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EDITORIALS

A Sore Sight for Eyes

Better coordination could help clean up Mall

Simplify, simplify, simplify. That's what Washington needs to remember as it oversees the Mall, which serves as the front porch of the nation's capital. The Mall once stretched beautifully from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial. Today, it's becoming a salad bowl that everything in the refrigerator gets dumped into.

A big reason for the mess is that the buck doesn't stop on anyone's desk. As Judy Scott Feldman explains on Viewpoints today, there's no one agency or committee to guide the Mall into its third century. In fact, Ms. Feldman reports, six federal agencies, eight congressional committees and the District of Columbia claim responsibility for the task.

With so many people in charge, no one's in control. That's why we have ended up with the policies that have cluttered the Mall with too many monuments, memorials, concessions and security barriers. Not only is the majesty of

Viewpoints: A q-and-a on the Mall, 15A

the Mall already a memory, but without better coordination, there will be no room for the next generations to honor their great ones.

President Bush could make his mark here, as John F. Kennedy did in shaping Pennsylvania Avenue's development. By pressing the bureaucracy and Capitol Hill to simplify its management of the Mall, he could ensure it endures as the living symbol of our democracy.

First lady Laura Bush could play a special role, too. Much as Lady Bird Johnson championed the beautification of the Potomac River, Mrs. Bush could leave her mark on Washington by helping guide the Mall's evolution. After all, she already is working on a project to save treasured sites across America.

The Mall belongs to everyone in the United States. It also belongs to future generations. We owe it to them to save this treasure.

Saving our Mall

MALL OF THE FUTURE

Despite a congressional moratorium on Mall construction, these projects are among those under way or being considered for the Mall:

Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial

John Adams Memorial

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Latino American Museum

U.S. Capitol underground Visitor Center

Vietnam Memorial Visitor Center

Washington Monument underground visitor center

Two concession buildings at the Lincoln Memorial

Two concession buildings at the Washington Monument

Learn more about the National Coalition to Save Our Mall at www.nationalmall.net or call 1-800-618-3166 (toll free).

Judy Scott Feldman says construction and mega-events take away from the Mall.

Nobody's really in charge of 'the people's place,' and now it's filled up, says **JUDY SCOTT FELDMAN**

The Washington Mall is a mess. There's no other way to describe it. When you gaze down from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, you see clutter everywhere. Security barriers litter the landscape. New museums wipe out the horizon. And big tents hosting celebrations for groups like the National Football League resemble a revival meeting.

Former University of Dallas professor Judy Scott Feldman has had enough. The Washington native has helped organize the National Coalition to Save Our Mall, whose goal is to protect the Mall for the future.

Editorial columnist William McKenzie recently toured it with her. Here's an excerpt of their conversation:

Who oversees the Mall?

Everyone thought it was the National Park Service. But there are at least eight congressional committees and six federal agencies, plus the District of Columbia. We learned they don't talk to one another.

There is no coordinated planning, nor any means to do that.

Congress adopted a policy in 2003 that says the Mall is a completed work of art, that it is finished and we want to stop any further building.

The Park Service also wants to get large public gatherings off the Mall. They want people to park their cars in distant lots, take the Tourmobile and visit the Mall episodically on it. Essentially, they want people to stay off the grass.

Why?

To protect the grass. They're trying to reduce wear and tear on natural resources at big national parks. The problem is, the Mall was designed as a public civic place. It will kill the Mall if we follow through with this policy.

Couldn't you say the Tourmobile is a good way to go from Point A to Point B and get off and walk?

There's nothing wrong with the Tourmobile. It's just not enough. It's designed for the first-time visitor and takes you to all the major sites. Once you do that, you have no means of getting around. You can't park there during rush hour. People who want to play ball on the Mall or come to a concert at night are shut out.

Congress once designated the Mall as a recreational place?

Yes. The original Mall ended at the Washington Monument. The rest was the Potomac River. Later, the Lincoln and

Jefferson Memorials were put on filled land in what was known as Potomac Park. Congress intended that land for recreation, but it keeps getting filled up with memorials.

You can sure say that. Is there a consensus we're malled up?

Yes. In 2003, Congress established a moratorium on building from the Capitol to the Lincoln, from the White House to the Jefferson.

But Congress keeps making exceptions, like a possible visitors center at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. And supporters of an African-American history and culture museum are looking for a site, and they like the Mall. If they choose it, Congress will exempt it. There are others looking for a site too, like those who want a monument for John Adams.

You also can hardly move around with all the security barriers.

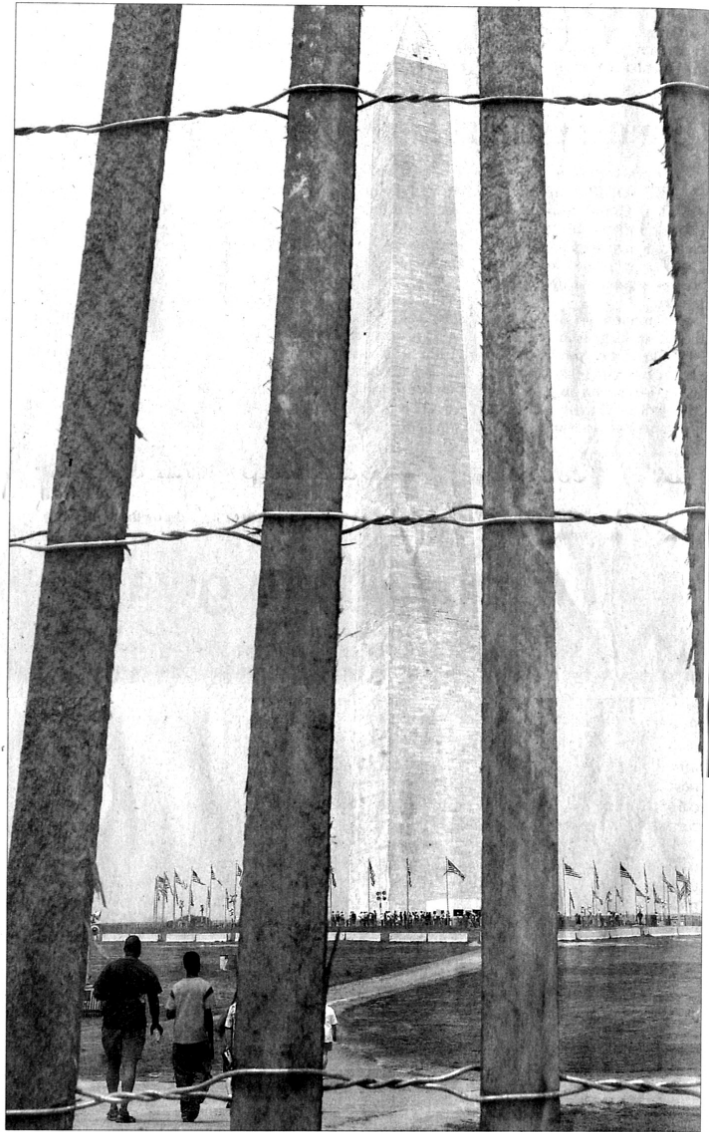
We're restricting access to our institutions. The parking lot at the Jefferson Memorial has closed for security reasons. And we have new 30-inch-high stone security barriers at the Washington Monument. We're not against security barriers, but they're in the middle of the open grass and not at the street.

Another problem is mega-events. The NFL had a kickoff event in 2003 and closed a part of the Mall off for three days and had commercial advertising.

What's your answer?

We think of the Mall as symbols of our government. It's the people's place. It always has been cluttered, and it always has been changing. But there never has been an implementing body. That's what we're trying to address.

We're really trying to get rid of the divided management. That would help come up with a better definition of the Mall. There actually is no statutory description. The Park Service thinks of the Mall as a theme park.



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What does Congress say about that?

They don't know about it. It's happening slowly and incrementally.

What else do you recommend?

We want citizens to get involved in saving the Mall. We want Congress to create a Third Century Commission, like the McMillan Commission that guided the Mall in the early 1900s. We think the answer is a really good plan.

Once you establish a plan, we need a National Mall Conservancy. It would be a public private partnership that could raise money for projects.

Right away, we need better public amenities, like concessions, to make it a more vibrant urban park. And we need a sustainability program. The park service wants to get people off the lawn to preserve it. We suggest improving maintenance, like they've done at Central Park. We also should increase the Mall's size.

How do you expand it?

You could take available public land and double the size of the Mall like they did a century ago. For example, you could expand south and east of the Jefferson Memorial on over 300 acres of public parkland. It's a gorgeous waterfront, and

you could connect it through a pedestrian bridge.

That would have to be a big bridge.

There are ways you can do it, including using shuttles.

We'd also like to use South Capitol Street as a gateway from the Anacostia River to the Capitol. You could use this grand avenue for monuments.

South Capitol's been pretty ugly for a while.

Yes, but the new baseball stadium may be going there.

We could also put big mega-events behind the Jefferson Memorial. There's land there along the Potomac.

We're suggesting these ideas as the Third Century Mall. And we're not saying this is the end of it. The only areas we have identified have been identified by Congress.

We're just saying the public land is there, and we can connect it through bridges, bicycle paths and pedestrian paths. We can add new monuments.

Current policy says future generations have no place on the Mall, even if there is some great advancement in self-government. That's not an optimistic view of our democracy.

The Mall originally ended at the Washington Monument. More land was added for recreation, but it has been filled with monuments.



Judy Feldman