



America's 3rd Century National Mall

Visionary Idea, Democratic Reality, and Civic Opportunity

A proposal by the National Mall Coalition
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Honoring war dead



Celebrating literacy, learning, and storytelling



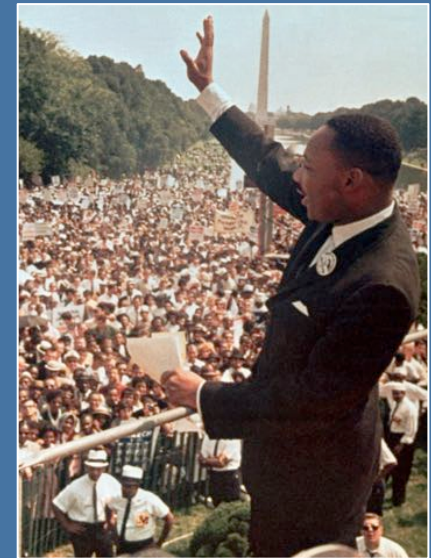
Exploring American history



Playing in the majestic open space



Studying founding documents



Making history

The National Mall is a landscape symbol of America's founding ideals and a stage for our democracy, a special place to experience and participate in celebrating our cultural heritage and common values.



1791 L'Enfant Plan



1901-1902 McMillan Commission Plan

The idea for the Mall and its inspired design is the legacy of two great visionary plans: the 1791 L'Enfant Plan by Pierre (Peter) Charles L'Enfant and the 1901-1902 Senate Park (McMillan) Commission Plan by Daniel Burnham, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr, Charles McKim, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

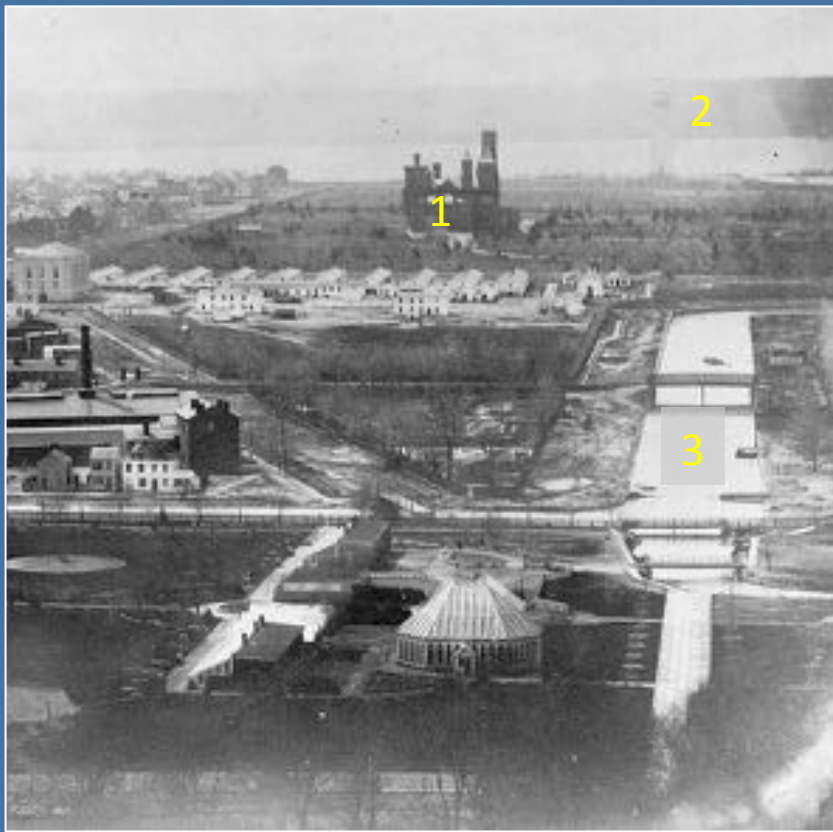


1791 L'Enfant Plan



The Mall cross axis

In L'Enfant's plan, the Mall was the centerpiece of the capital and of the cross axis that united the symbols of American self-government: a "Grand Avenue" and "place of general resort" for the American people – the Mall (1) – connected the Capitol (2) to a monument to George Washington (3) and to the President's Park (4) and White House (5).

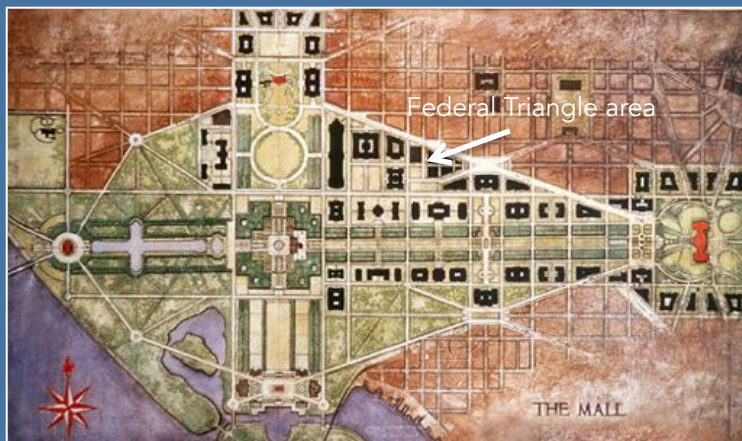


In 1860, the Smithsonian Castle (1) was in place and the Washington Monument (2) stood partially built on the banks of the Potomac River. The rest was a chaos of buildings, mud, and dirt roads stretching westward from the Capitol. L'Enfant's intended canal was instead a fetid open sewer (3). Photo: Library of Congress

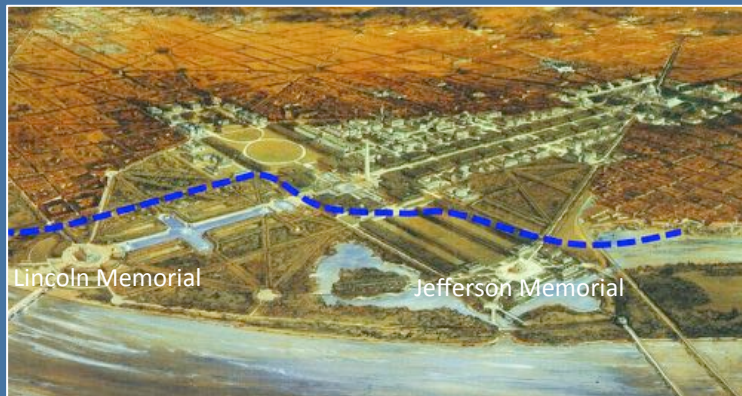


By 1900, instead of L'Enfant's "Grand Avenue" the Mall was mostly covered in trees. The "National Museum," later renamed the Arts & Industries Building (1), stood next to the Smithsonian Castle (2). The 1868 U.S. Department of Agriculture Building (3) was razed in 1930 to make way for the new building. Visible at 6th Street where railroad tracks crossed the Mall is the shed roof over the tracks (3) where the National Gallery of Art is located today. Photo: Library of Congress

But development during the 19th century mostly ignored L'Enfant's vision and design concept.



The kite-shaped 1901-1902 McMillan Commission Plan included areas north of the Mall – today's Federal Triangle -- for new public buildings for the growing government



The blue line is the original Potomac shoreline



The McMillan Plan replaced the tree-covered 19th century Mall with a formal landscape of grass, trees, pools, and classical architecture. The Washington Monument, originally located on the banks of the Potomac, gained new prominence as the centerpiece of the expanded cross axis and was designed to be the "gem of the Mall system"

Confronting the chaos on the Mall in 1901, the McMillan Commission reclaimed the original Mall concept and updated it. The new plan extended L'Enfant's cross axis westward over landfill to the Lincoln Memorial, adding a new chapter to the American story told on the Mall, and southward to the site of the Jefferson Memorial. The plan reconceived L'Enfant's "Grand Avenue" as a lush green landscape lined with rows of elm trees and white neoclassical museums.



This view from the Washington Monument in the 1940s shows the temporary World War I and World War II government buildings that were not all removed until the 1970s. Photo courtesy Smithsonian Institution Archives.



By the 1950s the area between the Capitol and the Washington Monument had been cleared of trees to create the open space framed by rows of elms. The group of government buildings to the north planned by the McMillan Commission – the Federal Triangle – was largely completed in the 1930s. Photo courtesy Smithsonian Institution Archives.

A half century after the McMillan Commission, the Mall was still very much a work in progress. Instead of a lush tree-covered landscape, temporary buildings filled the area around the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument and occupied much of both sides of the Mall near the Capitol. Only three neoclassical buildings were in place: the National Museum of Natural History, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Gallery of Art. Development picked up speed after 1960.



Museum of the American Indian



Vietnam Veterans Memorial



World War II Memorial



WWII Memorial (2004) MLK Memorial (2011) FDR Memorial (1997)
 Vietnam Vets. Memorial (1982) Korean Vets. Memorial (1995)

In the 1960s new museums filled out the Mall towards the Capitol, drawing visitors to explore American history, art, science, and technology. The new architecture of the National Gallery East Building, the Air and Space Building, and the Museum of the American Indian looked more to modern trends than to the McMillan Plan's classical ideal. Meanwhile, the Mall area near the Lincoln Memorial, after the temporary buildings were removed in the 1970s, took on new meaning as a place of pilgrimage for visitors to memorials honoring Vietnam Veterans, Korean War Veterans, FDR, World War II, and Martin Luther King Jr.



Home to museums, monuments, and public gatherings large and small, the Mall in recent decades has taken on new purpose never imagined by L'Enfant or the McMillan Commission. The American public flock to the Mall to explore their history and heritage, to exercise their First Amendment rights, and to participate in civic events in a national spotlight. The Mall has become a stage for American democracy.



But today the integrity and vitality of this national treasure is threatened:

- There is no updated visionary plan to support modern needs while advancing the L'Enfant and McMillan legacy for future generations.
- On the contrary, Congress has declared the Mall a “substantially completed work of civic art” but already has made exceptions to this policy for the Vietnam Memorial visitors center, the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture. What will be exempted next? Where will new projects go?
- The 8 federal agencies who manage the Mall do jurisdictional planning and policymaking to maintain and upgrade their own facilities but do not plan for the larger needs of the Mall as a national treasure. For example, the Library of Congress seeks to hold its popular National Book Festival on the Mall. But the National Park Service since 2014 has denied the Festival a permit in order to protect the National Park Service’s new turf grass. In truth, to lose cultural activities such as the Festival is to lose the very lifeblood of the Mall.

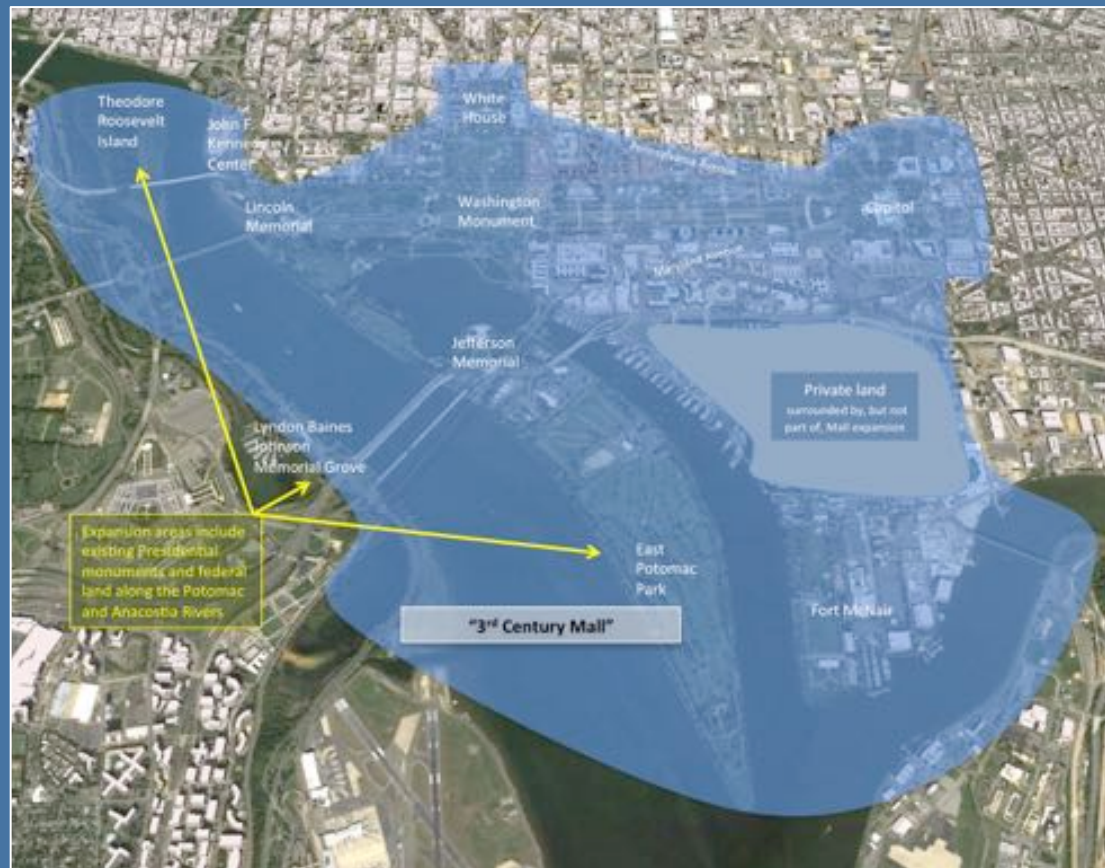


Furthermore, with Mall management fragmented among numerous agencies and oversight bodies, no one entity has authority to coordinate planning or public use policy for the National Mall as a unified whole. What's the solution?

The National Coalition to Save Our Mall proposes a “3rd Century Mall”

The Mall cannot be “complete” any more than American history is finished. We need a new McMillan-type Commission to create a visionary plan for the Mall in its 3rd century that will expand the future vitality and resilience of this national treasure for generations to come.

One possibility is to extend the Mall boundaries once again. The 1902 McMillan Commission Plan turned landfill into the majestic setting for the Lincoln Memorial. Today we can incorporate miles of underutilized federal land along the Potomac and Anacostia waterfront as a welcoming venue for future museums, monuments, and public events.



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