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Celebrating a Milestone: NCPC's Revised Introduction Chapter Embraces Equity and Resilience

On June 6, 2024, marking a century since its founding, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) unveiled a pivotal update to the Introduction Chapter of the Federal Elements of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*, and corresponding updates to the agency's Submission Guidelines. The revisions are more than a procedural update; they represent a transformative shift in how NCPC approaches planning within the National Capital Region (NCR). By integrating social equity considerations, the revised chapter lays a robust foundation for a more inclusive and responsive planning process for generations to come.

NCPC initiated the effort to update the Introduction Chapter in 2022, in accordance with the Biden Administration's executive orders emphasizing racial equity, environmental justice, and climate action. Notably, Executive Orders 13985 and 14091 focus on advancing racial equity and supporting underserved communities. In alignment with these directives, NCPC undertook a comprehensive overhaul of the Introduction Chapter, ensuring that equity, environmental justice, and climate resiliency are central to future planning efforts.

Staff used an equity lens to analyze the historical and contemporary impacts of NCPC's policies on underserved communities, which shaped our understanding of how federal development has transformed the region's social and urban design. This framework necessitated engaging a diverse range of stakeholders from across the NCR, including community organizations like the Greater Washington Community Foundation, Friends of Anacostia Park, regional groups such as the Piscataway Conoy Tribe, local government planning departments, and educational institutions including Howard University and the University of Maryland.

The agency's pre-planning initiatives and engagement efforts resulted in a revised Introduction Chapter that acknowledges the region's rich history, addresses the impacts of long-standing equity challenges, while also establishing a framework for analyzing equity in future policy revisions. Major revisions addressing equity include:

1. **Acknowledging that Washington, DC is a place full of people, in addition to its symbolic and representative functions as the nation's capital.** A new callout highlights that Washington, DC is first home to nearly a million people who help to make the city a culturally-rich and vibrant place to live and work. The National Capital Region is a diverse region home to more than five million people. Nearly 175 different languages are spoken in the area, and the region is one of the of the most educated and affluent metropolitan areas in the United States.
2. **Expanding the narrative about the history of land-use in the region.** Community stakeholders told us to incorporate more information about the history of land use and development in the region. Suggested topics ranged from the presence of American Bison in the National Capital Region NCR to the establishment of the McMillan Commission. The chapter was revised to reflect on indigenous and colonial settlement patterns that predate the 1791 L'Enfant Plan, but influenced regional development. It also includes a new section titled "Confronting the Legacy: Examining the Impacts of NCPC's Past," which addresses four historical policies and their impacts on underserved communities. These policies include discriminatory recreational space allocation, displacement due to urban renewal, community disconnection from freeway construction, and the expansion of federal campuses into established neighborhoods.

3. **Revising the document formatting to make it more reader-friendly and accessible.** We've included maps, graphs, and photographs for visual emphasis – such as this chart that compares the amount of federally-owned office square footage to federally-leased square footage by jurisdiction in the NCR, as well as providing references to historical statements and defining key terms. These revisions help to enhance accessibility while also making the document easier to understand.



4. **Collaborating to address the planning challenges of our time.** The revised Introduction Chapter anticipates the mid-21st century challenges facing the NCR and emphasizes the urgent need for collaboration to address them. These challenges, which include the need to protect the natural environment, implement equity practices, secure urban spaces, and navigate the changing federal footprint for workplace needs, shape the region's development and impact federal properties, infrastructure, and communities. By tackling them collectively, the chapter envisions a future where the NCR becomes more resilient, equitable, and inclusive, with coordinated efforts across all levels of government and community stakeholders.



5. Using equity as a guide for land-use development. Staff developed a new principle to promote equitable development and opportunity for underserved communities to further emphasize the agency's commitment to equitable planning practices. This principle includes corresponding key objectives that focus on promoting equitable access to public amenities, advancing economic opportunities in underserved communities, and fostering meaningful community engagement. The key objectives emphasize cultural affirmation and diversity, the use of data to address the impacts of past policies, and the prioritization of investment in sustainable and resilient practices to improve human health and protect federal assets in underserved communities.

In summary, the revised Introduction Chapter of the *Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* is a testament to NCPC's commitment to creating a more equitable and resilient NCR. This achievement underscores the agency's dedication to addressing historical injustices and fostering a planning process that serves all communities. It is a significant step forward in advancing social equity within the planning profession and a model for others to follow.