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The Context

BACKGROUND

The *SW Ecodistrict Plan* is the outgrowth of various planning activities and related initiatives spearheaded by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC). In 1997, NCPC's Legacy Plan outlined a vision to guide development of Washington's monumental core and suggested that federal development serve as a catalyst for enlivening the city. In 2009, in partnership with the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and consultation with the District of Columbia, NCPC prepared the *Monumental Core Framework Plan* which focused on how to improve the federally dominated precincts surrounding the National Mall, including the area now identified as the SW Ecodistrict.

Additional guidance from the national and local levels informed development of the *SW Ecodistrict Plan*. In 2009, President Obama signed Executive Order 13514, "Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy and Economic Performance" (E.O. 13514), making the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions a priority for the federal government. In 2012, District Mayor Vincent Gray released "A Vision for a Sustainable DC," a community-designed plan which calls for transforming the District of Columbia into the "greenest, healthiest, and most livable city in the nation."



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

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



(Top image) May 2011 Task Force/Working Group workshop

(Left image) February 2011 public meeting

(Above image) July 2011 community meeting

THE STUDY AREA

Located immediately south of the National Mall, the 110-acre SW Ecodistrict is bounded by Independence Avenue to the north, Maine Avenue to the south, 12th Street to the west, and 4th Street to the east. The 15-block study area includes eight federal buildings, eight private buildings, and three federal parks. Approximately 56 percent of the land is federally owned, 26 percent is private, and about 18 percent is devoted to streets, freeways, and rail lines under the jurisdiction of either the District of Columbia, the Federal Highway Administration, or the CSX Corporation.

Originally established to support the adjacent waterfront and military arsenal at Fort McNair, the working-class community was the nation's most ambitious Urban Renewal Program following World War II. To make way for this modern development, the community was physically razed and its residents and businesses displaced. The construction of the Southwest Freeway physically separated the neighborhood's residential and office uses. North of the freeway, the predominately federal office precinct remains characterized by oversized superblocks, single-use office buildings, large setbacks, and limited ground floor activity. Buildings and public spaces are designed in the late Modern International style. Tenth Street, later renamed L'Enfant Promenade, became the area's central spine. Extending between the Smithsonian Castle and a circular park overlooking the Washington Channel, the imposing and elevated street crosses an active railroad and freeway. Its design creates a labyrinth of elevated streets, ramps, and stairs that make any form of navigation difficult. The streetscape is oversized and barren with little vegetation and minimal amenities.

The form of the study area's existing buildings, segregated land uses, infrastructure, and condition of the public realm create barriers separating it from the surrounding city. The result is a large, prominent area of the nation's capital that feels isolated and undesirable for improvement and investment.

DEVELOPING THE PLAN

The SW Ecodistrict Initiative is led by NCPC in coordination with the District Office of Planning (DCOP), and is guided by the SW Ecodistrict Task Force, comprised of 17 federal and local agencies (see page 98). The Task Force first convened in spring 2010, and worked together to set goals and develop recommendations for the area. A staff-level working group provided technical support. NCPC had primary responsibility for oversight of ZGF Architects LLP, the project's principal consultant.

An important component of the *SW Ecodistrict Plan* is the *Maryland Avenue SW, Small Area Plan* prepared by the DCOP in consultation with an advisory committee of private property owners and transit and rail operators. Completed in the summer of 2012, the plan addresses how best to reconstruct Maryland Avenue to support a diverse array of land uses and improved public spaces.

Several methods were used to solicit input during preparation of both the *SW Ecodistrict Plan* and the *Maryland Avenue, SW Small Area Plan*. The SW Ecodistrict Task Force and Working Group held a total of 17 meetings. The Maryland Avenue, SW Advisory Committee held four meetings. Seven public meetings designed to obtain citizen input were hosted independently or jointly by NCPC and DCOP. Throughout the process, comments were collected via a District-initiated on-site user survey, an online public comment forum hosted by NCPC, a live chat with the Washington City Paper, and by community blogs.



THE SW ECODISTRICT WILL BE A REVITALIZED COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL DESTINATION