

## Plans Progress for Southwest Ecodistrict

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY WILLIAM RICH

After several public meetings over the past couple of years to solicit feedback on plans for the Southwest Ecodistrict, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and the Office of Planning (OP) held meetings in July to go over the three development scenarios proposed for the area. While the Office of Planning's meeting on July 14 dealt with the Maryland Ave., SW corridor, the NCPC meeting on July 26 took a more holistic approach to the Ecodistrict, but focused more on the 10th Street, SW corridor.

### Transforming a Stodgy Office District

The Mission Statement of the SW Ecodistrict is as follows: Establish an Ecodistrict that transforms the 10th Street, SW and Maryland Ave., SW corridors into a vibrant well connected place to commemorate, visit, work, and live in a matter that creates a national showcase of sustainability through innovation, technology, and design. NCPC recommends at least 1,000 residential units and/or hotel rooms need to be created in the area in order to sustain the neighborhood. Currently, no one lives in the study area. Mixed use development (including residential) will be encouraged in the central portion of the study area from around C Street south to the freeway, while federal and cultural uses will predominate the northern area bordering the National Mall and civic uses at Banneker Overlook. Below are descriptions of the three development scenarios currently under consideration by the NCPC.

**Rehabilitation:** Under this scenario, several federal properties would be rehabilitated, including the Department of Energy Headquarters



LEFT - Currently, 10th Street, SW from Banneker Overlook to the Smithsonian Castle is a wide street with little shade.

ABOVE - The Maryland Ave., SW view corridor connects the Capitol Building with the Jefferson Memorial.

complex along 10th Street, SW; the historic HUD building at 7th & E Street, SW; USPS headquarters along 10th Street, SW; GSA's building at 7th & D Street, SW; Department of Education headquarters at 4th Street, SW & Independence Ave., SW; and Wilbur/Orville Wright FAA buildings along Independence Ave., SW. Infill opportunities exist along Maryland Ave., SW, 12th Street, SW near Independence Ave., SW, and at Banneker Overlook. An additional 2.1 - 2.4 million square feet of space (divided evenly by federal office, cultural, and residential/hotel) would be added under this scenario, along with 70,000 square feet of retail, 3,500 - 4,000 employees, and 840 - 960 residents.

**Redevelopment:** The redevelopment scenario takes things further and proposes instead of rehabilitating the Department of Energy complex, that it should be redeveloped, allowing the view shed to be reestablished along Virginia Ave., SW towards the Washington Monument. In addition, a portion of I-395 would be decked

from 9th Street, SW to just west of 10th Street, SW to create more space for infill development. Between 3.3 and 3.9 million square feet of space would be created in this scenario, along with 100,000 square feet of retail, 5,500 - 6,500 employees, and 1,320 - 1,560 residents.

**Repurpose:** In addition to the rehabilitation and redevelopment of the Ecodistrict, this scenario would look to repurpose three buildings for different uses - the United States Postal Service headquarters, the General Services Administration building, and the Wilbur Wright FAA building. The repurposing scenario would add between 3.9 and 4.9 million square feet of space.

Currently, the 10th Street, SW corridor from the Smithsonian Castle to Banneker Overlook is a wide, mostly empty road that's devoid of a significant tree canopy. There are four scenarios under consideration for the reconstruction of the street - a median axis (or "Ramblas") with street lanes on the sides and a large median;

a roadway axis where the street would run in the middle with wide sidewalks on either side; a pedestrian axis with a large sidewalk on the west side and the street running off-center to the east; and a hybrid median/plaza axis with the median axis format north of Maryland Ave., SW and south of L'Enfant Plaza, but a plaza format at L'Enfant Plaza. All four scenarios provide ample tree canopy and offer space for a plaza area near L'Enfant Plaza and infill areas along the street. Deep tree wells will allow larger trees to grow along 10th Street, SW and filtration systems will be installed to carry water to storage tanks below the street that will reduce run-off.

At Banneker Overlook, two build-out scenarios have been proposed. One is the "minimum" buildout, which adds civic/cultural buildings adjacent to the freeway, a parking zone beneath, and landscape features that connect to Maine Ave., SW and The Wharf. The "maximum" buildout also includes a civic/cultural building on the hillside near the intersection of 9th Street, SW

and Maine Ave., SW. Throughout the Ecodistrict, sustainable features and principles are proposed to comply with President Obama's Executive Order mandating the greening of federal buildings, including: water filtration systems (as mentioned above); photovoltaic panels on rooftops and along the freeway; green roofs; a cogeneration plant; building placement to reduce sun exposure; and better use of the district heating system currently in the area.

### Maryland Ave., SW to Become a Grand Boulevard

The western boundary of the Maryland Ave., SW study area on 12th Street, SW abuts the Portals, where Maryland Ave., SW is a rebuilt, landscaped road on a deck atop railroad tracks. On the east side between 4th and 6th Street, SW, there are plans underway to build a memorial to President Eisenhower called Eisenhower Square.

The results of a survey conducted by OP found that respondents thought the Maryland Ave., SW corridor needs parks and open spaces the most, as well as improved building facades. Basically, OP recommends (with the help of their consultants at AECOM) that Maryland Ave., SW should be decked from 12th Street, SW to Reservation 113 (AKA Hancock Park, or the green space formed at what would be the intersection of Maryland Ave., SW, Virginia Ave., SW, 7th Street, SW and 9th Street, SW) as well as 9th Street, SW from Independence Ave., SW to D Street, SW. The roadway along Maryland Ave., SW would run in the middle of the 160' right-of-way with one lane in either direction, along with wide park-like open space on both sides to accommodate pedestrians. Limited on-street parking would be accommodated. Storm water can be collected and filtered from deep tree wells along the Ave. and sent to infiltration zones beneath the street.

In addition to storm water connection, there would be space beneath Maryland Ave., SW for a four-track railroad system with two tracks for passenger rail and two tracks for freight rail, which would improve rail access in the corridor. Improvements are envisioned for

Reservation 113 to connect pedestrians with an expanded L'Enfant Station, that would serve VRE, MARC, AMTRAK, Metrorail, Metro Bus, and streetcars.

There are four potential infill sites along the Avenue that are owned by the GSA. They are located at the northeast corner of 12th & D Street, SW, the northwest corner of Maryland Ave., SW & 10th Street, SW, the northeast corner of Maryland Ave., SW & 10th Street, SW, and the northeast corner of Maryland Ave., SW & 7th Street, SW. There are also opportunities to redevelop the GSA building along D Street, SW that faces Reservation 113 and The Reporters Building at 7th & D Street, SW (where Pizza Autentica is located). OP and AECOM recommend that any new development in the corridor should be oriented toward Maryland Ave., SW to help frame and define public spaces and the historic right-of-way (whether or not the decked roadway has been constructed at the time the buildings are completed).

Proposed zoning changes would encourage a mix of uses, including residential, cultural, hotel, retail, and office, in order to make the corridor (and the SW Ecodistrict as a whole) an extension of downtown. For instance, retail nodes are suggested at the intersection of Maryland Ave. & 10th Street and at L'Enfant Station. Residential and hotel uses are also possible along Maryland Ave. - the SW Ecodistrict plan calls for at least 1,000 residential/hotel rooms to make the area a viable neighborhood. Also, a cultural/commemorative destination is envisioned for the southwest corner of Maryland Ave. & 10th Street.

It will most likely be several years before any meaningful changes come to the SW Ecodistrict, but improvements along Maryland Ave., SW would begin with the block from 6th Street, SW to 7th Street, SW, since this section already exists and is at-grade. The elevated sections of the street would be built later as financing becomes available.

*William Rich is a blogger at Southwest... The Little Quadrant that Could (www.southwestquadrant.blogspot.com) ★*

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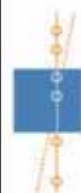
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