



# Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements

2024



The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital | Federal Elements

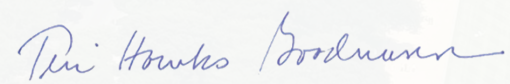


## Message from the Chair

As we celebrate the National Capital Planning Commission’s centennial in 2024, we are reminded of how much our capital has evolved. The nation’s capital is a symbol of our democracy, and our values are represented in physical form through civic buildings, monuments and memorials, expansive public spaces, and thriving communities. NCPC’s centennial is a time to reflect on how the lessons of the past can inform today’s planning for a resilient and equitable region, and how the federal government can lead by example.

As NCPC’s primary policy document, the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements plays an important role in guiding the region’s future development while preserving its history, culture, and natural beauty. It helps us honor our past while moving forward sustainably. Building upon a rich legacy of planning, the Commission responds to changing needs and opportunities, ensuring the Comprehensive Plan remains relevant and effective.

I am pleased that the Comprehensive Plan’s Federal Elements are tackling critical planning challenges like environmental sustainability, equity, and the changing federal footprint for workplaces. This guidance helps today’s leaders ensure a more resilient, vibrant capital. It sets a standard for other communities worldwide, showing how comprehensive planning can make a place thrive for future generations.



Teri Hawks Goodman  
Chair

# Introduction Chapter

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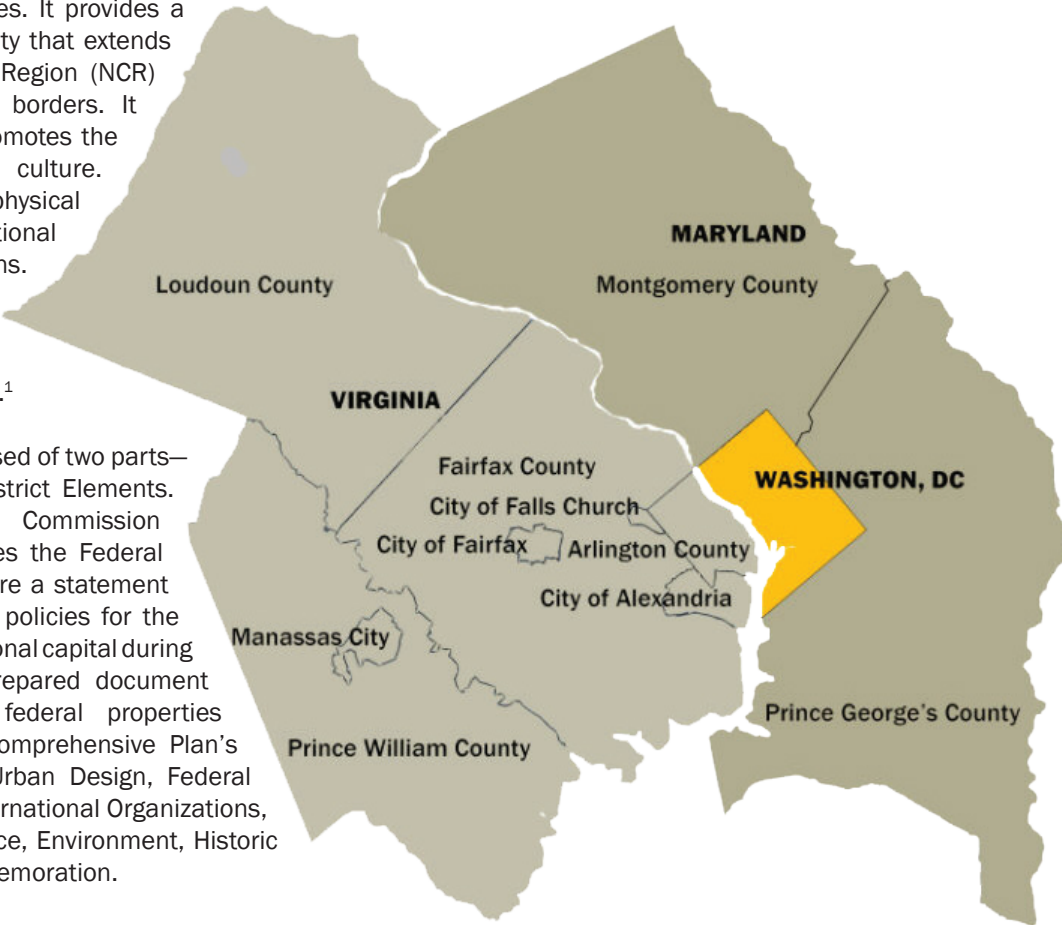


Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan | Federal Elements

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. Washington is also a bustling local city that nearly 700,000 people call home and work to shape the city’s present and future.<sup>1</sup>

The Comprehensive Plan is comprised of two parts—the Federal Elements and the District Elements. The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), a federal agency, prepares the Federal Elements. The Federal Elements are a statement of principles, goals, and planning policies for the growth and development of the national capital during the next 20 years. The NCPC prepared document addresses matters related to federal properties and interests in the NCR. The Comprehensive Plan’s eight Federal Elements include Urban Design, Federal Workplace, Foreign Missions & International Organizations, Transportation, Parks & Open Space, Environment, Historic Preservation, and Visitors & Commemoration.

The District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP), on behalf of the Mayor, prepares the District Elements which are reviewed and adopted by the Council of the District of Columbia. The District Elements consist of three Context Elements, twelve Citywide Elements, and ten Area Elements. NCPC reviews the District Elements to ensure they do not negatively impact the federal government’s interests or functions in Washington.



NCPC commemorated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2024. The agency’s centennial offered a unique opportunity to reflect on the history and evolution of planning in Washington, DC and the surrounding region, acknowledge barriers and inequities created by past planning practices, and consider lessons learned to inform the agency’s work today and into the future. To find out more visit: <https://centennial.ncpc.gov/>



NCPC developed a “Centennial Exhibit” for display at DC libraries as part of the 100<sup>th</sup> celebration year, 2024.

## NCPC's Role and Responsibility

The region's significant federal presence requires extensive planning and coordination. As the central planning agency for the federal government in the National Capital Region (NCR), NCPC is charged with planning for the appropriate and orderly development of the region and the conservation of its important natural and historical features. The Commission coordinates all federal planning activities in the NCR and has several planning functions.



View of the U.S. Capitol building from South Capitol Street, SE.

Commission responsibilities in the NCR include:

- Preparing long-range plans and special studies to ensure the effective functioning of the federal government.
- Preparing the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* jointly with the District of Columbia government.
- Approving federal master plans and construction proposals as well as some District of Columbia 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.
- 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.

Section 4(a) of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952 requires that NCPC prepare and adopt a “comprehensive, consistent, and coordinated plan for the National Capital.”<sup>2</sup> The Comprehensive Plan’s Federal Elements are the blueprint for the long-term development of the nation’s 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 as described in the Federal Elements.

## The Comprehensive Plan: Shared Stewardship

Collectively, federal, regional, and local planning plays an important role in the character, development and growth, and livability of Washington. A vibrant Washington, DC 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 Comprehensive Plan’s Federal Elements are developed by NCPC and focus on the entire NCR. The District Elements are prepared by the District of Columbia’s Office of Planning. Combined, these elements constitute the District’s mandated planning documents, and guide development in Washington to balance federal and local interests with a collective responsibility for the natural, cultural, economic, equity, and social environments. Both the Federal and District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan have local, regional, and national significance and advance Washington’s great design and planning heritage.

The National Capital Planning Commission and the District of Columbia Office of Planning work together to enhance Washington 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 is a diverse region home to more than 5 million people.<sup>3</sup>*

The NCR encompasses the District of Columbia, Montgomery, and Prince George’s Counties in Maryland, as well as Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties in Virginia, along with all cities within the geographical bounds of this area.

Anchored by the iconic nation’s capital, Washington, DC, and bridging two states—Maryland and Virginia—this region stands as one of the most educated and affluent metropolitan areas in the United States. With over 25 universities contributing to its intellectual landscape, the NCR boasts the distinction of being one of the highest-educated metropolitan area in the nation. The region is also one of the most diverse, with nearly 175 different languages being spoken. The median household income in the NCR has increased by 23 percent since 2016, further cementing its status as one of the highest-income metropolitan areas in the country and dynamic hub of prosperity and opportunity.<sup>4,5</sup> The federal government supports the economic and cultural vibrancy of 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 Washington, DC as the established seat of the national government.

There are more than 230 memorials and museums in the city and surrounding environs. In 2022, Washington attracted approximately 20 million domestic visitors<sup>6</sup> and 1.3 million international visitors, generating about \$8.1 billion for the local economy.<sup>7</sup> 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.

Washington, DC is one of the world’s most important diplomatic centers. In 2013, there were 322 chanceries (chancery and chancery annexes), 78 ambassador residences, and 46 missions to the Organization of American States located within Washington, DC.<sup>8</sup> In addition to their role in promoting peace and stability among nations, foreign missions also have a positive economic impact in the region due to their ability to attract visitors and generate country-to-country business opportunities. 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, even though the federal share of total regional employment has declined since 1990. In 2013, approximately 12.3 percent of the total regional workforce was federal. In 2022, approximately 436,000 federal employees worked in the NCR, in a region of four million workers.<sup>9</sup> Of the total federal workforce, approximately 47 percent worked in Washington, DC; 31 percent in Virginia; and 22 percent in Maryland.<sup>10</sup>



In 2023, more than 3 million people visited the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.



*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 have increased. Regional federal procurement spending grew from approximately \$32.3 billion in 2001 to more than \$80 billion in 2010.<sup>11,12</sup> Most of the growth was due to large procurements for homeland security and defense. In Fiscal Year 2017, the federal government accounted for approximately 30 percent of the Washington region's economy, which included \$78 billion for federal procurement.<sup>13</sup> Federal procurement spending saw an increase in 2020 and 2021 due to pandemic relief aid packages. Between 2019 and 2023 the average federal capital investment within the NCR was \$846 million.<sup>14</sup> However, the recent fiscal outlook suggests increased budget constraints that are pushing agencies to achieve their missions with greater efficiencies, limited budgets, and reduced spending on federal contracts.



View of Pennsylvania Avenue cycle track towards the U.S. Capitol.

*The federal government leases or owns a significant amount of space in the region.*

The federal government is the single largest owner and occupant of real property in the region. The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) owns, manages, constructs, and leases a total of approximately 95.6 million rentable square feet of space in the NCR.<sup>15</sup> There are approximately 500 leased buildings and 190 federally owned buildings, many of which are historic headquarters.<sup>16</sup> In addition to GSA, the U.S. Department of Defense controls more than 71 million square feet in more than 5,380 buildings in the NCR.<sup>17</sup>

*The federal government owns and maintains vast holdings of open space in the region.*

Parks and open space are important resources for residents, visitors, and workers. These federal parks and open spaces are significant settings for important monuments, grand public promenades, major federal buildings, quiet gatherings, and

other events. 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. Within the NCR, the National Park Service administers approximately 27 percent of the parks and open space.<sup>18</sup> These include historic sites, natural and cultural landscapes, public plazas, urban forests, and conservation areas at places such as Piscataway Park, Prince William Forest Park, Great Falls Park, the Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, the L'Enfant Plan's formal squares and circles, the National Mall, Manassas Battlefield, and the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal.



View from Anacostia Park. Source: National Park Service, Marcey Frutchey.



# The Planning Legacy

## L’Enfant Plan Era

Today’s Washington, DC is the result of a confluence of cultures, dating back nearly 4,000 years before its development as the nation’s capital. The lands now comprising Washington were first inhabited by Native American chiefdoms, primarily the Piscataway, Anacostank, Pamunkey, Mattapanient, Nangemeick, and Tauxehent.<sup>19</sup> European exploration of the area began in the early 17th century when English explorer John Smith navigated the Potomac River and mapped the surrounding terrain. While Native people and European settlers supported each other economically, new diseases brought by European immigrants and land conflicts decimated the indigenous population. In 1632, King Charles I of England granted Lord Baltimore control over Maryland, which encompassed part of the future District of Columbia territory, while the future state of Virginia would claim the opposite bank of the Potomac. By



The L’Enfant Plan of 1791, planned for two “avenues” of public land, one extending from the President’s House, the other extending from the Capitol.



The port at Georgetown Waterfront in 1865. Source: Friends of Georgetown Waterfront Park.

1751, Irish and Scottish merchants transformed a small trading outpost into Georgetown, a thriving commercial activity center for the Maryland colony.<sup>20</sup>

After the American Revolution, the Continental Congress searched for a central location for the new country’s federal operations. Through a compromise to protect Southern states’ interest in the institution of slavery and pay outstanding war debts for Northern states, the Constitution authorized the new federal government to establish a federal district as the seat of government in 1787.<sup>21</sup> In the Residence Act of 1790,<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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 (Maryland) and Alexandria (Virginia).<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> Issues developed as L’Enfant had multiple

disagreements with the city commissioners and, in extreme action, relocated the residence of Daniel Carroll, a prominent Washington resident, to clear space for an avenue.<sup>26</sup> At the urging of Thomas Jefferson, L’Enfant resigned to prevent his dismissal from the project. After L’Enfant’s resignation, brothers Andrew Ellicott and Benjamin Ellicott hired Benjamin Banneker, a free Black man, to support finishing the surveying work for the new Federal City.<sup>27</sup>

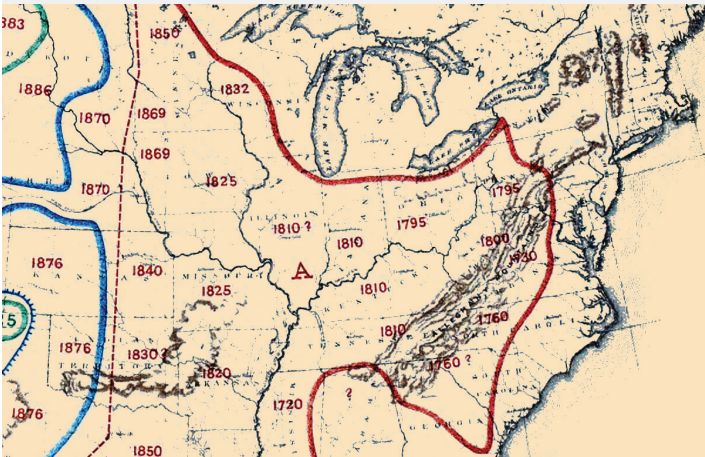
L’Enfant’s city plan, though occupying only a portion of the federal district, was extraordinarily ambitious. It included sites for major government buildings; memorials and other civic art; barracks and arsenals; cultural facilities; institutions such as hospitals and city markets; and the urban fabric 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.<sup>28</sup>



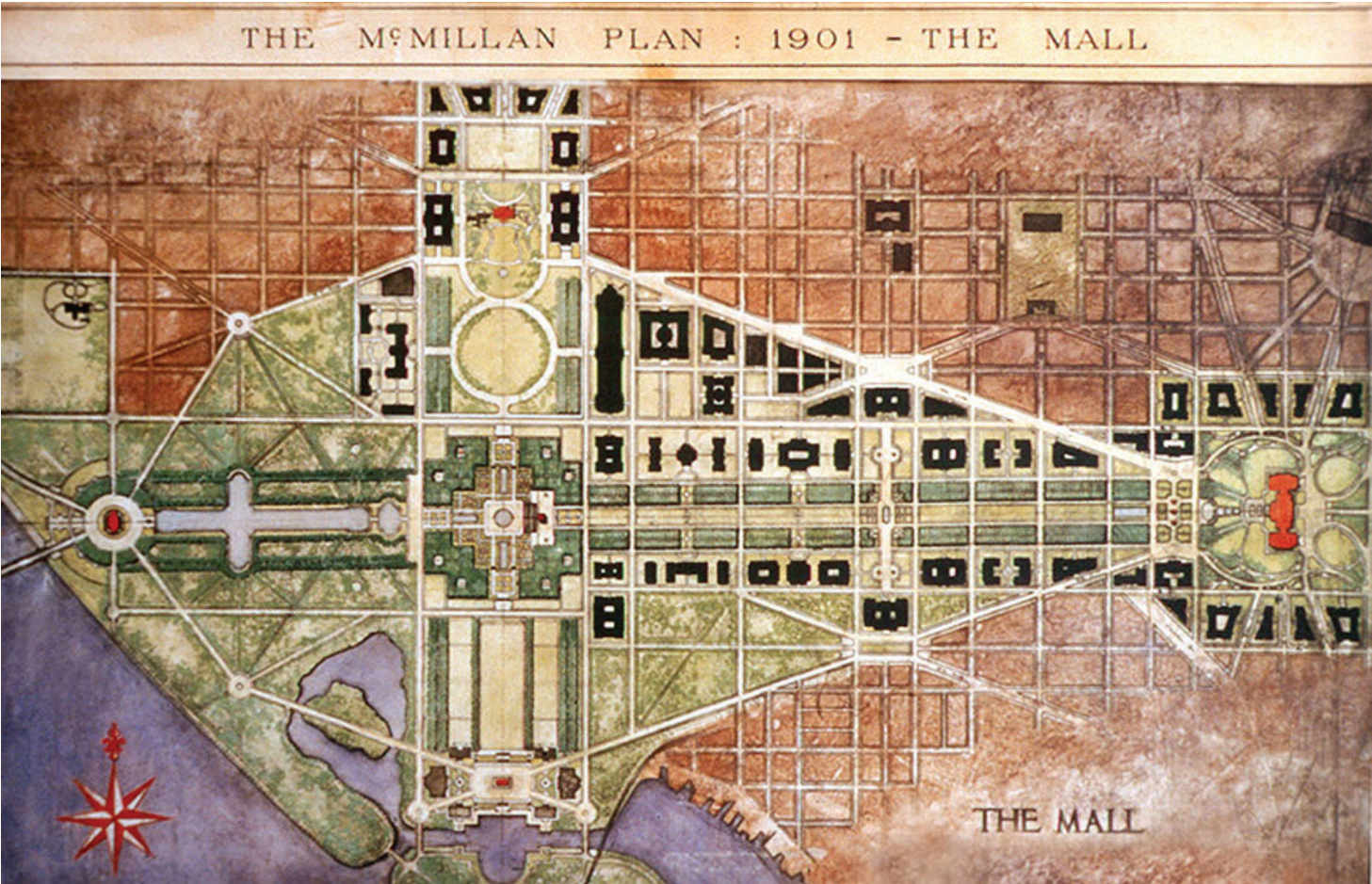
United States National Mammal:

The American Bison

For thousands of years, Native Americans relied heavily on bison for their survival and well-being, using every part of the bison for food, clothing, shelter, tools, jewelry, and ceremonies. The decimation of millions of bison in the 1800s was pivotal in the tragic devastation of Indian people and society.<sup>31</sup> The American bison (often referred to as buffalo) did exist in the present-day National Capital Region.<sup>32</sup> It is estimated that the majority of the American bison population in the region was found in Virginia. William T. Hornaday’s Map illustrating the extermination of the American bison, does not show any west of the Alleghany Mountains prior to 1730. Extirpation of bison began in east Virginia tidelands in 1730, with the last bison in the state being killed in 1797.<sup>33</sup> European, settlers, however, attempted to domesticate the American Bison, which brought about new cattle diseases that greatly decimated the American Bison population in the region. President George Washington evening breeding American Bison at his home in Mount Vernon.<sup>34</sup>



Excerpt of William T. Hornaday’s 1887 map depicting the extermination of the American Bison. Source: Library of Congress.



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 1902 addressed two main issues: building a public park system and designating sites for groupings of public buildings.<sup>29</sup>

The McMillan Plan was developed by the McMillan Commission, formally known as the Senate Park Commission. The McMillan Commission was established in 1901 due to concerns about the urban development and planning of Washington. Led by Senator James McMillan, the commission aimed to address

the chaotic growth and haphazard layout of the nation's capital. The initiative was prompted by the desire to create a more cohesive and aesthetically pleasing cityscape, reflecting the grandeur befitting the nation's capital. The commission's landmark report, published in 1902, proposed a comprehensive redesign of Washington, DC, which included what we now know as the National Mall. The plan was designed to support the implementation of the City Beautiful movement principles, and the revitalization of neglected areas.<sup>30</sup> The McMillan Plan fundamentally transformed the city, shaping its iconic landmarks and enduring urban layout for generations to come.



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.<sup>35</sup> 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 in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The development of planning in the NCR 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 1902 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 "advise(ing) upon the location of statues, fountains, and monuments in the public squares, streets, and parks in the District of Columbia."<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1910s and 1920s, the planning field became 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 expanded 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. The agency was responsible for all planning matters within the District of Columbia with 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 (M-NCPPC) in 1927, established by the state with authority in both Montgomery and Prince George's Counties.



Postcard of Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. looking east, 1905. Source: Library of Congress.



1920s



1950s



1960s



1999

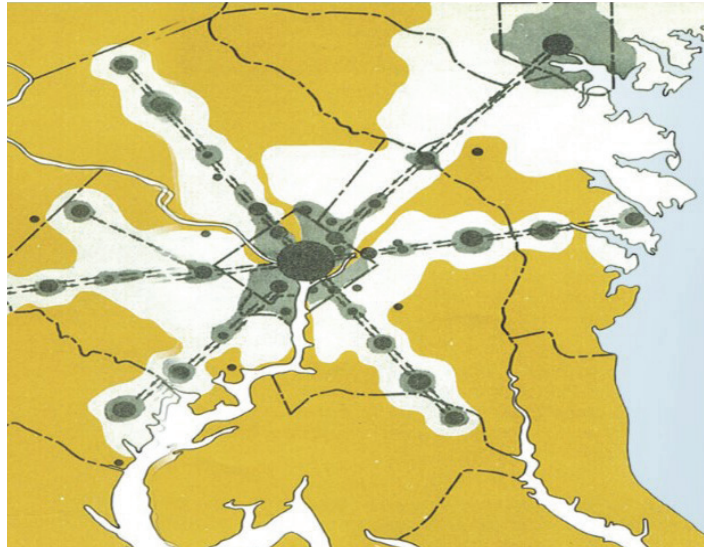
Iterations of the National Capital Planning Commission and its predecessor agencies over its 100-year history.

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.<sup>38</sup>

NCPPC produced the 1950 Comprehensive Plan, primarily covering Washington, DC but also addressing regional issues. Among other goals, the 1950 plan focused on maintaining and restoring livability by clearing "slum areas" and eliminating land overcrowding; and reducing congestion throughout the city by reducing commuter distances, making public transportation more convenient, and creating a system of collector and distributor roads to redistribute traffic within the central area. The 1950 Plan helped establish the framework for the city's ongoing urban renewal program and the future highway construction proposals. In 1952, the federal agency was renamed the National Capital Planning Commission. In 1959, NCPC and the National Capital Regional Planning Council prepared a regional transportation plan that recommended more than 300 miles of new roads.



During the 1950s, 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, which proposed a model for long-term regional growth.<sup>39</sup> M-NCPPC then incorporated and expanded on this recommended model in its comprehensive plan, titled On Wedges and Corridors. The National Capital Regional Planning Council, a federal agency that operated between 1952 and 1966, issued a Regional Development Guide in 1966.<sup>40</sup>



A diagram from On Wedges and Corridors illustrating regional growth and agriculture out of the downtown core.

Leading up to the Bicentennial of the United States in 1976, there was concern among federal and local officials about the ongoing deterioration along Pennsylvania Avenue's north side.<sup>41</sup> Congress established the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) in 1972, of which NCPC was a major stakeholder. The PADC oversaw the development and implementation of the 1974 Pennsylvania Avenue Plan, the basis for the Avenue's redevelopment for more than 40 years that created the Avenue's design and character that we know today. The PADC was also responsible for projects which improved the public areas and ambience of Pennsylvania Avenue, as well as assembling land for housing, office buildings, retail uses, and

community art spaces. The latter activity involved partnerships with the private sector to develop projects compatible with the plan.

During this period, pressure was building for home rule in Washington 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.<sup>42</sup> NCPC's role was re-defined to focus primarily on federal property in Washington 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 that addressed federal concerns throughout the region, and District Elements that addressed 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.

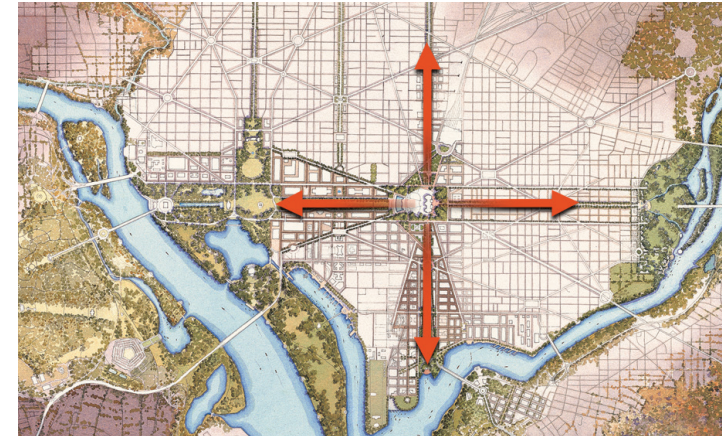
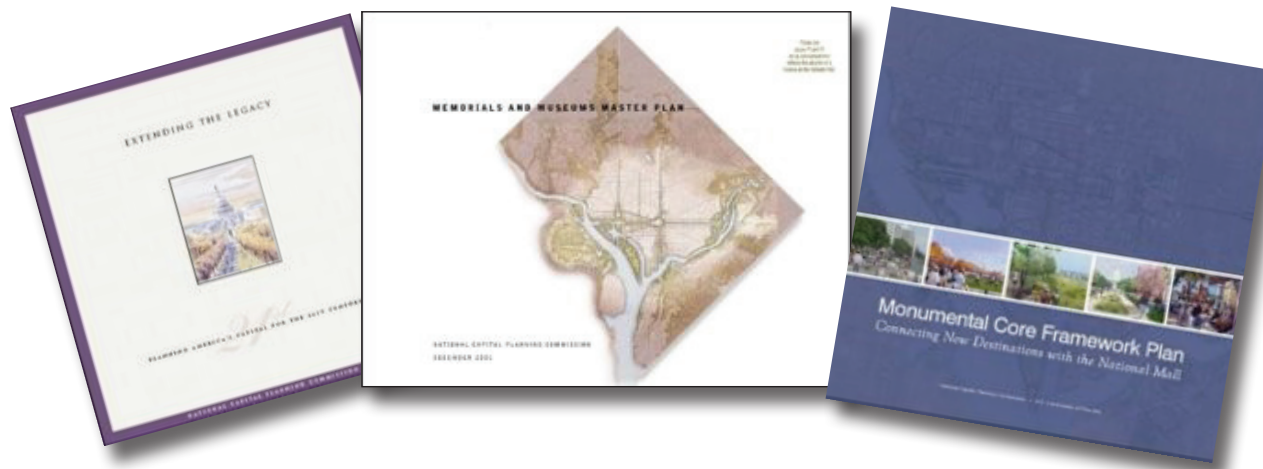


Metrorail construction along Connecticut Avenue, NW, 1973. Source: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.



WMATA's Metrorail proposal, 1967. Dashed lines show proposed future extensions. Source: Architect of the Capitol.





Map from the Extending the Legacy Plan, which promotes extending federal offices, museums and memorials to the city's four quadrants.

## Comprehensive Planning in the National Capital Region in the 21<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup>

By recentring the monumental core on the U.S. Capitol, the Legacy Plan created opportunities for new monuments, museums, and federal offices in all city quadrants. It called for mixed-use development, expanding the reach of public transit, and eliminating obsolete freeways, bridges, and railroad tracks that fragment the city. It reclaimed Washington's historic waterfront for public enjoyment and added parks, plazas, and other urban amenities. The Commission characterized the Legacy Plan as a long-range vision, and many of the proposals outlined in the plan have come to fruition, including the redevelopment of South Capitol Street, The Yards development, The Wharf development, and two key capital improvements projects: the DC Circulator and the new Frederick Douglass Bridge.

Principal Legacy Plan themes:

- 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.

In 2009, the Commission released the *Monumental Core Framework Plan: Connecting New Destinations with the National Mall*. The Framework Plan provided more in-depth analysis and tools to advance the Legacy Plan's goals to

relieve development pressure on the National Mall; better integrate federal development with city life; and support a diversifying local economy, growing population, and expanding downtown. It sought to remove or minimize infrastructure barriers and address the unintended consequences of some past development decisions. The Framework Plan responded to executive and legislative policies to use federal land, facilities, and resources more efficiently and sustainably. The Framework Plan led to precinct and corridor level planning and design that helped move the Legacy Plan and the Framework Plan's visions toward implementation.

A key planning document that was completed because of the Legacy Plan is the Memorials and Museums Master Plan (2M Plan). Approved by the Commission in December 2001, the 2M Plan identified 100 potential locations for memorials and museums and provided general guidelines for their development (four were later removed from consideration). Current NCPC projects that will help achieve Legacy's vision include the SW Ecodistrict, the Monumental Core Streetscape Guide and Construction Manual, Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and U.S. Capitol, Independence Avenue between 3rd and 15th Streets, and connecting the Kennedy Center to the National Mall and President's Park.



## Confronting the Legacy: Examining the Impacts of NCPC's Past Planning Efforts

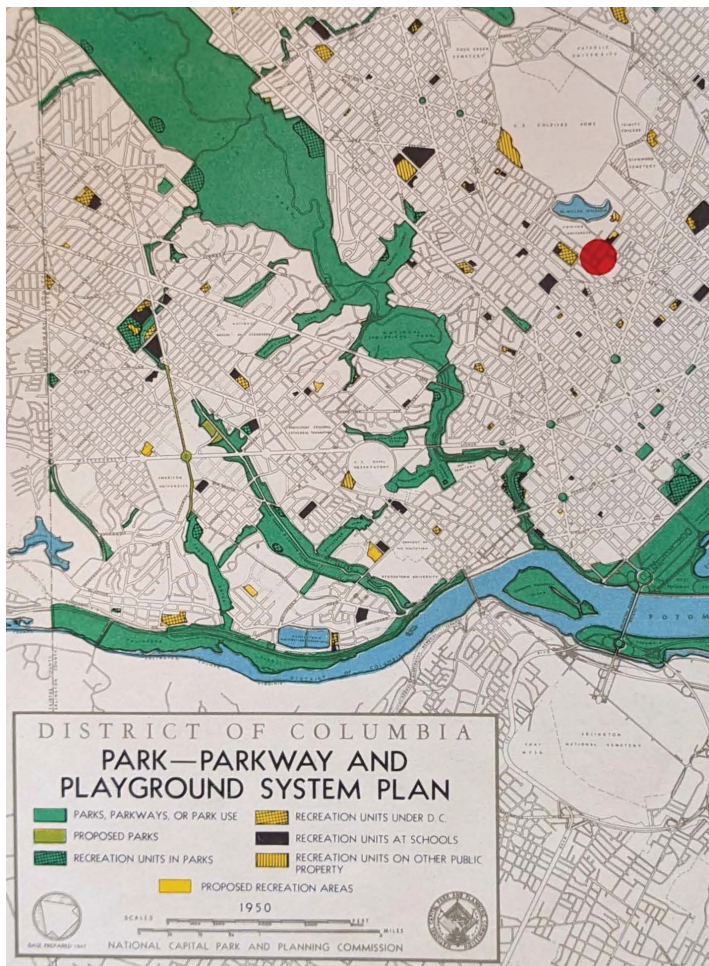
As NCPC commemorates its Centennial in 2024, it is critical for the agency to conduct an introspective analysis of the agency's past policies and programs. This is being done to better understand the ways in which the agency has shaped the physical design of the National Capital Region, as well as the social and economic opportunities for the people who live here. Moreover, this analysis allows for the examination of NCPC's impact on the history and evolution of planning, acknowledgment of inequities created by past planning practices, and consideration of lessons learned to inform planning today and into the future. While many of NCPC policies, projects, and programs explored in this chapter had positive impacts and enhanced the quality of life throughout the region, other policies, practices, and programs presented barriers to equity.

### *Planning for a Segregated Parks and Recreation System*

Through NCPC's predecessor, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, the agency was responsible for purchasing land for the development of parks and playgrounds for the District of Columbia. Through this process, the agency purchased and designated parks and playgrounds explicitly for "whites" or "colored." This policy mandated racially segregated parks and public spaces on select federal properties through the agency's implementation of the recreation plan. As a result of this policy, there was not only state sanctioned segregation—preventing the interaction of races in public spaces; but the policy also disproportionately allocated recreational spaces for residents depending on race and prohibited non-White residents from accessing prominent public spaces.

For instance, in the 1945 Summary Report Recreation and School Study for the Old City and Adjacent Areas in Washington, DC it was determined that there were 107 usable acres of recreation and playground spaces designated for White residents and 70 usable acres of recreation and playground spaces designated for non-White residents. Maps from this

report also illustrate that many prominent public spaces located near the National Mall, such as The Ellipse, were identified as "Whites-Only" parks. The policy of mapping and planning for segregated recreation centers continued until 1949 when the Commission voted to eliminate all racial designations from the official Washington, DC recreation system map.



1950 Park—Parkway, and Playground System Plan for the District of Columbia.

## Updating the Introduction Chapter: Our Process

As part of the Introduction Chapter update, NCPC developed a framework that acknowledges that the agency's policies and programs - both historic and contemporary - have presented barriers on equity for underserved communities. This process included:

- Conducting a historical analysis and background research to identify potential policies that contributed to community design.
- Identifying legacy practices and policies established or implemented by NCPC that were designed to advantage or disadvantage a group of people with respect to race, ethnicity, religion, income, geography, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability and analyzed the contemporary impacts of unjust practices and policies.
- Clarifying NCPC's current role in addressing these contemporary impacts of legacy policies.
- Developing key considerations, principles, and future potential agency actions that support advancing equity.
- Meeting with local, regional, and federal stakeholders to explore the principles and discuss if they accurately respond to the agency's impact on socially disadvantaged communities.

Using this framework, NCPC was able to use key components of equity and sustainability planning, such as historical analyses and engaging impacted individuals in the planning process to promote equitable development and opportunity for historically underserved communities.



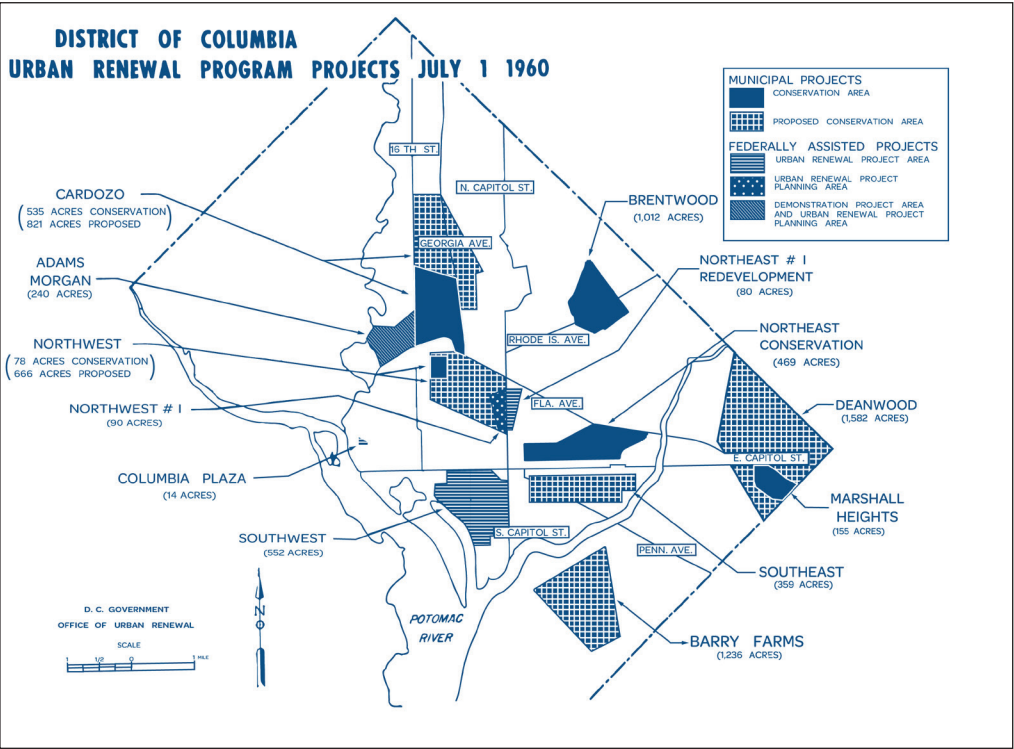
# Displacing Communities through Urban Renewal Programs

At the turn of the 20th century, American cities were dealing with two major urban issues—the rapid industrialization of work and rapid urbanization. During this period, millions of Americans fled their rural communities and European immigrants moved to search for economic and social prosperity in American urban centers.

In Washington, the city’s population more than doubled during this timeframe, increasing from 230,000 residents in the 1890s to nearly 490,000 residents by the end of the 1920s. Housing construction could not meet the demand of newcomers. At the time, local developers often exploited this urgent demand for housing for low-income workers by building settlements for low-income workers in alleyways.<sup>44</sup> The drastic rise in the city’s population, coupled with an insufficient housing supply, led to unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions, and overcrowding in many District neighborhoods.

In the years during and after World War II, the African American population in cities increased as Black Southerners fled racial violence in their hometowns and searched for greater economic opportunity in Northern cities. Simultaneously, White residents and retail began to leave cities for the suburbs due to federal and local policies that incentivized new community development outside the city center. Local governments attempted to use redevelopment to retain residents, increase tax bases, and prevent the perceived deterioration of downtowns and neighborhoods.

In 1945, Congress adopted the District of Columbia Redevelopment Act, which launched the process of urban renewal. The act allowed for the use of eminent domain to take private property for private redevelopment; and established the DC Redevelopment Land Agency to assemble land and prepare it for developers. The District of Columbia Redevelopment Act empowered the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (predecessor agency to NCPC), as the planning agency for all of Washington, to complete this task. Between 1945 and 1972, NCPC prepared, adopted, and certified 12 plans for implementation for the removal and rehabilitation of blighted, decayed, and deteriorating areas of the city. One of the most



Map of DC’s Urban Renewal Program Projects in 1960.

well-known incidences of urban renewal in Washington is that of the Southwest community, historically a predominately African American neighborhood within the city tracing back to the period of American enslavement.<sup>45,46</sup>

In the 1950 Comprehensive Plan Washington: Present and Future, NCPPC identified the Southwest neighborhood “as a Principal Problem Area with over 50 percent of housing [that] needed repair or lacked private baths.”<sup>47</sup> The neighborhood was particularly identified to serve as a pilot case for urban renewal due to its proximity to federal government facilities and the prominent views it held to the National Mall, United States Capitol and other symbolic spaces.

As a project, the approved urban renewal plan proposed the demolition of existing housing deemed obsolete or blighted, and incorporated a renewed waterfront, a federal employment center, modern shopping center, public plaza and promenade,

highways, newly constructed housing, and other community amenities. The effects of the Southwest Urban Renewal program were devastating for the community. Urban renewal destroyed 99 percent of Southwest’s buildings, forced 1,500 businesses to move, and displaced 23,000 residents.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, there was an 80 percent decline in Chinese immigrants and American born Chinese living in DC’s Chinatown because of factors relating to urban redevelopment.<sup>49</sup>

While the Southwest neighborhood was the first major redevelopment in Washington because of an urban renewal plan, other urban renewal areas were approved and implemented throughout the city. These included Northwest, Northeast, the Shaw School, downtown, Columbia Plaza, Fort Lincoln, Adams Morgan, H Street, NE, and 14th Street, NW. NCPC also

defined boundaries for five additional urban renewal areas, including Georgetown and the South Capitol Street/Buzzard Point area, that were never adopted.

Strategies of urban renewal plans within NCPC’s regulations continued to exist into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in the form of the Downtown and Shaw renewal plans, which were intended to guide rehabilitation in these two designated areas. These were the last two Urban Renewal plans in Washington, DC. In 2019, NCPC approved a request submitted by the District of Columbia Office of Planning to terminate the Downtown and Shaw renewal plans as they were outdated and do not align with current zoning and planning initiatives.

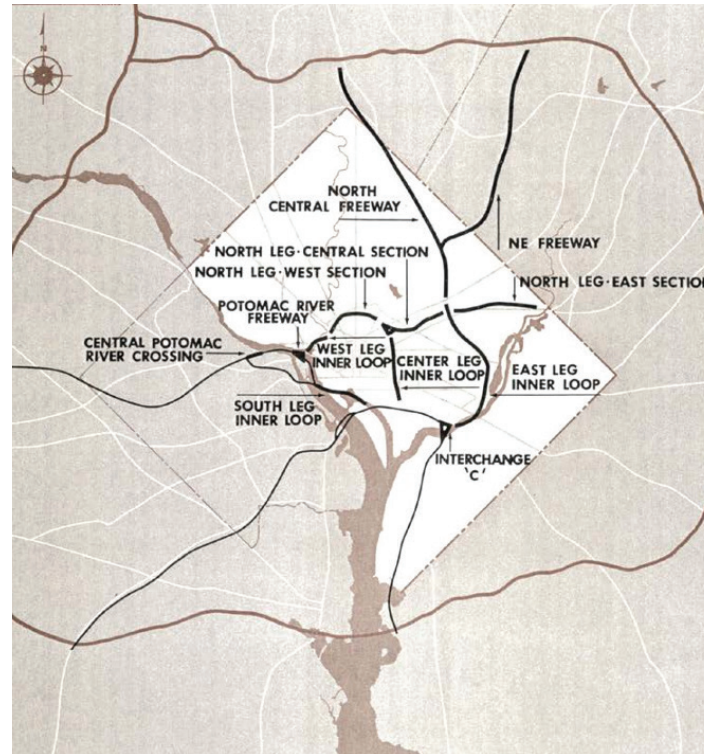


## Disconnecting Neighborhoods with New Highways

In the mid-1950s, NCPC was part of the National Capital Regional Planning Council, which prepared a regional transportation plan that recommended the locations of new interstate highway corridors within the region. These plans were largely outlined within the 1950 Comprehensive Plan. These highways included an inner belt freeway that would surround the White House and the central business district of Washington (northern portion canceled due to citizen opposition) and an outer belt (which later would be signed as Interstate 495 as the Capital Beltway). Radial freeways were planned to link both the inner belt and the outer belt in the form of the following:

- A radial left intersecting from the western inner belt and continuing northwest along the northern edge of the Potomac River to the outer belt in the direction of Frederick, Maryland (loosely Interstate 270, portion within district cancelled due to citizen opposition).
- Two radials left intersecting the inner belt near the National Mall traveling in a westerly and southerly direction across the Potomac River into Northern Virginia (loosely Interstates 66 and 395 respectively).
- A route entering the area from a northeasterly direction from the outer belt traveling southwest and splitting near Bladensburg, Maryland whereas one split would travel in a southerly direction paralleling the Anacostia River toward the southern outer belt (loosely Interstate 295) and another route paralleling the New York Avenue corridor within the district (portion canceled due to citizen opposition).
- A short route connecting the Anacostia River freeway with the proposed inner belt (loosely Interstate 695). Both the northern portion near the White House and the route paralleling New York Avenue were canceled due to civic opposition.

Highway construction in the region improved transportation efficiency, reduced congestion on city streets, and enhanced connectivity between urban and suburban areas. While new highways provided easier access to employment centers and amenities for residents across the region, the development of



Map of the proposed highways in the National Capitol Region, included in the 1966 report, *Transportation Planning in the District of Columbia 1955 to 1965: A Review and Critique*. Source: Federal Highway Administration.

the freeway system drastically changed the city's social and demographic makeup.

The construction of I-395/695 alone displaced at least 4,700 people in 1960 and destroyed at least 1,400 homes in the Southwest community alone. In response to the urban renewal and freeway construction programs in Southwest, Washington, DC, Elizabeth "Libby" Rowe, the first female Chair of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, authorized the development of a "Social Impact of a Highway on an Urban Community" study. The report documented the social implications and relocation requirements of the North Leg of the Inner Loop in 1963, in partnership with the District Office of



The Anacostia Freeway Under Construction adjacent to the Barry Farm community. Source: DC Public Library.

Health and Welfare considering the impact of physical changes on residents and the need for comprehensive planning and support services to address their needs and concerns.

Ultimately, the report concluded that "... a major highway programmed through a specific section of an urban area influences life within the whole community—those who remain, those who are displaced, other neighborhoods, public officialdom, private business and future projects. The engineer, the planner, the public official, the social scientist, the resident, the businessman, all citizens have a common objective—the betterment of their city. Only through their mutual concern, cooperation and respect can it be achieved."





Images above show public and private redevelopment of the Washington Navy Yard and Capitol Riverfront, including the Frederick Douglass Bridge, The Yards Park, and the US Department of Transportation headquarters.

## Expanding the Federal Footprint in Local Communities

Extending the Legacy Plan (Legacy) was a visionary guide for new initiatives and policy development – it influenced Comprehensive Plan updates and set the stage for more detailed planning as described in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan (2001) and the Monumental Core Framework Plan (2009). Many of Legacy’s goals that relate to new federal facilities, enhanced transportation, reconnecting Washington to its waterfronts, and improving gateways into the city are becoming reality.

The plan has a strong vision of directing federal development to all quadrants of the city to promote economic development directly and indirectly, using federal investment as a catalyst. As a result, many new federal campuses were developed across Washington, DC, in communities that are now classified as equity emphasis areas, by the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments. NCPC reviews federal development applications for site selection and development for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan’s Federal Elements. The development of federal facilities and installations have had both positive

and negative equity impacts in underserved communities. For example, the siting and design of federal buildings and campuses can adversely impact a community’s access to open space and existing amenities. Security requirements at these facilities can also restrict public access through communities and to amenities such as waterfronts, views, and historic and environmental resources. Lastly, the design of a federal facility may not be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood character. In applying an equity lens in building and site design that mitigates direct and indirect impacts, federal development projects can be stronger assets in underserved communities. For example, a federal development can plan for areas of public amenity spaces, such as parks and community rooms that are accessible to the surrounding community that may improve health outcomes. A critical component of developing these policies is a firm commitment to engaging underserved communities and centering their input as part of the planning process.

## Contemporary Impacts

The vestiges of planning policies have long-term implications on individual opportunity and community design. Contemporary

analysis of the effects of NCPC or its predecessor’s practices, indicate that these programs have contributed to underserved communities feeling a reduced a sense of belonging throughout the nation’s capital; experiencing a reduction in community cultural wealth; and having less access to parks and green spaces.

Neighborhoods throughout Washington and the National Capital Region are also impacted by these policies which have contributed to racial and economic housing segregation. As a result, underserved communities in the region, both social and geographic, carry a disproportionate burden of air-pollution, flood risks, food insecurity, commute times, and other environmental hazards.

While NCPC has historically been involved with planning and development that has impacted underserved communities, NCPC is committed to addressing this legacy and working with federal and local partners to remedy the negative impacts of past planning decisions.



### Critical Planning Challenges

Innovative practices are needed to support planning for the appropriate and orderly development of the NCR; conserving the region’s important natural and historic resources; and creating public spaces where all Americans are represented and included. Critical planning challenges faced by federal planners within the NCR include an urgency to protect the natural environment, implement equity practices, secure urban public spaces, and navigate the changing federal footprint for workplace needs. NCPC continues to collaborate with federal and regional partners to address these emerging planning challenges.



Constitution Avenue in Federal Triangle during a flood event.

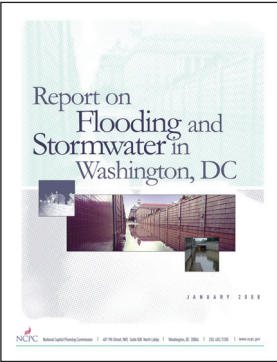
### Environmental Sustainability and Resiliency

Land use patterns and urban form can have a substantial impact on a community’s contribution to global climate change as well as the community’s susceptibility to negative environmental impacts. The region is experiencing many climate change risks, which include increased flooding, extreme precipitation, sea level rise, average temperature rise and extreme heat, and severe weather events.

The federal government owns approximately 85 percent of the shorelines in Washington, DC and has many properties located within the 100-year and 500-year floodplains.<sup>50</sup> Federal properties are thus vulnerable to flooding that results from heavy rain, snowmelt, tropical storms, hurricanes, and flash flood events. These events can damage property, cause power outages, interrupt operations, and overwhelm aging infrastructure and other urban assets. Predictions suggest that by 2050, a 100-year storm could be as likely as today’s 25-year storm. The Potomac and Anacostia River levels have already increased 11 inches in the past 90 years due to sea level rise and DC Department of Energy & Environment, “Climate Ready DC: The District of Columbia’s Plan to Adapt to a Changing Climate.”<sup>51</sup> The US Army Corps of Engineers predicts up to 3.4 feet of additional sea level rise in Washington, DC by 2080.<sup>52</sup>

Construction and renovation of federal facilities will also be affected by warming temperatures. Washington, DC’s average annual temperatures have increased by two degrees over the last 50 years and are predicted to continue to rise.<sup>53</sup> The area also suffers from the urban heat island effect, where paved areas in the District of Columbia can be 10-15 degrees hotter than the actual temperature during heat waves, while large natural areas like Rock Creek Park can measure 10 degrees cooler.<sup>54</sup> Typical average summer high temperatures of 87 degrees are projected to increase to the mid-to upper 90’s by 2080.<sup>55</sup> Increased average temperatures will also increase the number of heat emergency days (days with a heat index of 95 degrees or above) and cause longer heat waves.<sup>56</sup> In Washington, DC, heat emergency days are projected to increase from the recent average of 30 per year, to potentially 70 per year by 2080.<sup>57</sup>

There are many federally owned properties vulnerable to climate change impacts in the National Capital Region,



### Protecting the National Mall from Coastal, Riverine, and Interior Flooding

In 2023, NCPC approved development plans for the National Park Service to repair and rehabilitate approximately 6,800 linear feet of the failing seawall along portions of the Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park in Washington as part of the Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park Sea Wall project. Over the years, the seawalls have significantly settled, leading to overtopping and poor drainage. This has led to reduced public access and damage to the cultural landscape and park infrastructure along the heavily visited Potomac River waterfront from Hains Point northwest toward the Tidal Basin, resulting in negative impacts for visitors. The project will address immediate issues of the failing seawall in locations demonstrating the highest degree of settlement and erosion. The goal of this project is to return the seawalls to their historical functional height, improve visitor accessibility and experience over the next decade, and plan for sea level rise in the future.





Multimodal transportation options in Federal Triangle.

including parkland, military installations, museums, and agency headquarters, which could be damaged or significantly impaired if no action is taken. In addition to federal operations and properties, many federal sites also house national treasures and important documents of national significance which could be permanently damaged or lost.

Climate change may affect the form of the city and the integrity of both the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans. These two plans have been the basis of the street grid and the urban development pattern in Washington since the establishment of the capital in 1791. For example, symbolic views of national memorials, the White House, and the U.S. Capitol may be permanently altered if large scale infrastructure solutions to mitigate increased flooding are required in the vicinity of the National Mall.

Federal planners are increasingly turning to evaluating building and site design, as well as facility siting to mitigate environmental risks for capital improvement projects. As the region continues to experience an increase in the frequency and intensity of climate-related extreme weather events, advancing

climate change adaptation and supporting resilience planning is critical in protecting federal assets and investments, ensuring the long-term resiliency of federal operations, and supporting economic vitality in the NCR.

### *Transportation and Mobility*

The transportation landscape in the Washington, DC region has undergone significant shifts over the past two years, largely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of Metrorail stations serve federal facilities and are critical transportation infrastructure for the region's largest workforce. With federal telework and remote work becoming more prevalent, downtown offices are experiencing increased vacancies.<sup>58</sup> Combined with the changing commuting patterns, policymakers are confronted with the challenge of ensuring safe, reliable, and accessible transportation options for workers and residents.

Congestion remains a persistent issue, contributing to lengthy average commute times of slightly more than half an hour in the

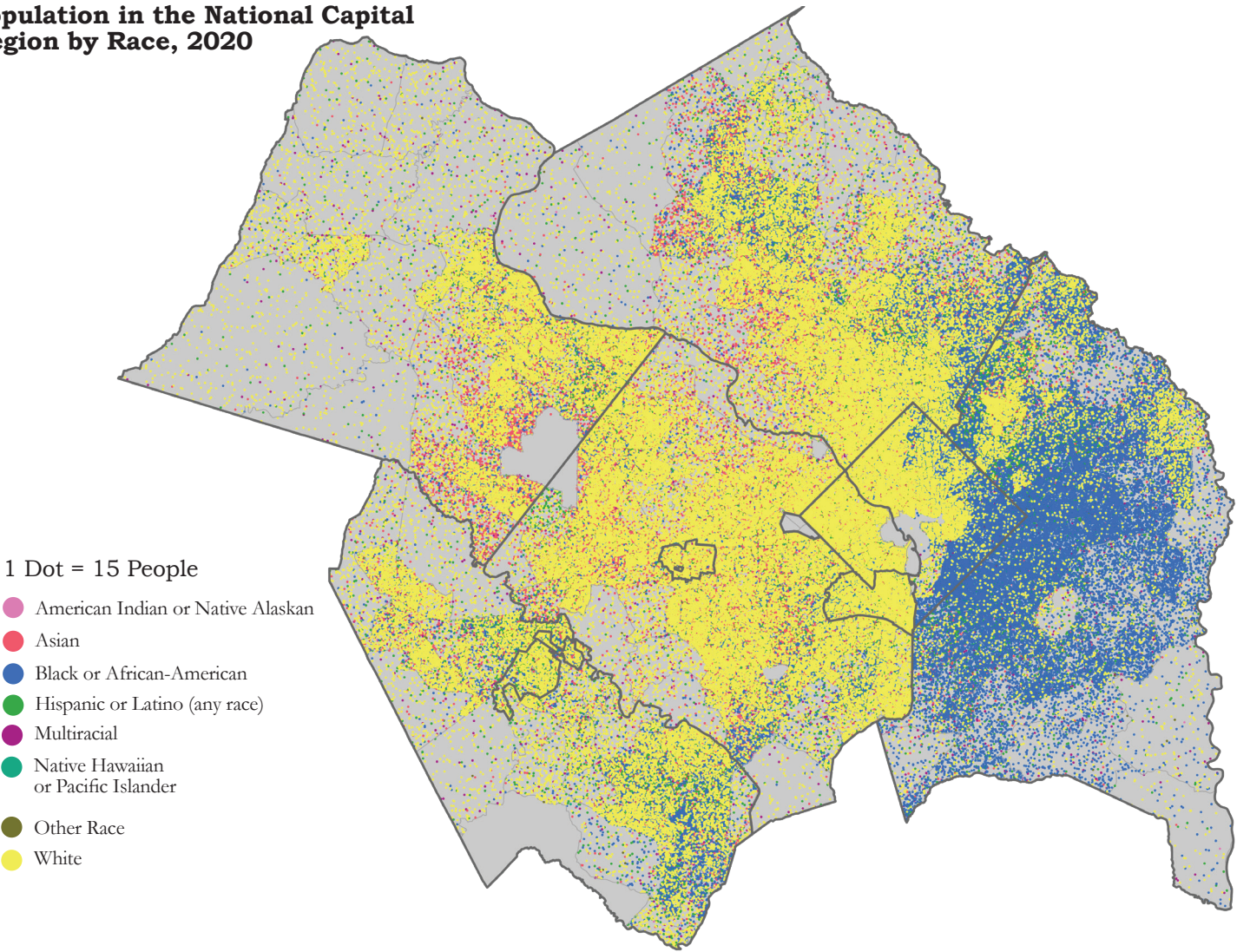
region. Approximately three in five Washington-area commuters still drive to work.<sup>59</sup> This heavy reliance on cars not only exacerbates congestion but also leads to elevated levels of air pollution, posing health risks to the population. Compounding these challenges is the lack of dedicated funding for WMATA, the region's central public transportation system, resulting in frequent threats of service cuts that disproportionately affect low-income and marginalized communities, exacerbating transportation inequities.<sup>60,61</sup>

While public transit ridership in the region has historically been higher than in many other U.S. cities, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted the region's public transit system. To date, 2024 daily rail ridership was approximately 50 percent of pre-pandemic ridership averages, while daily bus ridership has rebounded.<sup>62,63</sup> This decline in transit ridership has been exacerbated by a decade-long trend preceding the pandemic, characterized by declining Metrorail ridership amid concerns over service reliability, safety, and the emergence of ride-sharing services.



However, as planners and policymakers grapple with the complexities of transportation planning in the post-pandemic era, they must confront the broader economic, social, and environmental consequences of individual transportation choices, ensuring equitable access to reliable, climate-friendly transportation options for all residents in the face of fiscal constraints and political uncertainty.

**Population in the National Capital Region by Race, 2020**



*Social, Health, and Racial Equity*

In 2020, the United States faced social upheaval because of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as civic protests that brought renewed focus on equitable outcomes for underrepresented populations, including people of color. The COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects on the nation, including sickness and loss of life. The social and economic impacts of the pandemic created or accelerated trends that continue to

shape communities. The region’s economic performance relies heavily on the federal government. Economic impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic in the NCR mirrored national trends but were not as extreme due to the presence of the federal government. However, the region continues to face a unique set of economic challenges during post-pandemic recovery.

The region lost 300,000 jobs during March and April of 2020, which corresponded with a peak unemployment rate of 9.8 percent in April 2020, which is significantly below the national unemployment rate of 14.7 percent.<sup>64</sup> As the region began to recover economically from the loss and uncertainty caused by the pandemic, the economic recovery has been uneven across subsets of the region’s population and has highlighted inequities throughout the region. For example, the African American unemployment rate within the region was nearly double that of any other racial category and triple the unemployment rate of white participants in the labor force.<sup>65</sup>

Also, people living in neighborhoods with higher percentages of African American or Hispanic residents and lower income and employment rates, were more likely to experience a larger reduction in life expectancy.<sup>66</sup> Many of these inequitable outcomes are connected to the design of the built environment which shapes physical and economic access. Past planning decisions, such as urban renewal, highway development, and housing displacement contribute to systemic residential segregation—which allocates community resources disparately and presents barriers to an individual’s ability to access medical care or job opportunities.<sup>67</sup> Throughout the region, several of the most salient equity issues center around affordable housing, healthy food access, and exposure to pollution or other environmental hazards. Not only do these factors contribute to disparate long-term community recovery and health following the ongoing COVID-19 recovery in the region, but these inequities lead to overall life-expectancy differences throughout the NCR, with the greatest disparity being between residents who live in Georgetown, Washington, DC (life expectancy of 94 years) and individuals who live in the Trinidad neighborhood of Washington, DC (life expectancy of 67 years).<sup>68</sup>



## Commemoration Diversity

Civic discourse at the height of the pandemic brought renewed calls for diverse stories and perspectives in the federal commemorative landscape. The 2021 National Monument Audit, funded by the Mellon Foundation, examined 50,000 U.S. monuments and found that of the 50 individuals represented most frequently, 88 percent are white, six percent are women, 10 percent are Black or Indigenous, and none honor Asian Americans, Hispanic and Latino Americans, or self-identified members of the LGBTQ+ communities.<sup>69</sup> NCPC's 2012 *Memorial Trends & Practice in Washington, DC* report acknowledged that there is an imbalance towards military and war-themed memorials in the capital. As of 2019, more than 44 percent of total memorials in Washington reflected military themes. If memorials with themes of statesmanship and founding of the nation are added, which prominently feature White men, the percent total increases to 63 percent.<sup>70</sup> There is a lack of diversity and representation in today's national memorial collection. There are also issues with the process to construct permanent memorials in the nation's capital, which is complex, time-consuming, and costly, creating barriers for many underrepresented communities.

Over the past decade, NCPC has worked on several plans and initiatives related to memorials that provide a comprehensive picture of Washington's commemorative landscape and highlight barriers to equity in the representation of commemorative works. Commemorative works focused on women, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, and members of the LGBTQ+ communities, as well as the many other identities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs of the American people, are vastly underrepresented in the national capital's landscape.

Conversations about who our monuments should represent are occurring around the country – the National Mall is at the front of this dialogue because it is our Nation's collective space for commemoration. In looking to expand who and what is represented at the Mall's monumental core, federal planners also face the issue of available land for present and



*America's Playground: DC*, by Derrick Adams reflects the story of desegregated playgrounds in the nation's capital. Source: Trust for the National Mall.

future monuments. There are only a handful of sites left close to the Mall, however, there are more stories to commemorate than the available land can accommodate. While permanent commemoration provides the opportunity to firmly cement a historically significant event or person in the physical landscape of the Nation's Capital, this permanency creates an equity challenge – restricting opportunities for future generations to celebrate historic American events and people of the future.

Temporary artworks are seen as a viable complement to address constraints of permanent commemoration, and an idea suggested in previous NCPC studies. These art installations can provide powerful experiences that are cost-effective, faster to implement, and respond to recent events. In addition, the flexibility of temporary artworks can help to lower longstanding barriers to sponsoring new commemorative works from people, groups, or events that have been historically underrepresented on the National Mall. The introduction of new perspectives in the commemorative landscape allows for a more comprehensive story of America's history to be told.

With previous studies and plans in mind, NCPC in partnership with the Trust for the National Mall and the National Park Service,

## Expanding America's Stories on the National Mall

*Beyond Granite* is a collaborative partnership between the Trust for the National Mall, the National Park Service, and the National Capital Planning Commission designed to test solutions for encouraging more representative and inclusive storytelling on the National Mall by using temporary artworks. The pilot project–*Beyond Granite: Pulling Together*–was a four-week outdoor art exhibition curated by Monument Lab and featured work by six contemporary artists that all responded to the question – “What stories remain untold on the National Mall?” To learn more about *Beyond Granite*, visit – [www.beyondgranite.org/](http://www.beyondgranite.org/)



*Of Thee We Sing* by vanessa german, celebrates Marian Anderson's 1939 performance on the Lincoln Memorial. Source: Trust for the National Mall.

explored one way to expand subject matter representation and narratives with temporary artworks through the *Beyond Granite* pilot project. The exhibition, titled, “Pulling Together”, presented multi-layered representations of American history, experiences, and untold stories of diverse communities by six artists from across the country.



Public Space and Security

NCPC is at the forefront of developing policy guidance to address security, urban design, and public access in a thoughtful and balanced manner. After the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the events of September 11, 2001, security needs were elevated and unsightly temporary solutions often restricted access to public space. In recent years, due to an increase in vehicle-ramming attacks and domestic terrorism, the focus on security through urban design has shifted to include parks, plazas, and streets—and the protection of people in these spaces. Design professionals have an important role in planning public spaces to ensure the protection of public and federal assets. As part of the agency’s design review process for capital improvements, risk assessments are reviewed to determine appropriate security requirements, while also identifying suitable security solutions. It is critical to build on strong public-private partnerships; incorporate new technologies; build upon the research and lessons learned from other cities; and be adaptable to address future security needs while balancing today’s risks.



Public space security measures outside of the Herbert C. Hoover Building, headquarters for the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Changing Federal Footprint

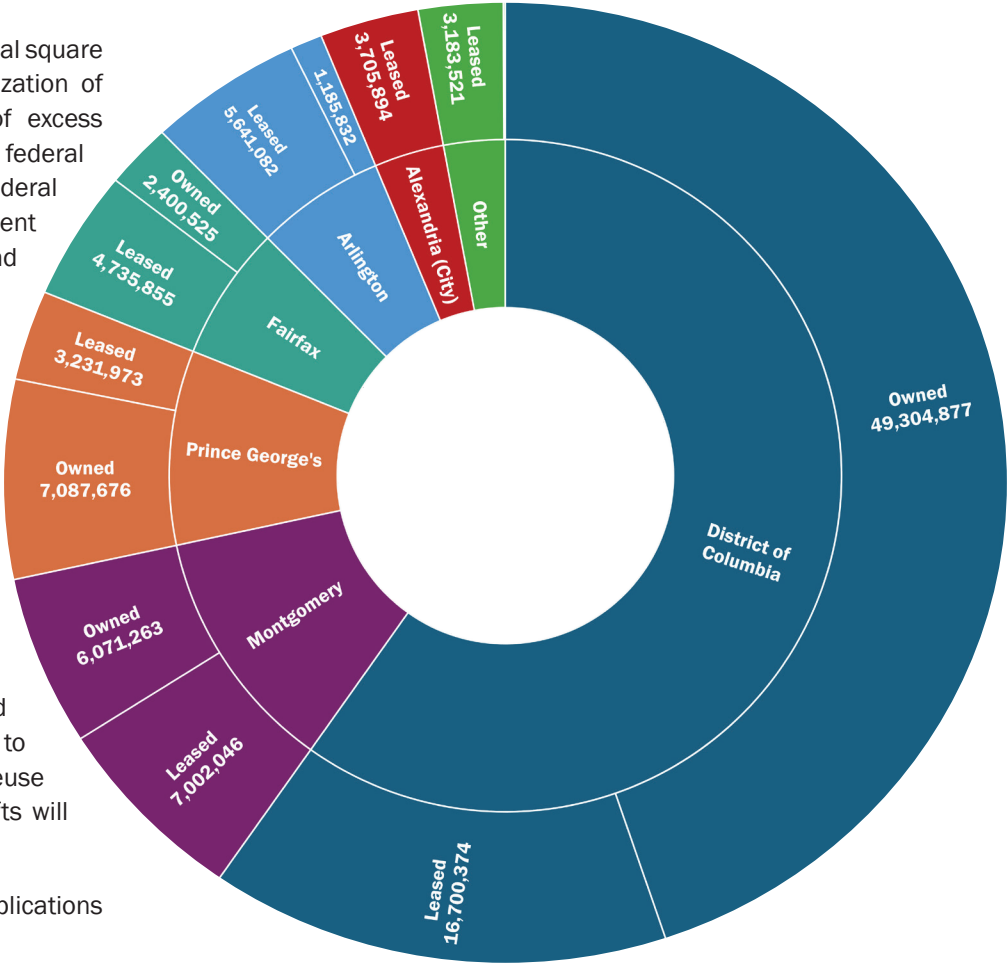
The federal government is the single largest property owner and occupant of real estate in the region, which has significant implications for the region’s economy, transportation, real estate, and employment. The General Services Administration (GSA) owns, manages, constructs, and leases a total of approximately 47 million square feet of owned space and 45 million square feet of leased space. In addition, the Department of Defense controls approximately 71 million square feet. During the pandemic, a significant percentage of the region’s federal workforce worked from home, which impacted many jurisdictions. Many federal agencies have returned to the office, with many transitioning to a hybrid work environment.

The federal government-wide policy is to reduce the total square footage of federal workspace by improving the utilization of federally owned buildings, lowering the number of excess and underutilized properties, and improving the federal real property portfolio’s cost effectiveness. Many federal buildings are currently underutilized. The U.S. Government Accountability Office collected building size and attendance data from the 24 agencies in the Federal Real Property Council during January-March of 2023 and found that these agencies used an estimated average of 25 percent or less of their headquarters building’s capacity.<sup>71</sup> In 2023, there are 474 total GSA leases consisting of approximately 45 million rentable square feet. Approximately 58 percent of those leases are set to expire by 2027.<sup>72</sup> There are 177 leases within Washington, DC; 195 leases within Virginia; and 102 leases within Maryland. Four million square feet of leased office space will expire in the next five years, specifically in Washington. As agencies are reevaluating office space needs and the use of telework, this provides an opportunity to improve the use of federally owned properties and reuse or dispose of federally owned properties. These shifts will ultimately change the region’s federal footprint.

The changing federal footprint poses important implications

for the future of local communities and the region. In 2013, NCPC in partnership with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, explored scenario planning to better understand the cumulative impacts of federal telework and hybrid workplaces on our region and the implications they may have on office demand, federal footprint, the transportation network, and federal procurement. NCPC continues to work with the federal, regional, and local governments to advance strategies and policies that create a positive federal presence in the region as the federal footprint continues to change.

Federally Owned versus Leased Square Footage Space in the NCR, 2022. Source: 2024 Workplace Scenario Planning Study, NCPC







View of Pennsylvania Avenue NW during a sports championship parade with the U.S. Capitol Building in the background.

## The Planning Framework: Vision and Guiding Principles

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### 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 four guiding principles and goals that emerged within these principles.

Each guiding principle includes key objectives that frame policy and guidelines within the Federal Elements.

1. Accommodate federal and national capital activities.
2. Reinforce resilient and sustainable development planning principles.
3. Support local and regional planning and development objectives.
4. Promote equitable development and opportunity for underserved communities.



**Key Objectives:**

- Promote the highest quality design and development in the National Capital Region.
- Preserve historic properties and important L'Enfant and McMillan Plan design features.
- Balance accessibility and security.
- Prioritize the public's access to federal properties, when possible.
- Enhance the beauty and order of the nation's capital.
- Disperse activities throughout the city and region.
- Promote Washington, DC as the prime location for foreign diplomatic missions.



Looking from Lafayette Square toward the White House.

# PRINCIPLE 1

## Accommodate Federal and National Capital Activities

One of the key goals 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. As the seat of the federal government, 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 goal 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 National Capital Region. The Central Employment Area (CEA) is seen as the primary focus of new federal office development and the preferred location of new major federal employment activities. Government headquarters and other federal workplaces are encouraged to be located within or near the CEA. Washington 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 be 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 siting and design of new federal facilities within Washington and its environs that are convenient to public transportation will encourage employees and visitors to make greater use of transit options. Furthermore, the siting and design of new federal facilities within the NCR should consider access and linkages to the local community, as appropriate. 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 accommodate government functions and be designed in a manner that reflects our democratic ideals of openness and participation.



# PRINCIPLE 2

## Reinforce Resilient and Sustainable Development Planning Principles

The Federal Elements encourage resilient planning practices 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 and reduce the need for federal parking facilities and the associated costs and land use.

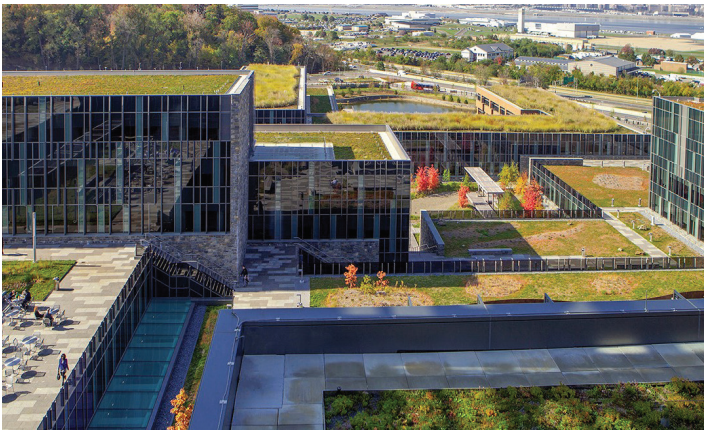
A critical goal within this guiding principle is transportation mobility and accessibility. To facilitate the movement of federal employees to and from their places of employment, federal agencies in the region are leading the way with a variety of creative commuting programs. The federal government 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 goal 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 impacts on, lands, buildings, and communities across the National Capital Region related to climate change and flooding. It is important to anticipate the scope, severity, pace, and unpredictability of future climate change impacts on the federal government’s sites, buildings, and operations. Adaptation planning will allow federal agencies to minimize the negative impacts of climate change that are already occurring in the National Capital Region and take advantage of opportunities to coordinate and respond effectively to future conditions. This will facilitate the protection of federal assets and investments, ensure the long-term resiliency of federal operations, and support economic vitality in the National Capital Region.

### Key Objectives:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and consumption of fossil fuel energy.
- Evaluate and mitigate environmental impacts in communities.
- Advance climate change mitigation, adaption and resilience planning for site and building design, including rehabilitation.
- Reinvest in the efficient use of federal facilities and plan for the long-term use and space needs of the federal workforce.
- Concentrate more intense federal development near existing high-capacity transit routes and other multi-modal facilities.
- Encourage pedestrian oriented development, mixed uses, and other compact forms of development.
- Promote non-auto transportation alternatives, including transit, walking, and bicycling.
- Preserve open space, natural beauty, cultural resources, and critical environmental areas.



Green roofs at the U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters Building. Source: GSA.



### Key Objectives:

- Maximize the contribution of federal projects to local and regional jurisdictions through the location and design of federal facilities.
- Promote intergovernmental coordination and engagement.
- Encourage federal agencies during the early stages of planning to facilitate community engagement meetings and other similar initiatives to inform community organizations of pending development.
- Encourage agencies to work with local jurisdictions to ensure land disposal and workplace consolidations can support their needs.



DC Department of Transportation advertises the Vision Zero program at an Open Streets event. NCPC coordinates with DDOT on issues relating to public space and security.

## PRINCIPLE 3

### Support Local and Regional Planning and Development Objectives

A key goal of this principle is to ensure that 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.

Given the distribution of federal facilities across the NCR, 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.

Finally, 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 governments so federal agencies can develop the best approaches to land use, economic development, transportation, and other potential impacts in communities.
- Encouraging federal agencies planning development projects to participate in the Commission's "early consultation" program to inform non-federal officials and community organizations about such projects prior to their submission to the Commission.
- Providing public participation opportunities in the Commission's preparation and review of federal policies, plans, projects, and capital improvement programs.
- Evaluating the applicant agency's local community participation, outreach, and engagement with underserved communities to determine its effectiveness.
- 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, and local community groups.



# PRINCIPLE 4

## Promote Equitable Development and Opportunity for Underserved Communities

The key goal of this guiding principle is to advance equity as a central component of the agency’s planning policies. While NCR has played a key role in shaping the NCR into a vibrant and culturally diverse region, it is imperative that the agency strive to recognize and remedy, to the greatest extent possible, historical planning practices that may have resulted in inequitable outcomes for underserved communities and how those policies have shaped communities today.

**Key Objectives:**

- **Physical Access:** Promote universal and equitable access for visitors to onsite public amenities, and employees to amenities in the surrounding community.
- **Economic Development:** Advance economic opportunity through economic development and investment in sites and workforces in communities with underserved populations.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage with underserved communities in a responsive, transparent, and inclusive manner, which allows communities to understand policy proposals and participate in bidirectional conversations with public officials.
- **Cultural Affirmation and Diversity:** Affirm the importance of local cultural identity and traditions and recognize the role that cultural recognition plays in supporting civic engagement and community enrichment.
- **Data Analysis:** Use qualitative and quantitative data to identify and track the legacy and contemporary impacts of policies, practices, and procedures relating to federal development that have adversely impacted underserved communities.
- **Sustainability, Resilience, and Health:** Improve human health and protect federal assets in underserved communities through investment in resilient planning practices that mitigate the impacts of climate change.

### Documenting Local History and the Impacts of the Federal Footprint

As part of the agency’s 2023 review of the Pentagon Master Plan update, Pentagon officials documented the history of the campus’ construction and acknowledged the legacy of eminent domain, which resulted in the mandatory relocation of over 900 people residing in East Arlington and Queen City, two largely African American communities that evolved from the former Freedman’s Village that was established on their general vicinity during the Civil War. In 1942, East Arlington and Queen City were demolished to construct the roadway network to support the Pentagon campus. The image to the left depicts the neighborhood prior to demolition. By acknowledging this history, the Pentagon is shedding light on its past, while also sharing this previously unacknowledged story with the broader public.



Queen City with the newly-built Pentagon in the background. Source: U.S. Army via Lindsey Bestebreurtje, Ph.D.



### 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:

- Guide urban design features that contribute to the image and function of the nation’s capital.
- Guide the location of new federal facilities and the management of existing federal facilities.
- Guide the placement and accommodation of foreign missions and international agencies.
- Promote the preservation and enhancement of the region’s natural resources and environment.
- Protect historic and cultural resources.
- Encourage federal, local, state, and national authorities to work together.
- Support 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; Federal Workplace; Foreign Missions & International Organizations; Transportation; Parks & Open Space; Federal Environment; Historic Preservation; and Visitors & Commemoration.



**Urban Design:** 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. A technical addendum is included in the Urban Design Element, of the Comprehensive Plan, which is a resource that supports the element’s policies.



**Federal Workplace:** 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.



**Foreign Missions & International Organizations:** 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:** Support the development and maintenance of a multimodal transportation system that meets the needs of federal workers, residents, and visitors, while improving regional mobility, transportation access, and environmental quality. A technical addendum is included in the Transportation Element, of the Comprehensive Plan, which is a resource that supports the element’s policies.



**Parks and Open Space:** Protect and enhance the National Capital Region’s parks and open space system—for recreation; as commemorative and symbolic space; as social, civic, and celebratory space; and to provide environmental and educational benefits.



**Federal Environment:** 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.



**Historic Preservation:** 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.



**Visitor and Commemoration:** 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.

The Federal Elements also includes an **Action Plan** as a technical addendum. 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 Federal Elements—along with the District Elements, federal and District agencies’ 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.



## Definitions

**Environmental Justice:** The just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in agency decision-making and other federal activities that affect human health and the environment so that people: are fully protected from disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects (including risks) and hazards, including those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers; and have equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment in which to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices.

**Equity:** The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

**Underserved Communities:** Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding definition of “equity.”

**Equitable Development:** An approach for meeting the needs of underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant. It is increasingly considered an effective placed-based action for creating strong and livable communities.<sup>73</sup>

**Sustainability:** To create and maintain conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony and that permit fulfilling social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations.<sup>74</sup>

**Resilience:** A capability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from significant multi-hazard threats with minimum damage to social well-being, the economy, and the environment.<sup>75</sup>

**Adaptation:** An adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities. Various types of adaptation can be distinguished, including anticipatory and reactive adaptation, private and public adaptation, and autonomous and planned adaptation.<sup>76</sup>



*LOVE HATE* by Mia Florentine Weiss, is an ambigram that reads “love” from one side and “hate” from the other. Located in Farrgut Square and part of the Golden Triangle BID. Below: Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC.





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