

September 19, 2003

Testimony before the D.C. Council
The Southwest Waterfront Development Plan – Transportation

I am testifying, on behalf of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, on the Transportation section of the Southwest Waterfront Development Plan. The Transportation Introduction begins with this paragraph:

“The Southwest Development Plan involves a number of actions that will affect transportation and circulation in the Southwest, including the removal of Water Street, the transformation of Maine Avenue into an urban boulevard, the creation of a Civic Park near the intersection of Maine and M Streets, and the significant increase in density that will generate greater demands for parking. In addition to these actions affecting the circulation of cars, the Development Plan includes important enhancements to pedestrian and bicycle routes through the Southwest.”

In addition, the Development Plan proposes a *“Visitor and Transportation Center . . . at the 10th Street Overlook site with a number of ideal characteristics for a multimodal center . . . direct access to I-395 and Maine Avenue . . . (with the capacity) to park 1,200 automobiles (as well as) bus passenger loading and bus parking.”*

With respect to tour buses, the Plan observes that *“The management of tour and charter buses will be a crucial aspect of making the Southwest Waterfront a livable place. . . . The waterfront is too valuable to accommodate bus parking and maneuvering.”*

With respect to bicycle facilities, the Plan states that *“The Southwest Waterfront Plan includes two bicycle routes: a commuter route along Maine Avenue and a recreational route along the waterfront on the promenade. . . . An engineering study must be completed to develop the best scheme for accommodating the bicycle and pedestrian facilities under the Case Bridge.”* The text then suggests four alternatives.

The Development Plan would add *“. . . a significant number of new residential units. . . . It is anticipated that the increased density on the waterfront, and the presence of additional retail, new restaurants and a museum will make the waterfront a more significant destination . . . the Southwest neighborhood has the capacity to accommodate a well managed increase in traffic . . . ”*

It was a flaw of the L’Enfant Plan that it turned the city away from both the Potomac and Anacostia Riverfronts. The Senate Park Commission Plan connected the city to the Potomac River; the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative aims to connect the city to the Anacostia River and, at the Southwest neighborhood, to improve the connection to the Potomac. For this reason the Committee of 100 favors the Southwest Waterfront Development Plan and its Transportation recommendations.

We applaud the concern with improving pedestrian, bicycle and transit circulation, as well as automobile circulation in the Southwest neighborhood. But we have this reservation with the Plan; it is more a statement of development intentions than a Development Plan. We look forward to reviewing a more completely realized plan for the Southwest Waterfront. While it is therefore difficult to comment on the Plan in detail, we will comment on the proposals for Maine Avenue and for the Visitor and Transportation Center.

The removal of Water Street and the transformation of Maine Avenue into an urban boulevard is an excellent idea. Neither Water Street nor Maine Avenue were elements in the L'Enfant Plan; neither appears on the King Map of 1803. Water Street does not appear on a map of the area in 1940; it was probably added as part of the Southwest Urban Renewal project.

Water Street functions as a frontage road to Maine Avenue; today space on that Street is wasted. We applaud the addition of cross walks and increased signalization of Maine Avenue, and the proposal that *"The reconfiguration of*

Maine Avenue will change its character from a suburban-like arterial street that is conducive to high-speed traffic to an urban boulevard where pedestrian traffic, bicycles and motor vehicles can safely coexist."

Uwe Brandes, in charge of the AWI, early in the South Capitol Street project provided a fine list of characteristics of a "Great Urban Boulevard." But we are troubled by the diagram, Figure 7.05, and by a concern for *"greening of the median."* Too much concern for the median can compromise the creation of the Avenue as a "place," in the sense that the French use the word.

We would focus on greening of the edges; specifically, by eliminating Water Street, Maine Avenue could be lined with wide sidewalks framed with double rows of trees.

The proposed Visitor and Transportation Center is also an excellent idea, harder to implement than the transformation of Maine Avenue. The 10th Street Overlook, if use and maintenance are criteria, has been one of I. M. Pei's less successful designs. The Benjamin Banneker Park is generally deserted; I have never seen any water in the large fountain in its center, and the sycamores encircling the Park are dead or dying.

Proposals for the Center include *"Easily accessible parking facilities. . . services for visitors, commuters, and other users such as information and refreshments . . . facilities for parking charter and tour buses . . . comfortable accommodations for bus drivers and communication capabilities drivers' tour groups and drivers will allow drivers to wait for passengers away from congested areas."*

These proposals would be important elements in a Visitor and Transportation Center. Benjamin Banneker Park is an elegant design, and the vehicular and pedestrian connections between the overlook and Maine Avenue (with the Plan disparages) are both elegant and practical. It has been the problem, not with the design but with the fact that there is no activity around the Overlook and, therefore, the Park has not been used or well maintained. We have these recommendations:

- 1) That the basic design of Benjamin Banneker Park, the Overlook and the ramp connections to Maine Avenue be retained; Banneker was an important person in the city's early history.
- 2) That a feasibility study, that is also a preliminary three dimensional design study, be conducted to determine whether the large number of facilities recommended by the Development Plan can be accommodated at this site.

Attached is an axonometric drawing of the Southwest Waterfront, locating Maine Avenue, Water Street and the Benjamin Baneker Park/10th Street Overlook.

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