

## **A Grand Plan for a Grand Avenue**

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Plans for rehabilitating Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, first announced in 1961, have moved about as slowly as the inaugural motorcades up the shabby boulevard. Happily, the design now headed toward completion has benefited from the delay.

The original plan called for demolishing the Willard and Washington Hotels to create an overbearing National Square, as well as destroying the picturesque Old Post Office. Then, in a compromise with preservationists, the Post Office tower was to be retained as a sort of sentimental keepsake, and in a compromise with the 20th century, a medieval-classical-modern mélange was supposed to fill out the Federal Triangle.

In the years since 1961, architects have made peace with the past. The preservation and recycling of old buildings has progressed from sentimental eccentricity to commercial success. The General Services Administration has begun to identify its own landmark

buildings to try to reuse them. And the stone and marble hotels once labeled obsolete have regained favor. Finally, a depressed real estate market has turned into an opportunity for investment.

Today the Old Post Office stands cleaned and restored. The Willard and Washington Hotels will be saved; indeed, the Willard will be refurbished through "interpretative restoration," including a new wing that will be a lively adaptation of the old design. The Federal Triangle will be completed in its classical style.

None of this would have been possible when the development was first initiated; it has required changes in law as well as in architectural philosophy and practice to produce this greatly improved scheme. Economic feasibility and significant advances in the art of urban design have come together at the right moment for Washington's grand plan.

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