

# Height Master Plan Study for Washington, DC

Requested by the U.S. House Committee on  
Oversight and Government Reform

---

Information Session

September 25, 2013

- July 19, 2012  
“Changes to the Height Act: Shaping Washington DC for the Future” - Hearing before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
- October 3, 2012  
Letter from House Committee requesting a joint Height Master Plan Study of the Height Act
- November 1, 2012  
Response from NCPC Chairman Bryant and Mayor Gray
- September 5, 2013  
Draft Evaluation and Findings of Federal Interests - NCPC
- September 24, 2013  
Draft Evaluation and Recommendations of Local Interests - District of Columbia

1. Height Master Plan Study Overview
  - Lucy Kempf, NCPC
2. District of Columbia Draft Local Interests Report
  - Harriet Tregoning, DCOP
3. NCPC Draft Federal Interests Report
  - Lucy Kempf, NCPC

## \* Applies City-wide

### Residential Streets (80'-160' R.O.W.)

- Width of the street = building height
- Maximum height = 90'

### Commercial Streets (90'-160' R.O.W.)

- Width of the street = building height + 20'
- Maximum height = 130'

### Pennsylvania Avenue (160' R.O.W.)

- Maximum height = 160'



Image: District of Columbia



# Part 1: Height Master Plan Overview

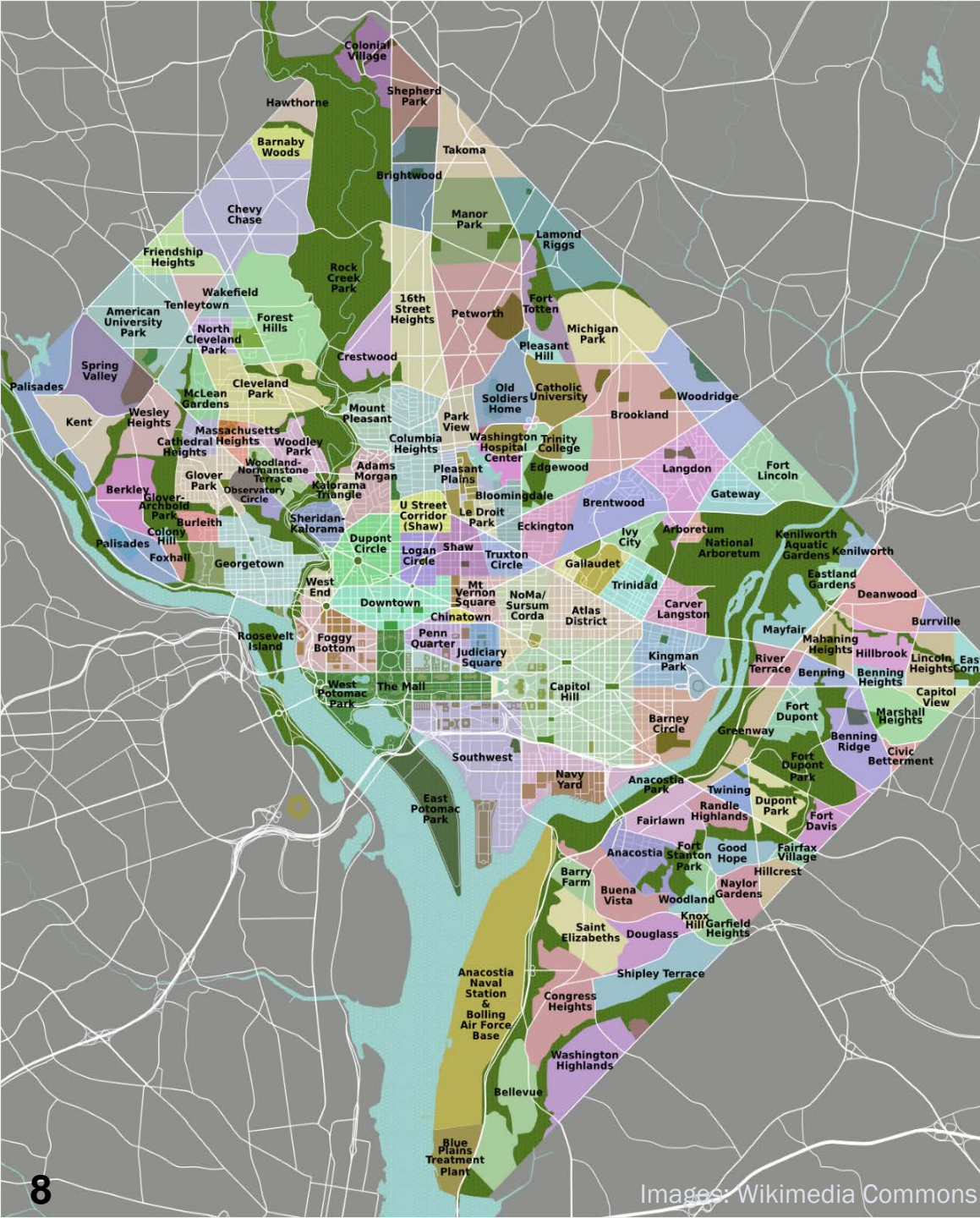
## Request from the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

“...the exploration of strategic changes to the law in those areas outside the L’Enfant City that support local economic development goals while taking into account the impact on federal interests, compatibility to the surrounding neighborhoods, national security concerns, input from local residents, and other related factors...”

“The character of Washington’s historic L’Enfant City—particularly the Monumental Core—establishes the city’s iconic image as our capital. Any changes to the Height of Buildings Act that affect the historic L’Enfant City should be carefully studied to ensure that the iconic, horizontal skyline and the visual preeminence of the U.S. Capitol and related national monuments are retained.”







## Core Principles of the Height Master Plan

### Principle 1

Ensure the prominence of federal landmarks and monuments by preserving their views and settings

### Principle 2

Maintain the horizontality of the monumental city skyline

### Principle 3

Minimize negative impacts to nationally significant historic resources, including the L'Enfant Plan



Ensure the prominence of federal landmarks and monuments by preserving views to and from their settings.





Image: National Archives



Image: White House



Image: District of Columbia



**Maintain the horizontality of the monumental city skyline.**



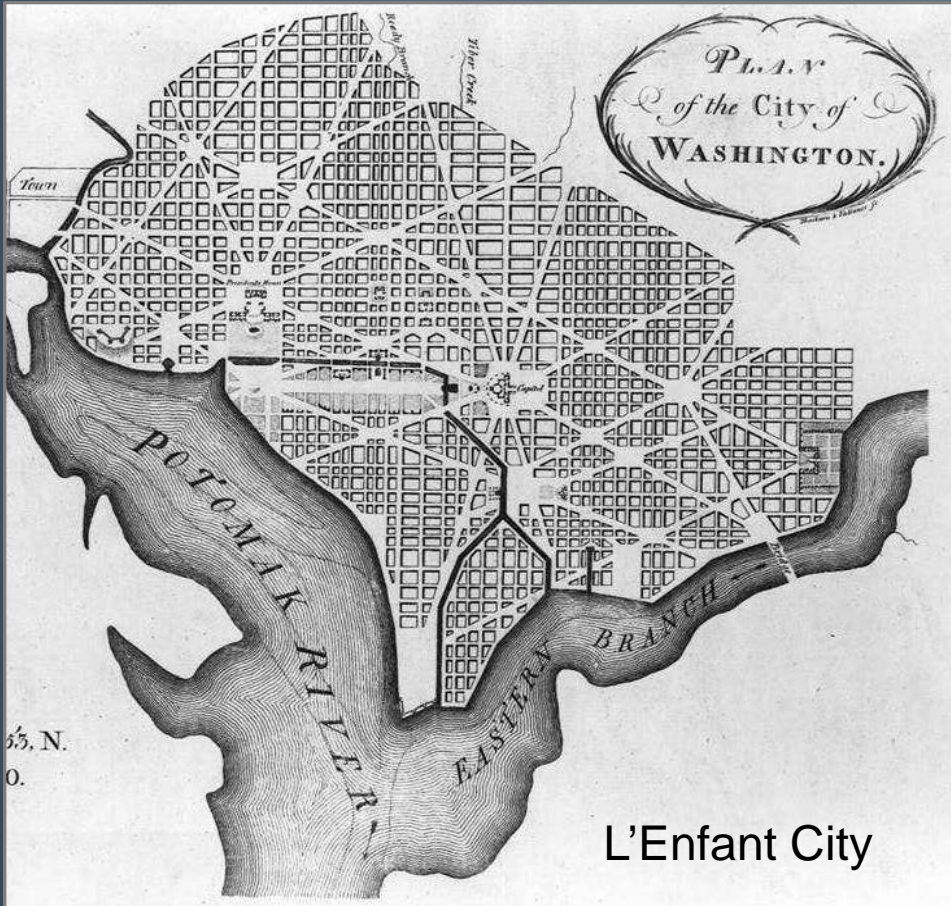


**Minimize negative impacts to nationally significant historic resources, including the L'Enfant Plan.**





## A Purpose-Built Capital City: The Original Plan for the City of Washington, 1791



L'Enfant City



Topographic Bowl

*“a magnificent city, worthy of the nation, free of its colonial origins, and bold in its assertion of a new identity.”*

## Phase 1

Case Study Research

Identify Federal and Local Interests - Agency Consultation

Background Research

## Phase 2 (District of Columbia)

Visual Modeling Study

Economic Analysis

## Phase 3

Preliminary Findings and Evaluation to the Commission –  
September 12, 2013

**Information Session – September 25, 2013**

**Commission Meeting and Public Hearing – October 2, 2013**

Commission Meeting and Information Presentation, DCOP – October 3, 2013

Final Recommendations to the Commission – November 7, 2013

Final Recommendations to the Committee – November 2013



## Phase II Modeling: Visual Impacts at Various Scales and Vantage Points



Images: District of Columbia



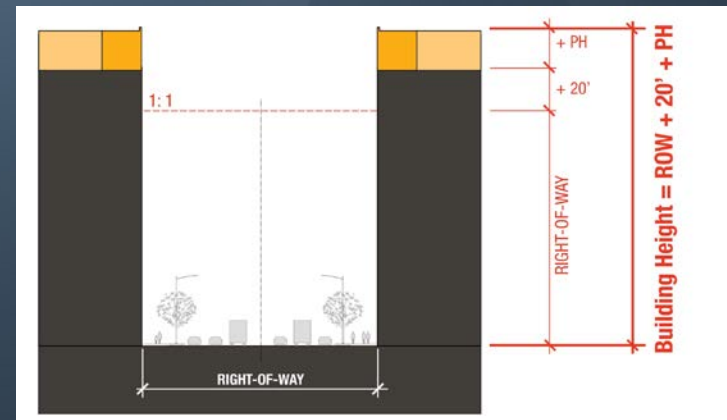
## Phase II Modeling: Approaches

### 1. No Change to the Height Act “Build-out”



### 2. Street to Height Relationship “Ratios”

### 3. City Wide Increase



### 4. Selective Areas “Clusters”

### 5. Adjust Penthouses Restrictions

## Local & Regional Outreach

- Hosted 10 public meetings, with at least one meeting in each of the District's eight wards
- 50-100 people attended each session, comprised mainly of DC residents
- Received nearly 200 individual comments from citizens in 16 states and four foreign countries

## Special Targeted Outreach

- Hosted two discussions with 26 historic preservation experts
- Hosted two- discussions with federal facility and agency stakeholders
- Convened a real estate developers focus group
- One-on-one conversations with federal facility and agency stakeholders
- Worked with the local AIA Chapter to explore occupied penthouse design.

## National Outreach

- Public feedback was collected from citizens of 16 states and four foreign countries
- Twitter hashtag “#HeightDC” reached 1,600 individual accounts, collecting 2,000 impressions
- Posted study-related information to 25 relevant design, urbanism, and planning-related LinkedIn discussion groups, touching 226,883 individuals
- 25 national, 28 local, two international media outlets ran stories about study

# Part 2: The District of Columbia Draft Report

## Preliminary Evaluation and Findings

# Part 3: The NCPC Draft Report Preliminary Evaluation and Findings Related to Federal Interests

- a. Federal Interests Overview
- b. Key Findings and Conclusions



## Part 3a. National Interests: Form and Character

Image: National Archives

Form of the capital city



Image: District of Columbia

Settings of iconic structures and grounds



Image: Wikimedia Commons



## Part 3a. National Interests: Form and Character





# Part 3a. National Interests: Form and Character

Image: District of Columbia





## Part 3a. National Interests: Form and Character



1790: A purpose-built capital city

1910: Height of Buildings Act

1973: Home Rule Act

- Considered the question of federal interests broadly.
- Congress continued long-term stewardship role in preserving the form of the capital city through the Height Act.

## Federal Interest Protections in H.R. 9682

1973 District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act

To understand and protect federal interests, before the Act was formally considered:

- The Committee solicited views and information from all members of the House and expected witnesses on the federal interest.
- “What is the meaning and definition of the federal interest...to what extent and by what institutions should it be maintained...?”
- Sought testimony and guidance from a range of experts.
- Grappled with the federal interest question in numerous mark-up sessions.

### 1973 Federal Interest Protections in H.R. 9682

#### District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act

To protect federal interests and the role of the federal government:

- The subcommittee and the full committee drafted and approved numerous provisions designed to protect the federal interest, including restrictions related to the Height Act. Council shall not “enact any act, resolution or rule which permits the building of any structure within the District of Columbia in excess of the height limitations contained in Section 5 of the Height Act.”
  - Included protections for institutions and mechanisms to protect federal interests.
- Articulated a desire for a “capital city for all Americans” and linked height to the beauty and form of the capital.



## Part 3a. Federal Interests: Form and Character





## Part 3a. Federal Interests: Facilities, Parks, and Missions

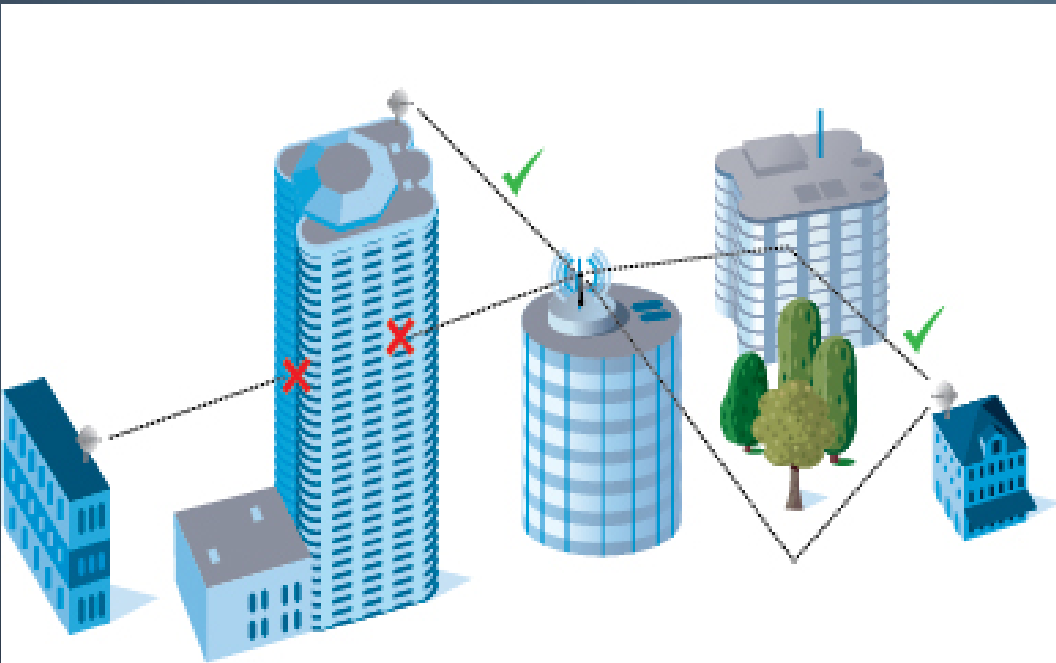


Image: NBC





## Part 3a. Federal Interests: Security and Infrastructure



## Summary

- The Form and Character of the Capital City
  - Building Heights
  - The settings of iconic federal buildings and grounds such as the White House, the Capitol, the Washington Monument, the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, and the National Mall.
  - The elements of the L'Enfant Plan, including reservations, vistas, streets, and open space above the streets up to building height limits.
- Federal agency headquarters and offices, national memorials and museums, national parks, and diplomatic missions.
- Matters related to security, infrastructure, and federal operations.

### Basis for the NCPC Findings Related to the Federal Interest

- A. An evaluation of federal and national interests, which is documented through the legislative history related to Home Rule; consultation with federal agencies; the Comprehensive Plan's Federal Elements; and other plans and policies.
- B. The Core Principles
- C. Policy-level considerations
  - Equity
  - Clarity and Efficacy of the Regulatory Review Process
- D. Tools such as the Visual Modeling Study

### Consultation with Federal Agencies and Organizations

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

Architect of the Capitol

Arlington National Cemetery

Armed Forces Retirement Home

Interagency Security Council

Smithsonian Institution

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

U.S. Department of Defense

U.S. Department of the Interior

U.S. Department of State

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

U.S. General Services Administration

U.S. Marine Corps

U.S. Navy NAVFAC

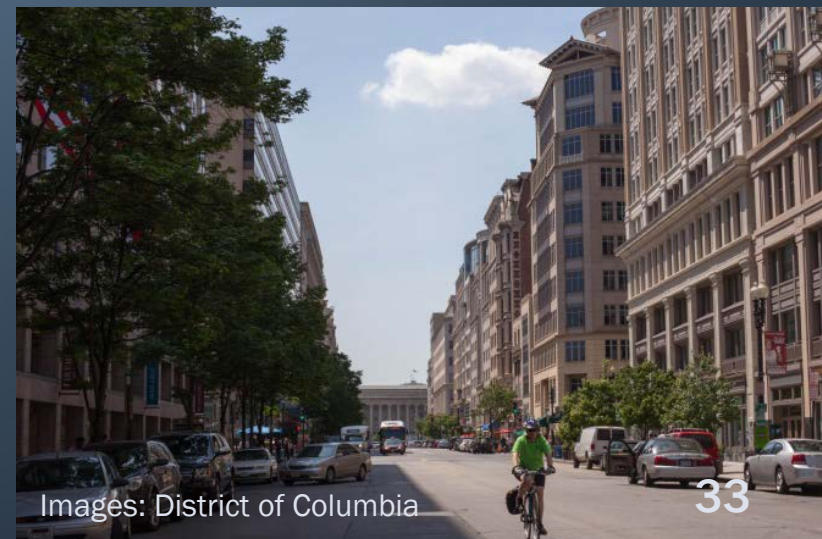
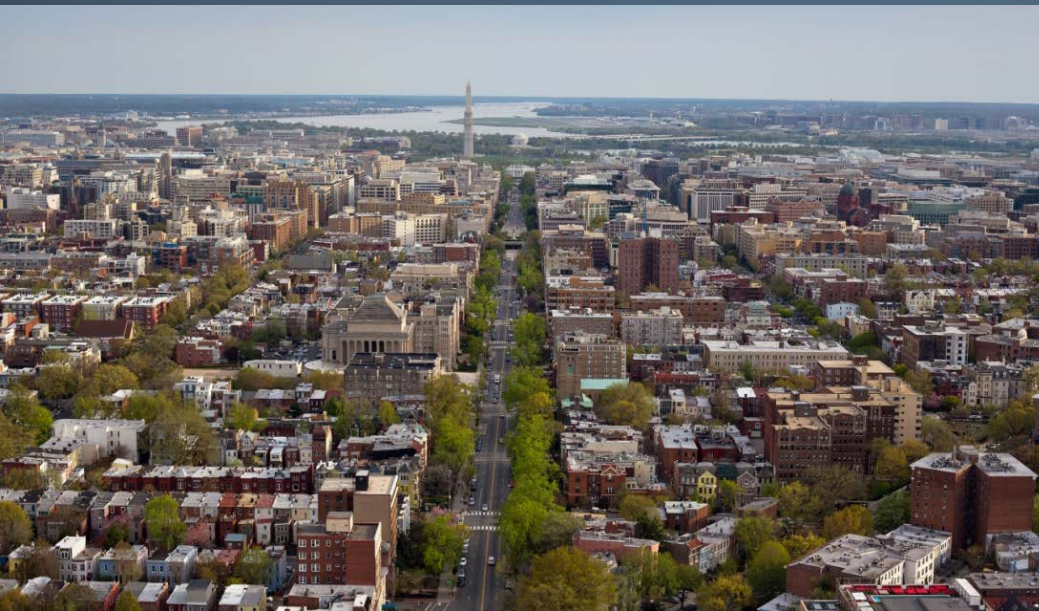
U.S. Secret Service

Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority



## Visual Impacts at Various Scales and Vantage Points



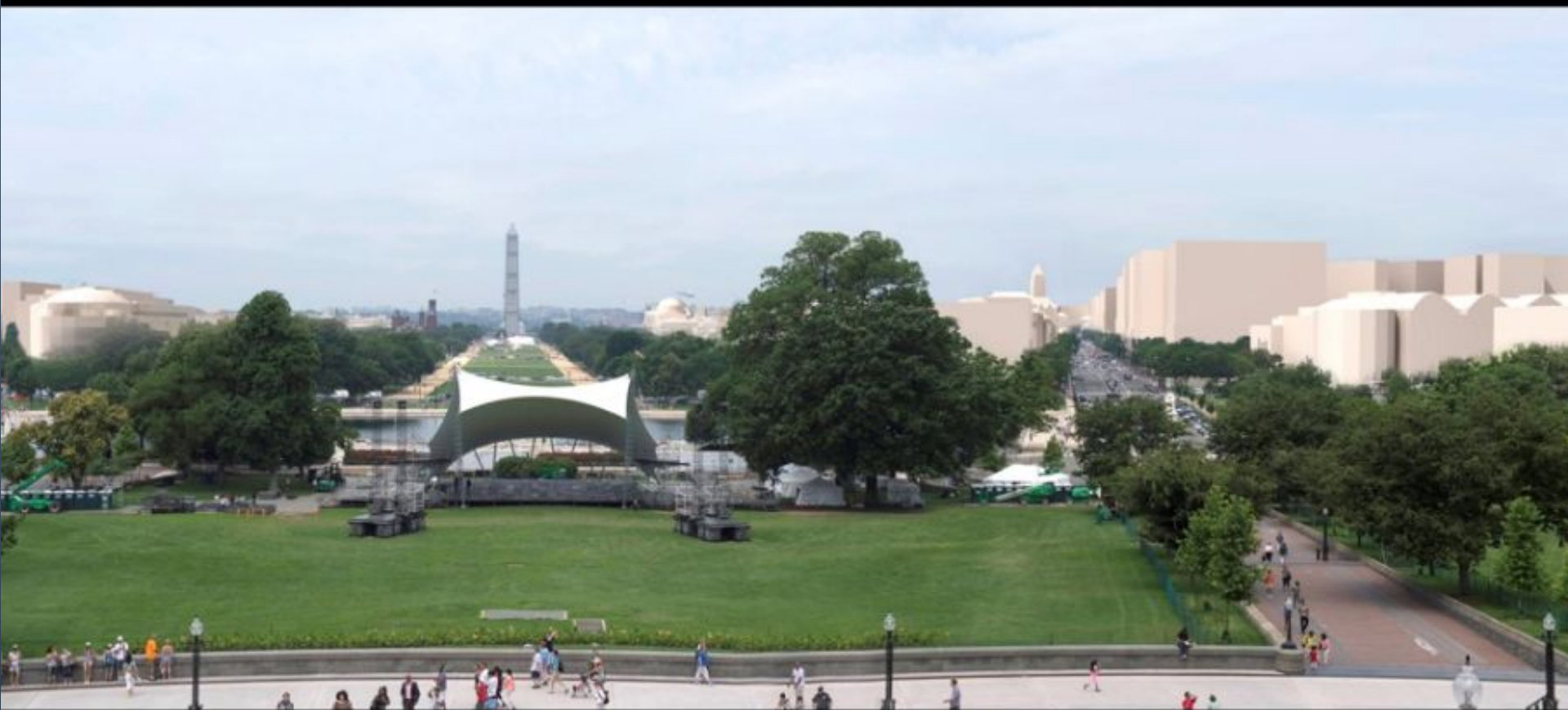
Images: District of Columbia



## U.S. Capitol Building: Existing Conditions



**U.S. Capitol Building:  
What if the building height  
in L'Enfant City increased to  
**130'****



**U.S. Capitol Building:  
What if the building height  
in L'Enfant City increased to  
**200'****







**North Capitol Street**  
**Street Width = 130'**  
**Building Height = 90'**





What if the building  
height  
increased to **130'**





What if the building  
height  
increased to **160'**



## View from Pennsylvania Avenue







----- Old Post  
Office Tower 315'

U.S. Capitol Building

160' ROW





What if the building height  
increased to

**200'**

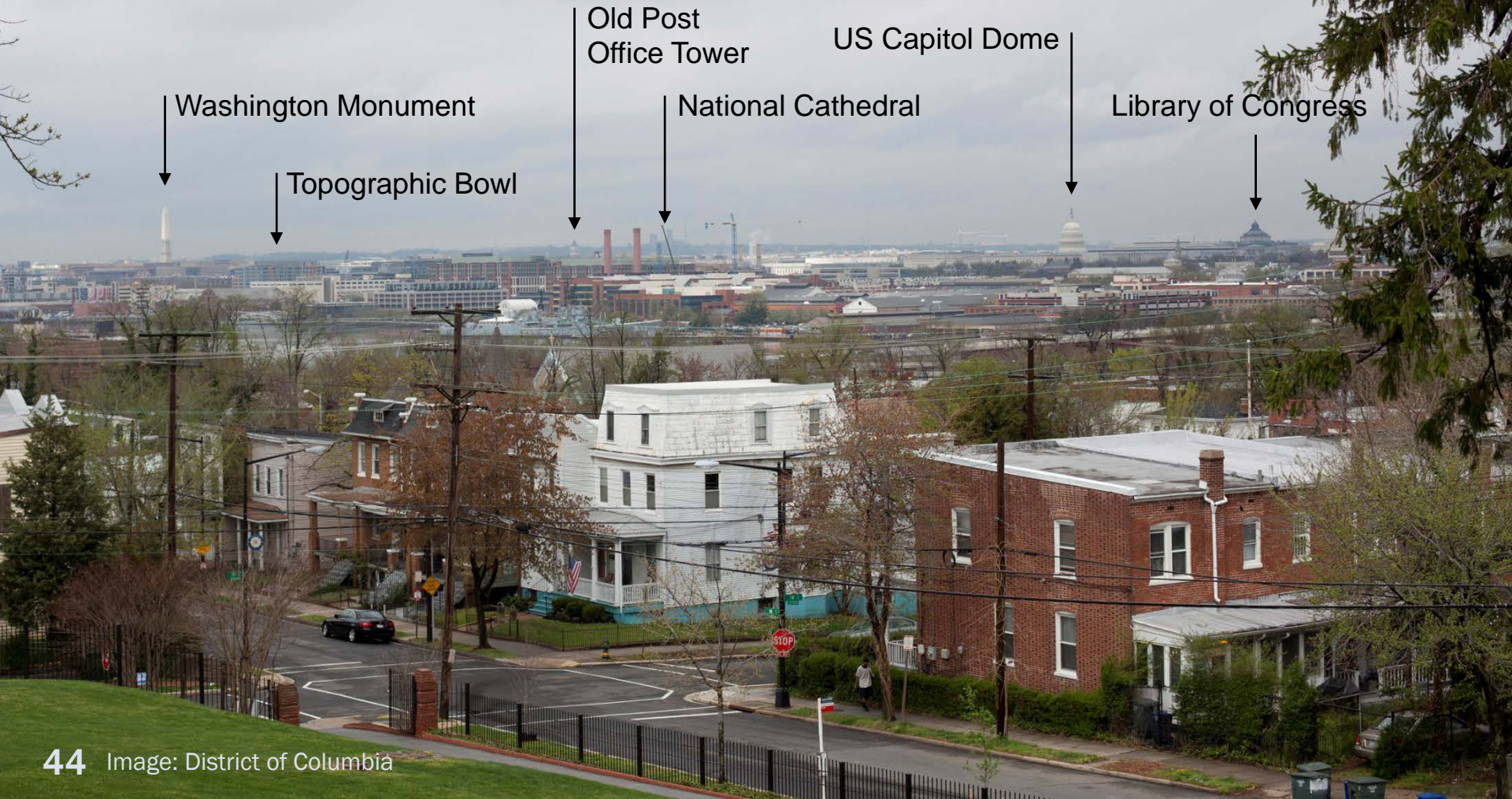


## View from Frederick Douglass House





# Frederick Douglass House: Existing Conditions





**Frederick Douglass House:  
What if the building height  
in L'Enfant City increased to**

**130'**





**Frederick Douglass House:  
What if the building height  
in L'Enfant City increased to  
200'**



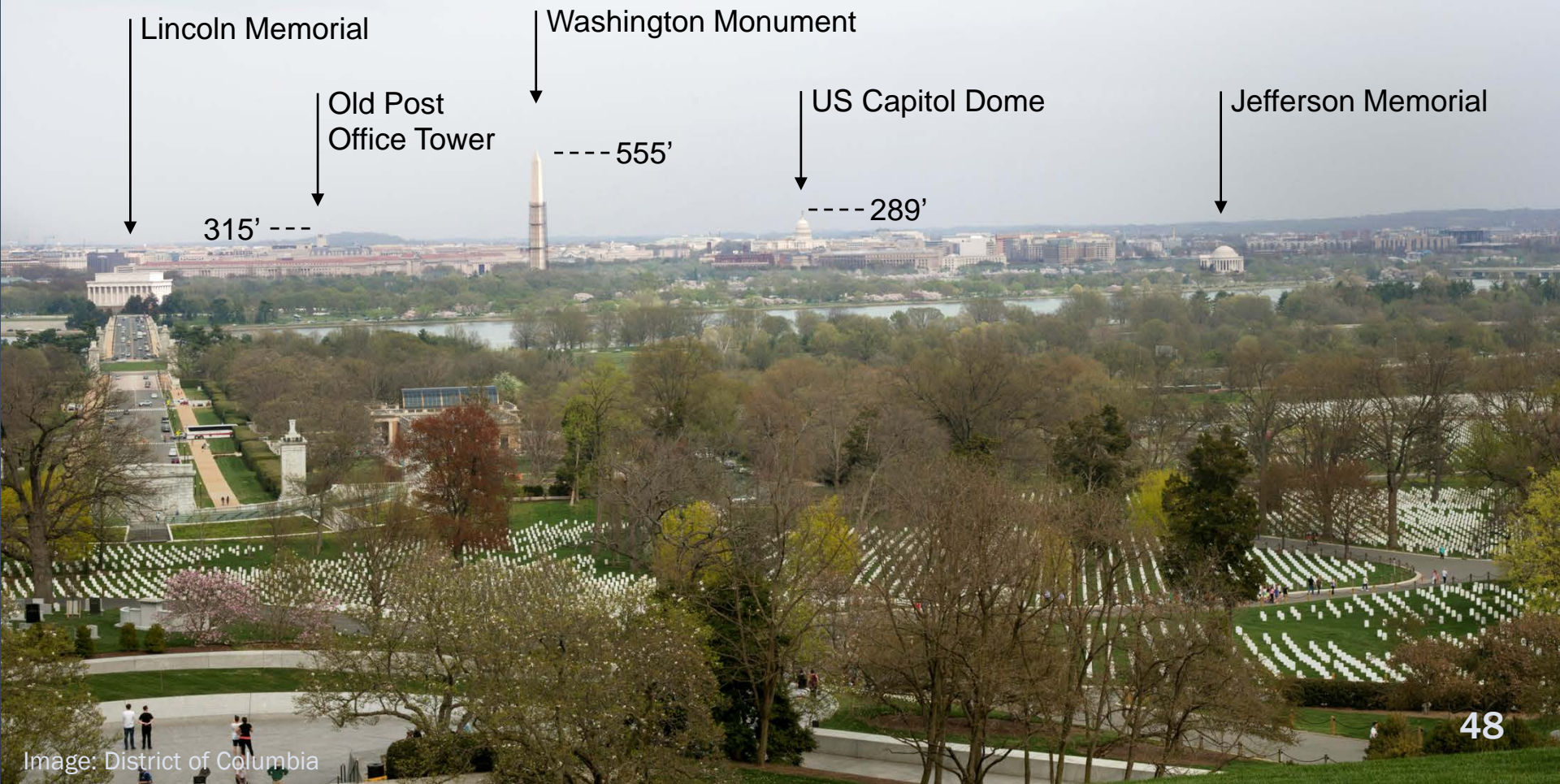


## View from Arlington Cemetery





# Arlington Cemetery: Existing Conditions





Topographic Bowl

**Arlington Cemetery:  
What if the building height outside L'Enfant City  
but within the topographic bowl increased to  
225'**





## Pennsylvania Avenue, SE: Existing Conditions



U.S. Capitol Building



**Pennsylvania Avenue, SE:**  
**What if the building height outside L'Enfant City**  
**but within the topographic bowl increased to**  
**130'**





Approach 3A: L'Enfant City

**Pennsylvania Avenue, SE:  
What if the building height  
in L'Enfant City increased to  
130'**





## View from Jefferson Memorial





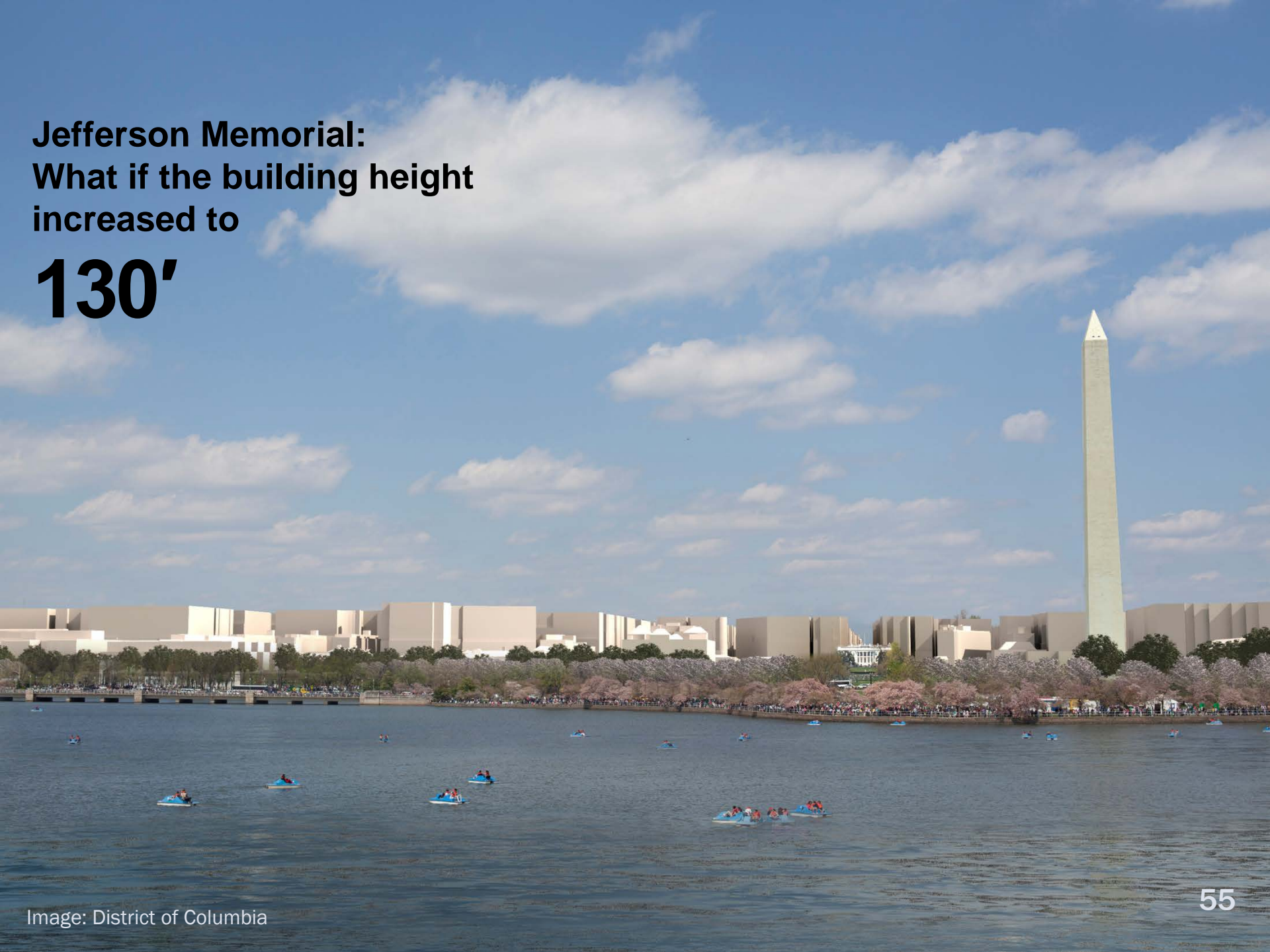
## Jefferson Memorial: Existing Conditions





**Jefferson Memorial:  
What if the building height  
increased to**

**130'**



**Jefferson Memorial:  
What if the building height  
increased to  
200'**





Additional federal interests that should be considered include:

### **Security**

**Key Take-away:** Evaluate new lines of sight to and from federal facilities. Evaluations and responsive measures may have costs.

### **Operations, Infrastructure**

**Key Take-away:** Additional study required to understand impacts to infrastructure and strategies to address costs.

### **Other site specific matters**

USDOT Headquarters



St. Elizabeths

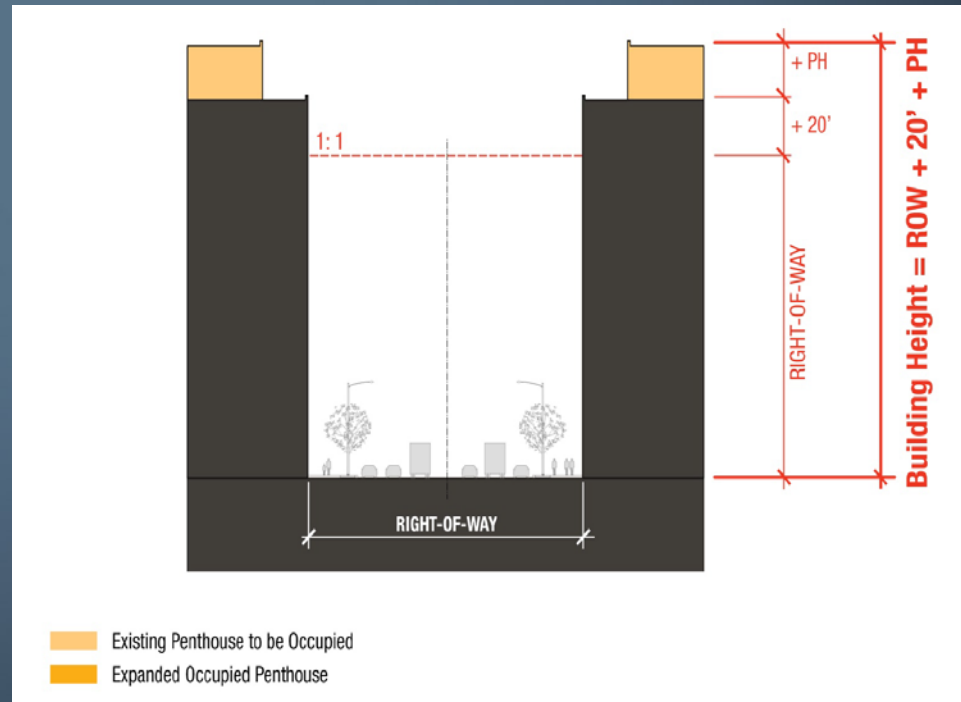


ATF Headquarters

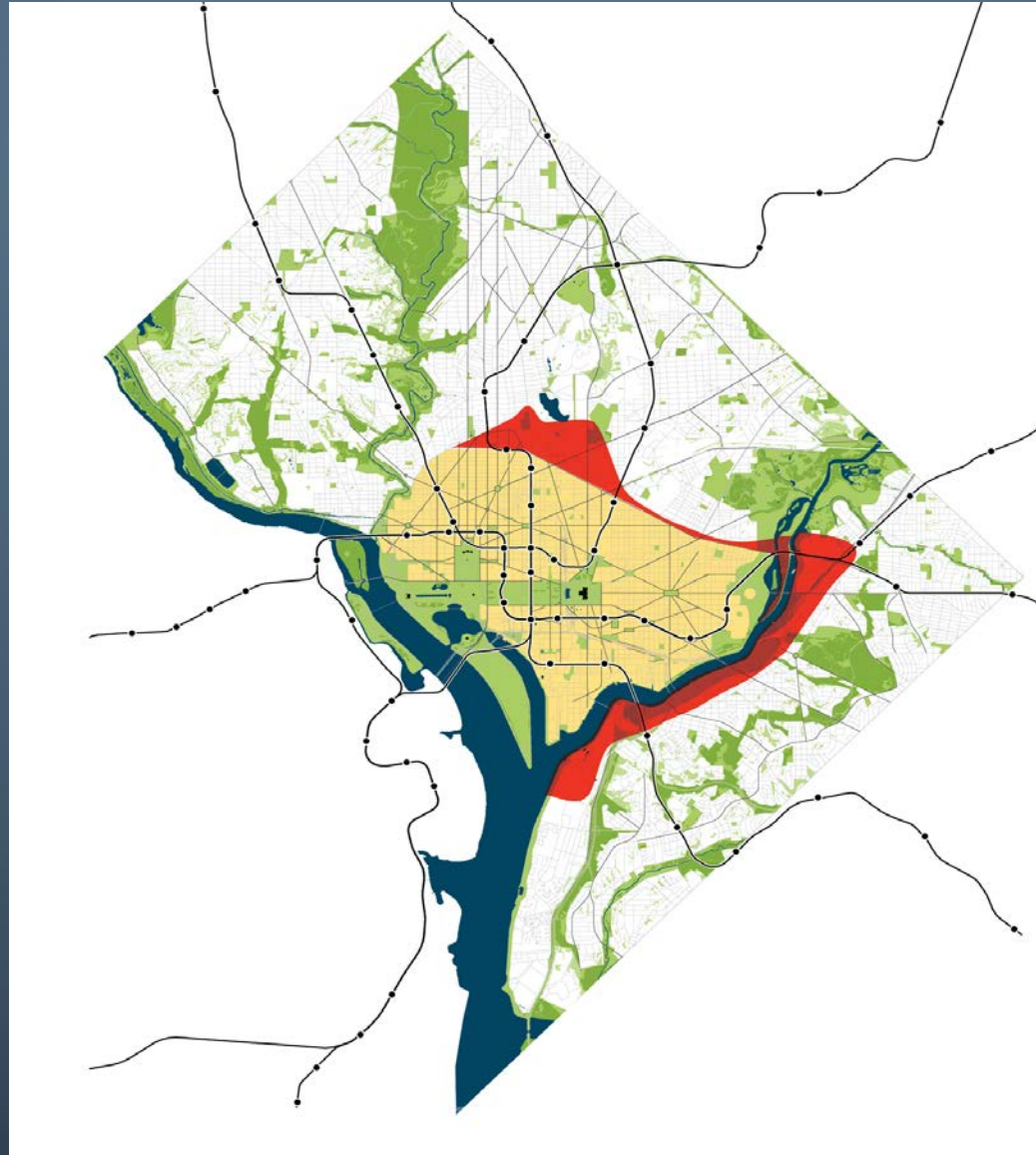


Several potential opportunities for strategic change include:

1. Permitting a broader range of active uses in penthouses
  - Include specific protections related to sightlines for select federal buildings, such as the U.S. Capitol and White House.
  - Retain the set back at a 1:1 ratio.
  - Prevent creation of multiple floors within penthouses, or stacking of penthouses atop penthouses.



### L'Enfant City and Topographic Bowl



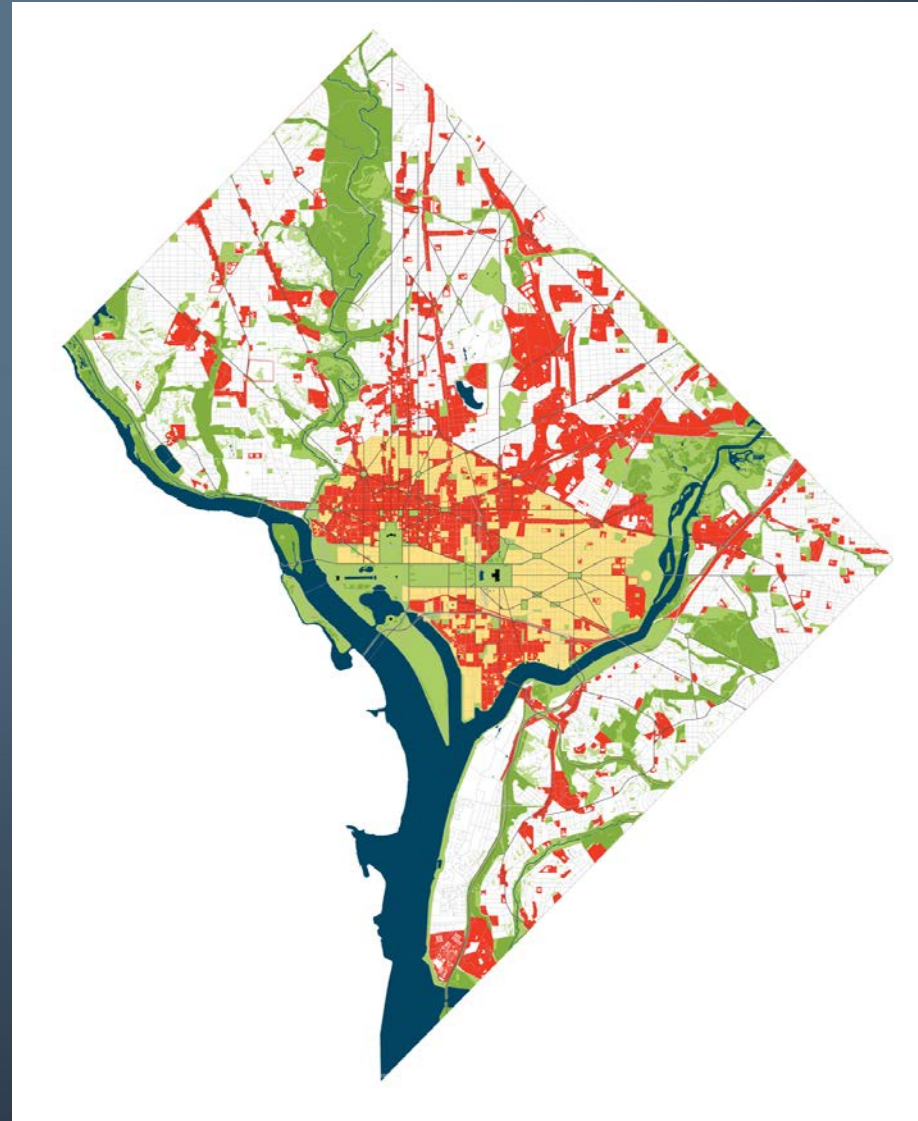


## Part 3b. Evaluation and Findings: Conclusion

### District of Columbia Modeling Study – Areas modeled for height changes

2. Explore opportunities for strategic change outside of the L'Enfant City and beyond the edge of the topographic bowl, considering:

- Current *Comprehensive Plan* goals and designations.
- Goals and issues outlined in the District's draft Height Study evaluation and findings.
- Protections for federal properties, resources, and interests.



# Public Comment Opportunities

**October 2, 2013 | 3:30 PM | Special Commission Meeting**

*Deadline to register to speak: Noon on Tuesday, October 1*

**October 15, 2013 30-Day Public Comment Period Ends**

Last day to submit written comments

**November 7, 2013 | 1:00 PM | Commission Meeting**

*Deadline to register to speak: Noon on Wednesday, November 6*





**For details on  
submitting written comments  
or registering to speak**

**[www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy/testimony](http://www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy/testimony)**

