

A New Plan for Pennsylvania Avenue

Commission of Fine Arts Information Presentation

April 16, 2026



Project Partners



National Capital Planning Commission
(NCPC)



National Park Service
(NPS)



General Services Administration
(GSA)



District of Columbia
(DC)



DowntownDC Business
Improvement District (BID)



Events DC

Consultant Team

DESIGN TEAM



IMPLEMENTATION TEAM



Project Background

INTRODUCTION

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC)—in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS), the General Services Administration (GSA), the District of Columbia, DowntownDC Business Improvement District (BID), and Events DC—is undertaking a planning project to create a Public Space Master Plan and an Implementation Program for the Pennsylvania Avenue area. This Project submission concerns the Public Space Master Plan and builds upon the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) Plan (1974), Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site Registration (2007), Cultural Landscape Inventory (2016), Pedestrian Life Study (2016), Market Analysis (2016), Urban Design Analysis (2017), Transportation Study (2018), Expert Focus Groups (2018), ULI Advisory Services Panel Report (2020), Federal Triangle Flood Charrette (2021), Three Vision Concepts (2022), Public Comments (2022), and much more (historic documentation, regulatory resources, and physical assessments).

This Plan will address right-sizing, realigning, and improving the street and public spaces; multi-modal circulation and transportation; connectivity; ecological resilience; modernizing infrastructure; memorials and cultural landscape protection; security; visitor experience, enjoyment, recreation, and services; stormwater; and flexible public spaces to accommodate a wide variety of national celebrations, First Amendment gatherings, and other permitted activities and events.

BACKGROUND

Pennsylvania Avenue, the iconic corridor between the U.S. Capitol and the White House embodies a deep history that represents America’s strength as a world capital. It hosts significant events such as Presidential Inaugurations, First Amendment activities, and grand processions. The Avenue has the potential to bridge the National Mall and its surrounding museums and federal institutions with private businesses, commerce, and urban life. This is central to the identity of the nation’s capital and plays a vital role in Washington, D.C.’s economy, culture, and social life.

However, despite its importance, Pennsylvania Avenue is governed by a 50-year-old plan that no longer meets modern needs. Its administrative structure is complex and inefficient. Changing economic, physical, and land-use conditions have diminished its role, and its aging infrastructure is in decline. The Avenue’s lack of street-level activity, modern retail, and pedestrian-friendly experiences is preventing it from realizing its full potential. New neighborhoods, shifts in office and retail sectors, and the impact of the pandemic have intensified challenges in revitalizing downtown D.C.

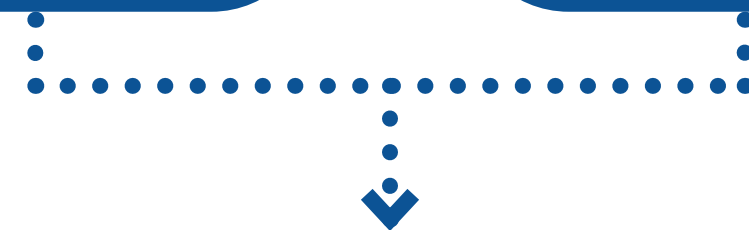
This is a pivotal moment for change. The new vision will transform Pennsylvania Avenue into a thriving, world-class destination. By updating its infrastructure and revitalizing its streetscape, we can restore the Avenue as source of national pride and economic opportunity for generations to come.

PUBLIC SPACE MASTER PLAN

- Right-sizing, realigning, and improving the street and public spaces
- Modernizing infrastructure

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

- Event programming requirements
- Strategies to improve administration, operations, and maintenance.



A NEW PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE PLAN

* Final design and construction documents to be developed and approved after the new Plan is complete.

Project Timeline

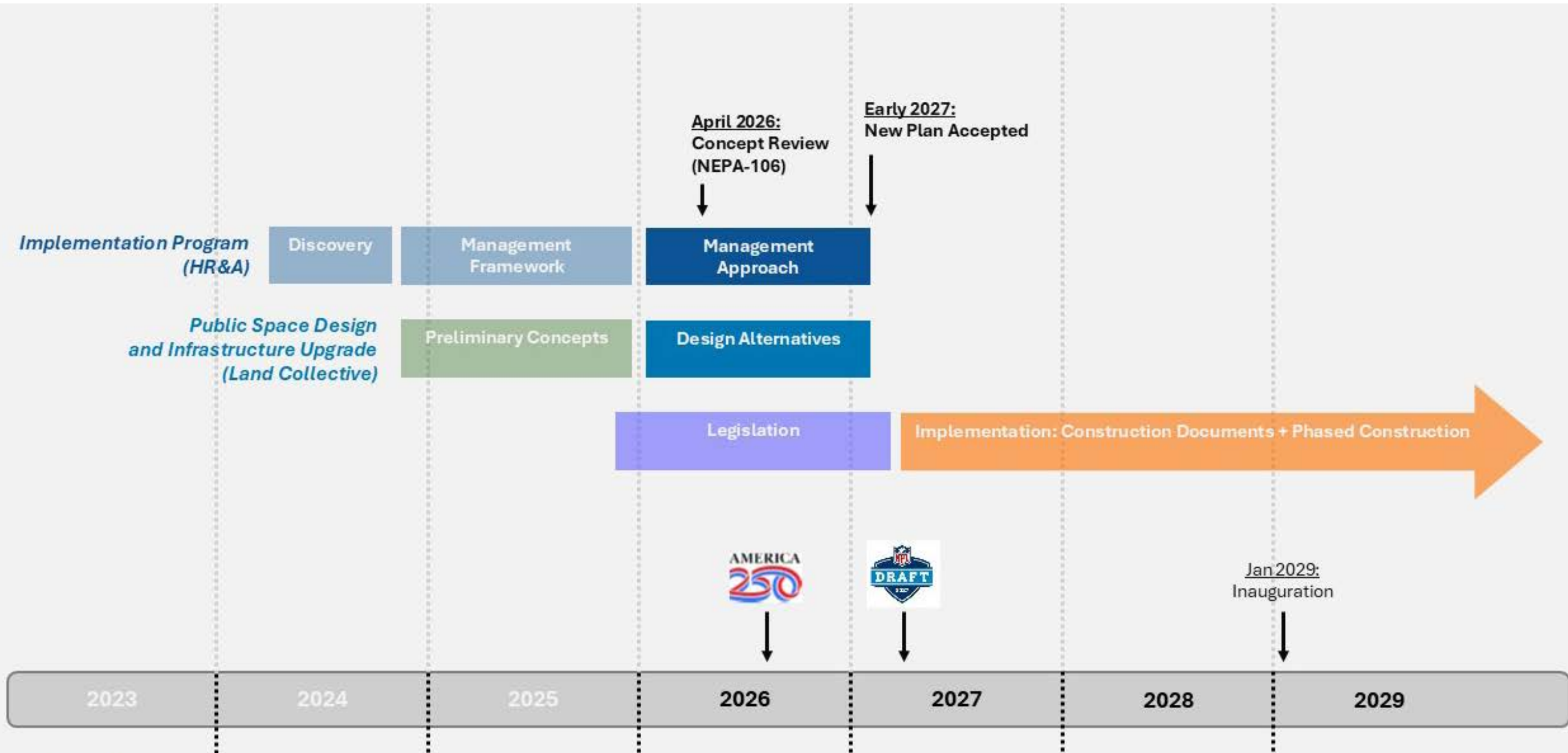


Image: National Capital Planning Commission

Brief History Overview

Throughout history, Pennsylvania Avenue has held an elevated place of importance to the development and identity of Washington, DC and the nation as a public place of connection, ceremony, and daily life. The plan for Washington, first drawn by L'Enfant in 1791 and then refined and implemented by Andrew Ellicott (1754-1820), envisioned grand government buildings embedded in the city and distributed throughout the dense urban fabric, with Pennsylvania Avenue physically and visually linking the executive and legislative branches, emphasizing the symbolic composition of the capital city.

For over 100 years the Avenue developed as a focal point of commerce, hospitality, and entertainment. Improved infrastructure, methods of transportation, public amenities and public spaces created a bustling downtown, attracting every walk of citizen, statesmen, and visitor alike. The inaugural parade tradition began in 1805, evolving from an unplanned gathering to a highly orchestrated event. Somber moments of national unity and reflection also occurred, beginning with a state funeral procession for President Lincoln in 1865. The Avenue became an important venue for peaceful exercise of first amendment rights, beginning with the march for women's suffrage in 1913, and continuing to present day.

Beginning in 1901, the McMillan Plan guided efforts to reshape the city's appearance and conform to ideals of the City Beautiful movement, resulting in the development of Federal Triangle on the south side of the Avenue, which separated the grand federal buildings from the rest of the city. After decades of decline, the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) was established in 1972 to revitalize the Avenue though it continued to be characterized by government buildings to the south and privately-owned buildings with new open public spaces to the north.

Pennsylvania Avenue exists as an urban palimpsest, recognized as a site of national historic, cultural, and social significance. The Avenue encapsulates themes of planning, architecture, landscape architecture, art, commerce, government, military, and social history along its length and breadth. It summons countless histories of generations of Americans from all backgrounds.

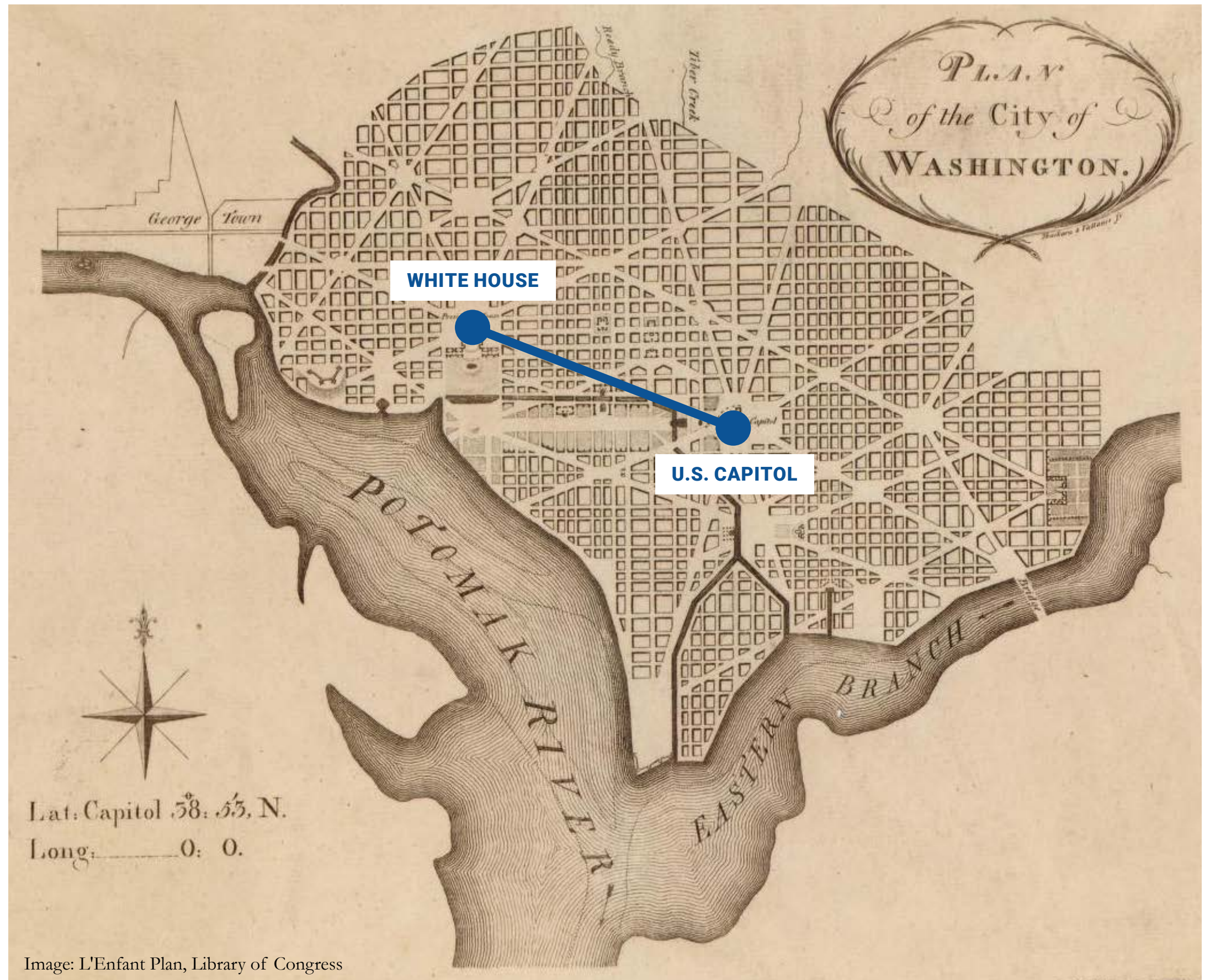
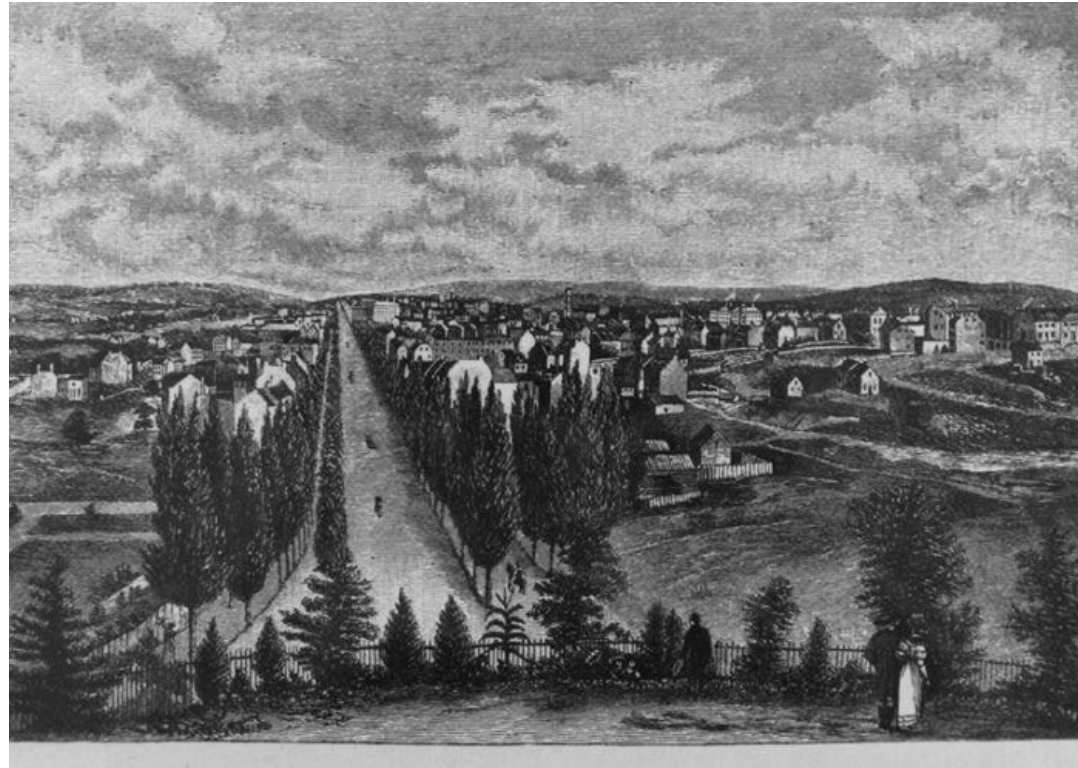


Image: L'Enfant Plan, Library of Congress

Brief History Overview



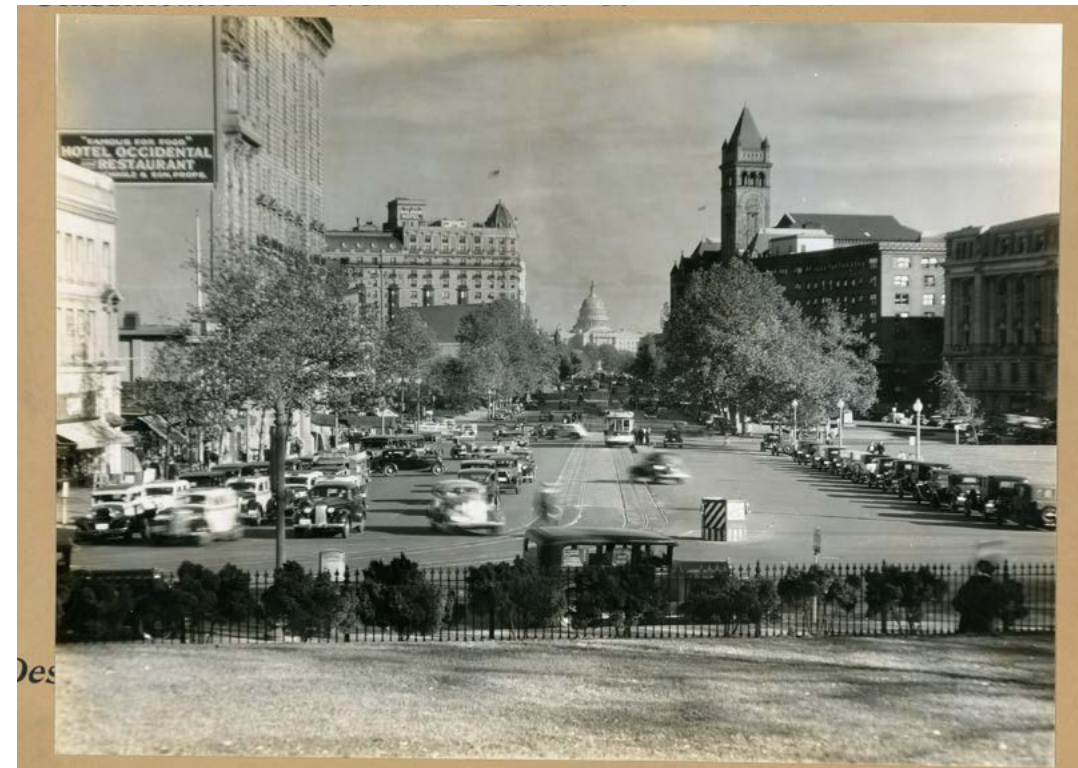
Poplar trees planted in 1803 flanked Pennsylvania Avenue until they were replaced with elms in 1839 (Library of Congress, 1834)



Lithograph of a vision for a paved and tree-lined Pennsylvania Avenue (Library of Congress, 1853)

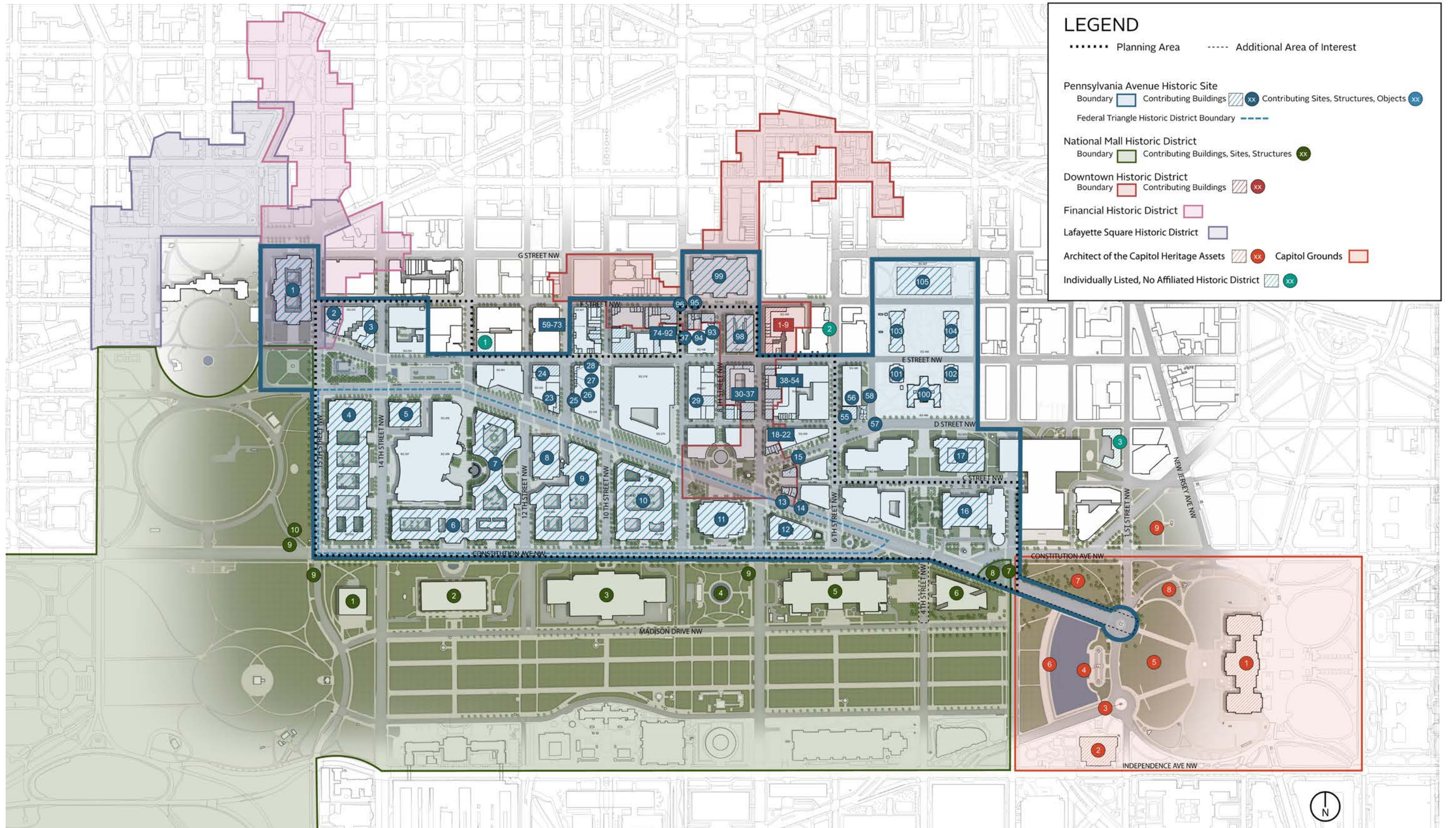


Lithograph of a birds-eye view from the Capitol grounds looking west along Pennsylvania Avenue (Library of Congress, 1852)



Pennsylvania Avenue from 15th Street looking east toward the Capitol (Library of Congress, 1949)

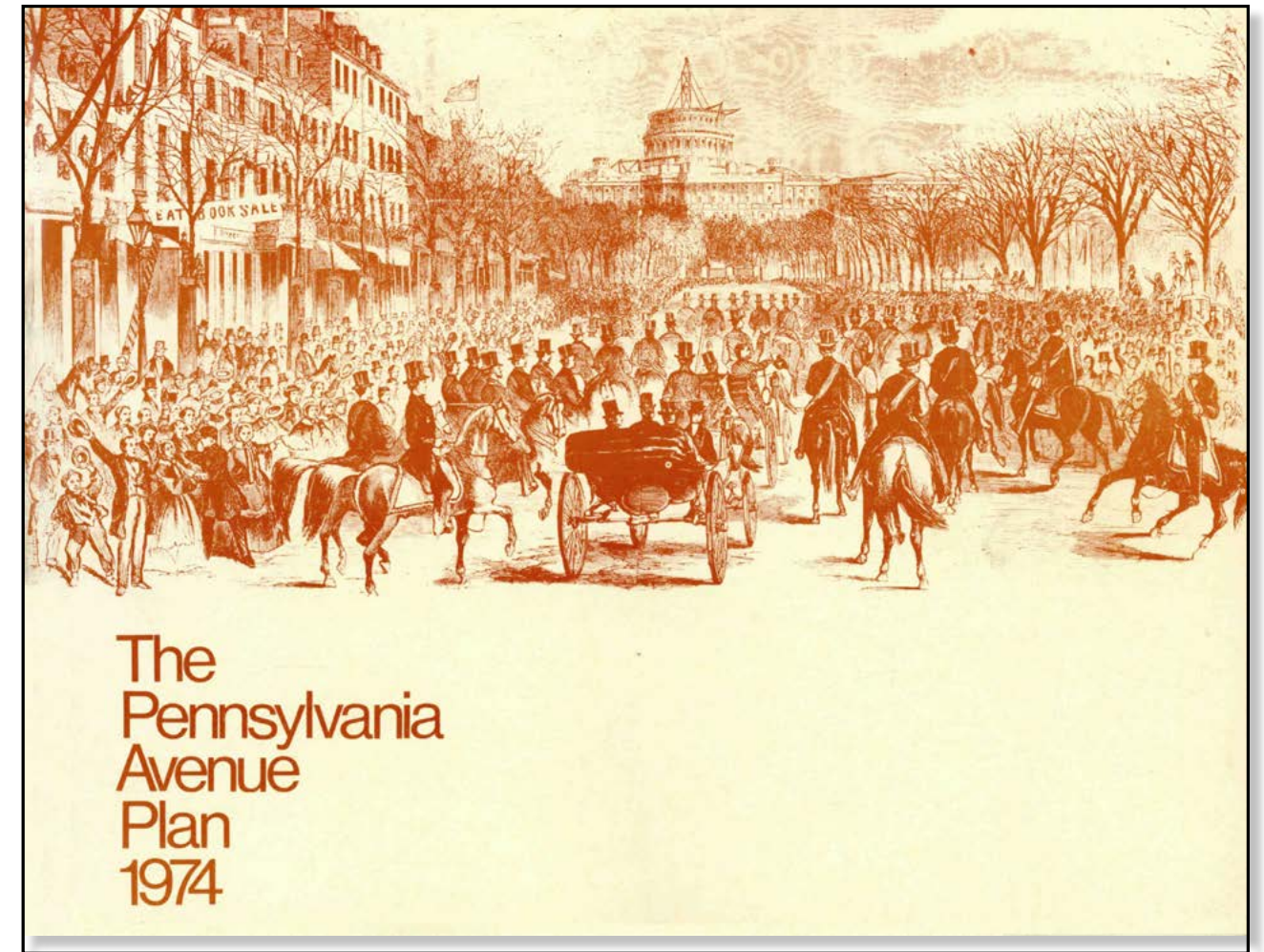
A National Historic Site



Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADDC)

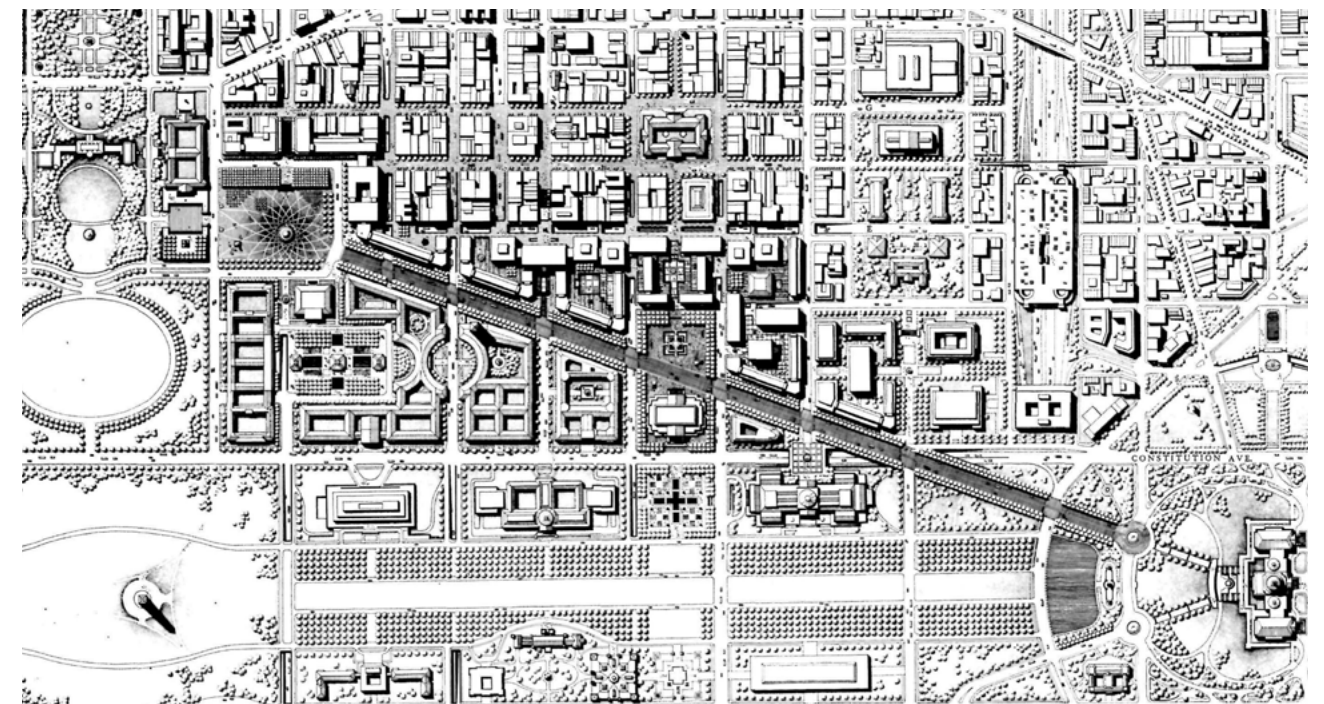
20th Century Efforts to Revitalize the Avenue:

- Congress created PADDC in 1972
- PADDC prepared and implemented in the 1974 Plan to redevelop the Avenue and several surrounding blocks.
- Congress dissolved PADDC in 1996, delegating responsibilities to:
 - GSA – Real estate planning, development, and management
 - NPS – Maintenance and programming of the sidewalks, parks, and memorials
 - NCPC – Plan review compliance
 - DC Government (DDOT) – Maintenance of the roadway between the curbs



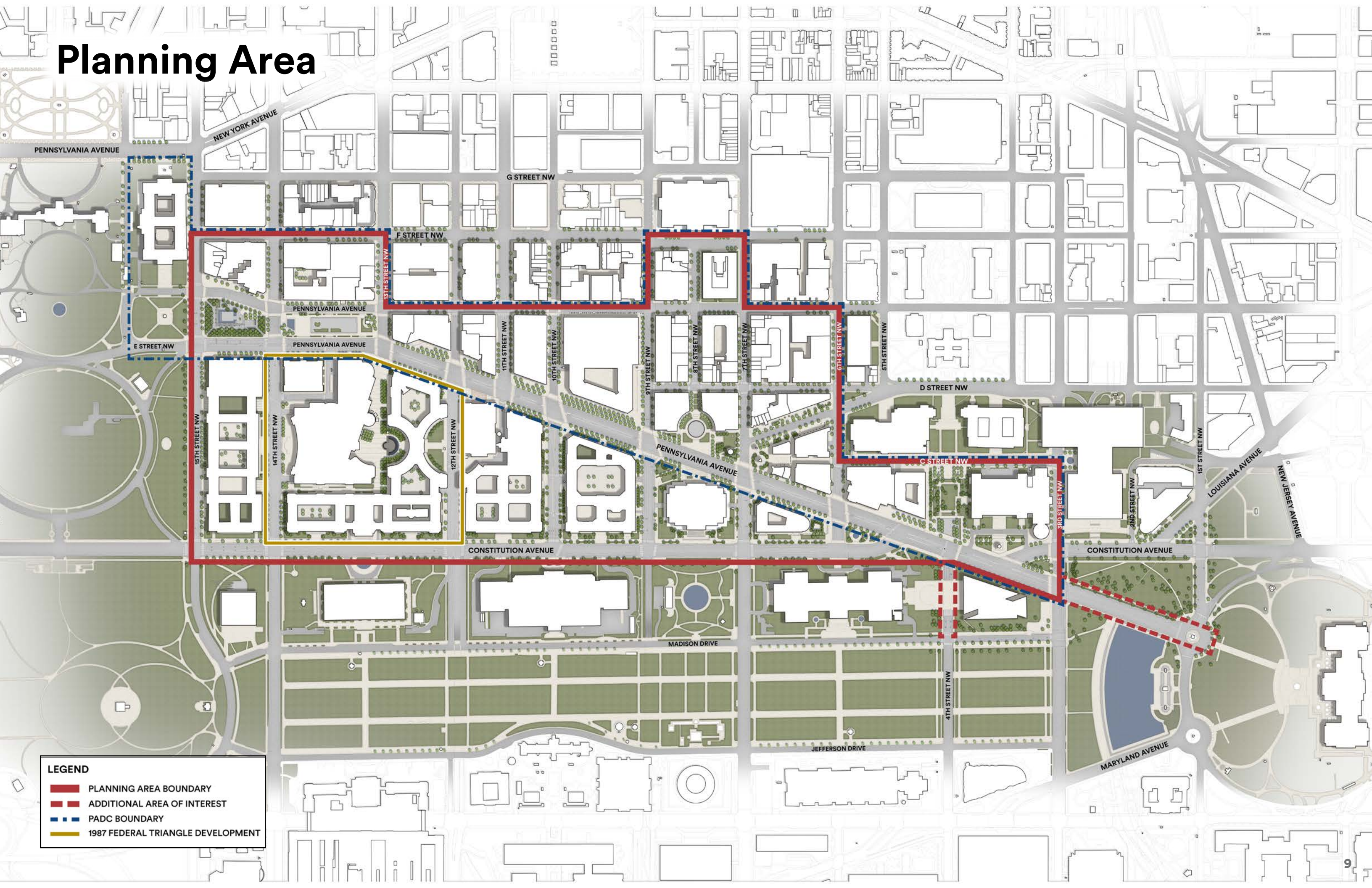
Challenges we face today:

- 50+ year old plan with aging infrastructure
- Multiple agencies have their own set regulations and policies for events and public space
- No single steward nor dedicated funding to champion economic development and adequately maintain and program the Avenue



Images: The Pennsylvania Avenue Plan, 1974 (NCPC)

Planning Area



LEGEND

- PLANNING AREA BOUNDARY
- - - ADDITIONAL AREA OF INTEREST
- - - PADC BOUNDARY
- 1987 FEDERAL TRIANGLE DEVELOPMENT

Global Monumental Streets

Many nations have monumental streets for celebration, protest, memorial, and events. Pennsylvania Avenues is among the world's most recognized, and the design should reflect its international significance.



The Mall, London, UK



The Champs - Élysées, Paris, FR



Unter den Linden, Berlin, DE

Image Credit:

Left - Simon Jones, Creative Commons, Crowd in the Mall
Middle - Clément Gruin, Wikimedia Commons, Champs-Élysées
Right - Unmarcheprovençal, Creative Commons, Berlin Marathon
2022 Teilnehmerfeld Unter den Linden

Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative Vision



The Avenue as a Venue for spectacular events.

A signature venue and economic generator for the city and a beautiful, iconic, and resilient civic space for the nation.

Image Credit: Ted Eytan, Creative Commons, Washington Nationals World Series Victory Parade



A Great Street for People.

A right-sized road that meets today's needs, with beautiful public spaces and modern infrastructure to offer flexible ways to balance daily use of the street with event programming.

Existing Site Conditions



Flooding on the Avenue



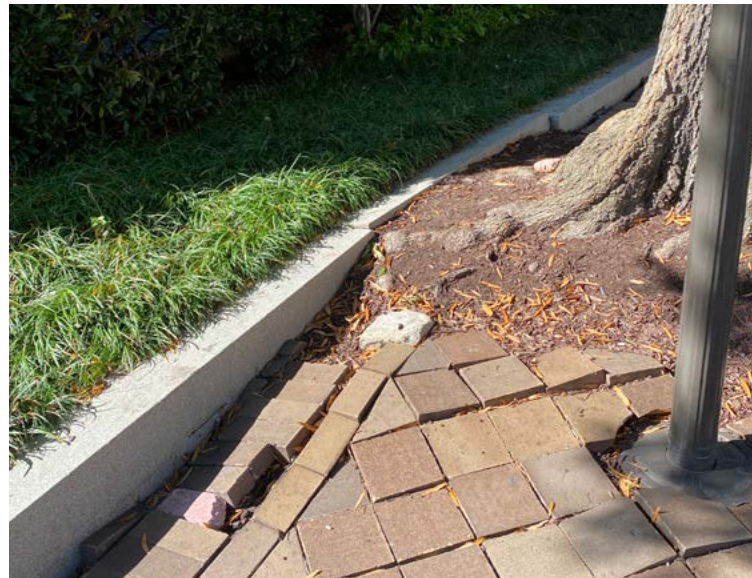
Missing trees along the Avenue



Dead and diseased trees in public spaces



Missing or broken Modernist pavers, bench slats, and other site elements



Tree roots in search of adequate soil volume



Attendees climb onto temporary site security elements to gain prospect



Lane dividers (or “caterpillars”), traffic signals, and other elements in the vehicular cartway



Temporary infrastructure elements for events

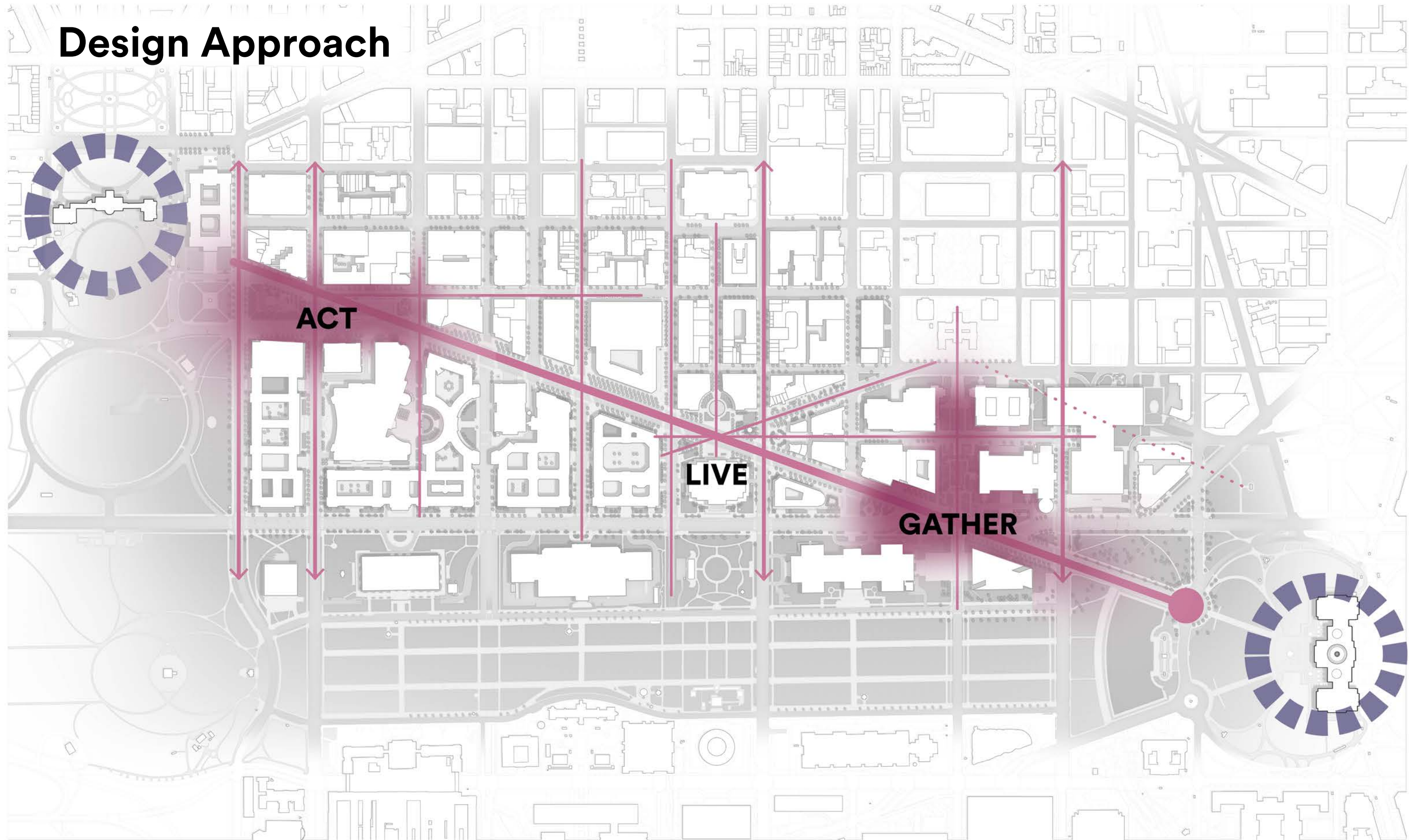
Baseline Conditions and Requirements

- The Avenue should be a beautiful place **welcoming and available to all Americans and visitors.**
- **View corridors toward the U.S. Capitol** should be prioritized and utilize trees as framing devices.
- **Multi-modal transportation is required** on the Avenue, including pedestrians, cyclists, private/shared vehicles, loading, and public/private buses.
- The Avenue and its associated public spaces should be **designed to host events of all scales**, helping alleviate over-programming of the National Mall.
- The **Inaugural Parade must be accommodated.**
- The plan should **integrate north-south connections**, linking the National Mall with downtown DC.
- The Avenue should **complement, not compete, with downtown.**

A Shared Vision For the Public Space Master Plan

- Design **a grand avenue that is human-centered and lasting** socially, economically, and ecologically.
- Celebrate the Avenue's role as **a civic venue for First Amendment activities and collective expression.**
- **Simplify regulatory and management policies** to streamline coordination with event producers and to facilitate improved operations and maintenance for the Avenue's long-term stability.
- **Modernize aging infrastructure** in a seamless and integrated design to enhance functionality and flexibility as a destination for events and daily life.
- **Amplify the layered histories** present in the Avenue's ever-changing cultural landscape and **make way for new stories, memories, and events.**

Design Approach





DESIGN ALTERNATIVES

Design Alternative and Options

The Corridor (3rd to 13th)

- Base Corridor Alternative
 - Staggered Canopy Grid Tree Alignment Option
 - Columnar (Fastigate) Allee Tree Alignment Option
- Corridor Poles Alternative

Western End

- Historic Alignment Alternative
 - Planted Respite Option
 - Triangle Plazas Option
- Central Plaza Alternative
 - Framed Plaza Option
 - Expanded Plaza Option

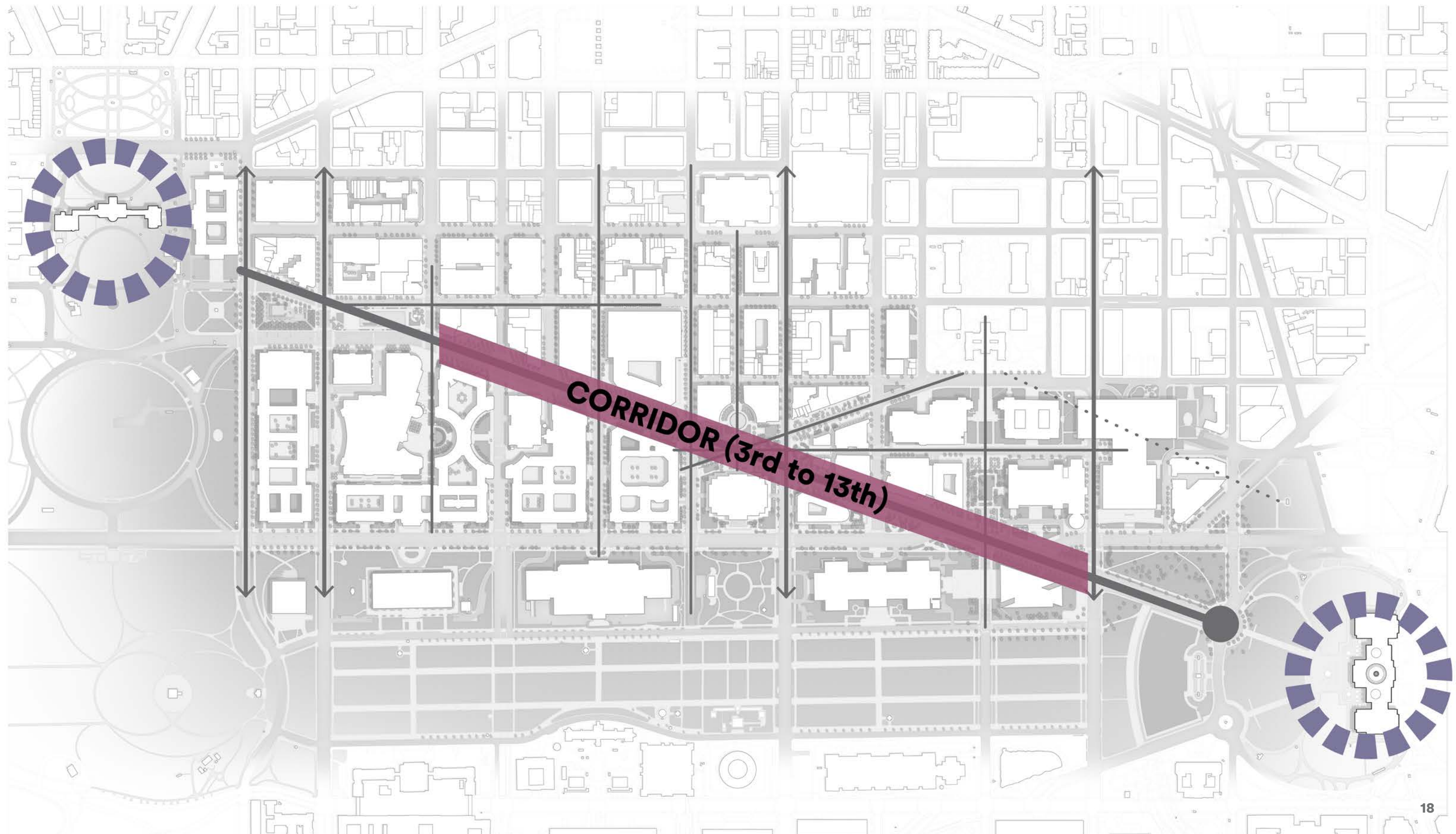
Market Square

- One Alternative
 - Crossroads Option
 - Neighborhood Garden Rooms Option

Eastern End

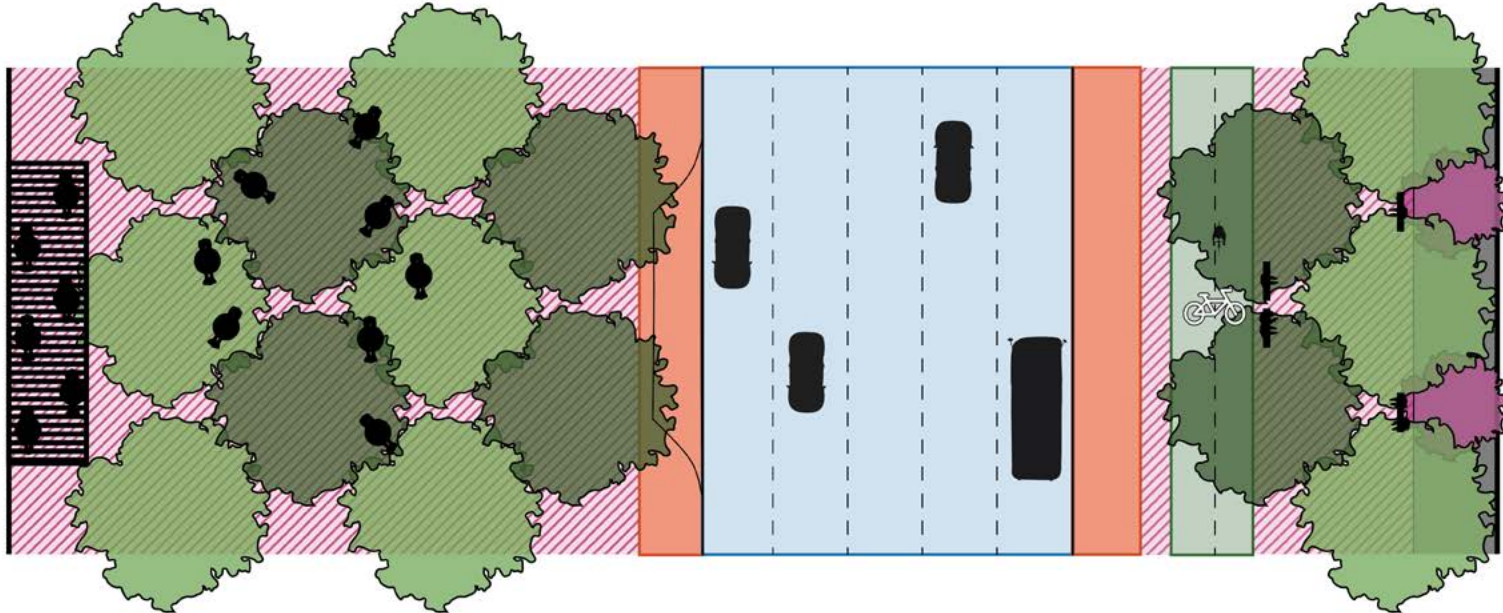
- One Alternative
 - Raked Lawn Option
 - Hillside Pavilion Option
 - Terraced Spaces Option

The Corridor

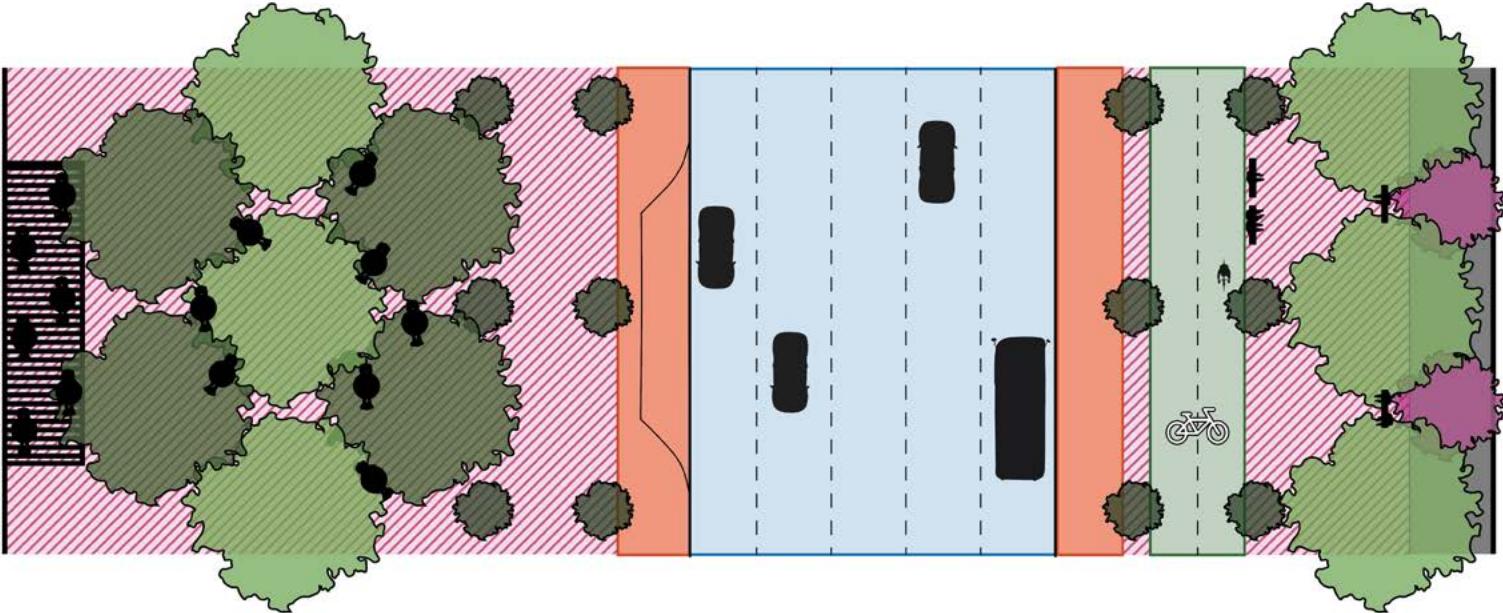


CORRIDOR (3rd to 13th)

3rd to 13th Corridor Base Alternative — Tree Options



Staggered Canopy Grid Tree Alignment Option



Columnar (Fastigate) Allee Tree Alignment Option

3rd to 13th Corridor Base Alternative

Staggered Canopy Grid Tree Alignment Option

STAGGERED CANOPY GRID

- Shade trees planted on a staggered grid and flanking each side of the Avenue to frame views to the U.S. Capitol
- Trees are set back from the curb allowing both pedestrian and bike circulation to be outboard of the trees, offering views down the Avenue.

OPPORTUNITIES

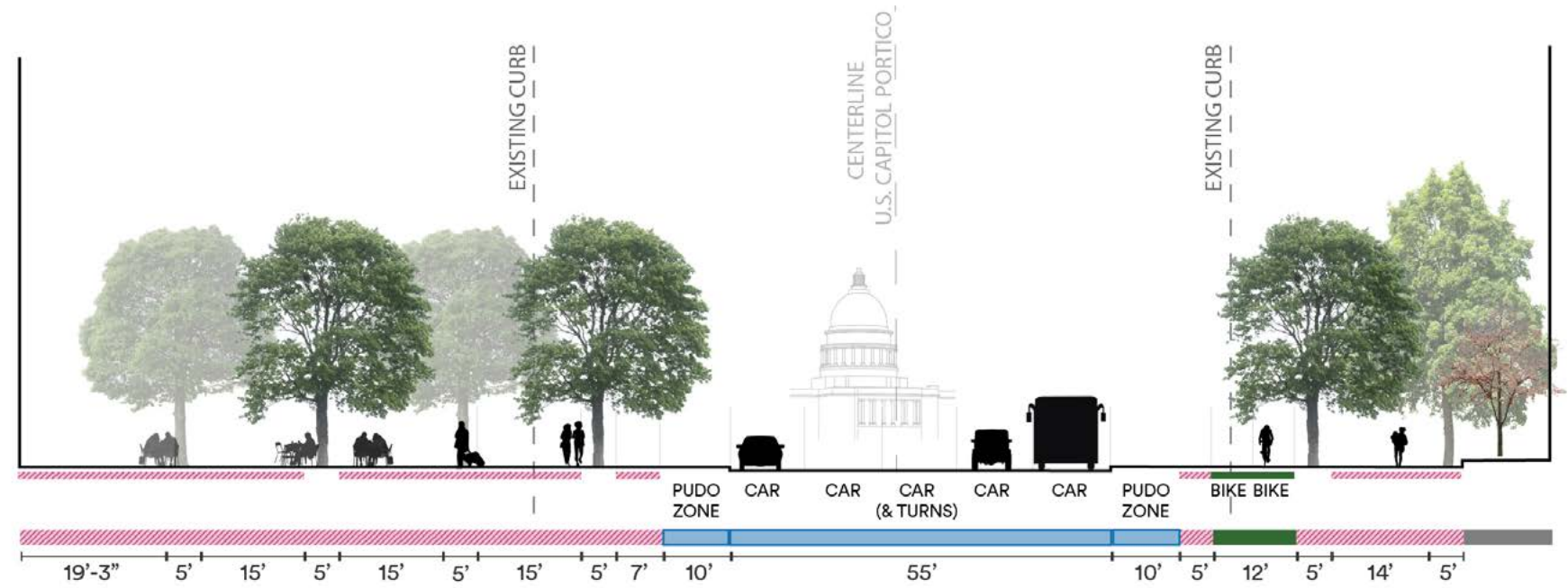
- Large event zone
- Increased opportunities for pedestrian experience/programming
- Canopy trees will provide ample shade

CONSTRAINTS

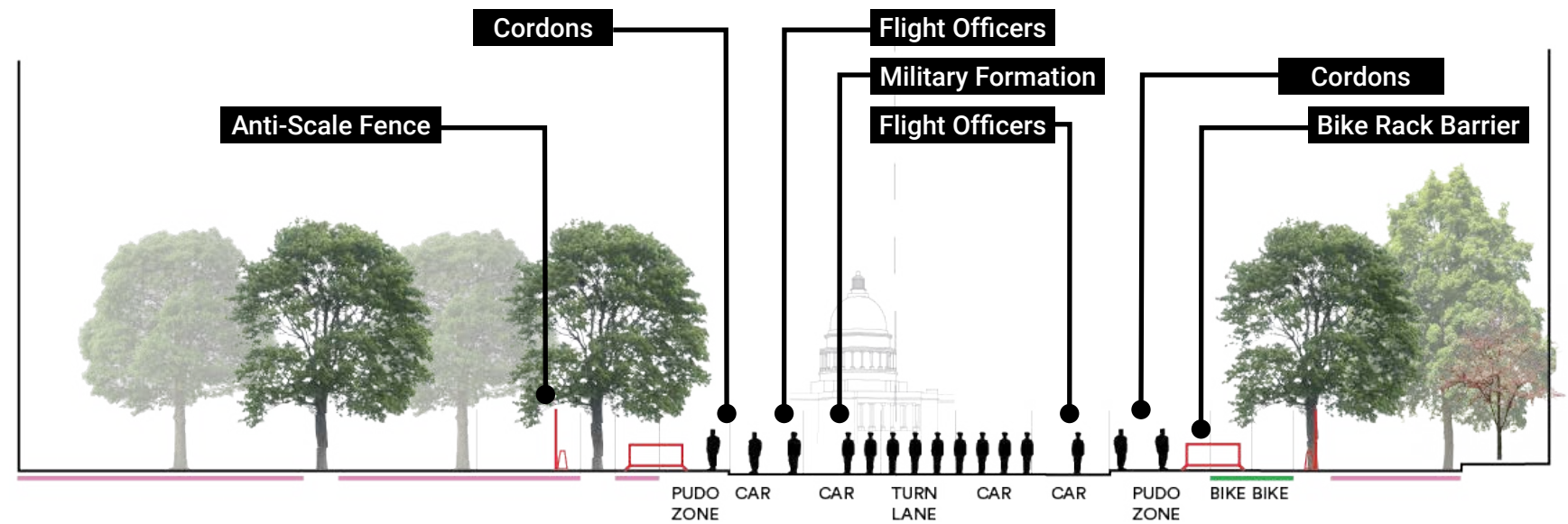
- Limited prominent pedestrian zone with clear view of the Capitol along the length of the Avenue
- Capitol viewshed has more limited visibility for cyclists and pedestrians due to larger shade tree canopy

LEGEND

- Pedestrian / Sidewalk / Activities Zone
- Cartway for Vehicles
- Separated Bicycle Lanes / Cycletrack



Section at Typical Wide Block



Inaugural Parade Layout In Corridor Alternative, Staggered Canopy Grid Option
(Ongoing coordination with MPD & Military District of Washington)

3rd to 13th Corridor Base Alternative

Staggered Canopy Grid Tree Alignment Option

View looking towards Capitol from vehicular experience



3rd to 13th Corridor Base Alternative

Staggered Canopy Grid Tree Alignment Option

View looking towards Capitol from primary pedestrian experience



3rd to 13th Corridor Base Alternative

Staggered Canopy Grid Tree Alignment Option

View looking towards Capitol from primary cyclist experience



3rd to 13th Corridor Base Alternative

Columnar (Fastigate) Allee Tree Alignment Option

COLUMNAR (FASTIGIATE) ALLEE

- Two fastigate, or columnar, allées of trees flanking the cartway providing a bold celebration of the Pennsylvania Avenue axis.
- Northern allée prioritizes a pedestrian circulation zone while the southern allée prioritizes cyclists, each focused on views of the Capitol.

OPPORTUNITIES

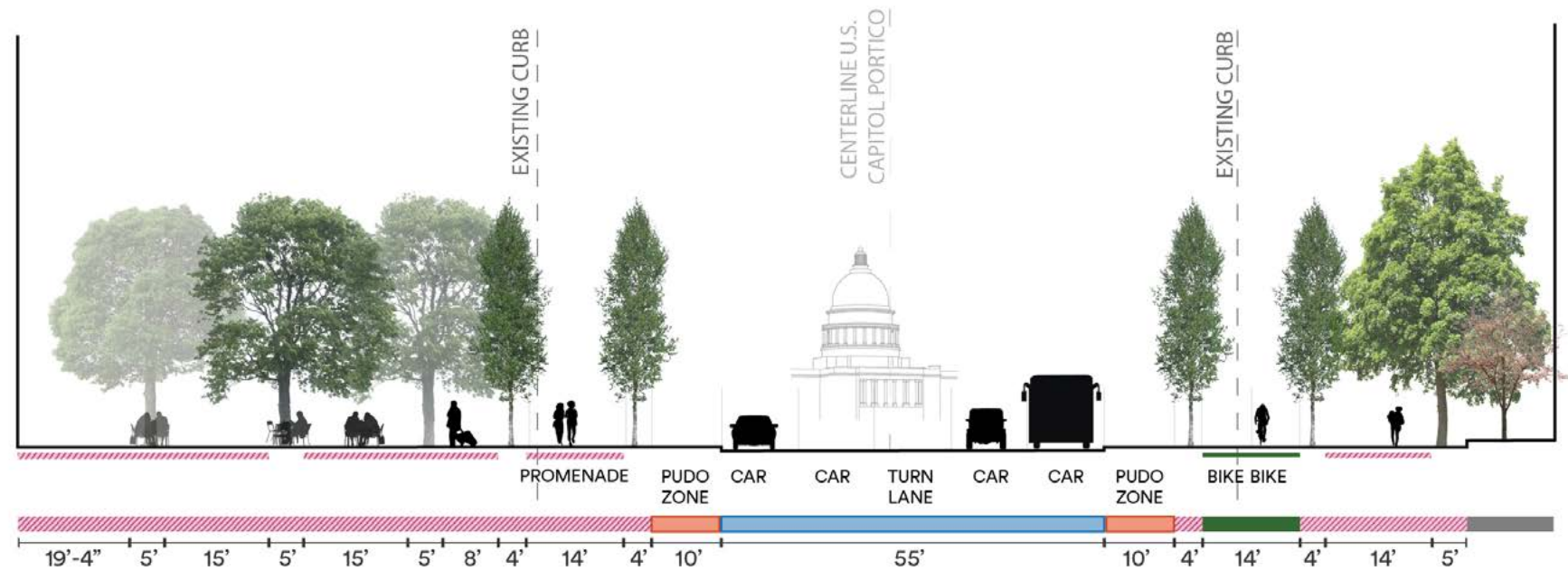
- Prominent pedestrian zone with view of the Capitol along length of the Avenue
- Capitol viewshed is available to majority of users
- New iconic landscape created (autumn)
- Increased opportunities for pedestrian experience/programming
- Increased safety for cyclists
- Fastigate allées on both sides of Avenue provide balance and relieve pressure on canopy trees beyond that line

CONSTRAINTS

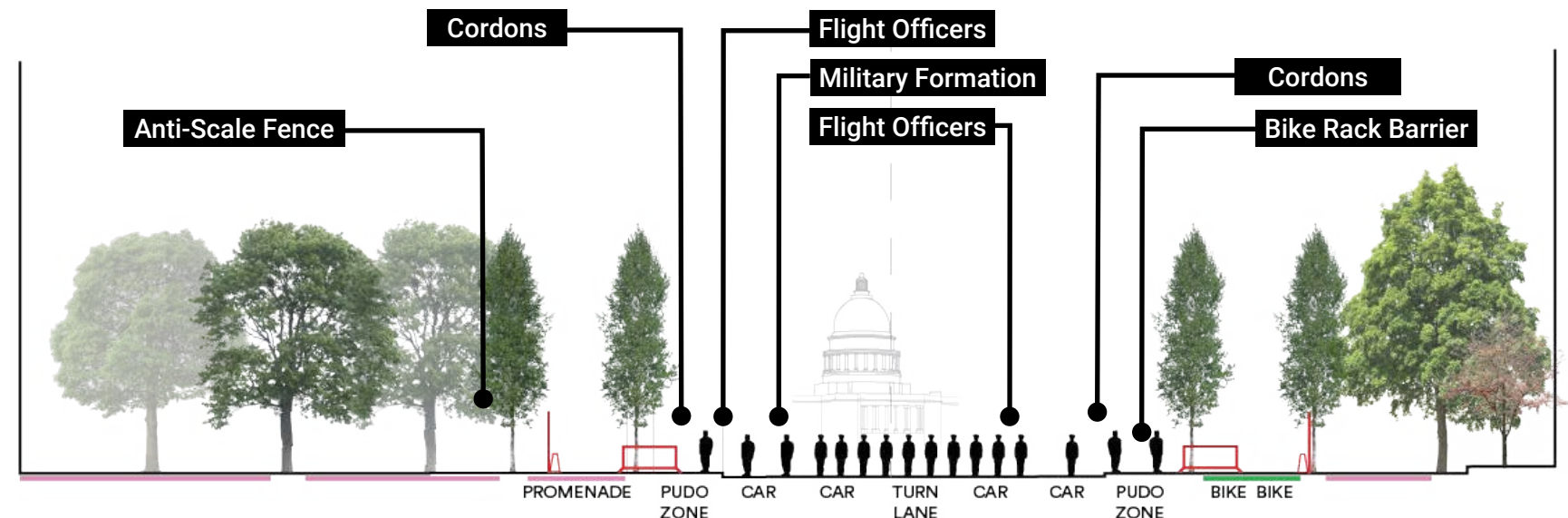
- Fastigate trees will provide less shade than canopy trees
- Additional tree reduces barrier-free event zone

LEGEND

- Pedestrian / Sidewalk / Activities Zone
- Cartway for Vehicles
- Separated Bicycle Lanes / Cycletrack



Section at Typical Wide Block



Inaugural Parade Layout In Corridor Alternative, Columnar (Fastigate) Allee Tree Alignment Option
(Ongoing coordination with MPD & Military District of Washington)

3rd to 13th Corridor Base Alternative

Columnar (Fastigiata) Allee Tree Alignment Option

View looking towards Capitol from vehicular experience



3rd to 13th Corridor Base Alternative

Columnar (Fastigiata) Allee Tree Alignment Option

View looking towards Capitol from primary pedestrian experience



3rd to 13th Corridor Base Alternative

Columnar (Fastigiate) Allee Tree Alignment Option

View looking towards Capitol from primary cyclist experience



Corridor Pole Alternatives

Many strategies for height, spacing, and locations were studied along the Corridor. Presently, the poles are diagrams, not designs and materiality is yet to be determined.

Poles are shown at 60 feet tall and approximately 150 feet on center spacing. Additional options are being studied and spacing and height may change in future design phases.

In addition to their symbolic meaning, the poles could support functional uses such as:

- Lighting
- Event Infrastructure
- Utility Connections
- Shading Devices
- Etc.

GOALS FOR THE CORRIDOR POLE ALTERNATIVES INCLUDE:

- Further celebrate the Avenue as a symbolic connection between the Legislative and Executive Branches of the United States government.
- Reconcile many vertical elements onto the Avenue into multi-functional poles that support daily life and celebratory moments.



Staggered Canopy Grid Tree Alignment Option



Columnar (Fastigate) Allee Tree Alignment Option

Corridor Pole Alternatives — The London Mall



Image Credit:
Top Left - Simon Jones, Creative Commons, Crowd in the Mall
Top Right - Aurelien Guichard, Creative Commons, The Mall, London
Bottom - Eluveitie, Creative Commons, The Mall London

Corridor Pole Alternative

Staggered Canopy Grid Tree Alignment Option



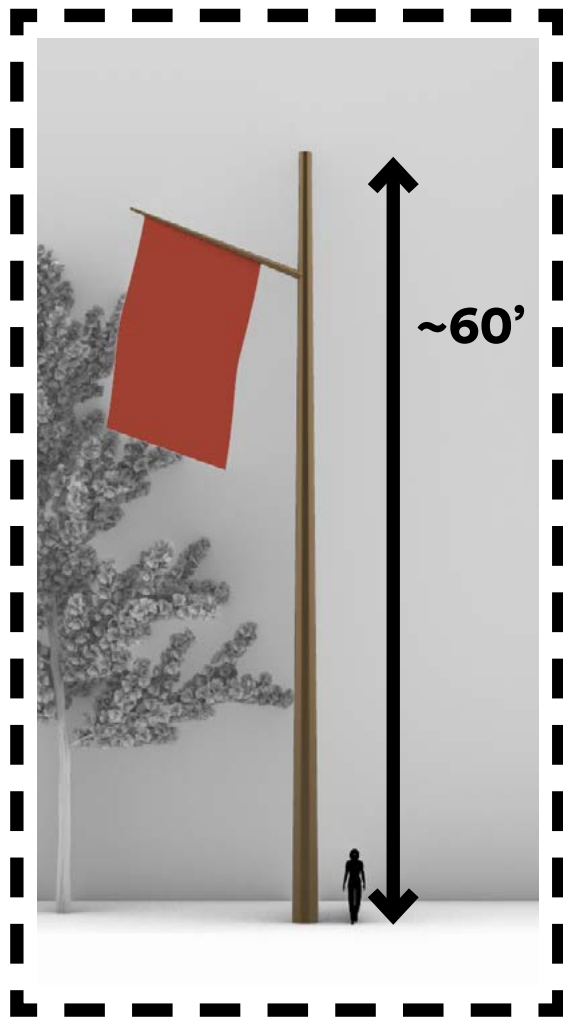
Corridor Pole Alternative

Columnar (Fastigiata) Allee Tree Alignment Option

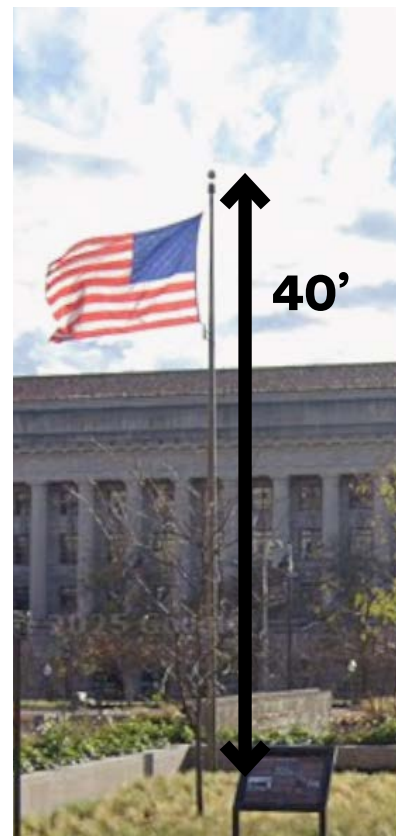


Corridor Pole Alternative Context

Flag Poles on Pennsylvania Avenue



Proposed Symbolic & Functional Pole
(Test size shown in graphics)



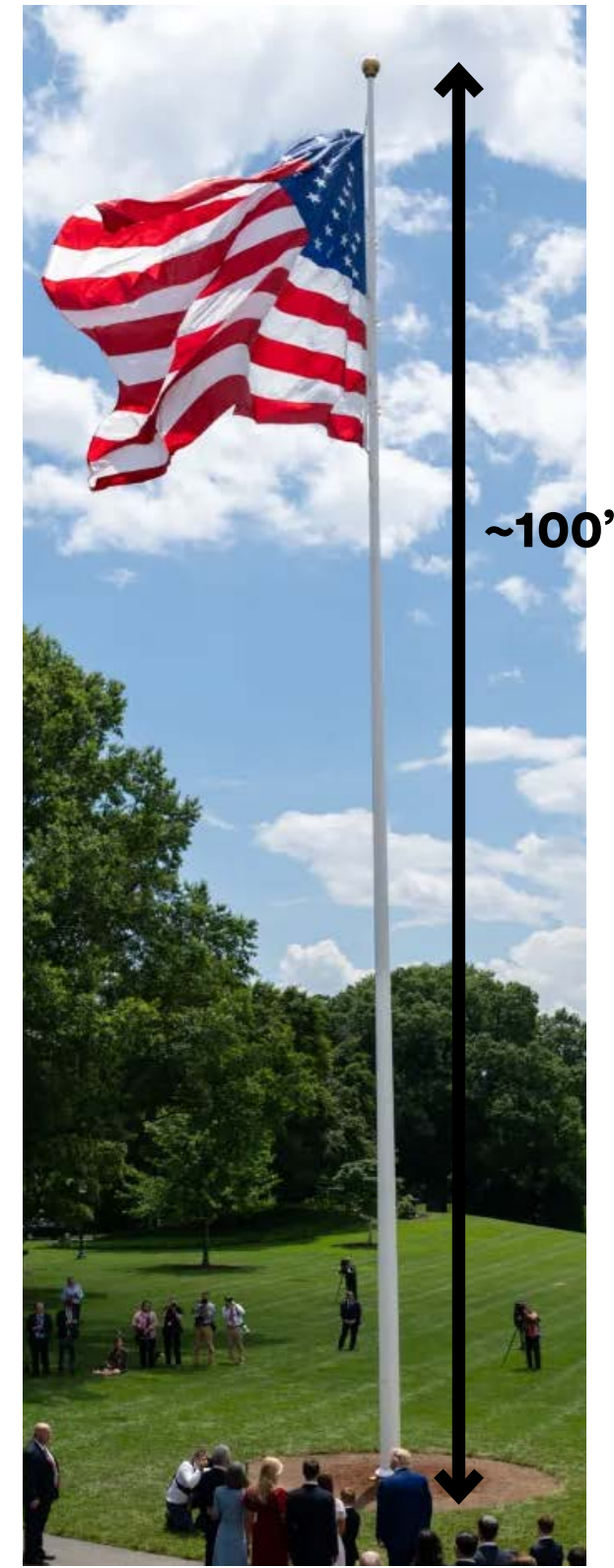
National World War I Memorial
at Pershing Park



Freedom Plaza



US Navy Memorial

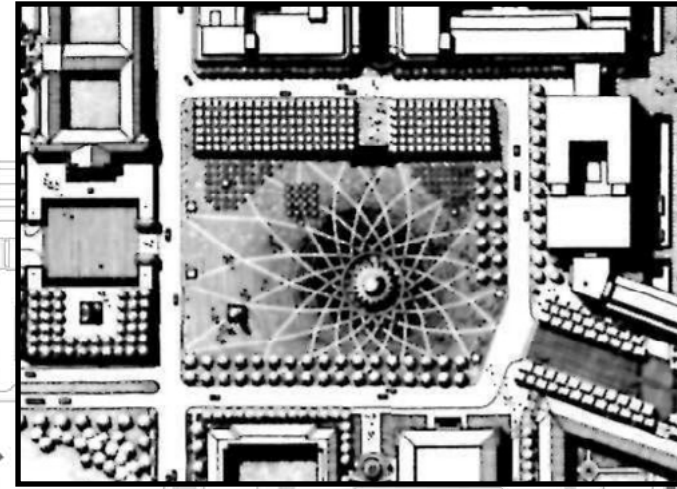


White House, President's Park

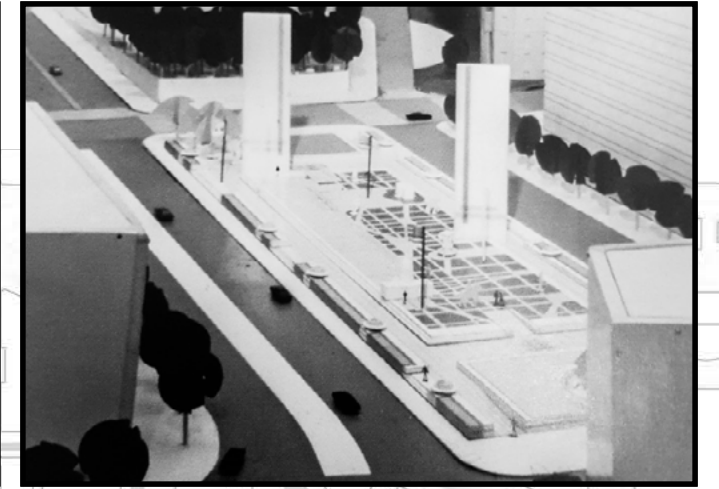
Western End



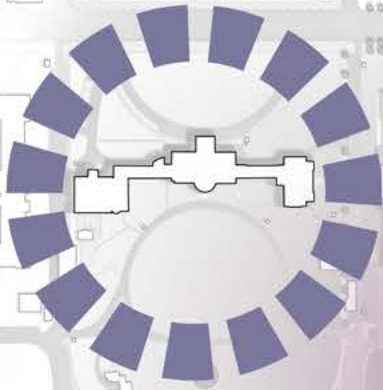
District Building, 1921
(Library of Congress)



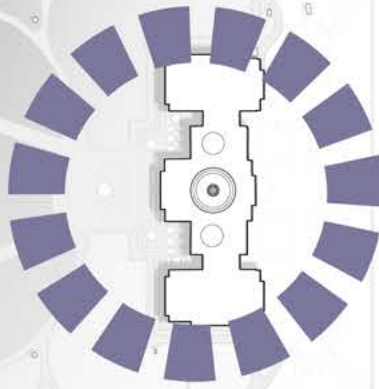
PADC National Square Proposal, 1974
(NCPC)



Freedom Plaza Model, 1978
(NCPC)

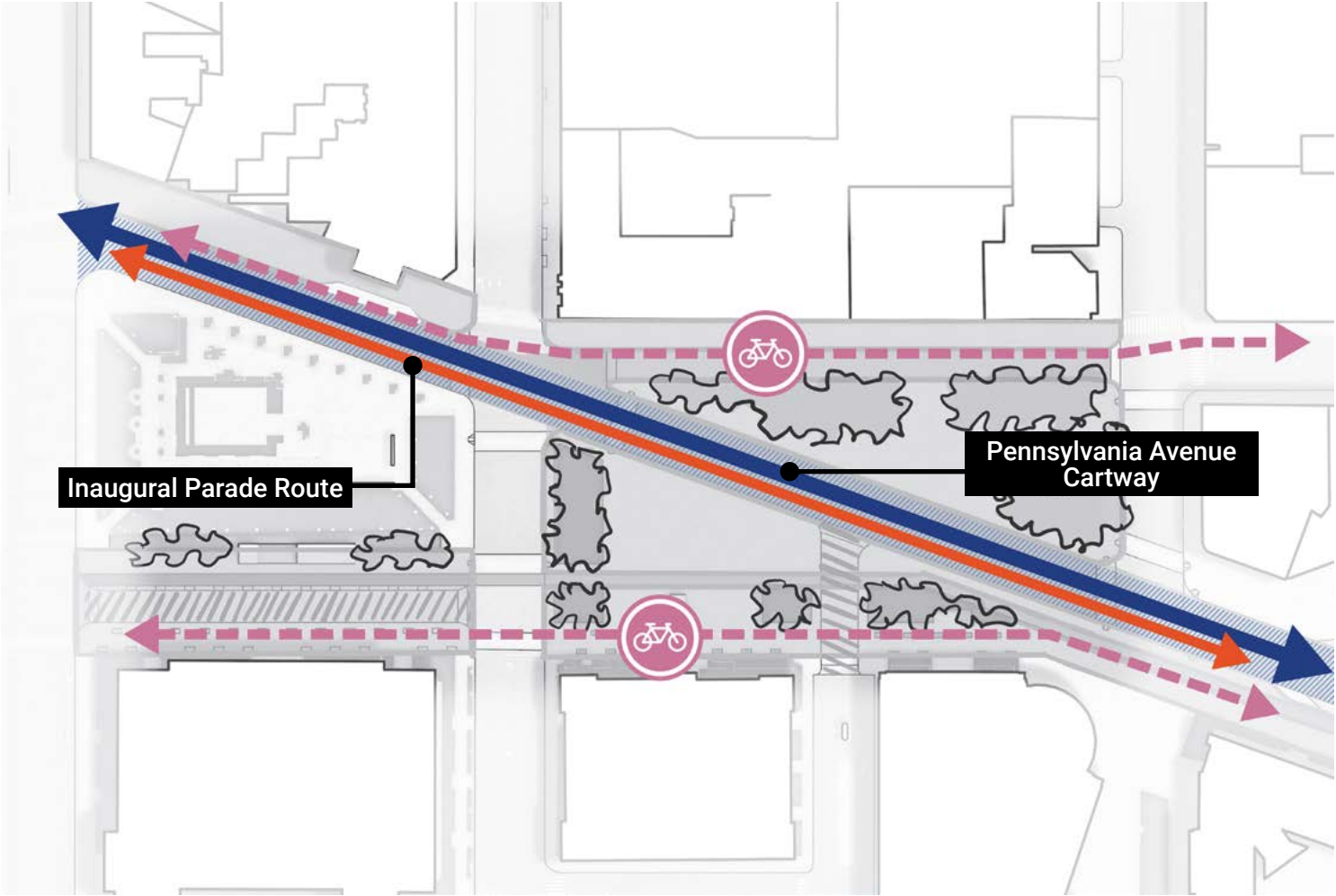


WESTERN END

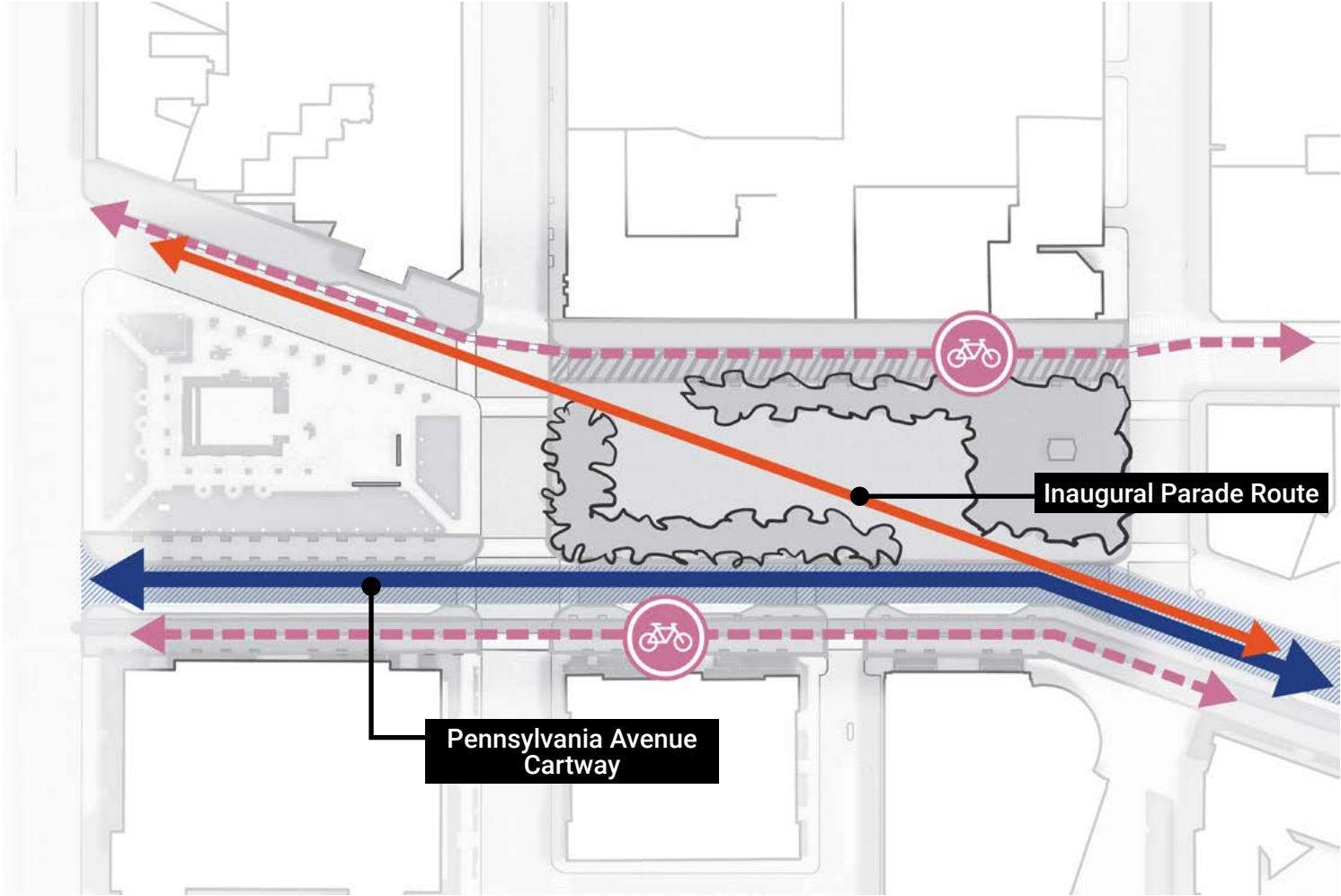


Western End — Two Alternatives

HISTORIC ALIGNMENT ALTERNATIVE

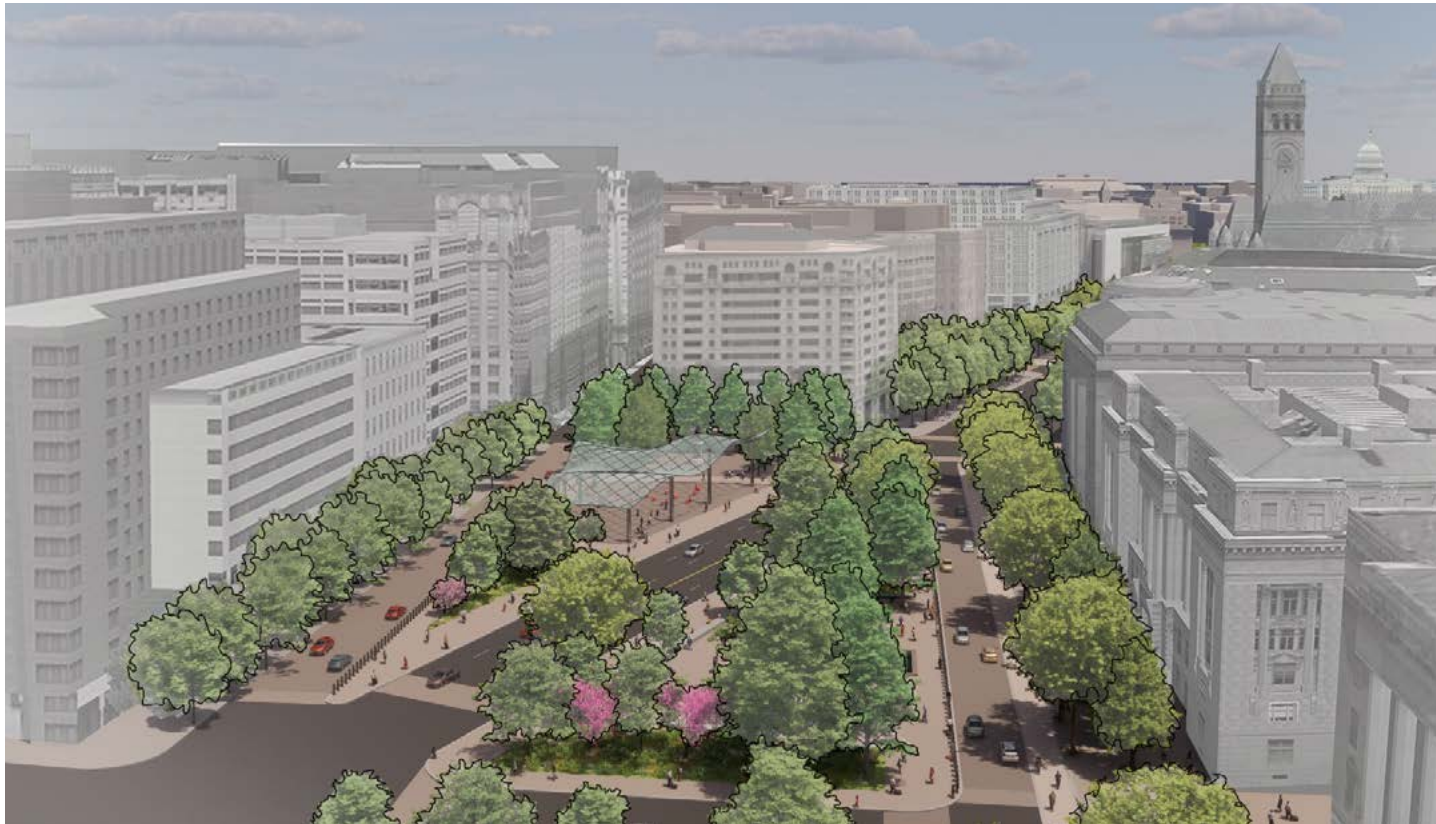


CENTRAL PLAZA ALTERNATIVE

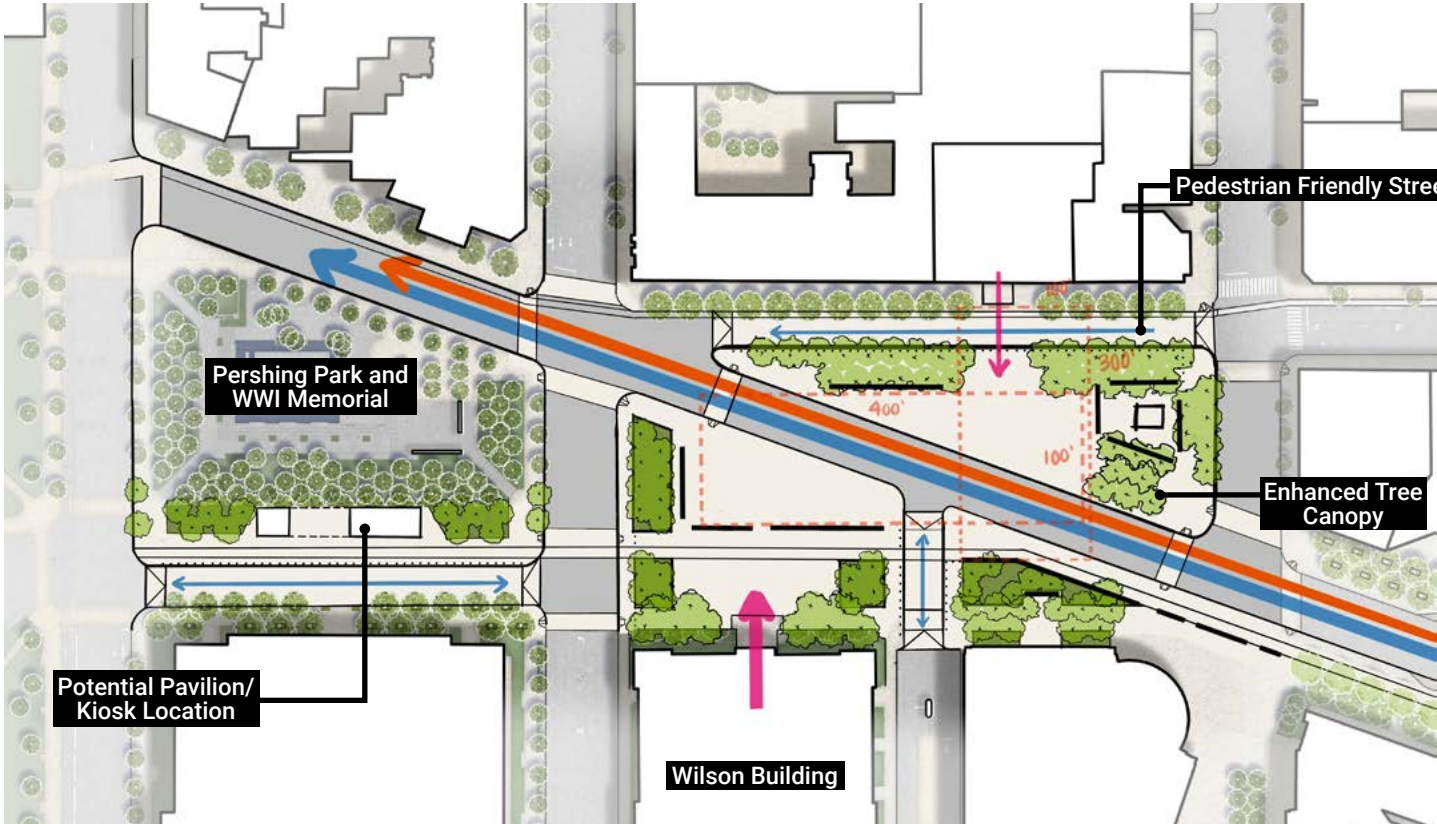
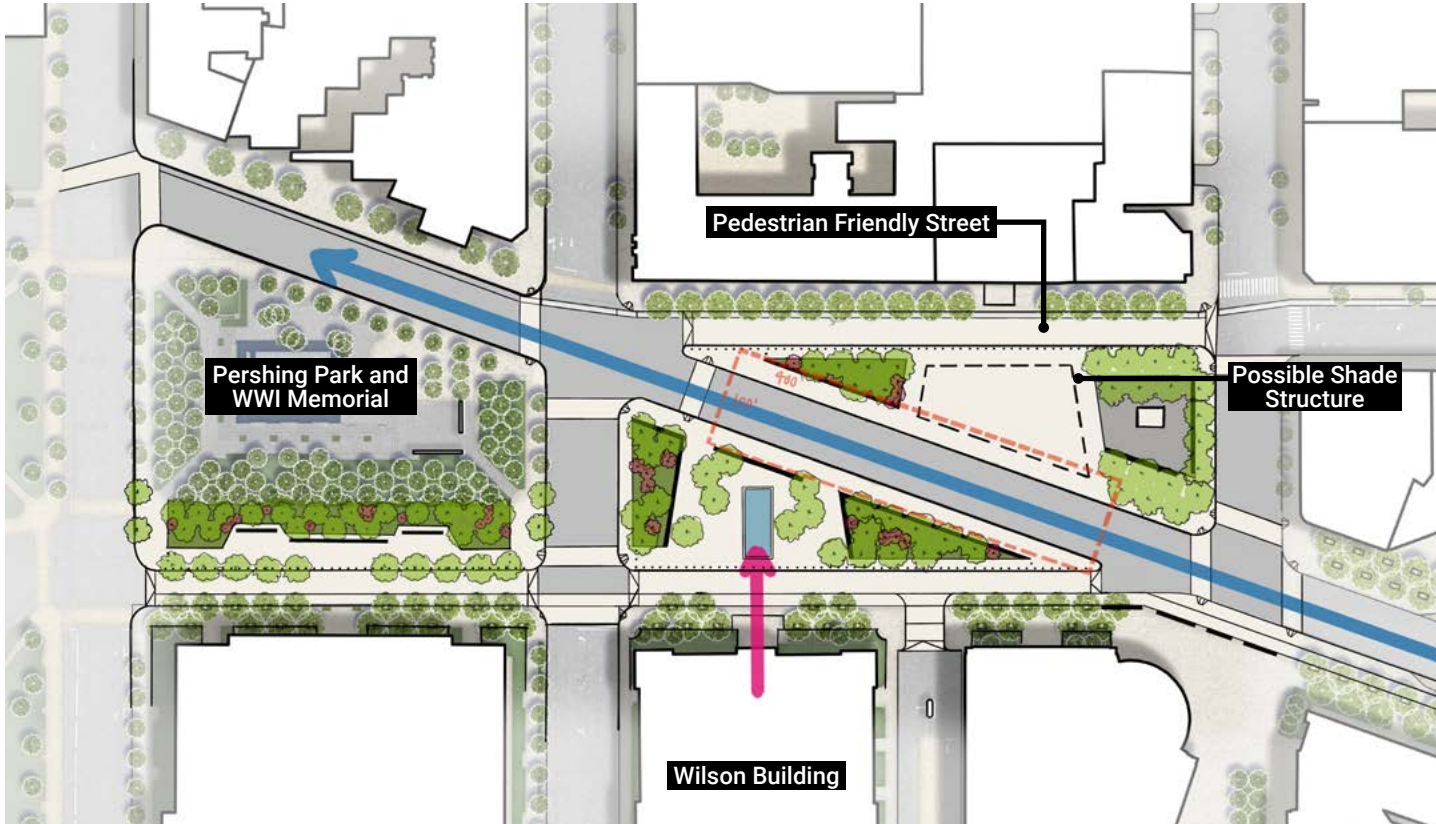
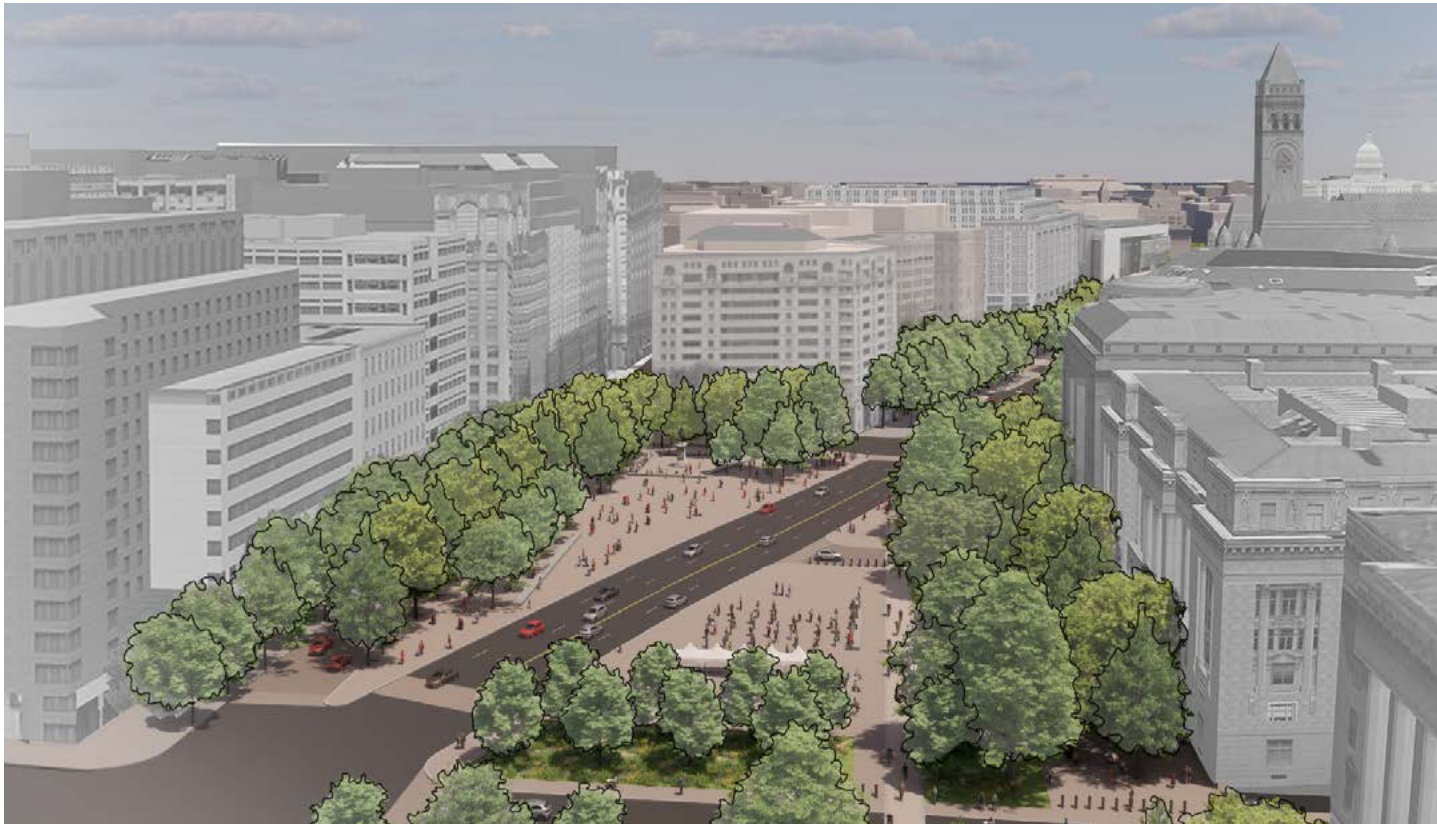


Western End — Historic Alignment Alternatives

PLANTED RESPITE OPTION

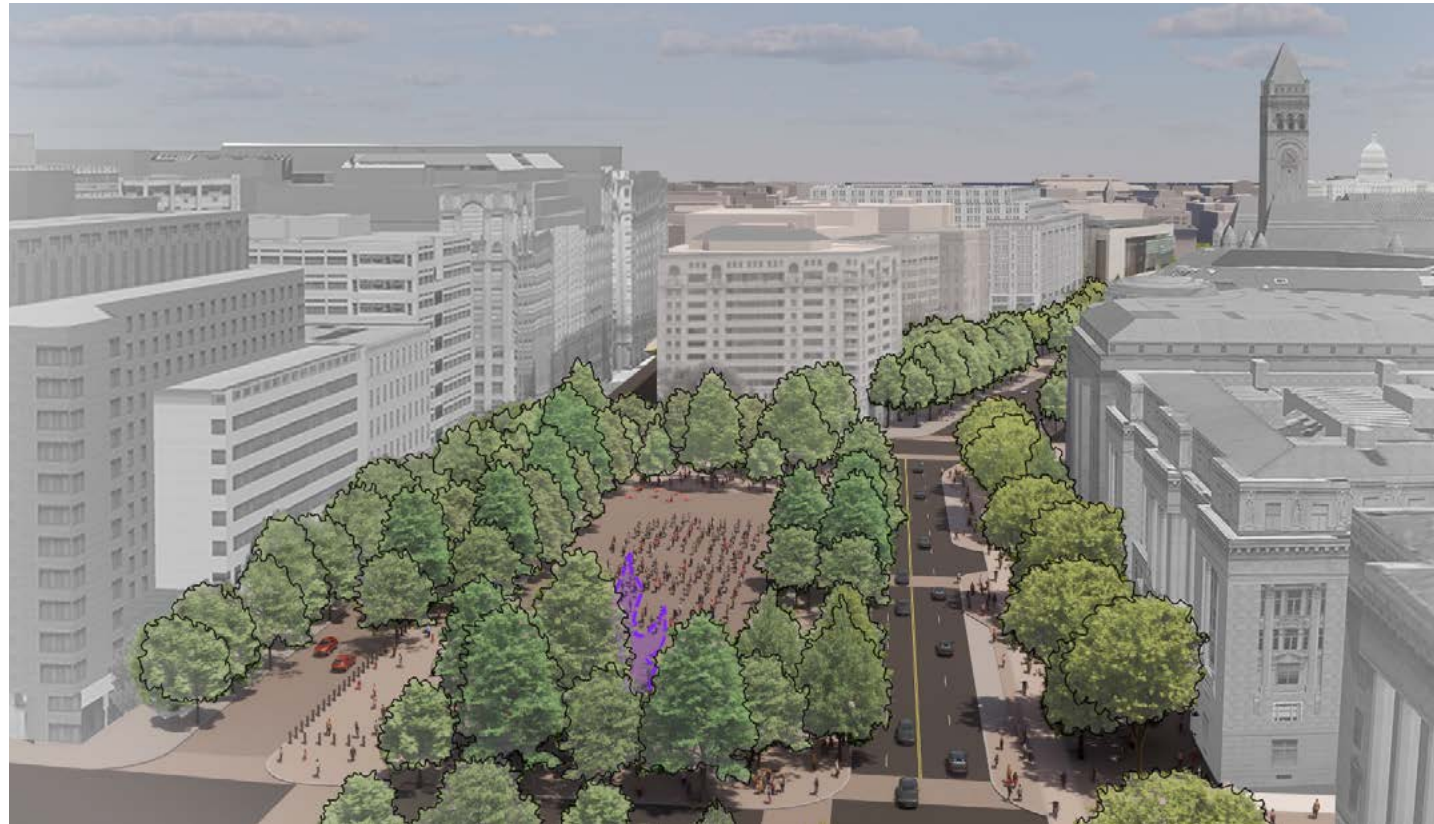


TRIANGLE PLAZAS OPTION

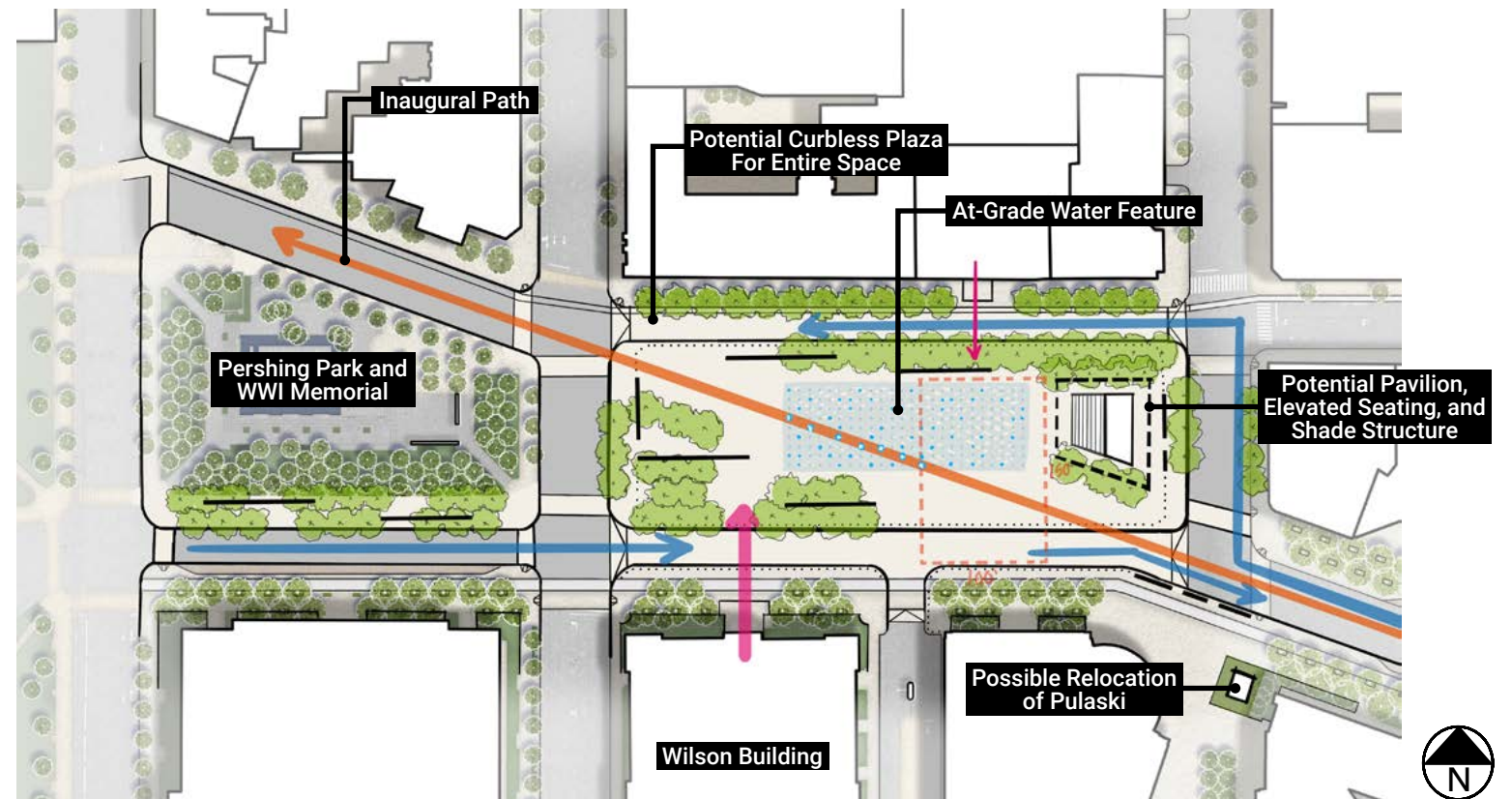
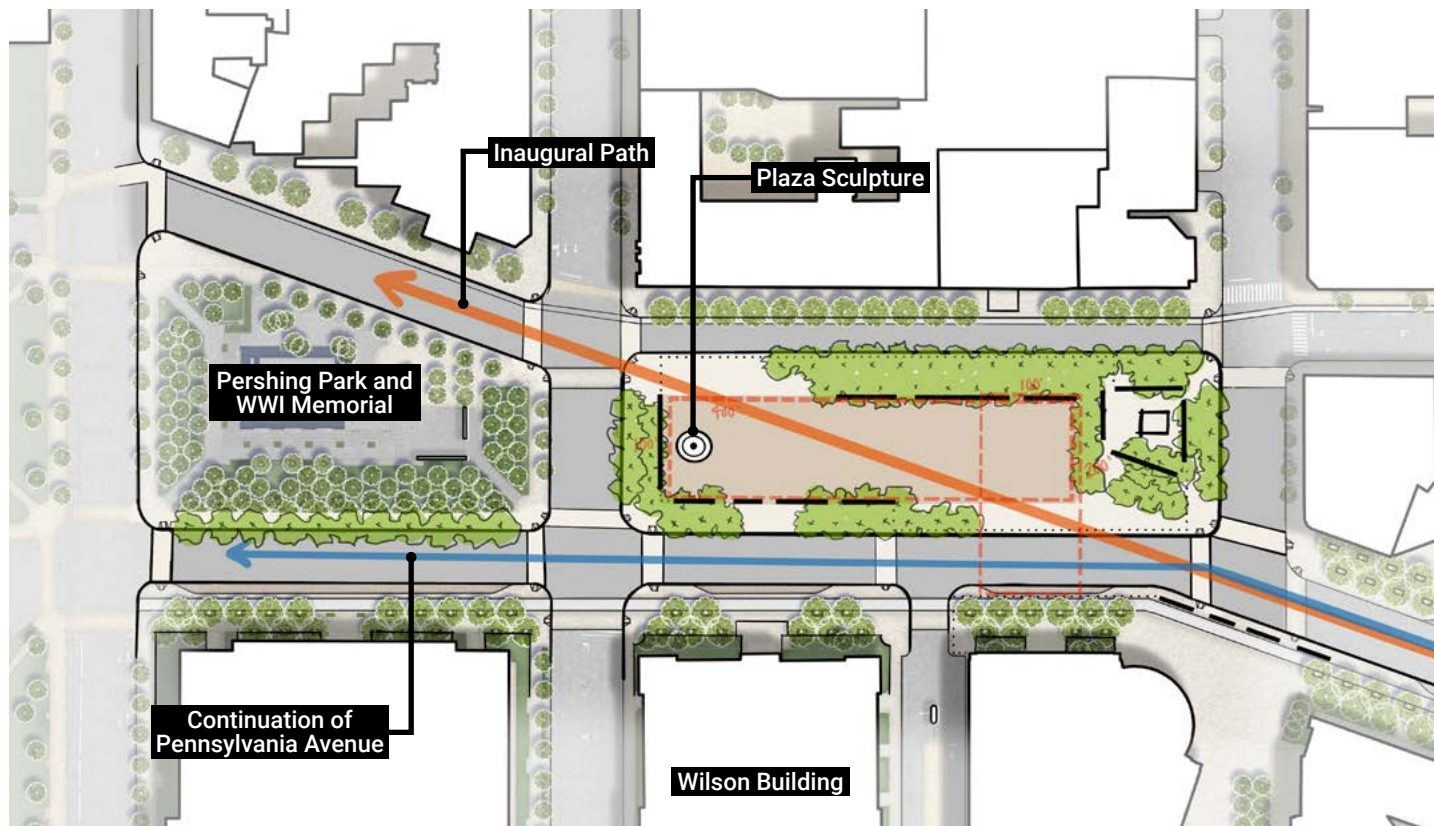
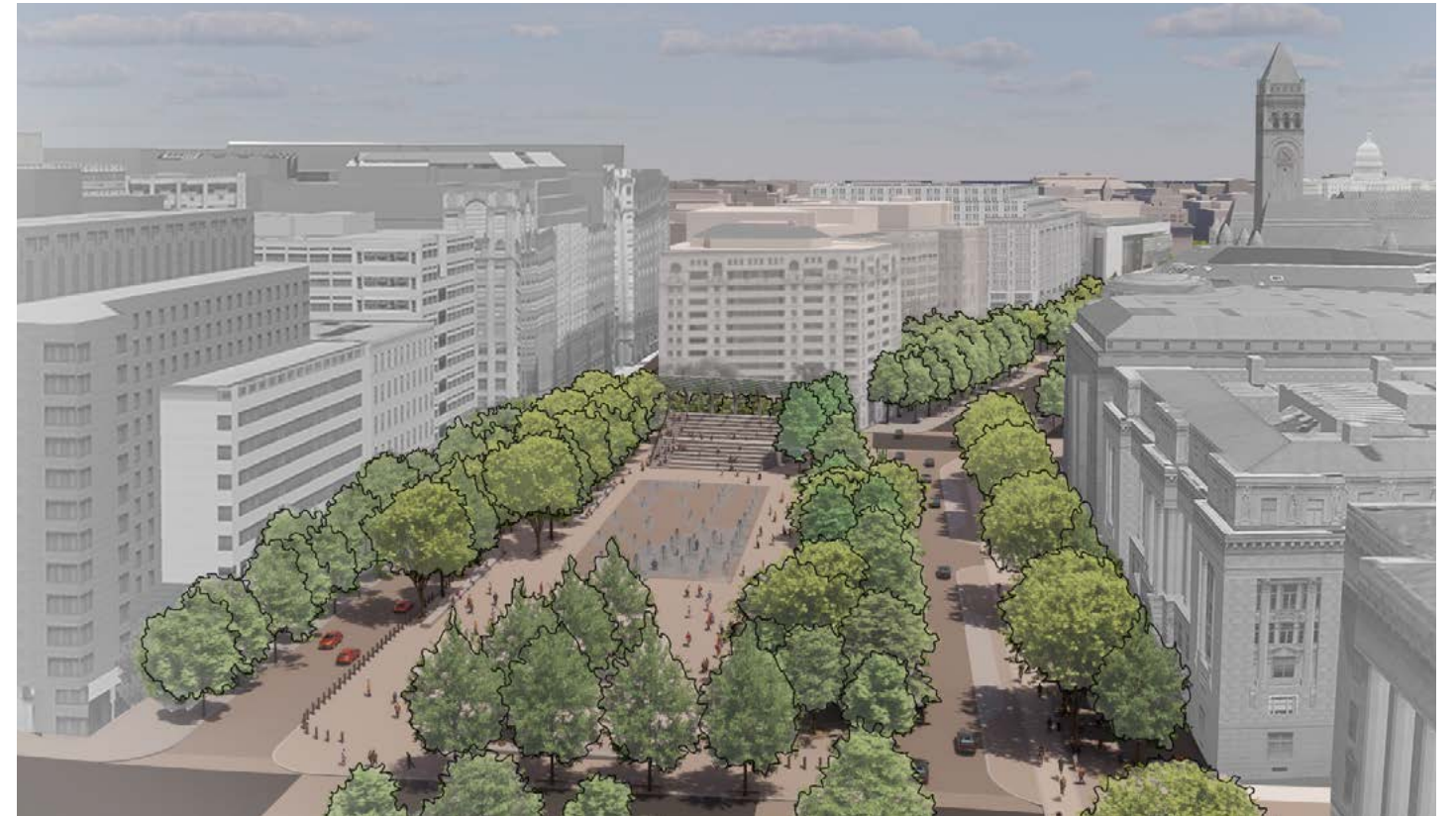


Western End — Central Plaza Alternatives

FRAMED PLAZA OPTION



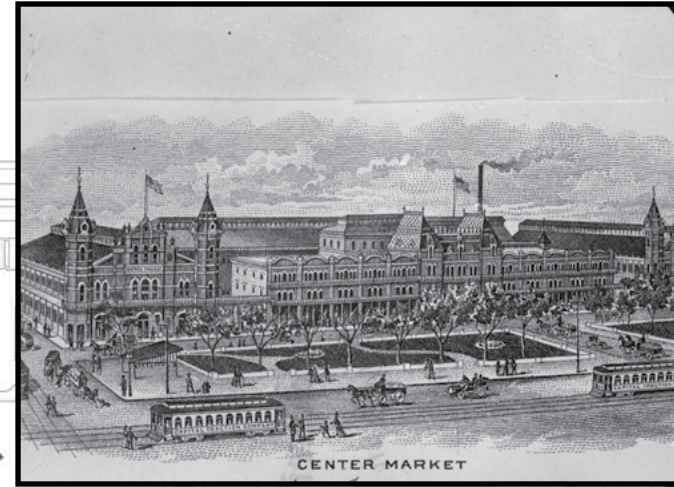
EXPANDED PLAZA OPTION



Market Square



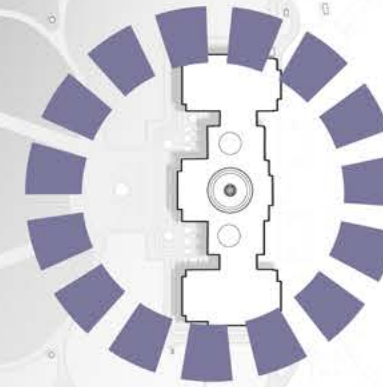
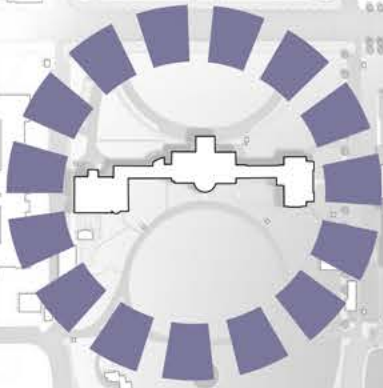
Pennsylvania Ave Looking East, 1901
(Library of Congress)



Center Market, Ca. 1908-1919
(Library of Congress)



Center Market Interior, 1922
(National Photo Company)



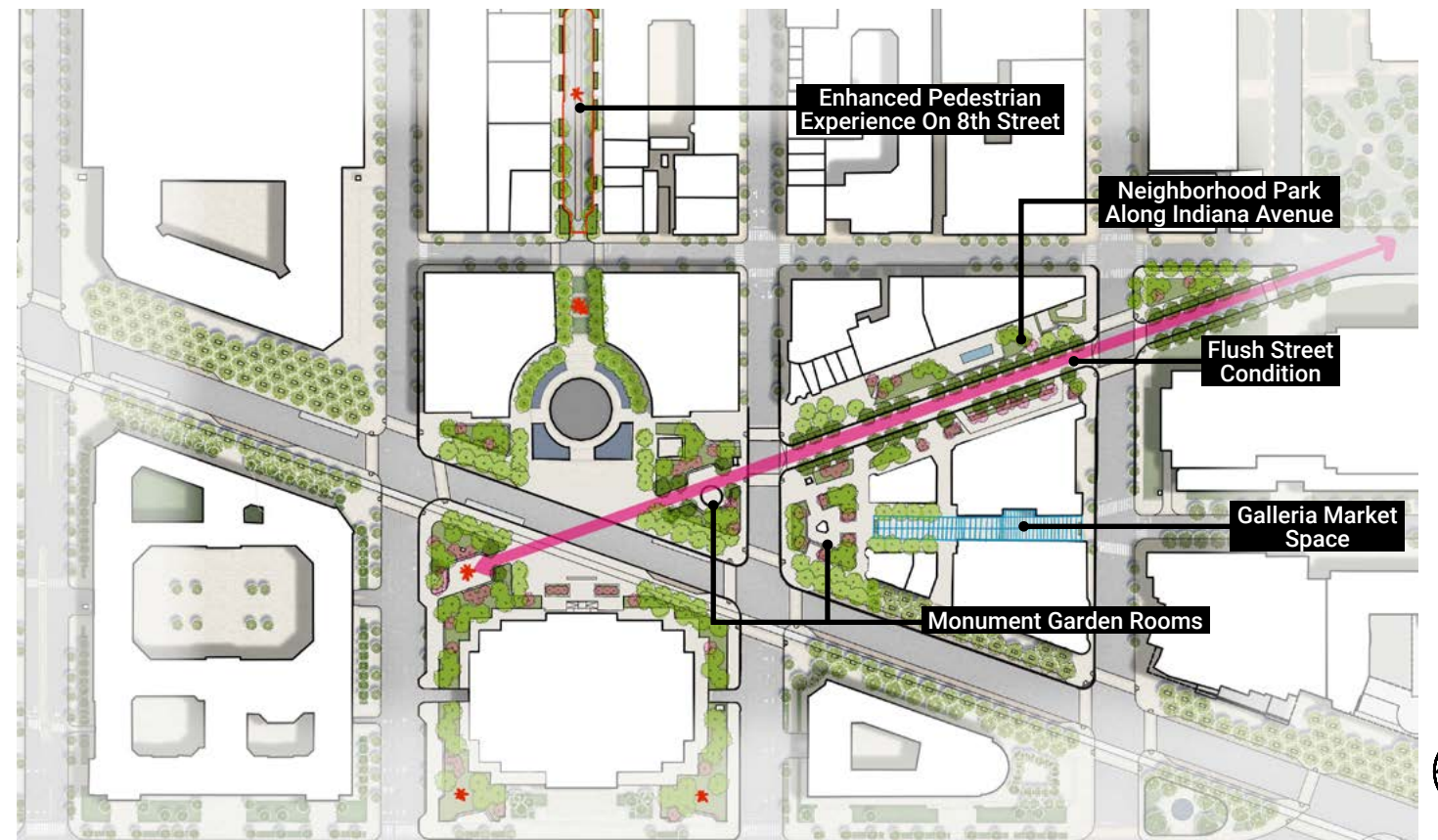
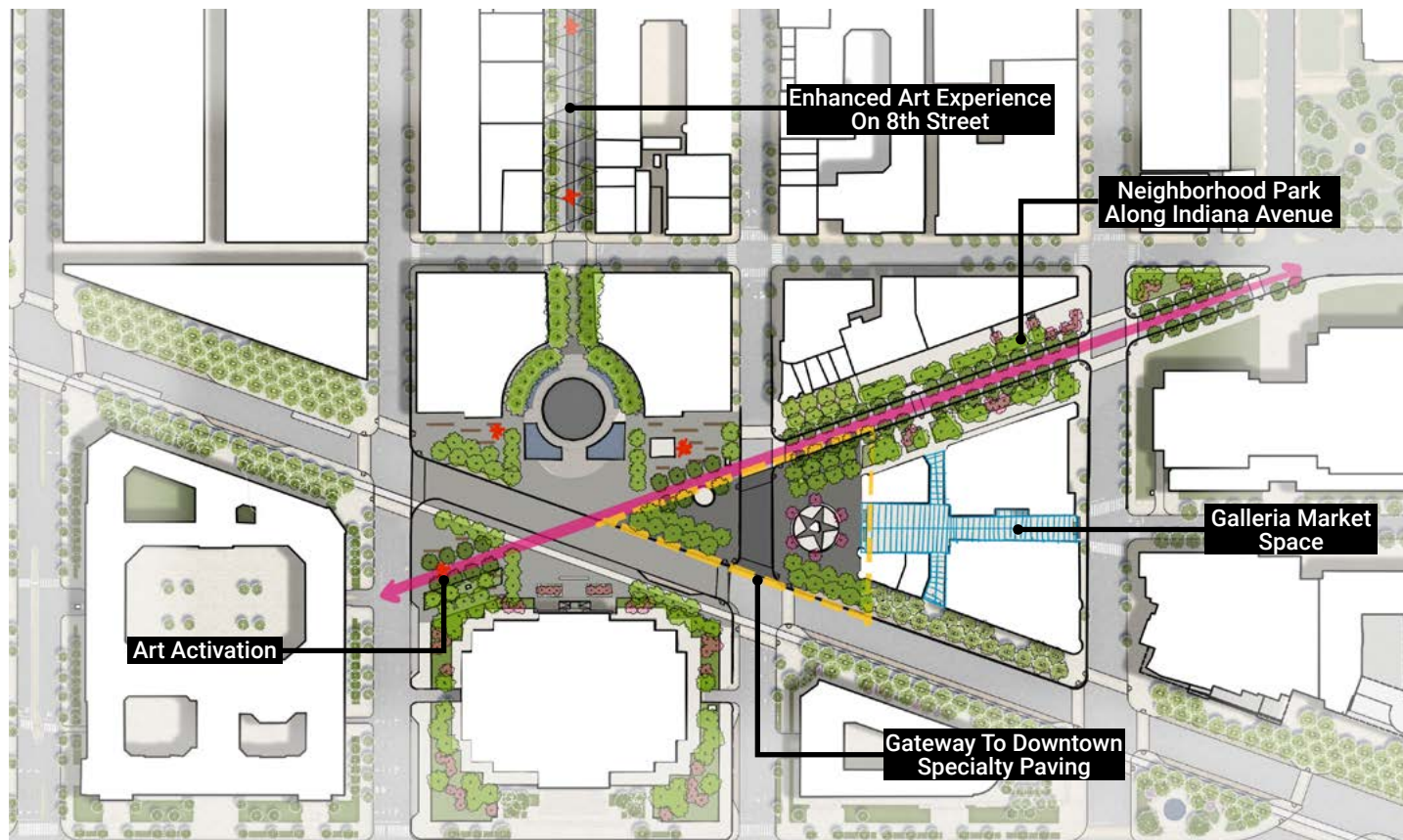
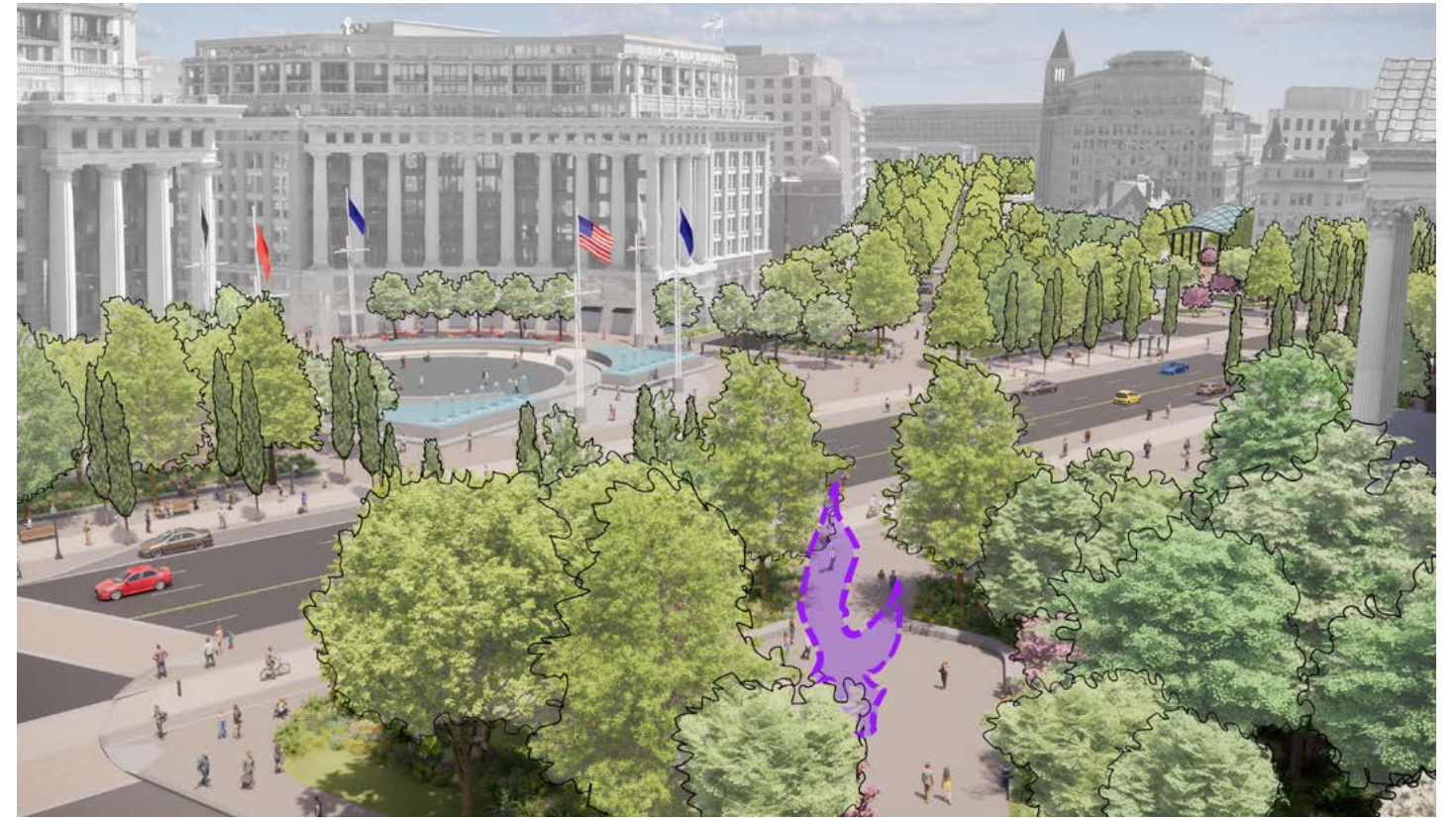
CROSSROADS

Market Square Alternatives

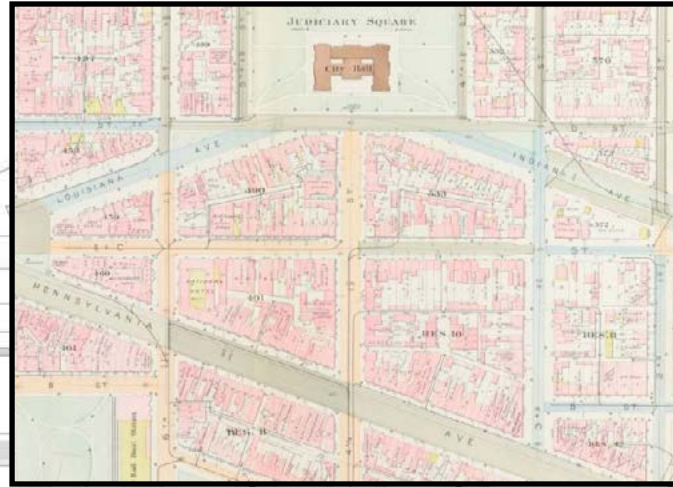
CROSSROADS OPTION



NEIGHBORHOOD GARDEN ROOMS OPTION



Eastern End



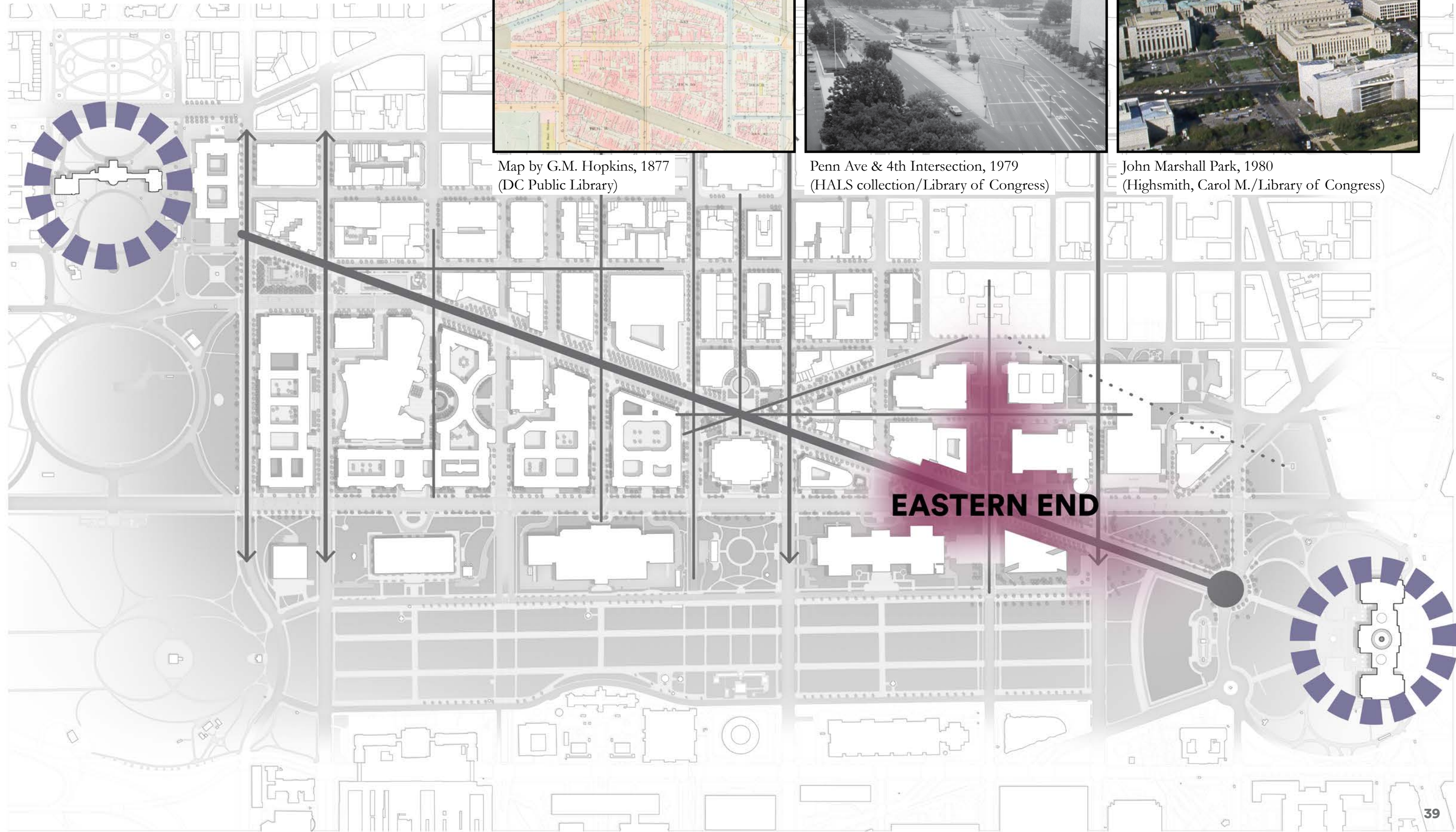
Map by G.M. Hopkins, 1877
(DC Public Library)



Penn Ave & 4th Intersection, 1979
(HALS collection/Library of Congress)



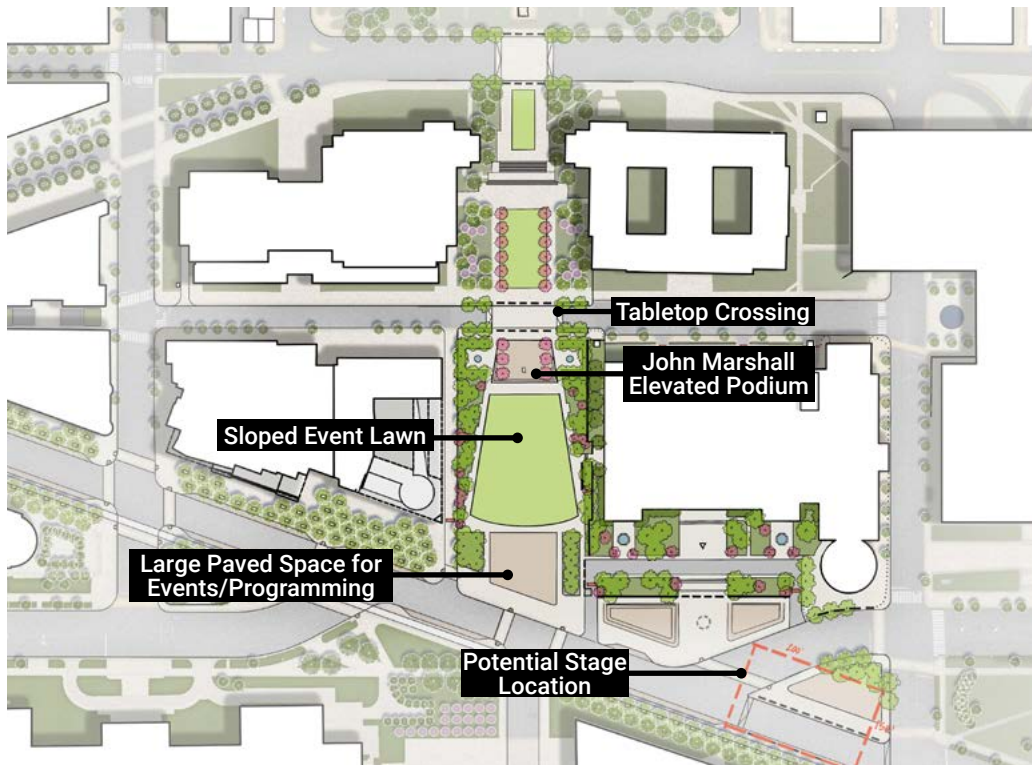
John Marshall Park, 1980
(Highsmith, Carol M./Library of Congress)



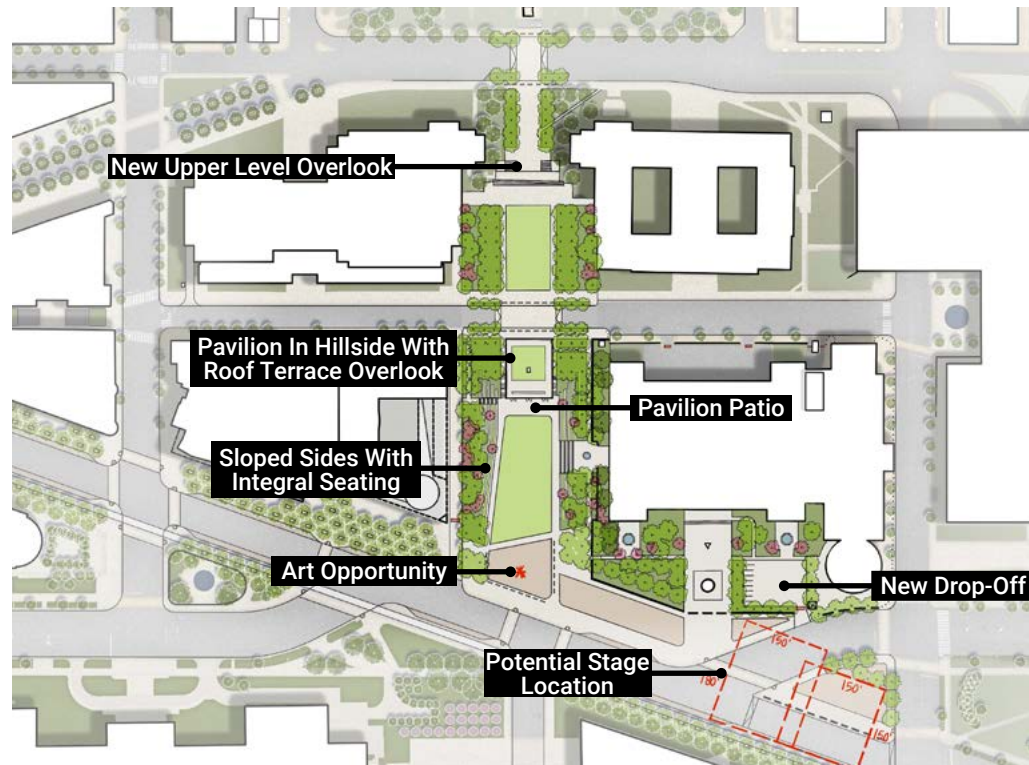
EASTERN END

Eastern End Alternatives

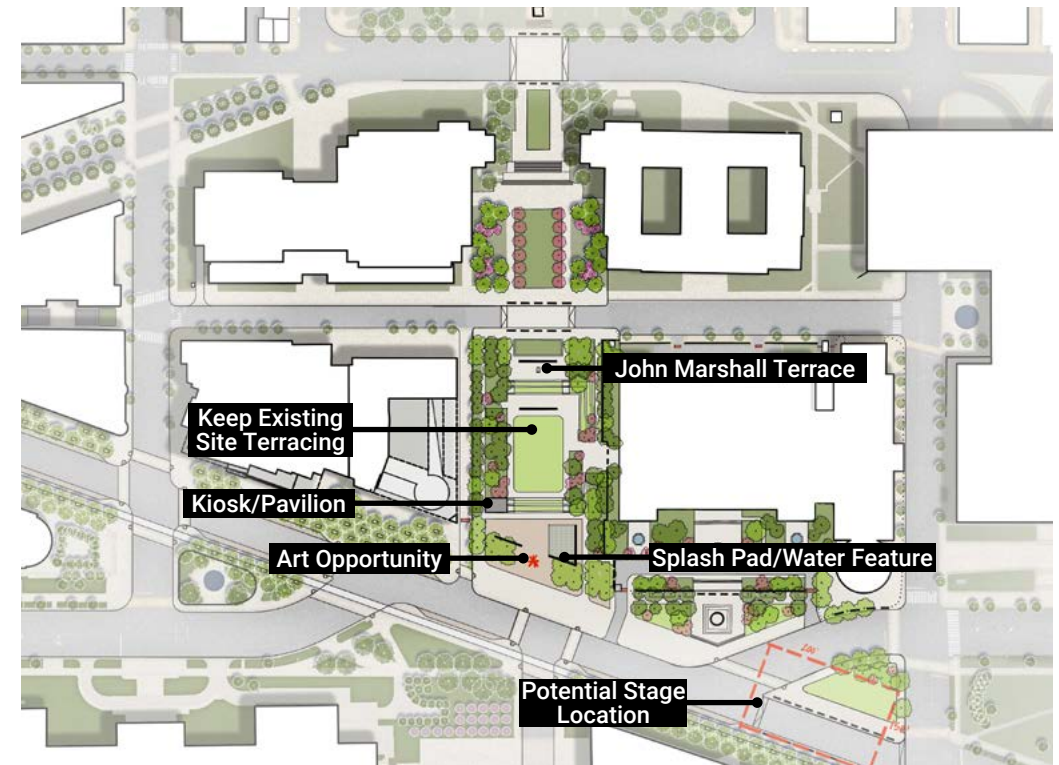
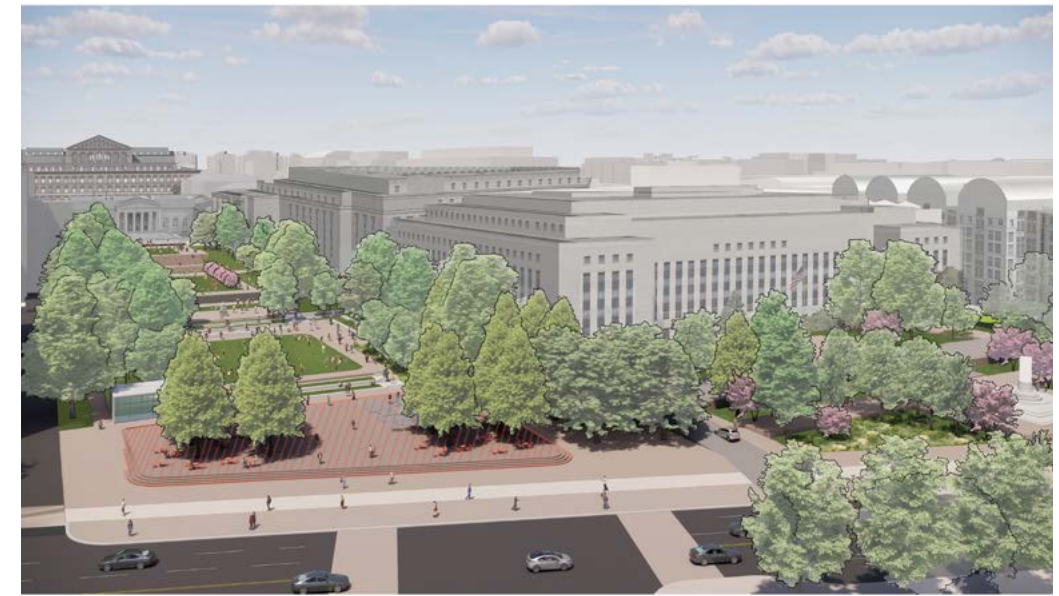
RAKED LAWN OPTION



HILLSIDE PAVILION OPTION



TERRACED SPACES OPTION





DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

First Amendment Activities



Example of First Amendment activity on the Avenue, "Women Strike for Peace" marchers, August 26, 1977 (Diane L. Kuzio/Smithsonian Institution)



Farmers driving tractors at night on Pennsylvania Avenue, as part of an American Agriculture Movement rally, 1977 (Library of Congress)

Event Requirements & Typical Dimensions



Presidential Inaugural Parade (U.S. Army image public domain/Sgt. George Huley)



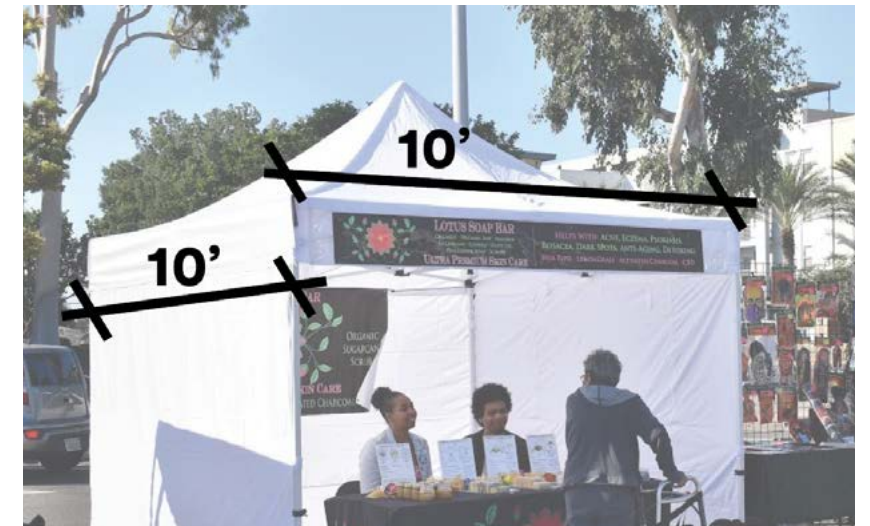
Desire for shade



Security perimeters & event entry points



Fire lane allocations



Typical vendor tent size



Challenges with temporary infrastructure



Service lane routes

Technical Event Test Fits

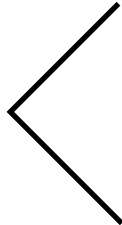


View of Potential Event Setup on Cartway



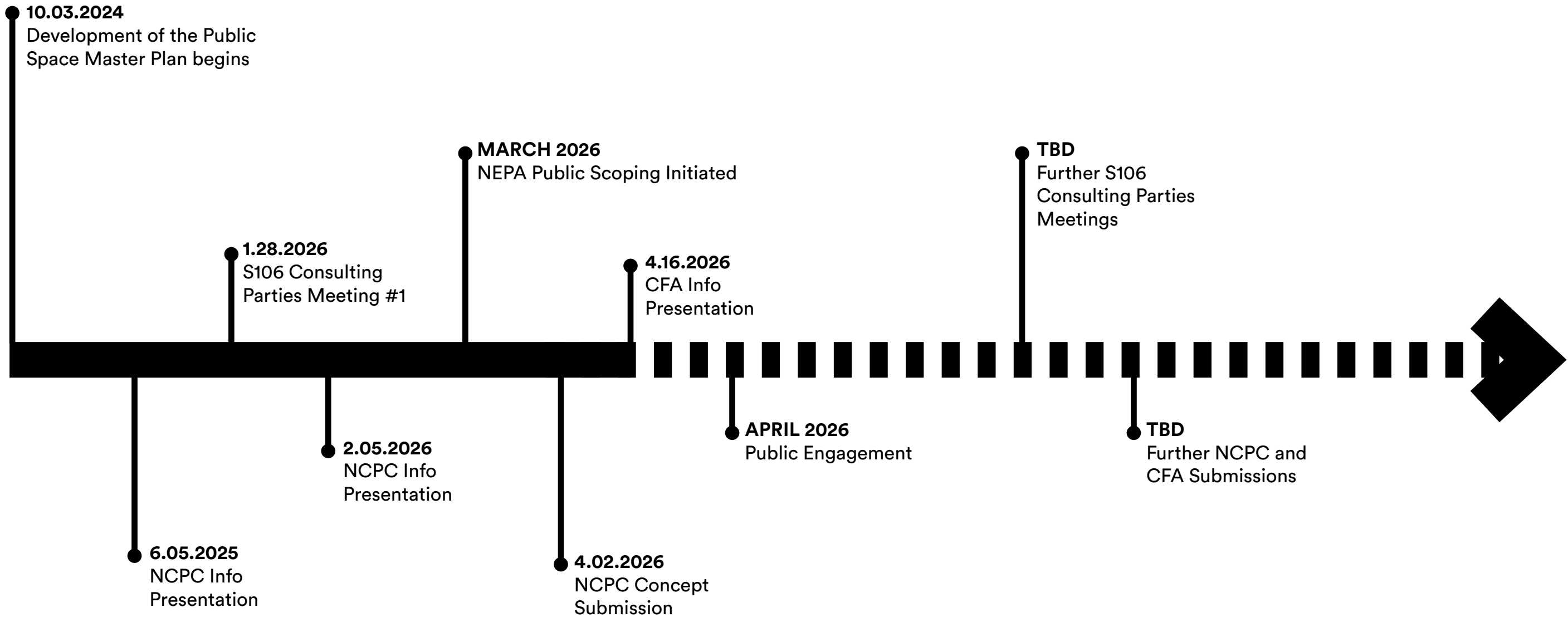
View of Potential Event Setup at 4th Street & Pennsylvania Avenue Intersection

Public Engagement and Regulatory Review



PRIOR TO 2024

NCPC & Project Partners acknowledged the physical decline of Pennsylvania Avenue. Vision concepts were crafted & a formal partnership was formed to launch this plan.



Upcoming April Public Engagement Activities

Public Comment Period

- Submit comments on ncpc.gov through Thursday, April 30

Engagement Opportunities

- Thursday, April 9 – Thursday, April 30:
City Action Hall inside Coming Together Exhibit (second floor)
- Wednesday, April 22 at 6:30pm:
Online only, register at ncpc.gov