

Remarks on Freedom Plaza

Location and Current Use:

Site #2 (Site #5 on NCPC's *Memorials and Museums Master Plan*) is located at Freedom Plaza, on Pennsylvania Avenue between 13th and 14th Streets, NW. Freedom Plaza, inlaid with parts of the L'Enfant Plan, was designed by Robert Venturi, architect, and George Patton, landscape architect, in 1980. Originally known as Western Plaza, it was renamed Freedom Plaza because Martin Luther King, Jr. worked on his "I have a Dream" speech in the Willard Hotel nearby. Quotes by famous people about Washington, DC are carved into the paving stones surrounding the L'Enfant Plan. The plaza is frequently used for festivals and special events. A time capsule, which contains the slain Civil Rights leader's robe, Bible, and other memorabilia, is buried here and is scheduled to be opened January 15, 2088. There is also a monument to Kasimir Pulaski, a Polish nobleman who fought in the American Revolution. It is a companion to Pershing Park, which honors General John Pershing, leader of the U.S. military forces in World War I.

Accessibility:

The site is an open, raised plaza of 2 acres under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service (NPS). Pedestrian access is excellent, and the site receives heavy walking traffic. However, much of the pedestrian traffic comes from local residents, since the site is in a business sector. It is about two blocks from the Federal Triangle and Metro Center Metrorail stations, which provide access to the Blue, Orange, and Red lines. In addition, multiple Metro Bus routes run

close to the site. Street parking in the area is poor, but there are parking garages nearby.

Surrounding Landmarks:

The site lies close to the National Mall and a few blocks from the White House and the Washington Monument, but it does not provide a good view of either one. It is adjacent to the Ronald Reagan Building, the Department of Commerce, and the National Theatre. It is also close to the National Aquarium, the National Museum of American History, and a number of other tourist sites, including the William Tecumseh Sherman Memorial, the Boy Scouts Memorial, and the Old Post Office.

Thematic Relationships:

A site on Pennsylvania Avenue, the Avenue of the Presidents, would bring a national spotlight to the memorial every four years. The location on an axis which extends from the Capitol to the White House (and beyond), and the proximity of the various federal agencies in the Federal Triangle, speak in a general way to Eisenhower's public service.

Reasons for Elimination:

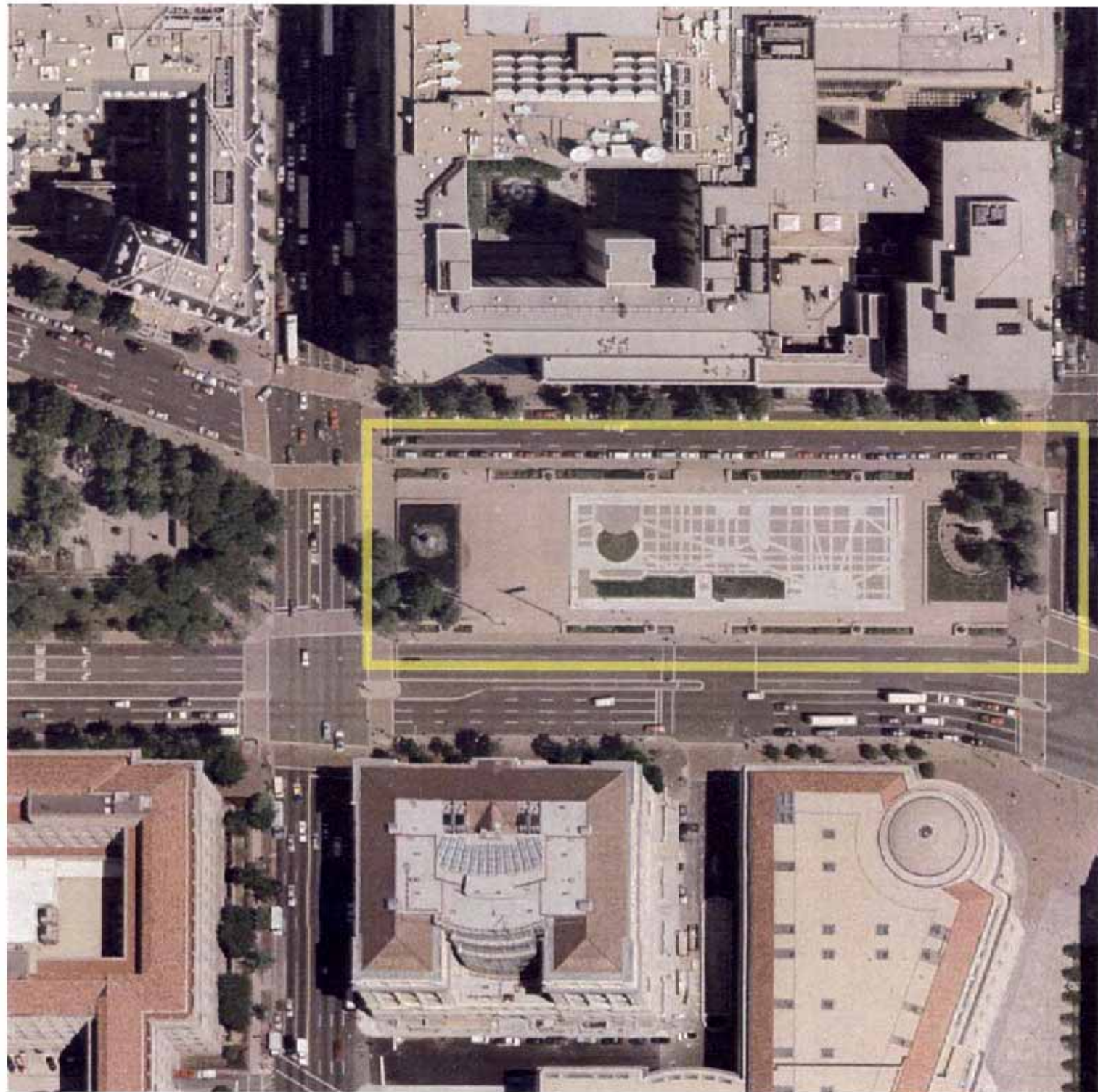
Numerous obstacles and difficulties would have to be overcome to build a memorial on this site. Relocation of the Pulaski Memorial and the time capsule would be necessary, but the most difficult issue would be relocating the many District of Columbia events that are regularly held at Freedom Plaza. The city's use of the plaza is appropriate

since the Mayor's office and other city government offices are housed at the adjacent Wilson Building. Although there is interest in re-designing the plaza, no consensus exists on how to re-design it or what to place in it.

Opportunities for housing living memorial components in this area are good, with commercial and federal lease options available. However, all buildings lie across bustling, heavily traveled city streets that make it difficult to

create a clear connection between the physical and living memorial components. Noisy streets and crowded sidewalks border the site on every side. The lack of quiet, tranquil space, even at the center of the plaza is one of the major drawbacks of the site. It does not enable contemplative reflection in a memorial setting in a manner promoting Eisenhower's legacy.

Site #2
Freedom Plaza
Pennsylvania Ave.
13th & 14th Sts., NW
(not to scale)



Site - Freedom Plaza



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2



3



4



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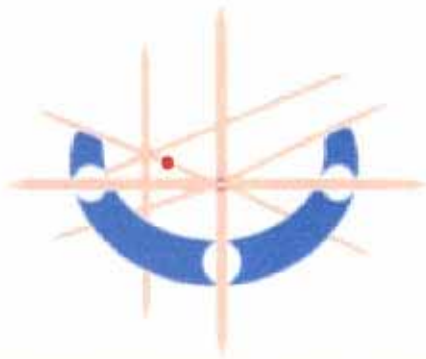
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1. Freedom Plaza, looking east
2. U.S. Capitol, looking east
3. General Pulaski Memorial
4. Freedom Plaza and Pershing Park, looking west
5. Ronald Reagan Building, looking south
6. Wilson Building, looking south

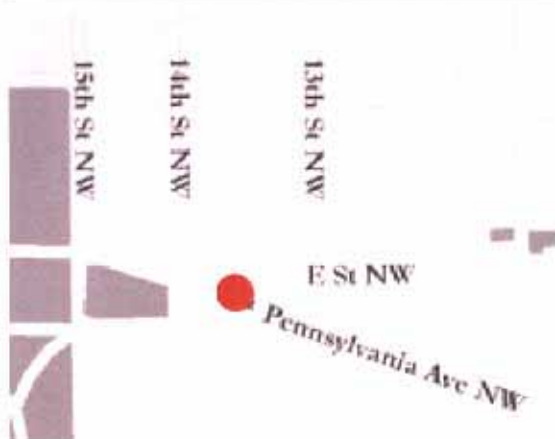
Location:



Framework Context:



Vicinity:



Site Description Summary

Freedom Plaza is located on Pennsylvania Avenue near the White House in the heart of the Downtown Core and Federal Triangle area. The site location is bounded generally by Pennsylvania Avenue, and 13th, 14th, and E Streets, NW. The proposed site, which is long and narrow, is currently developed as a formal plaza. The site has an existing scaled reproduction of the L'Enfant Plan for Washington. In addition, there is a fountain on the western edge of the site, a memorial statue of General Casimir Pulaski in the tree-lined, recessed, northeast corner, and a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day time capsule under the plaza. The site area is less than two acres.

Urban Design Conditions

This site location, along a Monumental Corridor, is a centerpiece of the Urban Design Framework. The site location is within walking distance of both the White House and the Capitol, as well as the National Mall. The site area also offers numerous cultural resources, including the National Theatre, the John Wilson Building (the District's City Hall), the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, and the Old Post Office. The site location offers a direct axial view down Pennsylvania Avenue (a Special Street) to the Capitol. The site location has been designated a Special Place and was highlighted as an urban square in both the L'Enfant and the McMillan Plans.

Economic Conditions

The Freedom Plaza site is in an active business district that also draws a substantial number of tourists, due to the nearby retail activities, theaters, and hotels. Much of the area is already economically mature. A memorial would likely rely on existing visitor patterns and spending behaviors in the area and not generate economic impacts independent of its neighbors. Greater street-level retail opportunities do exist in the area, but the site's strongest economic potential is likely as a mixed-use redevelopment with commemorative and commercial activities integrated on-site. The Navy Memorial mixed-use development could serve as a model for economic planning at the Freedom Plaza site.

Transportation Conditions

This site has an excellent supporting transportation system. The closest Metrorail station is Metro Center (less than 1,000 feet), through which the Red, Blue and Orange lines can be accessed. The Federal Triangle Metrorail Station (approximately 1,000 feet from the site) and the McPherson Square Metrorail Station (approximately 2,000 feet from the site) both provide access to the Blue and Orange lines. There is also excellent vehicular access to this site complemented by numerous public parking garages and on-street parking opportunities. The Circulator might be routed near the plaza if demand dictates. Metrobus access is excellent.

Environmental Conditions

Due to the open, urban character of this location, there are few natural resources associated with the site. The hard-scaped plaza does not offer soil, water resources, or habitat for animal species. However, a few trees and planting beds line the northeastern edge of the plaza by the Pulaski statue. Although the site receives impacts from traffic along Pennsylvania Avenue, the site does not suffer from adverse air quality.

Commemorative Opportunity:

Jurisdiction: Federal – National Park Service

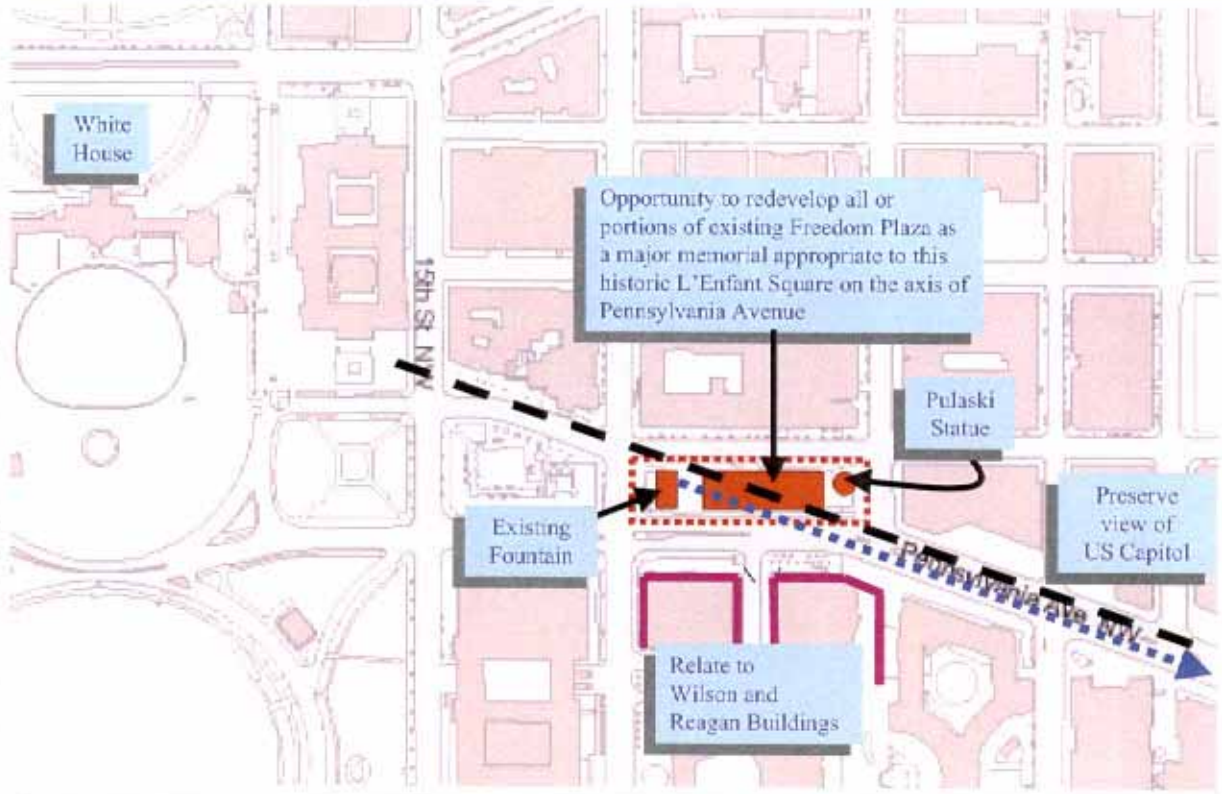
Opportunities exist to redevelop either portions of the plaza or the entire plaza in conjunction with a new primary memorial and/or potential associated memorials. Developing this site location as a destination-type memorial could enhance the axial relationship between the White House and the U.S. Capitol, provide space for commemorative events, and cater to the nearby tourist market. Ultimately, development could transform the site into an important gateway to the Downtown area. A memorial at this location would be able to accommodate a large volume of visitors because of the public transportation capacity of the three nearby Metrorail stations, numerous parking opportunities, and good regional roadway access.

Since the site is generally level, future memorial construction would not require major sitework other than removal of the existing plaza and lowering it to sidewalk level or below. However, developing the site for a higher use may require slight upgrades to utilities, especially lighting. The design principles of the L'Enfant Plan should be enhanced through the appropriate placement and design of a memorial at this location. The memorial should be oriented toward pedestrians and, if related in theme to nearby activities, could encourage additional activity.



The view shown above is looking east along the axis of Freedom Plaza. Although the site location has fulfilled historic design plans by being an urban plaza, this plaza has not achieved the vibrancy of public use that the early city planners envisioned.

Design Considerations:



1. Any future memorial should respect and relate to its location on Pennsylvania Avenue, and include a significant feature at this location. The original design concept for the plaza included two major pylons and sculpture representing the U.S. Capitol and the White House.

2. The opportunity exists to redevelop either portions of the plaza or the entire plaza in conjunction with a new memorial. The site could consist of a primary memorial, with associated and smaller memorials. Any future memorial should incorporate existing reciprocal vistas along Pennsylvania Avenue. The mass and scale should not change the primary axial relationships along Pennsylvania Avenue, and should not overshadow the importance of the Wilson Building.

3. The location is near the White House Visitors Center and other sites that draw tourists and visitors. A memo-

rial could draw visitors to the plaza and into Downtown through related museums or thematic connections.

4. The design of any future memorial should provide adequate space for commemorative ceremonies and casual gatherings. A memorial at this location could utilize a nearby building for a related museum. Any future memorial should utilize and take advantage of existing infrastructure, including existing street parking and Metrorail and Metrobus access.

5. This site is not appropriate for a building. Amenities such as parking and visitor services, i.e., restrooms, gift shops, and parking, should not be located at this site. Any design should recognize the importance of the Wilson Building as the District of Columbia City Hall.