

The Landscape Architect's Guide to **WASHINGTON, D.C.**

The Mall

History

Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 Plan for the Capital City envisioned the National Mall as a 400-foot wide avenue, connecting Congress House to a statue of George Washington.

In 1855, railroad tracks crossed the Mall, and the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad Station was completed in 1873. An elevated iron pedestrian and carriage bridge over the tracks opened in 1883. The tracks, bridge, and station were removed in 1907 as part of work to implement the McMillan Plan.

In 1851, addressing concerns regarding the condition of the Mall, President Fillmore commissioned Andrew Jackson Downing to redesign the Mall as a public park. Following his tragic death in a boating accident, his design—characterized by a picturesque, romantic style with curving walks and clustered trees—was developed piecemeal for more than 30 years.

Between 1865 and 1895, numerous tree, planting, grading, walks, and road paving projects were undertaken.

In 1901, the McMillan Commission formulated new plans for the restoration and redevelopment of the Mall. Led by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., as well as architects Daniel Burnham and Charles McKim, the plan proposed a 300-foot greensward, outlined by elm trees and lined with public buildings.

In 1931, most gardens and structures were removed or cleared.

From 1932-36 Olmsted Jr. constructed his revised McMillan Plan for the Mall. The signature formal layout of eight turf panels bordered by rows of elm trees included four parallel roads—Madison, Adams, Washington, and Jefferson Drives. Park furniture such as the Olmsted lights, designed for the center walks of the Mall, and the simple Mall bench are historic elements still in use on the National Mall.

Buildings began to line the Mall. The museums, buildings, or projects remaining today include: Smithsonian Castle (1865), the National Museum/Arts and Industries (1881), the National Museum of Natural History (1904), the Department of Agriculture (1908/1930), the Freer Gallery of Art (1923), the National Gallery of Art (1941), the National Museum of American History (1962), the National Air and Space Museum (1976), the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (1974), the National Gallery East Building (1978), the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the National Museum of African Art (both 1987), the National Gallery Sculpture Garden Food Pavilion (1989) with four refreshment stands (1994), the National Gallery Sculpture Garden (1999, OLIN), the National Museum of the American Indian (2004), and the National Museum of African-American History and Culture (construction underway, Freelon Group; Adjaye Associates; Gustafson Guthrie Nichol; Davis Brody Bond; and the SmithGroup).

Temporary buildings built during World War II (1941) were finally removed in 1971.

WMATA's 40-year-old subway system was constructed with four lines (blue/orange and yellow/green) going under the Mall in two tunnels. The Smithsonian Metro station was constructed with a Mall entrance at 12th Street and Jefferson Drive.

The SOM plan (1966-1976) for the "Washington Mall" replaced the paved Adams and Washington (vista) Drives with gravel walks, completed the elm tree planning, developed a sign system and small transportation support buildings, and tunneled roads under the Mall at 9th and 12th. The long grass panel near the 8th Street axis was broken into smaller panels.

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In 2006 the National Park Service began the process of planning for the National Mall, addressing issues of wear and tear associated with the park's 25 million annual visits. Using the principles of the Sustainable Sites Initiative™ (SITES™), diverse projects within the National Mall Plan include the restoration of compacted soils and deteriorated lawns, as well as broad improvements to the hydrology; pedestrian, car, and bus circulation; visitor facilities; and pedestrian signage on the National Mall. The plan was approved in 2010 and implementation is underway.

The 2012 Phase I of the Mall continues with irrigation, drainage, water collection and re-landscaping under construction (HOK). Phase II and III are in design. The Mall Paving Study (HOK) is also underway.