

1946-1976 Pedestrian Mall

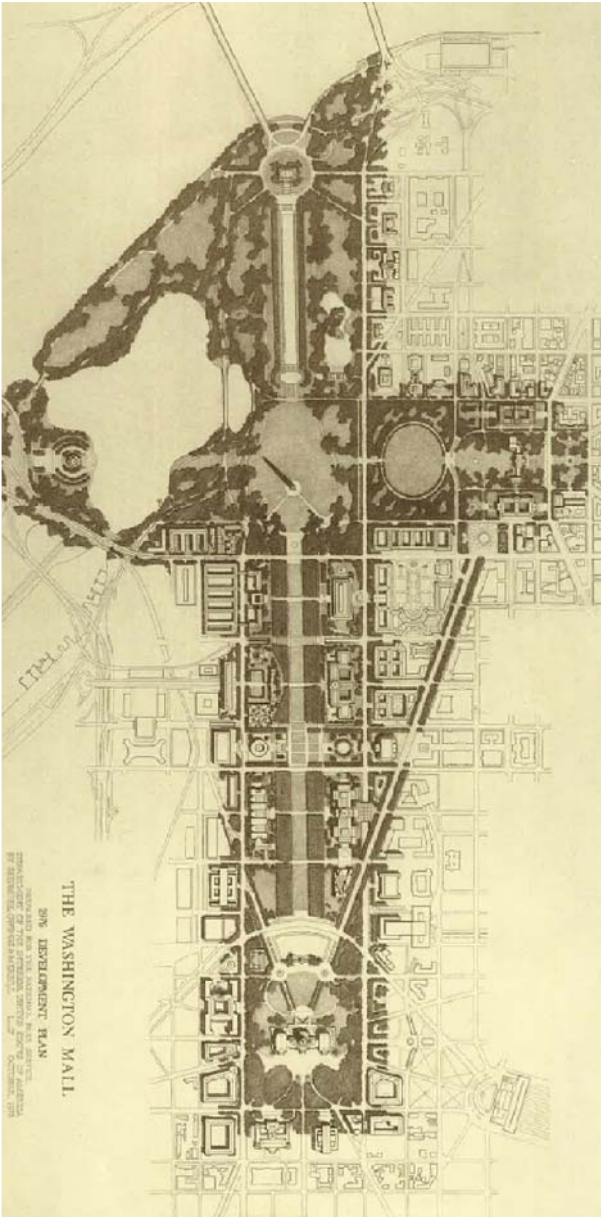
In the decades following the implementation of the Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC) redesign of the National Mall and Union Square, the area remained organized as constructed with modest changes. With the John F. Kennedy inauguration on January 20, 1961, the President’s concern over the aesthetics of the Capital core arose. The President’s Council on Pennsylvania Avenue was formed to impart enhanced dignity to the avenue, headed by architect Nathaniel Owings, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM). The proposals made formed a basis for later work and SOM was retained by the National Park Service to prepare a National Mall master plan. Owings worked with architect David Childs, landscape architect Dan Kiley, and traffic engineer Wilbur Smith & Associates. The 1966 Washington Mall Master Plan was circulation-focused, far reaching, and little implemented. With the further impetus of the upcoming United States Bicentennial, planning continued. In 1974, SOM provided additional details. Partially implemented, this plan altered the uses, pavement, and spatial character of the National Mall and Union Square landscape and resulted in a further degree of ground disturbance, particularly at Union Square. The 1974 layout outline (page 21) captures the National Mall and Union Square landscape at this time. The key sources presented for the 1946-1976 era are the National Park Service “Washington Mall Circulation System” (page 21), the John J. Allen Associates “Utility Survey” (pages 21 and 23), and the SOM “Washington Mall Plan: 1st to 14th Street” (pages 21 and 23), all dating to 1974.

The SOM overall plan includes the National Mall and Union Square (pages 22 and 23) and employs the linear geometry defined in the prior period. The focus of the redesign was on enhancing interior pedestrian circulation, removing vehicles, and emphasizing the framing tree rows between the Washington Monument and the Capitol. The removal of the last Tempo buildings by 1971 completed the central vista and in 1975, the final elm tree panel plantings were completed on the building site, creating a continuous tree frame adjacent to the lawn panels. Paving and street curbs with radius corners of the Inner Drives (Washington and Adams) were removed, as were the adjacent grass verges and sidewalks. These features were replaced by 45-foot wide gravel walks spanning from lawn edge to tree panel edge. To frame the lawn panels at crisp right angles, a three-foot wide stone curb was designed by SOM, but not constructed. Steel edging installed failed to define turf and the removal of concrete and asphalt drive and sidewalk paving and curbs reduced ease of access and resulted in diminished paving and panel definition. Tree panels were reduced to three rows wide at 50-foot spacing. Outer gravel walks were excavated from the outer edge of the tree panels adjacent to both Outer Drives, with the fourth, or outer, tree retained to each side and surrounded by a brick circle and positioned within these loose gravel walks. A system of water lines and spray heads for turf irrigation was added to the lawn panels requiring excavation in a closely spaced pattern at a depth of less than four feet. Light standards were reset presumably with underground electric supply excavations. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson established the Beautification Program, an effort inspired and led by Lady Bird Johnson which included flower beds planted on the Smithsonian crosswalk. Record photographs also show benches on pads. Both bed and benches generated shallow, site specific disturbances.

In this era, planning and implementation also addressed large scale projects that each created substantial ground disturbance. Over this timeframe the final tempos were removed to make way for both National Mall completion and new projects. In 1962, 12th Street was tunneled beneath the National Mall, removing this former crossing drive from the surface of the landscape. The tunnel included three northbound travel lanes. Between Madison Drive and Constitution Avenue, at the north edge of the National Mall, 12th Street gradually inclines to meet the surrounding grade. In January 1967, a project was begun to tunnel 9th Street below the National Mall with the new 9th Street tunnel opened in December 1971. The tunnel accommodated southbound traffic with three travel lanes entering the below-grade drive north of the National Mall at Madison Drive. Another large-scale excavation project was the construction of Interstate 395. The new interstate highway extended across the Potomac River and continued north, beneath Union Square with the wide I-395 tunnels. Construction of the new interstate required removal of much of the Olmsted-designed Union Square, prompting a redesign. SOM addressed this space in their plan, designing the Capitol Reflecting Pool with a large sub-grade basin, positioned partially over the I-395 tunnel at the base of the Grant Memorial. Together the construction of I-395 beneath the National Mall and the redesign of Union Square required considerable disturbance to the ground plane at the eastern National Mall edge.

Additional buildings and structures were added to the National Mall framing beyond the Outer Drives in the years leading up to the Bicentennial. This included larger buildings along the edge of the open National Mall landscape and smaller support facilities within the tree and turf panels. In 1969, the Army Medical Museum at the south edge of the National Mall east of the Smithsonian was demolished. Five years later, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden was constructed in its place with the sunken sculpture garden taking the space of the adjacent tree panel. The SOM planning concept used the sunken garden as one element of defining a group of four crosswalks, to enhance museum access, in the approximate center of the National Mall. From 1972 to 1976, the National Air and Space Museum was constructed to the east, between 4th and 7th Streets. In the late 1960s, a carousel was constructed as part of the Smithsonian facilities. It was placed in the elm tree panel northeast of the Smithsonian and directly north of the Arts and Industries Building, between 9th and 10th Streets. While this recreational feature may include limited sub-grade foundations, site construction and installation required some disturbance to the ground plane and established plantings. Around this same time, four temporary food service buildings were erected in close proximity to museums and institutions in preparation for the Bicentennial. These buildings remained in use until they were recently replaced in the same locations.

National Mall changes in this era occurred within the framework of the mid-century Olmsted Jr. and NCPPC plan. Overall the ground plane remained intact with focused interventions. The National Mall 180-foot wide lawn panels spanned the central space, bordered to the north and south by the elm tree panels with the single street tree row in gravel flanking both outer drives. Union Square was dominated by the large reflecting basin. The adjacent, nearly continuous rows of museum buildings framed the Union Square and National Mall landscapes. Two of the north-south streets, 9th and 12th Streets, were tunneled below grade. Interstate 395 was laid out beneath Union Square. Each of these projects required extensive excavation. By the end of this period, the National Mall was altered with deep and shallow ground disturbance through circulation changes, tree plantings, installation of lighting, water lines, building removals and additions, and a reconfigured Union Square. The National Mall at the close of this era resulted primarily from the Olmsted Jr. and NCPPC mid-1930s redesign and the SOM changes to specific elements, while retaining the overall linear organization and green central vista.



1973 DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR 1976

Source: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, “The Washington Mall, 1976 Development Plan,” 1973. Courtesy National Capital Region, NPS.  
MMP—SOM—TheWashingtonMall—1976—Development Plan—1973

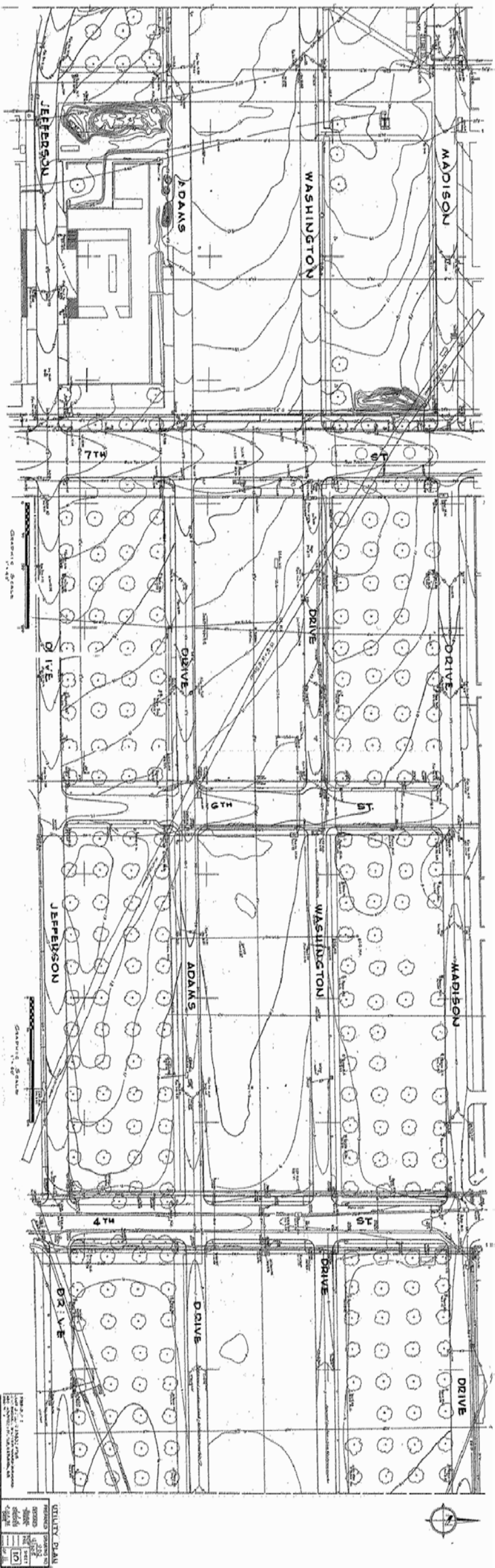


1977 OBLIQUE AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH

Source: National Mall Oblique Aerial, August 1977. Courtesy 2006 National Mall & Memorial Parks CLI. MMP—CLI—NatMall—Part3—Aug1977

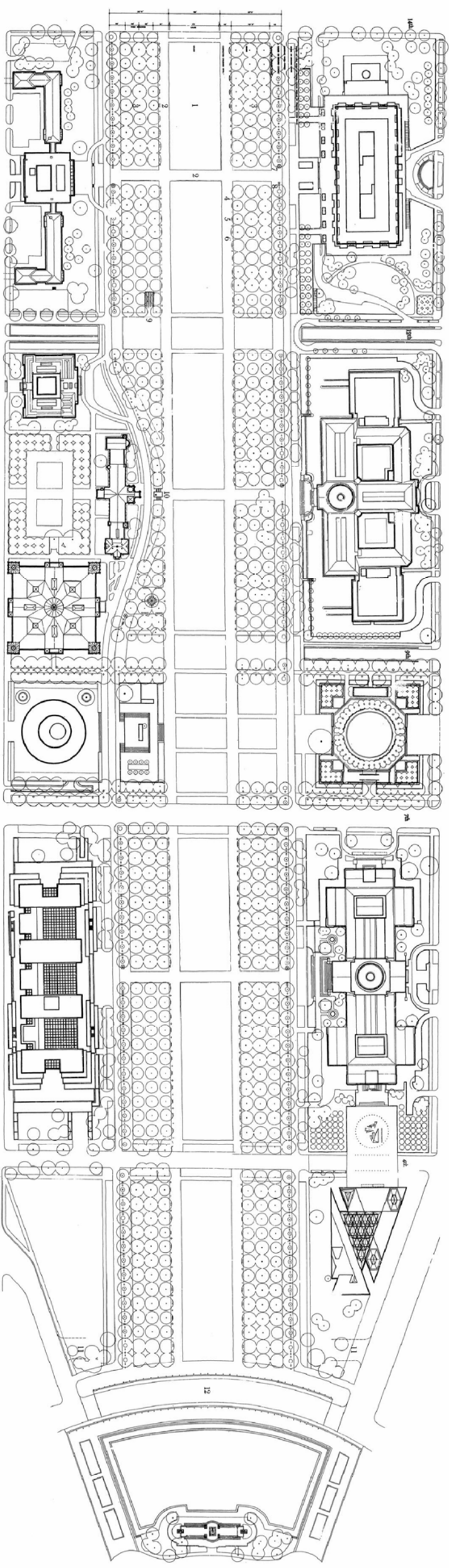
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1974 UTILITY PLAN

Source: John J. Allen Associates, "Utility Survey", 1974. Courtesy National Capital Region, NPS. MMP-NCR-Mall-41005-Survey-Sheets-10-11-1974



1974 SOM PLAN

Source: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, "The Washington Mall Plan: 1st to 14th Street", March 1974. Courtesy National Capital Region, NPS.

MMP-NPS-TIC-SOM-1st-14th-1974

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