

Written Testimony
National Capital Planning Commission

**Subcommittee on Economic Development,
Public Buildings, and Emergency Management on
“Federal Triangle South: Redeveloping Underutilized Federal Property
through Public Private Partnerships.”**

November 19, 2013

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) is the federal government’s planning agency in the District of Columbia and surrounding counties in Maryland and Virginia. The Commission provides overall planning guidance for federal land and buildings in the region. It also reviews the design of federal projects, oversees long-range planning for future development and monitors capital investment by federal agencies.

As the nation’s capital and seat of the federal government, Washington, DC has unique needs. NCPC’s planning work seeks to protect our symbolic and cultural heritage, ensure that there is room for future generations to locate new memorials and museums and host national events, and ensure that federal facilities meet agency needs and provide safe, efficient and attractive workplaces.

NCPC believes that the SW Ecodistrict Initiative is a roadmap to meet these goals, and a great example of the ability of partnerships to achieve greater results. We are very excited that the General Services Administration (GSA) an important partner in this process, is using the Ecodistrict Plan to inform this important project.

The SW Ecodistrict Initiative stems from earlier NCPC studies to identify opportunities to modernize and reconnect several federal precincts around the National Mall. Perhaps the greatest opportunity is the area defined by the SW Ecodistrict. It includes 110 acres of federal and private

land bounded by Independence Avenue, Maine Avenue, 4th Street and 12th Street. GSA's Federal Triangle South Initiative comprises the northern 35 acres.

Today, the area is defined by superblocks with predominantly single use federal office buildings at least 40 years old. A labyrinth of building entrances, streets, freeway ramps and stairs are the result of a tangled network of elevated viaducts crossing active rail and roadways. An expansive yet poorly defined public realm offers few pedestrian amenities, and makes walking difficult, uninviting, and generally unpleasant. The size and design of the buildings, related infrastructure, and inferior public realm contribute to the inefficient use of land and resources.

Now, several efforts underway are creating a once in a lifetime opportunity for transformation. Consistent with the Administration's "Freeze the Footprint" policy, the federal government is reexamining its property to create more efficient workplaces for a modern federal workforce, dispose of unneeded property and reduce its operating costs. Upgrades to the National Mall and a private multi-billion dollar waterfront development project bracket the area, and sponsors are considering this area for future museum and memorial projects. Southwest Washington is on the cusp of change and now is the time to leverage this momentum.

In 2010, NCPC, in close coordination with GSA, the National Park Service, the Commission of Fine Arts, and the District of Columbia created a remarkable partnership of 17 federal and local agencies to develop the SW Ecodistrict Initiative. This process included in-depth consultation with residents, private sector businesses, property owners and service providers to fully explore opportunities to synchronize projects, leverage resources, and develop mutually beneficial partnerships. Together, we examined how federal assets and natural resources can be used most efficiently and contribute to the economic vitality and environmental health of the city. Through this partnership and detailed technical work, we have built a compelling case to revitalize this federal precinct in the heart of the nation's capital.

The SW Ecodistrict plan recommends how to best accommodate future federal office space needs while creating a new vibrant mixed-use neighborhood with exciting cultural destinations, places to lives, and multiple transportation choices. In doing so the federal government can:

- Reduce its operating and maintenance expenses;

- Reduce its ongoing lease expenses; and
- Generate new tax revenue for the District of Columbia.

The plan also demonstrates that area-wide approaches can produce efficient, cost-saving and sustainable results that far exceed what could be achieved when looking at individual buildings alone. The results include the following:

Development Results

- Retains and improves efficiency of 8 million sq. ft. of federal office space and adds an additional 1 million sq. ft. of private office space to accommodate an additional 25,000 employees in the area.
- Creates 1.8 million sq. ft. of residential and hotel space for up to 1,200 residences and 600 hotel rooms that will accommodate 1,500 new residents and a total of 246,000 visitors per year.
- Establishes 4 to 5 sites for up to 1.2 million sq. ft of cultural development.
- Accommodates at least 100,000 sq. ft. of community-service retail.
- Reconnects the street grid.
- Expands the rail corridor and the L'Enfant Station to increase commuter transit capacity.
- Establishes a prominent connection between the National Mall and the southwest waterfront.

Environmental Results

- Manages all of the area's stormwater and significantly reduces potable water use, reducing costs as stormwater fees and impervious surface charges increase substantially over the next 10 years.
- Reduces the area's greenhouse gas emissions by 51%.
- Increases the amount of waste diverted from the landfill to 80%
- Transforms the federally-central utility plant into a highly efficient and financially successful energy model.
- Contributes to cleaner rivers and improved water quality.

High-level analyses show that the benefits to the federal government and taxpayer, the District of Columbia and private developers exceed costs, creating a win-win situation for all stakeholders.

The challenge however is its scale and complexity. Implementation can only be achieved through collaborative action by both the public and private sector, which can endure over time and provide more flexibility.

The SW Ecodistrict Vision Plan identifies several opportunities, which we recognize will be challenging given the current fiscal environment. These opportunities include:

- Implementing an area-wide stormwater management system to address escalating fees.
- Modernizing and expanding GSA's central utility plant to more (non-federal) subscribers for greater operating efficiency;
- Public realm improvements through partnerships with organizations such as the newly forming Southwest Business Improvement District; and
- Redeveloping and rehabilitating federal property to meet the needs of GSA and its' client agencies while contributing to the greater area.

The Federal Triangle South Initiative is unprecedented in scale and is critical to realize the SW Ecodistrict's potential. It has the potential to transform the area south of the National Mall into a vibrant new place to work and live and become the physical connection between the monumental core of the nation's capital and what has become a very vibrant and wonderful city. The federal government has the opportunity to reduce its expenses by being more efficient and thinking beyond the individual building scale.