

ABSTRACT

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The construction and subsequent abandonment of Dupont Underground speaks volumes about our culture and how we choose to treat our resources. The current tension regarding the fate of the site is an opportunity to re-evaluate the possible uses for the structure. This thesis will explore the roles of public space, historic preservation, and civic discourse in the urban environment. Topics of focus include: overcoming barriers to reuse, analyzing abandonment and desire, and questioning existing notions of authenticity.

DUPONT UNDERGROUND

By

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Linda Sunny Fox, who is responsible for my unyielding optimism, and to William Fox, who taught me to never be satisfied.

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01_Overview

The desertion of urban infrastructure is very common in American cities today, but there is a burgeoning movement to reuse these forgotten spaces. The streetcar tunnels below Dupont Circle include 75,000 square feet of space, now a financial burden on the city of Washington D.C., which could easily be an immense asset simply by allowing the space to be occupied. Additionally, the space was conceived of and built for a single, specialized use—as an underground streetcar tunnel and platforms. If it can be proven

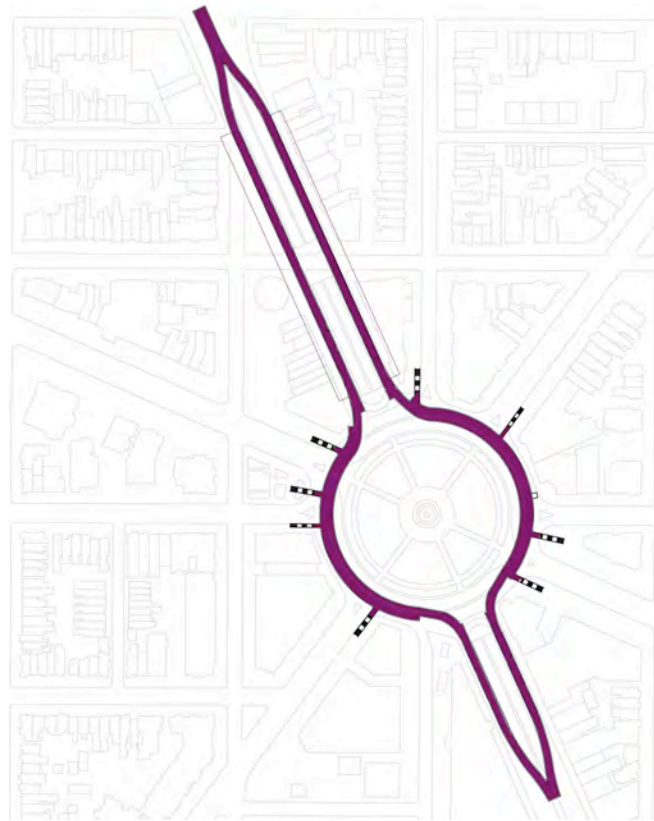


Figure 1 The Dupont Underground with entrances around Dupont Circle

that this space, so hostile to new uses, can be transformed to fit a new program, it could be a powerful case study to make the argument for infrastructural reuse elsewhere. This solution is incredibly complicated by the competing interests in the area, the preservation policies and attitudes, and the bureaucracy of the local and Federal governments. The value of this space is beginning to be recognized locally, and there is growing tension regarding what the space should function as, as well as layers of bureaucracy that limit connections between various local agencies. Creative experimentation to explore new possibilities for space should not be limited by the current regulatory framework. Visions

for the space should think beyond current restrictions to imagine the space's full potential. With my thesis, I am asserting that rules and laws are social constructs which we as a society developed, and as such, we have the power to rewrite them when necessary. We should not allow regulations to limit our vision for a space or prevent us from realizing its incredible potential—if everyone stands to gain something from the “rule breaking,” then the rules are not protecting anyone or anything and should be critically examined for their efficacy. By thinking beyond the limitations in place to imagine what a positive effect this place could have on the area, then it is possible to argue that the current regulatory limitations should be reconsidered, and a framework for connection between these agencies can be established. In this sense, creating political connectivity helps to expand capacity to creatively transform these abandoned spaces into successful urban amenities.

The project also has implications regarding historic preservation and adaptive reuse. Preservation should never be viewed as a limiting factor on the design of a space. It should instead add another layer of design to enrich the space with Historic Value and authenticity. It should not subtract other values from the space in the name of Preservation Value.

The Dupont Underground is not culturally significant in the typical sense—instead its significance lies in its abandonment and its potential for repurposing and transforming the surrounding area. An argument can be made that the desertion of the space says more about the society that created it than the actual function that it held. The underground is inextricably tied, physically and conceptually, to Dupont Circle above it, which is known not only for being a great civic place in the city, but for being a historic and beloved piece of our capital's history. It has thrived as a public space despite its inhospitable nature to pedestrians—it lies in the middle of a traffic circle.

This project has a unique opportunity to reuse an abandoned piece of common historic infrastructure, and reintegrate it to the space it above that it is tied to—Dupont Circle. This thesis will explore the perceived barriers to reuse that the space faces (including policy barriers and perceived financial barriers), and the nature of authenticity regarding a space's history and reconfiguration over time.

02_Prior Planning and Architectural Studies

The *Arts Coalition for the Dupont Underground*, a not-for-profit coalition of architects, artist, designers, businesspeople, and community members, owns exclusive rights to develop the space in the tunnels below the Dupont Circle. The organization has recently announced that it is currently calling for ideas for innovative uses for the historic location.¹ They are also developing schematic designs for how the site may be used and how it may connect to the surface of Dupont Circle.

The Arts Coalition for the Dupont Underground (ACDU) established five objectives for the space:

- “Create a unique, centrally located venue for exhibitions and events.
- Provide a democratic space for community groups, educators, and entrepreneurs.
- Develop an institution that brings wider attention to the District’s arts and design culture.
- Strengthen the social networks that patronize the arts and inform business interests in the city, the region, and across the nation.
- Return a long-abandoned space back to the public realm.”²

These five objectives are admirable aspirations for the valuable subterranean real estate, but the design that the coalition proposes *could* accomplish these objectives on a much larger scale if the design were not limited by current policy boundaries. These

¹ “Dupont Underground.”

² Ibid.

political boundaries are limiting the design to the subterranean realm and do not permit the connection to the already successful parts of Dupont Circle—the park, the businesses, and the metro. The policies that perpetuate these limitations can be re-evaluated, and new methods of collaborative ownership should be evaluated so that the space can be managed by a broader cross section of stakeholders.

MS&R Proposal

As a speculative venture, the MN/MD firm MS&R has developed proposals to reinvigorate the space below Dupont Circle. Their proposal focused on light and access, demonstrating how the existing medians are ideally located to function as light wells, and how above-ground access points within the park could not only provide a functional benefit, but they could improve the park’s aesthetic quality as well. MS&R proposed a series of canopies over the existing entrances into the Dupont Underground to make them more noticeable to the public. As the stairs exist now, they are completely overlooked by passersby, and are not considered entrances (since they have long been

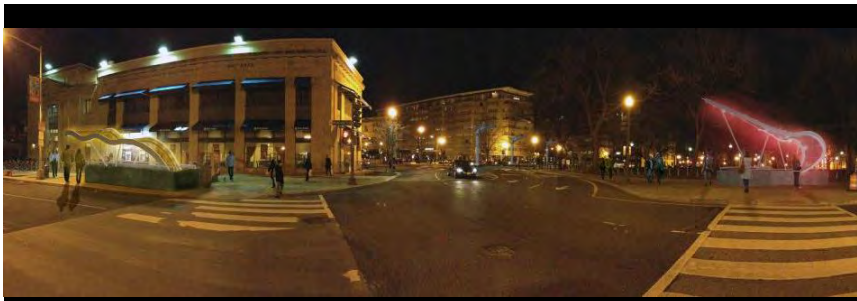


Figure 2 MS&R, *Proposal for new canopies over existing stairwells to the Underground (shown in context)*, image courtesy of Garth Rockcastle, MS&R.

Along Connecticut Avenue, MS&R proposed that the retaining walls that flank the underpass be cut open to allow a direct view into the tunnels on either side of the Avenue.

out of use and closed off). A new addition will be necessary to attract individuals to visit the out-of-view space.

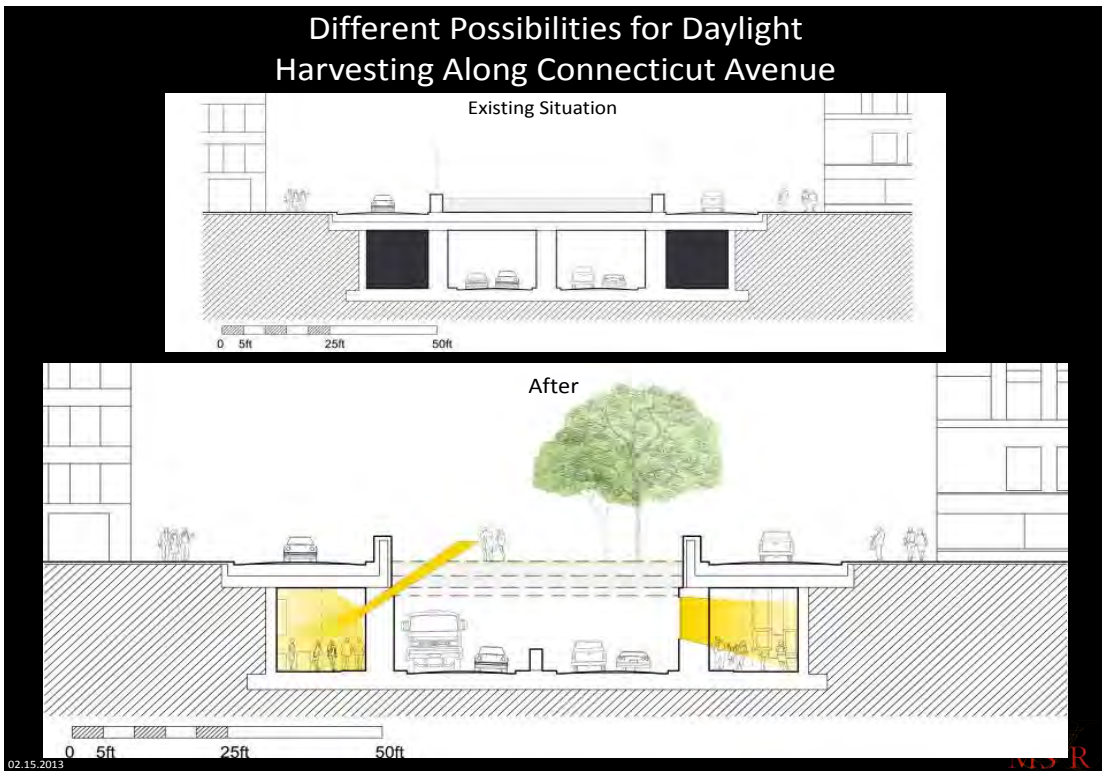


Figure 3 MS&R, *Proposal demonstrating new possible connections to Dupont Underground*, image courtesy of Garth Rockcastle.

Possible programs for the space were also explored, which included combinations of gallery space, performance space, retail, a café, and a bar.

Hunt Laudi Proposal



Figure 4 Hunt Laudi, *Gallery in Platform space of the Dupont Underground*, Washingtonian.com.



Figure 5 Hunt Laudi, *Minimally invasive linear gallery in the tunnels beyond the platform*, Atlantic Cities.

The proposal for the Dupont Underground from Hunt Laudi, one of whose principals (Julian Hunt) runs the Arts Coalition for the Dupont Underground, proposes minimal

changes in the space below ground, but grand moves above ground to give the space more presence. Below ground, Hunt Laudi envisions that the space will remain in its current condition (tectonically) and become a linear gallery throughout the tunnels and the platform.

Hunt Laudi Studio proposed a grand entrance to the underground at the unused triangle



Figure 7 Hunt Laudi Studio, *One of the proposed locations of platform tunnel entrance, West of the circle which proposes demolition of a small brick outbuilding*, PreservationNation.org.



Figure 6 Hunt Laudi Studio, *Second proposed tunnel entrance adjacent to the Dupont metro entrance in an empty triangle park in the purview of the National Park Service*, PreservationNation.org.

park to the West of Dupont Circle. Adjacent to the large Dupont Metro station entrance, they proposed a sloping entrance to the underground that begins at ground level and ramps down to the level of the underground.

03_Site & Context

History of the Dupont Underground

As early as 1909, the *Washington Post* called for a city-wide subway to be constructed. The Capital Transit Company, which managed all the streetcar lines running in Washington D.C., created a 35 million dollar plan to depress and resurface city streets creating tunnels for exclusive streetcar use, but it never materialized. The closest step



that the Capital Transit Company came to an underground streetcar system was in 1942, when the first underground terminal was built at 14th and C streets SW below the Bureau of

Figure 8 The first streetcar to pass through the tunnel at its completion in 1949, photograph, The Atlantic Cities.

Engraving.³ A few years later, on December 14th, 1949, the Connecticut Avenue Subway tunnel, which runs underneath Dupont Circle, opened.⁴

³ Flanagan, "Thirtieth Annual Report of the Public Utilities Commission of the District of Columbia."

⁴ Schrag, *The Great Society Subway: A History of the Washington Metro*.

The Dupont Circle streetcar tunnel and stations sought to relieve heavy traffic congestion in the circle. This congestion was caused in part by the increasing presence of cars on the road, and in part by the fact that streetcars only operated on the West side of the circle, which had tracks running in both directions, instead of moving all the way around the circle with the flow of the rest of traffic. The streetcar tunnels, which were constructed between 1947 and 1949, were built in conjunction with an automobile underpass to also help relieve the notorious traffic.⁵

The tracks traveled North-South along Connecticut Avenue and entered the underground tunnel at O street NW and R street NW. Each train completed a half circle underground (directly under the streets above) before exiting on the other side of the circle. The station platform under ground was also semi-circular and had four entrances on each side (at the four streets that intersect at Dupont Circle), which ensured that passengers did not have to cross the circle after exiting the station.⁶

The streetcar tunnels were only in use between 1949 and 1962. In the early 1960's, Capital Transit was sold to O. Roy Chalk with a stipulation—he had to replace the entire streetcar system with busses by 1963. Though he tried to challenge the mandate and keep the streetcars, he was unsuccessful. On January 28th, 1962, the streetcar system closed permanently. The Dupont Circle Station and its underground tunnels were closed along with it.⁷

The streetcar tunnel entrances on Connecticut Avenue were filled with concrete and paved over in 1964. The eight pedestrian entrances to the station platforms were barred

⁵ Padua, "What's Up with the Dupont Underground?".

⁶ Cohen, "Washington D.C. Railroad History."

⁷ Schrag, *The Great Society Subway: A History of the Washington Metro*.

or bricked closed. The space was designated as a bomb shelter, but remained empty and untouched from its original condition until the 1990s. There has been only one intervention on the space between the time it was abandoned and today—a particularly unsuccessful underground food court called “Dupont Down Under.” The developer of the food court renovated the entire west side of the subway station and the four entrances of that half of the underground platforms.⁸ The fast food court barely lasted a year before it was closed down by the city. As one columnist for the Washington Post explained,

“In the annals of bad ideas, the transformation of the abandoned old trolley station beneath Dupont Circle into a fast-food court back in 1995 was a championship Washington entry. The notion was that downtown workers might feel a deep need to leave the park and the surrounding blocks of eateries and shops to get their lunch instead in a dark tunnel.”⁹ Today the space sits vacant, waiting for a better idea to bring it back to life.

The city of Washington D.C. is currently buzzing about possible uses for the 75,000 square feet of space below Dupont Circle.¹⁰ In light of the new development being proposed, it is important to assess the cultural and historical value that this site may contribute to the larger story of the city. By documenting the existing spaces and analyzing them for meaning within the social context of mid-century Washington D.C., we can determine the extent to which these parts of the site should be preserved by the incoming proposals for development.

There is little information or photographic evidence of the below-grade stations during the time of its use, but that may be due to the fact that the streetcar tunnels were only in use for 13 years. It is difficult to understand why a fully functioning system with an

⁸ Cohen, “Washington D.C. Railroad History.”

⁹ Fisher, “Dupont Underground, This Time With Art, Not Burgers - Raw Fisher.”

¹⁰ “D.C. Art Activists See Old Trolley Station as Buried Treasure.”

incredible amount of already-in-place expensive infrastructure would be abandoned for busses, but the story has incredible consequences for public transit and private enterprise. The highway lobby was one of the most powerful political groups in Washington during the 1950s. It is often cited that large automobile companies, rubber companies, and construction fields that comprised this lobby were responsible for the demise of the streetcar in many American cities, including in our nation's capital.¹¹ This bit of history is important to understand and fully recognize the implications of the end of streetcar systems across the United States, including those that served the stations at Dupont Circle. It can be posited that the dismantling of the streetcar rail systems actually caused the mid-century decline of public transit in United States cities.¹² In this sense, the Dupont Circle streetcar stations are relics of an important social sea change that took place nationally during the middle of the 20th century. It is true that the streetcars were replaced with busses, and in that sense public transit had not actually decreased, just changed modes. However, the public had no say in the matter.¹³ The abandonment of public infrastructure marks an important social change—it is the manifestation of increased individualism and self-sufficiency and the abandonment of the existing public, populist resources. In this way, the desertion of the streetcar tunnels below Dupont Circle actually says more about the society that abandoned them than the creation of the tunnels themselves. It is important to recognize the tunnels for what they were—a short-term solution to a larger problem (traffic congestion and transportation), rather than glorifying them as a relic of Washington's common history.

¹¹ New Day Films, "Taken for a Ride (Full Length Documentary)."

¹² Snell, "Statement of Bradford C. Snell Before the United States Senate Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly."

¹³ New Day Films, "Taken for a Ride (Full Length Documentary)."

Entrances

There are four entrances to each of the two platforms at Dupont Circle (see figure 10). All of the entrances, above ground and below ground, are modest in scale and architecturally insignificant. From street level, these entrances (which are still in existence) look very similar to typical New York City subway entrances, and are quite the opposite of the grandiose scale of the escalator entrances of the current D.C. Metro system. Figure 11 shows one of the entrances during the time of its use, camouflaged by hedges and demarcated with two simple light

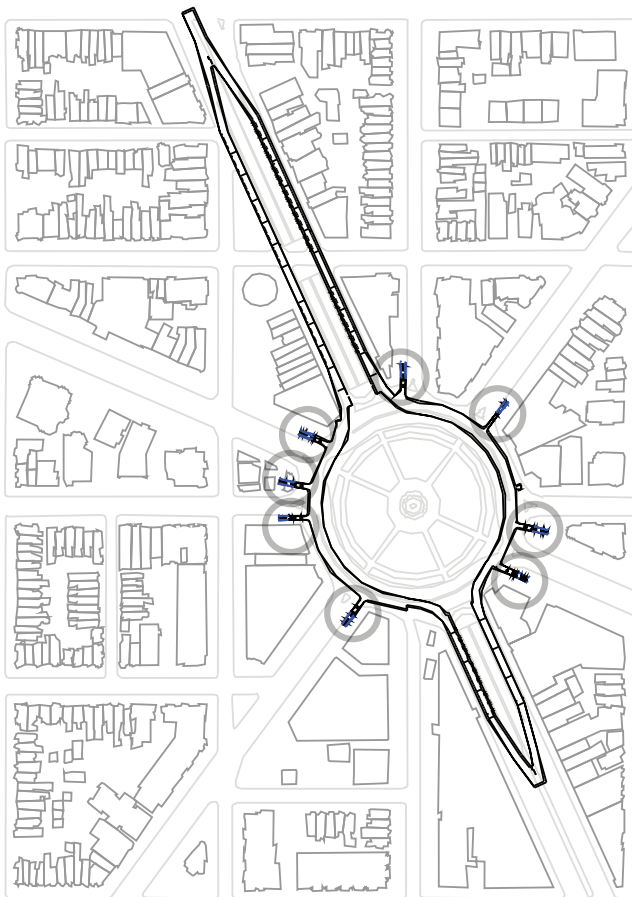


Figure 9 Entrances to the underground around Dupont Circle



Figure 10 Reservation No. 59, Looking West with Entrance to Underground Streetcar Platform in Foreground, 5x7

photograph, Library of Congress.

posts. There is no signage that rises above the height of the entrance, which barely grazes above the top of the waist-height hedge. This entrance is typical, and the other entrances follow the same pattern.

These entrances look almost identical today, except that metal panels laid horizontally over the opening prevent access from ground level. The next image, taken from a Google street view, shows an entrance as it appears today. Unremarkable in scale and barely protruding above the street surface, these entrances are rarely noticed by passers-by today, and surprisingly few know what they were used for. Several individuals I asked (who were unaware of the streetcar stations below) mistakenly thought that the metal covered stairs housed utilities from the metro station. Easily

Figure 11 Secured entrance as it appears today, Google street view.

overlooked, these entrances have little impact on the pedestrian's experience of the city.

Below ground, the entrances are similarly utilitarian and small in scale. The concrete stairs lead below ground and the walls on either side of the corridor flare open with a



sweeping curve to meet the platform walls. The wall surfaces are covered in square glazed porcelain tiles with a strip of two blue tiles where the wall meets the ground plane. These entrances remain in tact, and the tiled walls seem to be in good condition. Overhead, utilitarian square fixtures light the space. Some of the entrances have been bricked closed, but because of the disparate use of materials, it is obvious which parts are not original to the entrance.



Figure 12 Eric Purcell, *P Street Station*, digital photograph, Flickr.

The aesthetic choices in the platforms are relatively austere, but the splash of blue tiles at the floor, curved walls of the entrances, and metal lettering above the doorways show the character of the space, and are very well preserved. These are

the spaces that individuals interacted with on a daily basis and contributed to the everyday experience of living in Washington D.C. during the mid-century period. It should be questioned, though, whether the materiality of the place is important to keep when deciding a new fate for the underground space. I believe that taking too literal of an approach to the preservation of this space would be a mistake, as we can see by studying the interventions made during the construction of the underground food court,

Dupont Down Under.



Figure 13 Eric Purcell, *Abandoned remnants of "Dupont Down Under" food court*, digital photograph, Urban Ghosts Media.

Tunnels

The tunnels that the streetcars used to pass through below the circle remain untouched since the closing of the tunnel. The space is long, unadorned, and never intended for human foot traffic. In that sense, it is completely utilitarian, but it still has some interesting architectural features.

This photograph was taken at the Southern most end, where the two tunnels come back together and where the tunnel entrances were filled with concrete after the streetcars were shut down. The image was taken in 2011, but because the tunnels had not been altered between 1964 and 2011 we can assume that construction types and finishes have not changed since the time of use. The walls and ceiling of the space undulate, alternating concave segments and flat segments (see figure 14). This creates an interesting series of barrel vaults on the ceiling plane. It is clear, however, that this was not done for aesthetics, but rather structural purposes. The designers did not intend for



Figure 14 Eric Purcell, *End of the Line*, digital photograph, Flickr.

these undulating walls to be seen up close by pedestrians. These concave segments are actually due to the shape of the cast-in-place concrete forms that were used to structure the walls and ceiling.

The tracks are still in tact within the concrete floor and could be cleaned and left in place. But this brings forward the question: Should they be preserved? It should be questioned whether leaving the physical remains of a place is necessary to preserve its memory, especially when those physical elements are not what individuals interacted or identified with. The streetcar tunnels evoke ideas about the history of public transit and shared infrastructural resources, but their physical form doesn't really contribute to this memory. Though interesting architecturally, and tangentially comparable to important contemporary transit systems, the tunnels themselves were created entirely

economically and without intention for human contact. I argue that the tunnels have enough memory of place simply by being understood as tunnels, and do not require the preservation of the physical condition of the walls, ceiling, and floor.

History of Dupont Circle Park and Neighborhood

Although Dupont Circle is historically preserved, its history is not static. L'Enfant named the park 'Pacific Circle' in his original plan for Washington D.C. and it was not changed to Dupont Circle until 1882 to honor Admiral Samuel S. Dupont. It was originally planted with 850 ornamental trees and exotic flowers, and had gently curving paths much different from the radial ones there today. In 1884, it received its centerpiece—not the grand marble fountain we see today, but a modest bronze statue of Admiral Dupont, commissioned by the wealthy Dupont family. In the next twenty years, grand homes began to develop around its perimeter (much later than Logan circle, which had already

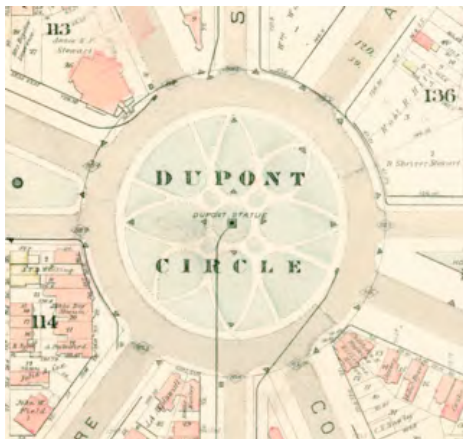


Figure 15 Hopkins Atlas Company, *Map 4, Dupont Circle, Washington D.C., 1887.*

been established as a fashionable residential circle). Dupont Circle became a wealthy neighborhood full of architecture made by real notable *architects*, not just builders.

In 1922, the Duponts had the statue moved out of Washington and commissioned Daniel Chester French to sculpt the giant fountain that now sits in the center of the park.

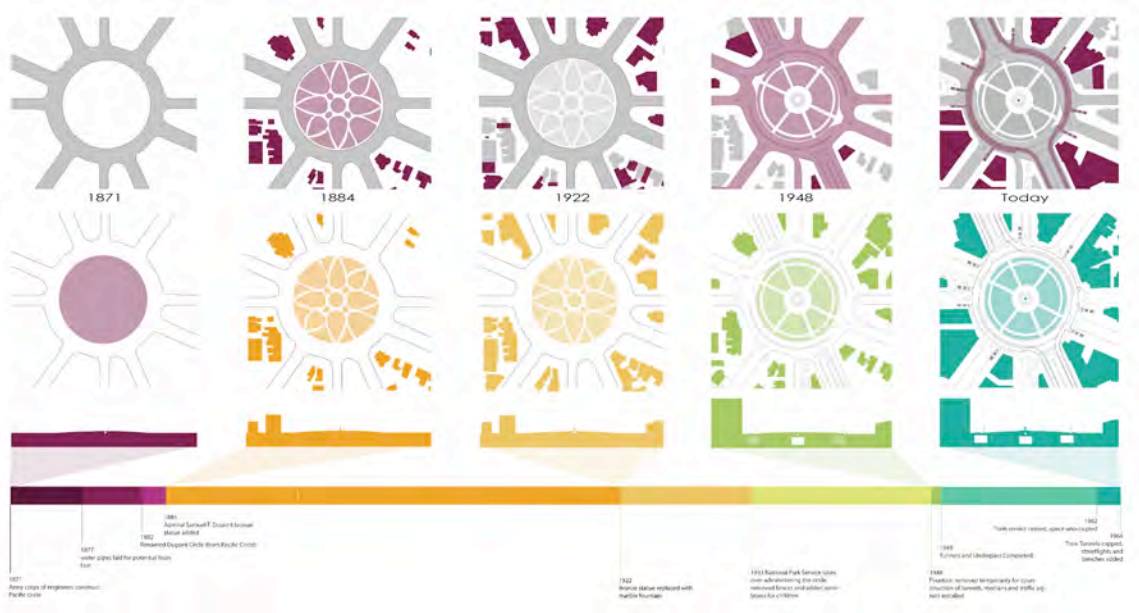


Figure 16 Diagram of the changes in Dupont Circle Park over time from information gathered from Sanborn maps and historic aerials.

Public Space in Washington D.C.: History and Trends



Figure 17 These images from 1963 show the intimate relationship citizens have with their space. Warren K. Leffler, August 28, 1963. Library of Congress, A.P.

Washington D.C. seems to be abundant with public spaces. But with further examination of these “public spaces,” it seems as if D.C. actually lacks in public space, since what it calls its ‘public space’ it treats as symbolic space. The so-called public space is no longer functional as such—the people are inhibited from participating with the space entirely. *In the Reflecting Pool: The March on Washington and the Diminishing Space for Public Protest* tells the story of the history of our relationship with public space using images from the March on Washington over time. Pictures of the past March on Washington events show an intimate connection between the citizens

and the space they occupy.¹⁴



Figure 18 Leonard Freed/Magnum, Images from the 1983 Anniversary of the March on Washington, Washington D.C., 1983.

The pictures from the most recent March on Washington are a startling contrast. The citizens in these photographs are penned in, away from their resources. These spaces have become symbolic spaces, no longer functioning as true public spaces wherein citizens have some agency and connection to. D.C. is starving for true public space that promotes free exchange between individuals, improved connection throughout the city (in a large and small scale) both physically and ideologically.



Figure 19 Paul Richards, Photograph from the most recent anniversary of the March on Washington event, 2013, Associated Free Press, Getty Images.

¹⁴ “In the Reflecting Pool: The March on Washington and the Diminishing Space for Public Protest — BagNews.”

Considerations for Future Proposals

It is important to remember our shared past as a city, but it is also important not to let the past hold us back. As one local D.C. citizen put it,

“Nostalgia can be as limiting and parochial...I worry that too narrow a focus on ‘lost Washington’ will only confirm the overweening tendency of the preservationists to drive out all other species of ideas...Let’s not get rolled by a wave of nostalgia for a relatively short period of urban history.”¹⁵

When we decide what the old streetcar tunnels under Dupont Circle should serve as for our city, we should consider its historical and social memory, but we shouldn’t feel burdened with keeping its physical pieces in tact. Employees at the National Trust for Historic Preservation recently visited the space and believe that putting the space to public use would be a great opportunity for the local preservation field. One National Trust Staffer wrote:

“When Americans (and likely the rest of the world) think about Washington, D.C., they think of tradition, classical architecture, museums, and partisan politics. Cutting-edge preservation, not so much. But converting the abandoned tunnels into a vibrant, useful space would put D.C. in the global spotlight for innovation.”¹⁶

Another National Trust employee has a similar opinion:

“I hope the tunnels once again connect the city in a thoughtful, purposeful way—not with trolley tracks as of yore, but with smart planning and people-friendly design. Watching this project evolve right in our backyard is a rare delight...”¹⁷

¹⁵ Alpert, “Lost Washington: Streetcars.”

¹⁶ “The Dupont Underground: A Grand Vision for DC’s Abandoned Streetcar Tunnels - PreservationNation.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

The focus should not be on “what was here,” but rather “what does this place mean.”

The streetcar platforms at Dupont Circle were a place where everyday people came together and interacted with one another. Whatever the fate is for the Dupont

Underground, it should preserve that memory by doing something similar for the city today—create a place that persuades individuals to interact with each other and engage in civic life.

04_Historic Preservation

The Role of Preservation

Preservation expands our experience of time in everyday life—it reminds us of our connection to a longer past, and deepens our experience of humanity and culture. It is a tool to help us understand how our civilization has changed over time and how it might continue to change. According to author Jon Lackman,

“When you preserve only one moment in a site’s history, then it is only a single snapshot. Only when you preserve multiple snapshots does preservation become a tool rather than entertainment—it now allows us to see how the site has evolved, and how it might continue to evolve. Furthermore, if it is your environment, you can intervene. You can endeavor not to take previous errors.”¹⁸

Preservation is a tool to allow us to understand ourselves.

Often what we preserve is carefully curated to tell a particular story. Preservation usually takes a fatalist approach, which is to let as little disappear as possible. This leads to a prioritization, or ‘triage’ method of preservation—a rationing of efforts to conserve each important piece of heritage. The preservationist usually privileges certain types of artifacts of heritage—often the most impressive or important pieces of heritage of a particular culture at a given time. However, what is most ‘important’ today isn’t necessarily what will interest people tomorrow. If it’s true that we can’t know what will

¹⁸ “Lazar Kunstmann, Jon Lackman: Preservation without Permission: The Paris Urban eXperiment - The Long Now.”

interest future generations, then everything may deserve to be preserved. Our selection process is arbitrary over the very long term; there is no truly rational way to decide what should be saved, because we don't know what the future will hold.¹⁹ So then, we should attempt to preserve the broadest range of tangible history for posterity to understand us—not just the finest historic construction, but also the vernacular and basic. We should strive to save things that provide material evidence of what life was like. The tunnels are a piece of the 'common' life of an American city, and pieces of this history deserve to be preserved, especially if they have important lessons to teach us. Preservation, however, should never limit the potential of a space, but rather help give the space character and authenticity. Preservation is a tool to help maximize historic value, but it must be weighed with all the other possible values and benefits that a site has to offer, including aesthetic value, recreational value, commercial value, etcetera.



Figure 20 Historic Landmarked Sites in Washington D.C.

Historic Districts

¹⁹ Ibid.

The Dupont Underground is actually within two overlapping historic districts—the Dupont Circle Historic District and the Connecticut Avenue Historic Corridor. Though the space is currently underground, proposals to increase the public’s awareness of the space by projecting upward above ground in some places have met criticism due to the disruption of this “historic view corridor.”²⁰



Figure 2. Historic Landmarked Sites and overlapping historic districts in Dupont Circle

One of the key preservation issues is how the space can connect to the street surface successfully without disrupting the historic view corridor. Additionally, proposals that would intrude upon the land within the Dupont Circle Park have been hailed as impossible to accomplish, due to the disparate agencies who control the various parts—the tunnels below are owned by the Washington D.C. government, but the above ground park is in the purview of the National Park Service.

²⁰ “Landmarks and Districts.”

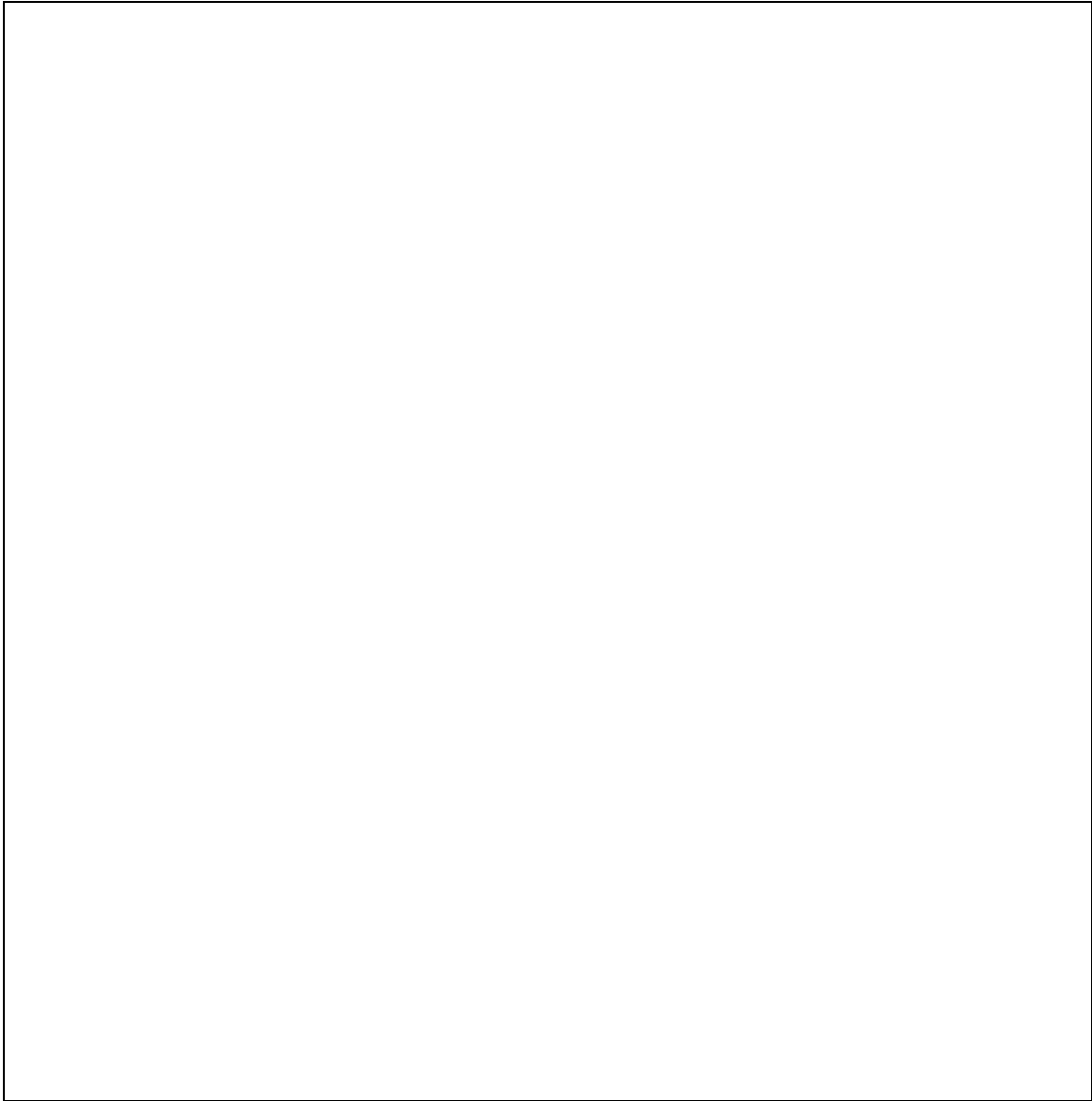


Figure 22 Disparate owners of major Dupont Circle elements

05_Preservation Policy: The National Park Service and D.C. Parks



Figure 23 Andrew Ellicott, revised from Pierre Charles L'Enfant, Thackara & Vallance, Philadelphia 1792, *Plan of the City of Washington*, March 1792, Engraving on paper, Library of Congress.

Many of the urban parks in Washington D.C. are created by the L'Enfant plan, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In his book *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History*, Spiro Kostof mentions a specific kind of monumental urbanism, which he refers to as "The Grand Manner."²¹ The grand avenues

²¹ Kostof, *The City Shaped*.

of Washington D.C. are one of the most important elements of L'Enfant's monumental plan of Washington D.C., but they are not purely for traffic purposes. Kostof argues that the diagonal avenues provide vistas to key buildings and monuments and are thus a crucial part in L'Enfant's plan for the District. The plan creates small triangular parks due to the series of diagonal avenues that cut through the orthogonal street grid. At the time, this was thought of as a beneficial consequence of the diagonal avenues. Creating small green spaces filled a need for locations for monuments of national significance. L'Enfant, and later Ellicott, also placed public circles and squares to serve each neighborhood within the city.²²



Figure 24 NPS owned parkland in Washington D.C.

²² "DC's Odd-Shaped Public Spaces Needn't Be Awkward or Neglected."

Washington D.C. is fortunate to have a much higher percentage of parks per resident than most other cities in the US—19.4% of the city’s acreage is comprised of park lands, partly due to the green spaces created with the L’Enfant plan.²³ However, Washington is a city without autonomy—the federal government shapes many of the policy and planning decisions that effect individuals within the district. This is true even of its civic spaces and parks. In addition to the historic parks like the National Mall and the Tidal Basin, the National Park Service (NPS) also controls hundreds of the triangle parks and traffic circle parks that dot the urban fabric of Washington D.C. In fact, almost 90% of the parkland in the District of Columbia is under the purview of the National Park Service.²⁴ The policy that requires the National Park Service to control small residential parks within the District is outdated, and not effective for either the residents in the district or for the NPS. A new framework of collaboration between the local government of Washington D.C. and the National Park Service should take effect so that the citizens of Washington can contribute to their own residential parks.

The Problems

Home Rule Tension

D.C. citizens are acutely aware of their lack of rights compared to citizens of any of the other 50 states. In an essay entitled *Left with Few Rights: Unequal Democracy and the District of Columbia*, Eli Zigas describes the typical D.C. citizen:

“He lives in a city in which residents pay, as individuals and in their business, \$5.5 billion in federal taxes, the second highest amount per capita in the nation, but have no say in how their money is spent. He and his neighbors serve on

²³ National Capital Planning Commission, *CapitalSpace Report, Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington’s Parks and Open Space*.

²⁴ Ibid.

juries governed by judges confirmed without any consideration of D.C. residents' opinions...In his lived experience as a resident of the nation's capital, full American democracy is rhetoric, not reality."²⁵

This idea of control, and lack of it, pervades Washington D.C. at all levels of public life, including public spaces. The National Park Service controls, manages, and maintains

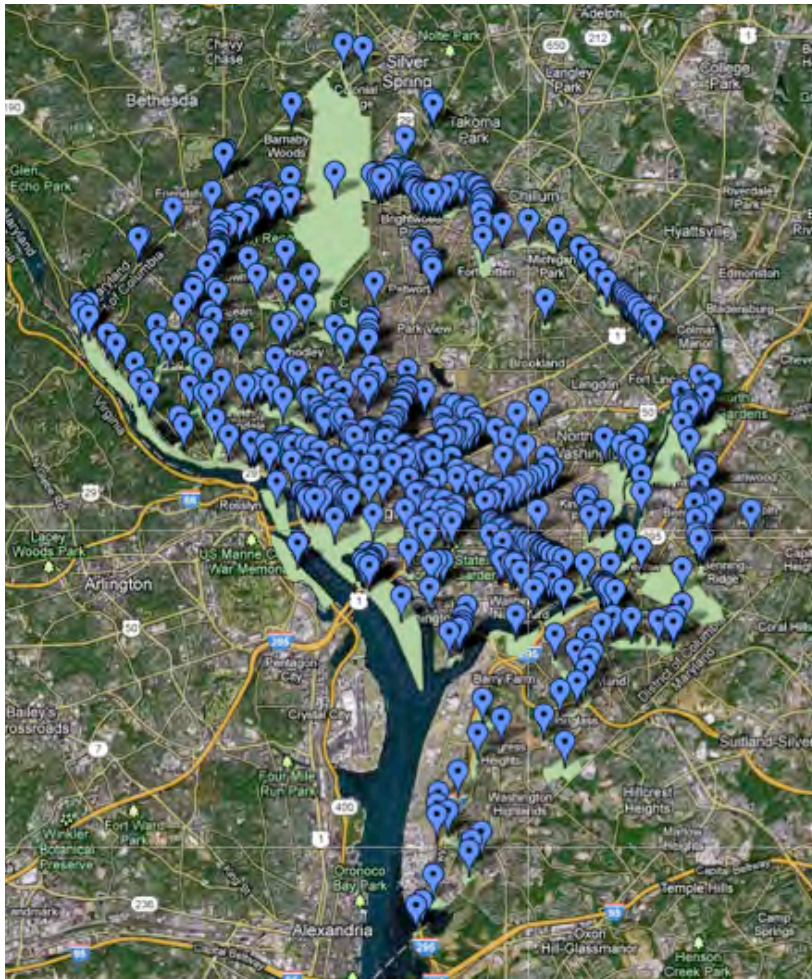


Figure 25 Map of all NPS controlled land in Washington D.C., Google maps.

almost all of the parkland within Washington, D.C., whether or not it is a nationally significant swath of land (such as the National Mall) or a 100 square foot triangle park. The National Park Service owns 6,776 acres within the District, while D.C. Parks and Recreation own 841 acres, only 11% of the total parkland.²⁶ The entire urban fabric of D.C. is

²⁵ Zigas, *Left with Few Rights: Unequal Democracy and the District of Columbia*.

²⁶ National Capital Planning Commission, *CapitalSpace Report, Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space*.

littered with over 500 plots of land under one acre that the citizens and local government have no control over.²⁷

The "Organic Act" of August 25, 1916, states that the National Park Service "shall promote and regulate the use of Federal areas known as national parks, monuments and reservations," so it makes sense that the National Park Service would control spaces like the National Mall and Memorial Parks.²⁸ National Control of the smaller residential parks makes less sense. D.C. residents are asking: Are the miniscule triangle parks, buried along the residential streets of Washington D.C., really of national significance? Why should their control be in the hands of a federal agency rather than the local institutions that serve the people who frequent them?

Limited participation possibilities in neighborhood parks

The National Park Service's control of residential parks is an issue because the residents who use the parks are not permitted to participate in the decisions made regarding the park, even though these decisions affect them. Stephen Coleman is the executive director of *Washington Parks and People*, a local non-profit that leads greening initiatives in many Washington D.C. neighborhoods to help revitalize communities.²⁹ Mr. Coleman has encountered difficulty in working in NPS parks, noting that "the National Park Service has been quite suspicious of community park partnerships. Somewhere along the line, some people decided it reflected poorly on the agency if they needed help from the community, if the federal government couldn't do it

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Organic Act of 1916."

²⁹ "Washington Parks & People."

by itself.”³⁰ He also contends that while the National Park Service has created positive partnerships in other major cities including Boston and San Francisco, the partnership between NPS and the local D.C. government has not been as positive, perhaps because of the lack of congressional representation.³¹ The triangle and traffic circle parks, buried in residential neighborhoods, serve the local residents, not the national constituency of the federal government. There is currently no framework that allows for individuals to affect change in their neighborhood parks. NPS control of public spaces in Washington D.C. limits positive development within these parks because specific regulations limit outside interventions in National Parks. The National Park Service recognizes this as well—in an interview, Peter May, the Associate Regional Director for Lands, Planning, and Design, National Park Service (National Capital Region), stated that the parks’ control is “not a perfect balance” and in fact, NPS is working toward solutions by hiring outside consultants to see how parks could be better managed.³²

Lack of care for parks

The traffic circles, triangles, and squares within Washington D.C. rarely live up to their calling as public amenities. According to the CapitalSpace Plan, “though Washington’s parks and open space are abundant and beloved, the quality and capacity of these spaces has not kept pace with the growing, changing, and sometimes conflicting needs of residents, workers, or millions of annual visitors.”³³ The reality is that at best most of these parks have become abandoned by the public. And, at worst, they have become

³⁰ DePillis, “Why Does the National Park Service Still Control Our Neighborhood Green Spaces? - Housing Complex.”

³¹ Ibid.

³² May, Interview with Peter May, Associate Regional Director - Lands, Planning, and Design, National Park Service - National Capital Region.

³³ National Capital Planning Commission, *CapitalSpace Report, Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington’s Parks and Open Space*.

trash dumps.³⁴ Between the National Park Service and the local government, operational expenditures for parks in Washington, D.C. per resident are higher than any other city in the U.S.³⁵ The spending is likely higher because these parks actually serve many more people beyond those who reside in the district alone, increasing the price per resident exponentially as visitors from across the U.S. make use of these spaces. The federal government does not have the resources to keep up the maintenance for the National Mall, much less these smaller residential parks. To illustrate this, Teresa Chambers, previous Chief of the U.S. Park Police, stated publicly that her 620-member police agency, which oversees federal parkland and national monuments, was underfunded and overstretched. She was subsequently placed on leave and then fired by the Department of the Interior after other officials with the National Park Service maintained that she provided an "open invitation to lawbreakers" by discussing the sensitive issue of budget cuts and safety. She has since been reinstated to her previous position as Chief.³⁶ It is not that the National Park Service specifically neglects these parks, but rather its budget is stretched to the point that incurring more costs for these small, seemingly insignificant parks is not an effective use of their limited funds. There is simply insufficient federal resources to enhance or even maintain the parks appropriately.³⁷

The National Park Service's limited budget does not allow them to visit the smaller triangle parks for maintenance as often as other, more prominent parks. When there is a specific problem brought to their attention, they will visit the smaller triangle parks to

³⁴ DePillis, "Why Does the National Park Service Still Control Our Neighborhood Green Spaces? - Housing Complex."

³⁵ Rogers, *City Park Facts 2010: The Trust for Public Land*.

³⁶ Barker, "Park Police Chief Fired After Dispute, Suspension (washingtonpost.com)."

³⁷ National Capital Planning Commission, *CapitalSpace Report, Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space*.

solve it, but small parks rarely have the information posted or even listed online about who is responsible for maintenance or who to contact if there are problems. When citizens don't know who to contact when there is a problem, those problems cannot be resolved.

Cary Silverman, president of the Mount Vernon Square Neighborhood Association, has tried for many years to improve some of the pocket parks in his neighborhood. He contends that the federal spaces move much more slowly than city parks because of the layers of bureaucracy, and District residents are not able to do anything about it. He even ran against Jack Evans, Ward 2 Councilman, with a "home rule for our parks" platform in 2008.³⁸ Between the limited budget, insurmountable bureaucracy, these parks are not getting the attention they deserve.

Lack of amenities within parks

The National Park Service has more stringent rules than the local government about what can happen on National Parklands, even if it's a tiny residential park. They prohibit campfires (including grills), eliminating the possibility of a neighborhood cookout, and also prohibit any public gathering at the parks without a permit, which, though typical of many city parks in the surrounding area (Prince George's County, Montgomery County, Arlington, and Alexandria to name a few), is not an easy task to accomplish through the National Park Service. A community group called Dupont Festival has begun to organize community events in their neighborhood, specifically at Dupont Circle. When they wanted to host a World Cup viewing at Dupont Circle in the summer of 2010, they encountered open hostility from the National Park service, who flatly denied their permit

³⁸ DePillis, "Why Does the National Park Service Still Control Our Neighborhood Green Spaces? - Housing Complex."

at first, citing a host of reasons why the event would never work. Aaron DeNu, a principal organizer of the event, contends that his experience with NPS was a series of "unprovoked and highly irritating tactics toward citizen groups."³⁹ This group, like many others, has encountered more trouble with subsequent events because of lack of communication and inflexibility on the part of the National Park Service.

Other amenities are also prohibited in National Parks, including vendors. In a recent interview, Peter May explained National Park service regulations prohibit vendors within National Parks unless it can be proven that it is absolutely necessary. In order to prove the need for vendors, it must be determined that visitors cannot obtain the vended items within a reasonable distance from the park. This is difficult to prove in the case of small parks across the district—refreshments and food are always available in such a dense urban environment. May contends that these city parks could really benefit from incorporating small vendors in the larger squares like Franklin Square Park, but because of these regulations, there can be no such amenities in any park that is owned by the National Park Service.⁴⁰

Inappropriate National Park candidates

In 1933, the national parks were transferred to the purview of the National Park Service from an independent agency, when President Herbert Hoover signed the reorganization act of 1933, which streamlined the federal government. At that time, the local government was incredibly limited—D.C. had no budget or authority to take care of

³⁹ Alpert, "Park Service Rules Stifle Neighborhood Events in Dupont."

⁴⁰ May, Interview with Peter May, Associate Regional Director - Lands, Planning, and Design, National Park Service - National Capital Region.

these parcels of land themselves. Only since the Home Rule Act of 1973 have citizens been allowed to vote for its own Mayor and Council.⁴¹ The parks were transferred to the National Park Service because there was simply no better agency to care for them.

In 1997, the L'Enfant plan was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. However, there are only 29 contributing parks listed on the national register form, including Dupont Circle, Logan Circle, Market Square, MacPherson Square, and Franklin Square. The several hundred smaller parks in the district owned by the National Park service are not on the national register, they are only in the purview of NPS because of the 1933 transfer. In fact, most of the parks that NPS owns within the District do not conform to the criteria for National Parks at all.⁴² These criteria include:

- Is it an outstanding example of a particular type of resource?
- Does it possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our Nation's heritage?
- Does it offer superlative opportunities for recreation, for public use and enjoyment, or for scientific study?
- Does it retain a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of the resource?⁴³

Current Policy Efforts to Mitigate the Problem

The CapitalSpace Commission and the CapitalSpace Plan, adopted on April 1, 2010, creates a framework in which the National Capital Planning Commission, the National

⁴¹ Office of the General Counsel, Council of the District of Columbia, *DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA HOME RULE ACT*.

⁴² National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, "Criteria for New National Parks."

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Park Service, and the District of Columbia's local government can collaborate to develop ideas and strategies for the parks' futures together.⁴⁴

The CapitalSpace plan allows the various entities to better communicate to achieve park improvements.⁴⁵ This effort is a positive step to allow citizens to engage and take ownership of their public spaces. It also begins the conversation of what to do with our historic resources by bringing everyone to the table, rather than excluding the individuals whom these parks affect. However, it does not solve all problems. Although the aims of the plan include citizen engagement and collaboration between managing entities, the actual policy falls short of achieving those goals. The plan promotes six 'big ideas,' one of which is to "transform small parks into successful public spaces."⁴⁶ In the January 2012 CapitalSpace Progress Report, none of the parks cited as having improved by this program were in the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, only parks that the city already had control over. Additionally, the CapitalSpace plan has no timeline for implementation, and specifically states that "desired modern uses of these [parks] often conflict with the NPS' service-wide management and preservation methods for traditional parks" and that programming, vending, and other support services can only be achieved through existing NPS legislation and regulations.⁴⁷ Though civic leaders and community members helped to shape the original plan, there is no opportunity for continued involvement by the community.

⁴⁴ National Capital Planning Commission, *CapitalSpace Report, Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space*.

⁴⁵ "CapitalSpace - A Park System for the Nation's Capital."

⁴⁶ National Capital Planning Commission, *CapitalSpace Report, Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space*.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

There is another solution, which is already being implemented. Because the D.C. government is considered a federal entity, the National Park Service can hand over these lands to the local government without congressional intervention and without the need for an environmental impact assessment. There is reciprocity between the two entities, thus the transfer is purely jurisdictional and only requires paperwork to transfer management responsibilities from NPS to the district, which the National Park Service has been doing already on an ad hoc basis.⁴⁸

Proposed Policy Changes

Overall, these parks are treated as spaces that cannot be altered from their original plan, when in reality their historic significance does not lie in the current character of each park, but rather their form within the L'Enfant Plan. As long as the park remains a park and keeps its original boundary, there is no reason to keep them as they are. In fact, it would be a shame to allow their current state to be perpetuated when there are so many residents eager to beautify and take ownership of these small parks, which is the mark of a great community.

The CapitalSpace plan should be updated and amended to include a timeline for implementation and ways in which citizens and citizen groups can be involved. It should present a plan for community input on which parks need attention, and once those parks are chosen, what improvements should be made. Instead of being a cooperative agreement between the National Park Service, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the local government, this should be a document that connects the federal government, the local government, and most of all, the community that it serves

⁴⁸ May, Interview with Peter May, Associate Regional Director - Lands, Planning, and Design, National Park Service - National Capital Region.

currently. Additionally, it should call for the development of a National Park Service office to specifically deal with the requests of D.C. citizens, including maintenance requests and requests for permits.

Creating an agreement between the concerned entities would be one solution, but it also has the potential to even further increase the already debilitating bureaucracy surrounding these parks that prohibit achieving any improvements. The National Park Service should individually analyze all D.C. parks within their portfolio against their criteria for a New National Park. All parks that do not fit their criteria should be transferred to the local government incrementally over a ten-year period.

There would be no loss of historic elements by transferring ownership—when a historically designated structure transfers ownership, the subsequent owner is obligated to adhere to the same requirements of maintenance and care. The same is true for landscapes—if the parks are transferred, the city would be required to maintain the historic character of the parks. If the owner fails to adhere to these regulations, they are subject to the same penalties as anyone who fails to comply with the regulations associated with a historically designated site. Additionally, the NPS can place covenants on the jurisdictional transfer to protect certain elements within the parks that they feel are significant to the character of the parks. A covenant that protects the boundaries of all parks, even the more ‘insignificant’ triangle parks along the diagonal avenues, should be included in all jurisdictional transfers so that the integrity of the L’Enfant plan is not compromised.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

The lack of change over time that these smaller parks have experienced does not equate to preservation. The parks' function is to provide open green spaces along the grand diagonal avenues of the city. As long as they remain open space and their boundaries are not altered, their historic character remains. Altering the parks' internal designs and plantings or allowing them to be more utilized by residents does not compromise the parks' historic character. In fact, I believe that improving these parks only enhances the character of the L'Enfant plan.

Planning for Success

The federal government no longer controls all of the activities in the district. The push for Home Rule has expanded the city's jurisdiction and ability to care for parkland within their control.⁵⁰ There is now an urban forestry program, a District Department of the Environment, and a Department of Parks and Recreation that has been successful at revamping the city parks that it currently has jurisdiction over.⁵¹ The District of Columbia also has a Historic Preservation Office to assist with preservation questions as they arise. All of these agencies have expanded the capacity of the district to care for these parks, and they have more than enough framework in place to assume responsibilities for these new appropriations. Additionally, On April 23rd, 2013, D.C. residents overwhelmingly cast ballots to give the city budget autonomy from Congress. The ability of the local government to allocate funds is a step in the right direction to take care of D.C. parks. Washington D.C. is finally beginning the process of building capacity to maintain their own lands, both financially and organizationally. The department of parks and recreation should develop a budget plan with the help and input of the National Park

⁵⁰ "DC Home Rule."

⁵¹ DePillis, "Why Does the National Park Service Still Control Our Neighborhood Green Spaces? - Housing Complex."

Service to address the costs associated with park maintenance and ensure that the city has the capacity to properly take care of them over time.

A timeline should be implemented to slowly transfer these smaller parcels to the district over time. Strategies for allowing maintenance within the parks to be distributed to organizations beyond the local government should be explored. These include 'friends of the parks' neighborhood organizations, volunteer-based civic organizations (such as the *DC Green Corps* and *Washington Parks and People*) and Business Improvement Districts.

The National Park Service and the District's Department of Parks and Recreation have recently hired a third-party consultant to examine how Franklin Square Park can be better managed. This study explores how the Franklin Square Park Business Improvement District can be used to help maintain the park. These types of consultations should continue with each of the 29 parks that contribute to the L'Enfant plan (including Dupont Circle Park). The results of this study should help the district make decisions on how these parks can be maintained with minimal funds.

A 'friends of the park' program is another method to increase local participation within parks. Garfield Park, Montrose Park, Walter Pierce Park, and Lafayette Park are among the many already in existence. These organizations have an active role in the maintenance of these parks, and are comprised of people who live or work near the park and enjoy it frequently. It is a completely volunteer based program, and it has an enormous impact for the city with no cost to taxpayers. This successful program can be expanded to include many more city parks.

For those spaces that are more neglected or perhaps don't have an active community group to sponsor them, The *DC Green Corps* is another volunteer organization that can play a large role in ensuring that these blighted small spaces are well maintained after they are placed in the care of the District. The Green Corps' mission includes increasing the number of green spaces available for citizen uses, and increasing and improving Governmental relationships. *Washington Parks & People*, a grassroots organization dedicated to reclaiming neglected parkland, has managed over 50,000 volunteers in the Watts Branch stream valley alone, and has planted over 3,000 trees within the District.⁵² I recommend that the local government reach out to these organizations to solicit input and request help with maintenance and improvements.

Local participation in these smaller parks is essential. It will increase the exposure of residents to the historic and cultural resources. Instead of being pushed out, residents will finally be able to take part in the conversation about what makes a place historic. Minimizing the cost to taxpayers while allowing citizens and civic groups to actively participate is a great opportunity for the entire community.

For the 29 parks that are listed as contributing to the L'Enfant plan, including Dupont Circle, the National Park Service should continue to research new methods of management that work better for D.C. residents and visitors alike, just as they have begun to do in Franklin Park. The collaboration framework begun by the CapitalSpace plan is admirable, but provisions for community input will make it a much more usable document that allows for real and continued cooperation on many levels.

⁵² "Washington Parks & People : DC Green Corps."

The smaller parks require a shift in their ownership responsibilities to an agency that is more accessible and cooperative with individual citizens, the local government. This allows those citizens to truly understand what it means to preserve a historic landscape. It also saves the National Park Service money, which allows them to better focus on significant parcels like the National Mall. By allowing participation by local organizations in the care of maintenance of these places, the cost of maintenance to taxpayers is minimized. In short, everyone wins.

06_Site Opportunities

Connections

Currently, the site has an almost overwhelming amount of constraints. The space as it is today has zero connectivity—the pedestrian entrances are barred and the tunnels are concreted over. Despite its current lack of purpose or use, the site has incredible potential to become a connector for the urban fabric of the neighborhood and beyond.

Even within the site itself, connectivity is an issue. In order to pass from the West Platform to the East Platform (on either side of Dupont Circle), one must walk the entire length of the tunnel, reach the end, then enter the adjacent tunnel, and finally walk the length of the tunnel back to the platform. The tunnels wrap around either side of Dupont Circle—they do not pass beneath it at all, so between the East and West tunnels is about 106,500 additional square feet that can be removed to connect the two tunnels, which currently are only connected at the very ends. Excavating even part of this would increase the viability of the space in terms of program and also increase the connectivity between one side of the site and the other. In order to fully connect the two sides of the tunnel, the Connecticut Avenue underpass would have to be lowered further underground.

The tunnel's eight pedestrian entrances are in very good condition—the metal panels that were built into them to keep out the public after the station was closed are shielding very minimally worn, minimally damaged steps. Removal of the panels would cost a negligible amount, and already the problem of access to the site would be solved.

However, these entrances are minimal and already completely ignored by the general public who moves through Dupont Circle on a regular basis. It will be necessary to

increase the exposure of the space to attract visitors. This means an above-ground presence for this underground space. Access for those with disabilities is also necessary, which entails new vertical connections to the park's surface.

The buildings surrounding Dupont Circle provide yet another opportunity for connection. The below-grade space can be connected to the basement levels of retail stores in the immediate vicinity, again increasing connectivity (which increases the probability of the project's success).

The tunnel is also directly above the Dupont Circle Metro Station, currently in the purview of WMATA. This is an opportunity to create a connection between the Dupont Underground, which barely grazes below the earth's surface, and the heavily trafficked metro station, many yards below. By connecting these two underground spaces, visibility and foot traffic can be increased with minimal intrusion above ground. The original as-built drawings show the location of the metro station directly below the circle. The section shown (figure 26), clearly illustrates the depths of the Connecticut Avenue

underpass, the streetcar station, and the Metro.

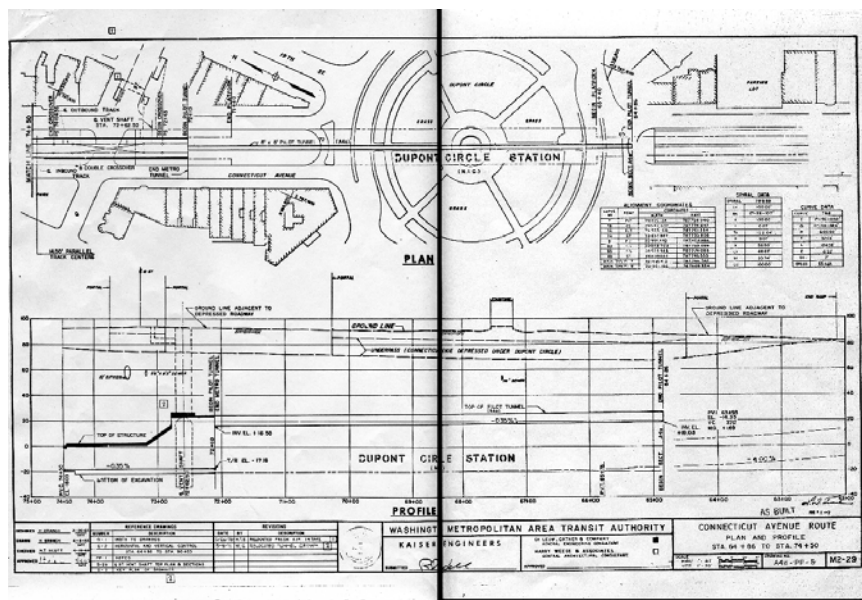


Figure 26 De Leuw Cather & Co. General Engineering Consultant, Harry Weese & Associates, General Architectural Consultant, Drawing M2-29, June 26, 1970.

Washington D.C. is also developing plans for a new streetcar system, which is a spectacular opportunity to re-engage this lost site. The current proposed route does not cross Dupont Circle, but by rerouting the plans by only a few blocks, the tunnels (or at least a single tunnel) could conceivably be used for its original function.⁵³ Additionally, if the space is used as a streetcar station, its connection to the metro would have even greater impacts on the viability of public transportation—it would connect two disparate

systems and allow both to operate more effectively.

The space currently has dismal ventilation—the *Dupont Down Under* food court reportedly failed in part due to its poor ventilation in the summer, which made the space uninhabitable. The owner of *Dupont Down Under* cut holes from the Underground’s tunnels straight through the granite retaining walls that flank the Connecticut Avenue underpass.



Figure 27 Proposed change to D.C.'s streetcar phasing plan shown in dashed lines; this allows the Dupont Underground to be utilized as a streetcar station.

⁵³ “DC Streetcar.”

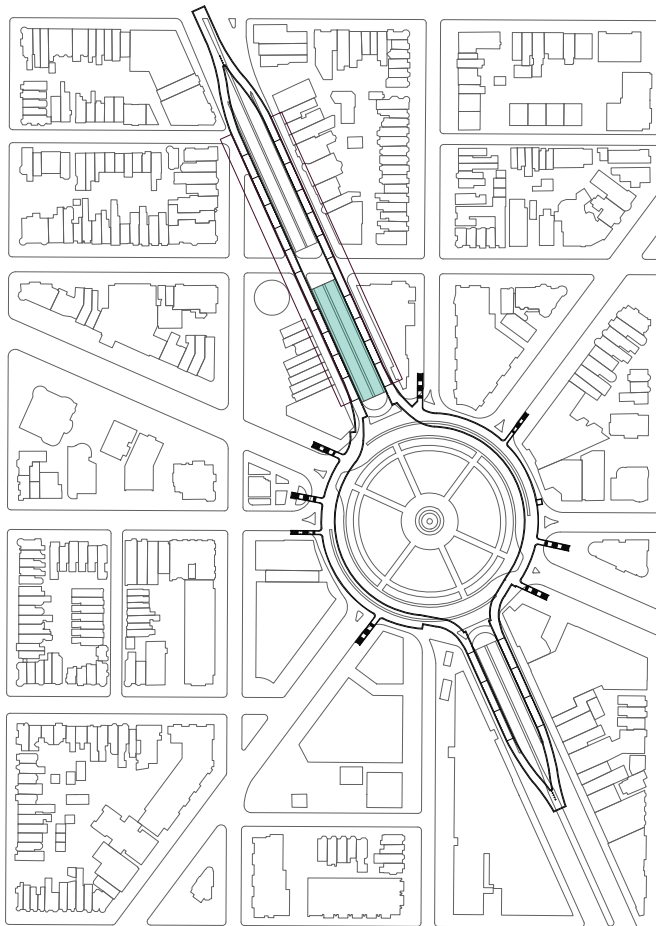


Figure 28 Poorly cut ventilation outlet in the granite wall of the Connecticut Avenue underpass, Google street view.

This was completely ineffective for providing the entire space with adequate ventilation, and because of poor craftsmanship and lack of regard for the stone wall's construction, it is an unsightly incision that is visible above ground and from vehicles travelling through. It will be necessary to increase connection to the surface to allow for fresh air and ventilation without compromising the integrity of the existing features.

Finally, the project provides an opportunity to fix the egregious problem created in the haste to complete this project in the late 1940's—the Connecticut Avenue underpass that extends North from Dupont Circle divides the street unnecessarily. While the ramp was under construction, crews realized that the slope of the ramp would extend past the intersection of Q street NW, so the underground portion had to be extended so that the ramp ended before the next intersection, R street NW. This created a massive gap in Connecticut Avenue that greatly disrupts the connectivity of the neighborhood.⁵⁴

Reconnecting these spaces would allow for better utilized public space, create further



connection, and solve an unintended negative consequence of the original infrastructure's insertion.

Figure 29 Unnecessary disruption in street surface due to underpass opening shown in green

⁵⁴ Hunt, "Metamorphosis."

07_Recognizing Stakeholder Interests

Objectives

The space is much too expansive and valuable to function as a transportation hub alone. The connections to various transportation modes only increases the functionality of the space, but it does not solve the problem of what the space should host.

Dupont Circle is the most comfortable place in the city to rest. It known as a destination for Washingtonians to sit, relax, read a book, and enjoy the weather on pleasant afternoons. The area around Dupont Circle is varied, vibrant and well-used almost 24 hours a day, due to the myriad of different functions it supports—the circle is surrounded by residential apartment buildings and condominiums, office space, retail stores of all kinds, restaurants, and bars. Despite this, the Organization *Project for Public Spaces* believes that Dupont Circle is performing at only 30% of its potential as a great public space. Dupont Circle is featured on its “Hall of Shame,” wherein PPS states:

“The city [Washington D.C.] has undergone a metamorphosis in the past ten years, with many areas gradually becoming more vital. However, there seems to be a limit to this improvement: a rigid adherence to a master plan that keeps many areas from coalescing into real destinations. Dupont Circle needs to be freed from that mold.”⁵⁵

It is my aim to enhance the civic space of Dupont Circle by expanding it to the underground and increasing its connectivity. I would also like to question the adherence to the rigid master plan to entertain ideas about what the site *could be*.

⁵⁵ “Dupont Circle (Hall of Shame) - Hall of Shame | Project for Public Spaces (PPS).”

Program Development

Washington D.C. has incomparable museums and galleries that host art that is nationally and even world-renowned. However, in the past, the district has been less successful at supporting up-and-coming artists than many other cities of its size and stature. The arts scene is just now beginning to grow and develop. In a November 2011 article in the Huffington Post, a columnist asserted that “In the 10 years I've lived here, I don't recall so much arts and culture happening on so many levels outside the usual institutions and a handful of galleries. All of this activity means more opportunities for artists to show their work, and more opportunities for arts lovers and potential arts lovers to discover it.”⁵⁶ The Dupont Underground could utilize an arts component, which can take the form of exhibition space, music, and performance space. The Dupont Underground's massive scale allows for a combination of these, plus additional, revenue-generating programming that would make the space more economically viable for the city and for potential developers (i.e. restaurants, bars, or retail space). In a recent Forbes Magazine article, Dupont Circle gallery owner Jamie Smith explained the arts' market base in Washington D.C.:

“The market here has become increasingly affluent, and also progressively younger in the past decade. The median age is now 34, which is younger than any of the states in the country. It's also one of the most educated markets in the country, so you have an abundance of young, wealthy, educated people living here. Because we have a strong base of young collectors here, D.C. is benefiting from a trend throughout country: museums are now also actively

⁵⁶ Hughes, “D.C. Developing an Arts Identity.”

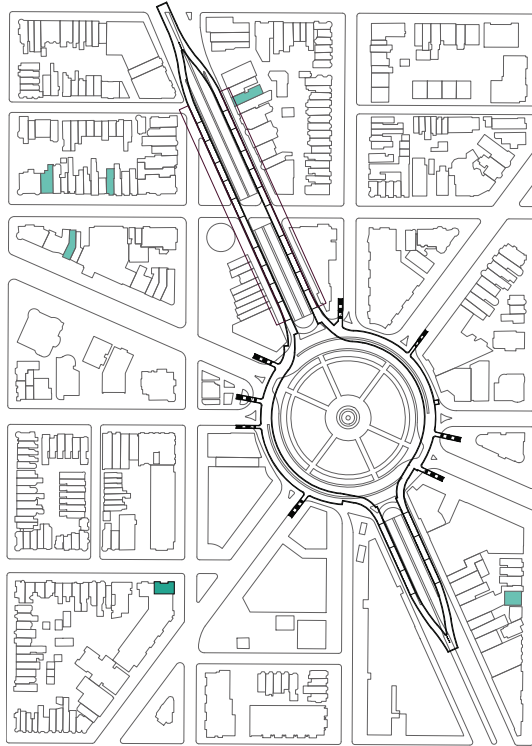


Figure 30 Existing private galleries around Dupont Circle

interested in younger patrons, people who are 35-45, actively collecting, extremely philanthropic and culturally curious.”⁵⁷

The arts are beginning to become a financially viable business venture in Washington D.C.

Allowing the program of the Dupont Underground to support this burgeoning

movement in some way would serve the public even beyond the realm of the

immediate neighborhood. Providing a public venue that supports local artists of all kinds and building less expensive studio space for those artists would have a positive impact on the cultural capacity of Washington.

This program not only provides D.C. with a service that it currently lacks (local arts programming), it could also supplement the character of Dupont Circle. The bar scene in Dupont Circle is very strong, but those bars lack an event space for music and shows. Bars near Dupont Circle regularly host DJs and perhaps smaller bands, but they are not set up to handle larger events. The space under Dupont Circle could provide that necessity. During the day, the space could act as a supplement to the character of the park above—providing an alternative civic space to be enjoyed.

⁵⁷ “How ConnerSmith Gallery Is Turning Washington, D.C. Into Capital of Contemporary Art.”

The businesses in the Dupont Circle area benefit from the invigorated underground because of the increased traffic the space would draw. Individual businesses that line the edge of the underground tunnels can easily connect to the underground space through existing basements with little excavation. This would further improve both the connectivity of the lower level and its activation.

Dupont Circle is known for the abundance of embassies that call it home. The embassies hold large annual events for the community, including Passport D.C. and the Kids Euro Festival.⁵⁸ The embassies are actively looking for a space to host these events, and the civic space at Dupont Circle could fill that void.



Figure 31 The BMW Guggenheim Lab in New York, Architectural Record.

Another important aspect of civic space is that it should be accessible by its users. This includes plans for changes that the space might undergo in the future. The Dupont Underground could host an Urban Lab space, similar to the BMW Guggenheim lab in New

York City, which invited citizens to become involved in planning ideas for their city.⁵⁹ Incorporating an Urban Lab where local residents are encourage to participate in the

⁵⁸ "Kids Euro Festival 2013 « Free Performances, Movies and Workshops from Europe Kids Euro Festival 2013"; "ATW Embassy Tour Map."

⁵⁹ "BMW Guggenheim Lab | Urban Design & Urban Think Tank | BMW Guggenheim Lab."

design and programming of the space would give agency to all stakeholders of the space.

Authenticity in the Urban Environment

The Atlantic Cities published a story earlier this year entitled “Why Is ‘Authenticity’ So Central to Urban Culture?” In it, the author explains how urbanites crave a sense of realness and rootedness amidst the city, which, according to Andrew Potter’s *The Authenticity Hoax*, is “increasingly dominated by the fake.”⁶⁰ The author explains,

“Cases in point can be seen in almost every moderately hip or gentrifying city neighborhood. It is clearly evident in certain parts of Brooklyn. The Brooklyn Flea is in many ways an archetype for the consumption of modern, urban authenticity. The Flea features hundreds of vendors of antique furniture, vintage clothing, and crafts by local artisans. Part of its charm is its curation of things from the past (antiques and vintage clothing) and a hand-crafted and local present. By shopping at its stalls, buying handmade soaps or McClure’s Pickles, we become curators of ourselves...The rarer these bits of realness are, the more we crave them and the more we will search and pay for them. Hand-crafting our consumption gives us a sense of control that is rare in modern urban life.”⁶¹

08_Architectural Opportunities

The adaptive reuse of the Dupont Underground creates opportunities to explore and compare different types of spaces—the light-filled, exterior parkland of the circle and the dramatic and historic space of the underground tunnels. It is not only about developing

⁶⁰ “Why Is ‘Authenticity’ So Central to Urban Culture?”.

⁶¹ Ibid.

two fundamentally different types of civic space, but also the bigger challenge of how to connect them.

The Underground

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard explored the phenomenology of spaces and how inhabitants interact with architecture mentally and emotionally. He explains that when individuals experience a new place, they compare it to every other place they have experienced. When an architect creates a room and an inhabitant experiences it for the first time, “The values of intimacy are so absorbing that the reader has ceased to read your room: he sees his own again. He is already far off, listening to the recollections of...the human being who dominates the corner of his most cherished memories.” When humans encounter a new thing, they understand it by categorizing that thing into their framework of existing ‘understood’ things. This judgment process functions to maximize understanding without overwhelming the brain. Although I understand that every historic brick in a structure was made by hand and has unique characteristics that separate it from every other brick on earth, I see the object as a brick, not as an individual. If we were unable to categorize, the ‘new’ things we see constantly would overwhelm us. This mental cataloging is similar for spaces as it is for objects. We compare new spaces to other spaces we have seen in our own lives and have familiar experience with so that we can further understand the new space.

Bachelard argues that humans react to certain types of spaces according to how those spaces fit into the archetypal unconsciousness. When studying the underground space of the cellar, one has to consider all of the connotations that humanity has placed upon that type of space—almost all with a negative connotation. Bachelard asserts that “In the cellar, darkness prevails both day and night, and even when we are carrying a

lighted candle, was see shadows dancing on the dark walls.”⁶² We fear darkness and death, both of which we associate with subterranean conditions, and so those subterranean conditions incite fear in us. Even today when we try to reconcile our fears by making those subterranean spaces more light-filled and airy, we cannot escape the unconscious association with fear, as Bachelard goes on to explain: “In our civilization, which has the same light everywhere, and puts electricity in its cellars, we no longer go into the cellar carrying a candle. But the unconscious cannot be civilized. It takes a candle when it goes to the cellar.”

It will not be possible to fundamentally change the way humans interact with underground spaces for the Dupont Underground. Instead, I intend to channel the natural fear of the space into more positive associations. Fear and curiosity, human emotions that have had dominant roles in the evolution of our society, are dualities. Thus with fear comes curiosity, which is a positive reaction that encourages individuals to explore and understand new spaces. Fear also can be channeled into excitement and drama. With this in mind, the challenge of having too-little light is also an opportunity—the placement, amount, and direction of the light can be carefully controlled to elicit an emotional response.

In Jun’ichiro Tanizaki’s *In Praise of Shadows*, the author explains the beauty of Japanese construction and space-making. He asserts that much of the beauty of their spaces stems from the shadows that dance within them. He states that the genius of his ancestors lied in choosing which spaces should remain dark. He describes a dark

⁶² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*.

alcove in his home and states that by “cutting off the light from this empty space they imparted to the world of shadows that formed there a quality of mystery and depth superior to that of any wall painting or ornament.”⁶³ If the room were to be lit with bright sunlight or electric lamps, not only would the beauty of the shadows be removed, but the entire space loses its depth and becomes flat and monotonous. In this sense, minimizing the sunlight within the space is actually an opportunity to accentuate depth, mystery, and curiosity.

The Park

There is nothing special or sacred about the Dupont Circle Park’s current design. The long benches that accommodate most of the parks visitors were not installed until 1964, and are not historic in their character or form. There is no reason the current state should be perpetuated. Moreover, because what has become the civic space of Dupont Circle (the park) will be expanded to include the tunnels below, the new park design should treat the underground and the circle above not as separate entities, but dualities—as two sides of the same coin.

⁶³ Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*.

09_Precedent Studies

Doug Aitken's *Song 1* at the Hirschhorn Museum of Art



Figure 32 Doug Aitken, *Song 1*, March 22-May 20 2013, Hirschhorn Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Vogue.

Doug Aitken's *Song 1*, an art installation at the Hirschhorn Museum fundamentally changed the historic cultural landscape of the National Mall. This project, very positively

reviewed by the public, shows how adding new elements to a traditional, historically preserved space, can be respectful of its context and yet transformative in nature.

The artwork, temporal in nature, played only from sundown to midnight, incorporating bright seamless projections, music, and sound. A review in the Washington Post said this:

“The Hirshhorn's building, long derided in Washington for its fortress-like heaviness, has never looked quite so fluid and light. Water rippled on its surface, boats floated by, cars streamed like liquid metal down highways that flashed across the 725-foot facade of architect Gordon Bunshaft's cylindrical museum. All the while, various spectral singers - some crooning for an audience, others affectless and lost in their own solipsistic space - sang an endless loop of different iterations of the classic 1934 pop song 'I Only Have Eyes for You.’”⁶⁴

The projections fundamentally changed the solidity of the building to an entirely ethereal and transcendent non-object. When the projections were lit, the building disappeared into the darkness of the night while the only thing remaining was the moving image. The Washington Post review goes on to say:

“As an urban intervention, it is brilliant, animating one of the city's monumentally grim dead zones: the Independence Avenue corridor just south of the Mall. It makes the march of government office buildings on the south side of the street seem even more forlorn, almost alive in their sadness, like the inhabitants of a badly run zoo looking out at freedom.”⁶⁵

The artwork simultaneously forced the viewer to understand both the original landscape (before the intervention) and how it has been altered (while the projections play). The

⁶⁴ “Song 1.”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

piece projected onto the building not only temporarily changed the character of the national mall, but it drew attention to it and how it has changed.

The same is possible for Dupont Circle—a new addition to the landscape would not hinder the public’s understanding of the historic view corridor, but rather it would make it more clear by providing a new lens with which to see the place. The National Mall, a beloved and historic cultural, was successfully altered to deepen the experiencer’s understanding of the space.

I.M. Pei’s Pyramid at The Louvre

In 1985, French President Mitterand announced the beginning of a spectacular project to be completed at the Louvre. This project, the insertion of a new 650,000 square feet of much-needed support space, was not immediately embraced by the French Public, most of whom feared the change proposed to the beloved palace. Today, however, the Pyramids together with the Louvre are iconic and world-renowned.

Paul Heyer, the president of the New York School of Interior Design and former dean of the Pratt Institute's School of Architecture, critiqued the Louvre in 1993:

“...the almost fluid, dematerialized presence of the pyramid establishes without bombast, a compelling brave concept whose intent is to be neither aggressive nor subservient but to complement through restraint. Through simplicity the new stands with the old, each acknowledging the other.”⁶⁶

In an interview featured on the PBS Series American Masters, I.M. Pei explained his glass pyramid intervention upon the Louvre in Paris, France. He says, “to respect

⁶⁶ Heyer, *American Architecture*.

tradition, you also need to think about the need for change, and the Louvre had to change—there’s no question about it. How to make history live, and at the same time point the way to the future, I don’t know. I’m trying.”⁶⁷ Pei has tried and succeeded—his pyramid at the Louvre certainly accomplishes this task. It not only breathes new life into the austere, meticulously preserved palace, but it also allowed for visitors to see the historic building with a new juxtaposition, making its age and character even more apparent.

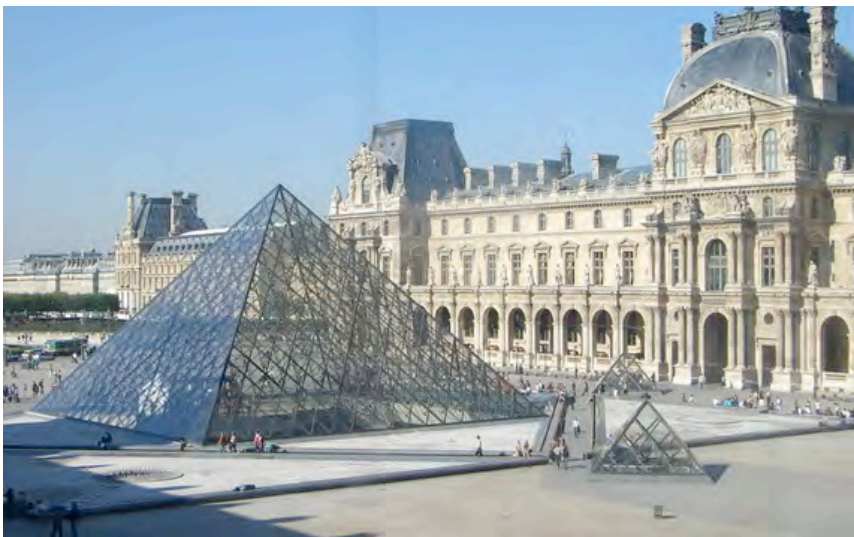


Figure 33 I.M. Pei & Associates, *The Louvre Pyramid*, 1989, Musee de Louvre.fr

Not only does Pei’s pyramid show how a historic landscape can benefit from a contemporary intervention, but Pei touches on another architectural aspect that affect the Dupont

Underground—creating a beautiful connection between the surface and below. The addition of the massive glass pyramid provided light and views to the structure above ground to minimize the sensation of descent. Additionally, the variation in lighting creates drama in the underground space—the area beneath the pyramid is light filled and airy, while immediately adjacent, the ceiling lowers to a significantly shorter height and shields visitors from the light above.

⁶⁷ “I.M. Pei Discusses The Louvre Pyramid | American Masters | PBS Video.”



Figure 34 Jeffrey Hapeman, *I.M. Pei's Louvre Pyramid Interior*, June 26, 2010, digital photograph. Flickr.

The additional program was placed underground so as to not disrupt the historic fabric of the building. The new space permits an entirely new architectural language because it remains visually separate from the original palace, while simultaneously becoming the literal lens through which the visitor sees the historic structure.

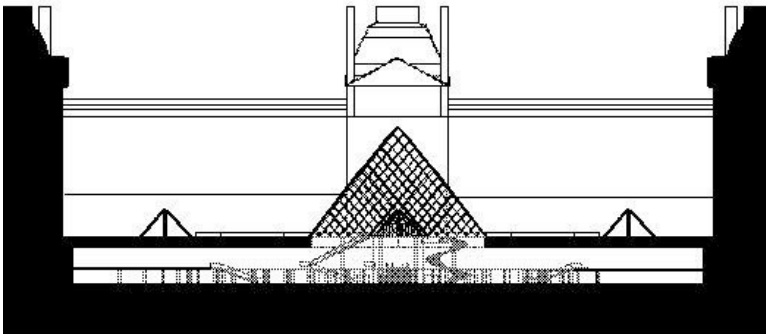


Figure 35 Section across the Louvre Plaza, Paris, France, 1989. Great Buildings Online.

Weiss/Manfredi's Women's Memorial and Education Center

The Women's Memorial and Education center, completed in 2007, is located in the Arlington Cemetery in Virginia.⁶⁸ It was the winning design in a national competition to erect a memorial and education center at the location of the original gateway into the cemetery, designed by McKim Mead and White in completed 1932.⁶⁹ This ceremonial entrance, which had been neglected since its construction, became the focus for Weiss/Manfredi's design—they sought to restore and preserve the original historic context while inserting a new, dynamic space. Their design placed the 33,000 square foot education center below ground, behind McKim Mead and White's retaining wall of the 30's. The Women in Military Service for America describes the design:

“The Memorial's roof is an arc of glass tablets, 250 feet in diameter, inscribed with quotations by and about women who have served in defense of their country. Sunlight passing over these quotes creates changing shadows of the texts on the walls of the gallery below and brings natural light into the interior of the Education Center. The glass tablets illuminate the cemetery hillside at night and during the day, serve as skylights to the interior of the Education Center, which houses the Hall of Honor, exhibits and artifacts of women's military service, a 196-seat theater, a gift shop and the Memorial's computerized Register. Four staircases pass through the hemicycle wall, allowing visitors access to a panoramic view of Washington, DC, from the terrace.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ “Weiss/Manfredi: Women's Memorial and Education Center.”

⁶⁹ “Women In Military Service For America Memorial.”

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Ben Forgey, an architecture critic for the Washington Post, called the project “a perfect gesture in a proper place at a fitting moment,” and the project has been hailed as “an elegant solution to integrating an exciting new purpose with an existing, historic structure.”⁷¹ Not only does this project show that new functions and space can be added seamlessly and respectfully to historic ones, it shows that those interventions do not have to remain even tectonically similar to the original, historic fabric. In fact, Weiss/Manfredi’s design is appropriate because it does not attempt to copy the historic structure, but instead contrasts it with contemporary, modern designs that provide a foil to see the original more clearly. On the interior of the space, the rough concrete buttresses that hold up the historic hemicycle remain unadorned and provide a contrast to the pristine white marble on the opposite wall.

To solve the problem of movement underground, visitors enter at ground level and move to a space that has been carved out from the hillside behind the retaining wall. Four niches on the retaining wall lead to stairs which pass through the underground space behind the retaining wall and lead up to the cemetery above. These stairs also lead to the top of the retaining wall, where visitors are permitted to view the glass roof of the structure up close—quotes memorializing women in service to America are inscribed onto the glass panels, which project onto the floor as the sun moves overhead, moving and marking the passage of time.

⁷¹ Ibid.

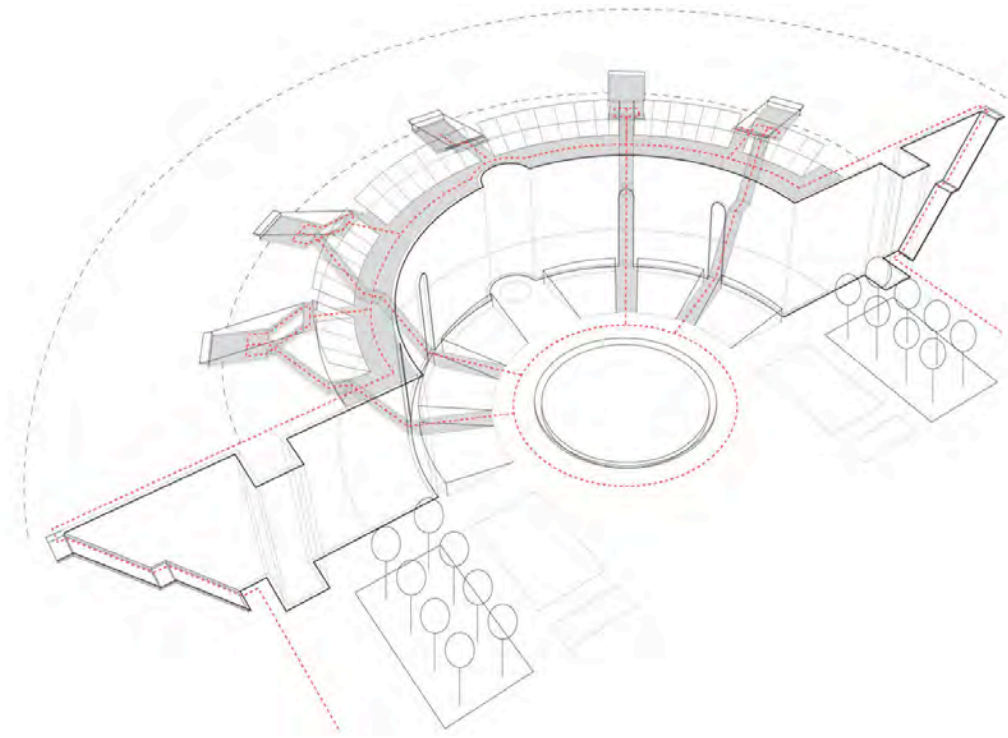


Figure 36 Weiss/Manfredi, Diagram of movement through the Women's Memorial and Education Center, Arlington Virginia, 1997. WeissManfredi.com.



Figure 37 Interior of the underground memorial



Figure 38 View of the skylights into the underground space

Taxonomy of Traffic Circles

As part of my precedent explorations, I looked at traffic circles from around the world and compared their features.

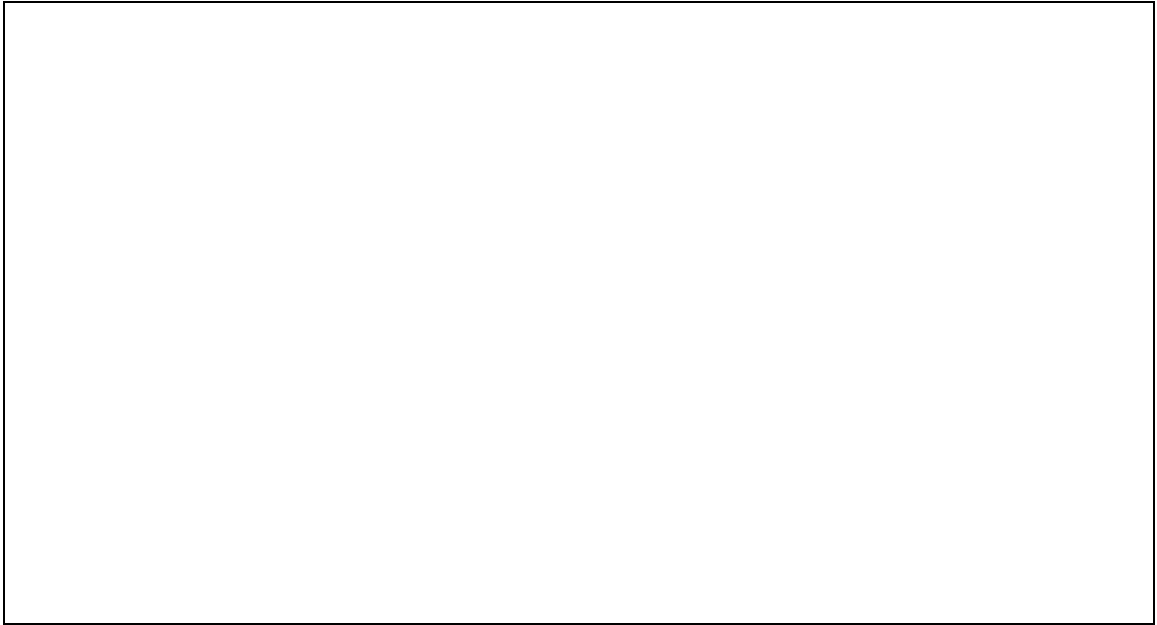


Figure 39 Taxonomy of Traffic Circles (International)

I first ordered them based on their distance from Dupont Circle, then I looked at the scale of the building grain, street grain and types, and pedestrian accessibility. Each of the 20 circles is drawn to the same scale for comparison.

10_Possible Directions for Improvements

Original Options

When understanding the possible programs for Dupont Underground, it was necessary to understand the current uses around the site. After a comprehensive survey of existing uses, I studied the zoning of the vicinity, which is very open in terms of program—the entire area is essentially zoned for mixed-use.

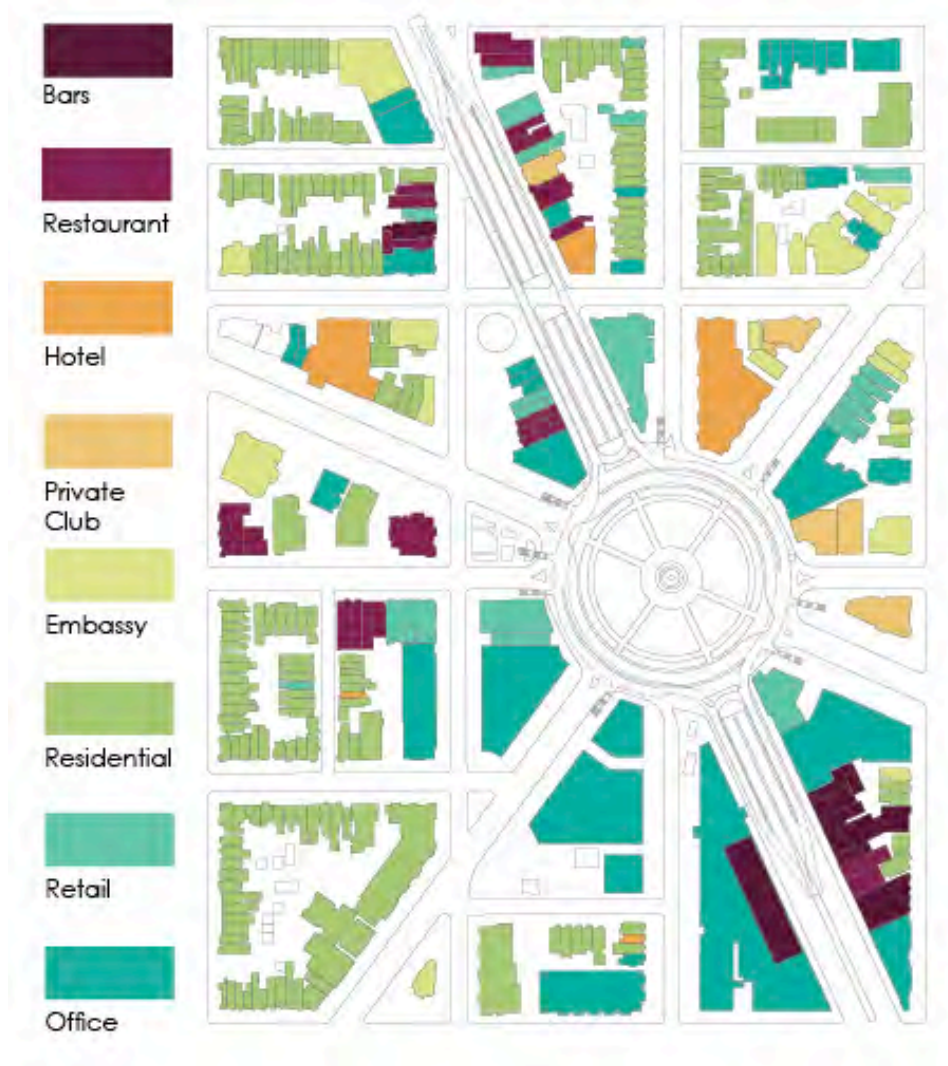
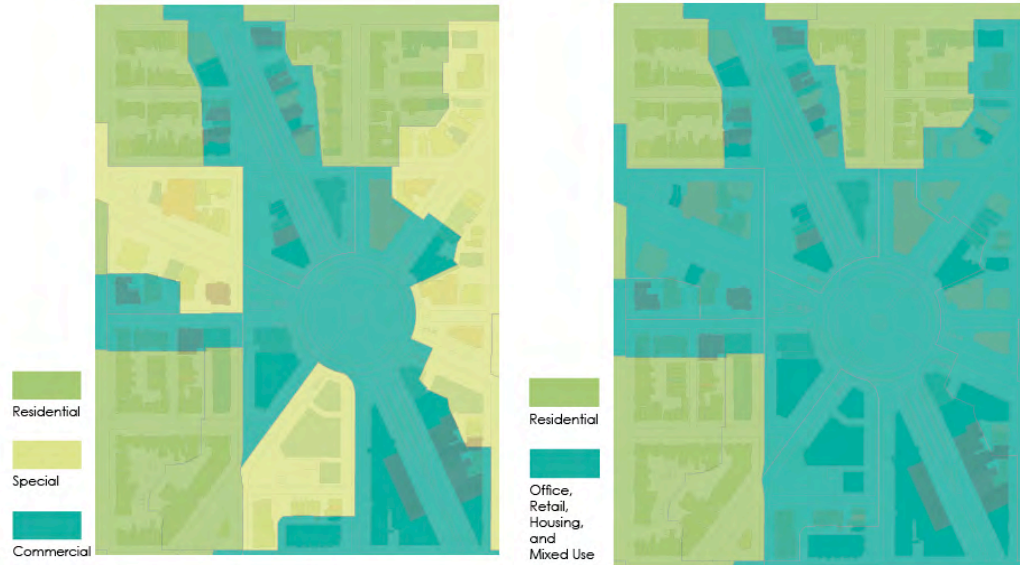


Figure 40 Uses around site



From these diagrams, I designated zones within the underground that corresponds with similar above-ground use.

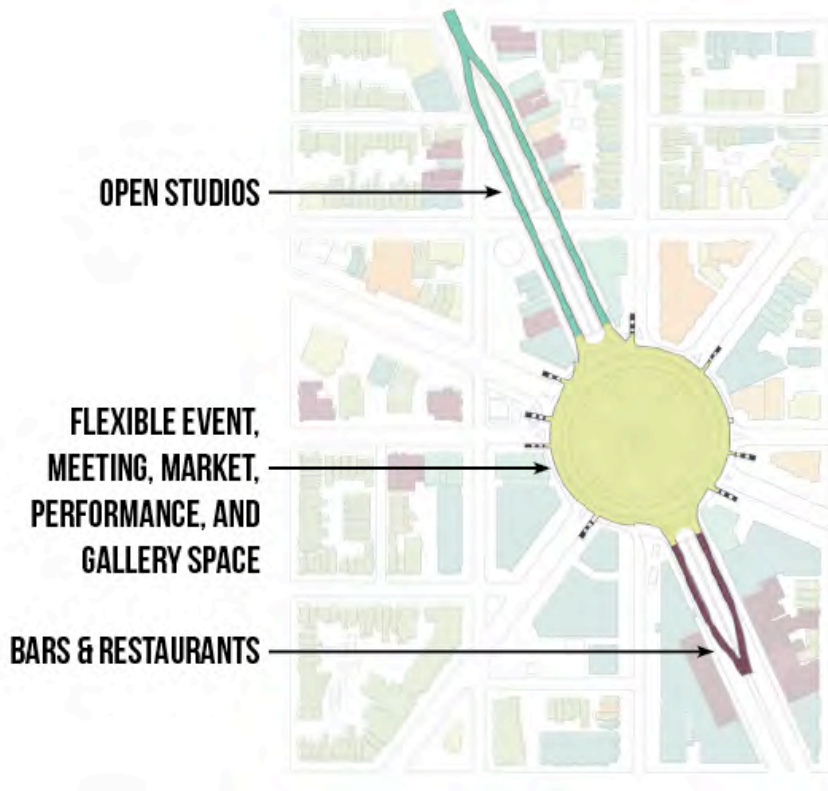


Figure 41 Proposed Programming for the Underground

Based on this information, I developed three strategies that employ various methods of perforation and connectivity to create options with varying degrees of ‘disruption’ to the existing fabric. These three options are entitled *Program Restoration*, which seeks to reinsert the original program back into the site, *Underground Excavation*, which excavates the space below Dupont Circle to create an expansive civic space, and *Surface Integration*, which perforates the surface of the park to make a physical connection between the underground and the street surface.

Program Restoration

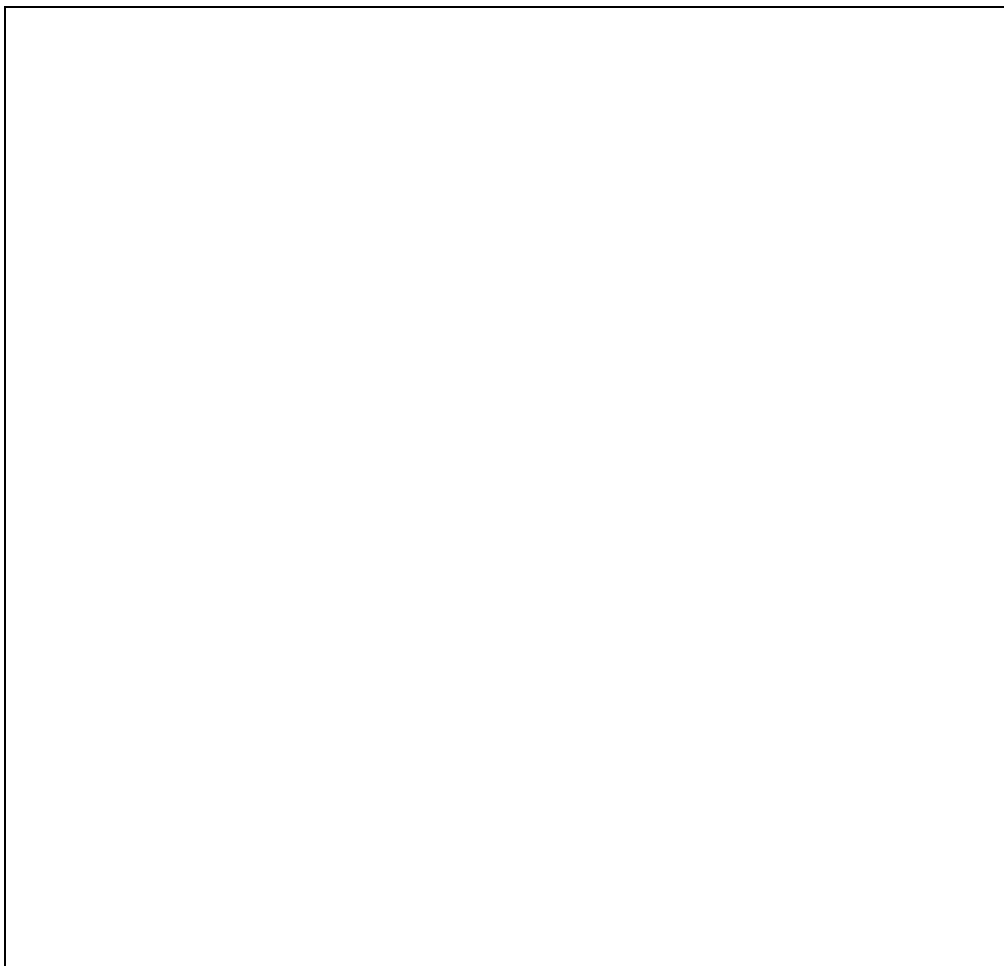


Figure 42 Program Reinsertion Diagram. Red line indicates proposed streetcar line, Blue indicates studios, Green indicates civic center (marketplace), and purple indicates bars and restaurants

The program restoration option is the least intrusive on the tunnel as well as the park and street surfaces. In this scenario, the East tunnel would function as a streetcar tunnel and platform again. The West tunnels would function as art studios in the Northwest portion, bars and restaurants in the Southwest portion, and an open marketplace on the platform. Because of the repurposing of the West tunnels for alternate programs, the streetcar line would be a loop line that passes through the underground from one direction only. This intervention does not require any excavation below the park or street surfaces except the tunnel ends to allow pedestrian access.

Underground Excavation

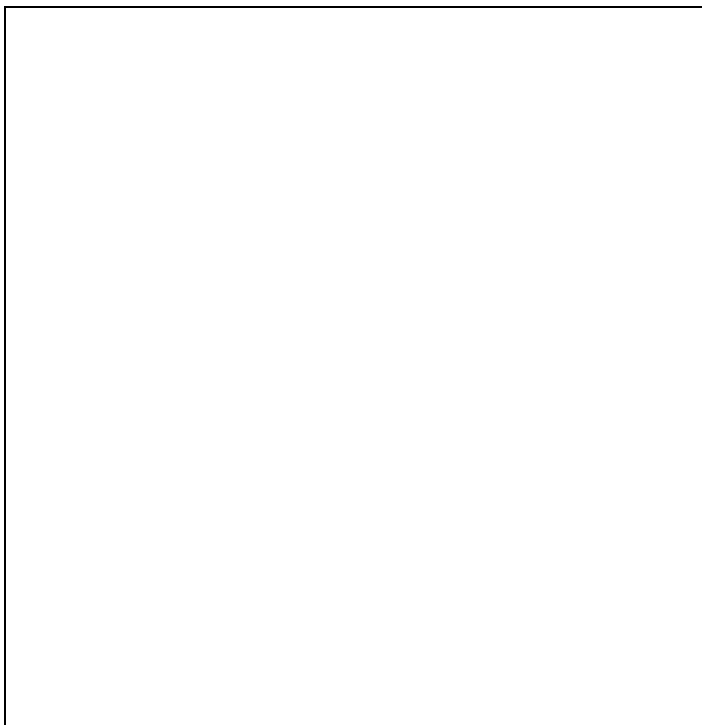


Figure 43 Underground Excavation option for little change to the park above while still allowing the expansion of the civic space. The blue denotes studio space, the green civic (performing and market) space, and the purple represents bar and restaurant space.

This option minimizes disruption to the surface, but creates a substantial subterranean civic center below Dupont Circle. The North tunnels act as studio space with entrances at the triangle park and the end of the tunnel. The South tunnels function as a bar and restaurant space. The biggest change is at the platform locations—the ‘interior’ of the circle formed by the underground platforms would be excavated to create a grand performance space as well as flexible market or gallery space below Dupont Circle. In order to accomplish this, the Connecticut Avenue underpass would be lowered.

Surface Integration

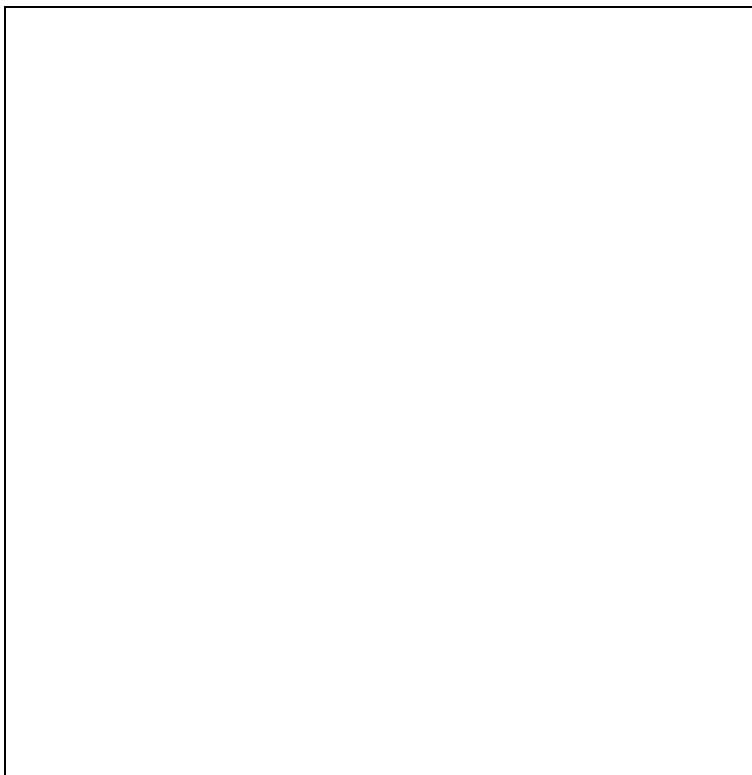


Figure 44 The Surface Integration option connects the excavated space of the Dupont Underground with the Park's surface and allows the tunnels to become public walkways with excavated studios and restaurants on either side.

The surface integration option is the most dramatic and expansive change to the look and function of Dupont Circle. It seeks to completely integrate the street surface and the underground by blurring the boundaries between levels and increasing connectivity



Figure 45 Diagram of how the tunnel can function as a public walkway with adjacent excavated studio space that displays the process of art-making

(visual and physical) exponentially. The North tunnels would become a public pathway between the North and South Dupont Metro access points—they would be excavated below the adjacent buildings to create studio spaces including recording studios, painting, sculpture, photography, etc. This way the entire tunnel becomes a public walkway that allows the process of art-making to become accessible.

The South tunnels would still function as bar and restaurant space, but with excavation to extend to the bars and restaurants above to create multiple access points.

The surface of Dupont Circle could function as a much better public space if the traffic that surrounded it was calmed. In order to do this, I propose the burial of Massachusetts avenue (see figure 39), which carries the highest volume of traffic through the circle. With this street buried along with Connecticut Avenue, the streetlights can be removed and the traffic circle can be simplified to a single roundabout.

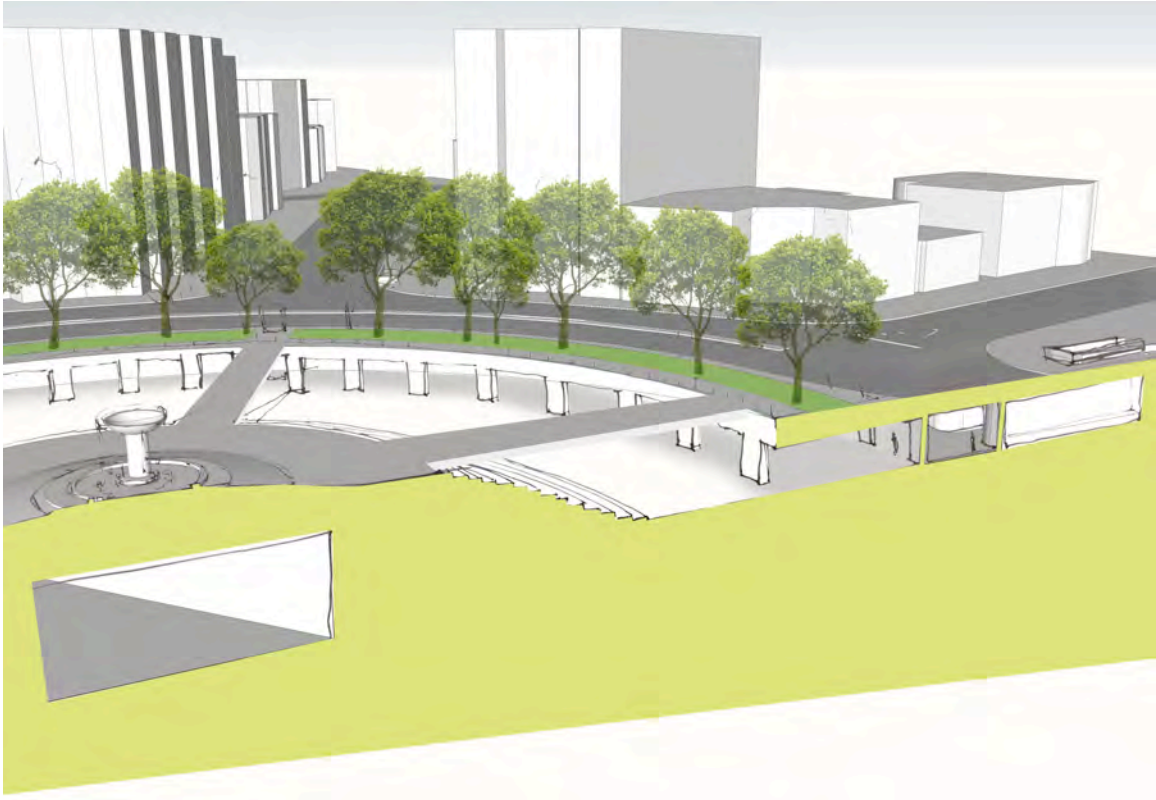


Figure 46 excavation on either side of tunnel to provide space for galleries, retail, and events.

The platforms below Dupont Circle would be excavated to create civic space below the park. The tunnel would again function as a public walkway, and markets, studios, bookstores, galleries, and an event space would flank the existing tunnels to both sides (see figure 41).

The most dramatic part of the surface integration plan is the removal of part of the park surface to create multi-level civic center.

Phased Approach

Rather than weighting various “solutions” for Dupont Circle, I looked at its redesign as an unfolding over time. I imagined the project happening in phases, allowing the space to grow and develop with the input of the community and its stakeholders. The

underground becomes a bridge for pedestrians between city blocks and creates a realm that is always accessible no matter what traffic conditions exist on the surface.

The park design should be based on the street grid and the geometry of the stairs leading to the underground.

11_Design

I was drawn to Dupont Underground as a thesis site because the problems there seemed to be “unsolvable”—the problems are packed so deeply, not just with physical issues (like access and day lighting), but with jurisdictional constraints and deep political and bureaucratic issues.

The question I came to was: why hasn’t anything been successful here?

Solutions for the underground have been too limited by the rigid constraints of the site (both physically and politically), like strong organized neighborhood opposition, enormous expense, logistical nightmares, regulatory spaghetti, and issues of home rule and control.

But, the underground has the potential to become an incredible connector for the surrounding area. I’ll be tapping into assets around the underground to allow it to become not just an occupied space, but rather a vital part of the infrastructure of the Dupont Circle, physically, economically, and socially.

I believe that the underground can be used as a pedestrian bridge to create direct access to Dupont Circle, making the park much more accessible despite its use as a traffic circle. Beyond that, it can serve as an economic generator so that the major improvements that I’m proposing for the park are not monetarily unattainable. The underground has the potential to become a destination if we can look beyond and then re-evaluate the limitations preventing its success.

From the start of this project, I have had three topics of focus:

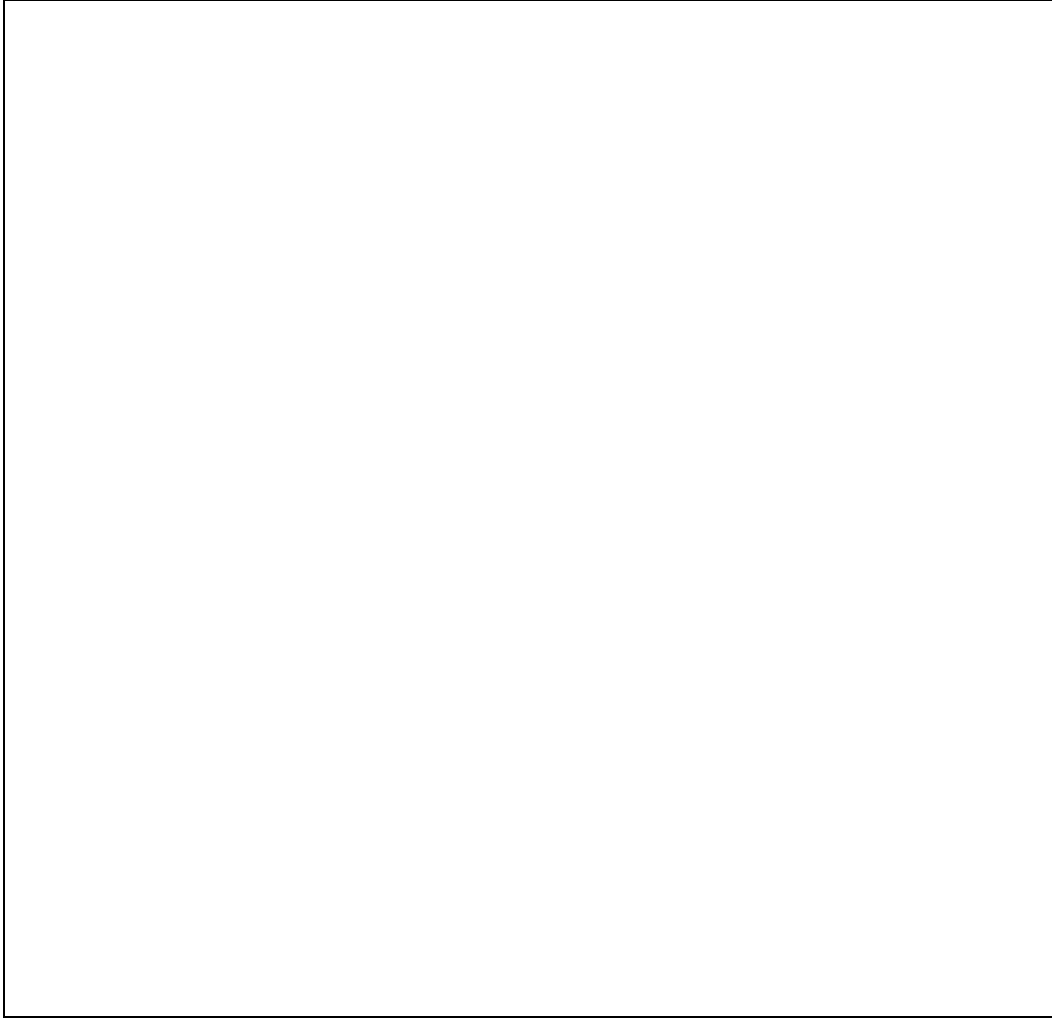


Figure 47 The three central themes for this thesis endeavor

Background & Project Parts

I believe that the reason the underground has remained vacant for so long is because of limitations in thinking. Problem solvers should think of the area as a whole to see how all the assets can work together to create a real destination. Previous endeavors were limited by the immediate boundaries—if you think holistically about the space and how it can contribute to the area, limitations can be reconsidered once a true vision that benefits all stakeholders is formed.

In an effort to understand the public's view toward the underground, I conducted a survey in the park, and found out that even frequent visitors of Dupont Circle don't know of the tunnel's existence. 60% of people polled within the park didn't even know the tunnels were there, despite physical evidence around the circle--all of the eight staircases to access the promenade are in plain view above the surface, just covered in a metal grate.



Figure 48 Dupont Circle survey results and stakeholder opinion

The Project for Public Spaces believes that Dupont Circle is performing at 30% of its potential mostly due to “a rigid adherence to a master plan that keeps many areas from coalescing into real destinations.”⁷²

More specifically, the circle itself suffers from an access problem— in order for pedestrians to access the circle, they have to traverse as many as three separate crosswalks, all timed for cars rather than people. Despite Dupont Circle’s issues, it has remained surprisingly successful which I believe is a symptom of a larger problem—the lack of quality civic space in Washington D.C. That might sound like a ridiculous statement considering that 19.4% of the city’s acreage is comprised of park lands (partly due to the green spaces created with the L’Enfant plan). But lets take a closer look at those public spaces over time.

⁷² “Dupont Circle (Hall of Shame) - Hall of Shame | Project for Public Spaces (PPS).”



These photos were startling. They show the lack of access individuals have with what is supposed to be *their* public space. This is no longer public space—this is symbolic space.

Parks within traffic circles are not ideal civic spaces--they are hard to access, cut off from amenities by complicated traffic patterns, and they were created for other purposes entirely (traffic flow). BUT, the aim of this project is to RECLAIM space, and despite the circle's lack of hospitality to its use as a civic center, it has thrived anyway. But intervention on the park is limited because of jurisdictional issues. The park is in the purview of the National Park Service, while the tunnels are owned by the city. Additionally, it is listed on the National register of historic places as part of the L'Enfant plan, and any change in its design would be subject to the review of the National Fine

Arts Commission. These seemingly daunting limitations can be overcome when you think holistically about the nature of the redesign. Preservation should never limit the potential of a space, but instead serve to enrich people's understanding of that space's transformation over time. As far as the review by the National Fine Arts Commission, I believe that a redesign of the park can absolutely be respectful of the park's history while dramatically improving its functionality. Overall, these parks are treated as spaces that cannot be altered from their original plan, when in reality their historic significance does not lie in the current character of each park, but rather their form within the L'Enfant Plan. As long as the park remains a park and keeps its original boundary, there is no reason to keep them as they are. In fact, it would be a shame to allow their current state to be perpetuated when there are so many residents eager to beautify and take ownership of these small parks, which is the mark of a great community.

I believe the problem here is a misunderstanding of Preservation Goals: When a site is listed as Historic, it is assumed that no changes can take place there. In actuality, the site has changed several times over the course of history, and it should not remain stagnant just because of its label. The place and character can be preserved without preserving the current plan of the park (which is not original). **The lack of change over time that the parks have experienced does not equate to preservation.** The parks' function is to provide open green spaces along the grand diagonal avenues of the city. As long as they remain open space and their boundaries are not altered, their historic character remains. Altering the parks' internal designs and plantings or allowing them to be more utilized by residents does not compromise the parks' historic character.

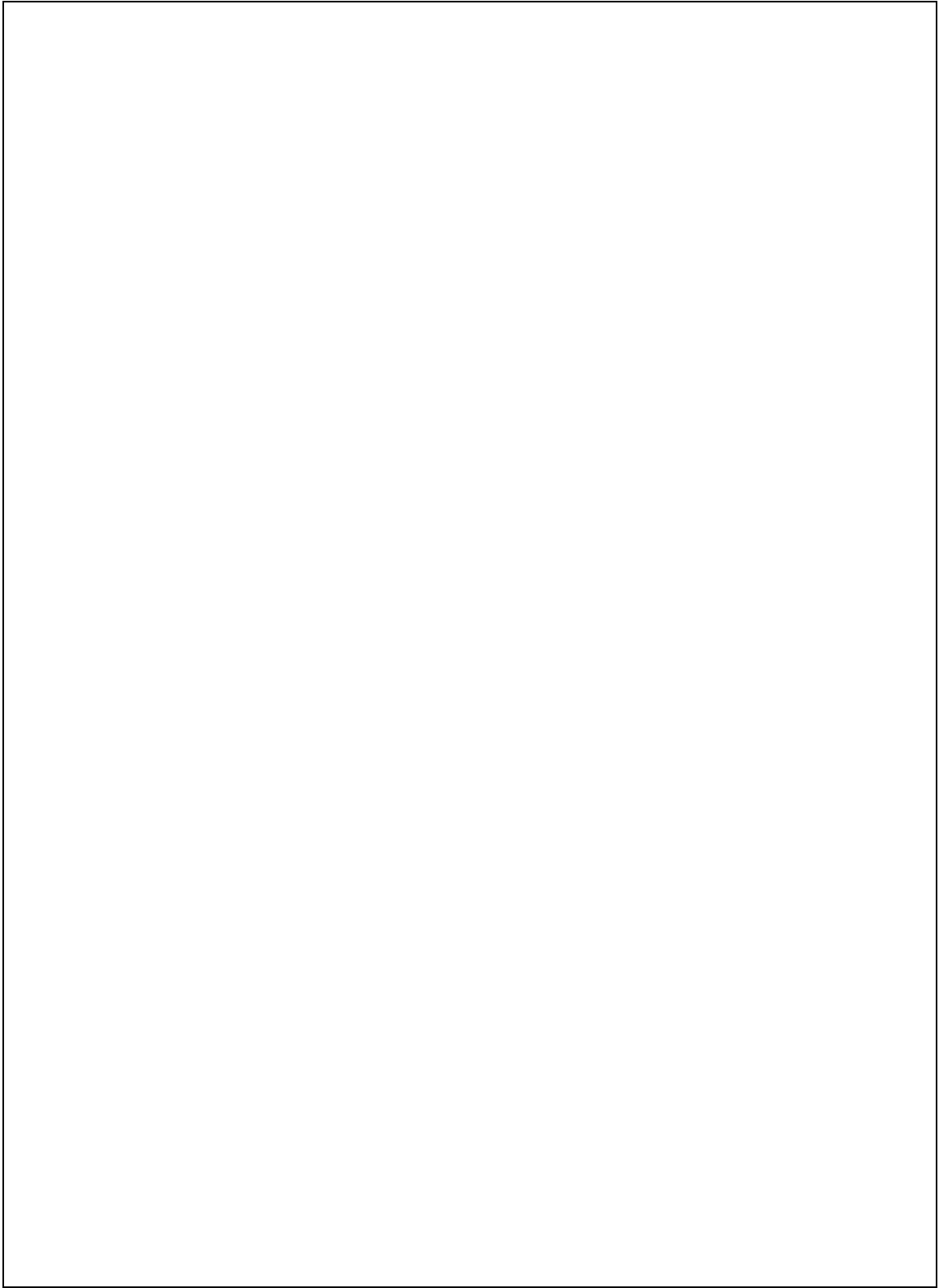


Figure 49 Disparate ownership and historic preservation policy board

The other assets nearby that would be ideal to tap into include the basements of the buildings above, but again we run into the issue of disparate ownership. By thinking bigger—we can imagine how this joint space of the tunnels and the park could be managed by a public-private partnership, where in the beginning phases of the design, the property owners would be candidates for investment in the shared venture of the public project. They would have privileged access to leasehold space below ground, at the level of the tunnel.

So the tunnels of the Dupont underground can serve to connect the pedestrians to a new, multi-level park, and the length of the tunnels could host lease space to activate the below ground addition. But how do you solve the problem of access? Simultaneously, if the park is pushed down to the level of the tunnels, then we have Connecticut avenue running straight through the new public space.

So let's think bigger. How can we use Connecticut Avenue in a different way that will help tie all these parts and pieces together?

If we solve the transportation problem creatively, then the underpass doesn't have to function as a car underpass anymore. What if it is a shady pedestrian promenade that creates a vital city at the minus 1 level? What if it is the route for a new streetcar line that would serve Dupont Circle? What if it fosters a connection to the metro to create an even more connected *place*?

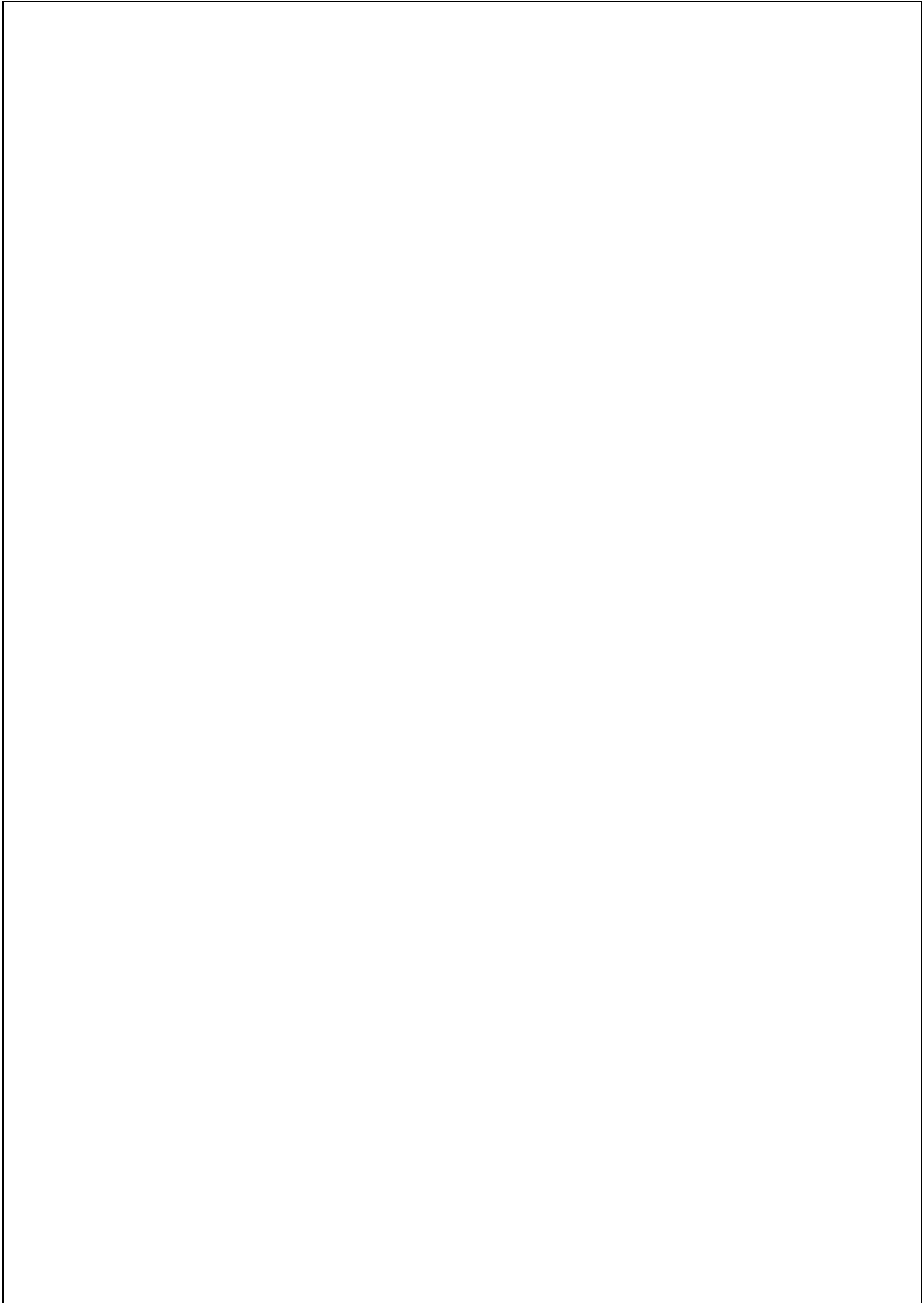


Figure 50 Traffic rerouting research and options around Dupont Circle

Rules and laws are social constructs. We made them, and we can rewrite them. We should not allow regulations to limit our vision for a space or prevent us from realizing its incredible potential—if everyone stands to gain something from the “rule breaking,” then the rules are not protecting anyone or anything and should be critically examined for their efficacy.

This project is about design thinking process—using vision unlimited by restraints, speculating about what would be ideal, and working backward to make that vision a reality.

Design Moves

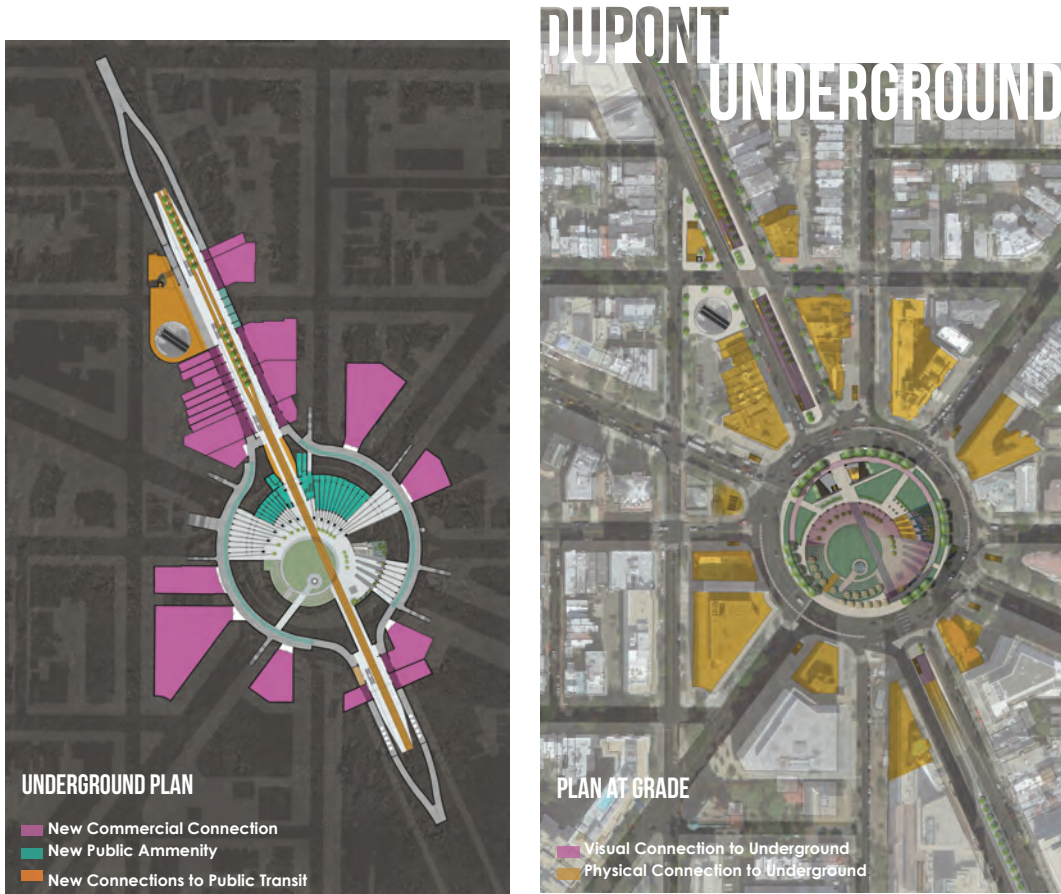


Figure 51 Plans of the proposed Underground & Park

My morphological philosophy is based on this history of the site (the geometry), the materiality, the role of daylight, and connection. I wanted to connect the disparate spaces and levels while still allowing them to retain their character.



Figure 52 Section through proposed pedestrian promenade and park

Tunnels

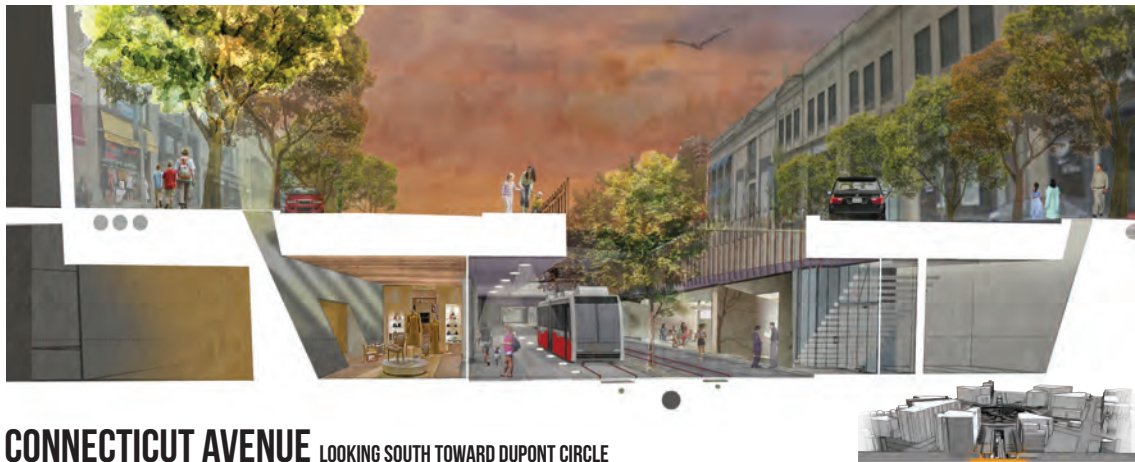


Figure 53 Section Perspective through North Tunnels looking South toward park

The two biggest issues for the tunnels are access and daylight. The linear tunnels on the North and South ends are now storefronts that open up to a pedestrian promenade where Connecticut Avenue once ran. This takes care of the other issue—access. I’ve also looked at the plans for the DC streetcar lines and redirected two lines to pass through Dupont Circle using the Connecticut Avenue Underpass. In addition to populating the space and providing transportation, the streetcar links with the Metro at the new level of the park by adding a metro entrance



Figure 54 Proposed streetcar route changes

park (figure 55). The streetcar becomes a force multiplier for the metro system and exponentially increases the ease and options for transit around Washington D.C.

METRO ENTRANCE PARK



Figure 55 Metro Entrance Park Perspective

The platforms at the East and West side of the circle serve as flexible Market and Urban space lab within tunnels. The Urban Labs allow people to contribute to the place as decisions are made about its use over time. This would be similar to the BMW Guggenheim Lab in New York, which emphasizes active citizen participation in shaping public space.

Park



PARK PAVILION

Figure 56 Section Perspective through the East Park Pavilion

These two pavilions are much needed meeting spaces that can serve the embassies in the area, the ANC, and community members (who could host weddings or events there). By putting these buildings below grade, Dupont Circle still looks like a park, still functions as a park, and has the same boundary conditions as in the L'Enfant plan, but it has added utility.

PAVILIONS ABOVE



Figure 57 The pavilion entrances are minimal on the parks surface but reinforce the Connecticut Avenue axis

Monumental stair and water feature—the stairs that lead from ground level to minus 1 (tunnel level) feature a large water feature that follows visitors to the underground level. This has two functions—to clean storm water from this massive transit hub, and to collect it from the underground level so that it doesn't flood. Excess water is collected and stored in cisterns in the unused portions of the tunnel.

MONUMENTAL STAIR



Figure 58 The monumental stair functions as a place of stasis, a path for access, and a water filtration system

The existing East and West platforms are connectors into the park, but they also function as flexible market space and a programmed “urban lab” where community members can participate in questions of urban planning, design, and park programming. This would function similarly to the BMW Guggenheim lab in New York City.



CONNECTION TO PLATFORM

Figure 59 Section Perspective through open market space

In sum, this thesis is about design thinking to overlook seemingly insurmountable obstacles to come up with the most ideal design, and to work backwards to make that vision a reality. Rules and laws are social constructs—we created them and we can rewrite them if an alternate solution benefits all stakeholders.

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