

# A New National Mall for the 21st Century



An aerial photograph of Washington, D.C., showing the Potomac River in the foreground and the city grid extending to the north. The Supreme Court building is visible on Capitol Hill. A large, semi-transparent white box contains the main title and author information.

# **A BOLD PLAN EXPANDS IT INTO THE POTOMAC RIVER WITH THE SUPREME COURT AS ITS CENTERPIECE**

**BY ARTHUR COTTON MOORE**

The new section of the National Mall would extend south of the Jefferson Memorial. It would move the Supreme Court from its Capitol Hill location and create space for the new museums and memorials that inevitably will be built here.



All artwork courtesy of Arthur Cotton Moore

**W**ashington has two new challenges that when seen together should bring about a rethinking of the city's monumental core.

One challenge is the pressure for more memorials and museums on the Mall. Despite a congressional moratorium, supporters of the recently approved African-American museum insisted that it go on the Mall.

Many more memorials and museums wait in the wings, ready to flatten the Mall's grass and trees under hundreds of columns, statues, car-touches, caryatids, cenotaphs, acroteria, effigies, laurels, obelisks, pedestals, steles, and pediments.

In response to the memorial tsunami, a group has been formed, chaired by Judy Scott Feldman and coordinated by W. Kent Cooper, called the National Coalition to Save Our Mall. It has concluded that the Mall must expand, an idea the coalition calls the Third Century Initiative. The Mall has been expanded before: In the first century of Washington's existence, the Mall ran from the Capitol to the Washington Monument; in the second century, the McMillan Commission pushed the river westward, extending the Mall to accommodate the Reflecting Pool and the Lincoln Memorial.

Now, in Washington's third century, we need to do it again.

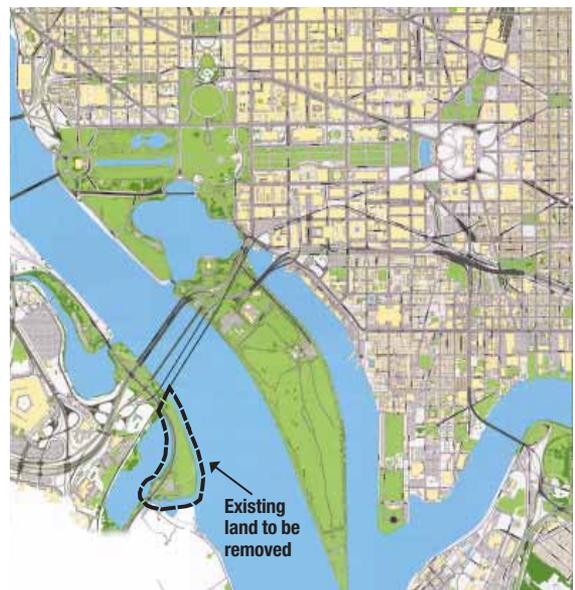
Some believe Congress should stand firm on its 2003 moratorium. But ask politicians, and they will tell you about the many groups who fervently want their memorial on their Mall. They ask why we have a National Mall if it is not a place to memorialize our great people and events.

Another challenge is protecting federal offices from terrorism. The most susceptible place in the country for a damaging terrorist attack is along the railroad lines running through the southwest part of DC just

Shown above is a proposal for a new Maryland Avenue—the great missing avenue of the L'Enfant Plan.

According to L'Enfant's plan, Maryland Avenue was to be the mirror of Pennsylvania Avenue, bracketing the Mall. One of the great realizations of the 1901 McMillan Plan was removing the trains and train station from the middle of the Mall. In the process of creating Union Station, which opened in 1907, the train lines were fixed to where Maryland Avenue was planned to be, were left exposed, and are now accessible to attack.

By enclosing the railroad in a hardened structure, we could reduce the vulnerability of the rail lines and complete Maryland Avenue—the missing part of L'Enfant's plan.





## A BIGGER MALL FOR DC'S THIRD CENTURY

### Eight Reasons to Do It

#### 1. Room for more memorials

By the addition of another canal, the northern portion of East Potomac Park would be shaped as an ellipse similar to the ellipse south of the White House, providing an area for 24 smaller statuarylike memorials. The plan envisions the island as a monument-filled garden similar to Il Prato della Valle in Padua, Italy; it also would provide a link to the Banneker Overlook at the end of the L'Enfant Promenade and a bridge to M Street in Southwest DC.

#### 2. Visitors' hub

The cavities under the hill between the highways and rail lines would house a Metro station (the Yellow Line runs through the new expansion), visitors center, Tourmobile station, and parking so visitors would leave their cars

and use the Tourmobile or Metro.

#### 3. Washington Monument area linked to the expanded Mall

The plan envisions a pedestrian bridge, like the one across the Thames in London, facilitating access between the Washington Monument area and the expanded Mall and marking the centerline of the axis across the Tidal Basin.

#### 4. Increased water frontage

The plan's additional waterfronts, marinas, and waterfront restaurants would foster a livelier engagement with the river, as in Vancouver or a bit like Venice.

#### 5. A monumental sculpture

The plan envisions a monumental figure at the end of the expanded Mall. On a much smaller scale, it would act like the Statue of Liberty, greeting boats coming up the Potomac and

signaling the beginning of the monumental core of the nation's capital.

#### 6. Protest plaza

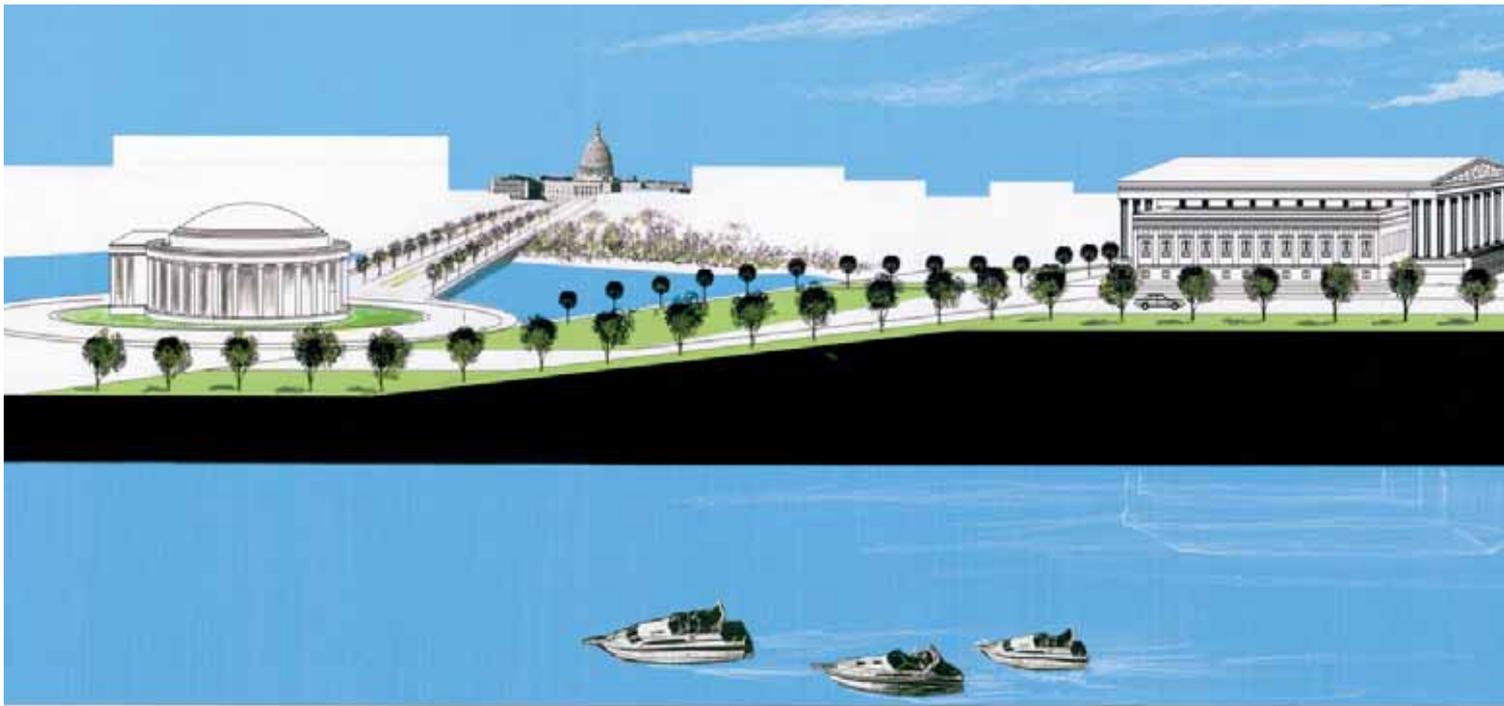
The plan envisions—between the Jefferson Memorial and the Supreme Court—a kind of Speakers' Corner where people could shake their fists at or salute the White House, the Capitol, or the court.

#### 7. Increased recreation

We now use the Mall for softball, soccer, polo, volleyball, ice skating, and more. By expanding it, we increase the potential for recreational use.

#### 8. Reconnecting the city

The southwest quadrant of DC is cut off by the Southeast-Southwest Freeway and the railroad lines. This plan provides much greater access to Southwest DC and its waterfronts.



The new Supreme Court and Mall expansion would span the highways and railways as they enter the city. Between each of these arteries would be spaces for a visitor center, a Metro stop, a Tourmobile stop, and parking.

below the Mall. A terrorist could stand on any of our bridges—for instance, on 12th Street—or on the L’Enfant Promenade and shoot at one of the chlorine tankers on the freight line below. The resulting chlorine-gas cloud could kill 100,000 people and disable the national government.

**T**his 21st-century plan is a logical segue of the basic geometry of the McMillan and L’Enfant plans. Its detailed design should maintain the same sense of hal-

lowed ground.

The Mall’s east-west axis—the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol—cannot be expanded. But its north-south axis—the White House to the Jefferson Memorial—can expand to the south.

Just below the Jefferson Memorial is a spaghetti of highways and rail lines—the confluence of the George Mason Memorial and Rochambeau bridges, I-395 feeding into 14th Street and the Southwest Freeway, and the rail lines of Metro, Am-

trak, Virginia Railway Express, and CSX. The messy infrastructure dips at this point, allowing the creation of a gently sloping landscaped hill to span over and hide it. Then out of land now used largely for Park Service parking lots, there could be a Mall expansion about equal to half of the present Mall. There would be space for up to 20 new memorials and museums, depending on size.

Because the expanded Mall would protrude into the Potomac River, the small

## Is There Room on the Mall for . . .

Here are some of the memorials and museums that have been proposed for the National Mall under the Commemorative Works Acts.

- A memorial to Martin Luther King Jr.
- A memorial to John Adams
- A memorial to victims of communism
- A memorial to Benjamin Banneker
- A memorial to Dwight D. Eisenhower
- A memorial to American veterans disabled for life
- A memorial to Frederick Douglass
- A memorial to Ukrainian genocide
- A memorial to Ronald Reagan
- A memorial to slavery

- A Pyramid of Remembrance for soldiers who died in peacekeeping, covert work, and more
- A memorial to Native Americans
- A memorial to the Cold War
- A memorial to children of the American Revolution
- A memorial to Hispanic Vietnam veterans
- A memorial to Thomas Paine
- A National Peace Garden
- A memorial to black Revolutionary War patriots
- A memorial to women who served in Vietnam
- Middle Passage National Monument
- A memorial to Ralph David Abernathy
- A memorial to Draza Mihailovich
- A memorial to Davy Crockett
- A memorial to Peace Corps volunteers

- A memorial to the teaching profession
- Tiananmen Square Memorial Park
- A memorial to Raoul Wallenberg
- A monument to honor the American flag and display the world’s largest
- A memorial to the Merchant Marines
- A memorial to members of the American press
- A memorial to those killed while covering a war or other armed conflict
- A memorial to Hispanic-American members of the armed forces
- A memorial to American astronauts
- The National Museum of the American Latino Community
- The National Women’s History Museum
- The National Health Museum
- The National Museum of African-American History and Culture



**GEORGE MASON  
MEMORIAL BRIDGE**

**395**

**METRO AMTRAK VRE CSX**

barrier island at Roaches Run could be removed and its single road to the airport relocated to the west to open up the throat of the Potomac. Part of the end of this portion of the expanded Mall could be on pilings, depending on water-flow analysis, and provide a concession for covered boat slips.

If all this seems too grand, it is less than a third the scope of what the Army Corps of Engineers accomplished following the 1901 McMillan plan when it created East Potomac Park, West Potomac Park, the land for the Lincoln Memorial, and the Tidal Basin. We have been manipulating the eastern edge of the river ever since the early 1800s, when water lapped at the land where the Ellipse is now, right below the White House.

The plan provides ways to reconnect our waterways so the river can be used more for recreation and transportation. Washington Channel is a dead end because of the long distance around Hains Point, frustrating any kind of ferry or water-taxi transit system. The plan also provides canals joining the north end of the channel to the river, defining the expanded Mall while preserving the Hains Point golf and recreation area, enriched by waterside restaurants and marinas.

The McMillan plan called for building and extending Maryland Avenue beyond 14th Street to a circle around a monument (now the Jefferson Memorial) that would connect—visually and functionally—to

the Capitol; realizing this critical feature would also connect the Capitol to the expanded Mall.

**T**he 21st-century plan envisions the Supreme Court as the anchor of the expanded Mall. In keeping with the symbolism of planning in Washington, it balances the executive branch at the north end of the monumental core, the legislature at the east end, and the judicial branch at the south end—presenting the three pillars of our democracy in a monumental triangle.

The Supreme Court heads the only branch of government whose obligations and organizational structure were not specifically set out in the Constitution, and its wanderings reflected its early lack of power and how it evolved.

For 145 years, the court moved about, meeting briefly in a private home but mostly in two spaces in the Capitol. In 1929, President Taft proposed building a separate court building. Lore has it that when the architect Cass Gilbert asked where was the grassy hill on which he would build a suitable structure for the Supreme Court, he was told to fit it in across the street. It sits in the shadow of the Capitol, between the Library of Congress and the Methodist Building and opposite small apartment buildings on Second Street.

Completed in 1935, the Supreme Court's exterior has become so iconic as the backdrop of our confrontations and

aspirations that its symbolic façade should be moved to the new location. Because the building was made from small pieces, its exterior could be reassembled—the same way it was built—while its utilitarian spaces would be newly constructed.

The Library of Congress could use the vacated site. A contractor who specializes in this kind of disassemble/reassemble monumental work has estimated a cost of \$30 million. That is about 5 percent of what is being spent across the street for the Capitol Visitors Center.

Located on the new Judiciary Hill, the Supreme Court would have the presence, majesty, and symbolism commensurate with its role in our lives.

To expand the Mall, something like the McMillan Commission needs to be formed. Compromises and changes and consensus are how we do business in Washington, but the basic ideas in this plan address real needs: We have to protect the rail lines—they are the spinal nerve system of the East Coast. And we have to deal with the political pressures to build more memorials and museums on the Mall.

Every century or so in Washington there is a moment when a door opens and lets the future in. That time is now. **W**

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