

# RENEWING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY ON THE 3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY MALL

A Vision for the National Mall



**National Coalition to  
Save Our Mall**  
*an organized voice for the public on Mall matters*



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Officers:

Judy Scott Feldman, PhD  
Chair

W. Kent Cooper, FAIA  
Vice Chair

George H.F. Oberlander, AICP  
Vice Chair

Lisa Benton-Short, PhD  
Secretary /Treasurer

Charles I. Cassell, FAIA  
Director

George Idelson  
Director

Thomas C. Jensen, Esq.  
Director

Joseph D. West, Esq.  
Director

THIRD CENTURY COMMITTEE

Gordon Binder  
Senior Fellow  
World Wildlife Fund

M.J. "Jay" Brodie, FAIA, AICP  
Baltimore Redevelopment Corp.

Louis Kriser  
Kriser Enterprises, LLP

Frank Mankiewicz  
Hill & Knowlton

Amy Meyer  
Co-chair, People for A Golden  
Gate National Recreation Area

William K. Reilly  
Former Administrator, EPA

Robert E. Simon, Jr.  
Founder, Reston, Va.

November 2009

To Our Readers:

The recent release of Mall-related plans by the National Park Service, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts prompts the National Coalition to Save Our Mall to speak out while there is time to avoid costly development mistakes. These federal agencies claim that together their plans represent the new comprehensive vision for the National Mall.

**But these federal plans are neither comprehensive nor visionary.** The Planning Commission's "Monumental Core Framework Plan" proposes improvements to federal lands surrounding the Mall, which assumes the Mall is "complete" and therefore unchanging. The Park Service's "National Mall Plan" is, in reality, a grounds keeping and maintenance plan applying only to parts of the Mall under Park Service jurisdiction. The Smithsonian museums, the National Gallery of Art, the White House, and Capitol grounds – none of these institutions located on the National Mall factor into these new plans.

Conspicuously missing in the federal offerings to date is an updated, long-range vision – in the tradition of the historic L'Enfant Plan of 1791 or the McMillan Plan of 1901-1902 – that can guide the continuing evolution of this symbol of democracy cherished by the American people.

Furthermore, no one is addressing the long-standing, intractable problem of fragmented planning and management by six federal agencies, and oversight in 14 committees in Congress – a mind-boggling bureaucratic jumble that has resulted in uncoordinated, piecemeal development over the last three decades. None of the federal plans propose a way to provide the District government and the general public a meaningful voice in Mall planning. Instead, these plans embrace the status quo.

Our Coalition is alarmed that, absent a new visionary direction encompassing the *entire* Mall, federal plans are being completed and agencies are asking of Congress funding for a host of individual, uncoordinated Mall projects. In order to ensure cost-effective decisions and sound stewardship for the long term, **the visionary plan must come first.**

The **National Coalition to Save Our Mall** has spoken out repeatedly and strongly since 2004 about the need for a new, compelling vision to animate renewal of the National Mall for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – in what we call the **3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall**. In "Rethinking the National Mall" (December 2008), we reiterated our long-standing call for an independent Presidential or Congressional Commission of prominent Americans to lead the country in creating this new vision.

In this report, we outline a public vision for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall – the legacy we have inherited, the needs today that invite attention, and a bright new century that awaits a spirited response.

Judy Scott Feldman, PhD  
Chair and President







## The Stage for American Democracy

**In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American people took ownership of the National Mall.**

Here, amidst the abundant and moving symbols of our founding ideals, we individually and collectively renew our sense of national identity of what it means to be an American. This was amply demonstrated during the recent Inauguration weekend. Two million citizens from all across the country joined President-elect Obama, members of Congress, the Supreme Court, and others on the National Mall to open a new chapter in our country's history.

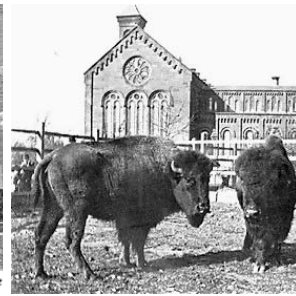
Twenty-five million people visit the Mall every year. They flock to world-class museums and monuments. They participate in First Amendment demonstrations and July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations. They come to play field sports and simply to enjoy the wide-open spaces and majestic vistas. The American public has given this grand, symbolic landscape new meaning as the **Stage for American Democracy.**

But the National Mall does not meet public expectations. People are shocked at the poor condition of the grass, trees, and walkways, and the lack of basic affordable circulation, and parking. On deeper consideration, some are disappointed that there are few points of interest and family-friendly activities among the vast open spaces. Why, they ask, are there are so many war memorials but no monuments to poets, scientists, explorers, and other representatives of the country's rich and diverse history? Teachers, tour guides, and families trying to make sense of the story told in the monuments and museum collections on the Mall find little guidance – no maps no central visitor center, no information hub. And everywhere else security barriers come between the people and their government.

The **National Coalition to Save Our Mall** in the following pages proposes a visionary way of looking at the National Mall that takes inspiration from the Mall's *evolving public role* as America's civic stage. What does it mean to be an American today? Do we understand the history that guided the decisions of our nation's founders? Do we understand how history since has shaped and reshaped the continuing story of American democracy? Do we understand our role in this rapidly globalizing world?

These questions and their answers are a key to crafting a vision to animate renewal of the National Mall in Washington, D.C. for the Third Century.

Left to right: The first permanent building on the Mall, the Smithsonian Castle; then, a zoo; Suffragettes marching on Washington in 1913; Flag Day, 1919 at the open-air Sylvan Theater; Morgan Dancers on the Tidal Basin beach in 1923; residents skating and boys sailing toy boats on the Reflecting Pool in the '30s; WWI and WWII temporary buildings surrounding the Reflecting Pool in the 1940s; marching for Civil Rights in 1959; celebrating July 4<sup>th</sup>; honoring veterans at The Wall; raising awareness with the AIDS quilt.



## Evolving Symbol of American Identity

The historic L'Enfant and McMillan Plans provide the blueprint for the Mall's evolving design and meaning as a symbol of American identity.

In 1791, **Pierre Charles L'Enfant** conceived the plan for the City of Washington as a symbol of the new nation experimenting with a unique form of governance empowering “We the People.” He located the Capitol, White House, and Washington Monument in symbolic relationship to one another – connected by the Mall, a mile-long public promenade and “place of general resort” – and thereby embedded principles of the U.S. Constitution and our nation's founding in the design of the Mall. This “**1<sup>st</sup> Century Mall**” was to be the center of American government, the new capital, and the nation.

A century later, in 1901, a group of prominent designers known as the **McMillan Commission** was charged with expanding this monumental core to meet the needs of a rapidly growing nation. The country had grown across a continent and had survived a terrible Civil War. A burgeoning federal government and local population put new demands on the capital's resources. The McMillan Commission, aiming “to restore, develop, and supplement” L'Enfant's Plan, greatly enlarged the “Mall System” to incorporate monumental complexes of government buildings surrounding the Capitol and White House, and between them along Pennsylvania Avenue. This “**2<sup>nd</sup> Century Mall**” was doubled in length to accommodate new public parkland and, as a symbol of our country's reunification, a monument to Abraham Lincoln.

Today, in 2009, we are challenged again to meet new social and civic needs of American democracy while reinforcing the historic legacy. Coming off “The American Century,” our country is still the recognized leader of the free world. The 19th century rural, agrarian economy has given way to an increasingly urban, educated, diverse, and pluralistic society – with a more active citizenry. In the process, the American people have transformed the Mall's grand symbolic landscape into a vibrant center of American public life.

The Mall is entering its 3<sup>rd</sup> century. What is the symbolic quality of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall? The answer was before the eyes of our fellow citizens during the Inauguration celebrations. The active quality of public democratic participation augments the fixed geometry of past symbols: intensive public engagement and civic participation have become the symbolic expression of this era, adding yet another dimension to the Mall's place in American life. **The National Mall, no longer a static setting for government, has become an active landscape in the drama of American democracy.**



Top to bottom: The L'Enfant Plan of 1791 established the Mall's symbolic layout and meaning. The McMillan Plan of 1901-1902 extended the Mall over landfill and added to the narrative with a monument to President Lincoln, “Preserver of the Union”; the original Potomac River shoreline is shown in blue. The National Park Service's Mall Plan treats the Mall as a collection of individual, unrelated “Historic Landscapes” and “Cultural Landscapes” (colored areas), not a unified landscape with symbolic meaning.

*The symbols of the past were static*





So what does it mean to plan for a Mall that has been transformed through public action into **America's Civic Stage**?

The earlier plans emphasized the Mall's beauty, to be enjoyed and appreciated as a backdrop to the business of government. Current plans would preserve that status quo as a "completed work of civic art" and anticipate that Congress would impose restrictions to control "overuse."

## A 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall Vision

The Coalition proposes something different, something more active and purposeful, a vision that speaks to the questions of what it means to be an American today. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century National Mall can better support the roles the American public is asking it to play – and more. The Mall should help Americans, and visitors from abroad, understand this country's history, our heritage, and the evolution of our democracy. Moreover, the Mall can support more informed, active participation by Americans in our government and thereby help build citizenship and community – even while it serves as the "place of general resort" and enjoyment for local residents, citizens from all over the country, and visitors from around the world.

Our approach calls for a fresh look at the way our museums, monuments, public buildings, and open space can help build citizenship and strengthen American democracy.

In short, a truly visionary 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall should:

- Tell a more complete story of our country's heritage in our monuments and memorials, informing visitors about the people and the events that shaped American history and American democracy;
- Offer a full range of museum collections, exhibits, and programmed activities, educating visitors about science, art, history, world cultures, and issues of our day;
- Function as the civic stage on which American democracy plays out as citizens convene, demonstrate, and assemble to petition the government, while the government, in turn, invites citizens to learn first-hand about how the government works; and
- Satisfy its intended role as an urban park and "place of general resort" in the heart of a major capital city where visitors and local residents can relax and play.

For the once-in-a-lifetime visitor, a visionary 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall would be a memorable experience, leaving an indelible impression of our nation's commitment to government "of the people, by the people, for the people." Return visitors and local residents will be drawn over and over again to a landscape continually renewed with lively, inspiring, educational, and fun activities. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century National Mall will embody the fullness of American public life and make Americans of all ages proud. Being in this space, visitors will *feel* the place of citizens in our American system of government and of the freedom of their activities on the Mall.

**In the next pages we outline how this vision can play out on the Mall today – in often surprising ways.**

*Today public use itself has become a symbol*

# From “Place of General Resort” to Civic Stage



From top: The visitor-friendly Tuileries in Paris inspired the McMillan Commission's plan, below; an oasis at the new national garden at the Botanic Gardens; Hermann Park, Houston, a prototype in sustainable design; D.C.'s Circulator bus needs access to Mall central roads.

Public open space is an essential component of the Mall's historic concept and its modern role as America's civic stage. It literally and figuratively places the American people at the center of American democracy. But the Mall today is far from the intended “place of general resort” in the heart of the nation's capital.

Visitors are shocked at the Mall's poor condition and lack of amenities – bad grass, worn-out walkways, lack of food, restrooms, welcoming places to rest, child-friendly attractions. Affordable, accessible public transportation has been lacking for decades. Far from complete, the Mall landscape, after growing in fits and starts over two centuries, still lacks crucial elements. For example, shaded walkways end abruptly at the Washington Monument, forcing pedestrians into the sun and heat of Washington summers. Fountains designed to provide refreshment remain unbuilt.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall would put the public's needs and enjoyment first, and anticipate growing public use in coming decades. It would restore the Mall's intended quality as an accessible, welcoming, continuous promenade, inspiring vista, and “Central Park” for the capital city; a central Welcome Center would provide comprehensive information for Mall-wide events. Moreover, it would upgrade the 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape to support the Mall's modern role as an active civic stage. Sustainable practices would guide all development.

**Managing a welcoming urban park and civic stage** The key to improving the Mall's urban park quality is developing people-friendly, Mall-wide management policies. On a micro scale, the beautifully maintained and popular National Gallery Sculpture Garden and the new outdoor garden at the Botanic Garden achieve that welcoming urban park quality. But conditions change abruptly at the curb, where National Park Service jurisdiction begins. Park Service management fundamentally does not recognize the Mall's role as a grand urban park.

On the contrary, the National Park Service manages the open space resources with policies that apply equally to Yellowstone and other wilderness parks. A new ban on public events under the elm trees in order to protect the tree roots – a source of contention between the Park Service and Smithsonian Folklife Festival – is one example of this approach that favors preservation of resources over public use. But the Mall is not a “national park” like Yellowstone.

The first step in improving the Mall's urban park quality is creating a comprehensive management plan for the open space, across all

jurisdictions, that recognizes and supports the Mall's role as a lively urban park and increasingly active civic stage.

**New public transportation and circulation** Making the Mall easily accessible to all visitors is another critical factor in unlocking public use and comfort. The two-mile distance between the Capitol and Lincoln Memorial is daunting, especially for families, disabled persons, and older visitors. The Tourmobile provides interpretive services, mainly for tourists and first-time visitors; however, it is costly, especially for families, and simply does not meet the need for affordable circulation around the entire Mall. The local, low-cost Circulator bus has been restricted to the eastern half of the Mall.

A well thought-out circulation plan, integrated with the city public transit system, is needed to serve visitors at all levels including tour bus and Metro, and paths for bikes and pedestrians. Expanding parking is critical also for removing cars and tour buses from city streets to reduce traffic and pollution.

**Completing the “public walks” and fountains** Instead of preserving the Mall's unfinished condition, as proposed in the National Park Service's new Mall Plan, it would be preferable to follow the McMillan Commission's wise approach “to restore, develop, and supplement” the L'Enfant legacy – including the continuous shaded promenade and numerous water elements. New pathways could be added, carefully, under the elms adjacent to the museums using sustainable granular surfaces. This shaded promenade could be extended across the Washington Monument grounds to connect to the existing elm walks alongside the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. Pools and bubbling water features could be located at intervals throughout the landscape to provide beauty, refreshment, and fun. Fountains not only could humanize the often desert-like environment, they could solve the longstanding problem of stagnant, unhealthy water.

**What needs changing?** The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall goal to support growing public use of the open space requires a comprehensive plan to complete the still-unfinished urban promenade, and coherent Mall-wide management policies to support intensive public activity, including a central Welcome Center. Urban parks across the country provide examples of policies that allow a balance between landscape and the people who use it. The Mall should be a national model of forward-looking, sustainable planning and management.



# Telling A More Complete American Story

People who come to the Mall to remember our past and learn about our country's heritage find a collection of monuments spread out across two miles that does not add up to a complete or coherent story. The iconic monuments tell of presidents. Memorials added since the 1970s – to honor Vietnam and Korean veterans, FDR, World War II – speak more often of war. While Congress has declared the Mall “complete,” and imposed a moratorium on new monuments, the truth is the story told is selective and incomplete. The recent trend to add educational and interpretive facilities at existing memorials (the Vietnam Veterans Memorial) and at new memorials (the upcoming Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial) emphasizes what is already there but adds little to the larger story of American history.

Furthermore, the existing monuments seem to stand alone as separate, unrelated episodes. L'Enfant and the McMillan Commission conceived monuments as architectural placeholders in the Mall's symbolic landscape; they didn't have the modern visitor in mind. Recent, privately sponsored memorials were sited by targeting available land. Ironically, the Commemorative Works Act of 1986, which Congress intended to bring order to the memorial building process, does not provide for creating a coherent story line.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall would create new story lines and connections between monuments to make a walk on the Mall more interesting, emotionally engaging, and educational. There would be sufficient variety and complexity to create a memorable experience not only for the one time visitor but also others who return over and over again and would continue to find new insights.

**Telling a more complete story** Mall planners need to rethink the basic approach to the Mall's narrative landscape. Instead of leaving memorial decisions to private interests, they can develop a set of narrative goals and principles – a national curriculum for the Mall – to guide what stories are told, where new elements are best located to create a coherent narrative, and what forms new narrative components could take. These principles should include contemporary interpretive techniques that do not require new education centers at each memorial.

Who will select the narrative? Established civics curricula already exist. Working with those standards, a board of nationally respected

cultural leaders and historians can tailor a flexible American civics program for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall.

**New narratives at existing memorials** One way to tell more of the story is to add new layers of meaning and interpretation at existing monuments. For example, the Martin Luther King, Jr. marker on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial creates a narrative link to the modern Civil Rights Movement. Adding a statue of James Madison to the George Mason Memorial near the Jefferson Memorial would broaden this homage to a Virginia patriot to include the U.S. Bill of Rights. Self-guided tours, such as we propose below, and modern electronic communications technologies, including audio tours or commentary that can be accessed by cell phone, are simple but powerful tools to enhance learning.

**New permanent and temporary narratives** Another approach is to introduce small elements such as plaques, markers, statues, and memorial groves and fountains to animate the long walks between destinations. A Presidents' Garden at the Ellipse could satisfy the need for sites for presidential memorials and tell a story that includes more of our presidents. Additionally, a few well-located sites for temporary installations could provide new, short-term opportunities to mark anniversaries of important events. After a set time, these installations would be dismantled, or relocated. In this way, the landscape could be regularly renewed to draw visitors.

**Expanding the Mall** Ultimately, a way to allow this broader story to be told is to expand the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall onto new acreage, just as the McMillan Commission did a century ago in creating the Lincoln Memorial. New iconic locations can be selected for future, nationally important monuments. Properly chosen and designed, these sites can create venues to support civic activities, as the Lincoln Memorial did for our time.

**What needs changing?** Preparing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall requires a new, national civics curriculum and changes to the Commemorative Works Act of 1986, which today governs how new memorials are authorized and located. It requires lifting of the moratorium and creation of a new, well-thought-out 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall expansion plan that extends the symbolic legacy of the historic plans.



From top: The MLK marker; boys joining the Bread Line at FDR; picnicking with Albert Einstein; the DC WWI Memorial could be rededicated a national WWI memorial; Madison enriching the Mason Memorial.

# Building Knowledge and Understanding



From top: Appreciating Calder's *Cheval Rouge* (red horse) in the open space; hands on experience with Mr. Beazley, formerly outside Natural History; some things did not fit in the old Air & Space Museum; Agriculture Secretary Vilsack breaking ground for the People's Garden; experiencing world cultures at the Folklife Festival.

Visitors can freely explore world-class museums on the National Mall, but can still come away with an uneven and incomplete understanding of America's heritage and place in an increasingly interconnected world. History, world art, and science are reasonably well represented. Urgent issues of our day – health, global economics, climate change, energy, and technology – are less so. As with new memorials, the subject and location for initiatives and funding are not coherent as an overall cultural narrative. The recent trend on the Mall is museums with an ethnic identity, for example, the native American Indian, the future African American, and the proposed Latino American Museums.

Expanding the educational value of the national museums, and providing locations for new museums on Mall expansion areas, would be part of a larger civics education program for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall. Visitors would come away transformed by their new understanding of American heritage; of current issues in art, science, and technology; and of the nation's roles and responsibilities in the global community.

**Creating a Mall-wide Curriculum** An independent task force could analyze the full scope of current museum offerings and identify gaps in the numerous collections. This group could propose a flexible and broad set of educational goals that Congress and all museums could draw from to guide future exhibition and museum development.

**Learning on the Open Space** The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall would encourage museum collections to spill out the doors onto the Mall's open space. New outdoor educational attractions coupled with related cultural programming would afford visitors a more varied, fun, and seamless educational experience of the Mall's indoor and outside spaces. Already several permanent examples of adjoining museum buildings exist, including the Butterfly Habitat Garden at Natural History and the new National Garden at the Botanic Garden, while the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival takes over the Mall's open space for a few weeks each summer. More can be done.

Additionally, the shade trees offer protected areas that can accommodate a wide variety of temporary and short-term displays. Mr. Beazley, a child-friendly dinosaur sculpture that used to stand outside the Natural History Museum, demonstrated how such under-tree displays can transform an often lifeless open space into a lively, fun, open-air museum. The National Park Service policy that bans public events under the shade trees in its jurisdiction, long a point of contention between the Smithsonian and the Park Service, needs to be reassessed so this can happen once again.

**New Exhibition Space** New locations should be identified for future nationally important museums in Mall expansion areas. In addition, flexible exhibition space is needed for large-scale, temporary exhibits to showcase cutting edge topics beyond those covered in the existing museums. The Arts & Industries Building – the original “National Museum” – served that function until it was mothballed; its future use is being decided by the Smithsonian. A new, modern exhibition hall also could be located at a prominent location. For example, a new destination at the Banneker Memorial Overlook on 10<sup>th</sup> Street would open a new gateway from the Mall to the Potomac River waterfront and initiate the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall expansion.

**What needs changing?** Creating and implementing a museum education curriculum requires collaboration among museum curators and educators across jurisdictions and disciplines, along with consultation with nationally respected educators, museum specialists, and cultural leaders, and a well-thought-out Mall expansion plan. Changes to the process by which Congress approves new museums will be needed to reflect these new goals. New low-cost circulation systems, including parking, will be critical to attract more people of all ages to the new educational offerings.



# Connecting Citizens and Government

The American public has transformed the Mall's symbolic quality from a static landscape to a kinetic scene of citizens action. But the Mall has not adapted to this new role. Citizens who come by the thousands to Washington every year to exercise First Amendment rights are daunted by the Mall's vast size and lack of amenities such as transportation, restrooms, and support services for large gatherings. Imposing grey federal buildings seem to project an unwelcome image of a federal government disconnected from citizens – the opposite of the openness and transparency citizens seek. Security barriers and police cars do not help.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall would energize the relationship between citizens and our government to support public activity and make government more open, accessible, and transparent.

**Exercising First Amendment Rights** Historically, the landscape was conceived as a public promenade and setting for government, not the great civic stage it has become. Support services for public activities never anticipated in the previous planning need to be developed.

By creating staging areas at several locations throughout the Mall, equipped with electricity, video, wireless communication, restroom facilities, food, and easy access via low-cost transportation on clear routes, the Mall could be made a more welcoming and useful platform overall for First Amendment events. Union Square at the foot of Capitol Hill and the Lincoln Memorial are already popular locations for large gatherings, and are logical places for improvement. More can be done to open up new opportunities throughout the Mall, including Mall expansion areas. Deciding where and how such staging areas can be developed should be part of a larger, comprehensive, public use program to enhance the Mall's overall role as a civic stage.

**Learning What Government Does** Other visitors who come to Washington with the hope of learning first-hand about government encounter a complex federal bureaucracy. Most people understand what goes on in the White House and Capitol. But they have little opportunity to learn about what goes on inside the federal buildings

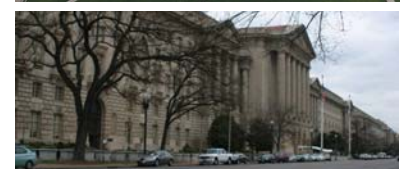
lining the Mall where much of the day-to-day work of government actually takes place – the Departments of Labor, Commerce, Justice, and other Executive Branch offices.

These barriers between government and citizens could be overcome in part by making these buildings “ambassadors” of federal policy. For example, each agency could develop a welcome center with educational materials to tell about its role in American government and put a more human face on government activity and policy. Currently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides one model on the Mall, with plans to upgrade its welcome center inside its Mall entrance and implement a fully sustainable landscape outdoors and work environment inside.

Creating another feature, a central Executive Branch Visitor Center, could educate visitors about that branch of American Government in much the same way the new Capitol Visitor Center does for the Legislative Branch. From here, visitors could be directed to the network of agency welcome centers on the Mall and throughout the city and region. A Judicial Branch Center would complete this civics goal.

**Connecting to the City** To make these federal mega-blocks more open to the Mall and the surrounding City, these buildings could be adapted over time to serve more municipal purposes. For example, the McMillan Commission intended the buildings south of Pennsylvania Avenue to house a market, armory, and municipal police and fire headquarters. Today only the Wilson Building serves District needs.

**What needs changing?** The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall goal to connect citizens and government requires a comprehensive public outreach program for all federal facilities, which would entail changes to public use and security policies. And it calls for new policies governing public use of the open space and upgrades of the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape to support intensive public use. Public input will be critical.



Top to bottom: People use the Mall for all kinds of free expression – the 1932 Bonus March, protests, farmer's rights; the red-roofed federal buildings form a wall between the Mall's green space and the surrounding City; on the ground these buildings loom as an unwelcoming barrier; USDA officials plan a welcoming, sustainable landscape.

# Programming the Open Space

For the many people who come to the Mall to walk, play, and enjoy the majestic landscape, this simple pleasure is often enough. Just being on the Mall is a memorable experience. But for those looking for more to do, there is little in the way of regularly scheduled programming and no central source of information for what offerings exist. The Mall seems to go dead at night after the museums close, leaving local residents with little reason to go there and sending out-of-town visitors back to their hotels.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall would activate public use of the open space with new visitor services, activities, and programs for people of all ages. With improved accessibility, an imaginative public use program could transform the visitors' experience in ways that cannot even be imagined yet.

**Providing generation-sensitive attractions and facilities** Another problem is the lack of attractions on the open space for children or families, and for older Americans. In the 1960s, Dillon Ripley, then-Secretary of the Smithsonian, observed that the Mall was dead space in the heart of the nation. He instituted the Folklife Festival and installed new features including the carousel, which remains the only children's attraction. A new Mall-wide public use program is needed to add child-friendly attractions, comfortable seating areas for older visitors, and features such as fountains and sculpture displays for enjoyment by people of all ages.

**Cultural and recreational enrichment** This public use program should include a host of new programmed activities in the open space to make the Mall more interesting, fun, and educational. Today there are only a few annual open-air events – including the July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks, Folklife Festival, Cherry Blossom Festival, and Book Festival – sponsored by a variety of public or private entities.

Examples for enriching the National Mall might include pageants, festivals, self-guided tours, podcasts, appropriate sporting events, concerts, performing arts, and political oratory.

A new, nonprofit Mall programming entity could take on this task of broadening the programming of the open space. Public representation in this entity would be crucial.

**A Mall Welcome Center** A long-standing need is a one-stop source of information about the Mall and public programs. Currently, visitors have to search numerous individual museums and websites to learn about the events, exhibits, lectures, and media events scheduled at the various Smithsonian museums, National Gallery of Art, Library of Congress, and other public buildings. Visitors to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall would have even more offerings – and a greater need for centralized information. A new Mall Welcome Center could consolidate information and make it available digitally as well as in a central location – potentially at the Arts & Industries Building or on the Washington Monument grounds.

**What needs changing?** The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall goal to activate public enjoyment and learning on the open space requires a new circulation system and creation of a new Mall Programming entity. This programming entity can be housed in a new National Mall Welcome Center. It should have strong public representation and be funded through public-private partnerships. It could have permitting authority for the open space, a job now confusingly divided between the National Park Service and the District's Parks & Recreation Department.



Clockwise from top left: Relaxing under the trees during Friday night jazz at the National Gallery's Sculpture Garden; getting around by pedicab; the old Watergate concert barge in 1942; bicyclists and boaters at the Tidal Basin in the '40s; ice skating on the Reflecting Pool in the '30s; carousel on the National Mall.



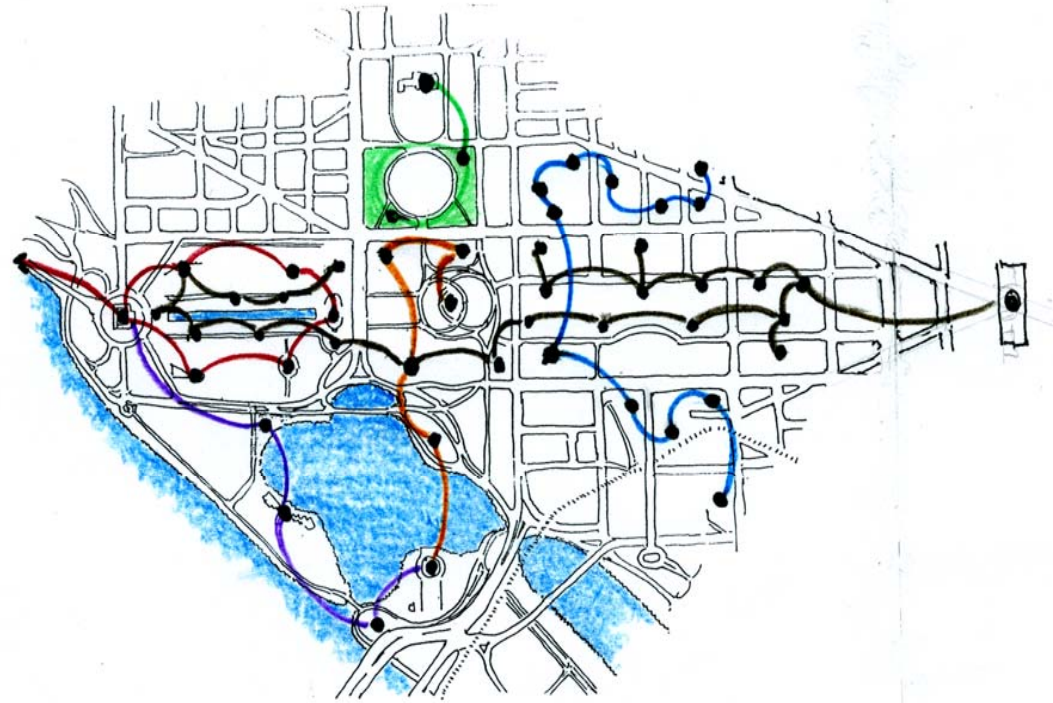
## One Example: Civics Education for All

Already the National Coalition to Save Our Mall and our new programming entity, National Mall Conservancy, have been developing and testing new guided and self-guided tours to help visitors use the Mall better as an open-air history and civics classroom. Typically, visitors move from monument to monument and museum to museum without any sense of how the parts fit within a broader picture of American history and heritage. The goal of these tours is to link unrelated monuments and public buildings into thematic narratives.

Our first self-guided tour, “America’s Struggle for Freedom,” uses visits to several unrelated memorials – Jefferson, FDR, and Lincoln Memorials – to explore a single theme: the struggle to establish and defend freedoms guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. This guide, downloadable free from our website [savethemall.org](http://savethemall.org), can be printed on letter-sized paper and folded twice to create a pocket-sized booklet, as shown below.

Building on this initial offering, we propose a network of tours, walkable in a one-hour or two-hour time frame, that go a step further in developing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall themes – a more complete American story, connecting citizens and government, and so on. These thematic mini-circuits not only link existing destinations, they also propose new attractions and points of interest on the open space to help visitors understand what it means to be an American.

These ideas are envisioned as early steps in developing, in consultation with a team of respected historians and teachers, a 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall national civics curriculum. Another step would be to coordinate these narrative scripts with public performances and activities at the museums and government buildings, as well as relevant destinations through the City.



### America’s Struggle for Freedom

The quintessential story of American democracy is the struggle for freedom, which can be explored through the Declaration of Independence at the Jefferson Memorial (and an optional stop at the nearby George Mason Memorial for the Bill of Rights), and the Four Freedoms at the FDR Memorial. From here, visitors can continue to the nearby location of the future Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial.

### The Story of Our Presidents

There is an ever-growing push to add monuments to Presidents — mostly recently, proposed new memorials for President Eisenhower and President John Adams — but no coherent system for locating them. We can create a new narrative to honor each of our presidents along a circular trail around the open space of the Ellipse or along Pennsylvania Avenue.

### The Story of Our Government

We have suggested that Federal agencies can transform the public buildings surrounding the Mall to make them more accessible to the visiting public. By visiting buildings on a circuit that includes the White House, Capitol, and Supreme Court, citizens can gain a fuller understanding of the structure and workings of our government.

### In the Service to Country

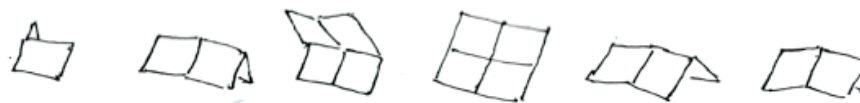
The Lincoln Memorial is centrally located in a thematic cluster of war memorials – Vietnam, Korea, World War I (District of Columbia), World War II – that can be linked with the Women’s Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery across the Potomac. Developing this thematic script can be an opportunity to think about how and where we can more fully tell the story of Americans’ service to country.

### A Nation of Immigrants

As social and ethnic diversity in America continues to evolve, we can tell the rich story of our nation as a nation of immigrants who have contributed to all aspects of American history, arts, science, and culture. We can incorporate existing memorials and museum collections into an immigrant narrative, including the popular Albert Einstein statue on Constitution Avenue at 22<sup>nd</sup> Street.

### The Founding of Our Nation

The Washington Monument was intended to honor George Washington as well as other leaders of the American Revolution; but, as with the incomplete landscape, that narrative was never realized. The Monument grounds can become the centerpiece of a founding narrative, as well as the fountainhead of the Civics Circuit.

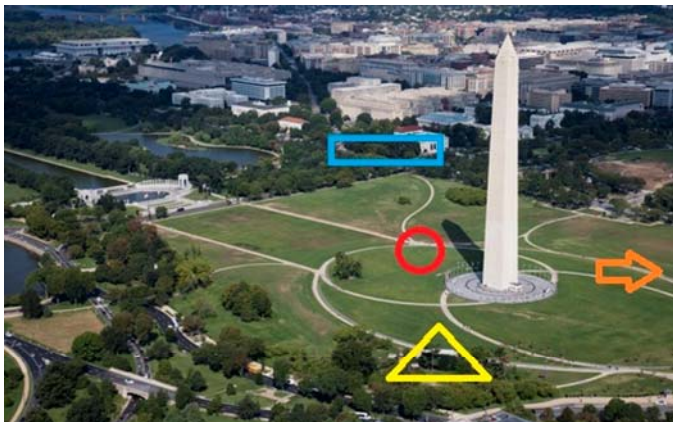




While L'Enfant's monument to George Washington was intended to be an equestrian statue honoring the "Commander in Chief ... during the war which vindicated and secured their liberty, sovereignty, and independence," Robert Mills' 1836 design, at left, was more expansive. He proposed an obelisk with at its base a circular, colonnaded "National Pantheon" with statues of the 56 Signers of the Declaration of Independence, other leaders of the American Revolution, and paintings of battles and other scenes of that period.



The McMillan Commission envisioned the Monument grounds with lush vegetation and water features. The Commission called the grounds "the gem of the Mall system": "No portion of the task set before the Commission has required more study and extended consideration than has the solution of the problem of devising an appropriate setting for the Monument; and the treatment here proposed is the one which seems best adapted to enhance the value of the Monument itself."



The Jefferson Pier (circled in red) marks the actual nexus of the Mall's great cross-axis. This intended symbolic center of the Mall and the capital needs to be given new prominence. An all-inclusive Washington Monument grounds plan should precede any final design for the 17<sup>th</sup> Street levee (blue box), the Museum of African American History and Culture (orange arrow), or the Sylvan Theatre site (yellow triangle).

# Renewing the Existing Mall Landscape

While the Mall grew and changed dramatically in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it never achieved its intended quality as a unified landscape and pedestrian experience. Now is the time to both renew the historic Mall and upgrade it to serve modern intensive public use. Exciting opportunities include implementing continuous shaded walkways, water elements, visitor amenities, new attractions, and programming the open space. Additionally, it is worth looking at significant portions of the Mall that presently are underutilized and have never developed into their full potential, including Constitution Gardens, Ash Woods south of the Reflecting Pool, the Tidal Basin, the Ellipse, East and West Potomac Park, and the Washington Monument grounds.

**Sustainable planning** All new development, as well as much-needed repair of the aging infrastructure and landscape, will need to be grounded in modern sustainable planning and practices. It will not work to simply refurbish the dead grass, dying trees, leaking Reflecting Pool, and crumbling seawalls. Rethinking is needed for each element to apply the best scientific insights for supporting the Mall's functions today. A first step must compile a full inventory of the cultural and horticultural resources. Then, establish criteria for both planning and technical issues across the Mall's varied ecosystem and develop comprehensive, science-based protocols for upgrading the Mall for current day use. Over half the Mall is unprotected from a 100-year flood event, yet amazingly there is no comprehensive flood plan. This should be a priority. Poor soils and compacted tree roots need independent scientific evaluation *before* any new restrictions are put on public use.

**Centerpiece of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall** The most surprising unfinished feature is at the Mall's center – the Washington Monument grounds. Historically intended to be the physical and symbolic centerpiece of the National Mall, the Monument grounds instead are now a void at the center of the Mall's cross axis – a virtual desert in summer and wind-swept tundra in winter. The Monument itself stands mute without the intended accompanying narrative of the nation's genesis. Creating a plan to renew the Washington Monument grounds as the centerpiece of the Mall is a logical first step towards implementing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Vision.

*There is urgency to this task.* Three federal agencies are currently designing separate, unrelated projects that will dramatically alter the grounds and restrict possibilities for future planning. Each project raises potentially serious problems for this central portion of the Mall: the Army Corp of Engineer's 17<sup>th</sup> Street flood levee will protect only areas in the city north of the Mall, not the Mall itself; the Smithsonian's Museum of African American History and Culture is located over Tiber Creek in an area prone to serious flooding; and the National Park Service proposal to rebuild the Sylvan Theater area requires a Mall-wide public use and circulation plan that does not yet exist. Now is the time to boldly step forward to deliver a coherent, unified plan for the Monument grounds.

**What needs changing?** Creating a new plan for the Monument grounds would unlock the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Vision. The great obelisk itself would be given due prominence as a symbol of America's founding father, nexus of the Mall's symbolic cross-axis, and fountainhead of the American story told on the Mall. The overall design would marry the landscape settings in all directions – Ellipse, museums and Capitol, Tidal Basin and Jefferson Memorial, Lincoln Memorial – into a coherent, continuous public promenade and welcoming public open space connected with the rest of the Mall and the surrounding City.



# Renewing the Mall through Expansion

Ultimately, expanding the Mall beyond its current boundaries would allow the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall to sustain the continuing evolution of public use in important ways. It would open up new sites to allow future generations to tell their story. It would enable the Mall to connect to surrounding neighborhoods, the larger City, and the region. It would allow visitors to reconnect the Mall physically and symbolically to the natural ecology of the Potomac River and the surrounding topographic bowl that inspired George Washington's choice of this site for the seat of government, and it would pay respect to L'Enfant's visionary design. Three ways of thinking about how and where to expand the Mall follow.

**Physical expansion** The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall can extend the Mall's footprint and symbolism to contiguous, federally owned land, as the McMillan Commission did with the Lincoln Memorial. Logical areas for expansion include East Potomac Park, South Capitol Street, and land on both sides of the Potomac River. The National Coalition to Save Our Mall presented design concepts for Mall expansion to East Potomac Park in an exhibit and lecture at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 2005; some of those ideas also appear in the recent NCPC/CFA National Capital Framework Plan. One destination ripe for development is the Banneker Memorial Overlook (red star, at right).

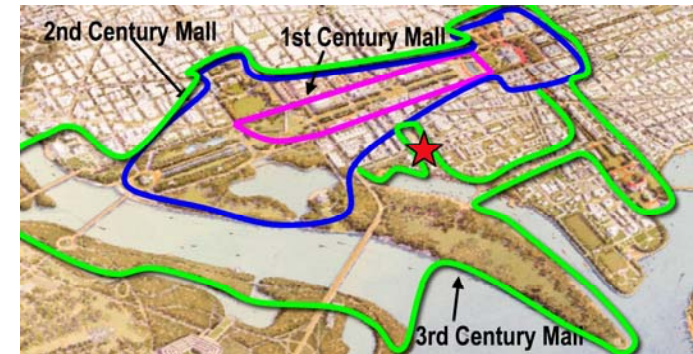
Another means of physical expansion would be to develop the never realized McMillan city-wide park system to link the Mall through a network of federal parcels, including the Civil War Fort Circle Parks, to public spaces and neighborhood parks throughout the City. The McMillan concept of a parkway for carriages could give way in favor of a pedestrian and bicycle circuit path.

**Expansion using transportation systems** Metro and Metro bus connections can be developed to make existing and future outlying destinations readily accessible to Mall visitors. This is something successfully realized in Paris, at its suburban science park La Villette. Improving Metro links to existing destinations could be a first step: to the Smithsonian's Air & Space Museum at Dulles Airport in suburban Virginia, the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, and the USDA's Agricultural Research Center and Library in Beltsville, Maryland. Future sites could be identified along the network of Metro corridors to expand the Mall's reach and connections across the region.

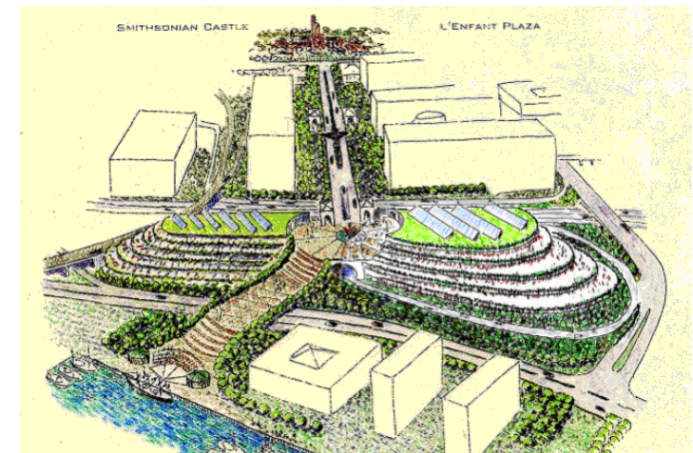
The Potomac River provides additional opportunities. With a new canal connecting Washington Harbor to the Potomac River, new ferry docks can be treated as contiguous territory. This would provide a conduit down river to historic sites in the Tidewater area and other venues that are logical extensions of the American story told on the Mall.

**Expansion through information technology** The creation of a single National Mall website "home" can provide one-stop access to the vast array of local sites as well as other thematically related websites, thus creating a Virtual National Mall Welcome Center. A variety of interactive educational programs could be added, that would expand the reach of the website to "visitors" of all ages not only across the country, but also the world.

**What needs changing?** Creating a comprehensive master plan for Mall expansion that extends the iconic Mall landscape is a task for the independent 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall Commission working closely with designers, historians, educators, communications specialists, and environmental scientists. Unlike the historical plans which were motivated by the need for government buildings, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century expansion's theme should be about facilitating public use and preparing for even more intensive public activity in the next 100 years.



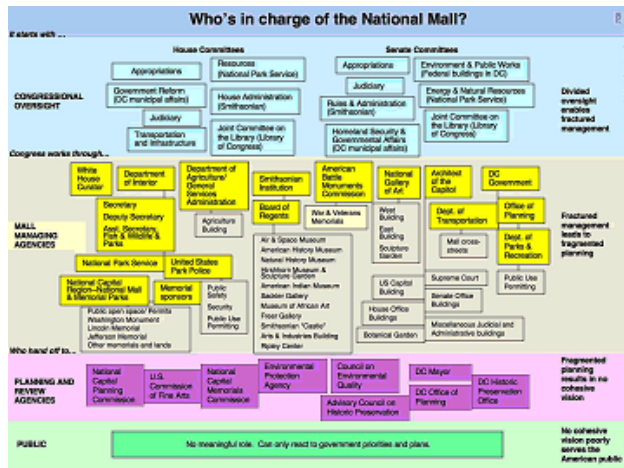
In 2004 the Coalition first identified the need for a 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall expansion onto contiguous federal land. The Banneker Memorial Overlook (red star) is a prime location to initiate the expansion.



Locating a major museum and circulation hub at the Banneker Overlook on the 10th Street corridor could open up new connections between the Castle and the Southwest neighborhood and further, by pedestrian bridge, to the Washington Channel and East Potomac Park.



Additional means of expansion could include new destinations along Metro routes and beyond. Ferry service on the Potomac could connect the Mall to a range of historic sites, recreational opportunities, and natural settings in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia.



## 3<sup>rd</sup> Century National Mall Commission

# Renewing the Mall through Governance

Without an end to fragmented governance for the Mall, the long-overdue vision described in these pages – or any other comprehensive and forward-looking alternative vision – will not be possible. Fragmented management and planning is now, and historically has been, the key barrier to coherent, intelligent development of the National Mall.

A unified system of governance is required to move forward. Unified Mall governance would provide: coordinated leadership and oversight in Congress; efficient collaboration among Mall managing agencies; new, comprehensive standards and principles to guide Mall-wide planning and plan review befitting a park at the core of a major urban setting; and a meaningful role in decision making for the District of Columbia and the American public. None of these conditions now exist.

A new means of Mall governance would fill two critical, missing functions. It would provide a much-needed mechanism for coordinating the various stakeholders. And it would act as the “protector” of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall Vision, and have authority, and dedicated sources of funding, to implement the new Plan. A governance board would provide benefits at every level of oversight, and give the public a meaningful voice in shaping the Mall’s future. As the protector of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall Vision, the Board would hold all entities and projects to a new, higher standard: to the benefit of the American public and our National Mall.

**What needs changing?** Congress should create a new, unified system of Mall governance. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall Commission, as part of its mandate to prepare a comprehensive Mall visionary plan, could make recommendations to Congress about the structure and make-up of a new governance system. Creation of a new Congressional Joint Committee on the National Mall would strengthen Congress’s oversight role.

## National Mall Governance System

### *Coordinated* CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT

A new **Joint Committee on the National Mall** would provide unified oversight in Congress over the 14 committees, each of which today oversees separate aspects of Mall policy and management. This new committee would recommend adoption of the **3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall Vision** to the full Congress. The **Mall Governance Board** would report directly to this Joint Committee.

### *Efficient* MALL MANAGING AGENCIES

The Mall managing agencies would share information about their needs with the **3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall Commission**. The **District of Columbia** would be given a seat at the table.

Once the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Vision was completed, the **Mall Governance Board** would become the “Protector” of that vision. The **Board** would work with all agencies to direct the day-to-day operations of the Mall, including concessions and general Mall-wide services such as transit, and create Mall-wide operating policies and update them as necessary. The **Board** would be charged to implement the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall plan and so should have bonding authority.

### *New 3<sup>rd</sup> C Mall Standards* PLANNING AND REVIEW AGENCIES

The Mall Governance Board, acting as the **protector of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Vision**, would advise the planning and review agencies, and have the final say in determining any projects’ conformance with that Vision.

*Meaningful*  
**PUBLIC ROLE**  
Public representation on the **Mall Commission** and **Mall Governance Board** would ensure meaningful public participation in the decision-making process.



# We're not waiting

With this report, the **National Coalition to Save Our Mall** seeks to raise the consciousness of the American people to the exciting possibilities for the 3rd Century Mall.

We appreciate that creating a 3rd Century Vision that supports the needs of all constituencies and the American public will require a national effort. So we continue to call on the President and Congressional leaders to form an independent, temporary 3rd Century Mall Commission to create the new, visionary plan. This is the opportunity to make a gift to the nation and future generations, as the McMillan Commission plan did before.

In recent months, as new stimulus funding has started to flow, and Mall restoration projects are underway, it is increasingly clear that without the necessary long-term visionary planning to help shape the work, many opportunities to support increased public use will be lost, and the status quo will be preserved for the next 50 years. Because of this urgency, we are not waiting for the President and Congress to act. We continue to work on projects that will be useful to a 3rd Century Mall Commission.

In coming months, the Coalition will:

1. **Prepare and conduct a national competition for the Washington Monument grounds** as the central pedestrian feature of the Mall and the capital, in addition to being the urban design and narrative centerpiece it was intended to be. Through the public competition process, we aim to enlist the brightest and most thoughtful individuals in the nation to study the future of the National Mall.
2. Work with tree specialists, soil experts, environmental scientists, and landscape designers to **create a Mall-wide landscape restoration plan** that follows the historic plans and precedents as guidelines. And we will explore the possibilities for establishing a continuous network of shaded pedestrian routes and sheltered rest areas throughout the Mall, enlivened with small-scale activities and attractions.
3. Consult with civics teachers, tour guides, arts groups, and others to **develop a public use program** that includes cultural and educational aids, and regularly scheduled public events and activities to interpret the nation's rich history on the Mall and engage citizens in the task of nurturing citizenship.
4. Continue collaborating with nonprofit groups and historians in developing **a working definition of the National Mall** that recognizes the historic L'Enfant and McMillan legacies as well as the Mall's ever-evolving symbolism and role in American public life.
5. Work with transit experts to develop a **comprehensive circulation plan** for the Mall connected to the surrounding city, as well as new parking.

Join us in making this happen – [www.savethemall.org](http://www.savethemall.org).

**NATIONAL COALITION  
TO SAVE OUR MALL**  
WWW.SAVETHEMALL.ORG  
P.O. BOX 4709  
ROCKVILLE, MD 20849  
800-618-3166

Copyright © 2009  
National Coalition to Save Our Mall

The **National Coalition to Save Our Mall** is a nonprofit citizens organization founded in 2000 seeking a broad, forward-looking vision for the National Mall that recognizes its value to all Americans as a symbol of American founding ideals, the People's Place, and a stage for our evolving democracy. The Coalition is the only organized voice for the public on Mall matters.

To comment or join our efforts, contact:

Judy Scott Feldman, PhD	W. Kent Cooper, FAIA
301-340-3938	202-338-3442
jfeldman@savethemall.org	w.kent.cooper@verizon.net

**Photo credits:** Cover photograph of January 18, 2009 by Lisa M. Scott. Pages 4-5, top, Castle from *Picturesque Washington* by J.W. Moore, 1889; historic views from Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (LOC); July 4<sup>th</sup> by Tom Wachs; AIDS Quilt by Carol Highsmith. Page 6, McMillan Plan, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; Hermann Park Conservancy; Bonnie Rowan. Page 7, Einstein by Dan Smith. Page 8, Calder by Bonnie Rowan; A&I by Ran Daffer; Sec. Vilsack courtesy USDA. Page 9, Bonus March, LOC; farmers by Tom Wachs; Monument by Carol Highsmith. Page 10, jazz and pedicab, Bonnie Rowan; Watergate barge, Washingtoniana Division, DC Public Library; 2 historic photos, LOC. Page 11, by W. Kent Cooper. Page 12, McMillan view, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; aerial by Carol Highsmith. Page 13, 10<sup>th</sup> St. design © 2008 W. Kent Cooper. All others by Judy Scott Feldman.

**Acknowledgements:** Special thanks to Nicholas Tom for layout; Valerie Armstrong for cover design; Gordon Binder, Kay Murphy, Ellen Goldstein, and Nicholas Tom for editing; Bonnie Rowan for photograph research; and Henry Arnold for landscape consulting.

## WHAT'S INSIDE

<b>TO OUR READERS</b>	PAGE 2
Why a compelling 3 <sup>rd</sup> Century Mall vision is needed now	
<b>THE STAGE FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY</b>	PAGE 3
Americans have taken ownership of the Mall but today the Mall does not fully meet their hopes and needs	
<b>EVOLVING SYMBOL OF AMERICAN IDENTITY</b>	PAGE 4-5
Intensive public engagement and civic participation have become the symbolic expression of our era. The 3 <sup>rd</sup> Century Vision for the National Mall builds upon this new modern purpose	
<b>FROM "PLACE OF GENERAL RESORT" TO CIVIC STAGE</b>	PAGE 6
The 3 <sup>rd</sup> Century Vision puts the people's needs first: new Mall-wide management policies to support public use, integrated circulation systems, pedestrian-friendly amenities and attractions, and more	
<b>TELLING A MORE COMPLETE AMERICAN STORY</b>	PAGE 7
A new national civics curriculum will set the stage, layering new narratives into the open space and onto existing memorials, and challenging the idea that the Mall is a "completed work of civic art"	
<b>BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING</b>	PAGE 8
The cluster of world-class museums leaves many topics and disciplines unrepresented; a new collaboration is required to fill in the gaps. The open space can be used more creatively for education and entertainment	
<b>CONNECTING CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENT</b>	PAGE 9
Citizens don't know their government. Make the work of government inside our federal office buildings more transparent. Create more "stages" to support First Amendment activities on the Mall's open space	
<b>PROGRAMMING THE OPEN SPACE</b>	PAGE 10-11
Visitors seeking activities on the open space need a variety of options. A new programming entity can open up rich opportunities on the Mall. One example is a series of self-guided tours that connect unrelated monuments, museums, and public buildings into explorations of American heritage	
<b>RENEWING THE EXISTING MALL LANDSCAPE</b>	PAGE 12
The Mall needs to be upgraded and made sustainable to support growing public use and meet the challenges of the future. Whole areas, including the Washington Monument grounds, have never been completed – yet	
<b>RENEWING THE MALL THROUGH EXPANSION</b>	PAGE 13
The Mall can be expanded three different ways to support continued evolution throughout the 21 <sup>st</sup> century: physically onto contiguous federal land, especially along the expansive Potomac River waterfront; using Metro to reach outlying sites; and integrating the latest digital communications technology	
<b>RENEWING THE MALL THROUGH GOVERNANCE</b>	PAGE 14
Consolidating the existing 14 Congressional committees and 6 agencies with a Mall Governance Board	
<b>WE'RE NOT WAITING</b>	PAGE 15
The National Coalition to Save Our Mall is moving forward with five programs to continue to raise public consciousness about Mall issues:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A national competition for the Washington Monument grounds</li><li>• A Mall-wide landscape restoration study</li><li>• Educational programs and self guided tours</li><li>• A formal definition of the National Mall</li><li>• A Mall-wide circulation planning study</li></ul>	