

May 17, 2006: Norton to Introduce First Ever Bill to Define and Expand the Mall

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Washington, DC—Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) today said that she would introduce a bill that for the first time in U.S. history defines the Mall by statute. Her bill will be based on a National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) Framework also announced today, that seeks to expand the Mall to its natural contours, including East Potomac Park. Norton said that because Congress had never defined the Mall, the cramped space between 3rd Street and the Lincoln Memorial has become the Mall in the public's imagination. Citizens and groups all seek a place there for their monuments, and already have overwhelmed the available space. The artificially small space, Norton believes, is being ruined. She emphasized, however, that even her bill will not seek a rigid and unchangeable definition of the Mall that does not allow for its organic expansion as a natural part of the environment at some future time or era.

"More important even than the Mall space that is close to being overwhelmed with memorials," Norton said, "is the fact that the existing cramped Mall space today is such a pitifully inert and empty byproduct for the museums on either side. I believe that the Mall as defined by the NCPC Framework will finally embolden Washington's imagination to see a place which emphasizes the people who come to view the memorials, not merely the monuments that are placed there. The Mall can become a living, breathing space with flower gardens, benches, eating places with chairs and small tables, and staging areas for music, such as small bands and string quartets for workers and visitors to listen to as they eat their brown bag lunches."

The full text of Norton's statement follows.****

I am particularly grateful for the National Capital Planning Commission's initiative announced today to expand the Mall to encompass its larger natural area. This initiative is so significant in beginning to define what we mean by the Mall for the first time in our history, that I intend to introduce a bill based on an expansive definition of the Mall for the 21st century. I will work closely with NCPC in framing the bill, and I will seek bipartisan co-sponsors in the House and Senate, and seek passage this session of Congress. The Mall, as defined by my bill, however, will recognize that the Mall is like all wonders of nature, a changing part of the natural environment and that its definition may change in the future.

Because I represent the nation's capital, I have spent a good deal of my time in Congress trying to protect the narrow strip of land informally known as "The Mall" from being overwhelmed. The process came to a head when the pedestrian World War II Memorial, a monument unworthy of "the greatest generation," was placed awkwardly in a way that interrupts the great expanse between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington monument. At the time I proposed a Mall preservation plan. I am grateful that the NCPC produced a reserve or no-build zone to protect the central Mall areas and designated other near Mall areas for monuments. This action in fact was helpful in quelling at least some of the demand of groups to be placed on what they view as the Mall.

Today's NCPC Framework rejects the idea that the Mall is a static space, which like the monuments that are placed there, does not change. The plan builds upon the Pierre L'Enfant vision of an organic, vital changing place, which like the city which surrounds the Mall, will never be finished. The NCPC Framework continues the vision of Sen. James McMillan, whose 20th century vision built upon the L'Enfant plan and had the courage to expand the Mall as many know it today. Although Congress has addressed important aspects of the Mall, including the Commemorative Works Act and the Reserve, Congress has never defined the Mall. As a result, many of the areas most people consider part of the mall, such as East Potomac Park, are not acknowledged by some. More important even than the Mall space that is close to being overwhelmed with memorials is the fact that the existing cramped Mall space today is such a pitifully inert and empty byproduct for the museums on either side. I believe that the Mall as defined by the NCPC Framework will finally embolden Washington's imagination to see a place which emphasizes the people who come to view the memorials, not merely the monuments that are placed there. The Mall can become a living, breathing space with flower gardens, benches, eating places with chairs and small tables, staging areas for music, such as small bands and string quartets for workers and visitors to listen to as they eat their brown bag lunches.

Only Congress can define the Mall but we look to the NCPC for guidance on these matters. Therefore I intend to commit today's NCPC Framework to a bill for introduction in the House and Senate. I ask that the Commission work with me and legislative counsel so that a bill can be appropriately encompassing of the intended area and can be passed this session.