

**Written Testimony  
Submitted to the  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Natural Resources  
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**“The Future of the National Mall”**

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**Government of the District of Columbia**



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Good morning members of the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands. I am Harriet Tregoning, Director of the District of Columbia Office of Planning and I am pleased to present testimony on behalf of Mayor Adrian M. Fenty regarding the future of the National Mall.

Pierre L'Enfant referred to the Mall as "the vast esplanade," and intended it to be the symbolic heart of the District of Columbia. The National Mall has been the city's common, its central park, its ceremonial gathering place, its festival site, and its protest grounds.

Through the years, the Mall has hosted an incredibly diverse array of activities. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, activities on the Mall included farming, canal transport, and a train depot. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, people could be found strolling in romantic gardens, picnicking on the grass, and studying botanical displays. Now, on any given day one can find families ice skating, playing ball, listening to blues, jogging, bicycling, flying kites, watching fireworks, or viewing monuments by moonlight.

The Mall has also hosted an amazing range of events - from the Solar Decathlon, the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival, and the Memorial Day concert, to marches in support of AIDS research, a breast cancer cure, climate change action or an end to famine. These events create a vibrancy that makes living in the nation's capital a unique experience, with the Mall an inspiring and evolving place of exploration, education, and ideas.

The Mall has long been the southern boundary of the District's Downtown. With Downtown's emergence over the past 10 years as both a real residential neighborhood and entertainment district, and as the premiere office location in the region, the Mall has been an important part of the area's growing vibrancy. However, the District of Columbia's Downtown will be fully built out in the next five years. Mayor Adrian Fenty unveiled a development and quality of life strategy earlier this year - the Center City Action Agenda - in order to continue to capture the growing demand for office, retail, culture, entertainment, and residential space. The Center City Action Agenda identifies an area nearly three times the size of the current Downtown that will be home to future vibrant, green, and sustainable mixed-use

development served by transit, but also designed to be walkable and bikeable. Several emerging neighborhoods surrounding downtown are part of the strategy, including NoMA, the area north of Massachusetts where NPR and the Department of Justice recently announced their relocation; the Capital Riverfront, where the new LEED-certified Nationals baseball stadium recently opened; Hill East, along the Anacostia, east of the Capitol Hill neighborhood; the Southwest Waterfront; Mount Vernon; and Poplar Point/Anacostia. This strategy moves the center of the city south and east to include the southeast and southwest waterfronts and crosses the river into Anacostia. No longer the lower boundary of Downtown, the Mall becomes the literal center of Center City Washington.

The District of Columbia has a deep interest in the future of the Mall. We have been collaborating with our federal partners on a series of efforts to enhance circulation and the quality of experiences for residents, workers, and visitors to our city.

Since 2006, several DC Government agencies, including the DC Office of Planning, the State Historic Preservation Office (as one of the Section 106 review consulting parties) and the District Department of Transportation, have been engaging with the National Park Service as it develops a 50-year comprehensive vision statement for the National Mall. Throughout this planning process, discussion has focused on preservation and necessary evolution of the Mall in response to opportunities created by the revitalization of the surrounding city blocks, waterfront destinations, and emerging neighborhoods.

Another of the District's recent collaborations with federal planning agencies resulted in a vision framework document called "Planning Together for Central Washington," which gives voice to the shared collective goals of the District and the federal agencies with responsibility for the stewardship and development of Central Washington, including the Mall. The DC Office of Planning, the National Park Service, the National Capital Planning Commission, the Commission of Fine Arts, and the Architect of the Capitol envision a Central Washington that achieves:

- Welcoming Atmosphere
- Well-Connected Public Space
- Distinctive Places

- Green and Sustainable Development
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Transportation

Also, for the past two years, the DC Office of Planning and the District's Department of Parks and Recreation have been working with the National Park Service and the National Capital Planning Commission on a collaborative planning effort called *CapitalSpace* so that local and federal agencies can develop a comprehensive system to manage parks and open space located in the District. While the National Mall is an icon in our nation's capital city, it is also a vital city park that provides both passive and active recreation for local and regional workers and residents. The *CapitalSpace* project has identified a deficiency in District-owned recreation facilities in Center City and other close-in neighborhoods. A significant challenge exists in an area like ours with significant growth and few land resources. The facilities and programs provided on the Mall - including more than six volleyball courts, 22 baseball diamonds, two football fields, and three rugby fields - play a big part in helping meet this challenge, as well as making the District one of the most livable cities in the world.

In addition, we are currently involved in another collaboration with the National Park Service related to the need for improvements to floodplain protection in the District. Recently the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) highlighted concerns they and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had about an increased risk of flooding on the Mall, as well as the Federal Triangle and adjacent areas because of deficiencies in the existing Potomac Park Levee, particularly at the 17th Street closure. With NPS and our other federal partners including NCPC, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, FEMA, and General Services Administration, we have organized an unprecedented cooperative effort that has allowed us to move very rapidly towards immediate remedies that will protect the National Mall, federal buildings, and private property. We are very appreciative of our federal partners, especially NPS, for the spirit of cooperation, and the quality of the resources that they have dedicated to this effort, which we expect to result in construction of an improved levee system in the next 18 months.

These collaborative efforts have several things in common, including recognizing the need to relieve some of the pressure for monuments, memorials, and the increasing number of activities on the Mall by

making other important locations in the city visible, well-known, convenient, and easily accessible. In order to realize this vision, the parties agree that key investments in a few streets and avenues are essential. A high-performing transportation system that provides convenient, safe, and equitable access to the National Mall and allows residents and visitors to experience the city by foot, bike, or transit is a goal that is shared among the entities responsible for stewardship of the National Mall. We are proud of the fact that for many of our city's visitors, their first experience with transit is in Washington, DC. We aspire to enhance our transit system with cutting edge transportation technology. Enhancing the ability for residents and visitors to get to and from the National Mall via 4<sup>th</sup> Street, 7<sup>th</sup> Street, 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Constitution and Independence Avenues on foot, bicycle, and transit is a priority. A walkable urban character, way-finding information systems, green infrastructure, and transit support strong and inviting connections between the Mall and surrounding Center City areas. Along existing vehicular routes across the Mall, improved pedestrian access, additional street trees, ground-level retail, and cultural activity can encourage residents to intimately experience on foot the nation's most important civic space and venue for expression of democratic events and ideals.

Part of the legacy of the Mall, dating from the McMillan plan, is the notion of that grand civic space as a kind of permanent world's fair, an exposition that showcases the latest technology and industry, the finest art and cultural achievements, as well as the history of this country and the world. We think the Mall should continue to be that place – but now also showcasing the best in 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation, and in green and sustainable development practices – in keeping with the General Services Administration's leadership and with the District's own Green Building Act, the most ambitious in the nation.

Transportation around the nation's premier civic space in particular should be a model for the rest of the country. This entails designing "Complete Streets" that provide for the mobility of pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, and drivers in an attractive and safe environment. This also means a road infrastructure designed using "Green Highway" principles, such as use of recycled materials, watershed-based stormwater management, and shared space for motorized and non-motorized travel. In addition, 21<sup>st</sup> century energy-efficient vehicles should be provided as options for visitors to travel among tourist sites along the National Mall, as well as other popular destinations throughout the city, such as Georgetown,

Dupont Circle, and Union Station. This also means re-thinking management of the Mall to support a strong presence of the District's SmartBike program on the National Mall. Bike sharing has a host of benefits for the environment in and around the National Mall. It is carbon-free and has no negative impact on air quality. It combats climate change, supports green collar jobs, reduces congestion, decreases noise pollution, requires no parking spaces, provides healthy exercise, and offers residents, workers, and tourists a great way to experience and navigate the city.

As the National Park Service prepares to celebrate one hundred years of stewardship and leadership in the management of some of the nation's most treasured public spaces, we have arrived at an important crossroads in the history of the National Mall. We are transitioning from a period where the citizens of our nation primarily experienced national parks by visiting our country's important wilderness areas. Today some of our most visited national parks are in urban communities like Golden Gate Park in San Francisco or the National Mall in Washington. These urban park sites are very intensely used – overused, some may say. Today, visitors have much higher expectations about the quality, programming, and management of urban parks than in previous eras. The Sculpture Garden at the National Gallery of Art is one park that seems to fully meet those higher expectations. Highly utilized, it is programmed for a variety of seasonally-appropriate activities, features a prominent and lovely restaurant, offering not just sustenance, but cuisine, and it is meticulously maintained. However, we should examine how we might enhance the existing resources allocated to our national parks and the current guidelines for the use and management of the National Mall to meet the new expectations of its 25 million annual visitors. Other urban parks have used public-private partnerships to provide for the unique and evolving needs of urban park users, including the Central Park Conservancy in New York City and the Golden Gate National Park Conservancy in San Francisco.

Together, I think we can continue to do all this and even more. We can take further steps to be a model of green and sustainable development. In the Summer of 2007, the Mall was host to the Solar Decathlon and recently the U.S. Botanic Garden constructed a Sustainable Schoolyard exhibit to demonstrate how green schoolyards can lead to healthy, active, green, and livable communities. It is our hope that the vision and

management plan that emerges for the National Mall will afford great opportunities for enhancements to event programming, public transportation, parking, visitor information systems and amenities in order that the city may realize its vision as a globally competitive, green and sustainable capital city, as well as continue the Mall's legacy as a permanent World Fair demonstrating to United States citizens and visitors what it is like to experience 21<sup>st</sup> Century transportation and green and sustainable development practices.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of the District of Columbia and Mayor Adrian Fenty. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.