

The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of The District of Columbia

Established Dec. 7, 1865

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March 10, 2010

National Mall and Memorial Parks
Attn: National Mall Plan
900 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Superintendent Piltzecker:

As the District's oldest civic organization – founded in 1865 – and dedicated to the maintenance and preservation of both the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans, the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia is pleased to comment on the Draft National Mall Plan and EIS.

First, we would like to commend Ms. Spain, her team, you and your staff for your research, documentation, attention to detail and thoroughness in your efforts to restore, improve and plan for the National Mall.

Second, of great concern to the AOI (but now somewhat ameliorated by the availability of funding through the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009) were the deteriorating conditions of the Reflecting Pool, World War I Memorial, Tidal Basin sea walls and other locales requiring immediate attention. We are pleased that these repairs will be addressed outside the scope of the Plan but we feel their needs must continue to be addressed, their maintenance ensured and their sight-lines preserved.

Third, the following will address our support and/or concerns for the National Mall Plan and our hope that our input will be given great consideration as the plan progresses:

-- The AOI supports many of the concepts and recommendations under the Preferred Alternative. We are first, and foremost, concerned about the immediate appearance of the green spaces of the Mall. We firmly believe that priority should be given to restoring (including re-engineering, irrigation, protection of) the grassy areas of the Mall. We believe the Mall's unique green space and vistas can benefit from a prohibition of all recreational activities (sporting events) on the Mall proper (soccer, rugby, football, baseball, etc.) which should be relegated to designated areas which currently exist in other locations on the Mall (West Potomac Park, the Ellipse, the area just northwest of the Lincoln Memorial or East Potomac Park). We believe that healthy life styles and recreation should be a part of the plan but not at the expense of the grassy areas of the

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Mall – its vistas and views so striking and worthy of protection. Without prohibiting recreational activities on the Mall’s lawns, we believe the Park Service will continue to expend extraordinary efforts and unnecessary maintenance funds attempting to maintain and repair the damage inflicted by sporting activities.

-- We believe the Preferred Alternative incorporates and addresses the goals of all the alternatives: Historic Landscape & Education; a Welcoming National Civic Space for public Gatherings, Events & High-Use Levels; and, Focus on Urban Open Space, Urban Ecology, Recreation and Healthy Lifestyles. In order to address all of these goals, visitor amenities, safety and a positive visitor experience must serve the visitors but not distract from the memorials, historic views and vistas. However, we do not want to see an array of pavilions, information kiosks, restrooms and snack bars polluting these vistas while, at the same time, we recognize the need for food, comfort, information, shelter and safety. We believe the National Park Service should work with its partners (the National Coalition to Save the Mall, the Trust for the National Mall, the Smithsonian Institution and others) to share space in either the Smithsonian’s Arts and Industries Building or the Agriculture Departments building on the Mall to design and establish a National Mall Visitors’ Welcome Center. We picture the Park Service’s Independence National Historical Park pavilion in Philadelphia, PA. Such an amenity could provide visitor services, a food court, orientation videos, a theatre, ticket acquisition for timed tours, First Aid Stations and restroom facilities. Both locations are convenient to Metro, Metro Bus, DC Circulator service and tour bus drop-offs. A facility such as this could provide not only the aforementioned amenities but would be a ‘first stop’ for the first-time or casual visitor to discover the many, varied programs, memorials and activities along the National Mall. It is somewhere a visitor could ask, “I have only three hours to spend on the Mall... our interests are democracy and history.” With that, Park Service Rangers and volunteers could help that visitor construct a series of walks and activities that would address their specific needs within their time limitations. Smaller information kiosks, combined with snack bar/restroom facilities could still remain available throughout the Mall; but, there should be one, comprehensive, full-service facility that would be the visitor’s first point of contact. Both of these wonderful facilities (the Arts and Industries Building and the Agriculture Department Annex) command the grandeur of architecture and location that the National Mall and its visitors deserve.

-- We support the improvements envisioned for Union Square, Constitution Gardens, the Washington Monument grounds, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, Viet Nam Memorial, Korean Memorial, World War II Memorial, World War I Memorial and the soon-to-be Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial; but, while we would welcome food services, additional or improved restrooms and information kiosks at or near all of these sites we are concerned that the Mall will be dotted with structures that interfere with its great open spaces. We recognize that locating these facilities and amenities underground would be nearly impossible, if not cost prohibitive, but every effort should be made to ensure they blend into the Mall’s environment and do not distract from its grandeur, space or story.

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-- In the interest of visitor safety and comfort, we agree that appropriate seating should be provided in shaded areas (to address heat issues during the summer months). Lighting consistent with 'green' technology that does not contribute significantly to light pollution to promote night time/after hours safety and sufficient drinking fountains should be available. We also believe that the Park Service should work diligently to ensure that visitors can navigate the long expanses of the National Mall based on their ability and time constraints. All efforts should be made to encourage, promote and welcome non-Park Service-contracted transportation providers (DC Circulator, 'pedicabs', hop on/off sightseeing providers, et al.) to facilitate the movement of visitors in and around the National Mall. Walking surfaces should be designed with sustainability in mind, ease on which wheelchairs and 'scooters' can traverse and walking surface maintainability. Gravel surfaces certainly have proved to be un-workable... concrete and/or asphalt is expensive to install, maintain and repair. We think that there should be alternatives in today's marketplace, sufficiently innovative to meet the 'traffic' requirements of the National Mall. Recycled automobile tires, assembled into large, easily replaceable sections, simulated wood planking from recycled materials (boardwalks and pedestrian bridges on the George Washington Memorial Parkway trails come to mind...) laid on a defined, slightly 'curbed' surface could replace all of the major walkways throughout the National Mall. All efforts should be made to discourage/prohibit social trails that cause so much damage and contribute to the maintenance nightmare of maintaining the lawns.

We genuinely hope that you will consider our comments, observations and recommendations and give great weight to the many other innovative, creative and visionary recommendations you receive in response to the draft plan so that as you move forward it is, in fact, a National Mall Plan and not just the National Park Service's plan for the national mall.

Sincerely,

William N. Brown, President

Attachment

Cc: National Coalition to Save Our Mall
The Trust for the National Mall

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Summary of Comments by The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia on the Draft National Mall Plan and EIS

- ❖ Restore, repair & maintain the lawns and grassy areas of the National Mall
- ❖ Prohibit sports & competitive recreational activities on the National Mall proper; relegate to existing recreation areas in East/West Potomac Park and the Ellipse
- ❖ Establish a National Mall Visitors' Center utilizing the existing structures of the Arts and Industries Building of the Smithsonian Institution or US Agriculture Department
- ❖ Limit unsightly/uncoordinated visitor amenity structures (information kiosks, snack bars and restroom facilities)
- ❖ Provide shaded, seating areas where visitors can find shelter in the summer heat
- ❖ Replace/improve pedestrian walkways by utilizing 'green,' sustainable walking surfaces (appropriate for wheel chairs/scooters) manufactured from recycled tires or plastic by-products
- ❖ Provide ample, 'green technology,' non-light polluting illumination
- ❖ Install an emergency notification/public address system throughout the National Mall to warn visitors of emergencies or severe weather events
- ❖ Promote and support non-Park Service transportation providers (DC Circulator, Metro Bus, hop-on/off buses, pedi-cabs, tour/charter bus operators) to ensure mobility/transportation along and around the National Mall

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