

February 17, 2022

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Transformative Vision Presented for Pennsylvania Avenue as a Venue

Potential concepts offer possibilities to achieve this vision

Washington, DC—Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the U.S. Capitol is a unique public space. A new vision and potential concepts for [Pennsylvania Avenue](#) were presented at a National Capital Planning Commission Special Session on [February 16, 2022](#). Public comment on these proposals will be sought starting in March.

Federal and District of Columbia agencies that are stewards of Pennsylvania Avenue collaborated on these proposals. Their efforts started with the recognition that the Avenue is in transition, affected by changing conditions and larger trends that are reshaping and transforming public space, office space, retail, and transportation. The pandemic accelerated these changes, and downtown Washington faces challenges. The Avenue also presents new opportunities, highlighted by a group of experts, to focus on its use as a venue. This is a critical moment in time, and the work on the Avenue can and should be a key element in how Washington, DC recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The vision proposes to capitalize on the Avenue's one-of-a-kind location, setting, scale, and character to make it a signature outdoor venue that could attract and support major national and international events. It could offer a new home for events previously hosted on the National Mall, increasing its profile as a location for events, as a stage for democracy, and a site for celebrations. Reimagined as a sustainable public space corridor, there are multiple opportunities to improve parks, plazas, and gathering spaces to be more welcoming to residents, workers, and visitors. Three concepts (Urban Capital, Linear Green, Civic Stage) explore different ways to "right-size" and realign the roadway to increase the amount of usable and flexible public space and provide multiple transportation options to prioritize people, bicyclists, and transit, rather than a corridor that primarily serves cars.

"All the conversations around where we might be heading in post-COVID-19 urban spaces—the importance of open space, creating inviting outdoor destinations, multi-modal transportation options that focus on people—are all coming to play here. It's an opportunity to expand Pennsylvania Avenue as a signature place where we can tell our stories, celebrate, and commemorate," said NCPC Chair Beth White.

"Reimagining Pennsylvania Avenue is critical to attracting people back to downtown DC and sparking economic development opportunities," said John Falcicchio, Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development. "From hosting celebrations for new presidents and championship teams to barbecue battles and Night Markets, Pennsylvania Avenue has the potential to become America's play area."

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“I’m very excited—we’ve reached a milestone moment,” said Commissioner Peter May, with the National Park Service. “These are great ideas for bringing the Avenue to its full potential—nothing will impact the federal and local city more than this.”

“This idea of the Avenue provides a reason for people to come back downtown or leave home. We don’t experience things together anymore—that’s something COVID has taken away,” said Commissioner Mina Wright, with the General Services Administration. “One overarching idea is that the Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative might provide opportunities for is communal joy.”

To help explore opportunities and tradeoffs in achieving this vision, three different concepts offer options for the corridor and three primary public spaces along the Avenue to improve the use and flexibility of these spaces for events and enhanced daily use. The intent is to explore ideas that resonate across the various concepts, and even to mix and match ideas.

The plan that guides the Avenue today was transformative in its time, but it is almost 50 years old. Public comments will be used to update the plan with a new vision and provide the roadmap to guide the Avenue’s use and development. It will also inform short-term actions to initiate pilot projects to test ideas and in the mid-term improve the Avenue’s infrastructure.

At its March 3, 2022 meeting, the Commission will be asked to release the vision and concept proposals for a 120-day public comment period that will include public meetings and additional online materials.

The February 18, 2022 meeting video is available at <https://www.ncpc.gov/videos/593/>.

More information about the Avenue is available at <https://www.ncpc.gov/initiatives/pennave/>.

The National Capital Planning Commission is the federal government's central planning agency in Washington, DC and surrounding counties of Maryland and Virginia. The Commission provides overall guidance for federal land and buildings in the region. It also reviews the design of federal projects and memorials, oversees long-range planning for future development, and monitors capital investment by federal agencies.