009) and the SW Ecodistrict Plan\(^9\) (2013). These projects propose to knit federal precincts to the surrounding urban fabric.

Since the last Comprehensive Plan update, site-specific projects such as conversion of the Old Post Office into a hotel and construction of the Newseum on Pennsylvania Avenue further strengthened the connection from the monumental core to downtown. There are also further opportunities to improve connections. One area is the connection along E Street, NW beginning west of the White House and running to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. E Street, NW is an important location for future national memorials.
Visitor Attractions within the Monumental Core and Beyond

As the seat of government and the symbolic center of the nation, Washington, DC is home to some of the nation’s most important cultural and historic national resources. The great cross axis of the National Mall is a focal point for the city’s original plan and orients visitors to important places such as the U.S. Capitol, the White House, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Jefferson Memorial. Smithsonian Institution museums—including the National Museum of African American History and Culture—flank the National Mall and are cultural centers. Beyond the National Mall, visitors can wander north towards the Smithsonian’s American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery, or downtown’s many theaters, galleries, parks, memorials, and museums.

The monumental core is a culturally and architecturally rich setting for many of the nation’s most treasured parks and civic institutions. Policies in this element focus on creating a memorable and meaningful experience for visitors that reveal facets of the nation’s culture and history through its symbols and institutions.

Although the monumental core is the major focus of the Washington experience (refer to the Federal Urban Design Element for more information on the monumental core), there are important attractions throughout the city and the region. There are opportunities to enhance the visitor experience beyond the traditional hallmarks of a visitor’s stay in Washington, and visitor information and services should also orient travelers to them. Within Washington, examples of federal and non-federal attractions include the Smithsonian’s National Zoo, U.S. National Arboretum, Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens, Rock Creek Park, Anacostia Park, Anacostia Community Museum, Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historic Park, Lincoln Cottage, Civil War Defenses of Washington, Washington National Cathedral, Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and Frederick Douglass National Historic Site. Washington’s waterfronts, including parks, open spaces, and other recreational activities are important visitor attractions.

Washington, DC has many vibrant and historic neighborhoods, each with a unique character. Neighborhoods such as Dupont Circle, Georgetown, U Street, and Capitol Hill also offer dining, shopping, cultural, and entertainment opportunities. Cultural Tourism DC publishes extensive walking guides to many of Washington’s beautiful neighborhoods and hosts the annual Passport DC to highlight Washington’s international diplomatic community.

Trends show that many visitor attractions were privately funded including the Newseum, Spy Museum, Museum of the Bible, and recent memorials dedicated by the District of Columbia. Federal and local agencies should continue to find opportunities to co-locate related attractions such as memorials and museums. Important sites outside of Washington include Arlington National Cemetery, the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial, the U.S. Air Force Memorial, Mount Vernon, and Old Town Alexandria.
Federal Policy Framework

The element’s policies are based on federal laws, regulations, guidelines, and plans developed to best accommodate visitors and cultural attractions. They also work in concert with local jurisdictional efforts. The Element’s policy framework has a regional focus, but pays particular attention to the area centered on the National Mall, an important symbol of national pride. Many plans emphasize the importance of protecting the National Mall’s historic open space and urban design qualities for future generations.

The vision of a symbolic and attractive capital city core is grounded in the L’Enfant Plan (1791). The McMillan Plan (1901) subsequently expanded the L’Enfant Plan’s framework. Responding to unplanned intrusions into the National Mall and its surroundings, the McMillan Plan envisioned a combined civic and cultural place that is both a national front lawn and a public forum.

NCPC’s Extending the Legacy: Planning America’s Capital for the 21st Century (1997) placed renewed emphasis on protecting Washington’s symbolic core while connecting its adjacent neighborhoods and business districts. The plan also recommended locating memorials, museums, and other federal facilities along key corridors, such as North and South Capitol Streets, 10th Street, SW, and the Potomac and Anacostia riverfronts. By dispersing federal visitor destinations into emerging areas of the city, the plan recognized their role as potential catalysts for development.

Additional plans and regulations guided implementation of the L’Enfant, McMillan, and Legacy Plans. In 2001, NCPC completed the Memorials and Museums Master Plan (also known as the 2M Plan) and set forth guidelines for locating future commemorative and cultural attractions in Washington, DC and identified sites for future commemorative development. NCPC’s Framework Plan built upon the Legacy Plan’s ideas by recommending the addition of enlivening infrastructure and public space improvements in federal precincts around the National Mall. The Framework Plan, together with the National Mall Plan, prepared by the NPS, and the District of Columbia’s Center City Action Agenda, sought to connect the National Mall with surrounding federal and downtown neighborhoods to improve the visitor experience and provide opportunities for future federal attractions and other development.

Security needs have changed the visitor experience at federal destinations throughout the National Capital Region (NCR). Security measures include permanent or temporary features, restricted access, and alterations to buildings and public spaces. While the federal government has a responsibility to ensure that federal visitor attractions are safe, they also need to remain publicly accessible and aesthetically pleasing. NCPC policies and guidelines that address these issues are included in the Federal Urban Design Element, the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan (2002, updates in 2004 & 2005), and Designing and Testing of Perimeter Security Elements (2005).
SECTION A: Policies Related to Visitor Transportation Modes

As the number of visitors to the region continues to increase, it’s important to improve access and mobility to major visitor attractions. Automobiles, Metrorail, and tour buses are the primary transportation modes used to access visitor attractions. The federal government should support transit alternatives such as specialized shuttle service, water transportation, walking, and bicycling, which alleviates demand on the area’s road network and limited parking capacity.

Curbing the use of private automobiles as a means of travel for visitors is an important regional goal. In a 2009 NPS survey, 36 percent of respondents indicated that they used a private vehicle for travel to and from the National Mall. To further reduce traffic, visitors are encouraged to use public transportation and related mobility alternatives. Fortunately the region offers a number of transportation alternatives including Metrorail, the Circulator, commuter rail, tour buses and local buses. Visitors are increasingly using public transportation to experience Washington, with more than 50 percent of National Mall visitors taking transit.

Circulators or similar transit alternatives expand travel options and complement existing Metrorail and Metrobus service, providing visitors better access to other destinations in Washington, DC and the region. The element policies encourage development of new modes of transportation, such as shuttle service between transit stations and visitor destinations. The policies also promote improved trails and sidewalks to facilitate visiting attractions by foot or bicycle. Refer to the Transportation Element for more information on federal transportation policies within the NCR.
The federal government should:

**VC.A.1** Locate federal visitor attractions within walking distance of public transportation stops. Ensure the path between attraction and the stop are ADA, pedestrian, and bicycle accessible.

**VC.A.2** Support increased access to visitor attractions through improvement or expansion of Metrorail, premium bus service, pedestrian and biking improvements, or other affordable, efficient, and effective transportation alternatives.

**VC.A.3** Encourage increased use of public transit and other sustainable transportation alternatives (car sharing, bicycles, and organized tours) to access regional attractions.

**VC.A.4** Major new attractions should address the transportation needs of visitors for an average day demand and provide transportation alternatives to reduce parking demand.

**VC.A.5** Work with federal, state, and local agencies and other organizations to provide appropriate sites for effective and coordinated satellite parking facilities for tour and commuter buses.

**VC.A.6** Develop tour and commuter bus management strategies to reduce traffic congestion in and around visitor attractions throughout the National Capital Region.

**VC.A.7** Improve distribution of information to visitors about long-term parking facilities and transportation alternatives.

**VC.A.8** Work with local governments to promote water transportation, such as water taxis, as a way of accessing and viewing attractions from the water.

**VC.A.9** Support public art and commemorative works at transportation facilities, where appropriate.

Tour buses are an important means to access the area’s attractions and are estimated to serve as many as one-third of the visitors. During the spring-summer peak season, up to 1,200 tour buses are in the District of Columbia every day. While tour buses are a desirable alternative to the private automobile, they often idle on already congested city roadways and impact scenic areas and viewsheds. The operational challenges associated with tour buses include negative impacts on local infrastructure from traffic congestion; residential neighborhood disruption; and obstruction of view corridors and major landmarks.

A U.S. Department of Transportation study developed in partnership with NCPC and several other agencies determined that a tour bus parking management system for Washington should be developed. In 2015, NPS’s National Mall and Memorial Parks Unit completed the National Mall and Memorial Parks Tour Bus Study, which looked at existing conditions of tour bus operations and provided short- and long-term recommendations to improve those operations. In 2015 the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments completed the Regional Bus Staging, Layover, and Parking Location Study to analyze the need for tour and commuter bus staging, layover, and parking locations in Washington, DC and Arlington County.
**SECTION B: Policies Related to Visitor Amenities and Information Services**

The nation’s capital is a major destination for domestic and international visitors: a center of civic, historic, and cultural attractions; as well as sites for special events and activities. Amenities such as information, restrooms, seating, food services, signage, and wayfinding are services to assist visitors, help activate public spaces, and increase pedestrian activity.

The growth of visitors in Washington has resulted in additional new attractions. As a result, it is important to provide coordinated information to new attractions through signage, kiosks, and multi-media platforms. These platforms could also provide digital and web-based content and applications. Coordinated and comprehensive visitor services, providing information about events, activities, shopping, transportation, and parking would help orient visitors and enhance their travel experience. One key challenge with developing such a service is that many different entities (federal, local, private, and nonprofit) manage their own major visitor attractions. Each has unique visitor information and service platforms.

Meeting the needs of those looking to experience Washington begins with development of information centers placed at key locations—both in Washington and the region—to orient, inform, and educate visitors about special features, activities, locations, and events at attractions. Large, comprehensive orientation centers, small kiosks, and mobile visitors centers can be developed to provide essential visitor information. Spread throughout the region, these facilities can further educate visitors about the wide variety of activities.

Visitor information can include a wide variety of dining and lodging options, arts and entertainment, sports schedules, and special events. Programs and services should respond to, and accommodate, the wide variety of facilities located throughout the region. Maps, signage, and other information resources should be accessible to visitors with special needs, such as non-English speakers. Web-based information should comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which requires federal agencies to provide website accessibility to people with disabilities.

Indoor and outdoor food service facilities are located throughout the National Mall and areas in the monumental core to handle anticipated demand. However, there are areas that lack adequate food services. Vendors selling food, including food trucks and other tourist-related items, can help fill the gap, although they should be carefully located and designed so they do not impede pedestrian and vehicular circulation and adversely affect the monumental core’s visual and physical qualities.

Reasonable restroom accommodations should be provided at federal employment centers, heritage sites, and other publicly accessible federal facilities. Popular attractions, including parks, should respond to visitation levels by planning for adequate numbers and varieties of food and beverage outlets. Visitors could also benefit from improved access to the riverfront and boat slips.

**The federal government should:**

**VC.B.1** Support the dissemination of information at regional locations frequented by visitors (e.g., hotels, restaurants, Metrorail stations, and major transportation centers). Information should include federal and local visitor attractions, events, tours, stores, shops, and restaurants nearby.

**VC.B.2** Encourage visitor interest in attractions, including less frequently visited regional attractions, by using brochures, multi-media, digital, and web-based materials.

**VC.B.3** Encourage multilingual information services in the vicinity of visitor centers and at key transportation centers.

**VC.B.4** Explore the feasibility of creating a central visitor information center and/or multi-media platform that includes information about both public and private visitor attractions.

**VC.B.5** Develop information visitor centers, kiosks, exhibits, and other educational programming in public areas of government facilities and other appropriate locations in the National Capital Region to inspire and educate visitors about the role of government and national attractions.

**VC.B.6** Conserve, enhance, communicate, and promote an understanding of the significance of heritage features, landmarks and the National Capital Region’s natural environment.

**VC.B.7** Support the location of information kiosks and visitor centers at federal facilities throughout the National Capital Region.

**VC.B.8** Enhance visual and functional connections to visitor attractions through well-designed and coordinated signage, pathways, parkways, streetscaping, wayfinding tools, and programming.

**VC.B.9** Develop and maintain a safe, comfortable and pleasant environment that offers a range and distribution of amenities, services, and access throughout the area (e.g., lighting, accessible restrooms, concessions, and information).

**VC.B.10** Ensure that any supporting facilities such as restrooms or concessions stands do not detract from the aesthetics or accessibility of the commemorative element and its grounds.

**VC.B.11** Support a variety of food, retail, and supporting services on federal lands or in adjacent buildings, where high levels of pedestrian activity exist or are encouraged.
The federal government, in coordination with the District of Columbia and other local jurisdictions, has a role in supporting special programs, festivals, parades, concerts, fine arts presentations, and other events that entertain and educate visitors and contribute to an enjoyable visit to the NCR.

Many of these special programs and events are located in downtown Washington. Special events that take place at central downtown locations including Freedom Plaza, the U.S. Navy Memorial, and nearby activity nodes (e.g., Washington Convention Center, Verizon Center), are ideally located to allow visitors and residents to enjoy special programs and events. However, special events require adequate support services, such as restrooms, safety services, and accessible public transportation.

The federal government should continue to be an active participant with local governments in supporting events and activities at traditional gathering places and on federal property, such as parkland and urban plazas. Special events related to the federal government, such as the inaugural parade, should be adequately supported by the federal government. In addition, NCPC and other federal agencies should continue to look at how visitor programs and special events can be used to further strengthen linkages between the monumental core and adjacent areas. The Visitors & Commemoration Element provides policies that reflect the benefits to the federal government of having special events and programs in the capital city and the need to adequately support them.

The federal government should:

VC.C.1 Actively partner with public and non-profit entities on programs which can enrich the visitor experience and provide educational services related to the capital city’s history and role.

VC.C.2 Regularly sponsor displays, special events, and arts, cultural, and recreational activities in, on, and around federal facilities throughout the National Capital Region.

VC.C.3 Design and program events in a manner that respects and minimizes impacts on the location and vicinity.

VC.C.4 Assist in providing support services for special events and programs, where appropriate.
SECTION D: Policies Related to Commemorative Works

Commemorative works, including monuments, memorials, ceremonial gardens, and plaques are often located among Washington’s high-profile structures, viewsheds, and promontories. This civic art form preserves and celebrates many important aspects of American history and culture. When designed well, memorials can inspire and broaden civic engagement, enhance their surroundings, and introduce cultural resources to neighborhood parks.

The Visitors & Commemoration Element guides the federal government’s goals regarding memorials and other cultural resources. For each memorial project, NCPC and other agencies involved in the process strive to ensure that the process is responsive and transparent. Using the Commemorative Works Act (CWA) as a guide, the agency’s goal is three-fold: ensure that Washington’s commemorative works explore the diverse, rich stories of American history; meet the expectations of millions of Americans who visit the nation’s capital; and plan so that future memorials have excellent locations.

Under the CWA, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) or the Administrator of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), along with the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) and NCPC must approve the site and design for each new commemorative work that Congress authorizes on federal land. NCPC works with memorial sponsors and the DOI Secretary or the GSA Administrator, along with other review bodies, including the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission and the CFA, to ensure that each memorial is located and designed in a manner that supports its commemorative purpose and enhances its surroundings.

In addition to NCPC’s project-specific work, the agency works with federal and local partners to develop studies designed to support the memorial process and plan for the next generation of memorials. In recent years, one of the central themes of NCPC’s work has been to protect the National Mall from overbuilding, which may diminish the distinctive openness of this symbolic place.

Most sponsors envision their memorial being located on the National Mall, the symbolic heart of the capital. In the past, many memorial projects have been sited on or adjacent to the National Mall.

As a way to relieve pressure for new memorials on the National Mall, NCPC and CFA published the Framework Plan in 2009 to identify strategies to extend the civic qualities of the National Mall and the vitality of the city into adjacent federally dominated precincts.

The Framework Plan identified several potential locations for new cultural destinations located off the National Mall, that can be attractive to museum and memorial sponsors. Examples include the precinct south of Independence Avenue, including 10th Street, SW and its terminus at Banneker Overlook. New cultural projects in these areas can serve as anchors that spark investment; add high-quality public spaces and buildings; and provide destinations that introduce visitors to new parts of the city. Museums and memorials have the opportunity to strengthen community linkages, as well as cultural and historic associations, between commemorative resources and neighborhoods. Commemorative works can provide additional benefits and amenities to neighborhoods. NCPC coordinated closely with the NPS to ensure that the plan’s goals and recommendations were consistent with the National Mall Plan. These collective plans provide the long-range vision memorial sponsors need to consider areas beyond the National Mall.
Commemorative Works Act

Created in 1986, the Commemorative Works Act guides the process for development, approval, and location of new memorials on federal lands administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) in the District of Columbia and its environs. Congress authorizes each new memorial by separate law. Site selection and design are delegated to federal agencies, including NPS on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior, GSA, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and NCPC.

The Act established the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission, which advises the Secretary of Interior, the Administrator of GSA, Congress, and sponsors on topics related to commemoration and consults on matters relating to the siting and design of new memorials. Memorials located on other lands, such as the U.S. Department of Defense, follow a separate process.

As amended in 2003, the Act designates a “Reserve” area within the core of the great cross-axis of the Mall where the siting of new commemorative works is prohibited. The Reserve generally extends from the U.S. Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial. To protect the historic and cultural integrity of memorials, the act also includes restrictions related to the acknowledgment of donors. The following figure reflects the Reserve and other designated areas:

Responsibilities of Federal Agencies as Outlined by the Commemorative Works Act

National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission

The National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (NCMAC) serves as a consultation focal point for those seeking to establish memorials on federal land that is subject to the Commemorative Works Act in the nation’s capital. NCMAC was originally established as a federal advisory committee of the U.S. Department of Interior. The CWA reestablished the committee as the NCMAC and directed it to report to Congress, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) on matters relating to commemoration in the District of Columbia and its environs when federal property administered by the Secretary of the Interior or GSA is used. NCMAC:

• Prepares and recommends to the Secretary or the Administrator criteria, guidelines, policies, and procedures for memorializing persons and events.
• Examines each memorial proposal for adequacy and appropriateness.
• Makes recommendations to Congress in conformance with the CWA.
• Makes recommendations to the Secretary or the Administrator with respect to site locations on federal land in the District of Columbia and its environs that are under the provisions of the CWA.
• Considers each memorial proposal seeking a site within Area I or for appropriateness, and make recommendations to the Secretary or the Administrator with respect to preeminent and lasting historical significance to the nation.

Membership of NCMAC is designated within the CWA and is composed of eight ex-officio members. The chairman is the Commissioner of the Public Building Service.

U.S. Department of the Interior
(Through the National Park Service)

Washington, DC memorials are typically proposed and paid for by private groups. However, once built, memorial sites are generally maintained and interpreted in perpetuity by the National Park Service when located on NPS land. NPS coordinates and assists with memorial proposals in Washington and its environs. NPS, on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior, reviews and approves sites and designs and issues construction permits.

U.S. General Services Administration

The landlord for the civilian federal government. It provides leadership, policy direction, and standards in the areas of architecture, engineering, fine arts, historic preservation, construction services, and project management. The Commissioner of the Public Building Service serves on NCMAC. In Washington, DC, GSA lands may be considered for commemorative works under the CWA.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

Established to advise the government on matters of aesthetics and design, including the location and design of statues, memorials, and public buildings erected by the federal and District governments in the nation’s capital. The President appoints seven members to serve four-year terms on the commission. Authorized to approve sites and designs for new commemorative works and is represented on NCMAC.

National Capital Planning Commission

Provides planning guidance for federal land and buildings in the National Capital Region, which includes Washington, DC. The 12-member Commission includes three Presidential appointees, and representatives from Congress, federal agencies, and the District of Columbia. With respect to commemorative works, NCPC is authorized to approve sites and designs for new memorial projects and is represented on NCMAC.
In 2001, NCPC, in cooperation with the Joint Memorial Task Force, published the Memorials and Museums Master Plan. The 2M Plan achieved two important goals. First, it identified a Reserve, which includes the great cross-axis of the National Mall, where no new memorials may be built. Congress subsequently enlarged and codified the Reserve in the 2003 Commemorative Works Clarification and Revision Act. The Reserve maintains the Mall’s open spaces and existing memorial landscapes that are greatly admired and enjoyed.

The plan also helps sponsors visualize opportunities for their projects and disperses cultural destinations to neighborhoods in all four quadrants of the city. The 2M Plan identified 100 potential sites for future memorials and museums throughout Washington, DC and Virginia. Each location is evaluated and includes information on scale of site, transit connections, cultural and historic resources, and neighborhood setting. This helps sponsors and review agencies evaluate whether a given project is suitable for a particular location. The plan identified developing areas such as the South Capitol Street corridor as a potential location for new museums or memorials.

The 2M Plan successfully guided six projects to locations off the Mall, including the President Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial; U.S. Air Force Memorial; Thomas Masaryk Memorial; Victims of Communism Memorial; Memorial to Victims of Ukrainian Man-Made Famine of 1932-1933; and the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.

NCPC’s Memorial Trends and Practice Study (2012) found that memorials are still concentrated in the western quadrants of the city, with only four percent of federal memorials are located in the eastern quadrants. While the 2M Plan provides strong policy direction for distributing memorials throughout the city, additional work remains to achieve this goal.
Memorials Themes and Trends

One of the most striking trends over time is the addition of memorials that honor groups, as opposed to honoring individuals or events. For example, there are 14 total memorials to individuals associated with the Civil War. Later war memorials are more inclusive; the DC World War Memorial lists the names of residents who died during World War I and honors all District residents who served. In terms of themes, memorials have also traditionally focused on military related events. However, commemorative themes have begun diversifying with issues related to society, culture, and international themes having become regularly commemorated.

NCPC and its partners continue to refine the approach for designing and building commemorative works in Washington. In 2012, NCPC completed Memorial Trends and Practice in Washington, DC, which includes a publicly accessible catalog and online map of existing memorials on NPS land in Washington. It also includes analyses of how other capital cities in the United States and abroad plan for memorials. This information is designed to better equip agencies and the public to consider the critical policy and planning decisions associated with memorial development. Study recommendations include developing site guidance for international gifts and identifying commemorative opportunities for sponsors other than permanent commemoration. In addition to nontraditional works and temporary displays, sponsors can explore commemorative activities such as solemn gatherings and community festivals, with opportunities to encourage placemaking through location and design.

The Visitors & Commemoration Element policies establish guidelines to sensitively locate and design commemorative works while respecting the limited land resources in the nation’s capital. Specific policies address pre-existing uses, context, viewsheds, sustainability, and accessibility.

The federal government should:

VC.D.1 Protect open spaces, existing public uses, and cultural and natural resources when locating and designing new commemorative works, to the maximum extent practicable.

VC.D.2 Locate new commemorative works in accordance with the Commemorative Works Act, in consideration of sites identified in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan.

VC.D.3 In addition to Area I criteria, reserve visually or culturally prominent sites, including the Prime Sites of the Memorials and Museums Master Plan and sites along Pennsylvania Avenue, for significant memorials of American history and culture.

VC.D.4 During site evaluation for international gifts, consider locations in and around related embassies or other cultural institutions and the associated maintenance with each site.

VC.D.5 Ensure that new memorials located in neighborhood settings are sited and designed in a manner that is consistent, with local land uses, activities, and objectives.

VC.D.6 Design commemorative works with durable materials and sustainable landscape features.

VC.D.7 Minimize on-site donor recognition and ensure that it does not detract from the visitor experience. Donor recognition should not diminish the integrity of the memorial design, including historic features.

VC.D.8 If a supporting structure is contemplated, use surrounding amenities rather than construct additional buildings, where possible. Build new structures in a manner that is not visually or functionally obtrusive.

VC.D.9 Accommodate visitor access by modes other than single-occupant vehicle.

The National Memorial AIDS Quilt, returned to Washington in 2012 for the 25th Anniversary of its display on the National Mall. This poignant living memorial evolves over time and includes programming, events, and a digital application. The quilt is a powerful reminder that there are opportunities to explore topics worthy of commemoration outside of the traditional permanent commemorative works process.
Endnotes

10. In 2016, the Smithsonian will evaluate a South Mall Campus Master Plan.
12. L’Enfant Plan and McMillan Plan: http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/About_Us(tr2)/About_Us(tr3)/History.html
14. Memorial and Museums Master Plan: http://www.ncpc.gov/ncpc/Main(T2)/Planning(Tr2)/2MPlan.html
17. A memorial, museum, parkland, natural feature, or commemorative work—under the jurisdiction of the federal government—that is of important national, historic, symbolic, cultural, or educational value of the general public.
Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Parks and Open Space Element

National Capital Planning Commission
# Federal Elements

Parks and Open Space

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Introduction

Parks and Open Space

It is the goal of the federal government to:

Conserve and enhance the park and open space system of the National Capital Region, ensure that adequate resources are available for future generations, and promote an appropriate balance between open space resources and the built environment.

One of the defining characteristics of the National Capital Region is its park and open space system. From community parks tucked away in residential neighborhoods, to the grand expanse of the National Mall, to the extensive open space and wilderness preserves in the outlying reaches of the metropolitan area, the National Capital Region is fortunate to have so many varied and beautiful outdoor spaces for public use. Open space serves many important recreational, natural resource, and cultural purposes. It offers places for wildlife habitat, wilderness protection, groundwater retention, air oxygenation, active recreational use, decorative settings, historic landscapes, and visual corridors. Historically, the federal government has used open space as settings for important monuments, grand public promenades, major federal buildings, and quiet gathering places within and outside the nation’s capital.

In recent years, however, many factors have challenged the region’s ability to adequately serve the residents of and visitors to the National Capital Region. The immense popularity of the Mall has stressed the infrastructure of this historic open space; an influx of residents to downtown in recent years has created the need for community-scale parks; established neighborhoods have either been underserved by parks and open space or the quality of their parks is deteriorating under tightening fiscal conditions; and the outer jurisdictions of the region are experiencing tremendous growth rates that reduce the amount of privately held open space and crowd our public parks.

The federal government places a high value on the environmental benefits, recreational use, and scenic beauty provided by monumental, natural, and cultural landscapes, and has amassed a significant inventory of natural and historic parks to complement the more formal open-space settings for monuments and memorials. The federal government also maintains parks and open space that serve the everyday recreational needs of residents and visitors. The National Park Service controls approximately 60 square miles of parks and open space in the NCPC-defined National Capital Region, representing 25 percent of the roughly 239 square miles of designated parks and open space lands controlled by federal, state, and local governments in the NCR. The 6,776 acres owned by NPS represents the majority of parks and open space in the District of Columbia, and is 17 percent of the District’s total land area.

1. Numbers are approximate, as discrepancies in boundary areas between jurisdictions, ownership, and definitions of parks and open space result in data that does not perfectly match across the region. The term “National Capital Region” is used by several groups, including NPS, with boundaries that differ from NCPC’s.
Several federal agencies have jurisdiction over open space, including the National Park Service, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Defense. Federal open space occurs in a variety of forms. As described below, estimates of regional federal open space holdings include:

- Designated parkland (such as the holdings of the National Park Service).
- Other areas designated primarily as open space, such as the National Arboretum.
- Open space settings for federal buildings, such as the National Institutes of Health.
- Water areas, including all of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers within the District of Columbia (approximately six square miles), as well as several reservoirs.

In addition to the vast federal ownership of parks and open space in the National Capital Region, the federal government’s vested interest results primarily from two provisions of the National Capital Planning Act, and federal environmental laws.

- The National Capital Planning Act of 1952 grants the National Capital Planning Commission the responsibility “to plan the appropriate and orderly development of the National Capital and the conservation of the important natural and historical features thereof.”
- In 1930 the Capper Cramton Act authorized funding for the acquisition of lands in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia for the park and parkway system of the national capital. Property acquisition included lands for George Washington Memorial Parkway; stream valley parks in Maryland and Virginia; and the park, parkway, and playground system of the District of Columbia.

- Parks and open space can significantly improve air and water quality, protect wildlife habitats, improve groundwater retention, and help prevent flooding. These are environmental benefits that support federal environmental laws.

Open space exists at many different scales, in many different forms, and under the jurisdiction of many different organizations. Within the District of Columbia, for example, many parks and open spaces were carved from the triangular blocks created by the original L’Enfant street grid system. Other parks, such as the Prince William Forest Park in suburban Virginia, encompass many thousands of acres of forest land in its natural condition.

A general definition of open space includes any land or water surface that is not occupied by buildings, a broad definition that encompasses the vast majority of federal property, particularly outside of the relatively small landholdings in central Washington. More specific definitions of open space depend on the context and needs of particular areas. In this element, parks and open space have been divided into seven broad categories, although many parks and open spaces could be defined by two or more of these categories.

- **Parks and Landscapes**, which includes natural and designed parks and landscapes.
- **Terrain Features**, which includes variations in the natural landscape such as escarpments, gorges and palisades, and mountain ranges.
- **Greenways and Greenbelts**, which includes linear parks and connecting greenways, the large reserves of open space areas essentially forming a “greenbelt,” and the tree cover that is so predominant in the Washington area.
- **Rivers and Waterways**, which includes the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, smaller tributaries such as Rock Creek, and other unnamed tributaries and creeks.
- **Trails**, which includes those used by pedestrians, bicyclists, equestrians, and motorized vehicles.
- **Gateways**, which includes the major roads, highways, and transportation terminals that are the approaches to the nation’s capital.
- **Parkways**, which includes roadways in linear landscape parks restricted to use by automobiles.

These various components, whether federal or nonfederal, should be viewed as part of a comprehensive system of parks and open space that contribute to the region’s setting or are significant in terms of their historical, cultural, or recreational characteristics.
Several planning challenges have emerged in recent years regarding future parks and open space needs. Among these challenges is the need to ensure that an adequate supply of parkland and open space is available to meet the needs of an increasing population and to fill the gaps in the existing system. Connecting parks and open space; providing public access to the park system; and protecting existing open space from overuse, conversion to other uses, encroachment by inappropriate new development, or diminution by inappropriate development on adjacent lands are additional challenges that planners are confronting.
In the past 20 years, the population of the National Capital Region has increased significantly. This population gain is expected to continue, which will likely prompt a commensurate demand for new parks and open space. Increases in tourism to the region also create a higher demand on parks and open space.

For several decades after its creation in the 1920s, the National Capital Planning Commission was actively engaged in the acquisition of parkland for the District of Columbia and coordination of open-space acquisitions throughout the region. While the Commission’s authority to acquire land remains intact, this authority has not been exercised for many decades. Other recent federal acquisitions have been few, and have been undertaken by individual agencies or special entities, such as the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation. Future federal land acquisitions could occur by purchase, easement, donation, or exchange.

Direct federal acquisition of new parkland and open space can and should also be augmented with public-private partnerships. For example, private development of greenways that use planned and existing utility easements could minimize public costs of greenway development. In addition, the federal government can provide leadership on regional open space issues and assist in linking new and existing local properties with federal properties to create an integrated parks and open space network serving the residents of and visitors to the region.

In recent years, local governments have served as the prime acquirers of new open space, helping to preserve important land parcels that become subject to potential development and to meet the recreational needs of local residents. Loudoun County’s Purchase of Development Rights Program and Montgomery County’s use of Transfer of Development Rights are two examples of local government efforts to protect natural, historic, and scenic open space.

Additionally, redevelopment of surplus federal property may also provide opportunities to add to the region’s inventory of parks and open space. The Cameron Station redevelopment in Alexandria, Virginia provides a successful example of such a commitment. The redevelopment of this former federal property not only provided the local community with new residential and commercial space, but importantly with new parks and open space. Over 60 acres of the 165-acre installation was transferred to Alexandria’s Parks Department, and the city now has new parks, sports fields, and playgrounds.

Theodore Roosevelt Island

The challenges of preserving, maintaining, and enhancing the region’s parks and open space and securing more for the future will require a coordinated, multifaceted effort. The Parks and Open Space Element of the Comprehensive Plan is designed to generate federal leadership in regional parks and open space planning by promulgating several objectives: preserving the key natural resources of the region as permanent open space; providing sufficient parks and recreation areas to meet the needs of residents and visitors; preserving for posterity the nature and diversity of our natural and cultural heritage; and using open space to help guide urban growth. The element also fosters cooperation and partnership among federal agencies, local government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations entrusted with the stewardship of the region’s parks and open space.
Expansion and Enhancement

Policies

The federal government should:

1. Plan for new parks as part of the park system of the region.

2. Acquire parks and open space as necessary to augment the open space system.

3. Use easements, donations, purchases, exchanges, or other means to acquire land or to enhance parks and open space. Examples of areas or park systems where further acquisition is desirable include:
   - South Capitol Street
   - Anacostia River waterfront and tributaries
   - Georgetown Waterfront Park
   - Areas immediately south of Meridian Hill Park where significant view corridors are blocked
   - Sites at or near the topographic bowl ridge line, as seen from the monumental core
   - Fort Circle Park system
   - Sites at the periphery of Manassas National Battlefield Park
   - An outer greenbelt ring of major open space at the periphery of the region

4. Coordinate planning and development of federal parkland with local parkland in order to optimize recreation, open space preservation, and resource protection.

Preservation and Maintenance

Existing parks often suffer from chronic overuse, which contributes to the decline of the condition of the park and further burdens the already dwindling resources available for park maintenance. For example, the Mall Complex, a major open space setting for the nation’s capital, plays host to millions of visitors who use it for a variety of symbolic and recreational uses. However, the use of the Mall as a gathering place for civic celebrations, peaceful demonstrations, and recreational uses is gradually being displaced by new memorials and museums. To counter this effect, the Mall Complex, from the U.S. Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial, should be considered essentially complete, and any improvements necessary in this area should be limited in scope and sensitively designed. Paradoxically, other parks are underutilized due to the lack of access and the poor condition of the parks. Examples include parkland along the Anacostia River and the waterfront park in Georgetown.

Shifting demographic and emerging development patterns mean that some parks no longer meet the needs of their users. Some parks in downtown Washington, for example, did not always serve a residential base and are not necessarily meeting residents’ needs. Additionally, some federal parks and open space are in need of maintenance. Federal partnerships with local agencies, such as the District’s Department of Parks and Recreation, business improvement districts, and nonprofit organizations, are key in developing a strategy and approach to upgrade these spaces, thereby improving their aesthetic and function, and adding vitality to their locations. Park use and development must strike a balance between recognition of national significance in designation, and local needs. Federal-local partnerships should focus on fulfilling shared goals, but not at the expense of impairing federal interests. Thus, a re-examination of federal open space in the District of Columbia should be considered so that federal open space that is essentially local in character can be more effectively integrated into the fabric of the District’s neighborhoods.
Many parks and open spaces in the National Capital Region are also threatened by adjacent development pressures and the encroachment of inappropriate new development along park borders, conversion of the land to different uses, and a lack of resources for adequate maintenance. For example, Manassas National Battlefield Park—a significant historical Civil War landmark and cultural landscape—should be protected from unsympathetic development adjacent to it, as such adverse adjacent uses next to parks threaten their integrity and can cause adverse environmental impacts. Greater emphasis should be given to coordinating federal park and open space master plans with development plans for the jurisdictions that surround them.

Historically, dwindling resources often leave little money for the development and upkeep of federal and nonfederal parks and open space. Because public funding is limited for land acquisition and maintenance, new sources for these essential activities need to be developed and novel solutions shaped. New park and open space planning initiatives that have emerged in recent years, for example, have allowed the federal government to work and partner with a variety of entities. Among these, a nonprofit organization has entered into an agreement with the National Park Service to assist in restoring and enhancing the National Mall; local business improvement districts are addressing small federally owned reservations in downtown Washington; and regional planning agencies are devoting more resources to thinking comprehensively about the regional open space network in its entirety and the importance of adequately planning for and acquiring open space in a growing metropolitan area.

**Preservation and Maintenance Policies**

The federal government should:

1. Enhance parks and preserve open green space for future generations.
2. Maintain and conserve federal open space as a means of shaping and enhancing urban areas.
3. Preserve open space that is crucial to the long-term quality of life of a neighborhood or the region.
4. Conserve and maintain the essential open space character of areas in the region with significant park, open space, cultural, or natural qualities that contribute to the setting of the National Capital Region. Such areas include the National Arboretum, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, and McMillan and Dalecarlia Reservoirs.
5. Conserve portions of military reservations that add significantly to the inventory of park, open space, and natural areas and should, to the extent practicable, be used by the public for recreation. Examples include Andrews Air Force Base, Fort Belvoir, U.S. Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Home, Fort Meade, and Marine Corps Base Quantico.
6. Maintain wildlife refuge areas in the region as critical natural open space and protect these areas from potential adverse impacts from surrounding developments, including major highway or other transportation projects.
7. Maintain and conserve trees and other vegetation in the landscaped buffer areas on federal installations in a natural condition. Perimeter roads and cleared areas on these sites should be kept to a minimum, carefully landscaped, and managed in a manner that addresses security, aesthetics, and natural character.
8. Enter joint ventures to acquire and manage parks and open space.
Connectivity and Access

Many parks and open spaces originally intended to be part of contiguous park systems are not linked. If they were, the region would have a better integrated network of parks, open space, greenways, and trails that could improve and increase recreational and commuter opportunities along the region’s trails. Connecting the shoreline parks of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, Rock Creek Park, the Fort Circle Parks, and other points within the National Capital Region with other regional, state, and local park systems and trails would serve to strengthen the entire regional park and open space system. A new trail, linking most of the Fort Circle Parks sites and the connecting green corridor should be designated and constructed.

Particular emphasis should be given to completing and maintaining the connectivity of linear open space networks, such as stream valley parks and waterfront recreational trails, since continuous access for the public (and for wildlife) is an important feature of these open space networks. For example, Watts Branch and Oxon Run are significant tributaries to the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers and provide green links between federal open spaces. In addition, shoreline trails should be developed on the Maryland shore of the Potomac, linking southern Prince George’s County with Anacostia Park in Washington through the Fort Foote and National Harbor areas, Oxon Cove Park, and the Bolling Anacostia Tract.

In addition, existing trails on the Virginia shore should continue to be strengthened in the Rosslyn area, providing access from nearby bridges to the Mount Vernon Trail. The existing foot trail north from Arlington along the George Washington Memorial Parkway should be linked to other county trails and extend along the American Legion Bridge connecting the C&O Canal National Historical Park. Where feasible, the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail should be developed on both sides of the Anacostia River to connect existing pedestrian and bicycle trails on the National Mall to those along Anacostia River tributaries in Maryland.

Providing or maintaining public access to open-space areas of particular interest or usefulness allows otherwise unused parkland and open space to become a resource that can be used and enjoyed by all. Additionally, access to major open space could contribute to a “greenbelt” around the region. This green space band could be comprised of stream valleys, agricultural farm land, parks, and other natural and open space areas. The green band concept, which should be a collaboration between federal, state, local, regional, and private entities, builds upon existing federal, state, and local open space programs to conserve land. Green space could include major federal holdings, such as the Patuxent Research Refuge, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, and the Marine Corps Base Quantico, as well as other public and private lands throughout the region. Green space also includes land with permitted and restrictive access to the public.

Connectivity and Access

Policies

The federal government should:

1. Promote public access along the region’s waterfronts, including waterfronts on military and other properties when security considerations will permit.

2. Plan, complete, and maintain connection between public parks and open space.
The Value of Open Space

Parks and open space are valued for a variety of reasons—aesthetics, active and passive recreational opportunities, restorative attributes, historic significance, cultural events, environmental benefits, ecological benefits, educational purposes, added economic value, and the opportunity to socialize and congregate with others. In short, society values parks for a multiplicity of reasons, each as unique as the individual user.

Aesthetic. Trees, flowers, and other green vegetation offer beauty and welcome contrast to the built environment. Benches, fountains, sculpture, and other built features can further enhance the beauty of urban open spaces.

Recreational. From active sports to quiet relaxation, open space can provide opportunities for a variety of outdoor activities for people of all ages. While the neighborhood park is most often considered to be the place for recreation, a space no bigger than a city lot can provide valuable space for neighborhood recreation.

Restorative. Natural open spaces, even small ones, can help people “get away” from the din of urban life. Nature can help to restore people physically and psychologically by reducing stress, improving moods, and even lowering blood pressure.

Cultural. A variety of cultural activities and events occur in parks in the National Capital Region, from music, art, and history to celebrations and festivals of other nations.

Environmental. Vegetated open space can improve air and water quality. Trees rid the air of harmful dust and gasses and lower summertime temperatures. Streamside vegetation filters runoff, and wetlands absorb chemicals that would otherwise pollute surface waters.

Ecological. Patches and corridors of open space provide essential habitat for the native plants and wildlife of the National Capital Region. Urban open space networks can sustain complex ecosystems and enhance residents’ understanding of and relationship with nature.

Educational. Many parks and open spaces serve the dual purpose of providing an educational experience while accommodating people in park-like outdoor settings. These educational experiences are often directly related to the purpose of the open space or park.

Economic. Parks, greenways, and other open spaces can significantly enhance property values, which has been demonstrated in studies of prices people are willing to pay for visual and physical access to open space.

Social. Neighborhood open space, such as community gardens and play lots, often serve a vital function in bringing people together and in building personal relationships and bonds that will promote community identity and stability.

Parks and Landscapes

Parks can be categorized many different ways. Size, use, location, and historic value are just some of the distinctions that are used to determine if the inventory of parks meets the needs of the users. Many parks do not fall neatly into one category. For example, the National Mall is a monumental open space, historic for both its architecture and designed historic landscape as well as the significant events that have occurred on it. It also serves as an educational resource and a place of active recreation and contemplative reflection for both residents and visitors.

The largest park operator in the region is the National Park Service with more than 700 individual sites. In the National Capital Region, the federal government is the steward of a variety of parks under its jurisdiction of many federal agencies. The largest park operator in the region is the National Park Service, with more than 700 individual sites, ranging from community parks that serve as neighborhood gathering places to national monuments that attract visitors from around the world. Other federal agencies that operate parks or manage open space include the Smithsonian Institution with its National Zoological Park, the U.S. Department of Agriculture with its National Arboretum, and the U.S. Army with its operation of Arlington National Cemetery. Further out in the region, the Department of Veterans Affairs is responsible for Balls Bluff National Cemetery; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service operates the Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge; and the Bureau of Land Management runs Meadowood Farm.

Other important parks are privately owned. Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens is one such example, though much of the adjacent land is under the control of the federal government. The Mount Vernon Memorial Highway portion of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, Piscataway Park, Fort Washington, Fort Hunt, and other land areas within the viewshed from Mount Vernon are considered integral parts of the historic property's landscape setting. The surrounding areas and natural views and vistas from Mount Vernon to Piscataway Park and beyond should be protected and enhanced to maintain the integrity of the historic setting.

Most parks in the National Capital Region can be placed into one of the following categories: monumental and designed landscape parks and parkways, natural parks, recreational parks, waterfront parks, and historic parks.
Monumental and Designed Landscape Parks

Designed landscape parks are the squares, circles, and triangles associated with the L’Enfant City as green landscaped areas. These areas provide oases for pedestrians in both neighborhoods and downtown areas, and settings for existing and future monuments and memorials with ornamental plantings. These urban park areas are often small parks and designed landscapes with fountains, monuments, memorials, and other features of civic art. Examples include Farragut Square, McPherson Square, Dupont Circle, Franklin Square, Lafayette Park, Pershing Park, Lincoln Park, and Stanton Park, as well as many smaller triangular parks within neighborhoods. Other designed landscape parks are larger, and often have cultural and educational purposes. Examples of these resources include Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, the Carter Barron Amphitheater, Meridian Hill Park, the National Arboretum, the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, and the National Zoo.

Monumental parks and landscapes provide settings for public buildings, monuments, and memorials. They create and enhance pedestrian spaces; they showcase ornamental plants; and they are used for displays, cultural activities, passive recreation, and controlled active recreational activities. The National Mall is perhaps the most significant example of a monumental park, and several planning issues must be addressed to ensure its future integrity as a national gathering place for civic celebrations and demonstrations, and as a place of recreation and education.

The demand is increasing for prime locations for new memorials and museums in the heart of the nation's capital. At the same time, the monumental core may soon surpass its capacity to accommodate these facilities. New memorials and museums may encroach on the settings of existing memorials, threatening the loss of the historic designed landscapes and features that make the Mall and its adjacent areas special places.

Following the release of the Legacy Plan, the Commission developed the Memorials and Museums Master Plan to preserve the open space, recreation lands, and scenic qualities of the monumental core. The master plan’s Commemorative Zone Policy, which has now been codified in law by the U.S. Congress, established the Reserve, a geographical area encompassing the central cross-axes of the Mall, from the U.S. Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial. No new memorial sites will be
permitted in this area. The law also delineates Area I, which is immediately adjacent to the Reserve and is considered to be a sensitive area designated for commemorative works of preeminent historic and national significance. Area II encompasses the rest of the city, where new commemorative works are encouraged, with emphasis on the important North Capitol Street, South Capitol Street, and East Capitol Street axes; circles and squares on major avenues; waterfronts; urban gateways; and scenic overlooks. The Memorials and Museums Master Plan identified 100 potential sites throughout the District of Columbia for locating new commemorative works. As an extension of the Mall, but within Area II, Hain's Point at the tip of East Potomac Park was identified as a location for a future memorial of lasting historical significance, provided that existing recreational resources are not compromised. Additional information and a map of the Commemorative Zones can be found in the Visitors Element.

Finally, sites of existing buildings at prominent and strategic locations in the monumental core should be considered when the useful life of those buildings has ended. Examples include the Navy Annex area, the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, the Liberty Loan Building, and the Department of Agriculture North Building.

Parks and Landscapes

Policies

Monumental and Designed Landscape Parks

The federal government should:

1. Restore, protect, and enhance historic designed landscape parks (squares, circles, and triangles) associated with the L’Enfant City.

2. Maintain small urban parks primarily as historic parks and designed landscapes with fountains, monuments, memorials, tree cover, and other features of civic art.

3. Provide facilities and areas for events such as concerts, fairs, and displays throughout the National Capital Region, at appropriate locations where such activities will not damage significant existing resources, disturb commemorative settings, or adversely impact adjacent neighborhoods.

4. Enhance the great cross-axes of the Mall, and protect them from inappropriate development.

5. Use monumental parks and landscapes to provide settings for public buildings, monuments, and memorials, and to create special environments for limited activities.

6. Site memorials in monumental and designed landscape parks in compliance with the Memorials and Museums Master Plan.

7. Create new open space, memorials, or museums at prominent and strategically located sites in the monumental core when the useful life of the existing buildings on the site has ended.

8. Maintain East and West Potomac Park as an extension of the Mall, as a valuable recreational open space, and as a space that can be used for outdoor cultural events, gatherings, and celebrations.
Natural Parks

Natural parks include open space that is primarily forest or wetland, rather than designed landscape, and is typically preserved for its scenic, ecological, or topographical qualities rather than, or in addition to, particular historic significance. Examples of natural parks in the National Capital Region include Great Falls Park, Rock Creek Park, Prince William Forest Park, and the Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge.

Rock Creek Park and its tributary parks in the District and Montgomery County serve important functions with their existing topography, indigenous plant materials, and other natural conditions providing open space amenities. Recreational uses such as hiking, driving for pleasure, biking, horseback riding, and picnicking should be permitted, to the extent that environmental qualities of the park are not adversely affected. The borders of the park should receive special protection from adjacent development that could cause erosion or adverse visual impacts.

Waterfront Parks

Within the urbanized area of the National Capital Region, most of the shorelines along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers have been preserved as parkland or in a semi-natural state. However, developed shorelines along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers can be found in Georgetown, the Southwest Waterfront, the Southeast Federal Center, and the Washington Navy Yard in the District of Columbia, and in Old Town Alexandria in Virginia.

The shorelines and waterfronts of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers within the District of Columbia should be publicly owned or accessible, except at planned waterfront locations in Georgetown, portions of the Southwest Waterfront along the Washington Channel, and Buzzard Point, where controlled private development could be permitted.

Noncontiguous parkland is intermixed with industrial uses on the Anacostia River and access to parks is limited at places. Continuity of urban parklands should be secured from the 11th Street Bridge to Buzzard Point in order to provide uninterrupted riverfront open space. Industrial and nonconforming uses of parklands should be phased out. Future improvements to Anacostia Park should protect sensitive natural and cultural resources while allowing the addition of park amenities and increasing public access for recreation.
Parks and Landscapes

Policies

Waterfront Parks

The federal government should:

1. Link open space along the waterfront to provide a continuous public open space system.

2. Develop the banks of the Anacostia River as a high-quality urban park with a mix of active and passive recreational opportunities.

3. Ensure that Anacostia Park functions as a regional recreational resource, emphasizing the park’s special riverside, ecological, and scenic qualities and character.

4. Complete the waterfront parks in Georgetown and Alexandria.

Anacostia Waterfront Initiative

NCPC’s Legacy Plan envisioned new growth and development east of the U.S. Capitol, and identified opportunities for parks along the Anacostia River. Today, the federal and District of Columbia governments have partnered to move this vision forward through the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) and are working together to successfully meet federal and local needs on federal sites. A critical component of AWI is providing over 100 acres of new waterfront public spaces as “Riverparks” and developing a 16-mile “Riverwalk” trail system along both sides of the Anacostia River. Federal involvement in this park and trail system is extensive. The National Park Service manages Anacostia Park, including Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Gardens, and Poplar Point. These areas alone are approximately 41 percent of the AWI study area. Other federal facilities along the Anacostia River include the National Arboretum, Fort McNair, and the Navy Yard, where providing continuous trail systems will require balancing public access goals with the security needs and mandates for these facilities. Another example of the federal government’s commitment to AWI is the five-acre waterfront park developed as part of the Southeast Federal Center, a public-private development partnership administered through GSA, which will provide a link in the proposed trail system.
Historic Parks

Historic parks are important legacies of national, historic, architectural, and landscape significance. Special efforts should be taken to respect their integrity while providing for the interpretation of their history. Ancillary uses, such as access, and visitor and multi-purpose activities should not detract from the historical value of these sites. Examples of historic parks include the Fort Circle Parks, the Manassas National Battlefield Park, and the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

Development and enhancement of the Fort Circle Parks should protect their cultural resources and be compatible with their important natural landscape features, which are visible from the monumental core. Community-oriented recreational opportunities, interpretation of the fort sites, and a well-delineated connecting trail in a park-like setting—utilizing the McMillan Plan park connections—should be provided throughout the system.

Appropriate development adjacent to the Manassas National Battlefield Park should be ensured for the protection of its open space character and historical qualities. Master or management plans for the park and local development plans for areas adjacent to the park should be coordinated to ensure the application of appropriate land uses and development standards for the surrounding areas.

Preservation of the C&O Canal National Historical Park's historic and natural resources, including its biodiversity and endangered species, should remain the primary focus of the park. However, recreational uses such as bicycling, jogging, hiking, and boating should be permitted, where consistent with this focus. Adjacent development should be low density, except in Georgetown. Public utilities requiring water from the Potomac should be located and constructed so as to protect the historic integrity and natural qualities of the park and help preserve and restore the health of the aquatic ecosystem and shoreline habitats.

Parks and Landscapes Policies

Historic Parks

The federal government should:

1. Establish and preserve historic parks as important legacies of national, historic, architectural, and landscape significance.

2. Preserve the important scenic, historic, and natural elements of the Fort Circle Parks.

3. Preserve Manassas National Battlefield Park as a significant historical Civil War landmark and cultural landscape resource.

4. Preserve the C&O Canal National Historical Park as a legacy of inland waterway development and as a significant wildlife corridor.

5. Preserve and protect the environs of Mount Vernon National Historic Site as a national legacy.
Terrain Features

Terrain features are distinctive topographic variations in the natural landscape, such as the escarpment of hills that form a topographic bowl surrounding the L’Enfant City; the palisades and gorges along the Potomac River and Rock Creek; the Coastal Plain and Piedmont Plateau in which Washington is situated; and the mountains of the western and northwestern part of the region. From L’Enfant’s time onward, topography has defined and characterized the capital, resulting in thoughtful relationships between urbanized areas and natural terrain. The natural juxtaposition of highlands and lowlands emphasized by extensive tree cover and tree lines contributes to the area’s unique views and vistas, including those seen from topographic vantage points on natural and cultural sites, such as Fort Circle Parks.

Topography has defined and characterized the capital, resulting in thoughtful relationships between urbanized areas and natural terrain.

Lowland and rim features of the L’Enfant City and environs form the topographic bowl. Its geographic boundaries are the Florida Avenue escarpment (the boundary of the L’Enfant Plan), the Anacostia Hills, and Arlington Hills. The bowl has forested ridgelines punctuated with constructed forms, and provides unobstructed views of the monumental core.

The National Capital Region is divided into two topographical provinces, the Coastal Plain and the Piedmont Plateau. The low-lying, flat Coastal Plain is characterized by many shallow inland bays and meandering tidal rivers. Further west are the low, rolling hills of the Piedmont Plateau. These hills are like stair steps to the higher mountains of the region to the west. Areas of typical Coastal Plain and Piedmont Plateau character have been preserved at the federally owned Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Patuxent Research Refuge, Manassas National Battlefield Park, Washington-Dulles International Airport, Fort Meade, Marine Corps Base Quantico, and Prince William Forest Park.
The palisades and gorges of the rivers and streams in the region, such as the Potomac Palisades, the gorge surrounding Great Falls, and the fall-line gorge through Rock Creek Valley, are areas of dramatic elevation changes where calm, upstream rivers and creeks converge at spectacular fall lines. The palisades and gorges are predominantly in their natural state, free of intrusive constructed forms.

The Blue Ridge, Bull Run, South Catoctin, and Sugar Loaf Mountains in the western and northwestern part of the region rise above the gently rolling hills of the Virginia Piedmont to their east. These natural forested areas are visible from the suburban locations of the region.

These geographic features provide views and vistas of terrain in its natural state, and the higher elevations of these features allow unobstructed views to the lowlands below. However, urbanization and other constructed intrusions threaten to obstruct and diminish these views. For example, construction in recent decades has changed the views to and from the topographic bowl, and further potential threats remain in this and other areas.

East of the region’s mountain ranges, creeping suburbanization and the construction of man-made intrusions on the landscape threaten to impair views of the mountains and diminish the aesthetic natural qualities of adjacent historic sites.

The transition from a natural to an urban setting on the higher slopes and crests paralleling the Potomac River and its tributary valleys should remain gradual, and permitted development should not exceed the

Federal agencies should generally identify appropriate locations for antennas and towers during their master planning process.
Terrain Features

Policies

The federal government should:

1. Protect and enhance the region’s unique terrain features. These features include, but are not limited to:
   - The region’s rivers and streams, their associated valleys and bluffs, and the shoreline park system.
   - The Blue Ridge, Bull Run, South Catoctin, and Sugar Loaf Mountains in the western and northwestern part of the region.
   - The headwater, reservoir, and other scenic and ecologically significant terrain areas along the Patuxent River.
   - The areas of typical Coastal Plain and Piedmont Plateau character.
   - The forested ridgelines of the topographic bowl surrounding the central city of Washington.

2. Ensure that development does not intrude through the ridge and tree lines of natural terrain areas unless it will not impact vistas to and from those areas.

3. Protect terrain features throughout the region through careful design.

4. Discourage the location of towers, antennas, or similar structures in or adjacent to the federal park system, to the extent possible.

5. In rare instances where antennas or towers must be located within a federal park or open space, ensure conformance with the Commission’s Guidelines for Antennas on Federal Property in the National Capital Region as well as the following:
   - Every effort should be made to avoid locating antennas and tower structures within the viewsheds of established natural and cultural landscapes and open spaces.
   - Innovative designs that reduce the visibility of antennas and towers in a natural setting should be encouraged. The use of compatible alternative tower structures that are similar in design or appearance to trees or other tall features may help to reduce the visual impact of these structures.

6. Along with local agencies, identify appropriate locations for the siting of antennas and towers through their master plans and comprehensive plans, to the extent practical. This should help protect the functional integrity of, and the important view-sheds to and from, federal parks and open space areas.
Terrain Features

Policies

Topographic Bowl

The federal government should:

1. Maintain the prominence of the topographic bowl formed by lowland and rim features of the L'Enfant City and environs by controlling the urban and natural skylines in the Anacostia, Florida Avenue, and Arlington County portions of the bowl as follows:
   
   - Preserve the green setting of the Anacostia hills and integrate building masses with, and subordinate to, the natural topography.

   - Maintain the Florida Avenue escarpment’s natural definition of the L’Enfant Plan boundaries by retaining developments that are fitted to the landforms and by promoting low-rise development that can be distinguished from the greater height of the L’Enfant City’s core areas.

   - Within the western portion of the bowl, retain a horizontal skyline by relating building heights to the natural slope and rim areas of Arlington Ridge as viewed from the Capitol, the Mall, and other riverside outlooks.

   - Control the urban skyline in the background areas of the Mall vista, as viewed from the west terrace of the U.S. Capitol, by ensuring consistency with the building height limits specified by Arlington County in an agreement with the Commission for the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor. Exceptional or “bonus” heights should be avoided.

Palisades and Gorges

The federal government should:

1. Maintain the rugged terrain characteristics of the stream valleys.

2. Retain the palisades and gorges of rivers and streams in their natural state.

3. Ensure that the transition from a natural to an urban character remains gradual in the area of palisades and gorges.

4. Maintain the “fall-line” gorge through Rock Creek Valley in its natural condition and keep its transition highlands and rim areas and surroundings free of intrusive constructed forms.
Greenways and Greenbelts

One of the defining characteristics of the National Capital Region is its green setting. Trees, grass, and other plant materials provide a landscape and park-like character. Narrow corridors of natural landscape connect more prominent parks and open space; and significant areas of undeveloped landscape form the basis for a greenbelt around the metropolitan area.

Green Setting

Perhaps the most predominant characteristic of the region’s green setting is its abundant tree cover and vegetation, from the urbanized areas of Downtown Washington to the suburbs of Maryland and Virginia. In addition to the aesthetic benefits, tree cover provides environmental and economic benefits by reducing stormwater runoff, air pollution, and energy usage. Plants reduce stormwater runoff by intercepting rainwater, and trees slow storm flow, reducing the volume of water that must be managed at once. In addition, trees and vegetation provide air quality benefits to the region by removing pollutants from the air.

Greenways

From narrow threads of natural greenway to the greenbelt in outlying parts of the region, open space at many different scales contributes to the area’s green setting. Greenways typically follow natural or constructed features such as streams or roads, and are used for transportation, recreation, and environmental protection. Greenway systems provide natural buffers that improve water quality, reduce the impacts of flooding, and provide wildlife habitat and corridors. Greenways also promote adjacent economic development and increase the beauty of neighborhoods as well as the value of surrounding properties. These corridors enhance the social and psychological well-being of citizens by providing them with settings in which to spend their leisure time.

Some of the greenway areas in the National Capital Region under federal control include Rock Creek Park, the Fort Circle Parks, Whitehaven Parkway, Klingle Valley Parkway, Glover-Archbold Park, Soapstone Valley Park, Piney Branch Parkway, and Oxon Run Parkway. These natural areas should be protected from border development that would adversely impact their natural resources and visual quality.

Greenbelts

A ring of major open space in the outlying parts of the region could provide a varied greenbelt zone that encompasses continuous wildlife habitats, local recreational amenities, and federal research and training areas. This ring could be formed through a combination of local actions (through limitations on private development) and continuing protection of federal properties within this greenbelt. In order to expand this greenbelt, it must include much more publicly and privately owned open space, incorporate existing local initiatives, and expand upon them. An established greenbelt system also would protect major federal installations, such as Beltsville Agricultural Research Facility, Fort Meade, and Marine Corps Base Quantico, all of which should continue as open space. Implementation of a greenbelt extends beyond the jurisdiction of the federal government to a partnership of local governments and landowners.
Several major federal facilities that could contribute to the greenbelt around the region include: Andrews Air Force Base, Fort Belvoir, Marine Corps Base Quantico, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, and the Patuxent Research Refuge. There are also wooded, undeveloped buffer areas, such as those along the perimeter of Andrews Air Force Base and Washington-Dulles International Airport, that could augment and enhance the greenbelt.

During the past several decades, the region has experienced a decline in tree and landscape cover due to increasing urbanization and higher attrition rates among trees, dramatically changing the ecology of the area. As the amount of forested area has declined and urban development has expanded, the tree and landscape loss has resulted in an increase in stormwater runoff, decreased air and water quality, and measurable changes in air temperatures from ground surfaces.

Maintaining and restoring tree and landscape cover is a cost-effective way to improve urban infrastructure, and tree cover is a good measure of ecological health. If the remaining tree and landscape cover is to be maintained and enhanced, the condition of existing trees and landscape must be improved; additional trees must be planted; and tree loss must be decreased in new development areas. Strategically planting trees in urban and suburban areas would increase energy savings, air and water quality, and wildlife habitat.

Other measures can be incorporated that balance the urban landscape with the natural ecological system, such as minimizing impervious surfaces and maintaining or restoring trees and vegetative cover.

Adverse development or land uses adjacent to green areas threatens to minimize or decrease their ecological benefits; and public funding is limited for new land acquisition for the development of greenways and additions to the greenbelt. In addition, the amount of greenways is inadequate and public access to many of the region’s green areas on federal installations is restricted.

### Greenways and Greenbelts

#### Policies

The federal government should:

1. Protect and maintain existing greenways and enhance greenbelt areas.
2. Support the establishment of new greenways and extensions and connections of new greenways.
3. Increase and conserve the tree canopy and landscape cover in urban areas of the region.
4. Protect and enhance the green landscape and park-like character provided by trees, grass, and other native plant materials in the National Capital Region by removing invasive species and replanting with native species.
5. Maintain large tree preserves and forests as part of future development in the region.
6. Conserve portions of federal installations that contribute to greenway and greenbelt areas.
7. Retain natural wooded buffer areas in the vicinity of federal installations throughout the region.
8. Protect and maintain the narrow threads of natural areas throughout the District, such as Whitehaven Parkway, Kline Valley Parkway, Glover-Archbold Park, Soapstone Valley Park, Piney Branch Parkway, and Oxon Run Parkway.
9. Incorporate street and shade trees as part of all public development, especially in the District, to help restore the historic green-city setting of the National Capital Region.
Rivers and Waterways

The waterways of the National Capital Region are an important defining characteristic of Washington, providing inland water routes for trade and transportation in the early days of the nation’s capital, and ecological, recreational, and scenic qualities today. There are a great variety of waterways in the region, and along their banks are natural areas, landscaped parks, and developed shorelines.

The Potomac and Anacostia Rivers are the greatest water resources in the region, and the confluence of these rivers form a mighty Y shape in the urban river setting. In addition, other waterways, such as Rock Creek and many unnamed tributaries and creeks, are important open space resources with fragile ecosystems. These ecosystems have unique aquatic plant life and are important for providing shoreline habitat, protecting watersheds, and filtering pollutants. Natural shorelines can be found along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, both inside the District and throughout the region. Water resources of special ecological importance along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers can be found in areas such as the Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Gardens, the coves and headlands south of Mount Vernon, Great Falls, Dyke Marsh, and the Gaps at Point of Rocks. Mason Neck, Kenilworth Marsh, Oxon Cove, Fox Ferry Cove, Smoot Cove, Broad Creek, and Piscataway Creek are important conservation and wildlife refuge areas.

Urbanization in the National Capital Region has deteriorated, and in some cases destroyed, riverine habitat, reducing the natural ecological function of the waterways and decreasing their landscape, wetland, and riverbank conditions. Channelization, undue siltation, intermittent flows, and covering over have harmed both the rivers and the adjacent shorebanks. Encroachment by urban development has destroyed the natural floodplain and wetland areas of the Anacostia River Valley, and both the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers have poor water quality: swimming, boating, and fishing are discouraged, as well as water-oriented tourist activities. Adjacent development and transportation infrastructure also take their toll, as bridges disturb unique local riverine habitat, and paved impervious areas inhibit the filtration of rain runoff, as at the Pentagon’s north parking lot along Boundary Channel.
The character of waterfront areas should reflect great variety, ranging from the developed shoreline in Georgetown, Old Town Alexandria, the Southwest Waterfront, the Southeast Federal Center, and Washington Navy Yard areas, to the more natural treatment along the shorelines of the Upper Anacostia and Potomac Rivers. Future development areas of intense activity should be carefully controlled and limited to selected key locations, such as the area around Buzzard Point, South Capitol Street, Poplar Point, and National Harbor. Development along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, including new roads and freeways, and concentrated governmental or institutional land uses that create barriers, should be designed to allow the public maximum visual and physical access to the waterfront. In other areas, the natural or landscaped character of the shoreline should be restored and preserved. The recreational uses of the rivers should be increased while simultaneously protecting the integrity and health of the shoreline ecosystem.

The closer a building is to the shoreline, the lower the profile should be. In areas characterized as urban waterfronts, such as the Georgetown Waterfront, the Southwest Waterfront, and areas near the Southeast Federal Center/Washington Navy Yard, there may be defined areas where building heights can be expected to be higher. Streets near shorelines where higher building heights could be focused include, but are not limited to, L’Enfant vistas such as South Capitol Street; New Jersey and Potomac Avenues; M Street, SE; and K Street, NW. Areas of lower building heights should generally include National Park Service lands and other parklands and natural areas.
Rivers and Waterways
*Policies*

The federal government should:

1. Protect the scenic and ecological values of waterways and stream valleys.
2. Restore forested buffers along waterways and stream valleys.
3. Protect and, where necessary, restore the region’s unique river-related features in their natural state. Such features include the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and marsh, the coves and headlands south of Mount Vernon, Great Falls, and the gaps at Point of Rocks.
4. Protect, restore, and enhance the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers as great open space resources and as recreational amenities, including shorelines and waterfront areas along rivers.
5. Improve the quality of water in the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers to allow for both restored natural habitats and increased recreational use.
6. Retain shoreline areas in their natural condition or appropriately landscape the water’s edge.
7. Manage all lands along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers in a manner that encourages the enjoyment and recreational use of water resources, while protecting the scenic and ecological values of the waterways.
8. Retain both privately and publicly owned land along waterways in a natural state, except in areas that are determined appropriate for development.
9. In urban waterfront areas that are determined appropriate for development:
   - Avoid construction in environmentally sensitive areas.
   - Restore, stabilize, and/or improve and landscape degraded areas of shorelines.
   - Limit development along or near the shoreline and integrate it with the generally low and continuous line of river embankments.
10. Avoid physical barriers to the waterfront, and long, unbroken stretches of buildings or walls along waterfronts.
11. Determine building height along or near the shoreline based on the building’s proximity to the shoreline.
12. Design and locate bridges so that they minimally affect local riverine habitat, waterways, shorelines, and valleys.
13. Encourage swimming, boating, and fishing facilities, as well as water-oriented tourist activities, on the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers.
14. Ensure that the shorelines and waterfronts of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers remain mostly publicly owned and that privately owned parks provide shoreline continuity through parks and promenades.
15. Discourage large paved parking areas and other non-water-related development along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers. Where large paved areas are required, preference should be given to using pervious surfaces. Existing large parking areas, such as the Pentagon’s north parking lot along Boundary Channel, should be removed as soon as feasible and restored to a landscaped condition with active or passive recreational uses.
Trails

There are hundreds of miles of trails in the National Capital Region, definable by use, purpose, topography, surface, and system. Trails range from those that are carefully designed and constructed according to standard techniques to nonconstructed trails that generally evolved informally from use.

Pedestrians use trails for walking, jogging, running, and skating. Trails that are appropriate for these purposes are typically heavily used and often accommodate people in wheelchairs. Other trails are used for more specialized purposes, such as bicycling or horseback riding. Watercraft use specially designated waterways as trails. Some trails are interpretive, with limited access to or around popular features, such as lakes. While all these trails are used for recreational purposes, pedestrian and bicycle trails are frequently used by commuters as well.

The topography and surface of trails can vary widely. From generally flat trails that may have no more elevation change than broad gentle dips, to steep or rugged trails with switchbacks and retaining walls or stone or log steps, trail surfaces can range from pavement or boardwalk to unpaved dirt or gravel. Often, the same trail will have varying degrees of improvements, and may be a hybrid of different types.

Patuxent Research Refuge

Trails in the National Capital Region often belong to one or more trail systems: local, regional, or national. Local trail systems, such as the Mount Vernon Trail, the Fort Circle Park system, and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Towpath, often have historic or especially scenic destinations and routes, and many are incorporated into larger regional trail systems. For example, the Fort Circle Park system was created from the former Civil War Defenses of Washington, and the proposed Fort Drive to connect them was part of the McMillan Commission's plan for the parks of the nation's capital in 1902. Although never completed, starting in the 1930s the federal government acquired substantial amounts of the land for the proposed Fort Circle Drive. Finishing a continuous trail as originally proposed could serve local and regional needs and accommodate educational as well as recreational purposes for both residents and tourists. (Maps on page 123 depict historic Civil War Defenses and NPS' Fort Circle Parks Plan.)

The Blue Trail is another example of a local trail system. A “blue trail” for paddle and rowing crafts on Washington's waterways would include signage and landing facilities along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, especially at key destinations such as the National Arboretum, Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, and other public and private attractions.

Regional trail systems, such as the East Coast Greenway, the American Discovery Trail, and the Potomac Heritage Trail, incorporate local trails into a larger network of trails over a broad geographic area. The East Coast Greenway, for example, is a long-distance city-to-city corridor for cyclists, hikers, and other nonmotorized users. It connects existing and planned trails that form a continuous safe, green route. The National Mall, Memorial Bridge, and the Mount Vernon Trail are official portions of the East Coast Greenway. The American Discovery Trail, stretching from the Pacific to the Atlantic runs through the NCR.

National trails are part of a federally designated system of trails incorporating recreational, scenic, and historic trails. The U.S. Congress established the system to incorporate existing trail systems and add connections between them.
Fort Circle Parks Plan

- NPS site - National Capital Parks, East
- NPS site - Rock Creek Park
- NPS site - GW Parkway
- Non-NPS Ownership

- Existing Trail (hiking/biking)
- Walking Trail (proposed)
- Visitor Facility (proposed)
- Earthworks (existing)
- Earthworks (no longer extant)
- Activity/Education Center
- Fort Dupont Improvements

Maps: Courtesy of the National Park Service

Civil War Defenses, 1865

- National Park Service site
- Forts and batteries on private property
- Managed by another public agency

Forts and batteries on private property
- Managed by another public agency

[Map of Civil War Defenses, 1865]
Although the trail system throughout the region is extensive, there is a demand for more trails of all types as the urbanized area encroaches on existing trails. Some of these demands could be met by providing better connectivity between trail systems, and more access points to existing trails. Greater regional issues could be addressed by tying together the local and regional trails to the trails of the national trail system. Additionally, many trails do not meet current national trail standards. National trail standards take into account intended trail uses, user preferences, proximity to sensitive resources and other criteria and assign each trail to an appropriate trail class. Each trail class prescribes the appropriate level of improvements necessary for that trail. In addition, maintenance on some trail systems is inadequate. Existing trails should be better maintained and upgraded, with recurring activities such as litter clean-up, sweeping, brush-cutting, painting, and minor bridge repair and construction of support facilities such as benches, picnic tables, and kiosks.

Using federal assets such as bridges, trestles, and tunnels through extant railroad, utility, and highway corridors, and developing other trails through federal civilian and military installations, the trail system could be augmented and expanded regionwide. In order to appeal to a variety of trail users, trails should connect to Metro stations, employment centers, and shopping areas.

Trails
Policies

The federal government should:

1. Develop new trails and complete partial trails that connect to parks, schools, businesses, and other community amenities to provide a system of contiguous regional trails for extensive recreational and transportation use. Examples of trails to be completed include:
   - Anacostia Riverwalk Trail
   - Metropolitan Branch Trail
   - Potomac Heritage Trail

2. Connect local trails to regional and national trail networks.

3. Use federal infrastructure to develop and connect trail systems.

4. Maintain and improve trail quality for a variety of users, as appropriate.

5. Protect trails from adjacent incompatible development.

6. Protect environmentally significant land adjacent to trails.

7. Develop a “blue trail” on Washington’s waterways.

8. Complete the Fort Circle Park trail system as a continuous trail, linking the historic Civil War Fort sites within the District. Existing street rights-of-way should be used when necessary to connect the various sections of the Fort Circle Parks. The existing hiking trail through Glover-Archbold Park should link the Fort Circle Parks trail system with the C&O Canal trail.
Gateways

A gateway is a point of arrival, a transition point that can have varying dimensions, such as the point where a scenic view or vista comes into sight, or the terminus of a journey, such as an airport or a train station. In the National Capital Region, gateways include major roads, highways, and transportation terminals. These approaches to Washington are important to how visitors, residents, and workers experience the capital.

The points where gateway routes enter the District of Columbia are of special significance. These entry points, and adjacent development, should provide an appropriate sense of transition and arrival, requiring careful design on both sides of the District boundary. The boundary streets of the District are defining features of Washington and should be enhanced and specially treated.

The major approaches to the region should be dramatic in appearance, but pleasant and functional, with a strong sense of arrival. Visitors and residents should enjoy the experience of entering a special place through gateways that are protected from unattractive development and designed and maintained in a manner consistent with their special role.

Special care, too, should be given to the points where gateway routes provide views of the monumental core, especially where such views first appear when approaching the core. These important views should be protected from signage and other intrusions, and enhanced by landscaping that is carefully designed and maintained to frame those views. View corridors to the monumental city of Washington—such as those experienced when traveling southbound on the George Washington Memorial Parkway atop the Potomac Palisades, or northbound along the Parkway from Alexandria—should be maintained and protected for the enjoyment of all. Underdeveloped gateways, such as New York Avenue, NE and South Capitol Street, should be improved to provide a positive image of the nation’s capital and a dignified route to the monumental core from the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and Suitland Parkway, respectively.

The federal government should work with local agencies to ensure the protection and enhancement of gateway routes through the appropriate regulation of nearby development, including scale and use. Where development is unavoidable (such as the Potomac Yards project), it should be carefully designed to avoid detracting from the scenic qualities of gateways and parkways. Where existing development is of an inappropriate character (such as along portions of New York Avenue), redevelopment should be encouraged to enhance the qualities of the gateway or parkway. Limiting advertising signs and erecting sound and noise attenuation walls complements their overall appearance. Gateways should have street trees and attractive street amenities in urban or densely developed areas and should not be encroached upon by new buildings.

Gateways

Policies

The federal government should:

1. Work with local jurisdictions to ensure the protection and enhancement of gateway routes.
2. Regulate the scale and use of nearby development.
3. Improve and visually enhance gateways with street trees and attractive street amenities.
4. Improve South Capitol Street between the Suitland Parkway and the U.S. Capitol with open space amenities consistent with the Legacy Plan.
Parkways

A parkway is a linear, landscaped park designed to encompass a roadway that is restricted to use by automobiles. Although the first concept of parkway design in the District of Columbia was identified by Pierre L'Enfant in his eighteenth-century plan for the city, the first parkway in Washington, D.C. was not approved until 1902, when it was identified for use by bicyclists and horse-drawn carriages.

There are five major parkways in the National Capital Region under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, and several smaller adjacent connecting roads with parkway characteristics. The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, the George Washington Memorial Parkway, the Clara Barton Parkway, the Suitland Parkway, and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway all have open qualities worthy of preservation, and are characterized by their scenic or pastoral views.

The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway

The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is the first federally constructed parkway and one of the best examples of early parkway design. Authorized in 1913 to enable the reclamation and conservation of the polluted Rock Creek, which had served as a dumping ground for nearby industries and tenement dwellers, it provides a scenic drive between the monumental core and Rock Creek Park. It is noteworthy for the graceful path it makes along the creek, into the cavernous valley where Rock Creek begins. The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway links two major parks—the National Zoological Park to the north and the Potomac River parks to the south.

The George Washington Memorial Parkway

The first section of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, was developed in 1932 as a memorial to George Washington. That section of the parkway was intended to connect the historic site of Mount Vernon, where he lived, to the nation's capital, which he founded. With its natural scenery along the Potomac River, the parkway is used to travel to historical, natural, and recreational areas, offering respite from the urban pressures of metropolitan Washington. Although the parkway is considered a commuter route by many local residents, its scenic and historic qualities are more important than its traffic-carrying role.

The Clara Barton Parkway

The Maryland side of the George Washington Memorial Parkway is a short segment named in honor of Clara Barton. It runs along the Maryland shore of the Potomac River between the District of Columbia and the Capital Beltway. Dotted along the parkway are several small access points to the adjacent C&O Canal towpath.

The Suitland Parkway

The Suitland Parkway was opened in 1944. It connects Andrews Air Force Base to South Capitol Street, a major link to the U.S. Capitol used by visitors and commuters approaching the nation's capital from the east. The White House, congressional and military personnel, and foreign dignitaries who fly into and out of Andrews Air Force Base frequently use the parkway. The parkway often provides foreign heads of state with their first views of the United States.
The Baltimore-Washington Parkway

The Baltimore-Washington Parkway opened in 1954. It is a 29-mile scenic highway that connects Baltimore, Maryland with Washington, D.C.

Visual and physical encroachment on and adjacent to parkways is an important challenge threatening the scenic and pastoral qualities of parkways in the National Capital Region. In recent years, development adjacent to parkways has threatened to encroach on—and, in some cases already has encroached on—the viewshed from parkways and associated parklands. Continued development pressures could result in more structures that are visible from the roadway. In addition to buildings, demand for new Metrorail lines and parkway interchanges due to development pressures continues to threaten the scenic views and vistas of the parkways. For example, the recent extension of Metrorail’s Green Line to Branch Avenue required spanning the Suitland Parkway with elevated rail tracks. Likewise, another challenge is protecting the historic designed landscape and parkway qualities from being compromised by the application of federal freeway design standards. Safety is important, but a balance must be achieved to preserve the scenic qualities and design character of historic parkways.

**Parkways Policies**

The federal government should:

1. Maintain parkways as scenic landscape corridors, and protect their historic aspects.

2. Encourage local jurisdictions to plan for and zone development in such a way that it is not visible from parkways.

3. Encourage local jurisdictions to minimize—through planning, regulation, and careful design—the impact of development that is visible from parkways.

4. Where transportation system impacts are unavoidable, require action to minimize and mitigate these impacts to maintain parkway characteristics.