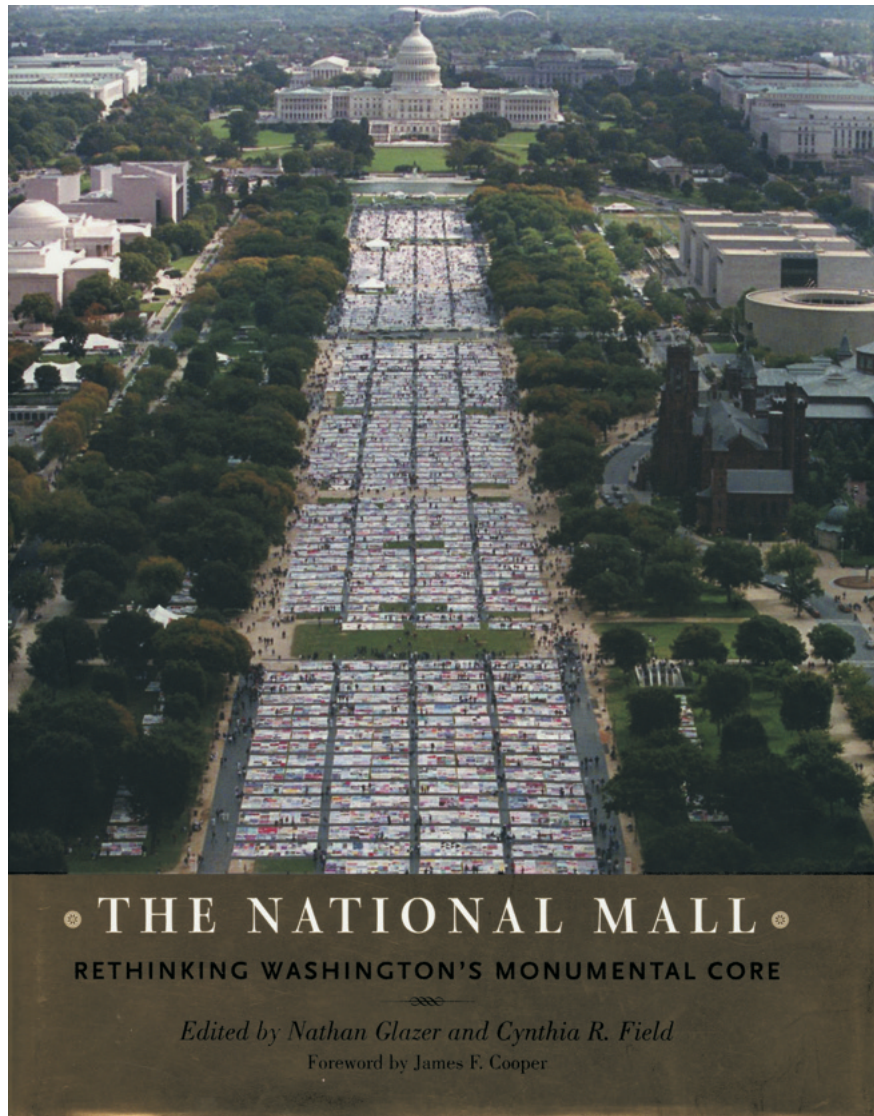


RETHINKING THE NATIONAL MALL!

(THAT'S WASHINGTON'S MONUMENTAL CORE)



This essay is adapted from a talk by Judy Scott Feldman at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., December 1, 2008, based on her essay in the new book, [The National Mall: Rethinking Washington's Monumental Core](#), Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

The ideas contained herein include recent proposals by the National Coalition to Save Our Mall for solving the Mall's ongoing problems.

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Rethinking The National Mall!

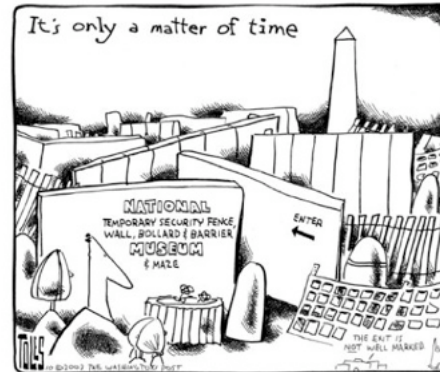
(That's Washington's Monumental Core)



Photo by Tom Wachs

In my essay in the new book *The National Mall: Rethinking Washington's Monumental Core*, I was asked to focus not on the art or history of the Mall but on the practicalities of day-to-day decision-making and how these realities play out on the Mall's symbolic landscape.

I began writing in 2004 at the time construction was underway on the World War II Memorial and on security barrier walls at the Washington Monument. The Mall's problems were well publicized then and have been ever since in the local media. For example, in 2003 *The Washington Post's* Tom Toles lampooned the obsession with security.



Reprinted with permission of Tom Toles and *The Washington Post*

And, this past spring, the Mall's dilapidated condition, an ongoing story in recent years, was the subject of yet another Toles cartoon published at the time Congress was holding an oversight hearing regarding the National Park Service's efforts to develop a National Mall Plan.

What I discovered in writing my essay were deeper problems that stand in the way of coherent planning for the future of the National Mall. These obstacles cannot be overcome by new planning initiatives by federal and DC agencies (initiated since I wrote my essay in 2004 and revised it in 2006), although these planning efforts shine a much-needed spotlight on the importance of the Mall to the nation and City.

If we're going to **RETHINK** the Mall, we need to start by understanding the basic dynamics that shape everyday decisions and actions. I'll focus on two: first, the effects of **FRAGMENTED OVERSIGHT**; and second, the planning premise that the Mall is a **"COMPLETED WORK OF CIVIC ART."**



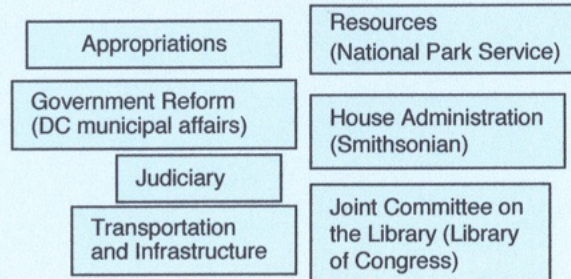
This page from "Planning Together for Central Washington," with its variously colored zones showing four ongoing planning efforts by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), National Park Service, Architect of the Capitol, and DC Office of Planning, illustrates the problem of fragmented planning: **LACK OF UNIFIED VISION**.

Who's in charge of the National Mall?

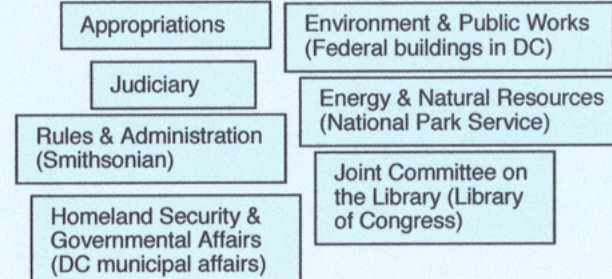
It starts with ...

CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT

House Committees



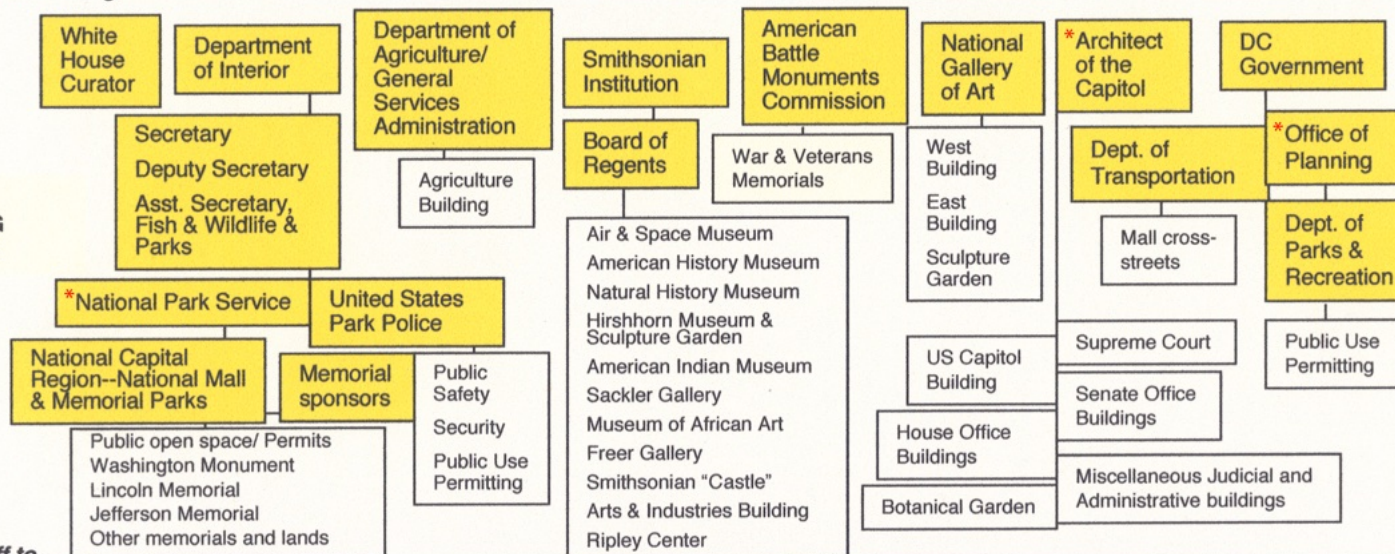
Senate Committees



Divided oversight enables fractured management

Congress works through...

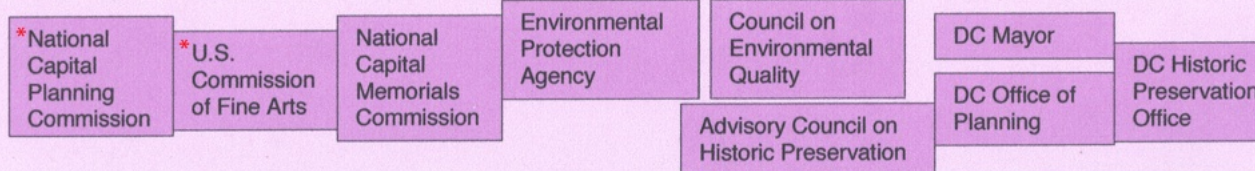
MALL MANAGING AGENCIES



Fractured management leads to fragmented planning

Who hand off to...

PLANNING AND REVIEW AGENCIES



Fragmented planning results in no cohesive vision

PUBLIC

No meaningful role. Can only react to government priorities and plans.

No cohesive vision poorly serves the American public

I. Fragmented Oversight, Management, and Planning

But Where's The Public Input?

We typically hear that the National Park Service is “in charge” of the Mall and its National Mall Plan will provide the vision for the next 30-50 years. But the reality is far more complicated. Authority is divided among at least six agencies. The Park Service manages the largest area, outlined in pink in the chart at the right, but also shares with the Architect of the Capitol, Smithsonian, National Gallery of Art, and others.

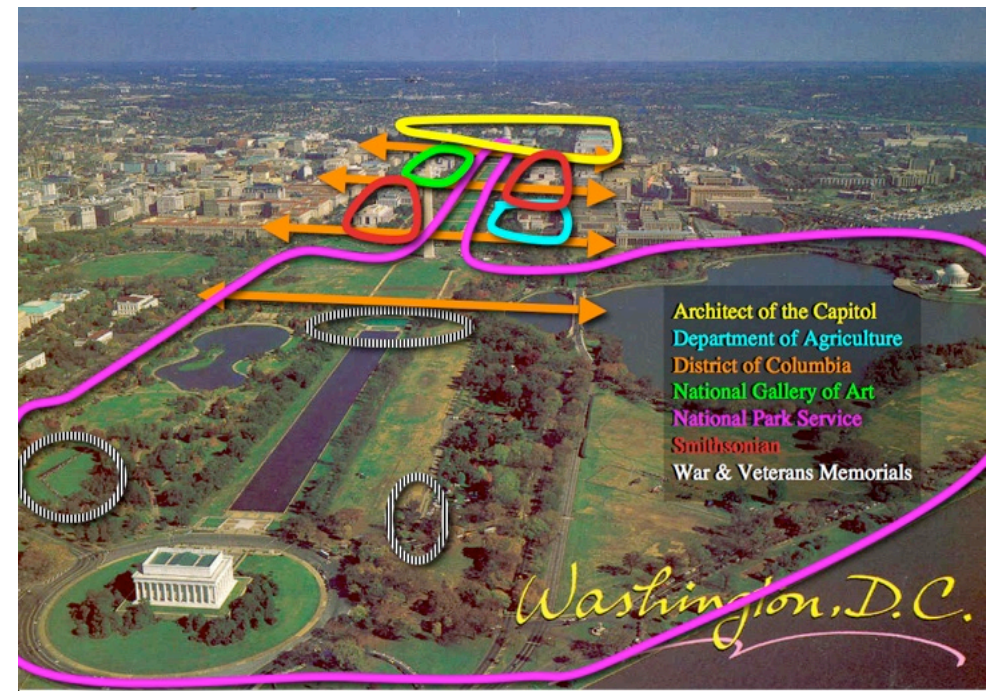
It's even more complex when we look at the broader picture of fractured oversight. **WHO'S IN CHARGE OF THE NATIONAL MALL?** I've tried to capture the answer in the flowchart on the left:

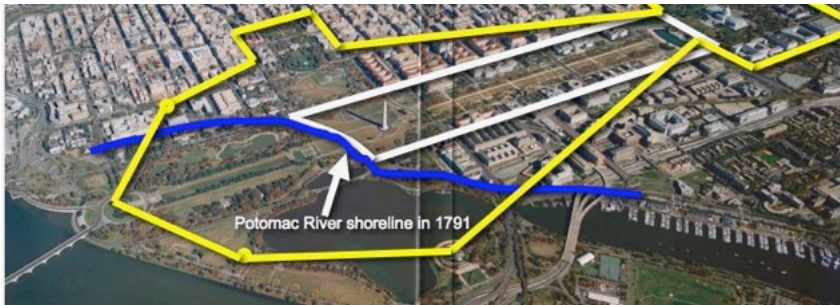
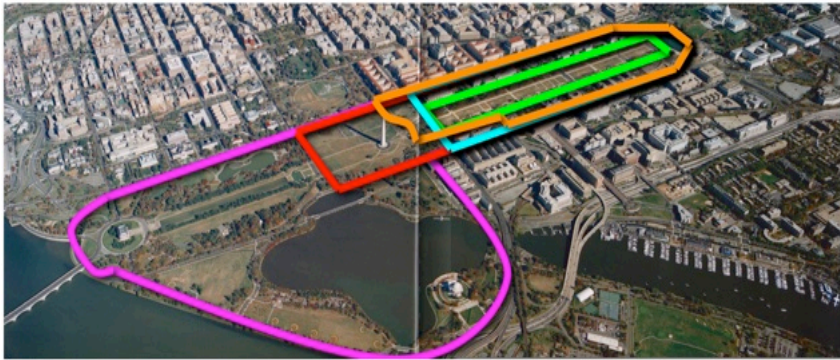
- At least 14 committees in Congress
- 6 to 8 managing agencies and authorities
- 9 planning and review agencies
- There is very little role for DC Government
- The public has no meaningful role at all and can only react to government decisions

The 4 ongoing planning efforts—by the National Park Service, NCPC, Architect of the Capitol, and DC—are identified on the chart. **EACH HAS A LIMITED SCOPE.**

Just weeks ago, the Smithsonian Institution announced its own new initiative – a strategic plan now getting underway for all its museums and facilities. How will the Smithsonian's effort mesh with the others?

CLEARLY THERE'S A NEED FOR SOME KIND OF COORDINATING ENTITY.





The consequences of fragmented oversight go even deeper. **AS ASTONISHING AS IT MAY SEEM, NO ONE EVEN AGREES ON A BASIC DEFINITION OF THE MALL.**

Here I've diagrammed the various ways federal and DC agencies define the Mall's boundaries, including 4 different definitions by the National Park Service alone.

Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 Mall (right, and white at left) was conceived as a "Grand Avenue" from the Capitol to the Washington Monument at the banks of the Potomac River. **The McMillan Commission's kite-shaped Mall plan of 1901-1902** (right, and yellow at left) expanded the Mall onto the Potomac Flats landfill west and south of the Washington Monument. It also included areas typically considered to be beyond the Mall.



In 2003, a Congressional Research Service report concluded that in fact **there is no statutory definition or map of the National Mall**. The report states that when a specific definition is needed **the McMillan Plan seems to be the standard**. Yet none of the agency definitions is consistent with the McMillan concept.

So whose definition is the correct one? If we turn to the historic McMillan concept—outlined in yellow—, then the Mall includes large areas of land not included in any current agency definition. Stakeholders with an interest in planning for the future of the Mall would properly include the Federal Triangle and the Wilson Building, home of District Government—not only federal interests but also DC and private interests.

A first step in any meaningful planning for the future of the National Mall is coming to some kind of agreement about where the Mall is—and who exactly the stakeholders are.

THEN AN INDEPENDENT AUTHORITY CAN BE CREATED, with the singular function of planning the Mall as a whole, to rise above the individual interests to fashion a coherent planning framework for this nationally significant symbolic landscape. Right now, such an entity does not exist.

It's been done before. At the start of the 20th Century, Congress responded to citizens clamoring for a much-needed rejuvenation of the Mall and set up the McMillan Commission that gave us the majestic Mall we know today. It can be done again.

WITH THESE BASICS DECIDED, WE CAN START THINKING ABOUT THE NEXT STEPS IN PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

II. Is The Mall “Complete”?

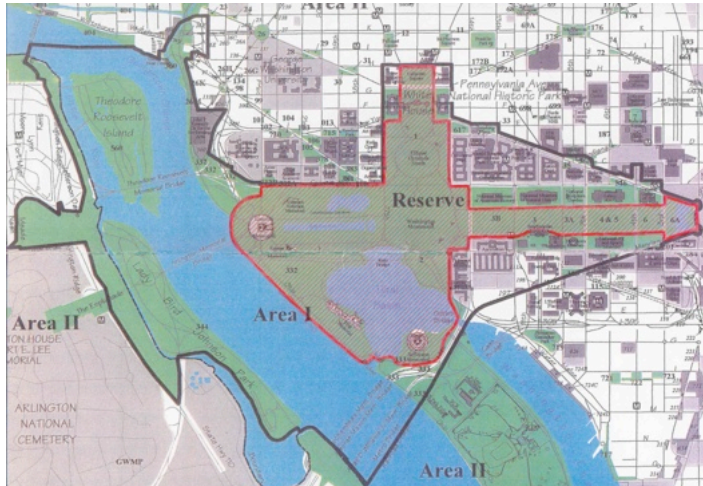
Can It Ever Be Complete?

THIS QUESTION GETS TO THE DEEPER MATTER OF THE MALL’S MEANING AND VALUE TO THE NATION.

Congress in 2003 declared the Mall “a substantially completed work of civic art” and imposed a moratorium on the “Reserve” portion of the Mall, outlined in red at the left, in response to the problem of overcrowding of museums and memorials. **This is the premise driving current planning for the Mall.**

BUT THIS POLICY IS NOT WORKING.

- ☐ Congress grandfathered the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial at the Tidal Basin (red star).
- ☐ And exempted the Vietnam Veterans Memorial visitors center (yellow star) from the moratorium.
- ☐ Then it made an exception for the National Museum of African American History and Culture (blue star).
- ☐ What about the recent proposal for a museum of **Latino American History**? Will its sponsors be willing to accept a location off the Mall? Or will they consider that second-class status?



NO! THE TRUTH IS THE MALL CANNOT BE “COMPLETE” ANY MORE THAN AMERICAN HISTORY IS FINISHED.

The problem is **not with Americans' desire to remember our past in new museums and memorials.**

After all, our monuments and museums give meaning to Washington's Monumental Core. They are a destination for the Mall's 25 million annual visitors; an economic engine for the city.

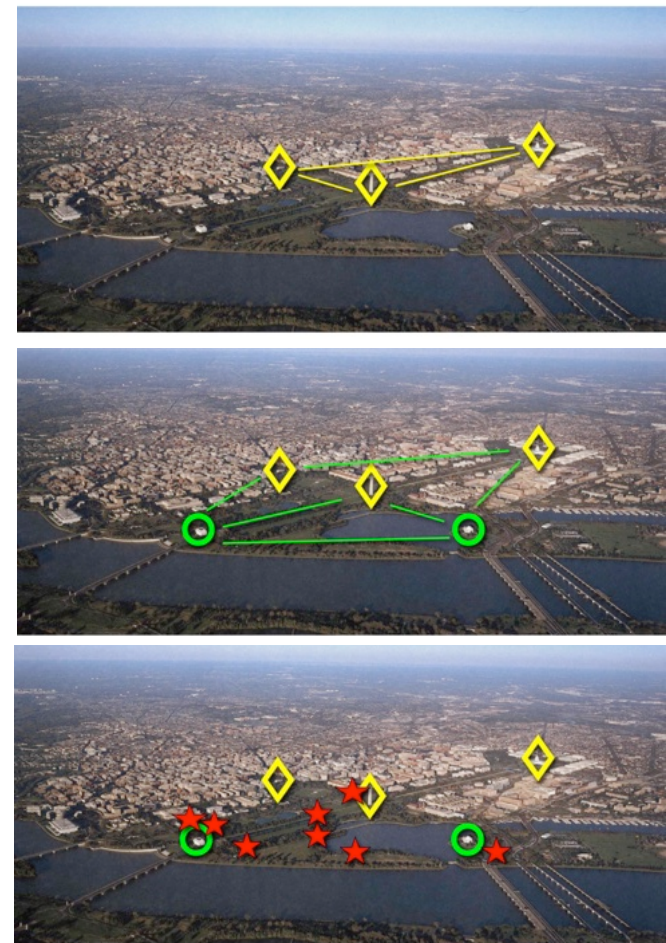
The problem is that since the 1970s we've been treating memorials as privately selected and located, *ad hoc* additions to the Mall instead of part of a COHERENT DESIGN and NATIONAL NARRATIVE.

L'Enfant's original monumental framework (yellow diamonds) for the Mall located the Capitol, White House, and Washington Monument in symbolic relationship to one another. **This established the idea of a narrative for the capital city.**

The McMillan Plan (green circles) **expanded the framework and the story told** on the Mall with the Lincoln Memorial to include the Civil War, Emancipation, and restoration of the Union.

However, starting in the late 1970s, Congress began authorizing private sponsors to construct new memorials on what it considered "empty space" near the Lincoln Memorial—the Vietnam and then the Korean Veterans Memorials. These were followed by the FDR, George Mason, World War II, and the future MLK Jr. Memorial, and then the Vietnam visitors center and Museum of African American History and Culture (red stars).

Lacking an updated plan with space designed to accommodate new monuments, we've been muddying the Mall's design integrity and symbolic coherence. DO WE REALLY BELIEVE THAT THE SELECTIVE STORY TOLD ON TODAY'S MALL IS OUR "COMPLETE" STORY?





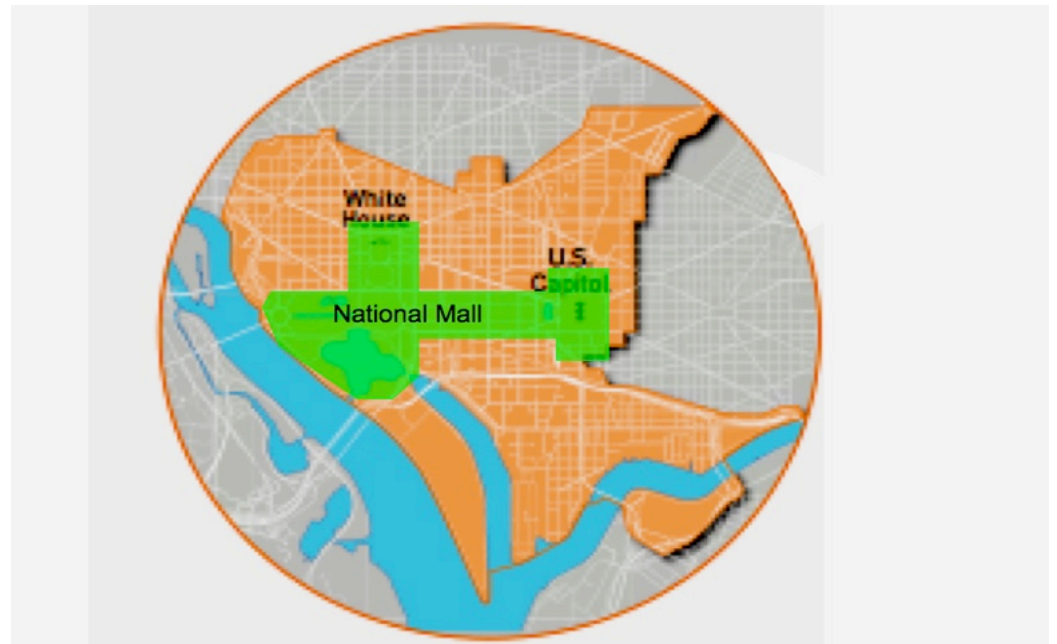
AP/Wide World Photos

The Mall also became an **URBAN PARK** in the heart of the growing city. In recent years, the Mall has become critical to future development. **DC's "Center City Action Agenda" envisions the National Mall—**described by planners as a “barrier” between neighborhoods—**AS THE “CENTERPIECE” OF A NEW EXPANDED “CENTER CITY”** (outlined in orange) stretching from Downtown to the Southwest Waterfront. **But the District has no planning authority for the Mall.**



What Else Changed In The Last Century?

Mall planners a century ago never imagined that this public open space would take on new roles and purposes in the 20th century: **THE MALL BECAME THE PEOPLE'S PLACE, THE STAGE FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY—a place for civic celebrations and First Amendment activities.**



Along with the Mall's growing popularity, new tensions have emerged **pitting preservation of the historic landscape against modern public use**, as Richard Kurin describes in his essay about the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in the new book. How do we decide the proper balance between vital public use and the National Park Service's regulations meant to protect the historic elms?

OUR NATION NEEDS A NEW
LONG-RANGE VISION FOR THE
MALL IN ITS THIRD CENTURY.

WE NEED TO RETHINK THE MALL:

- ◆ Its physical boundaries
- ◆ The role of museums and monuments in telling the American story
- ◆ The way the American people enjoy and use this grand public open space

A Proposal For A 3rd Century Mall

The Washington Post

MONDAY, MARCH 21, 2005

Fred Hiatt

Let the Mall Grow

The Mall is close to full. The next would-be stakeholder, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, should and probably will find a choice spot. But no one believes there won't be more museums and monuments clamoring for space. As history unspools, Americans will want to commemorate it, and the Mall will be their first choice.

This dilemma may seem to have only two outcomes, both undesirable. More and more structures could be crammed onto the Mall, to its detriment. Or worthy projects could be forced to accept what their proponents consider second-class addresses.

There is another way, however: The Mall could grow. If this sounds outlandish, re-

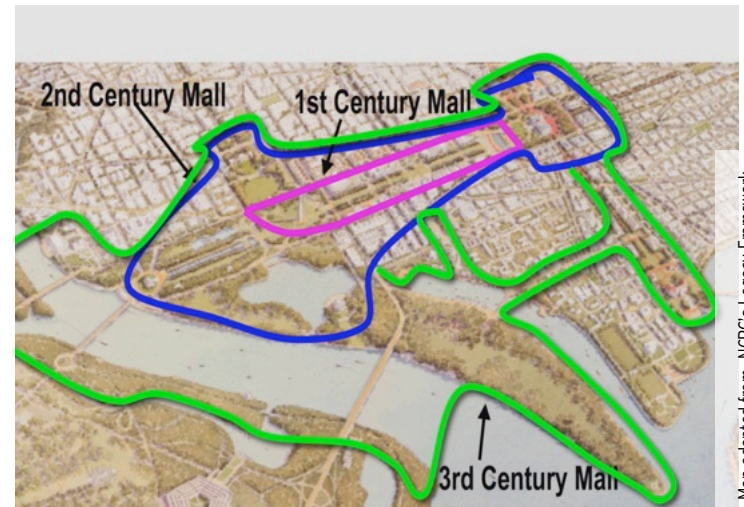
member that it's happened before. The Mall used to end at the Washington Monument. In 1901-02, the McMillan Plan called for extending the Mall south and west by filling in part of the river. Doubters predicted that no one would venture into the new swampland. But over the century the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials, Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Constitution Gardens have proven the "new" Mall reasonably popular.

The National Mall Third Century Initiative, a program of the National Coalition to Save Our Mall, a nonprofit advocacy group, says the Mall could grow again for the 21st century — this time by reengineering not the riverbank but our concept of the Mall. Let it swing around through East Potomac

Park, across a new bridge or two over the Washington Channel and east to South Capitol Street, taking advantage of redevelopment planned for that gateway avenue and around the new baseball stadium.

People will come up with reasons why it can't work, and many would resist being the first to settle on the newest "new" Mall. But the possibilities are exciting: fabulous new sites for dramatic architecture, incentives for circular sightseeing routes, new potential for the riverfront. "It's not a design, not a plan, but an idea," says Judy Scott Feldman, president of the coalition. Let a thousand concepts bloom.

fredhiatt@washpost.com



Map adapted from NCP's Legacy Framework

The National Coalition to Save Our Mall has proposed ideas for the foundation of a long-range plan:

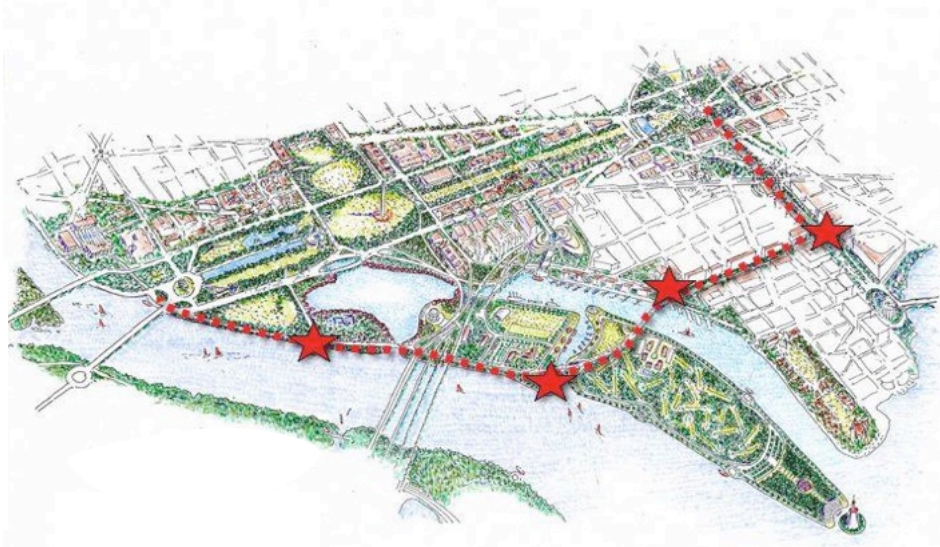
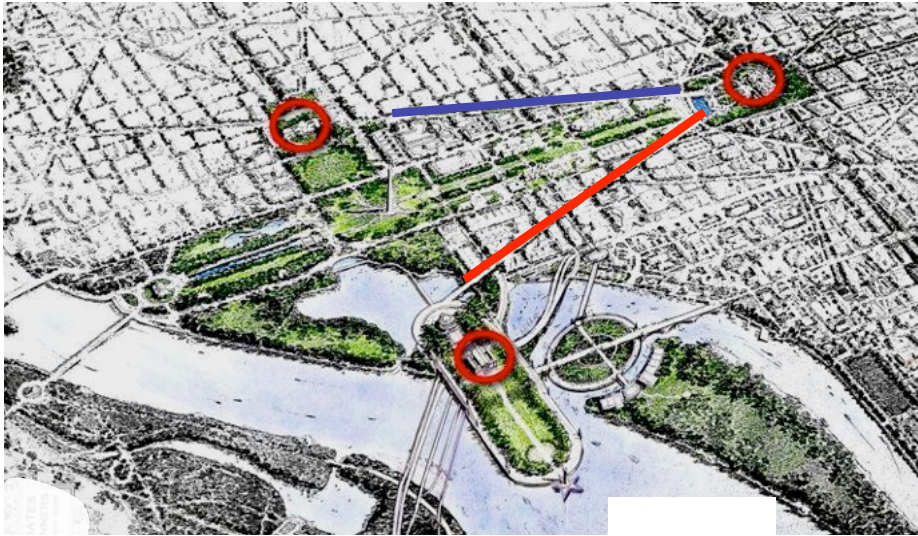
- **THE MALL CAN BE EXPANDED.** It's been done before when the McMillan Commission expanded L'Enfant's "First Century" Mall to include the iconic Lincoln Memorial. That "Second Century" Mall can be expanded again—on adjacent federally-owned land, even on both sides of the Potomac—to create what we are calling the "Third Century Mall." Expansion has been endorsed by *The Washington Post* as a logical step.

- **THE AMERICAN STORY TOLD ON THE MALL CAN BE EXPANDED**—made richer, more democratic, more complete—not just with monuments but with historical markers, new technologies...
- And with improved maintenance, visitor amenities, transportation, and regular programming on the open space, **THE MALL CAN BE MADE A MORE ANIMATED PUBLIC URBAN SPACE AND CIVIC STAGE**—better connected to the life of the nation, the surrounding city, and the expansive Potomac waterfront.

Two Local Architects Sketch A 3rd Century Mall Expansion

Esteemed local architects Arthur Cotton Moore and W. Kent Cooper offer different ideas for how expansion might work.

- ❑ **Arthur Cotton Moore** reshapes the landfill south of the Washington Monument to extend the Mall's historic north-south axis and create a whole new Mall for future museums and monuments, including a prominent site marked at the star.
- ❑ He proposes restoring Maryland Avenue (red line) to its intended prominence as the southern counterpart to Pennsylvania Avenue north of the Mall (blue line).
- ❑ Picking up on L'Enfant's monumental framework, he relocates the Supreme Court behind Jefferson to more fully express the equality of the three branches of government (red circles).
- ❑ Along the waterfront he creates lively new public spaces connected by bridges to the Southwest Waterfront neighborhoods.
- ❑ **W. Kent Cooper's** approach reprises L'Enfant's concept of the Mall as a Grand Avenue and proposes a new Mall boulevard and circulation pattern running from the Capitol southward, across M Street to a new bridge to East Potomac Park, then along the Potomac riverfront to the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials.
- ❑ He locates strategically along the boulevard prominent sites for major museums or memorials, as well as new public spaces for mega events such as the Folklife Festival and new recreational spaces serving visitors as well as local residents.



Can We Imagine A More Complete American Story, A More Accessible, Animated Public Urban Space?



Expanding the democratic, crowd-pleasing, 2-statue-per-state tradition of the Capitol's Statuary Hall onto the Mall's tree-lined pathways? Statues of Presidents along Pennsylvania Avenue?



Completing the landscape of the Washington Monument grounds as the McMillan Commission envisioned to create a welcoming oasis at the heart of the Mall?



A new 14th Street Gateway Bridge?
© 2005 Inscape Studio



Animating the open space year-round with public activities?
Courtesy Carol Highsmith



A place where American history continues to unfold--here Suffragists marching on Washington in 1913--perhaps commemorated with historical markers?



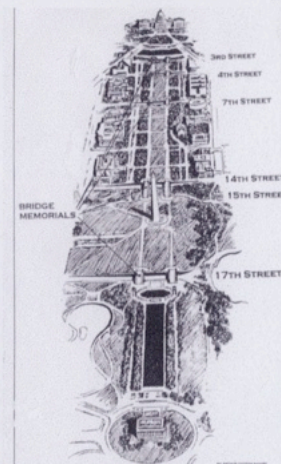
Restoring a 1920s-style swimming beach on the Potomac?



A National Mall Visitor Center in the Smithsonian's mothballed Arts & Industries Building serving the City and region?



A laboratory of sustainable landscaping and development on the island of East Potomac Park?



Bridge memorials create a continuous Mall landscape and promenade.
© 2005 Arthur Cotton Moore



A parking and transportation hub -- finally!
© 2005 W. Kent Cooper FAIA



The return of Mr. Beasley at the Museum of Natural History?

IF EVER A TIME WAS RIGHT TO PREPARE
THE MALL FOR ITS 3RD CENTURY, THAT
TIME IS NOW.

FIRST WE MUST FIND COMMON PURPOSE.

This will take political will and leadership from our elected representatives—the new Administration with Congress and District leaders.

A NEW INDEPENDENT ENTITY IS NEEDED—a commission of prominent Americans—to coordinate the full range of Mall stakeholders including the National Park Service, the Smithsonian, the National Gallery of Art, and more, and to ensure the District Government is well represented, and the public fully engaged in creating a new vision for the entire Mall.

...and then to implement it.

The possibilities are exciting—for the American people, the City of Washington, DC, and the nation as a whole. WE CAN dare to rethink the future of this special place that embodies who we are as a people and tells more of the American story...the stage for our democracy.

JOIN US IN MAKING THIS HAPPEN.

NATIONAL COALITION TO SAVE OUR MALL

WWW.SAVETHEMALL.ORG

P.O. BOX 4709

ROCKVILLE, MD 20849

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.

Please join our efforts by contacting:

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